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How one Elementary School Perceives the Implementation of Restorative Practices

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Senior Honors Thesis

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Introduction

School suspensions limit the amount of class time students experience, contributing to school to prison pipeline, achievement gaps, grade retention, dropout rates, and multiple referrals (Losen, 2014). Research has consistently shown higher suspension rates for students with special needs, those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and African American and Latino students. Most of these suspensions are the result of frequent, minor offenses, commonly classified as insubordinate behavior (Gregory, Huang, Anyon, Greer, & Downing, 2018, p. 168). While research has shown that negative student outcomes and repeated behavioral issues are linked to punitive suspensions, they are still a primary method for reprimanding children that schools deem as insubordinate.

Schools have begun to implement alternative discipline policies that seek to remedy the climate and relationships within the school environment to address suspension inequities. This project seeks to understand how discipline practices are implemented at one elementary school. In alignment with the district's equity report, this school in central New York, has implemented an increasingly common alternative discipline policy, Restorative Practices (RP) (Ithaca City School District, 2018). Restorative Practices take participation past the classroom and allow students, who previously would have been told by an authority figure what would happen to them, to now take part in the discussion of their behavior and consequences (Payne, 2015). This active responsibility approach to handling unwanted behaviors challenges the power structure.

The school -Ridgepoint Elementary¹- serves more African American children than any other elementary school in the district (ICSD) and has over 70 percent of students participating in Free and Reduced Lunch (U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics). While the school has the statistical indicators for high

suspension rates and the negative outcomes that come from it, their participation in culturally responsive workshops and conferences display their dedication to the their district's equity report that seeks to see race, class, and (dis)ability as irrelevant indicators for student outcomes (Ithaca City School District, 2018).

The research question driving this project is: How does the staff at one elementary school perceive the implementation of Restorative Practices?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

While Restorative Justice was originally modeled in the criminal justice system, schools are now using this approach to respond to students' behaviors (Payne, 2015). Both incarceration and suspension data show how marginalized groups are affected at disproportionate rates. The aim of restorative programs is to remove the focus from punitive punishments and allow the surrounding community involved to collaboratively address hurtful incidents. To engage in Restorative Justice, the first response to an unwanted behavior cannot be rooted in punitive, biased related punishments, but responds with an inclusive discipline style. By bringing both sides of the offense to discuss the incident, students are given a chance to partner with the community, instead of being ostracized from it (Payne, 2015). Students are impacted the most from discipline policies, yet it is facilitated by teachers who already engage in time consuming, high intensity work.

As elementary schools try to educate their young students, they are faced with an array of challenges, including disruptive behaviors. According to Education Section 3214 (n.d), those who are a "habitual truant from such instruction or is irregular in such attendance or

insubordinate, disorderly, disruptive, or violent during such attendance, is a school delinquent. A student can be suspended if these behaviors endanger the well-being of others” (McKinney, n.d.). Different schools may hold different interpretations of these terms. Nationally, schools have interpreted the grounds for suspensions to affect certain demographics at higher rates than others (Gregory, Huang, Anyon, Greer, & Downing, 2018, p. 168).

Excluding at risk children from the classroom and giving more punitive measures to those children reinforce the inequities and power hierarchy that Lisa Delpit (1995) deconstructs in *The Silenced Dialogue*. Within schools, there are multiple power struggles- the power of teachers over students, and an institutionalized culture of power. The way people present themselves by talking, dressing, and interacting with others is either supported by those in power or grounds to be further marginalized in the absence of a culturally responsive climate. Delpit (1995) argues that explicit instruction and conversation are vital to breaking down the culture of power in schools, understanding social capital, increasing a sense of belonging, and building trusting relationships (Delpit, 1995). RP’s philosophies state that to eradicate inequities, students from historically marginalized communities need to be given a voice and a place of belonging, even when harm occurs. It is not enough to attempt to decrease suspensions without a plan in action that provides a trusting environment to address behaviors. This project seeks to understand how an elementary school perceives the implemented discipline plan that was set into action in their district.

The behaviors and reactionary procedures outlined in -Ridgepoint Elementary¹- Schools’ code of conduct manuals fluctuate from discipline to punishment heavy vocabulary (Ithaca City

¹ This is pseudonym for the school will be used throughout this paper to ensure that the identity of the institution and participants remain securely anonymous.

School District, 2016-2017). In the 2018 Brown Lecture in Education Research, Richard Milner reinforced the importance of schools' shifting from punishments such as exclusion, zero tolerance policies, and other means of ostracization, to self-actualizing discipline when addressing deviant behaviors (Milner, 2018). As Milner (2018) describes the tenets of discipline and punishment, a clear distinction between the two is made. Punishment and discipline differ in the way that adults view the communities surrounding their students and react to children's behaviors. Milner (2018) details discipline as way to "provide multiple opportunities for students to excel, to focus on cognitively rich and rigorous curriculum practices, to communicate and collaborate with families on ways to support students' development, to model tenacity, persistence, and care, to cultivate and envision students as knowledgeable, to build and sustain relationships with students, and to engage in real talk about expectations in society" (Milner, 2018). Dr. Milner's definition of discipline stems from a culturally responsive mindset where adults actively validate relationships within the school community, because even amidst frustrating behaviors, students are believed to be contributing, valued members in society. A trusting relationship continues when collaboration and communication transpire between students who statistically experience marginalization.

