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PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AMONG BLACK GIRLS:
TALKING CIRCLES IN AN URBAN
ALTERNATIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL

By

Vanessa Marie McPhail

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Human Development of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education
In Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation, & Organizational Development
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

December 2019

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TALKING CIRCLES IN AN URBAN
ALTERNATIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL

By

Vanessa Marie McPhail
B.A., Indiana University Southeast, 2002
M.A.T., Bellarmine University, 2006
M.A.Ed., Bellarmine University, 2009

A Dissertation Approved on

November 11, 2019

By the following Dissertation Committee:

Dissertation Chair
William Kyle Ingle, Ph.D.

Dissertation Co-Chair
Meera Alagaraja, Ph.D.

Detra Johnson, Ph.D.

Cherie Dawson-Edwards, Ph.D.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother, Rose Marie McPhail.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I give honor to God. Without him, none of this would be possible.

To my late mother, Rose Marie McPhail and my father, thank you for instilling in me a work ethic that allowed me to persevere believing and telling me that I can do anything if I put my mind to it. My parents taught me not only the importance of education but taught me commitment and determination demonstrated through their actions.

To my sister, I could not have completed this journey without your everlasting encouragement and support. You listened to me when I was frustrated and motivated me when I needed it. Throughout the process you always said “just keep going, you will finish”

To my beautiful daughters Kennedi and Kendall, you witnessed mommy having to make sacrifices, but it was all worth it. I appreciated it more than you know when you said, “mommy we will go to the library with you.” Your love and encouragement helped me reach my goal and I am forever grateful. I love you!

To my friends, thank you for your understanding, support and prayers. The “thinking of you” texts and words of encouragement were powerful. “Press on finish strong” was one of my favorites.

To my doctoral committee, Dr. Ingle, Dr. Alagaraja, Dr. Johnson and Dr. Dawson-Edwards have been immensely supportive in helping to frame and challenge my assumptions and thinking. I would like to thank my committee co-chair, Dr. Alagaraja,

for her mentorship, encouragement, and support throughout my doctoral journey. To my committee chair, Dr. Ingle, I would like to express gratitude and appreciation for your support throughout this process. Most importantly thank you for your patience, guidance, and expertise.

ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AMONG BLACK GIRLS: TALKING CIRCLES IN AN URBAN ALTERNATIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Vanessa M. McPhail

November 11, 2019

Research suggests that Restorative Justice approaches have shown promise in terms of their impact on school climate, student behavior, and relationships. The purpose of this study is to explore Black female students' perceptions of Restorative Practice (RP) talking circles at an alternative school. The study examined literature on Zero Tolerance, School Discipline Disparities, African American Female students, Intersectionality, Restorative Justice, and Alternative Schools. A qualitative case study method was used for this study, drawing from two sources: (a) face-to-face interviews and (b) observations of the Black female students who attend the alternative school and participate in the talking circles. Analyses of the transcripts and observations of student experiences in the RP talking circles helped to paint a picture of the many emergent themes and individual stories. From these analyses, seven themes emerged: talking circle procedures and elements, single-gender circles, the circle keeper, self-awareness, helpful circle topics, letting things out, and relationships. The study concludes by providing implications for policy, practice, and future research studies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF TABLES	x
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Background	2
Accountability Policies	5
Purpose	7
Research Questions	9
Data Sources	9
Definitions of Key Terms	10
Summary	11
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	13
Black Girls and School Discipline	20
Intersectionality	22
Restorative Practice	24
Alternative Schools	32

Literature Review Summary	37
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY	39
Case Study Research.....	39
District and School Context Setting.....	40
Selection of Participants	42
Data Collection Procedures.....	44
Data Analysis	47
Trustworthiness.....	48
Researcher’s Perspective	49
Limitations	50
Summary	51
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS.....	52
Student Perceptions of Restorative Practice Talking Circles	54
Talking Circle Procedures.....	55
Single-Gender Talking Circles	58
The Circle Keeper	59
Self-Awareness	62
Circle Topics	64
Letting Things Out.....	65
Relationships.....	66
Summary	67

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	70
Summary of Findings.....	70
Study Implications	78
Implications for Practice	79
Implications for Policy.....	83
Implications for Future Research.....	86
Concluding Thoughts.....	89
REFERENCES	90
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	112
APPENDIX B: DISCLOSURE TO PARTICIPANTS	114
APPENDIX C: OBSEVATION PROTOCOL	115
APPENDIX D: OBSERVATION SKETCH.....	116
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	117

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. *School Demographics* 42

Table 2. *Participants*..... 54

Table 3. *Summary of Codes* 68

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nationally, Black¹ girls² experience discipline referral rates six times higher than those of White girls (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Wald and Losen (2003) noted that “the single largest predictor of later arrest among adolescent females is having been suspended, expelled, or held back during the middle school years” (p. 4). School administrators have expressed concern over the rising numbers of arrests of girls, proposing school programs that address the unique social-emotional and relational needs of girls before they get into trouble with the law (Chesney-Lind, 2004). Developed as a means of mitigating these trends, restorative practice (RP)³ is a philosophical approach that seeks to replace punitive disciplinary structures at school with those that emphasize building and repairing relationships (Hopkins, 2002). Restorative practices stem from innovative restorative justice (RJ) work in the European and American judicial systems. The goal of RP is to create school disciplinary practices that foster safe, inclusive, and positive learning environments while keeping students in school (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

¹ The terms Black and African American are used interchangeably throughout the paper. When used to refer to a person or a group of persons, the terms “Black” and “White” are capitalized in this paper.

² The terms girls and females are used interchangeably throughout the paper.

³ The term Restorative Justice (RJ) is used to refer to the justice system, and the term Restorative Practice (RP) is used to refer to the education system.

Background

Due to increasing crime and school violence in the 1980s and 1990s, school officials reexamined their disciplinary measures, adopting “zero tolerance” policies for certain infractions (Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Broad interpretations of zero tolerance resulted in a near epidemic of suspensions and expulsions for seemingly trivial events (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). According to the National School Board Association (1984), suspensions were increasingly applied to minor infractions of school rules rather than for seriously disruptive behaviors or violent acts. Because there was little to no evidence that zero tolerance was effective, schools and school districts needed and sought preventative alternatives, including alternative schools (Skiba & Knesting, 2001).

Alternative schools are committed to serving students who have become disengaged from the traditional educational model or who are experiencing chronic academic and behavioral difficulties (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1998), there were 3,850 alternative schools nationwide as of 1998 (Ashley & Burke, 2009). The number of alternative schools has steadily increased over time, with 10,300 district-administered alternative schools and programs for at-risk students in the 2007–2008 school year (Ashley & Burke, 2009). Meanwhile, research suggests that alternative education programs are increasingly being used to punish, exclude, and contain African American students (Lehr, Lanners, & Lange, 2003). Additionally, research further shows that African American youth are more likely than any other racial or ethnic demographic group to be removed from the traditional general education setting (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Further, in

urban districts, Black students are more than twice as likely as White students to be suspended or expelled (Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Wald & Losen, 2003). The race-based disparity remains even after removing the effects of socioeconomic status (Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron 2002; Skiba et al., 2002).

Scholars of school discipline who have studied the effects of such policies have often focused on boys of color (Ferguson, 2001; Noguera, 2008). In recent years, growing attention has been paid to the ways in which school discipline excludes (removes from the classroom) and punishes African American girls (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Nationally, African American girls represent 31% of all girls referred to law enforcement by school officials and 43% of those arrested on school campuses, while comprising only 17% of the overall student population (Smith-Evans, George, Graves, Kaufmann, & Frohlich, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2016), 12% of school-aged African American girls across the country have experienced out-of-school suspensions (OSS), compared with 7% of Native American girls, 4% of Latina girls, and 2% of White girls. A report titled *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Over Policed, and Under Protected* (2015) sought to increase awareness of the consequences of disciplinary and push-out policies for Black girls.

Restorative practice (RP) is an alternative to punitive discipline. Restorative Practices is centered on relationship-building. Restorative practices address antisocial behavior by shifting the emphasis from blame and punishment to a focus on responsibility, accountability, nurturance, and restoration (Braithwaite, 1989). Gathering in a circle is a primary component of RP in schools. Meeting in circles to build

relationships and discuss community issues has a long history among indigenous peoples, but the practice of talking circles has come into use in contemporary culture (Baldwin, 1994; Boyes-Watson, 2008; Pranis, 2005; Pranis, Stuart, & Wedge, 2003; Wolf & Welton, 2005). A two-year study of 12 weekly talking circles in an urban high school found that talking circles “provided a safe space for peers helping peers, with the participating girls improving their listening, anger management, and empathic skills, which led to greater self-efficacy” (Schumacher, 2014, p.1). Children taught social skills and how to handle their emotional lives thrive both in school and afterward (Bocchino, 1999; Goleman, 1995).

Since the expansion of RP and its initiatives in schools during the 1990s, a range of studies have been conducted in numerous contexts to gather evidence and assess its effectiveness in schools. Restorative approaches to discipline include a range of practices on the prevention-intervention continuum (Gregory, Huang, Anyon, Greer, & Downing, 2018). Some practices seek to prevent infractions through community building, while other practices intervene after infractions have occurred (Costello, Watchtel, & Watchtel, 2010; McCluskey et al., 2008). For serious incidents, restorative conferences and circles generally follow a formal procedure. Restorative practice conferences and circles facilitate dialogue between the offending student, those adversely affected by his or her behaviors, and supporting community members in order to expose and then address the needs of both victim and perpetrator (Vaandering, 2014). One of the first studies to emerge examined the use of RP conferences to address serious incidents in schools, such as assaults, on a case-by-case basis and demonstrated that participants were generally satisfied with the process and outcomes achieved, including the reduction of repeat

offending behavior (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). The results suggested that the RP participants were engaged in the process, and felt it was fair (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). Another study focused on the implementation of RP initiatives in the South St. Paul School District in Minnesota, finding that students across several schools experienced fewer suspensions, fewer expulsions, fewer behavioral referrals, and greater overall attendance (Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006). In addition, several exploratory studies have demonstrated that RP approaches have promise in terms of their impact on the school climate, student behavior, and relationships among students and staff, among other outcomes (Ashley & Burke, 2009; Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013). Other reports show that RP has led to increased student connectedness, better community and parent engagement, improved academic achievement, and offers of support by staff to students (González, 2012).

Accountability Policies

Since the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), high-stakes standardized testing has become extensive in the United States, putting school districts under pressure to find ways in which to address the achievement gap (Noguera & Wing, 2006). NCLB declared that all states must test every child annually in Grades 3 through 8 in reading and mathematics and report disaggregated test scores by race, ethnicity, low-income status, disability status, and limited English proficiency. States were required to monitor every school to see if every group was on track to reach proficiency (Karp, 2006). Although subject to some revisions in the most recent reauthorization in 2015, student testing remains a feature of federal and state education policies. The term “achievement gap” refers to the disparities in standardized test scores between Black and White, Latino

and White, and recent immigrant and White students. Achievement gaps between White and Black students and between White and Hispanic students in public schools remain a persistent and pressing problem in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2006). White students significantly outperform Black students on standardized tests, even when controlling for a number of other factors (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin, Anderson, and Rahman (2009) found that the national Black–White gap as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, National Center for Educational Statistics in 2007 was: 26 points in Grade 4 mathematics, 31 points in Grade 8 mathematics, 27 points in Grade 4 reading, and 26 points in Grade 8 reading. High-stakes standardized testing continued to dominate education policy and practice under the Obama and Trump administrations. Against the background of such achievement and discipline gaps, this study provides important insights into creating a safe place to teach girls listening skills, empathy, and how to build relationships.

Ongoing research focused on the issues faced by Black boys (Noguera, 2008) has generated national initiatives. In 2014, President Barack Obama introduced an initiative to address the challenges facing young Black boys. The My Brother’s Keeper Task Force was established to develop a coordinated federal effort to significantly improve the expected life outcomes for boys and young men of color (including Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans). It also included their contributions to U.S. prosperity so that all youth have an equal opportunity to achieve the American Dream (White House, 2014). More recently, Crenshaw, Ocean, and Nando (2015) called for education leaders and policymakers to place equal attention on Black girls.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore Black female students' perceptions of RP talking circles at an alternative school. In the field of RP, much more research is needed in all areas of praxis, from defining the paradigm shift to ongoing formative, process, and outcome evaluations using both qualitative and quantitative data (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Black female students' perceptions of RP must be studied to better understand the challenges schools face in implementing RP and establishing best practices for RP talking circles. In addition, girls' narratives provide important insights into the various ways in which talking circles may affect their lives. Capturing Black girls' voices is critical in order to learn the full history of their school experiences and to understand how they deal with intersecting oppressions every day. Tonnesen (2013) emphasized "African American girls—their voices, their experiences, and their victimization—matter" (p. 27). Furthermore, literature on Black adolescent girls (Haddix, McArthur, Muhammad, Price-Dennis, & Sealey-Ruiz, 2016) has emphasized the importance of connectedness and understanding the voice of this group (Edwards, McArthur, & Russell-Owens, 2016). By engaging students who have so much at stake, we may find ways to make schools better. Alliance for Girls (AFG) authorized a landscape study to learn more about the lived experiences of girls of color within the Oakland Unified School District. A recommendation from the study was to support an expansion of girl-specific programming and policies by implementing district-wide policies while also supporting site-specific efforts to create restorative spaces for girls (Ohlson & Bedrossian, 2016).

Noguera (2007) noted, “Students may not have all the answers to the problems plaguing urban schools. This does not mean they have no ideas on improving schools on a wide variety of issues, including school safety and student achievement” (p. 209). Increasing student voice in schools offers a way to reengage students in the school community and increase youth connection to schools (Mitra, 2004). Students have ideas on how to improve aspects of school and provide a voice that should not be ignored. Students want an opportunity to voice their views about change and to have their thoughts heard (Levin, 2000). Additionally, student voices are most successful when they enable students to feel they are members of a learning community, that they matter, and that they have something valuable to offer (Rudduck, 2007). If RP is perceived to be effectively implemented at the alternative school by the participants in this study, such findings will have implications for districts and schools seeking alternatives to zero tolerance policies that tend to exclude Black students (male and female) at higher rates than White students. The study may inform the development of a model for those interested in learning more about addressing gender-specific issues using RP talking circles (specifically, African American girls). This will also help identify the type of support middle school Black girls need.

In this study, Crenshaw’s (1991) intersectionality theory, rooted in Black feminist scholarship, was applied. Although intersectionality is situated in the legal field, the idea of cultural intersectionality can illuminate how various cultural constructions intersect to reproduce racial and gender disparities among youth (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality suggests that complex inequalities originate from distinct stereotypes and means of oppression that result from overlapping systems of inequality (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw,

1991). Central to this framework is the claim that inequalities and identities of race, class, and gender must be analyzed simultaneously, not in isolation (Morris & Perry, 2017).

Research Questions

To understand Black female students' perceptions of RP talking circles at an alternative school, I asked the following research questions:

1. How do Black female students perceive RP talking circles at an alternative middle school?
2. In what ways do Black female students report that RP talking circles have shaped their lives and prospects for the future?

