“YELLING AT THEM MAKES IT WORSE”: STUDENT AND FACULTY PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND EMPOWERMENT

AN ABSTRACT

SUBMITTED ON THE FIFTEENTH DAY OF JUNE 2022

TO THE CITY, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY PROGRAM

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS OF TULANE UNIVERSITY

FOR THE DEGREE

OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

Estilla S. Lightfoot

CCC Director of Doctoral Studies, Dr. Xiaojin Chen

Dissertation Chair, Dr. Charles Figley

Dr. Stacy Overstreet

Dr. Leia Saltzman
ABSTRACT

Exclusionary discipline practices create and maintain disparate power dynamics between school faculty members and students, which are especially apparent in the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of students of color and students in special education. These disparities reach beyond the classroom, as exclusionary practices can affect socioemotional skills (Kline, 2016), ability to graduate (Balfanz et al., 2014), and even lifetime earning potential (Marchbanks et al., 2015).

To curb these negative effects, schools nationwide have begun to seek out alternatives to exclusionary discipline. Among the more popular alternatives are restorative practices. Rather than seeking to deter behaviors through exclusion, restorative practices aim to integrate students into the community through accountability and relationship reparation (Zehr, 2015). Restorative practices may also have the potential to balance the power differential between faculty and students (Winn, 2018).

Through the ecological frameworks of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and empowerment theory (Rappaport, 1981), this study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) How do students and faculty across school settings experience restorative practices? 2) How do students and faculty experience issues of empowerment and disempowerment as they relate to restorative practices across these school settings? 3) What are the similarities and differences between student and faculty experiences with restorative practices and empowerment across these school settings?
This study uses grounded theory methods with process coding (Charmaz, 2014). Fifteen faculty members and sixteen students aged 12 and up from three schools in the New Orleans area participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. These methods resulted in five major interrelated categories: strong or poor relationships, emotional and physical security or insecurity, restorative practices working or not working, staff retention/development or turnover, and empowerment or disempowerment. Results show a strong preference for restorative approaches among all groups, with a few notable exceptions. Results emphasize that both students and faculty contend with issues of empowerment and disempowerment. Discussion of how school faculty, especially social workers, can help to turn restorative practices into restorative justice follows.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2007, nearly two years after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, I arrived in New Orleans to begin my summer of training for an alternative track teaching certificate in special education. At the end of this brief training, I was hired as a special education teacher at a local high school where 99% of the student population was Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). Nearly 80% of the teachers at this school were first-year teachers who, like me, had undergone one summer of training. Most of these first-year teachers, like me, were White. As students returned from prolonged evacuations, sometimes without parents or guardians, we saw a steady influx of new enrollees throughout the school year. Many of the students exhibited clear signs of trauma, which often translated into disruptive behaviors.

Amid the chaos of my first year as a teacher, it became increasingly clear that the “zero-tolerance” discipline practices espoused by the school principal were disproportionately affecting students in special education – my students. Furthermore, every student who fell victim to gun violence on the streets in that first year (and most gun violence victims in my subsequent years at the school) had been identified for special education. In my second year of teaching, my job duties shifted heavily toward preventing suspensions and expulsions for my students, which I hoped would in turn reduce my students’ exposure to violence. During this time the school moved away from a strict stance regarding discipline and began to implement restorative practices to supplement its existing discipline policies. Suspensions and expulsions noticeably
decreased as a result, but the problem did not entirely vanish. Although I did not realize it at the time, what I was witnessing in terms of school discipline was not specific to post-Katrina New Orleans schools, but rather it was a long-standing nationwide problem: exclusionary discipline practices fall disproportionately upon students in special education and BIPOC students (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

My experiences at this school led me to pursue a career in social work, during which I helped children, adolescents, and families work through their trauma. The knowledge I gained from working with traumatized families combined with the questions that remained in my mind about my students and the discipline practices they had endured led me to return to New Orleans to pursue a PhD in social work. The interdisciplinary nature of the City, Culture, and Community program at Tulane University allowed me to approach these persisting questions from various disciplinary angles, and the resulting dissertation is meant to reflect this.

**School Discipline in Context**

The United States has a long history of punitive and exclusionary school discipline. As the popularity of corporal punishment in schools waned, exclusionary practices took their place (Adams, 2000). The term “exclusionary discipline” refers to practices that remove a student from the learning environment, such as in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsion. Justifications for exclusionary discipline often rely upon the idea that a disruptive student in the classroom can negatively affect the learning environment for others, therefore the student causing the
problem must be removed (Arnott & Rowse, 1987). The 1994 passage of the Gun Free Schools Act introduced mandatory expulsion of at least one year for incidents involving a weapon on school grounds (Gun Free Schools Act, 1994). The zero-tolerance stance for weapons soon spread to lesser offenses, with the justification that small incidents left unattended would snowball into major offenses.

**Statement of the Problem**

Critics of zero-tolerance policies argue that such strict exclusionary discipline policies disproportionately affect BIPOC students and students in special education (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Anyon et al., 2014; Mongan & Walker, 2012), leading to decreased instructional time, increased suspension rates, and deterioration of overall school climate (Kline, 2016; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Furthermore, exclusionary practices can have lifelong consequences through an increase in school dropout (Balfanz et al., 2014), decreased lifetime earning potential (Marchbanks et al., 2015), and a direct connection to the prison-industrial complex (Wald & Losen, 2003). These deleterious effects fall disproportionately upon students from marginalized populations (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021b).

Exclusionary discipline practices fail to address potential underlying causes for disruptive behaviors, such as trauma (Chafouleas et al., 2016). As a result of growing criticism of the high rate of exclusionary discipline that accompanies zero-tolerance policies, schools are increasingly turning to alternatives to exclusionary discipline like restorative practices. Restorative practices frame discipline infractions as causing, and
being caused by fractured relationships. Advocates of restorative practices propose that the best solutions, therefore, are not punitive measures, but measures to restore and repair relationships and communities affected by an incident. They frame restorative practices in schools as a tool to improve student outcomes by keeping students in class, while simultaneously fostering socioemotional skill such as empathy (e.g., Okonofua et al., 2016).

Some scholars assert that if the relationships being restored are inherently unbalanced and oppressive, as is often the case in schools serving high numbers of students from marginalized backgrounds, the practices should include a component of justice in order to introduce a more equitable balance (Lustick, 2017b; Winn, 2018). This is a particularly salient point in New Orleans, where 91% of students attending public charter schools are BIPOC, and specifically to this study, in which 94% of student participants self-identified as BIPOC (New Schools for New Orleans, 2020b). In recognition of the importance of this difference between practice and justice, I discuss the results of this study in terms of both restorative practices and restorative justice.

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The general goal of this study is to better understand the lived experiences of both faculty and students in the New Orleans area with various school discipline approaches and related power dynamics. To this end, recruitment was restricted to participants who have experienced different discipline models, either within one school, or across different school settings. The more specific goals were to understand: 1) similarities and
differences between student and faculty experiences; and 2) similarities and differences in experiences between schools.

Although there are a few studies that include student voices and faculty voices regarding restorative practices in schools, there is a dearth of studies comparing student voices to faculty voices both within schools and between schools. The schools in this study were all in very different phases of restorative practices implementation, providing a rich backdrop for such comparisons. They varied in their states of stability and consistency in restorative practices implementation. One school was in the early stages of implementation, one school had vacillated between restorative practices and punitive measures, and one school had been consistently implementing restorative practices on a schoolwide level for years. The schools also varied regarding general stability and consistency. One school was growing, one school was undergoing a massive upheaval in staffing, and one school had relative stability in staffing. All these factors are reflected in the results and discussion, as they are all important factors in strength of restorative practices implementation and in the experiences of participants in terms of power dynamics and other issues.

Through semi-structured qualitative interviewing and grounded theory coding techniques, this study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) How do students and faculty across school settings experience restorative practices? 2) How do students and faculty experience issues of empowerment and disempowerment as they relate to restorative practices across these school settings? 3) What are the similarities and differences between student and faculty experiences with restorative practices and empowerment across these school settings?
Conceptual Framework

To best honor the narratives and experiences of the study participants, these narratives must not be siloed. Rather, they must be considered within the greater contexts of families, communities, time, larger political systems, and laws on the local, state, and federal levels. For this reason, I apply a bioecological lens to this study, in which I consider how micro, mezzo, macro, and time-specific factors affect the participants, and in turn how participants affect, or wish to affect, issues on these various levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). To enhance this lens and to bring into focus how participants might affect – or try to affect - their environments, I turn to critical pedagogy and its attention to raising awareness of one’s own position in relation to oppression (Freire, 1970). As a companion to critical pedagogy and bioecological systems theory, and a natural framework from which to discuss power dynamics, I also refer to empowerment theory (Rappaport, 1981). Each of these theories contributes to the overall understanding of the results of this study, and together they provide a useful combined framework through which to discuss these results.

The unique educational landscape of New Orleans is, in the worlds of the students and faculty participants, more than merely an abstract concept. Rather, this landscape is its own entity that has very real and immediate effects upon the lives and experiences of people with both direct and indirect involvement. There are no more non-charter public schools in New Orleans. The highly decentralized nature of this market-based system has led to higher school-level autonomy in exchange for increased accountability on standardized testing, which in turn has led to abrupt changes in staffing, leadership, curriculum, and discipline policies. Because these and other related factors play such a
prominent role in the narratives of many of the participants of this study, to ignore the ecological implications of the participants’ experiences would be a grave disservice.

**Overview**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this study relies upon the narratives of students and faculty at schools in the New Orleans area. While the results stem from individual narratives, each narrative tells a story beyond the individual. To set the scene, I provide a literature review and a background for the study in Chapter 2. I begin with a brief overview of the history of school discipline in the United States, which I then narrow down to focus on exclusionary school discipline and its effects, including how trauma can both result in and result from punitive discipline. Because the setting for this study is unique, I then focus on the educational landscape of New Orleans and how school discipline has played out here. I then turn to an explanation and review of the effectiveness of restorative practices, which I contrast with restorative justice. I conclude Chapter 2 with a deeper discussion of the theoretical frameworks for this study.

In Chapter 3 I discuss my research methods, beginning with an overview of the grounded theory techniques I apply. I generally describe the research settings, and I then discuss my research sample, including my recruitment methods and the general demographic composition of the study sample, followed by the human subject protections I had in place throughout the course of this study. I then discuss my data collection and analysis methods in depth, and I conclude with a reflection on my own positionality.

In Chapter 4, I present the results thematically, using the participants’ own words wherever possible. I begin with my general findings, and the resulting theoretical
statement. I then discuss the five emergent and interconnected themes from the study. Each theme is dichotomous, meaning that it is comprised of two contrasting families. For structuring purposes, I present each side of each theme separately, by school. For example, the first theme is “relationships.” I first present the general theme, and then I present the results for the family of “having strong relationships.” I break this family down by school, presenting results from Birdsong K-8, Cherrywood High School, and then Riverside High School. I follow the same pattern for the family of “having poor relationships,” and so on. The second theme, “emotional and physical security,” reveals factors such as relationships and strength of restorative practices implementation that affect participants’ senses of security. The third theme is “effectiveness of restorative practices,” which reveals why participants think that restorative practices work or do not work, and what that means to them. The fourth theme, “faculty and staff development and retention or turnover,” has implications on various ecological levels, and has strong ties to the other four themes. The final theme, “power dynamics,” builds upon the other four themes, and in many ways represents the culmination of the themes.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the results presented in the previous chapter. I begin by reintroducing the theoretical frameworks. I then discuss the results by each theme, with an emphasis on interpretation through the theoretical frameworks. I use these results and frameworks to discuss to where the schools fall on the continuum between punitive discipline and restorative justice, and what factors influence this positioning. I then discuss the limitations of the study.

In Chapter 6, I summarize my findings and reintroduce my theoretical statement. Using this summary and the theoretical statement, I discuss the implications and provide
recommendations for educators and social workers in practice, and I identify areas for future research.

**Conclusion**

This study takes place in a unique city with a unique educational landscape that faces unique challenges. Naturally, the results are informed by these conditions, which do not yet exist elsewhere in the United States. The problems inherent in exclusionary school discipline, however, are widespread. So, as schools increasingly look for alternative approaches to exclusionary discipline, the experiences of the participants contained herein might shed some light on challenges, benefits, and important considerations regarding restorative practices and restorative justice. Furthermore, as charter school advocates increasingly look to New Orleans as an example for other cities to follow, the implications of this study may become increasingly salient for other cities (Brinson et al., 2012).
Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review

This study seeks to understand the experiences of students and faculty in a holistic way. To this end, it draws on knowledge and literature from a wide array of disciplines, including social work, education, sociology, economics, public policy, psychology, disaster and trauma studies, neurobiology, and law. This chapter begins with a general overview of school discipline in the United States, including exclusionary discipline practices and alternatives to those practices. It then reviews the specific and unique educational landscape of New Orleans, the setting for this study. It concludes by discussing theories - specifically bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), and empowerment theory (Rappaport, 1987) in order to help frame the findings of the study.

History of School Discipline in the United States

School discipline in public and private schools in the United States has historically been primarily punitive. In the 1960s and early 1970s the predominant mode of school discipline, corporal punishment, faced increasing criticism on grounds of inappropriateness and ineffectiveness. As public opinion turned against corporal punishment, schools turned to exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspension and expulsion, to assert control over students and ostensibly maintain order (Adams, 2000). In 1994, the Gun Free Schools Act required schools to adopt a zero-tolerance policy
resulting in expulsion of no less than one year in incidents involving weapons in order for the school to continue to receive federal funding (Gun Free Schools Act, 1994). The Gun Free Schools Act also provided grant money for schools to use toward crime prevention measures, including metal detectors and security guard training. An increase in the prevalence of exclusionary discipline practices followed. In 1993, 15.2% of students in grades six through twelve had ever been suspended, while 1.5% had ever been expelled. In 2012, 19.6% of students in these grades had ever been suspended, while 2.2% had ever been expelled (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

Originally, zero-tolerance policies established predetermined mandatory punishment only for major discipline violations. Schools, however, soon began to apply the “broken windows” theory of policing to discipline. Using the example of a broken window in a building, this theory proposes that if one does not attend to a small issue (e.g. a minor discipline infraction), it will grow into a larger issue (e.g. a dangerous school environment) (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). Following the passage of the Guns Free Schools Act, a series of court rulings weakened due process for students (Black, 2015). Courts have ruled against students even in the absence of mens rea, or proof of intent, culpability, and harm in cases involving weapons (Mongan & Walker, 2012). Following the precedent set by these cases, schools began to more broadly apply the zero-tolerance tenet of the Guns Free School Act to more minor, discretionary discipline offenses (Black, 2015). A discretionary offense refers to an incident that relies on the teacher’s interpretation, such as disrespect.