Punishment, on the other hand, is seen to manifest through exclusionary practices such as, "Office referrals, teaching to the test, ostracization of families and communities, engaging in irrelevant talk, enacting curriculum as white, mainstream, and traditional, [along with] advancing an individualistic ethos of success while giving up on certain students and creating unnecessary distance between others" (Milner, 2018). While discipline depicts the importance of inclusion and relevant communication, punishment thrives on power hierarchies and furthers the

marginalization of some. All the while, the silent narrative that a specific and privileged demographic of students are the only ones desired in a school's learning community is enforced while a punitive, distrusting culture is provoked.

In alignment with their city's Equity Report, Ridgepoint Elementary, has implemented an increasingly common alternative, Restorative Practices (RP) instead of focusing on punishing methods (Ithaca City School District, 2018). Restorative Practices take participation past the classroom and allow students, who previously would have been told by an authority figure what would happen to them, to take part in the discussion of their behavior and consequences (Payne, 2015). In challenging the power structure, RP recognize that children can be active agents in their own lives as children explain their own needs, reasons and solutions for their behavior, promoting self-actualization.

Restorative Practices look through the lens of the Theory of Human Motivation and Maslow's concept of the hierarchy of needs. Students are thought to react based on their safety, esteem, belonging, and self-actualization needs (Gobin, Teeroovengadam, Becceea, & Teeroovengadam, 2012). Students may act out in behaviors if they do not feel a sense of belonging or adults may perceive the students' actions as defiant if there is not a mutual understanding between the two parties (Gobin, Teeroovengadam, Becceea, & Teeroovengadam, 2012). Some minor offenses that students are punished for indicate the status of their environments, not defiant behavior. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, it addresses that a lack of basic needs such as food and sleep can provoke frustrated behaviors. An esteem need (such as building a certain reputation with friends) can cause a child to engage in behaviors that would increase their status but cause disruption to the classroom (Gobin, Teeroovengadam, Becceea, & Teeroovengadam, 2012). As RP allow children to express themselves, teachers and students can

come to understand if certain behaviors are due to a physiological and safety needs from environmental factors, or a lack of belonging and esteem that hinder their social and emotional skills. When students feel comfortable to personally share with others, they can discuss ways to act amidst those needs in their life and move towards self-actualization. As students take responsibility for their behaviors and are not excluded from their community, they can develop social and emotional skills that help them recognize their potential to personally grow (Losen, 2014, p. 41).

While alternative policies may involve lowering suspension gaps, if there is no deep-rooted change in the school's climate, then it is not an effective tool to promote equity. The district believes that Restorative Practices' goals are for students to "restore their relationship to the affected person(s), restore their relationship to the school community, make progress in personally assuming responsibility for their actions, make amends for their actions, reduce the likelihood of repeating the behavior, (and) increase empathy for and understanding of the affected student(s)" (Ithaca City School District, 2016-2017, p. 38). This project will assess the proactive, appropriate, and equitable themes in RP (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Research lacks program evaluations on RP implementation. By interviewing the staff population at this elementary school, this project will assess how these programs remove the focus from punitive punishments and allow the community of teachers and students to collaboratively address their actions and if they feel it is an effective method to promoting equitable and trusting environments.

The Code of Conduct for Ridgepoint details the policies and procedures that should be enacted if students violate the institution's guidelines. Based on the Code of Conduct, Restorative Practices function in multiple capacities with varying consequences (Ithaca City

School District, 2016-2017, p. 39). RP methods include: “counseling/advising, participation in 1-1 mediation or group mediation, reading assignment and reflective paper on a relevant topic, making a verbal or written apology, entering a behavioral agreement, providing community service to the school, cleaning up or restitution for damages” (Ithaca City School District, 2016-2017, p. 38). The ways RP manifest itself in this district can vary greatly.

While these methods from the district and personal school initiatives are implemented to help decrease negative student outcomes and provide positive behavioral interventions, this alternative discipline policy is largely new and foreign. Consequently, there has not been time to assess the longevity and potential impact of RP on students and school climates. In the meantime, schools should still be held accountable and assessed for the way they implement these policies. A great indicator for how well a policy does is by how the people actively engaged in the program perceive it.

Methodology

In understanding how alternatives to suspensions function in this specific school, it is imperative to assess how the staff and students are supported. This project collected data through qualitative methodology. Ten individual faculty interviews were conducted. Staff interviews took place in the school in June, 2019 after I spent four preliminary months volunteering at Ridepoint. As a participatory researcher, I understood the school climate, built rapport with the children and the staff, and learned the daily schedule of the students and teachers. During a preliminary meeting with the principal and vice principal, the administrators collaborated to identify possible participants through snowball sampling. Participants were selected based on a range of diverse attributes- years of experience in schools, gender, race, and job position. Emails,

announcements during staff meetings, and personal invitations were extended to numerous staff members to increase the likelihood of diverse participants joining this study.