It is imperative that the voices of Black female students participating in the talking circles are heard to determine challenges facing implementation of RP talking circles and to learn whether they find talking circles valuable, as well as any impact the circles have. Additionally, the study provides insight into the support Black female middle school students need.

Data Sources

In this study, I used a qualitative case study research design to understand complex social activities within their real-life context (Yin, 2003). The context for this study was an alternative middle school in a large urban school district in the southeastern region of the United States. The data for my study came from two sources: (a) face-to-face interviews with approximately six Black female students and (b) observations of the Black female students who attend the alternative school and participate in the talking circles. The interview comprised semi-structured questions aimed at obtaining deeper

information on the Black female students at the alternative middle school. Observations of the talking circles were conducted to record the interactions between the circle facilitator and students as well as students and their peers.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms are used in the context of my study:

Alternative School: A public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school and provides nontraditional education (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

Intersectionality: Understands race, class, and gender as intertwined factors that might alter the experience and meaning of one another (Morris, 2007).

Out-of-School Suspension (OSS): According to Costenbader and Markson (1998), an OSS, or external suspension, is a disciplinary action administered as a consequence of a student's inappropriate behavior, requiring that the student be removed completely from the school environment for a set period of time.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS): A systems approach to school discipline for all students that promotes a positive school climate through the explicit instruction of behavioral expectations and consistent recognition of these expectations by all adults within the school (Sugai et al., 2000).

Restorative Justice (RJ): In RJ, victims of crime, offenders, and communities of care are viewed holistically and inclusively, positively impacting relationships and personhood like never before (Zehr, 1990).

Restorative Practice (RP): RP is centered on relationship-building, which stems from innovative RJ work in Western judicial systems, addressing antisocial behavior by shifting the emphasis from blame and punishment to responsibility, accountability, nurturance, and restoration (Braithwaite, 1989).

School-to-Prison Pipeline: School-to-Prison Pipeline “refers to the collection of policies, practices, conditions, and prevailing consciousness that facilitate both the criminalization within educational environments and the processes by which this criminalization results in the incarceration of youth and young adults” (Morris, 2016, p.2).

Talking Circles: Talking circles have evolved among nonindigenous groups for building relationships and personal growth by sharing private stories and emotions within the confines of a safe, supportive community. Communication is regulated by passing a talking piece, an object of special meaning or symbolism to the circle facilitator, who is usually called the circle keeper (Umbreit, 2003).

Zero Tolerance: Zero tolerance policies are “defined as a school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses” (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998, p. 18).

Summary

The remaining chapters of this study will be organized as follows: Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to zero tolerance, alternative schools, the disproportionality of discipline for Black students, and restorative practices. Chapter 3 outlines the study’s selected case study research design, while Chapter 4 presents the data obtained from

observations and interviews as well as data analysis. Finally, Chapter 5 offers conclusions, including policy implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspective of Black female students in an urban alternative school. The following research questions guided the study and to provide a framework centered on RP:

1. How do Black female students perceive RP talking circles at an alternative middle school?
2. In what ways do Black female students report that the RP talking circles have shaped their lives and prospects for the future?

The literature review covers four interconnecting topics. The first topic in the literature concerns the impact of zero tolerance on students, schools, and society. The second topic concerns alternative schools for students experiencing behavioral difficulties. The third topic covers African American females and their overrepresentation in school discipline. Lastly, the fourth topic comprises research on restorative practice (RP). Restorative practice grew out of the use of restorative justice in the criminal justice system. The terms restorative justice and restorative practice are often used interchangeably or without clear distinction. The combination of these topics sets the stage for the current research study.

Zero Tolerance Policies

Zero tolerance policies began with federal and state drug enforcement agencies in the early 1980s (Henault, 2001). In the context of PK–12 public education, zero tolerance policies are defined as “a school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses” (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998, p. 18). In 1998, zero tolerance drew national attention when then-U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese ordered customs agents to seize vehicles used in transporting drugs across U.S. borders and to charge any persons driving such vehicles in federal courts (Verdugo, 2002). Zero tolerance discipline policies, an outgrowth of state and federal drug enforcement policies, emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to an increasing frequency of violent student behaviors (Hanson, 2005). A growing number of suburban school districts adopted zero tolerance policies in the 1990s due to actual increases in arrest rates for juvenile violent crime (Gold & Chamberlin, 1996).

Public schools continued to expand their adoption of zero tolerance policies with the *Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994*, passed by the U.S. Congress to address the issue of school violence. The law required schools to establish a zero-tolerance policy for students, enforcing a minimum one-year expulsion for students who bring a firearm onto campus. Noncompliant school districts risked losing federal funds, as provided under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. Amendments changed the act’s terminology from firearm to any instrument that may be used as a weapon (Skiba, 2000). Some states limit the use of zero tolerance policies to only those offenses directly related to weapons and drugs; however, many states continue to apply mandatory suspensions and

expulsions for some of the most subjectively determined offenses, including fighting, insubordination, and bullying (Evans & Lester, 2012). Zero tolerance policies mean that suspension is used as a consequence for infractions ranging from severe (e.g., weapons possession) to minor (e.g., defiance or chronic tardiness; Berwick, 2015). It is interesting to note that as the policy was being more broadly adopted and implemented in schools, the U.S. Customs Agency was phasing out its use of zero tolerance policies (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

Within U.S. public schools, zero tolerance policies have become a common method to address violence (Skiba, Horner, Chung, & Rausch, 2011). In high poverty areas, school administrators tend to see “zero tolerance” and punitive responses as the best way to curb negative student behavior (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). The intention of zero tolerance policies was to send a message that certain behaviors would not be tolerated by punishing all offenses severely and consistently, no matter how minor the infraction (Skiba, 2000). One study examined an urban high school sample of one-year discipline referrals and found that African American students were overrepresented as compared to other groups in referrals for defiance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). The procedure for OSS is not restricted to serious or dangerous behavior, but rather it appears to be commonly used for day-to-day disruptions; especially defiance and noncompliance (Gregory & Weinstein 2008; Skiba et al., 2011). Although zero tolerance policies were meant to ensure a safe and orderly environment conducive to learning, they have been widely criticized for their disproportionate impact on students of color, and questions have been raised regarding their effectiveness (Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Skiba et al., 2002). Research has shown that schools with a higher proportion of Black

students are more likely to use a range of more punitive consequences such as zero tolerance (Welch & Payne, 2010) and are more likely to rely on exclusionary, criminal justice-oriented security, rather than restorative practices (Kupchik & Ward, 2014).

According to the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008), school violence and disruption have remained stable, or have even decreased somewhat, since 1985. Existing evidence on zero tolerance policies has focused on disciplinary outcomes, such as suspensions (Hoffman, 2014), without addressing the degree to which these policies improve the safety of schools for all students (Curran, 2016). Schools that reported no crime were less likely to have zero tolerance policies, according to an NCES study of school violence (Heaviside et al., 1998). McNeal and Dunbar (2010) examined urban students' perceptions regarding sense of safety in their schools. The study showed that "students overwhelmingly indicated that they perceive zero tolerance policy as ineffective and still do not feel safe in their schools" (p. 9).

Education researchers have begun to look closely at the punitive school discipline setting (Advancement Project, 2010; Bear, 1998; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). With respect to Black girls, discipline and zero tolerance policies are also among the most researched of the education system pipeline to incarceration (Morris, 2012). More recently, Wun (2016) examined the relationship between zero tolerance policies and their effects on Black girls at a suburban high school in California. Using qualitative methods, Wun (2016) found that "Black girls were more likely to be subject to disciplinary infractions through both formal and informal processes by adults and their non-Black peers" (p. 738). Additionally, the study showed "that Black girls are disciplined for behaviors such as disruption, profanity, defiance, and fighting" (p. 6). These infractions are subjective and left up to the teachers' and administrators' discretion.

Hoffman (2014) examined the outcomes associated with the expansion of zero tolerance in an urban district. The study showed that the expansion of zero tolerance policies resulted in a near doubling of expulsions for Black students compared with less than a 20% increase for Hispanic students and an approximately 40% increase for White students (Hoffman, 2014). There is evidence that suspension has harmful effects on student well-being and academic achievement. Schools with higher suspension rates have greater teacher turnover and attrition (Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). At the student level, school disciplinary actions are associated with a decrease in student academic achievement (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018) and an increase in the probability of dropping out of school (Peguero & Bracy, 2015). Also, Hirschfield (2009) demonstrated a link between being arrested and dropping out of school.

Although zero tolerance policies were attractive to school districts because of perceptions of fairness and consistency, the outcomes of these policies have been negative, as “using this policy to suspend and expel students—thus excluding them from receiving education—does not benefit anyone” (Martinez, 2009, p. 156). Another criticism of zero tolerance is the misuse and abuse of the policy by school districts and their administrators. Punishing every offense severely ignores the fact that the bases of these punishments may involve interpersonal dynamics or critical misunderstandings (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Because there is little to no evidence of the efficacy of zero tolerance, schools and school districts were encouraged to explore preventative alternatives (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). There are a range of alternatives to zero tolerance, and it is critical that schools and districts explore the use of such strategies within their context. Alternatives to zero tolerance include RP, targeted behavioral support for at-risk

students, character education and social-emotional learning programs, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS; Advocacy & Communication Solutions, 2015). PBIS is a systems approach to school discipline for all students that promotes a positive school climate through the explicit instruction of behavioral expectations and consistent recognition of these expectations by all adults within the school (Sugai et al., 2000). In response to the criticism of zero tolerance policies, some school districts have begun experimenting with other options, such as in-school suspensions or alternative education programs for students who would have been excluded from school altogether (Barnhart, Franklin, & Alleman, 2008).

Disparity in school suspensions has a long history. According to the Children's Defense Fund report of 1975, more than two-thirds of suspended students were Black. This study was one of the first to use a national data set on school discipline. In a study exploring the phenomenon of African American disproportionality in school discipline, male and Black students were overrepresented on all measures of school discipline (referrals, suspensions, and expulsions), while female and White students, by contrast, were underrepresented on all measures (Skiba et al., 2002).

In a more recent study, Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheva, and Hughes (2014) conducted a multilevel exploration of the factors contributing to the likelihood of Out of School Suspensions (OSS) and expulsions. In this study, race remained a significant predictor of OSS, regardless of the severity of the behavior. The most striking school-level result was that a school's higher percentage of Black students was among the strongest predictors of OSS, behind only weapons possession and fighting/battery.

Furthermore, recent data on school disciplinary practices and policies reported that 1.2 million Black students had been suspended from K–12 public schools in a single academic year, with 55% of suspensions occurring in 13 southern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia (Smith & Harper, 2015).

Skiba, Horner, Chung, Karega, Rausch, May, and Tobin (2011) reviewed the documented patterns of office disciplinary referrals in 364 elementary and middle schools. The results of their descriptive and binomial logistic regression analyses indicated that elementary and middle school students from African American families were 2.19 and 3.78 times as likely, respectively, to be referred to the office for problem behavior compared with their White peers. In addition, the results indicated that students from African American and Latino families were more likely than their White peers to receive expulsions or OSSs as consequences for the same or similar problem behavior. This data provides a comprehensive and nationally representative sample addressing some of the gaps in research knowledge on racial and ethnic disproportionality in school disciplinary procedures.

Similarly, Arcia (2007) noted the propensity toward higher suspension rates of Black students, finding that, on average, 36% of Black and 23% of non-Black students were suspended at least once. Black students are more likely than White students to experience suspension across gender and school levels, a claim supported in the study conducted by Raffaele-Mendez and Knoff (2003) that examined incidences of OSS in a large, ethnically diverse school district by race, gender, school level, and infraction type.

Raffaele-Mendez and Knoff (2003) found that Black male and female students were at much greater risk of being suspended than their non-Black peers.

Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002) conducted a mixed method study to examine OSSs in a large, ethnically diverse school district in Florida. Their findings showed that the percentage of students experiencing at least one suspension was 3.4% at the elementary school level, 24.4% at the middle school level, and 18.5% at the high school level. Across all three levels, 11.6% of students received at least one suspension (Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002).

Black Girls and School Discipline

Scholars studying the effects of school discipline have often focused on boys of color (Ferguson, 2001; Noguera, 2008). In recent years, growing attention has been paid to the ways in which school discipline excludes and punishes African American girls (Blake et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002). Research indicates “Black girls are highest suspended after boys” of color (Wallace et al., 2008, p.54). Nationally, African American girls represent 31% of all girls referred to law enforcement by school officials and 43% of those arrested on school campuses, despite comprising only 17% of the overall student population (Smith-Evans et al., 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Civil Rights Office (2016), 12% of school-aged African American girls across the country have experienced OSSs, compared with 7% of Native American girls, 4% of Latina girls, and 2% of White girls. Blake et al. (2011) examined reasons African American girls were suspended in one urban school district, finding that “black girls were most often cited for defiance followed by inappropriate dress, using profane language

toward a student, and physical aggression” (p. 100). This implies that discipline policies unfairly target Black girls.

Wun’s (2016) qualitative study drew upon document analysis, in-depth interviews, and participant observation at a high school in northern California. By assessing racial group differences in reasons for office referrals and OSSs, law enforcement referrals, and expulsions, Wun showed that African American girls are subject to punishment for nonviolent infractions, which qualify as “disobedience” and “defiance.” Wun found that behaviors categorized as defiant or disobedient included having “attitudes,” a “smart mouth,” or “talking back.” Prior research has focused on African American girls’ disciplinary sanctions in relation to those of African American boys, with the former rarely mentioned outside of the descriptive statistics (Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002).

Blake et al. (2011) examined the type of disciplinary infraction exhibited by African American female students at an urban school district to explore whether the pattern of disciplinary infractions enforced for these girls differed disproportionately from those enforced for all female students. Participants included elementary and secondary school female students who had at least one disciplinary referral ($N = 9,364$) enrolled in a Midwestern urban school district during the 2005–2006 school year. The analysis revealed that African American girls in the study were overrepresented in terms of exclusionary disciplinary sanctions and were twice as likely to receive in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions (Blake et al., 2011). This is one of a few studies that builds on Skiba et al.’s (2002) work on disaggregated disciplinary practices for students of color, particularly African American girls. It is important to examine how

the intersections of race and gender influence the disciplinary experiences of Black females, as the behavioral standards on which Black female students are evaluated may be based in part on their compliance with gender norms (Collins, 2004). Morris and Perry (2017) propose that school discipline penalizes African American girls for behaviors perceived to transgress normative values of femininity.

Costenbader and Markson (1998) noted that although most students suspended from school self-reported physical aggression as the main reason for their suspensions, female students were more likely to self-report minor behavioral infractions such as gum chewing, failure to comply with a prior disciplinary sanction, and defiance as reasons for their suspensions. Understanding Black girls and discipline in urban schools is critical because it can inform urban education research through a more precise analysis of the intersectionality of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality theory is rooted in Black feminist scholarship, specifically the work of Kimberle Crenshaw, an important figure in critical race studies. Crenshaw uses intersectionality theory as a tool to address how identity politics have often left women of color marginalized. Although intersectionality is situated in the legal field, the idea of cultural intersectionality can illuminate how various cultural constructions can intersect to reproduce racial and gender disparities among youth (Crenshaw, 1991). Similarly, Harrison (2017) suggested that intersectionality theory could be used as a way in which to advocate for marginalized youth. The intersection of racial and gender stereotypes has a significant effect on disciplinary rates for African American girls, likely due to bias in the exercise of discretion by teachers and administrators (Smith-Evans et al., 2014).