Effects of Exclusionary Discipline
Proponents of exclusionary discipline and zero-tolerance policies argue that students who disrupt the classroom negatively affect the learning environment for their peers. This “peer effects” theory proposes that students who require more energy from a teacher, such as students in special education or students with behavior difficulties, detract from their peers’ ability to learn (Hoxby, 2002). Those who support this theory believe that discouraging disruptive behavior through exclusionary discipline benefits the overall student population. The heavy reliance on high-stakes testing for resources and funding in the era of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) adds a sense of urgency to maintaining environments conducive to learning (Kirk & Sampson, 2013).

The American Psychological Association assembled the Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) to conduct an extensive literature review on zero-tolerance discipline policies. The Task Force found little evidence supporting zero-tolerance policies as a deterrent to undesirable behaviors (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Instead, the Task Force found that exclusionary discipline decreases days of student learning, potentially leading to negative outcomes. It also found that exclusionary discipline disproportionately falls on certain marginalized populations of students.

Kline (2016) described a cycle of discipline in which suspension causes frustration that results in misbehavior, which then results in further suspension. This cycle ultimately results in lost days of learning for the suspended student. Exclusionary discipline is correlated with poor student outcomes in test performance, school completion, and lifetime earning ability. Even after adjusting for demographic differences, schools with higher rates of suspension have lower test scores (Skiba &
Rausch, 2004). A single suspension in the 9th grade is associated with a two-fold risk of dropout (Balfanz et al., 2014). School dropout and disconnection are of particular concern in New Orleans, where 14.1% of youth between the ages of 16 and 24 are not connected with school or with employment (Burd-Sharps et al., 2018). Of the 98 U.S. cities included in the Burd-Sharps et al. (2018) study, New Orleans has the tenth highest rate of disconnected youth. In terms of earning ability, a study in Texas estimated lifetime costs in lost wages for a single cohort of students who dropped out to be between $5 billion and $9 billion (Marchbanks et al., 2015).

Schools suspend BIPOC students and students in special education at rates disproportionate to their percentage of the school population, in a phenomenon many scholars call the “discipline gap” (Balfanz et al., 2014; Shollenberger, 2015; Togut, 2011). The largest discipline gap among BIPOC students occurs with Black students. Schools suspend Black students at rates more than three times their share of total student population (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021b). Students receiving special education services have legal protections against excessive exclusionary discipline through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). Under IDEA, students with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, and teachers and administrators carry the burden of proof that they are not suspending or punishing students due to behaviors that are a manifestation of a student’s diagnosed disability. However, while students in special education comprise 13.2% of the student population nationally, they receive 24.5% of out-of-school suspensions (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021b).
Wald and Losen (2003) described a system whereby students from minoritized groups are funneled from the schools to prisons through, among other mechanisms, zero-tolerance discipline policies and the presence of police officers called school resource officers (SROs) on campuses. This phenomenon is widely known as the school-to-prison pipeline. Nationwide, Black students represent 28.7% of students referred to law enforcement and 31.6% of students subjected to school-related arrests, even though they represent only 15.1% of school enrollment numbers (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021b). Students in special education represent 26.1% of student arrests and law enforcement referrals (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021a).

Scholars like Erica Meiners (2007) have recently pushed for a more nuanced understanding of this connection between schools and prisons, and the term “school prison nexus” is becoming increasingly popular. This concept points to how schools not only funnel students into carceral systems, but how they also mirror many of the practices of the prison-industrial complex, essentially becoming carceral sites themselves (Sojoyner, 2013). Among these practices are the zero-tolerance policies, the use of SROs, and the installation of metal detectors. Hirschfield (2008) describes how an economic partnership between schools and the prison-industrial complex has developed as schools fill court dockets with referrals to law enforcement, facilitated by the implementation of SROs and the hiring of private security forces. The proliferation of armed security guards, SROs, and metal detectors in schools negatively impacts school climate (Bottiani et al., 2016), and makes students feel less safe and empowered (Bracy, 2011).
School Discipline and Trauma

School discipline and trauma are intimately linked in a cyclical manner, as in Kline’s (2016) cycle of suspension, frustration, misbehavior, and repeated suspension. As we study and learn more about trauma, we learn more about how strict disciplinary environments can exacerbate trauma, and how trauma affects behaviors. In urban settings like New Orleans, researchers point to trauma as a potential cause for disruptive behaviors (Chafouleas et al., 2016). For students in special education programs, trauma is often the underlying cause of classifications like emotional disturbance. Given these connections, it stands to reason that many students whom teachers perceive to be disruptive and unruly may in fact be experiencing trauma symptoms. Disciplinary action for such manifestations of trauma symptoms is not only counterproductive, but may in fact cause harm by exacerbating the trauma, or even retraumatizing a student (Dutil, 2020). Researchers recommend that teachers and school administrators adopt trauma-informed behavior modification practices (DeCandia et al., 2014).

Trauma, especially during early developmental years, can have lifelong effects. In a landmark longitudinal study with 9,508 participants, adults who had experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) had a four- to twelve-fold increase in alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and suicide attempt, and a two- to four-fold increase in smoking and sexually transmitted diseases than did those who reported no ACEs (Felitti et al., 1998). This study also found a graded relationship to the presence of diseases such as ischemic heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, skeletal fractures, and liver disease. As a vulnerable population that is dependent upon adults for many of
their basic needs, children typically have few resources of their own with which to mitigate the effects of trauma.

Attachments and relationships are important factors in resilience and growth. A child’s early interactions with their primary caregiver can shape how the child forms attachments throughout life. A secure attachment style arises in a child who is confident that a caregiver will respond to their needs (Ainsworth, 1978). Children with abusive experiences are more likely to form ambivalent attachments, which manifest as anxiety in the absence of a caregiver but ambivalence upon the caregiver’s return (McCarthy & Taylor, 1999). Children who have been exposed to neglect or rebuff of attachment behavior by their caregiver will often display avoidant attachment styles by avoiding contact with their caregiver upon return to the room following an absence.

Children whose caregivers have unresolved trauma or depression will often display disorganized attachment styles, which present as muscle-tensing patterns as they attempt to control crying. Disorganized attachment may result from abuse, neglect, disrupted affective communication, or frightening, intrusive, or insensitive caregiver manner, and can predict dissociation in childhood and early adulthood (Blizard, 2003). A randomized-controlled trial recently found supportive-expressive therapy to be highly effective in treating clients with major depressive disorder resulting from attachment issues, indicating the importance of building supportive relationships in helping people deal with attachment issues (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2021).

As trauma research increasingly focuses on neurobiological responses to violence and trauma exposure, our understanding of how trauma physically affects the brain helps us to also understand how trauma affects daily cognitive and emotional functioning.
Perry & Pollard, 1998). Perry et al. (1995) note that the developing brain organizes new information in a way that depends upon use. Because of this, they argue, children who experience frequent hyperarousal and dissociation are more likely to have neuropsychotic symptoms following trauma which, when they persist, can become maladaptive traits. The hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis, which regulates the fight-or-flight response, is responsible for cortisol levels (Bevans et al., 2005). Increased cortisol production over a long period of time can physically alter the brain in terms of brain volume (Hedges & Woon, 2010), and physical changes in the amygdala (the fear response center) and the prefrontal cortex (the processing center for emotion, mood, and cognitive responses) (DeBellis & Thomas, 2003). Such changes can affect attentional inhibition (Barrera et al., 2013), abstract reasoning (Beers & DeBellis, 2002), immune system functioning (Gunnar & Vazquez, 2001), and intellectual functioning and cognitive development (Bücker et al., 2012). Van der Kolk et al. (2005) found that people with prolonged exposure to trauma, especially early-life exposure, had high incidence of memory and attention problems, affect and impulse regulation problems, and problems with systems of meaning, such as belief systems.

Child maltreatment has well-documented correlations with behavioral problems. A 12-year longitudinal study found that adolescents with a history of early-life maltreatment had levels of aggression, anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and social withdrawal at rates three quarters of a standard deviation higher than their non-maltreated peers (Lansford et al., 2002). Maltreated children also have lower ego resiliency and more social skills deficits than their non-maltreated counterparts (Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001). As might be expected given the evidence, maltreated children
receive more discipline referrals and suspensions than their non-maltreated peers (Eckenrode et al., 1993).

Increased focus on trauma in the microsystem, rather than just trauma within the individual, has led to interest in trauma-informed care (TIC). Rather than focusing on individual interventions, TIC applies an ecological perspective to intervention, and focuses interventions within microsystem environments like schools (Crosby, 2015; Nastasi et al., 2011). Theoretically, a trauma-sensitive environment can benefit not only traumatized children, but also non-traumatized children who are affected secondarily by their traumatized classmates (Cole et al., 2005). Proponents of TIC highlight the need for a continuum of services to ensure complete mental health care, and note that trauma is especially prominent in places where macrosystems are disrupted or dysfunctional, such as in post-disaster settings or in urban environments with high rates of violence (Nastasi et al., 2011).

While the prevalence of trauma in the general population is potentially much higher than is currently observed, many people who experience traumatic events display resilience, or even growth rather than trauma symptoms. Lightfoot et al. (2020) found education to be a protective factor adding to resilience for both men and women following multiple disasters. Gardner and Stephens-Pisecco (2019) identify several techniques educators can employ to build resilience in students. Among these techniques are, 1) creating a safe, structured environment; 2) building respectful relationships with clear communication; 3) encouraging affect regulation, especially in areas of self-expression and responsibility taking; 4) improving self-perception; 5) encouraging a balance between individual and community needs; 6) fostering fortitude by empowering
students and allowing voice in school operations; 7) improving cognitive skills through strengths-based pedagogy; and 8) teaching adaptive coping and problem-solving skills. These resilience-building techniques share many common traits with restorative practices, as will be noted later in this chapter.

School Discipline in New Orleans

New Orleans area schools are not the only schools to come under fire for excessive application of zero-tolerance policies resulting in exclusionary discipline. The educational landscape in New Orleans, however, makes it a unique case study. Shortly before Hurricane Katrina made landfall in late August of 2005, the State of Louisiana had identified a handful of schools as failing under President Bush’s 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). These schools had continuously failed to meet standards of adequate yearly progress (AYP), and so were slated for takeover by the state-run Recovery School District (RSD) (Schwam-Baird & Mogg, 2010). The criteria for AYP are based mostly on standardized test scores.

Shortly following Hurricane Katrina, school board officials and lawmakers met while most residents were still evacuated. They decided to change the criteria for AYP without citizen input (Mirón, 2008). This highly controversial move resulted in more than 100 schools becoming eligible for takeover by the RSD, most of which were in New Orleans. Shortly after the change in the AYP requirement, around 4,300 teachers – with a collective average of 15.4 years of teaching experience, and 71% of whom were Black – were fired (Lincove et al., 2018).
The State took these measures to facilitate the building of what economists Paul Hill and colleagues call a “portfolio district”, in which parents are ostensibly presented with a wide array of choices for educating their children (Harris, 2020; Hill et al., 1997). The New Orleans school system was rebuilt after Hurricane Katrina with the idea that charter schools were the best way to provide such a high level of choice. New Orleans schools replaced most of the fired teachers with teachers in Teach for America (TFA) or The New Teacher Project (TNTP), two alternative-track teacher licensing programs that recruit young college graduates from across the country to receive a summer of training before entering urban classrooms to fulfill a two-year teaching contract (Barrett & Harris, 2015).

In the years since Katrina, the RSD systematically turned over its schools in Orleans Parish to charter school operators. Many of the charter management organizations were run by people and entities with little to no experience in the education sector (Harris, 2020). Initially, several of these schools implemented selective admissions criteria, resulting in a school system that was highly stratified by race and ability (Adamson et al., 2015). New Orleans is now the only city in the United States that has only charter schools and private schools (Jewson, 2019). Some frame this controversial shift as a model for other cities to follow (Brinson et al., 2012), while others are critical of the lack of community input and lack of attention to equity (Buras, 2013).

The proliferation of charter schools in the New Orleans area is important to the story of school discipline. In essence, charter schools are privately run, publicly funded schools. In Louisiana, charter schools exercise a great deal of autonomy over operations in exchange for increased emphasis on student performance, which ultimately boils down
to test scores. One of the ways schools achieve this autonomy is by the decentralization of the school system: each charter management organization (CMO) is its own local education agency (Rhim & Ahearn, 2007). In most other school systems, the school district acts as the local education agency.

This increased autonomy extends to school-based discipline systems. In the early days of Louisiana’s post-Katrina education experiment, school leaders frequently opted for zero-tolerance policies resulting in indiscriminate suspensions and expulsions (Ferguson, 2018). The problem became so prevalent that the Southern Poverty Law Center filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of special education students partially on the grounds of denial of a free and appropriate public education as required by IDEA (Heilman et al., 2010, 2015). In response to the lawsuit and growing criticism from parents and advocates over the schools counseling and pushing out low performing and behaviorally challenging students, New Orleans moved to a centralized expulsion hearing process (Harris, 2020). Currently, many individual schools and CMOs in the area are seeking out and implementing alternative approaches to discipline. These include, among other approaches, restorative practices.

**Restorative Practices**

Multiple states have passed laws favoring alternative discipline approaches in response to growing concern about the effects of exclusionary discipline practices on students (Rafa, 2019). One of these alternatives is restorative practices. In the United States, the use of restorative practices began in the judicial system rather than the education system (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Instead of pursuing a punitive course of
action, restorative practices rely on repairing and strengthening relationships and
community support in hopes of reducing recidivism (Standing et al., 2012). The
philosophy behind them has a long history in Indigenous cultures (Kehoe et al., 2018).
Canadian Aboriginal authors Henderson and McCaslin (2005) frame justice as a process
of healing rather than of punishment, and they warn about the dangers of individualism in
any healing process.