This project utilizes semi-structured, in-depth interviews with staff members as they play intricate roles in the development of children and research shows that teacher interpretations of policy affect implementation (Bridwell-Mitchell, & Sherer, 2017). Through recordings of the staff interviews, the reoccurring themes and methods of how Restorative Practices function as a discipline policy emerged. The aim of this research is to assess overarching themes found through staff answers, not to disseminate personal identifiers.

Staff interviews were conducted one time for approximately thirty minutes. Diversifying the sample size with people with different positions, racial backgrounds, genders, and years of experience allow for an all-inclusive collection of data and varying points of views and experiences. Ten different staff members, ranging from teacher aides, specialized faculty, and elementary teachers, were individually interviewed. Staff were asked about their involvement in discipline and their philosophies on discipline through discussion styled interviews. I asked the faculty about their experiences with Restorative Practices at their school; the questions were about the personal and whole school approach to discipline. Definitions, personal and whole school philosophies and examples of the culture and climate towards discipline, along with the perceived goals of RP encompassed most of the conversations.

Limitations

As an active researcher interviewing participants and analyzing the data, limitations in the study were found. As interviews progressed, certain questions became less relevant whereas other questions helped create more expository answers and showed the intersectionality and

impact of adult perceptions on implementation. Since the interview questions were revised, certain faculties' answers could not reflect nor add to some emerging themes. Because of the limitation of time, there were no consequent interviews for any participants. Another limiting factor to the project was that since the principal supported and pushed for faculty involvement in this project, faculty with dissenting views of RP did not feel as secure in participating. While there was a privacy disclosure form, interwork relationships still impact the level of transparency and engagement provided.

Through my role as an observational researcher, I found that while some classrooms would have been good to show a range of ways discipline is handled in varying grades and education professionals, there was not always a desire for an outsider in the classroom. As I was a continued presence in the school, a rapport was established, and increased numbers of faculty members were open and responded to being involved in the project. However, creating a trusting relationship takes time and limits the amount of observational experience originally.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the direct findings are limited due to software malfunctions. Upon later review, this section will be revised. While the findings are limited in this section, observations and interviews do support the main themes found throughout this paper.

It is imperative to assess how people define, interpret, and experience RP to measure how a school's discipline policy functions. In this section, the definition, implementation, and critiques of RP will be discussed. Through interviews, the school's definition of Restorative Practices was established and discrepancies within that term also came to light. For a policy to be

implemented effectively, a cohesive, clear definition needs to be understood by the practitioners. While there were many differences in definitions and perceptions, the faculty interviewed did believe that the discipline policy functioned within a three-tier system where community and authentic dialogue were the central focus. These three forms of RP provide multiple spaces for students to socially address broken relationships with others and/or shape their personal habits to advance their own emotional maturity and well-being. For the purpose of this project, a definition, based upon the commonalities in the faculty's answers, was determined-RP is a discipline policy that focuses on self and social restoration to repair harm caused by behaviors; instead of emphasizing a broken rule, a broken relationship in the school community is addressed. However, there is a difference in whether changing the focus changes RP into a soft or strong discipline approach.

Regardless of what act has been committed, it is a firm belief that students belong in the school community; this is often tied closely to the idea that RP helps generally marginalized communities. If students are actively listening and communicating with those affected in order to find out how to remedy the situation, then a restorative moment would seem effective. Sometimes, students are not ready to engage in a productive conversation, so they may need to leave. However, when they come back, the absence and the hurt need to be addressed so that all members of the classroom can feel valued and animosity is not harbored. Restorative Practices exercise a precautionary, active, and retrospective method to handling behaviors.

Within these tiers and types of RP, there is a wide range in how and who facilitates it. However, there is also a small group of faculty members who have seen the entire implementation process. Problems continue to arise when teachers are expected to increase or maintain their students' academic performance and simultaneously further children's social and

emotional learning. When teachers do not feel supported in this, personal dissenting perceptions of RP have risen along with an incohesive whole school approach to discipline.

Definition of Restorative Practices

Code of Conduct Definition

According to Ridgepoint Elementary School's code of conduct, "Restorative Practices are approaches to dealing with violations of the Code of Conduct which enable those who have been harmed to convey the impact of the harm to those responsible, and for those responsible to hold them accountable by acknowledging this impact and taking steps to repair the relationship or correct the situation" (Ithaca City School District, 2016-2017). This definition of RP addresses the need for dialogue and inclusion for all the affected parties. Here the person hurt expresses what he or she needs in order to feel as if the relationship is fixed or moved forward in some way. This district definition validates the philosophies of RP that justice is found when inclusive, relationship building is the core to handling discipline (Restorative Approaches to Conflict in Schools, 2013). However, within the school there lacks any formal introduction or professional development to RP. As this study asked classroom teachers, administrators, teacher assistants, a social worker, and a special educator for their definitions of RP, a clear discrepancy within the staff's philosophy of justice, punitive measures, and discipline were found.