Waldron (2011) used a race–class–gender intersectional approach in a qualitative study examining girls at two public high schools to understand the common perception that “girls are worse” in terms of school fights, because individuals do not experience race, class, and gender in isolation in their daily lives. Several interpretations of why girls fight emerged from the data. Girls involved in strictly face-to-face physical fights were often categorized as “ghetto girls,” highlighting racist stereotypes about violence in these schools (Waldron, 2011). By contrast, girls who admitted to face-to-face fighting offered an alternative understanding, explaining fighting as justifiable in certain contexts; especially when used as an avenue for self-defense or to gain power and respect among their peers (Waldron, 2011). Research examining individual risk factors for disciplinary referrals and sanctions has suggested that physical aggression is a significant predictor of school exclusion and disciplinary referrals for both girls and boys (Clark, Petras, Kellam, Ialongo, & Poduska, 2003).

In a two-year ethnographic study of a public middle school comprising approximately 1,000 seventh and eighth grade students, Morris (2007) examined how interpretations of race, gender, and class combined to influence the perceptions and discipline of African American girls. Race, gender, and class combined to shape the educational experiences of these girls, creating unique problems for them. For most teachers, molding the girls into young ladies included subtly (and unwittingly) molding them into less active learners (Morris, 2007). Furthermore, many teachers criticized the girls for their perceived challenges to authority and thought their behavior required reform. Morris showed how the students’ race shaped adults’ perceptions of their femininity, highlighting how systems in schools are targeted to cast girls in a specific

model of womanhood. Similarly, in another ethnographic study concerning race, class, and gender, adults at the school tended to view the behaviors of African American girls as not “ladylike” and attempted to discipline them into dress and manners considered more gender-appropriate (Morris, 2007). These findings demonstrate the need to create a caring, competent, and restorative community.

Restorative Practice

Restorative justice (RJ) originated from indigenous peoples and spiritual traditions that emphasize interconnectedness (Boyes-Watson, 2008). By the 1970s, the RJ framework was being used across the criminal and juvenile justice systems in the United States (Zehr, 2002). The framework was offered as a way for victims to participate in individuals’ punishments by verbalizing how they were impacted by a crime and what they needed to feel or see for justice to be served (Zehr, 1990). The victim is central to deciding how to repair the harm done, and accountability for the offender means accepting responsibility and repairing that harm. These face-to-face interactions between the offender, victim(s), and community helped reduce recidivism (Braithwaite, 1989). Empirical research has demonstrated the effectiveness of RJ on reducing repeat offenses within the juvenile justice realm (Latimer, Dowden, & Muise, 2005). However, the body of research on the effectiveness of RP in schools is limited.

Globally, schools are turning to restorative justice practices in hopes of fostering safe and caring school cultures that will effectively support the academic intent of school (Vaandering, 2014). Restorative practice (RP) originally developed from restorative justice. Restorative practices in schools include many specific program types and do not have one monolithic definition in the literature. They are commonly seen as a

nonpunitive approach to handling conflict (Fronius et al., 2016). According to the International Institute of Restorative Practice (IIRP), restorative practice includes strategies to both prevent rule infractions before they occur and to intervene after an infraction has occurred. Restorative practices used in schools, such as circles, mediation counseling, and peer juries, have been found to produce restorative school cultures that seek to provide a space for the reparation of harm. These programs have been found to be effective intervention strategies for student and staff conflict, negative youth behaviors in class, and other problems that may require parent involvement (Ashely & Burke, 2009). Furthermore, some research has found that restorative practices may reduce discipline disparities (Gonzalez, 2012).

RP in schools has arisen from dissatisfaction with the punitive disciplinary options applied to elementary and secondary school children (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). RP can be located along a continuum of replacements for punitive structures of schooling with those that emphasize building and repairing relationships (Hopkins, 2004). According to Zehr (2002) and Hopkins (2002), the disciplinary system implemented in many schools mirrors that of the Western legal system. Sawin and Zehr (2007) described the Western legal system as “preoccupied with identifying the wrongdoer, affixing blame, and dispensing an appropriate punishment or pain to the offender” (p. 43). Restorative practices fit this suggestion. The goal is to create disciplinary practices that foster safe, inclusive, and positive learning environments, while keeping students in school (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Early studies indicate that RP holds significant promise; however, proponents of RP in the field have identified that theoretical and evidence-based research is falling behind practice (Ashley

& Burke, 2009; Stinchcomb et al., 2006; Vaandering, 2010). There needs to be more rigorous evaluation studies of restorative practice (Acosta et al., 2016) to extend the dialogue.

RP has three main goals: (a) accountability; (b) community safety; and (c) competency development (Ashely & Burke, 2009).

- Accountability. Restorative justice strategies provide opportunities for wrongdoers to be accountable to those they harmed and allow them to repair the harm.
- Community safety. Restorative justice acknowledges the need to keep the community safe through strategies that build relationships. The restorative process is about the building of “pride and respect as communities and individuals work together to right wrongs while securing and nurturing the safety of the community as a whole” (Riestenberg, 2012. p.33).
- Competency development. Restorative justice seeks to increase the social skills of those who have harmed others, and it addresses the underlying factors that lead youth to engage in delinquent behavior and builds on young people’s strengths.

RP holds offenders accountable for their actions and for repairing harm through a set of values and principles used to guide responses to crime, misbehavior, conflict, or harm. In RP, misbehavior is considered to be a violation against people and relationships that requires repair (Braithwaite, 2007; Cameron & Thornsbome, 2001; Zehr, 2002). Simply put, RP is a method for dealing with crime that brings together an offender, his or her victims, and their respective families and friends to discuss the aftermath of an

incident and identify steps that may repair the harm an offender has done (Roche, 2006).

Zehr (2002) suggested that RP requires society to move away from a system that emphasizes traditional retributive justice (“an eye for an eye”). Instead, RP is grounded in the ethics of justice and the ethics of care (Held, 2006; Noddings, 2003).

Since the 1990s, the principles of RP have been increasingly implemented in the field of education for their applicability to school misconduct and student support (Karp & Breslin, 2001). RP is a framework, not a program, centered on relationship-building. This framework, which stems from innovative restorative justice work in Western judicial systems, addresses antisocial behavior by shifting the emphasis from blame and punishment to responsibility, accountability, nurturance, and restoration (Braithwaite, 1989). Restorative practices have been implemented in schools in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, other European nations, Canada, and the United States. According to Pranis (2007), RP is not about “justice as getting even” but rather “justice as getting well” (p. 60). Thus, the primary goal for restorative educators is to help students become healthier, both socially and emotionally. According to Cameron and Thorsborne (1999), RP provides an opportunity for schools to practice participatory deliberative democracy in their attempts to problem-solve around those serious incidents of misconduct that they find so challenging.

Research suggests that relational bonding is particularly relevant for girls (Brown, Way, & Duff, 1999), and RP offers students the chance to voice their opinions and accept responsibility for their actions, while at the same time allowing administrators to retain the authority required to maintain safe schools (González, 2012). The common approach, whether applied in conferencing or circles, is to create a collective opportunity to reflect

on the behavior and its consequences, seeking a resolution that repairs harm and reconnects marginalized stakeholders (González, 2012).

Gathering in a circle is a primary component of restorative practice. The most common types of RP circles in schools are peacemaking circles, which aim to restoratively address interpersonal conflict or antisocial behavior, and classroom circles, which aim to build community spirit and deal with behavioral issues on the spot, before they escalate (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2010). A two-year study of 12 weekly talking circles with 60 adolescent girls was conducted in a multiethnic high school situated in a transient and impoverished town (Schumacher, 2014). The primary data sources included 257 hours of participant observations in talking circles and individual semi-structured interviews with 31 student participants, who ranged in age from 14 to 18 and met between 15 and 33 times. The study used qualitative coding described by Charmaz (2006). The results demonstrated that talking circles provided a safe space for peers to help peers, with girls improving their listening, anger management, and emphatic skills, which led to greater self-efficacy (Schumacher, 2014). Schumacher's study was the first systematic qualitative study of talking circles organized under the support of an RP program in schools. Talking circles provide a microcosm where students can be themselves, unobstructed by judgement, and can tap into the very essence of what it means to be human: to care, to listen, and to be heard (Schumacher, 2014).

Meeting in circles to build relationships and discuss community issues has a long history among indigenous peoples; however, doing so has recently gained a position in contemporary culture (Pranis, 2005). Immersed in symbolic ritual, the talking circle establishes a communication style that supports respect by passing a talking piece—any

symbolic object such as a feather or a talking stick—from one person to the next. Only the person holding the talking piece may speak. To ensure safety, all participants agree to the circle’s guidelines of speaking honestly, listening without interrupting, and maintaining confidentiality.

In the United States, schools in California, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota have led the way in implementing RP in schools (Karp & Breslin, 2001; Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010). Research suggests that RJ is effective in reducing repeat offenses within the realm of juvenile justice (Latimer, Dowden, & Muise, 2005). However, there is limited research on the effectiveness of RP in schools. Although most published literature has reported decreases in suspensions from the use of RP, such studies do not meet the standards for evidence-based registries in education. One exploratory study demonstrated promising results for RP approaches in terms of their impact on the school climate, student behavior, and relationships between students and staff, among other outcomes (Ashley & Burke, 2009).

A study conducted by Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Grewitz (2016) drew on student surveys of 29 high school classrooms in two large diverse high schools in a small East Coast city in the United States during the 2011–2012 school year, the first year in which RPs were implemented in those schools. Hierarchical linear modeling and regression were used for the statistical analysis, with the results showing that high-RP implementing teachers had more positive relationships with their diverse students. In addition, the findings showed some initial promise that RP, if well implemented, could narrow the racial and discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2016).

Like many schools throughout the United States, Minnesota's K–12 schools have experienced high rates of suspensions, expulsions, dropouts, truancy, and behavioral violations (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). The state of Minnesota, through its Department of Children, Families, and Learning, made a strategic commitment to RP, using small intensive pilot efforts with a basic evaluation component attached to each program. In an exploratory case study focused on the implementation of RP initiatives in the South St. Paul School District, each of the participating schools implemented a variety of RPs and collected pre-post data measuring impact in five areas: (a) suspensions; (b) expulsions; (c) attendance; (d) academics; and (e) school climate. During the three years of the pilot project, RP planners conducted circles to repair harm, develop understanding in classrooms, and promote Make the Peace, a statewide campaign to promote alternatives to violence. Furthermore, teachers received a series of training programs and technical assistance during the three years of the pilot project. The results found that students in several schools implementing these initiatives experienced fewer suspensions, fewer expulsions, fewer behavioral referrals, and greater overall attendance (Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

In West Oakland, California, a single-school case study documented the implementation of an RP program at Cole Middle School as well as the observations and perceptions of those who participated in it (Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010). The school primarily serves students of color from low-income families. In 2008, Cole Middle School's student body was 63% African American, 15% Hispanic/Latino, 13% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0% White, and 9% multiple races or ethnicities. Conducted by researchers from the Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice, the study ran from

August 2008 through August 2009 and comprised more than 40 observations and interviews with 21 students, 10 parents or guardians of students, 12 teachers and staff members, and 10 community members. In addition, 24 students answered a questionnaire on their perceptions of RP. Disciplinary data published by the Oakland Unified School District and California Department of Education was analyzed by the Henderson Center.

Cole Middle School worked collaboratively with a local nonprofit RP organization, Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth, to develop its program. Cole incorporated commonly used elements of RP, including the circle, shared values, and circle keepers. Two years after school-wide implementation, suspension rates decreased from 50 to only six per 100 students (Sumner et al., 2010). Due to the pilot's successful results, the Oakland Unified School District adopted RP as a system-wide alternative to zero tolerance discipline. Student and teacher perceptions of the RP program were positive, as "some students felt that restorative justice strengthened the feelings of community at the school, helping them to better understand and deal with one another" (Sumner et al., 2010, p. 16). One limitation of the case study was that Cole was unusual during the year of observation because it was in the process of closing, containing only one grade.

RPs were implemented at six alternative schools in southeastern Pennsylvania, and all showed an improved school climate and experienced fewer disciplinary referrals and suspensions, while half indicated improved academic performance (Lewis, 2009). West Philadelphia High School demonstrated positive results within one year of implementation. Violent acts and serious incidents were down 52% in the 2007–2008 academic year compared with 2006–2007 (Lewis, 2009). McCold (2002) reported that

RP reduced offending by 58% for youth participants in an alternative education program in Pennsylvania over a three-month follow-up period.

By using a national random sample, Payne and Welch (2015) tested the racial threat perspective in relation to the use of RPs of student conferences, peer mediation, restitution, and community service. Racial threat is a macro-level explanation for greater social control, which predicts that the spatial presence of a high ratio of Black people will intensify public punitiveness because of the perceived political, economic, or criminal threat that a relatively large minority population presents to the White majority (Blalock, 1967; Liska, 1992). Payne and Welch (2015) found that schools with larger populations of Black students—arguably, exactly those sites where alternatives to zero tolerance discipline are most needed—are less likely than other schools to implement RP.

Alternative Schools

Alternative schools are committed to serving students who have become disengaged from the traditional model of education or who are experiencing chronic academic and behavioral difficulties (Lehr et al., 2009). Previous research has categorized alternative secondary schools into three broad types: (a) schools of choice; (b) academic recovery; and (c) behavioral reassignments (Raywid, 1995). The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2002) defines an alternative education school as a “public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school and provides nontraditional education which is not categorized solely as regular education, special education, vocational education, gifted and talented or magnet school programs” (p. 55). Several features have been recognized as important for alternative programming,

including small class sizes, teachers with experience in alternative education, integrated classes, an extremely structured environment, and a collaborative structure (Van et al., 2000; Weir, 1996). Some alternative schools may be a desirable option for students at risk of failing in school, while others are mandatory placements for students as a last resort (Lehr et al., 2003). Alternative schools may also be a desirable option for students who lack academic readiness or who habitually demonstrate behavior issues and are at high risk for dropping out of school (Kennedy, 2011).

Beginning in the early 1980s, the office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention began promoting alternative schools for behavioral assignments based on the idea that such schools could play a major role in reducing youth crime (Cox, 1999). According to Carver and Lewis (2010), there were 3,850 alternative schools in 1998, a number that has steadily increased over time, with 10,300 district-administered alternative schools and programs for at-risk students in the 2007–2008 school year. A national survey of public alternative schools and programs serving at-risk students reported that alternative schools are vulnerable to social, political, economic, and educational inequalities because such schools are located disproportionately in urban districts, districts with high minority student populations, and districts with high poverty concentrations (Kleiner, Porch, Farris, & Greene, 2002). Research suggests that disciplinary alternative schools are increasingly being used to punish, exclude, and contain African American students (Lehr et al., 2003). Race and gender interactions have an effect on the odds of being placed in an alternative school. Black girls have a significantly higher predicted probability of ever being placed in an alternative school than do White girls (Morris & Perry, 2017). One study examined the probability of being

placed in a disciplinary alternative education setting and found that minority students were significantly more likely than White students to be placed in disciplinary alternative education for discretionary reasons and were more likely to return within the same school year (Broker & Mitchell, 2011). The results support previous findings of the existence of a disparity in disciplinary actions.