In North America, the first recorded use of restorative practices as an alternative
to punitive forms of criminal justice occurred in Canada in 1974 when a probation
officer arranged for two teens who had vandalized property to meet with the property
owner to discuss reparations (Zehr, 2015). Educators began looking to restorative
practices as a potential alternative to exclusionary discipline in the 1990s in the United
States (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). In education settings restorative practices can fall
into a range of categories, from preventative to reactive. Preventative practices can
include use of impact-focused language such as “I feel” statements (affective language)
or regularly scheduled circles focused on relationship-building (community-building
circles) (Acosta et al., 2016). Reactive measures refer to practices implemented after an
infraction has occurred. These measures can include formal circles in which all parties
involved in an incident meet to talk about the impact of an action and come to an
agreement on how to repair the harm done (restorative circle), or a circle to discuss
norms and expectations with a student returning from a suspension to ensure a smooth
transition back into the school community (reintegrative circles). During a restorative
circle, a facilitator asks questions about what happened leading up to and during the
incident, who was harmed, and how to repair the harm (Liberman & Katz, 2017). They
then often write out a contract based upon the agreement and follow up with the participants regarding the completion of these steps. The types of practices used at any given school depend upon the teachers and administrators at the school; some schools may use the full range, while others might use only preventative or reactive measures (Fronius et al., 2016).

A growing body of research explores the prevalence and effectiveness of restorative practices in schools. In the 2017-2018 school year, 41.6% of the 4,803 schools in a nationally representative stratified randomized sample reported using restorative circles – up from 33.5% just two years prior (Diliberti et al., 2019). Qualitative studies have found that relationships improve in schools that implement restorative practices competently and consistently at a whole-school level (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014; Short et al., 2018). In such schools, student feelings of safety and belonging increase (Sandwick et al., 2019) and students display stronger socioemotional skills including empathy and respect for others (Kehoe et al., 2018). Strong implementation relies on administrator support and teacher buy-in (Sandwick et al., 2019), parental support (Ingraham et al., 2016), student feelings of ownership (Sandwick et al., 2019), student empowerment (Lustick et al., 2020), and sense of belonging (Haney et al., 2011).

Implementation fidelity is a key factor in the success of restorative practices in schools. A study in New Orleans found a decline in suspensions for violent behavior and for students who had previously been suspended, but only in the second and third years of steady restorative practices implementation (Glenn et al., 2020). The literature supports the finding that effects may take time to materialize (Darling-Hammond et al.,
2020). For various reasons, including staff turnover, schools may not have the resources or the desire to implement restorative practices long enough and faithfully enough for these effects to emerge (Guckenburg et al., 2015).

The strongest quantitative evidence to date on restorative practices comes from a randomized controlled trial involving 44 schools in the Pittsburgh Public Schools district (Augustine et al., 2018). The authors report an 11% decline in suspensions and a 16% decline in number of days suspended, but no reduction in student arrests, absences, or school transfers. Another randomized controlled trial focused on school climate indicators (Acosta et al., 2019). The study found that students who directly experienced restorative practices perceived a more positive school climate, higher sense of connection, and stronger peer relationships. However, some of the control schools began similar programs during the study, and some treatment schools reported inconsistent implementation, potentially affecting some results.

Restorative practices, as an empathic tool, can improve teacher-student relationships, which have in turn been found to improve student outcomes (Bottiani et al., 2016; Okonofua et al., 2016). Teachers who implement restorative practices form more positive relationships with students from diverse backgrounds (Gregory et al., 2016). Students perceive these teachers as more respectful, and the teachers themselves issue fewer discipline referrals to BIPOC students when compared with teachers who do not use restorative practices. However, when suspensions for BIPOC students and students in special education decrease, suspensions for their White, non-disabled peers also decrease. So, while restorative practices are showing some promising results in school climate and overall reduction of exclusionary discipline when implemented
faithfully, the discipline gap by race and ability becomes somewhat smaller, but it still remains (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

**Restorative Justice**

Critiques of restorative practices generally focus on a perception that they allow disruptive students to stay in class and disrupt the learning environment through peer effects (Eden, 2017), or they focus on the ways in which the practices can be (and often are) used to maintain disparate power dynamics, especially along lines of race, class, and ability (Lustick, 2017a; Winn, 2018). Lustick (2016) notes that restorative practices fail to acknowledge structural and systemic barriers to equity in discipline. This critique is supported by quantitative findings that restorative practices do not necessarily close the discipline gap (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Lustick (2017) further argues that in an age of high-stakes accountability, schools often use restorative practices as a tool of surveillance to subtly intimidate and maintain power over students.

Eagle (2005) expresses frustration with how leaders in the restorative movement view restorative practices as something to be inserted into current systems, rather than as a paradigm shift. Winn (2018) proposes that four pedagogical stances are essential to moving from restorative practices to restorative justice: history matters, race matters, justice matters, and language matters. This framework is reflected in her definition of justice as a paradigm shift that gives marginalized people the power to

…define themselves beyond static conceptions of race, class, gender, and ability as well as other labels and categories that capture neither the full humanity of a student (“eligible for free and reduced lunch,” “English language learner,” “boy,” “girl,” “undocumented,” “trouble-maker,” “college-bound,” etc.) nor the nuances of that student’s racial, ethnic, or cultural composition (“Asian/Pacific Islander,” “Hispanic,” “Black/African American,” “White,” etc.) (Winn, 2018, p. 31).
Theoretical Frameworks

This study uses grounded theory methods to examine the similarities and differences between student and faculty perceptions across three schools implementing very different models of restorative practices. There are many theoretical frameworks through which one could view the results, but there are three interrelated frameworks that especially align with the study: bioecological systems theory, critical pedagogy, and empowerment theory.

Bioecological systems theory is one of the core theories of social work, and it both supports and embraces the other two theories. It is a developmental theory that proposes that individuals exist within a nested set of systems that have influence upon their lives and development in varying degrees, and which the individual in turn can influence when in possession of sufficient resources (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Hobfoll (1989) notes the importance of resources, ranging from material resources to relationships, in increasing resilience. The systems in bioecological systems theory include the individual, microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). To view a topic such as school discipline from a bioecological (or ecological) framework, one would consider not only the infraction and the punishment, but also the causes and the effects of the infraction and the punishment from perspectives of the individual, the classroom and school communities, the families, the neighborhoods, etc. An ecological framework encourages one to think about the systemic causes and effects as well, including White supremacy and racism, classism, and ableism. Scholars across academic disciplines,
including disaster studies (Hobfoll, 1988), community psychology (Rappaport, 1981), trauma (Nastasi et al., 2011), and education (Bowen & Bowen, 1999), draw from bioecological systems theory.

Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) frames education as a tool which those in power can use to fill the heads of the oppressed with knowledge that is carefully curated to preserve the unequal power dynamic. This process is called “educational banking”, or just “banking”. Banking, as a form of social control, allows those in power to coerce the oppressed class into internalizing their position of oppression while measuring their own worth by external markers determined by the oppressors. Banking causes divides among the oppressed people through the selection of knowledge, thereby decreasing the chances of unified resistance. In the United States, one glaring example of banking is high stakes testing, which pushes increasingly tailored and narrow curriculum to improve test outcomes at the expense of critical thinking skills.

Critical pedagogy is both a theoretical and a praxis framework that promotes dialectical inquiry and praxis among the oppressed in order to counter banking, but it cautions against the oppressed becoming oppressors once they have realized their potential and achieved emancipation (Freire, 1970). The task of the oppressed in Freire’s view is to liberate both themselves and their oppressors. Punitive discipline can be used to promote educational banking by punishing students who voice criticism of curriculum. Freire (1970) argues that peaceful coexistence is based upon mutual love, which is similar in stance to restorative philosophy.

Rappaport (1981) defines empowerment as “enhanc[ing] the possibilities for people to control their own lives” (p. 15). He describes power in ecological terms, with
attention to how empowerment and disempowerment can occur on, and have effects throughout, various system levels from the micro to the macro (Rappaport, 1987). Power can also affect and be affected by historical and cultural contexts. Rappaport (1995) emphasizes the importance of narrative to empowerment. He argues that through narrative, one creates emotion, memory, and identity. He applies an ecological lens to narrative as well, and states that narratives can happen on individual, community, or even cultural levels. Narrative is a key component to restorative justice, as participants are asked to tell the story of why an incident happened or how they have been affected by it in order to repair the harm done.
Chapter 3: Methods

 Appropriately applied quantitative methods can give researchers a clear picture of suspension rates, lost instructional time, and juvenile justice involvement among students from schools with strict discipline policies. The effects of discipline policies, however, go beyond the realm of strictly quantitative analysis because they affect the everyday lives of the people in the schools. Qualitative methods can deepen understanding of the effects of discipline policy changes on individuals and on overall school climate.

Qualitative methods suit sociological and social work research, especially in their focus on subjects from a contextual and holistic standpoint (Padgett, 2017). One of the core tenets of social work is the ecological systems perspective, which asks a social worker to consider how micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level environments affect a person in their daily lives. Constructivist grounded theory method pushes this paradigm further by positing that researchers should not only be aware of how these environments affect a person, but also how the construction of “realities” such as race and mental illness affect a person, and a researcher’s own role in these constructions (Charmaz, 2014).

Grounded theory techniques are meant to allow a researcher to inductively derive mid-range theories through qualitative inquiry (Padgett, 2017). Charmaz’s (2014) constructivist approach adopts the inductive,\(^1\) comparative, emergent, and open-ended components of Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) original work on grounded theory. She resists the mechanical, step-by-step application originally laid out by Glaser and Strauss in favor

\(^1\) In inductive research the researcher begins from a place of neutrality and derives theories from the data rather than testing hypotheses and theories
of flexibility and a “constellation of methods” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 14). She also rejects the idea that researchers can be neutral, value-free observers. Charmaz (2014) pushes, instead, for researcher reflexivity.

This study seeks to answer the following questions through grounded theory techniques: 1) How do students and faculty across school settings experience restorative practices? 2) How do students and faculty experience issues of empowerment and disempowerment as they relate to restorative practices across these school settings? 3) What are the similarities and differences between student and faculty experiences with restorative practices and empowerment across these school settings?

**Research Settings**

This study primarily took place in three selected New Orleans area charter schools: one charter kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) school, one single-campus charter high school, and one charter high school with two campuses under the same name. Each of the schools was implementing restorative practices at the time of data collection. The degree and length of restorative practices implementation varied by school.

Faculty participants could opt to be interviewed at the school, at the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans office, at the Tulane School of Social Work, or at a quiet location of their choosing. Charmaz (2014) feels that an understanding of the setting is important to a grounded theory study. This was an important consideration in choosing the interview settings, but so also was the need for confidentiality and the consideration of participants’ potential need to balance their work lives with the desire to reveal
information that they may have deemed sensitive. I interviewed students at the schools, in private spaces provided by the schools. Every attempt was made to schedule school-based interviews only during elective periods or non-core courses to minimize academic disruption.

Sample

To gain a better understanding of firsthand experience of policy change, this study included school administrators (n=3), support faculty such as counselors and social workers (n=7), teachers (n=5), and students (n=16). All participants discussed their experiences with the school discipline policies. All participants have firsthand experience of both traditional exclusionary discipline and restorative practices, either through their present school setting, or from working in or attending various schools. This factor allowed each participant to comparatively reflect on their experiences with different types of school discipline.

While there is ongoing debate about qualitative sample size, the standard is to aim for “saturation”, or the point at which no new information is revealed (Padgett, 2017). Because this study involved schools with variation among ages and demographics of student bodies, as well as length and intensity of restorative practices implementation, saturation was not reached until fifteen faculty members and sixteen students had participated in the interviews.

Recruitment
I recruited faculty participants via publicly available school email addresses once each school had signed and submitted their letter of support for the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Although a total of 22 faculty members expressed interest in participating, only 15 were available during the data collection phase. This is due in part to the nature of the school system in New Orleans, in which schools can be shut down or change hands suddenly, and new charter school CEOs and principals can (and do) dismiss faculty members at will.

At the request of the school principals, I was in contact with the school social workers or counselors at each site as point persons, or key informants, for student recruitment. The social workers and counselors assisted me in recruiting students through purposive sampling by identifying students likely to provide rich data (Padgett, 2017). I met some of the students from Cherrywood High before beginning the interview process at a parent/teacher conference evening, during which the social worker introduced me to some students and parents and encouraged them to ask questions about the study.

This study originally involved four schools: two K-8 schools and two high schools. During the recruitment phase, two of the schools from the same charter management organization (CMO) – we will call these schools Oak Ridge K-8 and Cherrywood High - experienced a change in leadership. In response to consistently low performance on standardized tests, the CMO board of directors brought in a new chief executive officer (CEO). In an attempt to shift focus to academics, this CEO terminated the employment of most of the social workers, counselors, and behavior support specialists at these two schools. As a result, my key informants at Oak Ridge K-8 lost their employment without warning, severely impacting my ability to recruit participants
there. I was unable to interview students at this school. I was able to interview only one faculty member who worked at Oak Ridge full-time, and two faculty members who worked at both Oak Ridge K-8 and Cherrywood High.

Some other faculty members from this school and other schools in the sample who expressed interest in participating in the study either left their positions or were terminated between the recruitment and the scheduling phases, resulting in undeliverable emails. Both schools in this CMO paired restorative practices with traditional discipline strategies; specifically, they used a discipline ladder that ranged from demerits at the low end to suspension or expulsion at the high end of the ladder, with an accumulation of infractions at any level leading to the next level of discipline. For this reason, I consider these schools to be “low implementation” schools in terms of restorative practices.

The other two schools are not affiliated with each other, or with the CMO described above. The other high school, which we will call Riverside High, was implementing restorative practices in all school settings and in all interactions, resorting to exclusionary discipline practices only in cases involving weapons (as required by the Gun Free Schools Act) or drugs. For this reason, I consider this school “high implementation”. The K-8 school, which we will call Birdsong K-8, is across the river from New Orleans, in Jefferson Parish. It is also a charter school. At the time of data collection, Birdsong was just beginning its implementation of restorative practices. For this reason, it would be premature to think of this school as either low-implementing or high-implementing in terms of restorative practices.

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2 I included the open codes from the Oak Ridge full-time faculty member only in the general faculty coding document. I included the open codes from the faculty who worked at both schools in the general faculty document and in the Cherrywood High document.
Participants

All participant demographic information is self-identified based upon open-ended questions, so terms such as “mixed” or “other” reflect the participants’ own words. The demographic composition of faculty in the sample is similar to the overall demographics of faculty in New Orleans area schools (see Table 1). Approximately 58% (n=8) of faculty study participants in Orleans Parish identified as BIPOC, similar to the 61% of teachers in Orleans who identify as BIPOC (New Schools for New Orleans, 2020c). One of three of the faculty participants in Jefferson Parish identified as BIPOC, similar to 37% of teachers in Jefferson Parish who identified as such (New Schools for New Orleans, 2020c). Seventy-five percent (n=9) of faculty participants in Orleans Parish were female, with an 80% (n=12) overall rate of female faculty participation. This is similar to the 75% of female teachers in Orleans Parish (New Schools for New Orleans, 2020a), but because all of the three faculty participants from Birdsong K-8 in Jefferson Parish were female, similarities by gender could not be drawn there.