Faculty Definition

The faculty members that supported RP and attempted to facilitate it, all had definitions that believed that if "RP asked constant, caring inquiry based questions, then broken relationships would get fixed and students would behave better because they felt like a part of the community" (teacher interview). RP must be persistent and empowering. Those with dissenting

views believed that while RP functions similarly to the actions described above, opponents of RP believe that the emphasis on relationships and dialogue does not impact future behavior. RP is a soft approach that allows a disrespectful behavior to continue without a consequence and while building relationships are important, it does not bring justice.

How educators view students is an interesting predictor to how justice is viewed. While Ridgepoint Elementary is known for being the most culturally responsive institution in the area, there continue to be varying ideas on how community is built and maintained. As faculty defined what they thought worked for changing behaviors and what they perceived RP to be, it was evident that unifying people's philosophies would be the biggest battle. Whether adults felt that RP was a good policy or not, they understood "That we all need one theory behind our practices and while discipline will be differentiated for individual students, there needs to be a unifying theory behind teachers' practices" (teacher interview). While this research project built a definition of RP from the common threads of the interviewees, Ridgepoint Elementary itself does not have any sort of descriptor.

Equity Lens

Even as there is an equity officer at Ridgepoint, there is unrest as to how to define that individual's role. Concerning equity, educators need to see what lens they are looking at children with. "Are teachers looking at kids who cannot sit still as a disruption to the class that needs to be punished and removed so they can learn that their behavior is unacceptable? Or are children viewed as people who need help? Are adults looking through a lens that is appropriate and accessible for all children?" (teacher interview). These thought processes will dictate how discipline is handled. It is not just to remove students from the community, because it is challenging to manage students' social emotional learning (SEL) amidst other's academic

learning. Work must be done towards supporting student engagement and development in the classroom, along with supporting the adults to have the space and training to interact with students' dynamic needs.

Having a system in place that best supports teachers and students is critical when implementing a policy. One teacher that leads many equity initiatives at the school firmly stated that, "Equity and inclusion are nothing without a plan. In fact- diversity without a plan is racism because people are in a community where no one is equipped to deal with the presented needs. It is not a people problem; it is a system problem" (teacher interview). It is not an individual or an administrator's fault for how clear or undefined the RP policy is at Ridgepoint. It is an institutionalized problem where the education system does not fight just as hard for exemplar test scores as it does for culturally responsive policies. Even when there are diverse needs and a document claiming to eradicate certain identifiers as indicators for negative student outcomes, if the school is not equipped and taught how to use the processes and policies presented to them, then positive change is not likely to occur.

Discipline Versus Punishment

While RP is a discipline policy, when some people described their discipline philosophies, it embodied punitive punishments instead. Milner (2018) examined the difference between the two connotations and examples of "punishments and discipline." He found that punishments added further tensions between institutions and marginalized communities. Ridgepoint Elementary School has begun to make tremendous shifts as a whole towards discipline and away from punishment. For instance, upon a new student's arrival to Ridgepoint, he would routinely swear and break school property. The school's staff did not have a good relationship with the father or student. In response to these problematic behaviors, the teachers

would call for the administrators to take away the student and community within the classroom was not established. The school and the family did not collaborate on what to do to best help the student. During this time, the father felt that the school was targeting his son based on his color, English proficiency, and social economic status. While the staff had no ill intent towards this child and objectively certain behaviors were disruptive to the classroom's learning, the school's response towards a historically marginalized student created further discord. Instead of following a discipline approach that "build(s) and sustain(s) relationships with students, and engage(s) in real talk about expectations in society" (Milner, 2018), more punishment types of measures were initially made. As teachers and administrators consistently validated this child as someone who belongs there and who is also held to the same high standards as his peers, the father changed his viewpoint on the school as a place that no longer was characterized by systemic oppression, but as an extension of his own community. During this same timeline, the student's behaviors had shifted from ones of distrustful aggression to a student whom teachers find as a leader of their classroom.

The staff member who had seen this transformation wondered "if faculty recognized the importance of the upfront cost of time that it takes to engage in persistent, relevant, caring conversations, even when its faster and less straining to just yell at a kids to stop and get out, would everyone in the school view it and work towards making the school a place to cultivate more socially and emotionally aware people" (teacher interview). Not only does allowing the children to be a part of their own discipline narrative provoke them to take more ownership and strengthen the community, but it minimizes the opportunities for implicit bias to punish the act of a student that may be a cultural action. Creating a space where mutual understanding of people's backgrounds come to fruition is the first tier in RP.

The Tiers of Restorative Practices

Because RP is rooted in inclusion, the first step to this discipline policy is to extend culturally responsiveness beyond pedagogy and transform the whole school community. Faculty have much of the responsibility in creating an atmosphere that validates students. If the students do not feel like an integral part of the school, when a harmful behavior appears, they may not see the need to make it right with those who are hurt by their actions. This first step towards RP also actively helps faculty to understand their students, their needs, their culture, and will affect the teacher's pedagogy and relationships. Without RP, this is where many schools might engage in "white, mainstream, traditional curriculum" (Milner, 2018).