Fuller and Sabatino (1996) described the personality and demographic characteristics of a sample of at-risk students in four alternative school programs. The sample comprised 50 subjects, 37 young men and 13 women, who took two personality tests: (a) the Behavioral Assessment System for Children and (b) the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory–Adolescent. The findings showed that 62% of at-risk students had histories of poor academic achievement. Additionally, 42% did not participate in any extracurricular activities such as sports or clubs. In addition, truancy, repeated norm-violating behaviors, and negative attitudes toward school were the dominant characteristics of these students. To be effective, the researchers concluded that alternative school programs should include intensive individual and group counseling that focuses on self-esteem, self-concept, personal responsibility, the appropriate expression of feelings, drug/alcohol prevention, vocational assessment, and career exploration (Fuller & Sabatino, 1996). In addition to providing programs at the alternative schools, administrators need to focus on creating a school climate that improves students' sense of belonging.

A research study conducted by Poyrazli and colleagues (2008) explored associations between academic achievement, employment, gender, and age in relation to students' sense of school membership and perception of the adults in the school. The

sample consisted of 102 secondary alternative school students. Findings showed that girls in alternative schools who were personally greeted daily by their teachers expressed a sense of belonging to the school. Students with a more positive perception of school personnel also described a greater sense of school membership (Poyrazli et al., 2008). Studies show students who feel supported and treated fairly by staff and perceive a sense of belonging with their school community do better academically and behaviorally (Haapasalo, Valimaa, & Kannas, 2010).

In a qualitative study, Kim and Taylor (2008) examined alternative high schools from a critical perspective to determine if they benefit students to the extent that they break the cycle of educational inequality. Critical theory provided valuable insights for studying the relationship between theory and society (Giroux, 2001). The site was an alternative high school in the Midwestern United States with a high minority student population—60% were students of color, and 70% received free or reduced-price lunches. The study found that the school provided a caring environment for the students but did not offer a rigorous curriculum or foster higher order thinking to encourage students to achieve their goals (Kim & Taylor, 2008).

Research conducted by Vanderhaar, Petrosko, and Munoz (2014) explored the relationships among out-of-school suspensions, disciplinary placement in alternative schools, and the juvenile justice system. The longitudinal study, conducted in Jefferson County Public Schools, a large, ethnically diverse urban school district, showed that 1 in 10 students entering school would be placed into a disciplinary alternative school. Minority students, specifically those on free or reduced-price lunches, faced a significantly higher risk of such placements. Additionally, the results showed that four

out of 10 students placed in middle school were subsequently detained as juveniles within two years. A limitation of the study is that the sample comprised one cohort of 3rd-grade students within one large urban school district. The authors noted that social-emotional school wide programs, positive behavioral intervention support, and RP are proving to be promising alternatives with short- and long-term implications for students, schools, and their communities.

Wisner and Starzec (2015) examined the experiences of alternative school students as they participated in a mindfulness skills program. The qualitative study took place in a public compensatory alternative high school in a small city in a rural area. Findings suggested that the mindfulness skills program, combined into the alternative high school curriculum, offered an important source of personal empowerment and growth for adolescents. Mindfulness is described as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment” (p.145).

In a quantitative cross-sectional analysis, Perzigian, Afacan, Justin, and Wilkerson (2016) examined student distribution across school types in a large urban district to investigate enrollment patterns with regard to gender, race, socioeconomic status, and disability status. The study used data from 21,165 students enrolled in grades 9–12 during the 2012–2013 school year, showing that compared with the total district percentage of 62.3%, African American youth were significantly overrepresented in both behavior-focused (81.2%) and academic remediation-focused (87.0%) alternative schools. These findings were consistent with previous research showing that African American youth are more likely than any other racial and ethnic demographic to be

removed from the traditional general-education setting (Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). This disproportionality is concerning due to the negative impact of behavior-focused and academic remediation-focused alternative schools on the students enrolled.

Literature Review Summary

Most research involving school discipline has focused on Black males (Wallace et al., 2008; Noguera, 2003; Skiba, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). In addition, most research involving RP in schools has been exploratory case studies examining the implementation of RP and focusing on suspension and other behavioral outcomes (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). It was advantageous to investigate the use of RP talking circles and perceptions of Black middle school female students using a qualitative case study. Few studies have examined this topic, and those that have investigated it have shown positive findings. Therefore, future investigation using a qualitative case study methodology was helpful to better understand the challenges schools face in implementing RP talking circles and to establish the most effective practices. This study gave a voice to Black female middle school students who have experienced RP talking circles. It gave direct insights into the impact RPs had on their lives.

According to Slate, Gray, and Jones (2016), “Educational leaders must engage in critical discussions regarding the inequities directed toward Black girls and the strategies and interventions available to create a climate of belonging” (p. 251). In addition, the girls’ narratives provided important insights into a variety of ways in which talking circles may affect their lives. One study examining restorative approaches to school

discipline showed that higher RP implementation was associated with the lower use of defiance disciplinary referrals for Latino and African American students (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2014).

By exploring students' perspectives on the educational issues that affect them, along with how they affect school and district accountability, this study contributed to existing research on RP. Pearrow and Pollack (2012) suggested that youth should be engaged in a critical investigation of their school conditions and offer collaborative roles in shaping change. Furthermore, as Noguera (2007) noted:

Students may not have all the answers to the problems plaguing urban high schools. This does not mean that they may not have ideas on improving schools on a wide variety of issues, including school safety and student achievement.

Students may have insights that adults are not privy to, and that could prove to be very helpful to improving schools if adults were willing to listen. (p. 209)

Findings from this study have implications for how districts and schools implement RPs in light of zero tolerance policies that involve exclusionary disciplinary practices.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the design methodology selected to explore African American female students' perceptions of RP talking circles at an alternative school. This chapter includes the setting, sample information, instrument used for data collection, and procedures for data analysis.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine Black female middle-school students' perceptions of RP talking circles. Specifically, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Black female students perceive RP talking circles at an alternative middle school?
2. In what ways do Black female students describe how RP talking circles have changed their lives and prospects for the future?

This chapter outlines the methodology that I used and includes the following: a) rationale for a case study research design, b) data collection procedure, c) description of the sample, d) procedure for interviewing, e) data analysis, f) trustworthiness criteria, g) possible limitations, and h) positionality. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

Case Study Research

A case study approach was used to explore how Black female students perceive RP talking circles. In terms of methodology, a case study “takes the reader into the setting with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytic reporting formats” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 267).

Case study research involves a real-life setting (Yin, 2009). This approach was suitable given the goals of this study because the intent was to gain an in-depth

understanding of the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of Black female middle-school students. Case studies place importance on in-depth interviews with study participants (Creswell, 2013), an essential source of evidence under this methodology, because most case studies are about behavioral events (Yin, 2009). Therefore, data sources for this study were gathered by means of interviews, observations, and field notes to explore the central research questions.

District and School Context Setting

The research was conducted at an alternative middle and high school located in a large, diverse, urban school district. For the purposes of confidentiality, the school was referred to as “Tate Academy” (a pseudonym). Located in the Southeast region of the United States, the school district, overall, serves more than 100,000 students in a large urban metropolitan community of approximately 1 million people. In the 2016–2017 school year, the demographic characteristics of the district were 45% White, 37% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 8% Other, with 62.3% participating in the free and reduced-price lunch program and 12.2% considered to be Exceptional Child Education (ECE) students. This district has exhibited persistently high rates of suspensions and disciplinary referrals for African-American students and ECE students compared to the rates for their White counterparts. In 2014–2015, for example, African-American students accounted for 36.1% of the student population but 68.3% of the suspensions.

Tate Academy, one of two behavioral alternative schools in the district, is a combined middle and high school established in 2015. The school was created as an attempt to solve the problems afflicting the district’s struggling alternative schools. To better meet the needs of the students, the school used Positive Behavior Interventions and

Supports (PBIS) and restorative practices (RP), embracing a different focus from the punitive emphasis of the past. The principal of the school was named weeks before the school opened. The first few months of the 2015–2016 year were difficult. Teachers pushed back about the changes, and some wanted to leave the school in the face of increasing behavior problems. During this time, several local media articles highlighted the challenges in the school.

Students are referred to the school on an individual basis. The school was selected since it was the only alternative middle school in the district. During the 2016–2017 school year, Tate Academy had a population of approximately 140 students (77% Black, 19% White, 1% Hispanic, and 2% Other) with 81.7% eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and 28.5% ECE students. Table 1 shows Tate Academy’s enrollment demographics. The school operated with seven full-time administrators, one principal, two middle-school assistant principals, two high-school assistant principals, one middle-school counselor, one high-school counselor, and two retired counselors.

The International Institute of Restorative Practice trained the school’s administrative staff in RP in the summer of 2016. In addition, the school has taken a number of steps to improve the structure and climate of the building. For instance, the 2016–2017 school year saw an intentional focus on RP. Tate Academy is unique in that it was implementing RP throughout the entire building. While district plans included implementing RP in several schools starting in the 2016–2017 academic year, Tate Academy began its RP journey several years earlier, in 2014, with the partnership of an associate professor from a local university. As part of the program, students met on Mondays and Wednesdays with their advisory teacher during first period for a talking

circle. These students were also chosen to be part of another group by other school personnel or outside agencies. Based on need, a gender-specific group of middle-school students was pulled out of class once a week to take part in talking circles for 45 minutes with a school counselor and staff person.

Table 1. *School Demographics*

Gender	N	Percent
Male	91	64.0
Female	51	35.9
Total	142	100
Race	N	Percent
White	27	19.0
Black	110	77.4
Hispanic	2	1.4
Other	3	2.1
Total	142	100
ECE	N	Percent
	44	31.0
Free and reduced lunch	N	Percent
	116	81.7

Selection of Participants

The qualitative sampling strategy chosen was purposive sampling, which involves drawing on a non-representative subset of some larger population. According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling is employed to select information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. In purposeful sampling, the researcher is able to choose cases “from which one can learn a great deal about issues of essential importance to the purpose of the research” (Glesne, 2010). Study participants were recruited through

administrative referrals (purposive) and from staff referrals (purposive). Participants who met the criteria for participation in the study were Black female students enrolled at the alternative middle school during the 2018–2019 school year and who took part in an RP talking circle; thus, all middle school students who engaged in the talking circle during the fall semester of the 2018–2019 school year were invited to participate in the study. The rationale for the purposive sample was the ability to negotiate access through existing contacts. Before the study began, I met with the principal to provide an overview of the study. I also worked closely with the middle school counselor, who arranged the girls' schedules to allow them to participate in the talking circle.

Talking Circles

In a talking circle, the space is arranged to ensure that no tables or desks stand between the students or in the middle of the circle. Sitting in a circle requires that everyone can see every face without having to lean forward. Another critical component of the talking circle is the talking piece, which is an object of significance chosen by circle members. The person holding the talking piece is the speaker. The center piece also serves an important function, creating a focal point that supports speaking from the heart and listening from the heart. This component sits on the floor in the center of the open space inside the circle. Talking circles that take place within this physical setup are organized into four parts, including “checking in” (sharing briefly how participants are feeling), “burning issues” (sharing concerns or problems), “topic of the day” (discussion topics), and “closing” (reading a quote, poem, or song lyrics or performing a breathing exercise). The established structure provides consistency to the circles.

Data Collection Procedures

To generate data relevant to the research questions, a case study methodology using in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observations was used (Yin, 2014). In research, drawing from multiple data sources for each case allows for data triangulation to generate an in-depth understanding of the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research employs many methods for gathering information, interviewing among them. In this study, I conducted face-to-face interviews with the students, observed the students in the circles, and took field notes. The observations of students in the talking circles occurred first, followed by individual face-to-face interviews on another day. Field notes were taken throughout. For the interviews that did not occur on the same day, I made arrangements with the counselor to schedule another time to complete the interviews and created a schedule for meeting with study participants before beginning the interviews and observations. The purpose of the schedule was to help maintain accurate details that included the dates and times of the interviews and observations for data analysis. The interview recordings were transcribed by a professional transcription service.

Interviews. The interview part of the study consisted of questions aimed at obtaining deeper information about students' perceptions of the talking circles. The interviews were conducted between March and May in the spring semester of the 2017–2018 school year. During the interview with each participant, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) consisting of carefully chosen semi-structured questions designed to structure the interview while addressing the research questions.

The interviews were conducted in a classroom not being used at that time, and the door was closed to ensure privacy. The interviews lasted 20–30 minutes each and were digitally recorded and transcribed. For the purpose of security and confidentiality, the transcripts were stored in a secured location, and each participant was assigned a pseudonym. I also took field notes that described each participant's thoughts during the interview and observations immediately following the interview. Before beginning the interview process, I gained informed consent from each girl's parent/guardian and assent from the girls (see Appendix B). Letters were sent to provide information about myself, the study and its purpose, techniques about data collection, and confidentiality. The signed consent forms were kept in a secure location. Participants were chosen based on the return of consent letters. No known or foreseeable risks were identified for participation in this study. No cost related to participating in the study was incurred other than the time spent during the interview.

Observations. Observation is a vital tool for collecting data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). This technique is valuable in case studies because it provides a firsthand account of the situation under study (Merriam, 1988). In this study, observations of the talking circles were conducted to record the interactions between the circle facilitator and students as well as students and their peers. These sessions took place twice between March and May in the spring semester of the 2017–2018 school year.

During the observations, I gathered field notes by conducting observations as a non-participating observer. Watching and listening to the participants' interactions and responses assisted me in capturing information and a deeper understanding of each

contributor's perceptions (Kawulich, 2005). Wolcott (1981) proposed four strategies to guide observations:

- observations by a broad sweep,
- observations of nothing in particular,
- observations that search for paradoxes, and
- observations that search for problems facing the group.

As part of this study, I conducted observations of the participants while they were in their scheduled RP talking circles. First, I coordinated with the administrators to obtain the schedule for the talking circles, matching the length of the observations to the duration of each talking circle. Initially, my role was that of a complete observer. During each observation, I had an administrator introduce me. Over the course of the talking circle, I used an observational protocol for recording information while observing that consisted of a single page with a line dividing the middle to separate descriptive notes from reflective notes (see Appendix C). After the completion of the observation, I thanked the participants, informed them of the use of the data, and slowly withdrew from the site.

Glesne (2016) identified the field journal as the main recording tool of qualitative researchers. Accordingly, field notes were used in this study during the interview and observation process. My taking field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site comprised a qualitative observation (Creswell, 2014). I took notes in a spiral-bound notebook, using pseudonyms to protect the participants. I then referred to the field notes to help determine the follow-up questions that I asked during each face-to-face interview to seek clarification on a subject. As Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014)

have noted, the process of writing up formal field notes typically adds back content missing from the raw notes because review of the raw field notes stimulates the field worker to remember aspects that were not recorded in the notes at the time of observation. Moreover, full field notes involve running notes that are preferably written throughout the day but may alternatively be recorded as soon as possible after an observation period, depending on the circumstances (Glesne, 2016).