Student participants were aged 12 years and older. Of the 16 students, 10 were aged 18 or older. Students under the age of 18 obtained parental consent in writing via consent forms that included my contact information. Students over the age of 18 were able to sign their own consent forms if they chose to participate. Students under 18 also signed assent forms that I read aloud. Each participant received a blank copy of each form for their own reference and records. The consent and assent form included specific permission to record and transcribe interviews. Student self-identified demographics by race closely match the demographics of New Orleans area schools, where 91% of
students are BIPOC (New Schools for New Orleans, 2020b). Approximately 94% of student participants identified as BIPOC, as seen in Table 2.

**Table 1**: Faculty pseudonyms, schools, positions, and self-identified demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Hall</td>
<td>Oakridge K-8*</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Martin</td>
<td>Birdsong K-8</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Moore</td>
<td>Birdsong K-8</td>
<td>Support Faculty</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Flaherty</td>
<td>Birdsong K-8</td>
<td>Support Faculty</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Nelson</td>
<td>Oak Ridge*/Cherrywood</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Hill</td>
<td>Oak Ridge*/Cherrywood</td>
<td>Support Faculty</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Adams</td>
<td>Cherrywood High</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Rivera</td>
<td>Cherrywood High</td>
<td>Support Faculty</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Laurent</td>
<td>Cherrywood High</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Clark</td>
<td>Cherrywood High</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Johanssen</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Simpson</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Support Faculty</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Allen</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Support Faculty</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Bamberg</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Support Faculty</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Davis</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note**: *No student participants were recruited from this school

Participation was entirely voluntary. Study participants were not compensated individually for their time, but schools each received a $300 gift card to use toward school supplies. This was stated in recruitment materials. The gift cards were provided by the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans.
Table 2: Pseudonyms, schools, self-identified demographic categories, and age categories for students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Over 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andre</td>
<td>Birdsong K-8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Birdsong K-8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Birdsong K-8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xavier</td>
<td>Cherrywood High</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antoinette</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marquis</td>
<td>Cherrywood High</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis</td>
<td>Cherrywood High</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booker</td>
<td>Cherrywood High</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenora</td>
<td>Cherrywood High</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernadette</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalen</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justus</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darius</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Creole</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>Riverside High</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Human Subjects Protections

I implemented the following strategies to protect privacy and confidentiality of participants:

1) Interviews were conducted privately in closed-door settings

2) Other than publicly available work e-mail addresses used for teacher and staff recruitment, and names of interview subjects for parental permission and scheduling purposes, no information was requested outside of interviews.

3) Interview recordings and transcripts were encrypted and stored on a password-protected computer.
4) All signed consent and assent forms were kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office reserved for doctoral students at the Tulane School of Social Work.

5) I am the sole person with access to the raw data, I was the sole person involved in coding and analysis, and I am the sole author of this dissertation.

6) Recordings and transcripts are labeled using a coded numeric system to protect the identities of participants. The master file is double password protected and is saved on a password-protected computer.

7) No information that identifies individual subjects in any way, including school names, will be published or disclosed.

8) All direct quotes used in the final report and paper are blended quotes, or are connected to the randomly chosen pseudonyms listed in Table 1 and Table 2.

As a clinically licensed social worker and former special education teacher who has worked with children of all ages in some capacity for several years, I am particularly sensitive to, and aware of, trauma symptoms. Although the interview questions should have in no way triggered trauma symptoms, I discussed procedures for dealing with such situations with the school social workers and requested that they be ready to respond quickly if necessary. The interviews included questions focusing on perceptions of school climate as they relate to school discipline, and on personal experiences with discipline and restorative practices. Students and adults were aware that they could stop an interview at any time, and that social workers would be available to address any emotional distress that might arise. No participants requested to stop the interview.
Data Collection

The study began with interviews of faculty members in June of 2018, as time for teachers, support staff, and administrators is generally less constrained during summer months. At this time, I was able to conduct the single interview at Oakridge K-8 before losing access to that school. Due to multiple interruptions in data collection, faculty and student interviews continued through March of 2019. The open-ended questions in the interview guide were centered on perceptions of school discipline practices and school climate. I began each interview with basic demographic questions, but the order of the questions to follow varied by interview. Sometimes participants addressed questions before I could ask them, and sometimes an opportunity to segue into a different question presented itself. I followed participant answers with probes as needed for clarification, elaboration, or examples.

I wrote reflective memos immediately following each interview in order to aid in construction of theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2014) and to track thoughts, reactions, and linkages (Padgett, 2017). I recorded operational memos at the time of data collection to capture logistical and other concerns (Padgett, 2017). I recorded code and theory memos during data collection and transcription as part of the iterative process.

I audio recorded all interviews with written permission, and I personally transcribed each interview with the help of Otter.ai, which is an online voice recognition and transcription program (Liang & Fu, 2018). After the software transcribed each interview, I reviewed the transcription and the audio recording, and I made corrections or changes where necessary. I then copied and pasted each transcription into a Microsoft Word file, where I added keywords and line numbers, saving each file under double
password protection. Self-transcription adds another layer of confidentiality, decreases the chances for incorrect transcription, and allows a researcher ample opportunity to become intimately familiar with the data.

**Data Analysis**

Reflexive grounded theory coding techniques are meant to help the research synthesize strategies, perspectives, and opinions about the research topic (Charmaz, 2014). The coding process begins with open line-by-line coding, and then moves into categorization through focused coding and family coding. From there, the researcher moves on to thematic coding, with the desired result of some (not all) grounded theory research being a mid-level theoretical statement drawn inductively from the data. In line with Charmaz’s (2014) support for various techniques, I employed eclectic coding, meaning that various coding methods were used at various points in the coding process, depending upon suitability of the method (Saldaña, 2016). I used gerund coding (or process coding) and in vivo coding in the open, focused, and family coding phases (Charmaz, 2014).

I cross-checked the first stage of coding, open coding, by providing a few pages to a colleague. The colleague coded these pages separately, then we compared codes. Once we reached consensus on these open codes, I uploaded each transcription to Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software. I then proceeded with the open coding phase in Atlas.ti, resulting in 1,575 separate open codes. While Saldaña (2016) recommends compiling a provisional list of codes for the first round of coding, Charmaz (2014) prefers a completely naïve approach. I used both approaches. Because the IRB required an
interview guide, there were already some provisional codes built into the study. On the frequent occasions when the data did not fit into the provisional coding categories, I used a naïve approach. I typed the reflective memos from each interview in Atlas.ti and connected them to the corresponding interviews, and I added further reflections to each memo during the coding process.

During the focused coding cycle that followed open coding, I copied and pasted all codes into Microsoft Word. Using the navigation pane, I organized codes by similarity to begin to extract themes, for a total of 166 focused codes (see Table 3). I first split the codes by faculty or student, to create two focused coding documents. I then further broke down the documents by school, leaving me with a total of eight coding documents: faculty; students; Birdsong faculty; Birdsong students; Cherrywood faculty; Cherrywood students; Riverside faculty; and Riverside students. This allowed me to compare emerging themes not only between faculty and students, but also between schools, and to begin to determine conditions that give rise to the similarities and differences between stakeholder experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Saldaña, 2016). For purposes of simplification, during analysis I used the indicators LI and HI to separate the two high schools by low-implementing (combining restorative practices with traditional discipline at the discretion of faculty) and high-implementing (using restorative practices in all school settings throughout the school day, and very rarely using exclusionary discipline). I continued to write new memos and add to the original memos throughout this process to better help me identify emerging themes.
Table 3: Example of focused coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused Code</th>
<th>Open Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>- Building communication Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Restorative Practices improving communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Being proactive about issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Curating message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Documenting Communications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the open and focused coding cycles, I again used the navigation pane in Microsoft Word to arrange the focused codes into families (n=12), which I gave working titles (see Table 4) (Charmaz, 2014). Focused codes that were extraneous or did not fit into a family were separated and moved to the bottom of the document to form a 13th catch-all family. I applied the family coding to the “Faculty” and “Student” documents first, and I then used these documents as a reference for the documents by school: Birdsong faculty; Birdsong students; Cherrywood faculty; Cherrywood students; Riverside faculty; and Riverside students. These families helped to move the data to the conceptual level (Saldaña, 2016).
Table 4: Example of family coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong Relationships</th>
<th>- Building relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Maintaining Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Having family-like relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Trusting/being comfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Trusting/being comfortable with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Having empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Wanting connection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the family coding, I created a comparative Microsoft Excel document for my own visualization purposes (see Table 5). I referred back to the original codes in Atlas.ti for the frequency of occurrence of each code, giving me a sense of the similarities and differences in salience across groups.

Table 5: Example of frequency spreadsheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>K-8 STUDENT</th>
<th>K-8 FACULTY</th>
<th>LI HS STUDENT</th>
<th>LI HS FACULTY</th>
<th>HI HS STUDENT</th>
<th>HI HS FACULTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CODE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAVING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNICATING</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAVING FAMILY-LIKE RELATIONSHIPS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUSTING/BEING COMFORTABLE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUSTING/BEING COMFORTABLE WITH STUDENTS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARING</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAVING EMPATHY</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WANTING CONNECTION</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the final step of coding, I extracted five interrelated themes from the families. These themes apply to most of the cases, or else revealed negative cases that might provide alternate explanations from the developing theory (Charmaz, 2014).

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity has been an important ongoing component of this study. As someone who typically presents as a White, economically stable, non-disabled, cisgender female who is receiving an advanced education, I recognize that I reap the privilege of many groups on which the narrative most often centers. I did my best to be aware of how this positionality might affect my interactions with study participants through my consistent practice of reflexive memo writing.

Furthermore, as a former high school special education teacher in post-Katrina New Orleans at a public school that no longer exists, I was positioned as what Banks (1998) refers to as an external insider: although I am not originally from New Orleans, my experiences give me an intimate familiarity with the unique intricacies of the school system, and with the customs and norms of the communities in which the schools are situated. As a former child, adolescent, and family therapist specializing in trauma, I conducted constant self-check-ins during data collection and analysis to reflect on whether this professional experience was influencing the collection and analysis processes. My self-check-ins allowed me to identify moments in which my empathic emotional response might be influencing both my perception of an interview, and the interview itself. I particularly noticed strong reactions when faculty and students discussed violence and death, as I lost many students to violence during and after my
time as a teacher. I actively engaged in both coping and grounding techniques after each interview, and throughout the analysis process.

There were many moments in which participants expressed strong opinions about people like me who came to the city after Katrina through an alternative teacher certification program with no prior teaching experience and no substantial experience with the citizens or the culture of New Orleans. During and after these moments, I engaged in some serious contemplation about how I and other people in my position contributed to the gentrification, the power struggles, and the general systemic racism of the Katrina recovery effort. As difficult as it was to hear such things at times, to ignore, disbelieve, or refute such assertions by the participants would have done them a great disservice and would have perpetuated the very cycles of disempowerment they were speaking out against. Such denial would also have resulted in an incomplete, biased study.
Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study is to not only inductively examine school discipline practices, but to also draw comparisons between faculty and students both within schools and between schools. Each theme emerges from contrast in experiences and opinions. Accordingly, each theme consists of two contrasting families. For example, the theme of “relationships” includes the families “strong relationships” and “poor relationships.” I will present the results thematically. Since another purpose of this study is to honor experiential knowledge and to amplify unheard voices, direct quotes will be interspersed throughout this chapter.

Findings

The five themes that emerged from the data were: 1) relationships; 2) sense of emotional and physical security; 3) effectiveness of restorative practices; 4) faculty and staff development and retention or turnover; and 5) power dynamics. The following theoretical statement was drawn from these five interconnected themes: *Restorative practices may not be a necessary component of, or the only factor in, empowerment in school settings. Schools can, however, intentionally attend to the implementation of restorative practices in a way that both utilizes and supports the development and stability of positive relationships. These relationships, in turn, can promote feelings of a secure and safe environment in which students and faculty can raise their critical*
consciousness, foster their autonomy, gain a sense of worth of their own narratives and voices, work together to procure and maintain resources, and raise their awareness of how they can have an impact on various ecological levels, from communities to systems. In this way, faculty and students can move from restorative practices to restorative justice.

**Theme 1: Relationships**

**Table 6:** Families and focused codes for theme 1: Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families for “Relationships” Theme</th>
<th>Focused Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having Strong Relationships</td>
<td>• Building Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Trusting/Being Comfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Maintaining Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having Poor Relationships</td>
<td>• Damaging Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Failing to Communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Distrusting/Being Uncomfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Being Disrespected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because restorative practices are fundamentally based upon repairing relationships and strengthening community, relationships were a key topic of every interview with every participant. Participants spoke about both peer relationships and student/faculty relationships. Discussion of both strong relationships and poor or broken relationships was interspersed throughout each conversation and was mentioned within
the context of several of the other themes. The most salient focused codes were building or damaging relationships; communication; trust and distrust; maintaining relationships; and being or feeling disrespected (see Table 6). Both students and faculty across schools spoke more about having strong relationships than having poor relationships, but those who spoke about poor relationships felt anger, sadness, and confusion regarding the disconnection.

Having Strong Relationships.

Birdsong K-8.

Andre, a soft-spoken student at Birdsong K-8, spoke about relationships with other students and with faculty members. He said, holding up his hand with two fingers crossed, “my friend, who you don’t know, we got a strong bond like this. We can talk, you know what I’m saying?” When I asked him about his relationships with faculty at the school, he replied, “it’s like they raising me at this school. They treat me like, like the young man I am.” He further elaborated, “I got father figures here.” Ms. Martin, a patient yet direct teacher, confirmed, “most of the teachers do a really good job of, like, building a good relationship with the students.” When I asked Ms. Martin if she consciously worked on relationship-building with students, she replied, “yes, definitely...if I talk to them about (an issue), like it, it helps us build that relationship, that they know that I’m not going to automatically start yelling and screaming at them.”

Cherrywood High.

Faculty at Cherrywood High – especially those whom I interviewed before the mass turnover event - spoke about strong relationships. Ms. Clark, a teacher of small
stature, talked fondly about her students as she wrapped her oversized sweater around her. In relaying a conversation with a student with whom she had experienced some contentious interactions, she said, “he’s seen me cry out of joy and out of frustration, and I’m like, ‘You’re, like, pretty awesome now. And I wouldn’t have known that if I didn’t forgive you.’” Ms. Laurent, a teacher who smiled warmly when talking about her students, characterized the school as “the most inclusive, diverse workplace I’ve ever worked at.” She went on to say, “we do a good job of extending that to students as well.”