The second tier of RP is where active intervention to problematic behavior and student ownership increases. While there are not detailed processes for this step, they may include discussing the harm and possible solutions with adults and students, either in a circle or during a bonding activity. During this process, it is important to ask students what happened, how are they feeling, what do they need to do to make it right, why did they engage in the hurtful behavior, and then make each side accountable to what they shared. If punishments were enacted, the students would make no contribution to the subsequent course of action.

Sometimes faculty need to recognize that some cultural behaviors may be different than their own societal norms; the students' behaviors are not malevolent and not deserving of a negative student outcome. When certain behaviors are objectively unsafe though, students may have to leave the classroom to deescalate the chaos and tension. However, the retrospective component of RP ensures that when the student(s) come back into the community, they are welcomed fully, and that work in the third tier of RP is done to fix the social and emotional damage between people.

The Types of Restorative Practices

There is a distinction in how RP functions based on the reasons for why a student engaged in a certain behavior. These reasons may vary from external to internal triggers. However, the actions may manifest itself in the same manner. For instance, a student may throw an object, rip up papers, run out of the room, yell at others, not engage in classroom activities and rules, and a variety of other behaviors that are disruptive to the school culture. Regardless of which tier of RP students find themselves in and what behaviors they committed; they should always be given the opportunity to be heard and asked questions. There are two types of RP to which faculty can respond to with: self-restoration and social restoration.

Self-Restoration	Social Restoration
<p><u>Triggers:</u> Unfulfillment of basic physiological and safety needs, trauma, mental or physical disabilities, no ill intent towards others.</p>	<p><u>Triggers:</u> External factors, such as being emotionally or physically provoked by another person, mental or physical disabilities.</p>
<p><u>Course of Action:</u> First engage in 1 on 1 RP to see if the child is getting all his or her needs met. Authentic dialogue still transpires. The student’s needs (physical, emotional, etc...) is met before transitioning into anything else.</p>	<p><u>Course of Action:</u> This type of RP is engaged if a student was hurt by someone else. Authentic dialogue transpires. This is the collaboration component of RP between students.</p>

Both types of RP take purposeful time and effort to deconstruct the trauma, needs, and emotions that are germane to children's lives. There are certain educators at Ridgepoint who specialize in RP and in dealing with the needs of troubled students. Next to every classroom phone, there is a paper with an assigned administrator that should be called if certain grade level teachers are experiencing problematic behaviors. Once an administrator is called and arrives, the student(s) are taken to engage in authentic dialogue in either a psychologist's or administrator's room. There students may engage in a social and emotional story, video, or questionnaire. Then discussions occur of what the student could have done differently and what needs to happen in order to make the situation right, to fix the hurt caused. However, if it is determined early on that a student lashed out because they were triggered from a past trauma, did not eat or sleep well at home, or lacked support, the student may be fed, given gum, sent to a psychologist, or told to move around to help physically self-regulate themselves.

Regardless of intent, sometimes the impact is widely felt by others. Social restoration also relies on discipline, rather than punishment; however, there is more communal accountability and decision process of what would make the situation right. Therefore, there is more understanding and agreement of this type or RP

Reasons for Inconsistent Definitions

The staff know that there is a lack of professional development and education about RP. There are different reasons for the staff's misunderstanding on the definition of RP.

The faculty turnover rate highlights the inconsistency within the faculty's understanding of RP. The school's administrators were known throughout the district for their avid dedication towards restorative education. Upon the principal's immediate arrival, RP vision casting, and

training were at the forefront of staff meetings. The data in this study continually depict the importance of an administrator's philosophies towards policy implementation. While teachers' assistants and faculty members that came before the current administration do not experience professional development on the new discipline policy, faculty members who were hired after the administrators are more inclined to seeking out RP education. It is unclear though what marginalized communities were focused on during the original vision casting for RP during the principal's early years at Ridgepoint. While the district views RP as a more equitable method than suspension because it further marginalized communities, such as students with disabilities, students of color, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, it is not understand if the intent of the past professional development was just for one group of students or for more.

Implementation of Restorative Practices

A lack of understanding about RP definitions, lead to an inconsistent implementation. There is a substantial discontinuity in the way Restorative Practices are viewed. There are differences between grade levels, between the methods and logical responses that adults take, especially between different staff positions.

Different Grade Levels Interact with RP

Throughout the four months at the elementary school, it was apparent that after preschool, there was a shift away from SEL. However, there is a greater presence of SEL and integrating that into the classroom before third grade and start of standardized tests. Upon interviews, only the youngest grade levels appear to have curriculum that equips teachers with social and emotional learning skills. "The kids spend their day doing restorative practices. The curriculum that we get behind is all about those ideas. I think the reason it falls off is because

curriculum shifts from helping students function in social circles to writing, reading, and math. There are super high directives and demands because of the standards. While the standards may bring up SEL, it is not really emphasized. But why does nobody talk about how children cannot academically learn if they are socially and emotionally struggling” (teacher interview). A teacher for the upper elementary grades agreed as she detailed how if they wanted to be the ones addressing a behavior, the RP “realistically only occurs at lunch or at community meetings in the morning, because there is so much academic demand and test preparation that needs to take place during the day” (teacher interview). This finding aligned with school wide observations that only extra support staff came in to engage in RP elsewhere during the day, because the classroom teachers were preoccupied by the large group.