Data Analysis

An iterative process was used to analyze the interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell, 2013). The unit of analysis in this case study involved the students in the talking circles. The analysis was inductive because the research was exploratory. In their discussion of data analysis and interpretation, Creswell and Creswell (2009) laid out a six-step process. Step 1 is to prepare for analysis by organizing the data. For this study, I confirmed that I had completed a written transcription of all the interviews conducted. I listened to the recordings to clarify meanings and reviewed all the transcriptions. Step 2 is to read and reflect on all the collected data to gain a sense of the general meaning. In Step 3, the researcher uses a coding process to begin analyzing the data. In this case, I used the open coding technique to analyze the data. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), open coding is “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data” (p. 198). Step 4 involves establishing and categorizing the themes to be analyzed. I used a constant comparative analysis that allowed the data to be placed into categories. The responses to the interview questions were analyzed, and categories specific to each question were established to compare and divide participants’ responses into groups. Summarizing was used in the grouping to further justify the placement in a

specific category. Step 5 entails the process of creating the framework for presenting the findings, and Step 6 covers interpreting the data and creating meaning.

Trustworthiness

One technique of trustworthiness is prolonged engagement, which creates closeness with the participants and establishes relationships with everyone involved. I worked with the students and staff at Tate Academy for two years before conducting the study as well as working with a group of students at the school. This provided an opportunity for me to learn the culture and check for misinformation. Trustworthiness was established by using the exploring strategies of Creswell (2003). Peer review or debriefing provides another form of trustworthiness. I shared my study with colleagues, inviting them to ask unbiased questions about the study and offer criticism. In this way, a peer can act as a “devil’s advocate” who keeps the researcher “honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). To address subjectivity and bias, I wrote a reflection on my thoughts about the study to ensure that I was being objective.

Triangulation is a strategy used for the purpose of credibility. In addition, data triangulation allows the researcher to deal with potential problems regarding construct validity because the multiple sources of evidence offer multiple measures of the same phenomenon (Yin, 2009). The issue of transferability is managed by a rich, thick description, which means that the researcher provides details when describing a case (Creswell, 2013).

Researcher's Perspective

As mentioned, before the study commenced, I had already developed trust and rapport with students and staff at the study site, which are ideal characteristics in field relations (Glesne, 2010). As an insider at this location, I had and continue to have a strong voice in the potential opportunities for implementing the findings of this study into school and district policies and practices. An African American female for whom teaching is a second career, I have been in education for 13 years in the district where the study took place. I started my career as a middle-school teacher at a traditional school and then transferred to a large middle school in an affluent neighborhood. After teaching for seven years, I became a resource teacher for the district, working with staff to support students' behavioral and social-emotional needs.

I have also participated in national programs. For example, the district uses PBIS to address behavior, specifically the discipline disparities between Black and White students as well as ECE students. Accordingly, I have used PBIS to help support students with behavioral issues and to assist them in building relationships and establishing procedures and routines.

I have been vocal on issues of school discipline, especially over the use and abuse of suspensions. Even before I began this degree process, I was relatively familiar with RP and its transformative potential for students in general (and African American students in particular). In 2014, I observed an associate professor from a local university facilitate circles at Tate Academy and witnessed first-hand the possibility of RP. I believe I have an ethical responsibility to transform how students are disciplined. Suspending students is not the answer, and it does not change the behavior. I believe that establishing

relationships and creating a sense of community inside the classroom are both proactive and reactive means to addressing behavioral issues. It is also my understanding that educators cannot correct until they connect. Thus, it is imperative that we carve out time to allow students to have conversations and discuss how they are feeling. This research showed how Black female middle-school students at an alternative school perceive RP talking circles and find meaning and value.

Limitations

Limitations are aspects of a study that are outside the researcher's control and that "may negatively affect the results or (one's) ability to generalize" (Roberts, 2004, p. 146). This study had a number of limitations. While it has been noted that the purpose of a case study is "not to represent the world, but to represent the case" (Stake, 2005, p. 460), all student participants interviewed for this study came from one school district, meaning that the results may not be transferable to other geographic areas or socioeconomic groups. In qualitative studies, however, data are often collected from a few cases or individuals; as a consequence, the findings cannot be generalized to the larger population. In addition, inclusion of additional RP circles could have enhanced the richness of data and transferability of findings to similar contexts or settings. My position as a district administrator carried a certain authority, which may be considered a limitation as it may have affected student responses. Another limitation was the setting and staff turnover at Tate Academy. This study was exploratory and intended to create a line of inquiry for future research. For example, such research might want to explore the transient nature of alternative schools and the resulting impact on consistent culture and restorative practice implementation.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the research design that was used for this study. Data collection was comprised of observations, participant interviews, and field notes. A description of the data analysis procedures was included. Issues pertaining to the trustworthiness of the data as well as ethical considerations were addressed in this chapter, and limitations were discussed. In Chapter 4, the results of analysis of the qualitative data will be presented. If the participants in this study have perceived RP to be effectively implemented at Tate Academy, the findings will have implications for how districts and schools implement RP in light of zero-tolerance policies that involve exclusionary disciplinary practices. While methods for reporting the findings of qualitative methods are diverse, narrative text has been the most frequent form of display for qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1984). To convey the results of this qualitative research, I used quotes from short to long embedded passages, first person “I” in the narration, and narrative forms associated with specific qualitative strategies.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore Black female students' perceptions of Restorative Practice (RP) talking circles at an alternative school. Examination of African American female students' perceptions of RP is needed to inform understandings of the challenges schools face in implementing RP and to promote the use of best practices in RP talking circles. In addition, several exploratory studies have demonstrated that RP approaches have promise in terms of their impact on the school climate, student behavior, and relationships among students and staff, among other outcomes (Ashley & Burke, 2009; Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013). Other reports show that RP has led to increased student connectedness, better community and parent engagement, improved academic achievement, and the offering of support to students from staff (González, 2012). Schumacher's (2014) ethnographic study of weekly talking circles illustrated how restorative approaches provided a safe space for peers helping peers, and the girls improved their listening, anger management, and empathic skills. Additionally, girls' narratives provide important insights into the various ways talking circles affect their lives.

In this study, Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality theory, rooted in Black feminist scholarship, was applied. Although intersectionality is situated in the legal field, the idea

of cultural intersectionality can illuminate how various cultural constructions intersect to reproduce racial and gender disparities among youth (Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectionality suggests that complex inequalities originate from distinct stereotypes and means of oppression that result from overlapping systems of inequality (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991). Central to this framework is the claim that inequalities and identities of race, class, and gender must be analyzed simultaneously, not in isolation (Morris & Perry, 2017). Two research questions guided the study:

1. How do Black female students perceive RP talking circles at an alternative middle school?
2. In what ways do Black female students report that RP talking circles have shaped their lives and prospects for the future?

I used the qualitative case study method. Case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life setting (Yin, 2009). This approach is suitable given the goals of this study, as the intent was to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of Black female middle school students. I conducted face-to-face interviews and observations of students in the circles. During these interviews, I posed semi-structured questions through which I sought to obtain deeper information concerning five Black female students at the selected alternative middle school. While observing the talking circles, I sought to capture interactions between the students and the facilitator as well as among the students and their peers. In this chapter, I discuss the results that emerged from analysis of my observations and of the five individual semi-structured interviews. Direct quotes from students are used to ensure that their voices are heard as they express their experiences at Tate

Academy and in their RP talking circles as well as the meaning they make of these experiences. Initial coding was conducted based on the research questions. I followed this step using open coding as part of the initial data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Student Perceptions of Restorative Practice Talking Circles

The participants included five Black female middle school students attending Tate Academy. All five participants were all in the 8th grade. Four of them were 13 years old and one was 14 years old. Table 2 shows the participants 'grade, ages and duration at the alternative school.

Table 2. *Participants*

Participants	Age	Grade	Duration at Tate Academy
Tonya	13	8	3
Jaden	13	8	3
Stacey	13	8	4
Kaila	13	8	3
Destiny	14	8	2

Notes: Duration represents the number of months student was at Tate Academy

The primary data for analysis came from the transcriptions of the interviews and observations. Analyses of the transcripts and observations of student experiences in the RP talking circles helped to paint a picture of the emergent themes and individual stories. Transcripts were uploaded into the computer software program NVivo (version 10). Each interview was coded using the software. To prepare for the analysis, I read the interviews numerous times until I was familiar with the key ideas discussed and captured through the interview questions.

Initially, I began coding of key phrases in order to capture the essence of meaning of key ideas from the interview data. A code is defined as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2013, p. 3). Each interview was coded and then codes from all of the interviews were reviewed. The process of coding for research questions one and two was helpful because it allowed me to categorize the responses into themes. Saldana (2103) divides coding into 2 major states: First Cycle and Second Cycle coding. First Cycle coding is a way to initially summarize the chunks of data. Second Cycle is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of themes.

From the initial codes, I categorized and grouped the codes based on similarities of ideas, and expressions shared by the participants. From these categories, codes were grouped and regrouped until clarity was achieved for their inclusion to different categories. Initial categories were further refined until linkages between different categories helped in the development of broad themes (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). From these analyses, seven themes emerged: talking circle procedures and elements, single-gender circles, the circle keeper,⁴ self-awareness, helpful circle topics, letting things out, and relationships.

Talking Circle Procedures

The first research question addressed in this study was: “How do Black female students perceive RP talking circles at an alternative middle school?” Three themes emerged based on the information provided by the study participants. The first major

⁴ The teacher who facilitates the talking circle.

theme that emerged from student interviews involved talking circle procedures. A component of the talking circle is the talking piece, the person holding the talking piece is the speaker. In the talking circle there are certain guidelines that help ensure the conversation remains positive and allows for everyone to have an opportunity to share. The guidelines are: respect the talking piece, speak from the heart, listen from the heart, trust you will know what to say, and say just enough (Costello, Wachtel & Ted Wachtel, 2010). In general, all students complained that other students talked too much in the circles, leaving students unable to hear one another. Stacy described the circles as “chaotic,” sharing that during circle time she slept half the time in the morning and that many students played Uno. I observed a student sleeping with her head down during the talking circle. Best practices in talking circles include an expectation of high participation by students in circles with little or no passing. Students have the decision to share or not share. The goal is the students fully participate and all voices are heard in a respectful and attentive manner. Adamantly, Destiny shared that in her talking circle, “[There] ain’t nobody listening.” Furthermore, she said, “It’s too many people talking at the same time.” Destiny said that when everybody talked and did not listen, “it makes me mad. Then we can’t finish.” Destiny felt that if everyone would be quiet, all could “hear everybody’s opinion and stuff.” Destiny said she wanted structure in the circle so that the students could listen to each other and complete the talking circles. Another participant, Tonya, described the circle experience as “kind of frustrating sometimes,” saying, “It’s just like something is always distracting us because we’re not listening to each other.”

Due to a lack of circle procedures, the participants felt there was no level of respect or cooperation in the talking circles. Jaden believed that “there’s too much talking—nobody listens to the teacher.” She suggested that the teacher needed to “get them [the students] to listen and pay attention.” Stacy specifically mentioned the pen her teacher used as the talking piece: “I don’t find it interesting because using a pen or a marker is not going to grab anybody’s attention to be quiet, because they still talk.” During my observations, I noticed the students using a pen as the talking piece. It was being tossed, not handed, to each new student, and students were talking out of turn—consistent with what students said during the interviews about everyone talking at the same time.

Gathering in a circle is a primary component of RP. Circle processes historically stem from indigenous people of North America and are rooted in the ancient practices of coming together as a community in a “circle to solve problems, support one another, and connect to one another” (Pranis, 2005, p. 3). Students normally sit facing each other without barriers, and when students have the “talking piece,” they have a chance to voice their perspective. This gives students an opportunity to learn about one another, and practice social and emotional skills such as active listening and appropriate personal disclosure (Gregory et al., 2014). During the observation of the talking circles, students were scattered rather than sitting in a circle—clustered together so that not everyone could see everyone else (See Appendix D). The physical arrangement of the talking circle is important and greatly affects the quality of the circle, critically creating that level playing field where everyone feels safe and included (Costello, Wachtel & Ted Wachtel, 2010).

The talking piece is supposed to be an object of significance chosen by circle members; the person holding the talking piece is the speaker. Each participant felt that something needed to be done to control the talking so that everyone could hear one another. Several of the participants expressed a desire to be heard with respect.

Single-Gender Talking Circles

There was an overwhelming consensus that the talking circles would be better if boys were not included in them, as the girls perceived the boys as being too playful. The girls had clear answers and specific reasons as to why boys should not be in the circle. In Jaden's words, "It would be way better 'cause boys, all they do is talk and play." When asked to expand on this answer, she said, "The girls, they actually be answering [sic.] the questions and stuff. The boys just don't want to pay attention. Girls do. So, if it was all girls, it would be, like, more ideas." Jaden shared that she would feel more comfortable if the boys were not in the talking circles. She made reference to an all-girls circle when speaking of her level of participation: "They're giving ideas, I'm gonna start giving ideas—even though I don't got that many. But I could say something." Stacy shared a similar sentiment, stating that boys "make the talking circles funny, but sometimes they get too funny about it, and then she's [the teacher] like, 'No, serious.'" Stacy was adamant that boys not be in the talking circle: "They take everything as a joke. [They think] things so funny, and it's just like they don't need to be in it." Tonya said:

Boys, they just take it all like a joke. They have issues, but they don't wanna talk about it. They just take everything as a joke and laugh about it and play around and goof off—kind of like don't take it seriously, but deep down they

know that they need to talk to somebody. But they don't. They just keep everything bottled up (Tonya).

Tonya saw the boys as distractions. She believed that if boys were excluded from the talking circles stating, "There wouldn't be distractions. Mostly because girls, they care a lot. It would probably be most of them, but you would get to talk." Although the talking circles were comprised of male and female students, notably, most of the responses during the observation were made by female students. In these ways, participants imagined how the talking circles would be different if boys were not included. Students were very vocal regarding their perceptions of single gender talking circles. The participants expressed how gender impacted their level of participation, which in turn impacted their experience of the talking circles. The participants viewed the boys in the talking circles as playful, which they interpreted as a distraction. All five informants revealed talking circles were perceived as safe collaborative spaces to encourage peer relationships. This is consistent with extant research on RP talking circles (Schumacher, 2014).

The Circle Keeper

The study participants indicated that the disposition of the circle keeper was demonstrative of the organizational structure of the talking circle. Students' comments suggested that having the right circle keeper was important to them, especially with respect to the teacher's circle topics and disposition. The participants viewed the behavior of some of the circle keepers as exhibiting an undesirable attitude and too great a tendency to speak during the talking circles.

There were vast differences in circle keepers' choices of topic for the talking circles. Stacy described two different circle keepers: In one teacher's circle, "it's, like, more personal"—for example, the teacher might ask, "How do you feel about others in the classroom?" or "Do you keep promises?" In the other teacher's circle, "she just wants to get it done and over with." Stacy expressed frustration with her circle keepers' topics: "It feels like [teacher] doesn't know what to talk about in the talking circle, so it's just kind of confusing." Kaila stated that she liked a particular circle keeper because "we just talk about stuff we gonna learn from." The findings of this study indicated that some of the circle keepers did not maintain the integrity of the circle process and provide mature steady support to the girls. This is in contrast to previous research (Schumacher, 2014).