Student interviews at Cherrywood all took place after the mass turnover event, but students still talked about strong relationships. Xavier, a gregarious young man with a sharp wit and a mischievous smile, expounded on why students felt they could go to teachers with problem. “I guess they build up a trust by ‘em, because even I do it... when I have a troubled day, or when I’m just going through it and I’m just feeling down, I go to the band director.” Lenora, a confident young woman, talked about having “friends too that help me, like, they’ll tell me if I’m doing something wrong...they gonna help me succeed and be a better person.”

Riverside High.

Students at Riverside High especially felt strong connections with faculty and other students at the school. Darius, a tall, serious student with an affable demeanor, described student relationships as “more like a brother and sister kind of thing.” In a sentiment echoed by both faculty and other students, Alicia, a shy-seeming new student at the school said, “every student have a relationship with a teacher.” Josephine, an outgoing student with an ever-present smile, gave an example of what she meant when she said, “the teachers is really caring, and they’re really aware of what’s going on in
their environment.” She continued, “like, during my pregnancy, like I had back problems…the dean, he had come in he was like, ‘hey, are you okay?’ And then, next thing you know, he brought me a pillow.”

Faculty at Riverside overwhelmingly confirmed their care for, and support of, students. Mr. Bamberg, a thoughtful, loquacious man with extensive knowledge of critical and culturally relevant pedagogy, explained, “everyone is here because they have both good intentions as well as the skill set in order to bring something that we need to the table.” Ms. Davis, an intensely compassionate teacher, spoke about trust from behind her cluttered desk. “Kids take everything home from a teacher that they love and trust…the only way we can really make it here as teachers in this environment is to build strong, trusting relationships.” She added, “I don’t know anybody here who’s in it for themselves.”

Having Poor Relationships.

_Birdsong K-8._

Sarah projected an air of disinterest during the interview, but I could see her apprehension as she frequently stopped short of elaborating on her answers and instead picked at her long, purple fingernails. When I asked about her relationships at the school, she said, “I don’t have a good relationship with the adults. I don’t really talk to them one-on-one.” Although Ms. Moore interacted warmly with every student we encountered in the hallway on our way to her office, she painted a different picture of inter-staff relationships.

_We’re so big now. Like, there are just some faculty members who, who’ve worked here, like, since August this year? They’re like, I just, I know their name. I know_
what they teach or whatever. But, like, I don’t, I’m not connected to them in any way.

Ms. Flaherty, a young woman with a quick smile, chuckled as she said, “it’s a mixed bag.”

Cherrywood High.

Most of the students and faculty whom I interviewed at Cherrywood High were experiencing multiple breaks in relationships at the time of their interviews, due largely to turnover. Antoinette shifted in her chair uncomfortably as she quietly said, “Now, I don’t have no relationships with the teachers that’s here, but a few years ago I did. They made me want to come to school.” She said, of the new teachers at the school, “They just come here to teach and leave.” Booker, a tall young man with dreadlocks and glasses, looked at the floor as he said, “if I don’t have a good relationship with that teacher, I’m not gonna feel comfortable enough to tell them, like, ‘oh, this and this is going on.’” Xavier emphasized trust and respect as the basis of strong relationships when he said, “I can tell when somebody’s trying to play me as a fool.”

Ms. Laurent also spoke of trust, and of the constant changes in a school system experimenting with various discipline models when she said, “they have been let down in, in innumerable ways by the system we’ve created...we have not done a good job of establishing any reason for them to trust that this would work.” Mr. Rivera cut an imposing figure as a forward, no-nonsense support faculty member with a critical mind. We had the following discussion about his relationships with other staff members:

Mr. Rivera: I wouldn’t say I’m good at building relationships with staff.

E: Why is that?
Mr. Rivera: ‘Cause I’m not concerned about relationships with other staff members.

E: So, your main concern is the students.

Mr. Rivera: Yes.

Riverside High.

At Riverside High, Josephine talked not about current relationships, but about relationships with teachers at her previous school as a point of comparison. “When you’re no longer in their grade level and you not in their class, it’s like you never even went in their class ‘cause they don’t even speak with you.” Eli, a broad-shouldered young man with short-cropped hair, began the interview cautiously as he talked about the bullying that made him leave his previous school. He talked thoughtfully about why he had few relationships at Riverside: “I mean, I have some friends or acquaintances…I wanna keep with a smaller group, ‘cause mostly the kids are like, a little younger than I am.”

Although faculty did not speak of poor relationships within the school itself, Mr. Bamberg put broken relationships into a larger context when he said, “this charter school system that has broken down, you know, communities in terms of the relationship that the community has with their school.”

Theme 2: Emotional and Physical Security

Although, as one might expect, participants often equated a sense of safety with concrete security measures, they also often correlated safety with what they perceived as strength or weakness of relationships. They also correlated with level of restorative practices implementation, although there were multiple other factors as well. The most
salient focused codes that comprised the families of “emotional and physical security” and “insecurity” were consistency, boundaries, meeting needs, socioemotional skills, and trauma (see table 7).

Table 7: Families and focused codes for Theme 2: Sense of emotional and physical security.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families for “Sense of Emotional and Physical Security” Theme</th>
<th>Focused Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional and Physical Security</td>
<td>• Being Consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creating Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Setting Boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Meeting Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teaching Socioemotional Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bearing Witness to Trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Addressing Trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional and Physical Insecurity</td>
<td>• Being Inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Worrying About Student Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Worrying About Own Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Failing to Meet Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lacking Boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bullying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emotional and Physical Security.

*Birdsong K-8.*

Lisa, a girl with long brown hair and long fingernails painted silver and kelly green, alternated between hunching over with her arms crossed over her chest and leaning
back with her arm casually draped over the back of the chair as the interview progressed.

When I asked her what made her feel safe at the school, she said, “they actually, like, have a security guard here. At my other school they used to not.” Ms. Flaherty, when comparing her experience at Birdsong with her experience at another school struggling with restorative practices implementation said, of the other school, “I didn’t feel safe. Not just, like, physically... I didn’t feel comfortable accurately expressing my emotions and I don’t think that other people at that school did either.” In contrast, when talking about Birdsong, she said, “I do feel safe around the people. In case something were to happen, I would be in good company, and we would care for each other.”

**Cherrywood High.**

Students at Cherrywood High similarly talked about sense of security in concrete terms, but also in terms of relationships. Xavier said, “I think our school has a good safety, you know, we have a lot of safety procedures.” He described a recent incident when he said, “Somebody brought a weapon to school, but the situation got deescalated right then and there. Our security, we have wonderful security staff.” Lenora said, “I a hundred percent feel safe here, because, like I said, I have a lot of teacher support...Like, they worry about the scholar first.”

Ms. Laurent spoke about the faculty reaction to the weapons incident that Xavier mentioned, after which some staff...expressed feeling really unsafe that they didn’t find out about the, the weapon threat until at the end of the school day...and then other staff are like, “no, that makes me feel safer...that should be a need-to-know thing in the moment, so that it can be efficiently handled.”

Ms. Clark talked about how her strong relationships with students added to her sense of security when she said, “I do feel safer in that regard because students know me and they
know that I’ve been there, and they look out for me in the same way I look out for them.”

Mr. Adams was a friendly man who smiled frequently during the interview, but I could see him calculating the impact and intention of each statement before he spoke. About the sense of safety at the school, he said, “I think the environment that we’ve established, the love...I mean, I’ve had some (kids) who’ve admitted they definitely feel safer.”

*Riverside High.*

Justus was a confident young man with a fashionable, color coordinated red, black, and white outfit and a crossbody bag who frequently flashed a knowing smile as he reclined in his chair across from me. He emphasized the importance of relationships in school safety when he said, “you gotta know your students...Like, you gotta make sure they see that each other, like, they equal. They’re family.” In a matter-of-fact tone, he then explained why he thought that: “you don’t want none of your kids that you teaching...to go away because they losing theyself to gun violence.”

Faculty members focused on creating a safe environment for their students in order to create a safer environment for everyone at the school. Ms. Allen, a warm and inviting woman with a deep interest in learning more about restorative practices, talked about how she wanted her students to feel that,

*it’s okay to be vulnerable, you know, and to just be a kid.*” In talking about their lives outside of school, she said, “maybe you have these things that you have to put back on when you leave (the school). Your hard exterior, the way that you speak to people, the way that you interact with people.

Ms. Simpson, a direct woman with many years of teaching experience, talked about creating safety for students with trauma: “*that is what comes first, to stabilize them, you know, with their trauma.*” Mr. Bamberg elaborated, saying “we’ve had a number of trainings around trauma and helping young people who are experiencing trauma.” Ms.
Simpson explained that the faculty collaborated to write specific de-escalation plans for students with trauma.

**Emotional and Physical Insecurity.**

**Birdsong K-8.**

Some common themes across schools in terms of feeling insecure had to do with bullying and gun violence. Andre, who had been teased and bullied for a stutter, spoke to his distrust of new students when he said, “when we see new children, they think they ain’t a bully but they is, then they start messing with you.” Ms. Martin talked about her fear of an intruder on campus. “We can’t lock the doors. There’s so many windows, like, so, so if there was ever, like, an intruder on the campus, like, I seriously question whether we will be able to keep everybody safe here.”

**Cherrywood High.**

Students at Cherrywood worried about gun violence both on and off campus. Marquis, a bright, vigilant young man with sharp eyes and a deep sense of school pride, said, “You don’t know if you’re gonna make it back to your house at the end of the day...It’s almost like the Hunger Games.” It was clear that he had thought extensively about what would happen if there were ever to be a school shooting at Cherrywood:

*If I was at school getting shot up, or getting under siege, I see that, “Oh, that’s my brother or sister right there...I can’t just sit around, let ‘em kill everybody!” That’s my mindset. If I gotta sacrifice myself to save somebody else, I’ll do it.*

Faculty at Cherrywood shared Marquis’ fear of gun violence. Ms. Laurent admitted that due to “the amount of school shootings that have happened in the past couple years...I feel scared.” Ms. Clark referred to the previously mentioned weapon
incident when she said that her biggest concern was “people just not taking that, like, their, their role in the security entry seriously.”

**Riverside High.**

Although the students and faculty at Riverside High had few safety concerns, their worries also centered on gun violence. Justus explained, “Nowadays, they shooting just to make sure they get you. Like, they don’t care, they not just aiming at you, they just, like, making sure you feel them.” He explained his thoughts on violence prevention when he said, “that’s why you gotta come in here with a good attitude, everybody gotta get to know each other.” He worried if somebody were to “shoot up the school,” the police would “have no choice” but to shut the school down. Ms. Davis referred to the active shooter training the school had undergone, and said, “I’d hunker down here and, you know, hope I survive.”

**Theme 3: Effectiveness of Restorative Practices**

The student and faculty perceptions of the effectiveness of restorative practices varied between schools. The families of restorative practices “working” or not “working” covered many different subjective ideas of what it looks like when restorative practices are effective, but they were largely aligned with strength of implementation with at least one notable exception. The most salient focused codes had to do with whether restorative practices supported desirable behavior, helped a teacher with classroom management, seemed to reduce exclusionary discipline, helped to increase equity in discipline, or helped with emotional regulation (see Table 8). Some of the focused codes were based on
perceptions of traditional discipline, and some had to do with the struggles of effectively implementing restorative practices.

Table 8: Families and focused codes for theme 3: Effectiveness of Restorative Practices (RP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families for “Effectiveness of Restorative Practices” Theme</th>
<th>Focused Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restorative Practices Working</td>
<td>• Liking</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Disliking Traditional Discipline</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supporting Desirable Behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improving RP Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Managing the Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improving Behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Learning Emotional Regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Avoiding Trouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restorative Practices Not Working</td>
<td>• Disliking RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Preferring Traditional Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Seeing RP as Too Soft</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Struggling with RP</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Struggling to Manage the Classroom</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increasing Discipline</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discipline Being Unbalanced</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• RP Taking Too Much Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Restorative Practices Working.

*Birdsong K-8.*

Because Birdsong was in the beginning stages of implementation, the students had a difficult time naming the process. Lisa, however, recounted a circle for which she
was pulled from class for a circle with her best friend, who had attempted suicide. Her perception of the event was that it was difficult, but that it opened communication and allowed her friend to see that she was supported. Ms. Moore explained that she felt the restorative practices could help to heal trauma because it allowed people to be “in a calm, collected environment where people are brought in to support one another.” She also saw restorative practices as helpful with relationships because it allowed faculty to “not tak[e] a student’s disrespect, or what you perceive as disrespect, at face value.” Ms. Flaherty explained that “when we sit in a circle, we allow everyone the opportunity to speak, [and] those kids [who internalize trauma] have a chance to be a part of the conversation in a way that they wouldn’t otherwise.” She particularly appreciated the “self-determination and dignity of every human being that’s involved,” and the trauma healing potential of the “predictability and stability” of regularly implemented proactive restorative practices.

**Cherrywood High.**

Booker related that he liked the idea of talking and squashing the problem so that it “is no longer there.” Ms. Clark talked about faculty restorative circles that she saw as instrumental in “avoiding staff burnout, particularly now that we’re way less staffed.” She used proactive community-building circles with her students for the purpose of “starting the year and setting the tone of respect.” Ms. Laurent felt that the faculty circles had “helped me to get to know my coworkers a lot better and increase my empathy.” She further said that she “often think[s] back to them and use[s] them to inform how I interact with people.” When talking about referring her students with high behavior support needs to the dean, knowing that the deans were highly trained in
restorative practices helped her “feel confident that whatever conversation they’re about to have is going to be respectful of the student.” When I asked Ms. Hill, an outgoing woman with a loud, joyous laugh whether she thought restorative practices were culturally relevant, she replied, “I’m sure it’s gonna meet whoever, whatever population, where you are.”

Mr. Adams talked about introducing restorative practices to the school when he “realized that the suspensions weren’t accomplishing anything.” He said that when his approach to classroom problems shifted from punitive to restorative, students began to notice that “’wow, you know what, he’s allowing me to express myself’ and I’m not automatically assuming they’re guilty.” He saw the value in “being able to come to a common ground” and “making sure all parties involved feel heard and feel understood.”