Different Staff Facilitate RP

RP questioning is used by a variety of staff members, some of which have established relationships with the children and others do not have that. The staff members who attempt to engage in active RP questioning without having a relationship with the students often find RP to be unsuccessful and do not see a change in behavior. Many of these implementation problems manifest in the active, second tier of RP because the first community building component was not attempted. These often come from the teacher’s aides and teaching assistants who also do not attend professional development or staff meetings. There is a large gap in the competency and knowledge concerning RP between the Teachers’ Aides/Assistants (Tas) and the classroom teachers.

Throughout observations, it was evident that even the TAs in the room may have a completely different behavioral assessment method. There have been TAs that yell at students and publicly shame them, causing further community tensions. Sometimes the teacher is not

present and other times, no mention of the punitive incident is mentioned for the sake of providing a united front from the adults. There is discontinuity within classrooms and even greater differences to RP between grade levels.

Differentiating discipline procedures requires facilitators to invest more time. Differentiation can occur to accommodate the developmental difference of the child's age, triggers, and response to help. Instead of excluding students from the school after "disruptive, insubordinate, or violent" behavior, RP asks for the severity of behaviors and possible discipline practices to be addressed through a culturally responsive lens. Variants such as- "Age and maturity of student, student's disciplinary record (nature of prior misconduct, number of prior instances of misconduct), disciplinary consequences and interventions applied in prior behavior violations, nature, severity, and scope of behavior at issue, circumstances or context in which the conduct occurred, frequency and duration of behavior, student's IEP, BIP (Behavioral Intervention Plan) and 504 Accommodation Plan, if applicable, and student's response to intervention" (Ithaca City School District, pg. 14-15, 2016-2017) should be evaluated before punitive measures are encroached upon students. Differentiating the reason for a behavior and the best steps to take afterward takes time and energy from all participants.

What appears as a logical differentiation method to one adult may not be the same for another though. One teacher who never had any PD on RP said that she feels that RP is the "natural consequences for your actions. And always makes it clear to the kids that restorative justice isn't just when they did something bad and have to do something good to make up for it. When you've done something good, good things can come from that too...it kind of shows in our room where we made a mess together, we clean the mess up together. That teaching makes it easier when there is discipline, because they already kind of understand the process" (teacher

interview). She believes that a relational emphasis in the classroom is a natural process, that responsibility in the community is imperative to have RP implemented properly. That when students clearly understand their community expectations and the focus is on the members within that unit, even having to engage in retrospective RP becomes easier, because students know they belong in the community. This teacher, like every other teacher interviewed did not go through RP professional development at the current school. Because the definition of RP is not solidified, distributed, or practiced throughout Ridgepoint, many faculty members engage in non-restorative practices and simultaneously believe that exclusion from an activity, classroom, or the school is a logical consequence.

RP Language

Common language is one way that Ridgepoint attempts to make RP a more natural process. Throughout the school, the amount of time dedicated in the classroom towards social and self-restoration decreases; however, in all grade levels, the phrases- “how will you fix it” or “how can you make it right” is heard. Teachers will continually ask students these questions and hope that as the year progresses, autonomy will develop in students and they will engage in “I statements” and approach others on their own and let them know how their behavior impacted them and both participants would engage in discussions about how they can fix the harm in the relationship.

Exclusionary Practices

Some staff continue to exclude the students in the classroom and exclude them from engaging in ways they can take ownership of their behavior and the consequences. Bucket days is a specific term used at Ridgepoint, where disruptive students are taken out of the classroom

and placed into another teacher's classroom. While normally, the administrators, psychologist, or social worker would work one on one with that student, engage in RP stories, films, and writing and then talk with the other students impacted, when adult resources are preoccupied and unable to actively engage with student in need of discipline, the student is shuffled into another class. This form of exclusion from the classroom, but not the school premises, has caused extreme tension and confusion. Teachers wonder if this practice of moving the student from a high-tension area and mindlessly waiting for engagement is a necessary evil in RP. One faculty member disclosed that "Teachers are boycotting bucket days" (teacher interview). However, it is debated within the school if bucket days are really an example of RP, because while the student is in the school, he or she is not engaging in social restoration with authentic dialogue and many of the students have not reached an emotionally mature place to investigate self-restoration by themselves. So, while it appears that bucket days are merely a filler for when no other option seems accessible, some feel that since the administrators push for bucket days and for RP, that those two methods are apart of the same philosophy and practice. This misunderstanding has caused many dissenting views, biases, and unwillingness to engage in RP to arise.

Isolated RP

Throughout the building, opponents and proponents to RP are found. The building is separated largely where only teachers in the same grade level are in communication with each other. Yet even within the same grade level, conversations about discipline are not transpiring. As the grades rise and discipline is done differently and an emphasis is taken away from SEL, the children are not supported to transition into new discipline methods. Through interviews and observations, it was discovered that even while certain faculty's definition of RP closely aligned with the administrators' philosophy and definition of RP, these allies of RP are very secluded

from the rest of the school. Since they do not see other teaching instruction and discipline, there are not any natural, opportune times to positively showcase RP or help train others in it.