Destiny believed her circle keeper exhibited a poor attitude, saying that the teacher "got a[n] attitude, because every time we say something, she have a[n] attitude or something like that." Similar to prior research (Morris, 2007), Destiny was participated in the circle however, the teacher interpreted Destiny's questioning and assertiveness negatively. Kaila shared that in one of her circles, the facilitator "just argues with us for no reason." Stacy said, "It's difficult for us to get in a circle because sometimes people don't want to share or they got attitudes with [the teacher], so it's difficult for us to do a talking circle." When asked what type of circle keeper should lead the talking circles, Destiny emphatically said, "A person that gets along with kids well."

Tonya also felt as if her teacher did too much talking: "The teacher's just talking, so you get extra bored and you either fall asleep or you're not paying

attention.” Another participant, Kaila, felt as if students did not get enough opportunities to talk as the teachers dominated the talking circles. She said teachers were “the main ones talking in the circle; we don’t even talk in the circles, it’s just the teachers.” Elaborating, she explained that “if you got the talking piece, you the only one that can talk, so my understanding is if we got the talking piece and we the one that can talk, then why are the teachers talking?” During observations, I observed that the circle keeper did the majority of the talking, and there were times when she spoke although she did not have the talking piece. This may discourage some students from participating. Coates, Umbreit, and Vos (2003) conducted a study with the purpose of providing a qualitative look at the nature of how peace making circles work and how participants believe circle participation has affected them. Coates, Umbreit, and Vos identified 8 skills that are desirable for circle keepers. Those were: focus, organized, nonjudgmental/open minded; good listener; compassion/love/caring/empathic; respectful, patient/calm; and understanding. Observational data and interview data in my study provide evidence that the circle keeper at Tate Academy lacked organizational and understanding. The circle keeper is an important structural element in the talking circles, and the study participants provided examples of how the circle keeper’s disposition adversely influenced the talking circles.

The second research question addressed in this study was: “In what ways do Black female students report that RP talking circles have shaped their lives and prospects for the future?” Four themes emerged from the data: self-awareness,

helpful topics, letting things out, and relationships. Each theme will be discussed in further detail below as it pertains to the participants' perceptions.

Self-Awareness

Partaking in these experiences allowed study participants to gain self-awareness and learn more about other students. Some students recalled moments when they were misunderstood, shy, or used profanity a lot. Destiny revealed that people called her mean, but she said, "I'm not mean. It's just when you get on my bad side, I'm going to be mean. But I'm a nice person. Yeah—I like doing good stuff." Stacy further explained, "I'm very shy, and I'm not that outgoing. People talk about going skating, and I'm just like—I don't go." She further discussed the ways in which the talking circles have helped her become a better person, go out more, and find new friends, saying that they were "teaching me about myself." Stacy proudly admitted that the talking circles have had a positive impact on her and helped her become more social. Jaden shared, "I'm getting better at talking to people." She confessed that "I used to be so uncomfortable, but, like, I'm speaking now, 'cause I got used to them staring at me." The talking circles also impacted the prospects of high school for one participant. Jaden anticipated the talking circles helping her in the future: "It could help me in high school—like, what if I gotta do a project or something, gotta talk to the class?"

Kaila admitted that she had learned that she uses profanity a lot. This is relevant because Black girls are often disciplined for using profanity. Blake et al. (2011) found that Black girls were most often cited for defiance, followed by inappropriate dress, using profane language toward a student, and physical

aggression. Kaila admitted that she had “learned I cuss a lot in the talking circle” and that “I noticed when I started doing circles, I started talking, [and] every time I talk a cuss word come[s] out of my mouth.” Tonya reflected on her early participation in the talking circles: “When I first came, I always had an attitude. I always used to be mad because I didn’t wanna be here, but it’s changed a lot.” When probed about this, Tonya stated:

My attitude, my demeanor, academically—everything has changed. Usually I’m not more focused in school stuff than usual. Because usually I’m more focused about my phone and outside of school and talking to my friends and playing and joking around. Usually, like now after that, I just more focused on my work and determined. I know what I want to do in life, and I don’t want to be slacking around, slacking around every 5 minutes (Tonya).

Various statements by participants highlighted the significance of self-awareness when interacting with people in the talking circles. Self-awareness, which can be interpreted as the ability to identify one’s strengths and weaknesses, is exemplified chiefly by the ability to reflect on and be honest about oneself. Participants’ statements also highlighted self-confidence, which can be interpreted as the ability to do new things or to do things better than before. Self-confidence is exemplified chiefly by the ability to communicate. Being able to reflect on one’s own actions and on the actions of others while getting to know others on a deeper level is a positive force for development of growth-fostering relationships (Schumacher, 2014).

Circle Topics

This theme includes highlights from each participant's discussion of what she considered to be the most helpful topics addressed in the talking circles, including behavior, likes and dislikes, promises, and social media. Jaden stated, "We did a circle about how should we change our behavior. That one helped a little bit." Stacy shared that the discussion of promises was helpful: "My promise was to get out of bed earlier, get more sleep, and then my other one was [to] pay attention to my language more." Tonya said that discussions of social media and bullying were helpful: "The most helpful topics [were] when we talked about social media and how kids are being bullied and stuff like that—how most girls are so weak-minded about what other people think about them instead of what they think about themselves. Tonya touches on the negative perception some girls have for themselves. We talk about that a lot in the mornings because it's a really . . . especially social media—everybody. Everybody's always being bullied or something, so we talk about that a lot."

Kaila described an incident that occurred when they discussed bullying in her talking circle. In the beginning of the story, she admitted that she laughs a lot. Kaila said, "I just laugh at anything. I don't know why, like, I will just start laughing for no reason." During the talking circle, Kaila was watching a video and laughed at a comment that a student made, and the teacher yelled at her. When Kaila asked the teacher why she was yelling, the teacher told her that what she was doing was bullying. Kaila said, "Come on, that's not bullying. I thought that's just talk. Because I wasn't yelling at her. If I was yelling at her, I would have got in trouble

and got suspended.” Kaila wanted clarity on why her laughing was being called bullying. Kaila did not get suspended for this issue; however, the issue was not resolved. Further, Kaila recognized that yelling would have resulted in a consequence such as being pushed out of the classroom or out of school. Consistent with evidence that Black girls across the country experience discipline referral rates six times higher than those of White girls (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Biases and racialized stereotypes of Black girls’ behavior often leads to harsher punishments.

One improvement Tonya mentioned pertaining to topics was the creation of a topic jar. She said, “Think about certain topics that we want to talk about and each day, each person picks a topic out of the jar and that’s what we talk about before we start the circle.” Data analysis revealed that the girls not only want a voice in the talking circles; they want a choice when it comes to the topics discussed.

Letting Things Out

Students described the talking circles as a way to let things out—a frequently discussed theme. Destiny said that participation in talking circles “lets me get everything off my mind”, further explaining that she could have “a good day and stuff—talk to somebody about my problems and stuff.” Jaden also described the purpose of the talking circle, emphasizing that “we gotta let things out and talk about some stuff that we need to talk about. Like not too long ago, we talked about how things make us feel.” Stacy suggested that “the objective of the talking circles [is] to get your point across and learn things about other people and just share what you want to share.” Tonya’s reaction was similar: “If you have anything built up or

anything . . . just let it out, and talk about [the] way a certain thing made you—the way you felt about a situation.” Tonya shared her personal experience with letting things out: “Usually when I come, I’m just like, I don’t care but sometimes it’s just, like, well—you talk about it because that’s something that might be frustrating at home.” She went on to describe the talking circles as “an everyday thing [in which] I talk about what’s going on instead of balling it up and keeping it inside.” This point demonstrates that students have something to say and want to share. Evidence suggests that relational bonding is particularly relevant for girls (Brown, Way, & Duff, 1999).

Relationships

Four of the five participants spoke positively about talking circles’ influence on their relationships with staff and students. Several exploratory studies have demonstrated that Restorative Justice approaches have promise in terms of their impact on the school climate, student behavior, and relationships among students and staff, among other outcomes (Ashley & Burke, 2009; Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013). Destiny described the talking circles as a way to “make sure I don’t say nothing smart every time, and with my attitude, pretty much so I can know who I’m talking to, talk right to somebody.” Jaden said, “I got to know them, they got to know me. Some of them I still don’t know or like, but I’m going to get to know them, and they’re gonna like me. Everybody likes me.” Tonya said of the staff, “I can trust a lot . . . more people now that I got to know them, and students—it’s just I think it’s hard for me, but some students have it way worse than me.” This is an example of how talking circles can help teach students empathy. Schumacher (2014) found that

talking circles provided a safe space for peers to help peers, with girls improving their listening, anger management, and empathic skills.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the data collected to answer the two research questions posed for this study, as provided by five participants from Tate Academy, then drew conclusions from them. The data collected from all participants provided insights into Black middle school girl students' perspectives on RP talking circles. The major findings of this case encompassed seven salient themes: talking circle procedures, single-gender circles, disposition of the facilitator, self-awareness, letting things out, helpful topics, and relationships.

This study explored Black middle school girls' perceptions of RP talking circles with a view to improving current understandings of the challenges schools face in implementing RP and establishing best practices for RP talking circles. Additionally, providing Black female students the opportunity to share their views could help inform schools' implementation of RP, including by identifying the types of support these students need.

The findings from research question one—"How do Black female students perceive RP talking circles at an alternative middle school?"—revealed that the students were frustrated with the lack of structure in the talking circles and that there was too much talking from the students and the circle keeper. One student described it as "chaotic." The rule that only the person with the talking piece could talk was not enforced. The findings of this research suggest that students want strict circle

procedures and expectations to be followed to improve the talking circle experience.

Table 3 shows the codes and themes revealed by the five informants.

Table 3. *Summary of Codes*

Theme	Code	Destiny	Participants			
			Kaila	Jordan	Stacy	Tonya
Talking Circle Procedures	Classroom management	1		1	1	1
	Improvement to the circle	2	3	1	3	3
Single Gender Talking Circles	Single gender circles	4	1	3	2	2
	Excitement					2
The Circle Keeper	Facilitator	2	5		1	
Self-Awareness	Self-awareness	3	4	2	2	5
	Resistance to talking circles		1	2	3	
	Outside of school					1
Circle Topics	Helpful topics	1	4	2	2	1
Letting Things out	Letting things out	2		1		
	Check in	1				1
Relationships	Staff relationships	1	1	1		1

Notes: The number represents the number of coding references

The findings also suggest that the girls preferred single gender talking circles because boys were seen as too playful and a distraction. The girls would participate more if the boys were not in the circle. An additional finding was that the circle keeper's disposition influenced the talking circles. When asked what type of circle keeper should lead the talking circles, the participants said, "A person that gets along with kids well." The data showed that the students perceived their circle keeper as having an attitude and talking too much.

For the second research question—"In what ways do Black female students report that RP talking circles have shaped their lives and prospects for the future?"—

the findings indicated that the students were able to recognize aspects about themselves, express themselves, and build relationships. Stacy proudly admitted that the talking circles had a positive impact on her and helped her become more social. Tonya reflected on her early participation in the talking circles: “When I first came, I always had an attitude. I always used to be mad because I didn’t wanna be here, but it’s changed a lot.” Findings indicated that the talking circles showed evidence of shaping the girls’ lives and prospects for the future. Chapter 5 will relate key findings and implications for policy, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss key findings related to the research questions, the implications of those findings, and recommendations for future research before presenting the conclusions that can be drawn from this study's findings. The purpose of this study was to explore Black female students' perceptions of Restorative Practice (RP) talking circles at an alternative school. To address this subject, I posed two research questions:

1. How do Black female students perceive RP talking circles at an alternative middle school?
2. In what ways do Black female students report that RP talking circles have shaped their lives and prospects for the future?

This chapter lays out findings and conclusions made based on the results of the data analysis, as well as implications for policy, practice, and future research.

Summary of Findings

Seven common themes emerged from this study: talking circle procedures and elements, single-gender circles, the circle keeper, self-awareness, helpful circle topics, letting things out, and relationships. The major themes were inferred from data provided

by five middle school students during interviews conducted using semi structured questions. In addition, observations of talking circles were conducted during which to record interactions between the circle facilitator and students as well as between students and their peers.

Theme 1: Talking Circle Procedures

The findings of this study revealed inconsistencies in adherence to the procedures set for use of talking circles—inconsistencies, it should be noted, that frustrated some students. For example, participants in this study expressed displeasure at the quality of the guidelines in their talking circles, complaining that the circles were too loud.

Circle processes originated with the indigenous people of North America; they are rooted in the ancient practice of coming together as a community in a “circle to solve problems, support one another, and connect to one another” (Pranis, 2005, p. 3). Doing so provides people a structured opportunity to share their feelings and ideas. In principle, talking circles proceed as follows: (1) opening, (2) centerpiece, (3) talking piece, (4) guidelines/values, (5) guiding questions, (6) closing (Pranis & Boyes-Watson, 2015). Communication is regulated by passing a talking piece—an object of special meaning or symbolism to the group—to the circle facilitator, who is usually called the circle keeper (Umbreit, 2003). The talking piece is a tool used to maintain order and keep the circle running smoothly. Whoever has it in his or her hands is the only one in the circle who is permitted to speak (Costello, Watchtel, & Wachtel, 2010). The purpose of this rule is to ensure greater equity for all students, but the outcomes of this study are inconsistent with the aforementioned literature: Participants complained that the circles were characterized by too much talking from those not holding the talking piece, so that students were

unable to hear one another. Destiny, for example, shared that in her circle, no one was listening, and some people were talking simultaneously. The circles were described as chaotic, which caused some to feel frustrated that the circle guidelines were not being followed. Notably, however, the girls were willing, and indeed eager, to participate even though procedures were not followed consistently. Furthermore, there was a lack of significance for the talking piece used. It appeared the circle keeper used whatever was convenient, rather than a meaningful object.

Theme 2: Single-Gender Talking Circles

The Alliance for Girls (2015) has indicated that girls of color appreciate engaging in girl-specific programming that offers enrichment activities and support—and that they yearn for more opportunities to do so. Girls at Tate Academy agreed that the talking circles would be better if membership were restricted to a single gender—either boys or girls. Research supports the notion that schools need to create safe spaces for girls in which they have access to supportive environments (Mansfield, 2014). The participants thought that if boys were in the circle, they would be silly, treat everything as a joke, and present a distraction; overall, the girls believed that they would feel more comfortable if boys were not in the talking circles. The girls valued the opportunity to express their voices and wanted to maximize it by minimizing distractions from doing so. By excluding boys from the talking circles, the girls could gain a new sense of empowerment. In keeping with the literature, the participants viewed the boys as frivolous, interpreting their behavior as a distraction.

Research supports the use of gender-specific programs in schools to provide appropriate outlets for girls' anger and frustration before they get into trouble with the

law (Chensey-Lind, 2004). Furthermore, in a phenomenological study of Black adolescent girls, Koonce (2012) demonstrated the urgency of paying more attention to the needs of Black girls and the ways in which their race and gender affect their schooling. The purpose of the study was to highlight the experiences of two African American (AA) adolescent girls when they used the AA women's speech practice of "talking with an attitude" (TWA) when interacting with their teachers. This study is important because understanding this unique experience helps educators provide gender specific programs for students.