**Riverside High.**

Students and faculty at Riverside High especially saw the value in restorative practices. When comparing restorative to punitive practices, Darius said, “yelling at them makes it worse. It makes them not go to class because you just yelled at them...they just want, they want you to get your education, stay in class, and learn something today.” Justus talked about the value in talking through a disagreement and seeing “where they coming from...like, you and a person fought, you gonna want to know what that person, like, how they feel.” Josephine talked about how some students prefer punitive discipline “’cause they just want to get to the consequences,” but how she appreciated restorative approaches because she felt it gave students “room to give us time to breathe.” When I asked Jalen, a friendly student with braces, about his preference between restorative practices and punitive discipline, he responded, “I would rather choose a circle, right?
Sometimes I might, I might WANT it. I would always choose a circle.” I asked him to elaborate on why he felt that restorative practices worked, and he said, “Because I'm guessing we feel like they've given us a sense of freedom and we don't want to mess it up.” He added, “like a lot of trouble, we don’t have it,” in reference to the school.

Ms. Johanssen talked with me in her office. Two walls were covered with photos of graduating students in caps and gowns. A poster on another wall had a list of explanations as to “Why We Don’t Punish Students When They Mess Up.” Another poster on her desk read, “Sanctuary Everywhere – We Will Protect Each Other.” Although her phone kept buzzing and students continuously knocked on her door, she remained focused on the interview and explained the many reasons why it was so important to her that the schools implement a full-school model of restorative approaches. “A restorative model is more about developing behavior through relationships,” she said. “Relationships are really key to safety and security.” She further elaborated, “ultimately, that’s what makes us respect people and makes us change our behavior, because we actually, like, hear and start to care about what somebody else feels.” Mr. Bamberg talked about intentionally building community and relationships in a culturally responsive way. He described a professional development opportunity he organized for the school: “We were doing Gloria Ladson-Billings’ Dreamkeepers (2009), and we adapted two of the chapters to integrate some conversations around how the theories that you know...culturally responsive pedagogy align with restorative practices.”
Restorative Practices Not Working.

Birdsong K-8.

Students at Birdsong appeared to have some difficulty buying into the restorative process. When I asked Sarah what she thought about circles, she said, “It’s unnecessary.” She went on to elaborate, “Because we’re not gonna listen. I mean, you’re still gonna get in trouble after. The people…the children still not gonna like each other. It’s unnecessary.” She indicated struggling with the empathy component of restorative practices:

E: What do you think would work?

Sarah: For me to let go of the problem.

E: What about the other person though?

Sarah: I don’t care about the other person.

Andre said, “it’s a 50% chance that it would work.” He would rather “stand up as a man and face you to prove my point.” He elaborated, “’Cause the reason why I fight, or I get in a fight, ‘cause I’m trying to prove to you that I’m not scared.”

Ms. Flaherty talked about the difficulties the school had had with consistency in implementation when she said, “I think the previous dean…wasn’t invested in restorative practices really, in conversations with that person.” Ms. Martin confirmed that “some classrooms really do it, and some classrooms don’t do it at all.” She said, “They feel like they don’t have enough time to do it…I just don’t think there’s been as much a focus and attention to it as there is to academics.”

Cherrywood High.
Some students at Cherrywood saw restorative practices as too lenient. Booker said, “it kind of opens up a door where it’s like, you think you can’t get any consequences.” Others saw them as futile, as when Antoinette said, “we’ve always had that [remediation] here, and it’s always still been a lot of fights.”

Mr. Rivera revealed that some faculty members agreed with Booker. “Some staff have gotten very much of, like, resentful in some ways of, like, give an inch take a mile sort of thing.” He noted the difficulty in balancing academic requirements with the time it takes to properly implement restorative practices when he said, “it requires too much time. Well, we don’t have time for that because we have to achieve these academic goals.” He also saw restorative practices as not culturally responsive. “This thought process of, that any sort of physical interaction is strictly violence, that to me is a very Eurocentric narrative.”

**Riverside High.**

Not all students at Riverside appreciated the restorative model either. Bernadette expressed her opinion that restorative practices didn’t go far enough when she said, “I feel like, when you do somebody something, you should get discipline. But not just, ‘Oh, I’m sorry,’ and act like it never happened. ‘Cause it still affect that person in a certain way.” Mr. Bamberg noted some of the shortcomings he saw in implementation:

> I think more often than not, teachers don't get the opportunity to be involved in the actual mediations. And, and so what ends up happening is their voice isn't involved in the determination of “how do we make things right within the classroom community.”

He also noted some areas for improvement as far as students were concerned: “I think one of the major things I would like to see is a better sense of students being able to understand the process and to be able to speak to it, and to be able to name it.” Ms.
Allen spoke about how policies prioritizing mandated testing and deprioritizing socioemotional skills affect implementation when she said that she would like to see a way “to rewrite those policies and to be really thoughtful about what restorative approaches do for schools and for communities.” She added that it had been a “difficult kind of learning curve” to implement restorative practices consistently in her classroom.

Ms. Johannsen agreed that in the short term, restorative practices, “I would say are harder for adults. They take more time, they take a lot of finesse, they take a lot of practice.” She noted that for students as well, restorative practices can be laborious and time-consuming, and that sometimes “it’s easier to say, you know, ‘give me my punishment,’” but that with restorative practices, “you have to actually take responsibility for whatever happened, even if it’s not all the responsibility.”

Ms. Simpson disagreed with Ms. Johannsen regarding accountability, feeling that students were not being held accountable for their actions if they were not also receiving punitive consequences. She further saw issues with restorative practices in terms of faculty/student boundaries, noting that if boundaries are not “put in place, then that lessens the impact, or the positive impact of the restorative process as a whole.” She indicated that she did not feel that her respect for traditional discipline methods were welcome in a school that relied so heavily on restorative practices when she referred to herself as a teaching “veteran, which can be translated as I'm not teachable, if you will.”

Theme 4: Faculty and Staff Development and Retention or Turnover

The schools in this study varied greatly by degree of faculty and staff development as opposed to turnover. Participants identified components of development
as workload sharing, having an experienced faculty body, and having opportunities for professional development and team building (see Table 9). Where there was high turnover, they felt overworked, under resourced, and resentful of the leadership. Some faculty members chose to leave for these reasons, further amplifying the effects of turnover.

Table 9: Families and focused codes for Theme 4: Faculty and staff development and retention or turnover

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families for “Faculty and Staff Development and Retention or Turnover” Theme</th>
<th>Focused Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Developing Staff | • Sharing the Workload  
• Having Teaching Experience  
• Having Opportunities for Professional Development  
• Team building |
| Feeling the Effects of Turnover | • Leaving  
• Being Overworked  
• Lacking Resources  
• Not Having Teaching Experience  
• Resenting Leadership |

Development and Retention.

*Birdsong K-8.*
Students at the schools did not discuss faculty development, perhaps because they were not aware of it. Faculty talked about development of skills around restorative practices. Ms. Moore described the initial excitement when faculty were first learning and implementing the skills: “And everybody's really excited about it...and really, there was like, quite a bit of momentum.” Ms. Martin spoke about how a training she had received at a previous work site helped her “in terms of like, knowing that there's like always a reason behind what my kids are doing and how like they're being affected by what's happening at their household.” Ms. Flaherty talked about a recent training for “all the leadership team, thinking about how to move restorative practices forward at the school.”

Cherrywood High.

Before the mass turnover event, Ms. Laurent spoke about how the family atmosphere and “culture was here when I arrived, and I noticed it...I think we’ve done a good job of hiring for culture fit in that area.” Ms. Clark recalled the 2017/2018 school year as the time “when we really started getting more meaningful social-emotional professional development and things for our kids.” She also recounted the teambuilding aspect of a recent restorative practices training that was “really powerful. People were incredibly vulnerable in the staff.”

Riverside High.

Faculty at Riverside talked about the importance of development and retention. Ms. Johannsen said, “We do a lot of recruiting and a lot of selection. We put a lot of work into finding the right people, and then developing them.” Reflecting on faculty stability, Mr. Bamberg said, “we’ve had very little turnover in the last two years, I think.” Ms.
Allen, who had been a faculty member since the school’s inception, recalled that the faculty “had a lot of open dialogue about things that we were struggling with and what we could do as leaders and teachers to make the process more clear to us and to make it better.” As a result of these discussions, the school partnered with a local non-profit focused on restorative practices “to just continue to gain that understanding.” She also spoke about the expectation for faculty to share research on best practices, “so that we can always be, you know, digging in more and learning more and building our skillfulness so that we can support our staff and students.”

**Turnover.**

**Birdsong K-8.**

Although faculty at Birdsong did not specifically speak about turnover, they did talk about feelings of being overworked related to a growing student body. Ms. Moore recounted how at the height of the growth, she felt like she was “in crisis mode all the time.” She said, “sometimes I feel like I can’t do the real work or ever get completely caught up, because I serve, I do a whole lot of roles here.”

**Cherrywood High.**

As mentioned previously, turnover was a very pressing issue at Cherrywood. Students felt the upheaval acutely, as Booker alluded to when he said, “we’re losing teachers that we have good connections with.” When I asked Antoinette what she would say if she had input on how the school was run, and she replied,

*I would just tell them that I don’t think that they do a good job at their job, because it’s just...something (laughing) is going on with this school. And I say that because we’ve, I think in the last, since last year, we’ve had three CEOs.*
She added, “Now, I don’t have no relationships with the teachers that’s here, but a few years ago I did. They made me want to come to school.” Lenora echoed this sentiment, saying, “I had relationships with some of the teachers that was here, but unfortunately, they couldn’t finish the year off. They either quit or got fired.”

The students felt the disruption academically too. Lenora, a senior, talked about how the shift in workload affected the remaining faculty: “we had two college counselors and now we only have one...and she has to deal with those hundred-something seniors now.” When talking about a beloved chemistry teacher who was suddenly absent, she said, “now it’s, like, hard, because we got, like, benchmarks coming up next week, and it’s, like, very hard for the seniors to do chemistry now, ‘cause we don’t have a teacher.” The problem apparently went beyond just testing preparation. Lenora pointed out, “it’s very messed up for us, for seniors, because we need a certain class to graduate, and we don’t have no [math] teacher.” She concluded, “how can we lose a teacher when we barely have teachers at this school? So y’all just gonna keep getting rid of these teachers?”

Faculty members shared the students’ frustration. Although Ms. Hill was interviewed before the mass turnover, she indicated that there had long been issues with stability through frequent turnover of CEOs and principals. As she put it, “the structure changed. And it changed again. And it changed AGAIN.” Ms. Clark said, “it feels like it disrupted the family.” The noticeable instability “inspired me [Ms. Clark] to make a list of how many people I’ve worked with since I’ve been with [this school] and it was like, I think like, 85 or 90 different people.” As she talked about how the disruption affected school discipline, she said, “recently in cutting our assistant dean, our dean of discipline
is just extra running all over the place. So, he does come in when he can, but he doesn’t
have the time to make the meaningful interventions.” She summed up her point by
saying, “I think the theme that we see here is people have too many hats.”

Ms. Laurent pondered the effect of the charter school system in New Orleans on
students through turnover.

_Sometimes those kids are... have been used as guinea pigs for a lot of
approaches... And so, if a kid has experienced a lot of that, and it hasn’t worked
for them, or it hasn’t been done with fidelity, or an adult quits in the middle of the
year, or they have been let down in innumerable ways by the system we’ve
created...we have not done a good job of establishing any reason for them to trust
that this would work._

Mr. Adams, who left the school shortly after our interview, talked about the support that
was taken from students: “people can sit up there and say, ‘oh well, trauma and social-
emotional need to be addressed and it is a big issue’, but yeah, then turn it around and
you’re taking away those resources.”

In an interview conducted long before the mass turnover event, Ms. Nelson, a
friendly woman with an air of authority who worked on the CMO level, spoke about the
need for faculty to adopt a growth mindset when she said, “our students can learn despite
these challenges, so it’s not, it’s not a resource thing...I think just that mindset, the
mindset piece and the commitment to the work. Those are the things that I think make life
easier.” As she explained, a growth mindset proposes that a student can learn “despite
whatever environmental or, you know, socioeconomic challenges that they may have.”

_Riverside High._

Faculty and students at Riverside High spoke very little about turnover. Ms. Davis
attributed turnover to people teaching for the wrong reasons: “if you're not in it for the
kids, you won't last here...I've seen people leave just because they couldn't handle the pressure.”

**Theme 5: Power Dynamics**

The theme of power dynamics shares significant overlap with the other four themes. Its inclusion does not constitute repetition, however, as it builds upon some aspects and represents the culmination of other aspects. Some of the key components of empowerment and disempowerment that emerged through the focused codes were respect, voice, understanding, inclusion, strength or deficit-based mindset, community, support, responsibility, and cultural relevance (see Table 10).

**Table 10: Families and focused codes for Theme 5: Power dynamics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families for “Power Dynamics” Theme</th>
<th>Focused Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Empowerment**                    | • Respecting/Being Respected  
  • Being Heard  
  • Understanding Students  
  • Including  
  • Working with Strength-Based Mindset  
  • Building Community  
  • Supporting/Being Supported  
  • Accepting Students  
  • Culturally Relevant Instruction  
  • Taking Responsibility |
| **Disempowerment**                 | • Being Disrespected  
  • Not Being Heard  
  • Misunderstanding Students  
  • Excluding/Being Excluded  
  • Working with Deficit Mindset  
  • Destroying Community  
  • Not Supporting/Not Being Supported  
  • Culturally Irrelevant Instruction |
Empowerment.

*Birdsong K-8.*

Students at Birdsong had little to say about empowerment, but Ms. Moore briefly discussed how there had been “a major shift recently” in terms of empowering faculty around restorative practices implementation. A core group of faculty members had approached school administration about “owning” restorative practices, “And they were really receptive and like, ‘okay’. [So, we] took the reins, and we actually, Thursday, have a whole leadership team meeting about restorative... a two-hour workshop.” She said it made her feel that her input was valued.

*Cherrywood High.*

Students at Cherrywood reported feeling respected and supported. Lenora talked about the support that she was receiving on her college applications from the remaining college counselor. She said, “she sent out emails every day about scholarships and tuition, and she helped us with our financial aid, and, you know? The whole school itself is a big support system.” Marquis spoke of a teacher who respected students’ self-determination by working to increase motivation rather than forcing learning upon them: “in his perspective...the students have a, have a choice to learn. We can’t force a student to learn.” Xavier said of the teachers, “They totally respect me.”