Even while some teachers who are well respected by the administrators and have aligning practices and mindset, still it has been said that they've, "never been told this is exactly what restorative justice is or this what we're doing at our school" (teacher interview). It is an unspoken rule that RP is the policy that should be followed, and exclusionary practices will not be supported. It is an undefined policy, philosophy, and practice. Every interviewee believed that teachers within and outside their own grade level would have a different definition. No matter how long the teacher was serving for, they all mentioned that they are not sure if the way they use RP is correct. There is a lack of knowledge and there is also flexibility concerning RP.

There are committees that work towards educating themselves on equitable practices, such as RP. However, the work done in these small cohorts of likeminded individuals does not disperse throughout the school. A member in one such committee shared that, "There are lots of committees here, some of which talk about behavior, but it seems to get stalled out in the committee, and then don't get reported back out" (teacher interview). Committees are mostly made up of faculty members who already took a personal initiative to divulge into RP more, because it was known that the administrators greatly desired a restorative culture.

Critique of Restorative Practices

Lack of RP Understanding and Training

While there are three tiers of RP, it is not always clear what level of RP should be practiced and how practitioners should enact it. RP can be embodied in preliminary building, actively engaging, and sustaining peacekeeping culture and activities. However, regardless of the

faculty's level of professional development around RP, there is a confusion and debate mainly surrounding the second and third tier. The focus of the first tier in RP is on culturally responsiveness and all full-time teachers receive district mandated professional development (PD) on this. Other elements of "PD consist of: inclusion, teaching & learning innovation, and professional responsibility & compliance" (Ithaca City School District, 2018). However, nothing is mandated or even outlined from the district in regard to Restorative Practices specifically.

The teachers who have personally inquired about professional development for RP all have criticized their specific school's implementation of the policy. While all these educators agree that RP is an effective tool and their administrators want to see it, the staff believe that RP is not explained enough at their school. So, they believe the implementation is weak, but hold potential to make even more positive change is understood and adopted by the whole school. Teachers who have not received any training on RP find the policy itself to be a soft approach, incapable of effective implementation. These very two different beliefs show that a lack of understanding adds to the dissenting views on RP.

Self-Restoration Implementation Critique

While the school lacks a schoolwide definition of RP, teachers still experience and observe some level of RP. Some teachers criticize the second tier of self-restoration because they have only witnessed certain aspects of RP. Their misconstrued definition creates RP to be a soft approach in their mind. There are teachers that believe that actively using RP means that they must praise any student behavior and focus on self-restoration alone. Specialized faculty who are trained on treating students with trauma have said that "they have probably focused too much on self-restoration and fixing the student's internal hardships and then move on, without checking in on the hurt student if they need anything else" (teacher interview). Social restoration does not

seem necessary sometimes because the adult knows the one child who caused the issue was only doing it because they did not have the skills to address their internal triggers and unmet needs. However, impact and intent are two different things.

Self-restoration is when a student addresses what is happening in their life that is provoking an unhealthy behavior and is when RP has a more egocentric focus. This is merely just the first step in RP. “Once they’re calm, they can process, and then be ready to go back and learn. It is this multistep process, where you take care of their physical needs and then do the other pieces. From a teacher’s view, they say- a little kid ran out of my room and they ran to the office and now you’re feeding them, what is up with that? They think you are giving them positive reinforcement” (teacher interview). Sometimes RP stops after meeting the internal needs of an individual. Staff with trauma training sometimes argue that the student’s behavior is not meant with ill intent, so the behavior mainly needs self-regulation and the fulfillment of basic needs.

The duality of self and social restoration within RP must be validated. If self-restoration is done fully and correctly, then it should transition into social restoration. From here the students can rebuild the relationships within their community and make things right. However, if RP is stopped after self-restoration, inaccurate procedures and beliefs continue to spread and cause division and unrest in the faculty body.

Nonlinear Discipline policy

Teachers critiquing RP as a soft discipline approach is not uncommon. Throughout Ridgepoint, staff find RP to be soft, because it is not a cut and clear policy. RP demands a lot of chances and a lot of creativity for the children. If RP methods become a menu where a specific

behavior, produces a predetermined set of outcomes, then it is no better than zero tolerance and suspension heavy policies. An advocate for RP understood “Why people want there to be a bottom line for students’ behaviors, but we do not operate or view any other part of kids’ learning like that. We do not say, if you do not get these math problems right, you cannot go out for recess. So why is their social and emotional learning, which is so critical for their success, done so differently and we do not differentiate” (teacher interview) This educator understood the difficulties of a nonlinear discipline approach. However, she argues that students’ lessons on their behavior and emotions should be just as varied and multimodal as their academic lessons. This idea requires all faculty to unite under the same culturally responsive mindset. While the RP could technically look different with different facilitators and students, if the philosophy is the same, adults will at least not perpetuate the distrusting, negative student outcomes from punishments.