Theme 3: Circle Keeper

The participants in this study indicated that the disposition of the circle keepers was affecting the organizational structure of the talking circle. Moreover, some of the participants were adamant that their circle keeper had brought an attitude to the process. One participant believed that her circle keeper always found something to argue about. Some teachers perceive Black girls as being loud and defiant, and Black girls are more likely than White or Latino girls to be reprimanded for being "unladylike" (Morris, 2012). One of the circle keepers was described as not being prepared with good topics, and circle keepers were generally believed to do too much talking. The needs for the circle keeper to do less talking, have a better attitude, and introduce better topics were not findings that I anticipated, but further study of these topics could help Black girls and their circle keeper develop positive relationships with one another and improve the outcomes of their circles.

Coates, Umbreit, and Vos (2003), in taking a qualitative look at the nature of circle work and the ways in which participants believed that circle participation had

affected them, identified one skill particularly desirable for most circle keepers: the ability to be clear on the rules—and enforce them. Explicit expectations affect circle participation by ensuring participants are respectful and that everyone’s voice is heard. A noteworthy point of divergence revealed by the participants in this study was that the circle keepers—in this case, the teacher—dominated the talking circle, did not enforce the rules of the talking piece, and did too much talking. Some participants perceived the circle keeper as bringing an attitude with her, an observation that raises important questions about the selection of the keeper who leads the talking circles and the importance of developing ongoing training to achieve better outcomes. Rather than students’ being trained in the intervention alone, training must also address effective implementation practices (Foreman, 2015). Accordingly, a holistic study of RP talking circles, student perspectives, and teacher outlooks would be helpful.

Theme 4: Self-Awareness

The girls in this study were clearly interested in talking and sharing things about themselves and their emotional mindsets. The findings of this dissertation study support Crenshaw et al.’s (2015) findings from their qualitative study with Black females, who reported feeling undervalued, misunderstood, and overlooked. Specifically, the girls interviewed for this dissertation study, expressing their knowledge about how they were viewed by themselves and others, described themselves as misjudged, very shy, angry, and having a bad attitude. The talking circles encouraged the girls to engage in nonacademic conversations and provided them with an opportunity to do so, sending the message that their voices were important. One participant said that the talking circles helped her become a better person, get out more, find new friends, and be self-reflective.

Another said that her attitude, demeanor, and academic approach had changed since she had begun participating in the circles. Experts on RP have emphasized the need for everyday educational practices such as talking circles that can develop positive attitudes among students toward the process of Restorative Justice (Karp & Breslin, 2001). Kaila, for example, admitted that she used curse words a great deal—and her willingness to embrace personal accountability can be seen as an asset. Addressing the use of profanity is important because, according to research, Black girls are often disciplined for behaviors such as disruption, profanity, defiance, and fighting (Wun, 2016). Since profanity is an issue with some Black girls, intervention strategies can be put in place to teach replacement behavior.

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Civil Rights Office (2016), 12% of school-aged African American (AA) girls across the country have experienced Out-of-school Suspension (OOS) compared with 7% of Native American girls, 4% of Latina girls, and 2% of White girls, so that Black girls experience OSSs at a rate six times higher than that experienced by White girls. In a review of the literature on AA female discipline, Wun (2016) showed that AA girls are subject to punishment for nonviolent infractions, which qualify as “disobedience” and “defiance.” Using the framework of intersectionality, one could suggest that Black girls are disciplined inequitably. This disparity speaks to the racial biases in discipline policies affecting Black girls. The girls’ narratives are in line with the literature describing nonviolent infractions that result in disproportionate disciplining. An example of this in my study came when Kaila discussed how, initially, she was not participating in the talking circle and was resistant; however, she changed because she knew that she would be disciplined for not

participating. This is an example of how the students in this study were aware that their defiance could lead to their being written up or receiving other disciplinary consequences. School administrators in high poverty areas tend to see “zero tolerance” and punitive responses as the best way to curb negative student behavior (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Middle school is a critical time for girls, for “the single largest predictor of later arrest among adolescent females is having been suspended, expelled or held back during the middle school years” (Wald & Losen, 2003, p. 4). Accordingly, we must transform how we do discipline.

Theme 5: Circle Topics

In the talking circles, it is important to carefully select topics for the group depending on the needs of the group. Black girls are faced with many disturbing realities that can be categorized as negative stereotypes, societal pressures, and conflicting messages (Phelps-Ward & Laura, 2016). For example, “Black girls are subjected to anti-Black racism, penalized under exclusionary school disciplinary practices, and constructed as malice perpetrators who intellectually and physically trespass in the classroom” (Hines-Datiri & Andres, 2017, p. 2).

This creates negative consequences for Black girls’ educational experiences.

Participants in this study shared in the talking circles a variety of topics that they found helpful. The topics were focused around behavior, promises, social media, bullying, and negative self-image. Bullying and hostility among children is a long-standing and prevalent social problem (Jones, Manstead & Livingstone, 2011). Girls are more likely to experience cyberbullying. Adams (2010) found adolescent girls experience cyberbullying 25.8% compared to boys 16%.

From this study, one improvement that a participant mentioned regarding topics was the creation of a topic jar. Each student would write his or her topic of choice on a slip of paper and place it in a jar; and the circle keeper would then draw the topic of the day from the jar. This practice allowed the students to express their choices and have a voice in the topics discussed, ultimately creating authentic, meaningful conversations.

Theme 6: Letting Things Out

The most noteworthy outcome of the research was that the participants described the talking circles as an opportunity to let things out, talking about how they were feeling on a particular day, what was on their mind, or what was frustrating them at home. One student stated that she preferred letting things out in the talking circle as opposed to keeping them bottled up. The girls were comfortable sharing what was on their mind and believed that doing so helped them have a good day. They also stated that letting things out allowed them to learn things about other people. These findings are in line with those of Schumacher (2014), who conducted a 2-year ethnographic study of 12 weekly talking circles in an urban high school, identifying four relational themes that affirmed the development of growth-fostering relationships within talking circles. One of the themes, feeling safe and protected, was attributed to three factors: girls' being able to trust each other, to not feel alone, and to not be judged. As a result, the outcomes predicted by Relational Cultural Theory and Restorative Justice actually occurred in gender-specific talking circles. Talking circles allow students to build community and share their experiences. This is important because the experiences and needs of Black girls are unique (Evans-Winters, 2005). Mansfield (2015) asserted that student voice helps

promote a school climate, culture, and practices that encourage safe and productive learning environments.

Theme 7: Relationships

The literature indicates that relational bonding is particularly relevant for girls (Brown, Way, & Duff, 1999). Notably, the talking circles created such an opportunity for the girls to bond. Participants reported that the talking circles allowed members of staff and students to get to know them. Building healthy relationships through connectedness and a sense of community is a key factor in RPs (McCluskey et al., 2008; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Tonya, a participant in the study, stated that her experiences in the talking circles had improved her relationships with other students. She described herself as having become able to trust people and concluded that even though she had it rough, other students had it worse than her. Thus, talking circles seem to be teaching students about empathy, which helps people treat one another with care, by creating an emotional safe space that fosters positive conversations and relationships (Schumacher, 2014). These findings are in line with research conducted on RP in schools. Skiba and Losen (2016) have reported that RP approaches are beginning to be widely used in schools across the United States to proactively build relationships and a sense of community and to repair harm after conflicts. This promising development should encourage further research into the value of talking circles.

Study Implications

There are a number of implications for this study in terms of educational practice, policy, and future research. These findings also have implications for practice, specifically related to nurturing stakeholders, including principals, assistant principals,

counselors, and teachers, so that they can work collaboratively to improve the educational experiences of this student group and the design and implementation of talking circles; particularly at alternative schools. The findings indicate the importance of urging educational leaders and policymakers to implement RP talking circles, while implementing suggested modifications for improving outcomes for Black female middle school students. Finally, further research among this population at alternative schools should address the effectiveness of talking circles and support programs at improving empathy and social emotional skills; and the use of single gender talking circles can also bring about a shift in discipline.

Future research should also address the limitations of this study, benefiting stakeholders who are struggling to address the discipline gap as well as those seeking to support specific supports for Black girls through the implementation of RP talking circles. The findings of my study highlight several factors that educational policymakers and stakeholders at the state and district levels should consider when implementing RP talking circles.

Implications for Practice

The student voices featured in this study highlight the need for targeted resources that can train the circle facilitator in circle protocols, improve relationships, and generate relevant circle topics. Students reported that some circle facilitators had attitudes and talked too much. This is not an effective practice; the circle keeper's role is to facilitate the circle. The circle keepers "do not control the circle, but help participants uphold its integrity" (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005, p.53). This study supports calls for mandatory professional development in the basics of RP and how to run circles, as well as for the

provision of professional development books and other materials on RP. A useful and practical tool is the *Circle Packet with Planning Guide*, created by the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUD). It includes circle processes, sample topics, and a circle planning guide. Furthermore, school administrators and teachers should consider using Carolyn Boyes-Watson's book *Circle Forward*, a resource guide designed to help teachers incorporate the practice of circles into everyday school life. To monitor the circles, schools should consider having an administrator do walkthroughs on the talking circles to give the facilitator feedback on any adjustments needed, ensuring that protocols and best practices are being followed. The facilitators should inform the students ahead of time that periodically an administrator will observe the talking circles. Explaining the purpose of the observation is meant to provide the facilitator with feedback to improve the talking circles that may ease any anxiety the students have.

Teachers and staff should also be trained on gender-specific needs. Black female voices are valuable assets for RP planning, and the experiences and self-identified needs of these students can help identify specific supplemental programs related to socioemotional and anger management, character building, conflict resolution, and empathy. The African American females who participated in this study revealed that the inclusion of males in the talking circles served as a distraction. Administrators must ensure that circle facilitators are fully prepared and trained to support the diverse needs of alternative students, in particular Black female alternative middle school students. Teachers require training in working with these students to foster better relationships and improve cultural competency. Yearly mandatory professional development in culturally responsive teaching is recommended for all preservice, practicing, and veteran teachers.

The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) recommends that teachers incorporate culturally responsive practices in classroom instruction and management. Culturally responsive teaching involves “dealing directly with controversy; studying a wide range of ethnic individuals and groups, contextualizing issues within race, class, ethnicity, and gender, and including multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives” (Gay, 2002, p. 108). The district is making efforts to improve the quality of relevant cultural practices in schools by offering professional development opportunities to all staff throughout the school year, and its passage of the historic Racial Equity Policy requires counselors to have a specific number of hours of training in working with girls of color.

The outcomes of this study have implications for school administrators’ and teachers’ RP implementation and training. One limitation of the case study was that Cole was unusual during the year of observation because it was in the process of closing, containing only one grade.

A limitation of this research study was the setting and staff turnover at Tate Academy. In, 2018 a new principal was named to Tate Academy, which highlights the need for ongoing training. Ongoing training can assist teachers in their roles as circle facilitators, helping them create the best possible experience for students in talking circles. Protocol for RP talking circles must be focused on training staff (circle facilitators), while focusing on supports unique to Black female middle school students. Furthermore, this training should also include best practices that are proven to help students develop empathy and social skills. These professional development opportunities could help staff buy into and commit to creating the best circle experience

possible. Teachers need to adhere to circle protocols and procedures, which will help them improve classroom management while addressing the lack of structure experienced by participants in this study. If possible, talking circles need to be single gender; this could be accomplished by a simple adjustment to their implementation and could provide girls with a safe space and opportunities to interact, build relationships with each other, and be comfortable.

Observation of students in talking circles proved somewhat challenging, because they take part in these circles only twice a week. A change in the frequency of the activity might be needed. For students to experience the full benefit of talking circles, they need to engage in these circles daily. To help improve the effectiveness of talking circles, and thus their ability to meet students' needs, circles should be held at least four days a week, from Monday to Thursday. This study contributes to a growing body of research that suggests that RP leads to increased student connectedness, better community and parent engagement, improved academic achievement, and staff support of students (González, 2012).

Monique Morris's (2016) article "Protecting Black Girls" and the Alliance for Girls' (AFG's) *Valuing Girls' Voices* report are two key documents that are helping shift the lens toward the critical needs of Black girls. *Valuing Girl's Voices* provides school districts critical information that can inform the development of gender-specific, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, strength-based, and developmentally appropriate (GCTSD) approaches, policies, and programming. Morris (2016) provides reflection questions relating to biases and provides strategies for developing culturally competent,

gender-responsive tools. Morris (2016) suggests that collective examination of policies and systems that push Black girls away from school should ask three questions:

- What assumptions are we making about the conditions of Black girls?
- How might Black girls be uniquely affected by school and other disciplinary policies?
- Are our systems and policies creating an environment that is conducive to the healthy development of Black girls?

Asking these questions can keep schools from ignoring Black girls' needs.

Implications for Policy

The results of this study have implications for preservice teachers' mandatory training, instilling in them the impact and importance of using restorative practice talking circles. As a result, when teachers enter the profession, they will be prepared to facilitate talking circles. Teacher preparation programs can train future educators in the use of restorative practice talking circles by restructuring course offerings to align with a restorative practice framework. Such a framework should promote relationships that will produce culturally aware educators who understand the needs of Black girls.

As my findings indicate, critical components of the talking circle include the circle keeper as well as talking circle procedures. Accordingly, a district policy should be devised for creating and implementing yearly, mandatory restorative practice training and professional development in culturally responsive strategies for all teachers. Amidst widespread stereotyping (Fordham, 1993) of Black girls (as being loud, rough, and aggressive), making teachers aware of how perceptions convey an implicit bias

concerning Black girls will increase educators' willingness to implement restorative practices.

Use of RP in schools, however, is often stymied by lack of funding. The need for funding to launch and sustain an RP program is a key consideration in doing so (Riestenberg, 2003). The school district where my research was conducted began implementation of RP in 2016 when its board of education approved an approximately \$3,000,000 investment in training and supporting schools in its implementation. If RP does not provide consistent impact and evidence across the district, there is the potential for loss of financial support. Although the research has not identified a strong relationship between educational outcomes, my study revealed that, in spite of some criticisms the students may have about the implementation of the talking circles (e.g., circle keeper talking all the time), there is no evidence that talking circles do any harm and they provide an opportunity for students to work through issues. Considerable time and resources are required to build an RP program in a school or district. Funds for doing so can be generated through state grants and reallocation of capital. Districts that receive federal Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) funding in California are being encouraged to use their grants to implement RP, which can improve the school climate and reduce dependence on punitive responses to student misbehavior. Disproportionality in school discipline should be monitored, and corrective action plans such as RP should be mandated where disparities exist.

RP implementation can be complicated by the need to obtain buy-in from the administration and community. Some researchers have suggested that a shift in attitudes toward punishment may take one to three years (Karp & Breslin, 2001). Another

possibility for funding RP at the local level is the leveraging of existing community partnerships, an approach to funding successfully taken in Oakland and surrounding counties (Kidde & Alfred, 2011). One way to sustain RP is to integrate it across the school and district rather than using it as a standalone program (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). A district's ability to integrate an RP approach into its formal policy and procedures is critical to long-term sustainability (The Advancement Project, 2014).