Mr. Adams spoke of empowerment through communication, and “being able to come to a common ground.” In his view, “when a kid feels that they can be expressive and they’re heard and understood, you’re getting a lot more accomplished.” He talked about encouraging self-determination and self-sufficiency because,

*at the end of the day, I’m not always gonna be around. So, I need to know that you are able to handle yourself accordingly, right? And that I’ve laid nuggets, or*
planted seeds inside you to where, as you blossom, as you grow, you can take that, and that develops.

He tried to act on his philosophy that “everyone deserves a fair shot” by encouraging critical thinking skills. “Just because I’m an adult doesn’t give me any extra power.”

Ms. Clark noted that to empower other people, one should take responsibility for their own actions. She admitted that sometimes she responded to students in ways that did not necessarily honor or respect their feelings, and she said, “I’ll circle back in those instances and like, ‘hey, I’m human and I... I let myself... let my personal feelings go onto you. I’m sorry, you don’t deserve that.’” Ms. Hill spoke about empowering parents. Her goal was to “help them understand that they have a voice. I’m trying to show them how to register to vote, how to come to meetings...I want them to know that they’re heard.”

**Riverside High.**

Students and faculty overwhelmingly reported feeling empowered and working to empower others at Riverside. Alicia, who had only been at Riverside for a couple of months, revealed that she had been chosen to represent the student body at a leadership summit involving multiple schools to voice her opinion on standardized testing. She also appreciated that the school provided “beaucoup opportunities. Like, internships and stuff to work with. . .” Josephine talked about not knowing what she wanted to do after graduation until she transferred to Riverside, where a counselor assessed her skills and interests and suggested that she might be good at program administration. “And then I did some research on it, and actually found out it was something that I like.” She expressed her appreciation that “these teachers, they will actually pay attention to the things that you really enjoy, and actually try to give you resources and stuff to try and help pursue that.” Darius expressed his excitement at “having passing grades I never used to have at
any other school.” He added, “this school really helped me with everything I need. And I graduate next year.”

Mr. Bamberg expressed a sense of urgency in creating a space where students can “really take ownership of their education.” He hoped that this sense of ownership would extend to other areas of their lives, and that they would become engaged in their communities and in the wider world. He wanted the faculty at the school to do “everything that we can and everything that is possible to make sure the students are being heard and the students do feel a sense of agency, that students can see how their actions impact others.” When I asked him whether he himself felt empowered to affect his environment in such a way, he said, “I don't feel as though I don't have a platform to discuss those things. I meet almost weekly with the principal.”

Disempowerment.

Birdsong K-8.

Faculty at Birdsong did not express feelings of disempowerment other than frustration at inconsistency in restorative practices implementation. Andre expressed his own frustration with the restorative process, and a preference to use exercise to center himself and deescalate his feelings. When I asked if he had talked to any of the faculty about that preference he said, “Nah, ‘cause I really don't think they gonna waste they time for all that.”

Cherrywood High.

Students at Cherrywood talked about their feelings of disempowerment. Marquis expressed frustration at the discipline ladder and its vulnerability to bias. He said, “some
teachers are lenient, some teachers are strict...If I say, if it’s [one certain teacher], he’ll
give you demerits for any little thing...he abuses his power.” He reiterated his feeling that
“demerits is childish.” Lenora discussed a recent protest that the students had organized
over the dismissal of important support faculty personnel and teachers. “So, like, I
remember when we lost our college counselor, we was all mad, we was all sad, so we did
this little protesting thing out in the yard.” Feeling unheard and discouraged by the
dismissive administrator response following the protest, she added: “But, you know, I
learned from it and so I’m not gonna do a protest again unless it’s about violence or
anything.”

Mr. Rivera expressed his frustration with top-down rule making. “[The CEO], the
board of that school, right? You rarely see them inside a school...But yet, they’re the
ones that are voting and passing this and passing that and saying, ‘this is what should be
implemented.’” He mused that the rules are based on “Eurocentric standards of
professionalism.” His frustration became increasingly apparent as he banged his fist on
the table while saying, “You come in here, you come and observe for eight hours. See
what we’re dealing with. Boots on the ground. See what we’re going through.”

Mr. Adams expressed frustration and sorrow over the turnover. “You have
individuals who establishes great...who ESTABLISHED, who ESTABLISHED great
relationships with students to where they trust, where they confide in, where now you’ve
taken away a part of that child, in essence” In talking about his own experiences, he said,
“it then puts strain on other individuals who then have to carry their load but also now
pick up the slack...It gets you further burnt out...it makes you feel inadequate, that you
can no longer do your job.”
Riverside High.

There was very little discussion of feelings of disempowerment at Riverside, but that does not mean that faculty did not feel disempowered sometimes, as Ms. Davis revealed when she said, “I don't always feel comfortable speaking in meetings because I just don't really feel like my opinion is...(pause) I speak when spoken to.”

Conclusion

The grounded theory methods applied in this study resulted in five major interrelated categories: strong or poor relationships, emotional and physical security or insecurity, restorative practices working or not working, staff retention/development or turnover, and empowerment or disempowerment. Results show that both students and faculty across all schools experience issues of empowerment and disempowerment. These experiences are related to strength of relationships, feelings of security and insecurity, strength of restorative practices implementation, and whether schools decide to allocate to staff development and retention, or instead to undertake massive restructuring in the form of turnover. There is a strong preference for restorative practices among all groups, with a few notable exceptions. Results emphasize that both students and faculty contend with issues of empowerment and disempowerment. In the next chapter I will discuss these interconnected results within the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 2, and within the context of restorative practices versus restorative justice. I will also discuss the limitations of this study.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This study sought to answer three research questions: 1) How do students and faculty across school settings experience restorative practices? 2) How do students and faculty across these settings experience issues of empowerment and disempowerment as they relate to restorative practices across these settings? 3) What are the similarities and differences between student and faculty experiences with restorative practices and empowerment across these school settings? In this chapter I will frame the discussion of this study’s findings and implications according to the themes and theories in the literature review. I will apply bioecological, critical, and empowerment lenses throughout the discussion. I will discuss the implications for research and practice, and I will discuss limitations of this study before concluding this chapter.

Theoretical Framing

To review, the three interrelated theories discussed in the literature review are bioecological systems theory, critical pedagogy, and empowerment theory. Bioecological systems theory allows us to expand our understanding of school discipline beyond the narrow view that it is a means to curb undesirable behaviors by an individual student, and to consider also the environmental, community, cultural, systemic, and even time-related elements. When we consider these elements beyond the individual, we can begin to see how schools in the United States apply punitive and exclusionary school discipline as a
tool to enforce educational banking, and to reinforce power differentials between faculty and students. Freire (1970) encourages an ecological viewpoint when he espouses conscientização, or critical consciousness raising. He explains critical consciousness raising as the process of learning to see and act against oppressive elements in social, political, and economic arenas. Rappaport (1987) frames power in ecological terms when he discusses how issues of empowerment and disempowerment can occur on, and have effects throughout systemic levels from micro to macro, and the importance of historic and cultural contexts. Rappaport specifically notes the importance of access to resources, ability to voice one’s narrative, and ability to have control over one’s own life and decisions as essential to empowerment (Rappaport, 1981, 1987).

Drawing from these frameworks, I will discuss the resulting themes of this study in terms of ecological considerations, opportunities for critical consciousness raising, access to resources, narrative or voice, and ability to control one’s own decisions and actions. Additionally, although the concept of restorative practices versus restorative justice is not specifically a theoretical framework, it is a concept to which many participants referred in some way when they spoke in terms of empowerment and disempowerment. Therefore, I will discuss the findings from the stance of whether participants were experiencing restorative practices or restorative justice. I will discuss the limitations and strengths of this study before concluding this chapter.

**Relationships**

The theme of relationships was present in every interview with every participant. Its prevalence speaks to its salience when discussing both restorative practices and
empowerment. Notably, communication, which is directly related to voice and narrative, was one of the more salient focused codes. Experiences with relationships varied by school, although they tended to align between faculty and students at each school. Strength of relationships aligned with strength of restorative practices implementation when observing differences between schools. As discussed in Chapter 2, relationships and attachments are also important when considering trauma and recovery.

At Birdsong, Ms. Flaherty’s observation of relationships being a “mixed bag” seemed to apply to both students and faculty. This mixed bag also seemingly correlated with the bumpy start to restorative practices implementation at the school. Andre saw his relationships with faculty at the school as almost familial. He found that strong attachments were empowering when he described them as treating him like “the young man” that he felt that he was. Sarah, on the other hand, denied having strong relationships with faculty because she did not find herself communicating with them “one-on-one” frequently. Ms. Moore felt that her limited time resources due to her increasing workload hindered inter-faculty relationship building. So, while Ms. Moore was expending considerable time to bring a resource built on relationships and connection to the school (restorative practices), she was simultaneously depleting her own resources.

Students and faculty at Cherrywood High generally agreed that relationships at the school were strong before the mass turnover, but that the turnover had severely affected their support system and attachments. Lenora saw relationships as a resource to help her “succeed.” Antoinette talked about losing those resources and important attachments through turnover, affecting her desire to attend school. Ms. Laurent agreed
with this sentiment, adding an ecological viewpoint that the entire school system – specifically the school system in New Orleans - had let the students down, thereby affecting their trust in the school system overall.

Students and faculty at Riverside reported consistently strong relationships, both within and between their groups. Faculty provided resources for students by doing things like bringing pillows to a student whose back hurt. Students felt that faculty members were well aware in an ecological sense of their impact on their surroundings and their community. Faculty members appreciated the resources of skills and knowledge that other faculty members brought to the table, as well as the training resources that the school provided to help them better understand trauma-informed care. As Mr. Bamberg pointed out, at least one of these trainings focused on the connection between trauma and attachment, which he felt better positioned faculty to address trauma by building healthy attachments. When Riverside student participants did talk about broken relationships, it was within the context of a previous school other than Riverside. When faculty talked about broken relationships, it was within an ecological context of how the post-Katrina charter school system had broken communities apart by abolishing neighborhood schools.

**Security**

Participants spoke of their senses of security and insecurity in both emotional and physical terms. Participants who expressed a strong sense of emotional security had the resources of strong relationships and healthy attachments. Ms. Flaherty, from Birdsong K-8, found security in being able to express her emotions and being able to rely upon the
resource of other faculty members for support. She was able to identify this sense of security by comparing her experiences at Birdsong with her experiences at other schools. At Cherrywood, Lenora felt secure in her sense of being supported by faculty, and Ms. Clark felt that her own ability to support students and build relationships with them increased her sense of emotional and physical security. At Riverside, Ms. Allen talked about attending to emotional security by providing a safe space for students to take off their armor and to be themselves.

The most common theme among both faculty and students across schools in terms of feeling physically insecure was fear of gun violence. With this fear came a sense of loss of control over, quite literally, one’s life. Students and faculty drew connections between violence and relationships, control, and voice. Faculty feared school shootings, while students feared gun violence both at school and in their wider communities. It was clear that participants had thought through various gun violence scenarios, some in great detail. At Birdsong, Ms. Martin despaired over her lack of control over student safety should a school shooting occur, due to there being so many windows through which an intruder could see students. At Cherrywood, Marquis expressed a similar sense of lack of control when he described his journey home from school as “the Hunger Games.” He imagined that his way of regaining that control would come in the form of self-sacrifice to save someone else’s life in the event of a shooting. At Riverside, Justus connected relationships and attachments with violence prevention. He saw gun violence itself as an attempt to reclaim voice and control by people who wanted to “make sure you feel them.” Ms. Davis seemed resigned to a lack of control in an active shooter situation when she explained her plan to “hunker down here and…hope I survive.”
Effectiveness of Restorative Practices

Participants varied on whether they thought restorative practices were effective overall. No participant expressed an opinion to one extreme (that restorative practices are the only effective discipline model) or the other (that exclusionary practices are the only effective discipline model). There were, however, strong preferences that, with few exceptions, closely correlated with strength of restorative practices implementation at each school site. The conversations about restorative practices touched on ecological considerations, critical consciousness raising, access to resources, voice or narrative, and control over actions and decisions.

In much the same way that faculty and students at Birdsong disagreed on strength of relationships, they also disagreed on whether restorative practices were effective. Ms. Flaherty viewed restorative practices as a way to give voice, dignity, and self-determination to students who tended to internalize their traumas, thus providing a means to process the trauma, and indicating that she may have seen the potential for restorative practices at the school to eventually grow into restorative justice. Students disagreed with Ms. Flaherty. Sarah was less optimistic about the potential for restorative practices to enhance voice, feeling that students would not listen to each other in conflict situations, regardless of the method of mediation. Andre supported Sarah’s assessment. To Andre, fighting was the way in which he felt that he could gain control of his own narrative.

There were some differences between faculty and student feelings at Cherrywood High as well. Ms. Laurent appreciated the respect for student narratives that restorative conversations supported. Mr. Adams concurred, emphasizing that he wanted everyone involved in a restorative conversation or circle to “feel heard and feel understood.”
Students, however, saw a disconnect between the ideals of restorative practices and the use of a discipline ladder. Some thought the school should solely use the discipline ladder, as a way of maintaining control through strict consequences. In other words, they seemed to feel that students who acted out did not deserve to have the privilege of self-determination. Other students disliked the power struggles that occurred in classrooms where demerits were more frequent than restorative conversations. They would prefer more opportunities for restorative practices.

At Riverside High, there was near consensus that restorative practices were effective. There were few students who did not appreciate having the voice and sense of control over decisions that restorative practices offered. As Darius pointed out, just yelling at students tended to cause them to shut down and lose their confidence in their own abilities and their interest in participating in education. Justus expressed a desire to understand the root of conflicts, and to allow the other person to voice their thought processes, which he could do through restorative practices. Jalen voiced his opinion that, given the choice, he would strongly prefer a restorative circle to a suspension. He saw the sense of control that restorative practices offered as central not only to specific incidents, but also to overall school climate, as students monitored and controlled their own behavior to avoid giving up the freedom they experienced at Riverside.

Ms. Johannsen saw the focus on voice and narrative as central to behavior change, as it helped students and faculty to increase their empathy, thus strengthening their community. As Mr. Bamberg pointed out, though, more could be done to honor the narratives and decision-making power of faculty in the restorative process. Ms. Simpson supported this sentiment, when she expressed dismay at the way in which she perceived
restorative practices to blur the boundaries between faculty and students, taking control out of faculty hands.

Although students at the schools did not specifically talk about restorative practices in terms of resources, ecological considerations, or critical consciousness raising, faculty members did. Ms. Moore and Ms. Flaherty at Birdsong both saw restorative practices as a resource to address trauma by providing a calm, safe, and stable environment in which students could process their trauma. At Riverside, Ms. Johanssen saw relationships, a key component of restorative practices, as a resource for creating that safety.