Recommendations

There are monthly professional development meetings at the school and district level; however, they are greatly underattended. To purposefully implement a policy, there needs to be administrative and whole group philosophical support to fully eliminate misunderstandings surrounding RP. While there are many teachers that have been hired under this RP centered administrator, there are over thirty teacher aides that do not have sufficient training and investment yet are still adding to the whole school attitude towards RP (Johnson, L., & Faunce, W., 1973). Training and supporting staff members are a necessary first step towards effective policy implementations. Allowing a space for people to feel a part of the culture and to voice their opinions can be accomplished through a few, more intimate settings. There is a committee

that is working towards understanding what the continuum of discipline looks like and the middle ground between necessary suspensions and regular, tier 1 community development in RP. However, as mentioned earlier in the Critiques section, the work of committees often stall out and do not infuse into the whole school. Faculty need to understand that while the upfront cost of investing time in RP and those discussions, it is vital to development of children.

Scaffolding RP

In lower grades, educators need to support the students more with providing the language and ask probing questions, specifically, “Did you make it right?” and “How can we fix this?” There needs to be an ownership and responsibility from all students. A large piece of RP is that students need to resolve and be given the tools to have authentic conversations with their peers to make the hurt relationships right. If Restorative Practices emphasis tactics that empowers students to reconcile on their own, then there will be less pressure for adult educators to facilitate that instead of teaching the large class. Similarly, to how creating sentence frames help developing academic learners to be able to be more independent, continuing to create common language for the students to use will help in the scaffolding process of discipline instruction.

Bottom Up Approach to RP Implementation

The top down implementation method at Ridgepoint caused misunderstandings, tensions, and varied approaches toward RP. The approach at which a policy is created and implemented at Ridgepoint could change if the adults were active members in the school’s vision casting process. When whole staff meetings occur, constantly focusing on RP when there is already contempt for the policy can be time consuming and create more hostility towards the discipline approach.

Discussing an element of RP once a month as a whole staff and in small groups during the month will allow for higher participatory, informed conversations. First creating safe spaces where educators can discuss among themselves their current understanding of RP's definition and how it is enacted within their grade levels may be helpful. Then at the end of the month, at one whole school meeting, these teams can share their definitions and dissenting views towards RP. This is an important step in order to dissect what aspect of RP do educators need to learn more about and the greatest philosophical hurdles needed to overcome in order to create a clear, unified theory behind RP.

Looking at the funds of knowledge, the ways that students already bring in unique perspectives and skills from their own lives (Reinhardt, 2018), and the preconceived ideas that educators hold for RP can help identify the misinformed assumptions that the faculty hold towards students. A unified philosophy will drive a more effective policy. The next whole school meeting concerning RP can focus on what the administration believes are the aims of RP and culturally responsive ways to view the children in school. Before the next meeting, the established groups can again meet to discuss what are ways that they could meet the goals of RP. Creating multiple venues for educators to discuss and eventually create an action plan to discipline students can increase faculty morale and the likelihood for a fully changed school culture.

District Implementation

In school professional development and discussions provide more ownership and originality for their discipline policy than if it was implemented through the trickle-down method that it had previously run on. The district provides banners with restorative, community themed phrases. While words are powerful, it requires more to change a culture. Leveling out the

spectrum of professional knowledge on RP is important. In a district wide survey, it was found that teachers felt overwhelmed by the behavioral issues at their schools and did not feel supported by the district. Consequently, having individual schools construct their own definition and plan for RP is a positive plan of action.

There are some plans that need district approval, such as the “Morning Readiness Program” where students from marginalized communities and those known to have experienced trauma will come to a designated room in the morning to engage in activities that will help calm them down and socially and emotionally transition to school. Meeting these needs in the morning is a preventative measure for unwanted behaviors and a proactive method to help self-regulation. While this idea may require lengthy approval processes, if done by classroom teachers or by trained teacher aides, then students may have opportunities to develop social and emotional skills, while feeling apart of the school community.

After observations, training teachers’ aides appears to be one of the most necessary elements to building a whole school approach to discipline. Teachers’ aides observe a lot of behavioral issues as they work in smaller groups with students and are out at recess and lunch, which are prominent places for student arguments. Additionally, their ability to focus in and support individual students could be utilized in implementing RP. If those adult demographics had a strong, culturally responsive relationship with students and were trained in facilitating RP, the impacts could be extremely beneficial in further changing Ridgepoint’s discipline culture. However, professional development for teachers’ aides is almost nonexistent. Because of public school’s limited budgets and inability many times to compensate who attend professional development activities, mandating or incentivizing teachers’ aides is difficult. There is little incentive for teachers’ aides to spend their own time, energy, and money to engage in meetings,

trainings, and conversations when they are often overworked, underpaid and not seen with equal importance to classroom teachers. While higher officials in the district need to provide participants better benefits for professional development, individual schools can work towards training teachers' aides and assistants by giving them a mentor teacher that can provide informal professional development on RP.

Educating everyone in the school about the definition and implications of RP is essential. Students can only take ownership of their discipline narrative if they first experience scaffolded instruction on social and emotional responsibility for their actions. Adult staff members can only provide culturally responsive differentiation if they themselves are trained on such topics. While students receive the direct impact of a discipline policy, the facilitators of that policy are imperative to the effective implementation of RP.

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