By the 2015–2016 school year, 23 of the nation's 100 largest school districts implemented policy reforms that reduce the use of suspensions or require less punitive discipline strategies (Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017a). For example, public school systems in Baltimore, Chicago, and Cincinnati have changed their discipline policies to decrease the use of suspensions (New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, 2013). A school or district should consider multiple stakeholders to ensure buy-in from all drivers of change (Kidde & Alfred, 2011). School districts should support an expansion of girl-specific programming and policies, implementing districtwide policies, while also supporting site-specific efforts to create restorative spaces for girls (Ohlson & Bedrossian, 2016). For example, community partners should be engaged to create more girl-specific programming and RP opportunities for girls and to expand sports, enrichment, and other girl-specific programming (Alliance for Girls).

A strong professional development program is needed to help teachers and administrators understand the philosophical shift from retributive to restorative discipline. Early in the school year, a series of trainings should be planned, starting with an introductory session for whole-staff training (IIRP, 2010). Many resources, guides, and toolkits are available to practitioners for those who are interested in implementing an RP

program. Use of RPs in schools is intended to bring together all stakeholders with a view to resolving issues and build relationships (Gonzalez, 2012). School practitioners, researchers, and policymakers are increasingly calling for nonpunitive alternatives—known generally as “RPs”—to zero tolerance policies so as to emphasize repairing harm rather than punishing misbehavior (Lustick, 2017).

Implications for Future Research

In light of the gaps in the RP-related literature, the findings of this dissertation study can inform future research by encouraging further studies that investigate the intersection of RP talking circles, alternative schools, school discipline, race, and gender. Gender-disaggregated data could aid identification of the programmatic needs of Black girls. Examinations of talking circles across race and gender are scarce, but this dissertation study suggests the existence of relationships among talking circles, alternative schools, school discipline, and intersectionality should be further explored. As evidenced by this study, further investigations are needed of how single gender talking circles affect the experiences of Black girls in an urban alternative school, using focus groups to explore more student voices. Although steps were taken to ensure the quality of research, limitations remain that need to be addressed as part of this study. Saturation of the data was not reached due to the few consent and assent papers received and the school having a transient population. Future research that expands on the limitations of this study would prove beneficial for stakeholders struggling to address the discipline gap, as well as those seeking to provide specific supports for Black girls by implementing RP talking circles. The findings of my study highlight several factors that educational

policymakers and stakeholders at the state and district levels should consider when implementing RP talking circles.

In my study, I explored Black female students' perceptions of RP talking circles at an alternative school. This qualitative case study research was designed to elucidate the complex social activities that take place within this group's real-life context (Yin, 2003). Taking such an approach allowed me to look at student perceptions and experiences, but the study was limited by its small sample size. Although not generalizable beyond the school that served as the context of this study and the five students that served as the participants, my study offers important insight into the nuances of the implementation of talking circles in urban alternative school. As Stake (2005) noted the purpose of a case study is "not to represent the world, but to represent the case" (p.460). A recommendation for future research is to replicate the current study with Black boys. A study that examines the boys' perspective may yield a similar perspective and would be valuable to understating the impact of single gender RP talking circles on Black boys in an alternative school.

Future research could replicate this study using focus groups, a commonly used qualitative technique for collecting data on a specific topic. Due to the importance of group affiliation in female identity formation, focus groups of adolescent girls would form the basis of an ideal research method for understanding social issues (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Focus groups encourage discussion of a topic or question through participant interaction. In this study, in-depth information was gained during face-to-face individual interviews with students. Observation allowed the recording of interactions between the circle facilitator and students as well as between students and their peers in

the talking circles. Use of only the focus group approach would allow researchers to explore more student voices and perhaps bring the study to full saturation.

In addition to being conducted using only one research method, this study should be expanded to include student voices from all levels: elementary, middle, and high school. It specifically examined students' perceptions of RP talking circles through the lens of middle school students, but the literature suggests that a discipline gap exists on all levels. Highlighting multiple voices would allow the study to identify whether these concerns apply to all grade levels in the district. Expanding the study to include student voices from all levels would allow the researcher to explore using more student voices and allow the study to reach full saturation.

Because the facilitator of the talking circle was identified as playing a significant role in students' perceptions, a future study could explore the circle facilitator's role, and effectiveness, in the talking circles. Such an exploration would be valuable to understanding the types of training and additional programs needed to support these circles.

Future researchers could also explore the effects of intervention, enrichment, and support programs on Black female students at alternative schools. Various supplemental programs are linked directly to RP, including Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) and social emotional learning programs. This research adds to the few studies thus far made of RP talking circles and contributes to the research base on issues concerning Black female middle school students.

Finally, a longitudinal study could be conducted in which perceptions would be explored at the conclusion of students' time at an alternative school, shedding light on

whether the benefits of talking circles are sustainable. Such a study could reveal the effects of these circles over time. Ideally, students would have had time to be fully immersed in talking circles and would have valuable information to share about their experiences and about actions that could be taken to improve the circles, increasing practitioners' understanding as they seek to provide RP and training on the intersectionality of Black girls.

Concluding Thoughts

Within its acknowledged limits, and based on its stated findings, this study addresses the research problem and suggests that RP talking circles not only positively affect Black female students' lives but also might be able to help identify the types of supports that these students need. In doing so, this study has focused on a demographic that is often absent from the literature. My study's findings improve understandings of the challenges that schools face in implementing RP and establishing best practices for RP talking circles. The data presented are insightful for practitioners and administrators at all levels—and, what's more, could also help identify the types of support that middle school Black girls need. These data are particularly useful for school districts seeking to implement RP in light of zero tolerance policies, while helping create safe spaces for Black females to share. They could also inform the development of a model for schools that are interested in learning more about how to address gender-specific issues using RP talking circles. Finally, I hope that these insights into Black girls' perspectives on talking circles can help school districts identify and work through any barriers to successful implementation of restorative-based programs.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following questions will be asked to the students. As each interview develops, additional questions may be asked, but at a minimum, these listed questions will be asked.

Date:

Time:

Site:

Interviewee:

Interview questions

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.
2. Describe what it is like for you to come to the talking circle each week.
3. What comes to mind when you hear the term talking circle?
4. In what ways does participating in a talking circle help you in school?
5. Describe if and how the talking circle has made a difference in your attitudes about coming to school?
6. Describe if and how the talking circles are helping you outside of school?
7. How have the talking circles helped improve relationships with staff and students in your life?
8. How can the talking circles be improved?
9. What topics benefited you in the talking circles, if any?
10. What feature of the talking circle did you dislike and why? Please share examples.
11. What have you learned about yourself while participating in the talking circles?

12. How would the talking circles have been different if boys were in the circle?

APPENDIX B: DISCLOSURE TO PARTICIPANTS

Disclosure to Participants

January 27, 2018,

University of Louisville

Dear Participant:

My name is Vanessa Posey and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education at University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky. I am conducting research of middle school Black female students as a part of my dissertation entitled, "Black girls' perceptions of restorative practices: Talking circles in an urban alternative middle school." The purpose of the study is to explore Black female students' perceptions of Restorative Practice talking circles at an alternative school.

You are invited to participate in this study because you are a female student currently attending an alternative middle school. Participation in this study is voluntary. You asked to participate in one-to-one interviews. It will involve an interview of approximately 30 minutes in length and take place at the alternative middle school. There are no foreseeable risks to the participants. You can skip any questions you do not wish to answer, and you can stop answering questions at any time. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis.

Any information that is obtained and that can be identified with you will remain confidential to the extent allowed by law and identified only with a member code number. Your name will not appear on any of the results.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me, Vanessa M. Posey at (502) 485-3631 or Vanessa.posey@jefferson.kyschools.us, thank you in advance for your time and cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,

Vanessa Posey
Doctoral Candidate
University of Louisville

APPENDIX C: OBSEVATION PROTOCOL

Setting:

Individual in talking circle observed:

Talking Circle Observation #: (first observation, second, etc.)

Observer involvement:

Date/Time:

Place:

Duration of Observation (indicate start/end times):

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
(Detailed, chronological notes about what thoughts the observer sees, hears; what occurred; the physical setting)	(Concurrent notes about the observer's personal reactions, experiences)

APPENDIX D: OBSERVATION SKETCH

CURRICULUM VITAE

Vanessa M. McPhail
Vanessa.mcphail@jefferson.kyschools.us

OBJECTIVE

I am seeking the opportunity to diversify my background in Jefferson County Public Schools. I wish to expand my current knowledge of practices and policies while exposing myself to different leadership styles.

EXPERIENCE

JCPS Diversity, Equity and Poverty Department, Louisville, KY 07/2018 - present
Specialist Community Affairs

- Assists in the daily operations, tasks and activities of Diversity, Equity and Poverty Programs.
- Supervise one Diversity Equity Poverty (DEP) Resource Teacher and one Data Management Research Technician.
- Lead the District Racial Equity Analysis Protocol (REAP) Committee Team.
- Support the Racial Equity Advisory Council.
- Coordinate the Girls of Color Committee and community conversations.
- Coordinate the Competency, Awareness, & Responsiveness to Diverse Students (C.A.R.D.S.) program in partnership with University of Louisville.
- Manage “Literacy & “programs, budget, staffing, vendors, and ordering of supplies.
- Support and coordinate other programs, coding and music production in partnership with AMPED.
- Coordinate district professional development for teachers.

JCPS Diversity, Equity and Poverty Department, Louisville, KY 10/2016 - present
Administrative Intern

- Assists in identifying and recruiting quality candidates for Alternative Certification Elementary and Secondary (ACES) Program.
- Reviews and processes candidate applications to evaluate qualifications or eligibility of applicants.
- Coordinate Educators Rising, monthly sponsor meetings, plan Educators Rising District Conference, college tours and coordinate and ensure eligible students and their sponsor attend National Educators Rising Conference.
- Coordinate “literacy & “programs, budget, staffing, vendors, ordering supplies, providing materials, support the teachers.

- Support and coordinate other summer programs Informative Reading through Artistic Performance (iRAP), Girls on the Rise and I am a Phenomenal G.I.R.L. Gifted, Innovative, Resilient Leader.
- Ensures implementation of all policies, procedures and applicable laws when performing assigned duties.

JCPS, Academic Achievement Area 5, Louisville, KY

Director, Restorative Practice

03/2016 – 10/2016

- Co-presented a two-day Restorative Practice districtwide training.
- Presented Restorative Practice at the JCAPA and JCCA summer conference.
- Developed a JCPS Restorative Practice guide for staff, students and parents.
- Determined the specific Restorative Practice strategies to be added to the Code of Conduct in collaboration with the Code of Conduct Committee.
- Built relationships and served as a liaison between local government, community agencies and nonprofit organizations interested in restorative practices.

JCPS Academic Supports Program, Louisville, KY

03/2014 – 03/2016

Student Response Team (SRT) /Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Lead Coach.

- Provide feedback to appropriate district and school staff on implementation of SRT and PBIS.
- Assist with providing SRT training as assigned to meet district goals and objectives.
- Collect and analyze data as needed.
- Ensure that JCPS is in compliance with policies and standards related to SRT and PBIS.
- Provide assistance to teachers and other staff in the area of effective instructional and class management techniques.
- Ensure that all JCPS staff are in compliance with the requirements for the KAR 7:160, Restraint and Seclusion law (Positive Behavior in Schools III: Bullying Prevention training) and collect certificates from all JCPS staff.
- Provide district wide Youth Mental Health First Aid Training (YMHFA).
- Coordinate the YMHFA trainings and provide assistance in the preparation of required performance reports submitted to the federal program offices.
- Provide support, assistance, and advice to the data subcommittee (i.e., transition to one data system, teachers entering referrals on Infinite Campus, and the Assistant Principal task force).

Crosby Middle School, Louisville, KY

Assistant Principal Intern

09/2013 – 03/2014

- Perform general administrative and supervisory duties.
- Assisted with coordinating the day to day operations of student success.
- Collect and organize Student Response Team (SRT) data.
- Conduct Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES) peer pre-observations, mini observations, and post-observations.
- Facilitate and present Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) training to staff.
- Lead the Dress Code Committee to review and revise the dress code.

Social Studies Teacher

08/2010 – 09/2013

Jefferson County Traditional Middle School, Louisville, KY

08/2006 – 06/2010

Social Studies Teacher

- Instruct 150 students individually and in groups using discussions and demonstrations.
- Plan and supervise Junior Achievement field trip and guide students in learning from activities.
- Meet with parents and guardians to discuss their children's progress and determine their priorities for their children and their resource needs.
- Maintain accurate and complete student records.
- Have students submit a portfolio piece from social studies.

EDUCATION

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY 8/2014 – 12/2019

- Doctorate of Education, Educational Administration and Leadership

Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY 5/2008 - 07/2009

- Masters of Arts, Instructional Leadership and School Administration

Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY 08/2004 - 05/2006

- Masters of Arts in Teaching, Middle School Mathematics and Social Studies

Indiana University Southeast, New Albany, IN 5/2001 - 08/2002

- Bachelor of Science in Business
- Major: Business Management and Minor: Mathematics

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Student Support Behavior and Intervention (SSBI) Committee	2018 - 19
Aspiring Assistant Principal Cohort	2018 - 19
Black Achievers Education Cluster Leader	2017 - 18
Presented at the Deeper Learning Symposium	2016 - 17
Code of Conduct Committee	2016 - 17
Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Co-Leader	2013 - 14
Student Response Team (SRT) Case Manager	2012 - 14
Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES) field test	2011 - 14
School-Based Decision Making Council (SBDM)	2012 - 13
Future Educator Association (FEA) advisor	2011 - 12
Principal Selection Committee	2011 - 12
Preparing for Principal Leadership (PPL)	2010 - 11
Future Administrator Mentoring Experience Program (FAME)	2009 - 10
Jefferson County Teacher Association Representative (JCTA)	2009 - 10
School-Based Decision Making Council (SBDM)	2008 - 10
Budget Committee	2008 - 09

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Attended Equity and Inclusion Conference, Frankfort, KY	2019
Attended Council of Great City Schools Conference, Louisville, KY	2019
Attended Strobel Education Growth Mindset workshop, Louisville, KY	2016 - 17
Attended Teach to Lead Summit in Chicago, IL	2016 - 17

Attended International Institute Restorative Practice training, Bethlehem, PA	2015 - 16
Attended International Institute Restorative Practice training, Nashville, TN	2015 - 16
Attended Mean Girls Seminar, Louisville, KY	2014 - 15
Attended Behavior Institute, Louisville, KY	2014 - 15
Attended National PBIS Leadership Forum, Rosemont, IL	2014 - 15
Attended National Dropout Prevention Network Conference, Louisville, KY	2014 - 15
Attended JCPS Equity and Inclusion Fall Institute, Louisville, KY	2014 - 15

ORGANIZATIONS and AWARDS

Greater Louisville Alliance of Black School Educators (GLABSE)	2011 - present
Women in School Administration (WSA)	2007 - 2015
Jefferson County Public Schools Perfect Attendance	2009