Faculty members across schools also lamented the lack of resources, especially time and funding, to implement restorative approaches. They often framed this conversation ecologically, noting that tightly controlled curriculum and standardized testing shifted focus and resources away from socioemotional learning. At Riverside, Ms. Allen expressed a wish for a systemic shift toward macro level policy support and funding for restorative practices, as she believed in the potential for restorative practices to improve schools and communities. Faculty at Riverside also noted the ecological implications and potential for critical consciousness raising on the micro level that is inherent in restorative practices, indicating the potential to expand the practices to restorative justice. As Ms. Johannsen explained the importance of the resource of relationships, she observed that the empathy-building that resulted from these relationships has a positive impact on not only the individual, but on the entire community. Mr. Bamberg viewed culturally responsive pedagogy, which builds upon critical pedagogy, as closely aligned with restorative practices. In this way, he saw the
potential for critical consciousness raising in both faculty and students through the restorative model. He wished to further develop critical consciousness and increase systemic impact by helping students to be able to name the process of restorative practices so that they could frequently and deliberately apply the skills in their worlds outside of school.

**Faculty and Staff Development and Retention**

Degree of restorative practices implementation, especially at the two high schools, was closely correlated with faculty development and retention versus faculty turnover. Unsurprisingly, the school with stronger professional development and lower turnover was able to implement restorative practices more consistently, on a schoolwide level. Riverside intentionally hired faculty who supported the restorative model, provided faculty with multiple professional development resources and trainings, and even partnered with a local nonprofit to sustain outside support as needed. They focused on “building skillfulness” to better support faculty and students. Faculty members were encouraged to contribute their own resources, increasing a sense of ownership over the process.

Faculty and students at Cherrywood High had a very different experience, resulting in a great deal of resource loss in terms of relationships, time, and sense of control. Many students lamented the loss of the relationships that provided them with the support and security that motivated them to attend school. They had little faith in how the school was being run, especially when they saw the strain that the turnover placed on the remaining teachers and support faculty members. They worried not only about the
remaining faculty members, but also about the implications for their own futures. The loss of these resources for seniors jeopardized their ability to graduate.

Faculty echoed these sentiments, expressing sadness at the loss of relationships and exhaustion from the increased workload caused by the abrupt departure of, and failure of administration to replace, colleagues. Mr. Adams clearly expressed this when he juxtaposed the recent push for trauma-informed schools and resources in New Orleans and elsewhere with the abrupt removal of the faculty who provided those very resources at Cherrywood. Ms. Nelson’s assessment that “. . . it’s not a resource thing” highlighted the thought process on the higher management level that faculty should be able to overcome a student’s “environmental or socioeconomic challenges” without resources. Ms. Laurent framed this resource loss in ecological terms when she lamented the innumerable ways that students had been let down by “the system we’ve created” (in reference to the charter school system), in which students had been “used as guinea pigs.”

The way Birdsong faculty talked about resources reflected the instability of the very early stages of restorative practices implementation. There had been few trainings at time of interviews, and Ms. Moore was still serving “a whole lot of roles” at the school, making it difficult for her to commit full time resources to implementation. Rather than being an issue of turnover, the struggles with time seemed to have more to do with expansion as the school was growing to accept more students and hire more faculty.

**Power Dynamics**
The final theme, power dynamics, draws from the previous four themes. As might be expected, it touches on all five of the components of empowerment identified in this study: ecological considerations, opportunities for critical consciousness raising, access to resources, narrative or voice, and ability to control one’s own life, decisions, and actions. Although elements of both empowerment and disempowerment were present at each school, there were strong differences between schools regarding student and faculty experiences.

Birdsong students were ambivalent about issues of empowerment. Although Andre did appreciate being treated with respect, he also felt that he did not have a voice when it came to his own de-escalation preferences. At the same time, he expressed a preference for faculty members to exert their power in instances of conflict and decide upon a punishment, rather than to be involved in a conversation and take part in the decision-making process. So, although he desired to have a voice in his own de-escalation, he did not desire to have a voice in discipline practices. Whether this is due to his experiences at the school, his developmental age, or just his own discomfort is difficult to say. While the faculty members involved in restorative practices expressed enthusiasm for the potential for faculty and student empowerment, that potential was not yet realized. Struggles with balancing workloads amid a growing school population made it difficult to establish consistency in discipline and support for a new modality.

The environment at Cherrywood High affected faculty and students alike regarding their feelings of empowerment. Students expressed feeling empowered at the school level by the support and resources they had received from faculty and other students. They specifically mentioned some teachers who refrained from engaging in
power struggles when it came to teaching and learning, like the teacher whom Marquis
described as recognizing learning as a choice. Some faculty members talked explicitly
about empowering students. Mr. Adams spoke about the importance of encouraging
students to use their voices to assert their self-determination when he foreshadowed his
own departure: “I’m not always going to be around.” He was one of few faculty
participants across schools who indicated that he was willing to give up his own power to
empower students when he said, “Just because I’m an adult doesn’t give me any extra
power.” He attended to critical consciousness raising by encouraging critical thinking in
his students, while simultaneously feeling intensely disempowered by the administration
changes, the mass turnover, and the lack of resources. The efforts toward empowerment
did not stop at students, as Ms. Hill demonstrated when she discussed encouraging
parents to voice their opinions at school meetings.

However, efforts to raise critical consciousness, provide resources, encourage
voice, and foster self-determination at Cherrywood High were thwarted on an
administrative level, leaving both students and faculty feeling angry, sad, hurt, and above
all, powerless. Beginning with the school-level administration, the combination of
restorative practices with a discipline ladder meant that teachers could easily disempower
students by handing out “childish” demerits, “abus[ing their] power,” as Marquis put it.
Administrators on the school and the CMO level left students deeply discouraged, as
Lenora expressed. When she attempted to think critically and raise her voice in protest
against the loss of beloved and important faculty members, the response she received
conveyed the message that her voice was ineffective and that the efforts and energy she
had put forth in advocacy and protest were all for naught. Mr. Adams described how this
turnover affected both students and faculty by depleting resources and taking away “a part of that child” while making faculty feel “burnt out” and “inadequate.” Mr. Rivera similarly expressed discouragement and frustration at what he perceived as the intentional quelling of faculty voices and assertion of administrative control through top-down rulemaking by people who had no experience on the actual school level.

Students and faculty at Riverside High had a very different experience than students and faculty at Cherrywood High. Students at Riverside expressed feeling empowered through resources and relationships. The internship opportunities gave students a sense of control over their own futures, which was apparent in how many students discussed their post-graduation plans with confidence and hope. Individual attention was an invaluable resource in making students feel heard and appreciated, and in supporting them in their journey to become thriving community members. As Mr. Bamberg said, it was important for students to feel “ownership of their education.” Although the students expressed feeling empowered, Mr. Bamberg worried that perhaps the faculty should be doing more to empower students and raise their awareness of the ecological impacts of their own actions. While faculty at Riverside generally felt that they had voice and a good deal of autonomy, Ms. Davis and Ms. Simpson indicated that they did not feel that dissenting opinions were always welcome.

Student and faculty perceptions of restorative practices and empowerment differed among the school sites in this study. These perceptions were closely tied to strength of relationships. Student and faculty perceptions of empowerment were strongest at Riverside, the school with the strongest sense of positive relationships, strongest restorative practices implementation, and strongest emphasis on faculty professional
development. They were weakest at Cherrywood, the school with the strongest sense of broken relationships and attachments, and the highest amount of disruptive turnover. This was also the school which paired restorative practices with a traditional discipline ladder. Perceptions of empowerment were most ambivalent at Birdsong, the school in the beginning stages of focusing more attention on restorative practices and faculty professional development.

**Restorative Practices or Restorative Justice?**

Recalling Lustick’s (2016) assertion that restorative practices often fail to address structural and systemic barriers to equity in school discipline, we focus on an important question: Which school sites of the three in this study intentionally attend to issues of justice and empowerment in discipline through restorative approaches? If we review the results by the five themes - ecological considerations, opportunities for critical consciousness raising, access to resources, narrative or voice, and ability to control one’s own life, decisions, and actions - we can see which schools most strongly espouses Winn’s (2018) pedagogical stances that justice matters.

Students and faculty at Birdsong, except for Ms. Flaherty, rarely discussed ecological considerations, even in terms of personal impact on the community, or community impact on the individual. There was no discussion of critical consciousness raising. Access to restorative practices resources had been limited until shortly before the interviews, so the results of the increase in resources, if any, were beyond the time frame of this study. There was some discussion of voice and narrative, with a recognition of the potential for restorative practices to amplify voice, but this potential had not yet been
realized. Students were ambivalent about desiring control and self-determination, and faculty were just beginning to gain more control over implementation and resources. Birdsong was far from the point at which restorative practices could be considered restorative justice.

At some time before or after the data collection period Cherrywood High may have been practicing restorative justice. When I began data collection at Cherrywood, however, it would be a stretch to say that the school was even implementing restorative practices, much less restorative justice. Although students and faculty were aware of their potential impact on their communities, and of the impact of systemic issues on the school and its individuals, they felt too powerless, frustrated, and exhausted to realize their potential. This sense of powerlessness did lead to critical consciousness raising in many of the participants, but the lack of – and indeed, depletion of – resources only increased feelings of powerlessness and exhaustion. Faculty members found that the exhaustion, and perhaps also a fear of termination, kept them from using their voices outside of our confidential interview setting. When students tried to raise their voices in protest, they were met with defeat and frustration to the point of promising to never protest again unless it involved a matter of life and death. Whereas some faculty had expressed a sense of control over their environments before the mass turnover event, faculty interviewed during and after this event expressed a pervasive sense of loss of control. Students described struggles for self-determination and autonomy in classrooms. Any sense of control over their potential futures had quickly dissipated with the mass turnover.

Students and faculty at Riverside High had been implementing restorative practices faithfully and consistently for several years before the data collection period
began. Students had a sense of their impact on their community, and a sense of the impact of their community on their own daily lives. Faculty recognized and encouraged this sense, and most faculty members actively worked toward creating and maintaining their own community. Students felt empowered to cultivate their critical consciousness and to be civically engaged in political processes at the school, in their communities, and beyond. Faculty actively encouraged this engagement. Students acknowledged and appreciated the resources faculty provided, and faculty acknowledged the resources that they shared with one another. Students and most faculty felt that their voices were welcome, and students even felt comfortable having conversations with the principal when issues arose. Students especially felt empowered to make decisions concerning their lives and their futures, and faculty supported them through counseling, graduation support, and internships. While many faculty members felt that decision-making was shared among faculty and administration, it is important to note that some did not feel this way. Overall, however, Riverside was consciously moving toward restorative justice, and consistent and pervasive restorative practices implementation was at the heart of this movement.

**Limitations and Strengths**

One of the limitations of this study is its focus on a small number of charter schools in the New Orleans area. The educational landscape of New Orleans itself is like no other in the nation, in that it has become somewhat of a portfolio district (Harris, 2020). While the demographic composition of New Orleans may mirror that of other cities, like St. Louis, the decentralization and high level of autonomy of the schools with regards to discipline policies is unique. Furthermore, the schools and participants in this
study were all experiencing circumstances specific to the broader New Orleans school system, the school sites and CMOs, and the timing of data collection. Accordingly, the experiences and data reflected in this study may not be generalizable to other cities, or even to other schools in New Orleans.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I encountered numerous barriers and delays in data collection during this study. As was the case with Cherrywood High and Oak Ridge K-8, the ability of higher administrators to restructure schools with minimal notice and the dissatisfaction of many school employees greatly affected the sampling pool and the data collection process. The fact that these very issues were heavy on the minds of many participants meant that they took a prominent position in many of the interviews, in turn affecting the results and direction of analysis. Had the timing of the data collection been different or even truncated, the resulting themes might have been very different.

The limitations of this study are also its strengths. When taking an ecological view, as I did in this study, the consideration of the influence of the time-situated political and systemic environments is essential to forming a complete picture. The factors that weighed heavy on the minds of the participants, such as testing standards, the regional educational landscape, and site-specific stressors, all brought important justice-related thoughts and themes into focus. In fact, as political favor increasingly falls on the side of school choice, and therefore charter schools, the results of this study may become more and more relevant in the near future. The experimental nature of charter schools and their stated intention of applying innovative solutions to major issues in education means that sudden transitions in general school policies and specific discipline policies become more likely as more charter schools open.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the similarities and differences between schools and between faculty and students regarding restorative practices, restorative justice, and empowerment through the theoretical frameworks of ecological systems theory, critical pedagogy, and empowerment theory. The five themes that emerged from the grounded theory techniques – relationships, sense of security, effectiveness of restorative practices, faculty development and retention or turnover, and power dynamics – are all inextricably linked. Relationships form the foundation for a sense of security and effectiveness of restorative practices, and in some ways, power dynamics. Faculty turnover irreparably broke important relationships and attachments, while faculty development and retention allowed relationships to thrive. Power dynamics were bidirectionally related to relationships, sense of security, effectiveness of restorative practices, and faculty development and retention or turnover. The combination of these factors determined whether schools were implementing restorative practices or restorative justice. In the final chapter I will discuss the implications for this research and provide some recommendations to move toward restorative justice based upon these findings, and then I will offer some closing thoughts.
Chapter 6: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This study has examined the narratives of 31 participants in charter schools in the New Orleans area implementing, or attempting to implement, restorative practices. As is often the case with public schools in general, but with charter school especially, each school viewed and executed discipline differently. The participants’ experiences with and opinions on restorative practices, as a result, differed at each school site. To conclude this study, I will discuss the implications of this study for school faculty members, especially social workers, and I will provide recommendations for moving forward. I will close with my thoughts.

Implications and Recommendations

To examine the implications of this study and make recommendations based upon these implications, I return to my theoretical statement:

Restorative practices may not be a necessary component of, or the only factor in, empowerment in school settings. Schools can, however, intentionally attend to the implementation of restorative practices in a way that both utilizes and supports the development and stability of positive relationships. These relationships, in turn, can promote feelings of a secure and safe environment in which students and faculty can raise their critical consciousness, foster their autonomy, gain a sense of worth of their own narratives and voices, work together to procure and maintain resources, and raise their awareness of how they can have an impact on various ecological levels, from communities to systems. In this way, faculty and students can move from restorative practices to restorative justice.

Restorative practices may not be a necessary component of, or the only factor in,

empowerment in school settings:
To say that there is only one solution to the disproportionate negative effects of exclusionary discipline upon students from already marginalized populations would be to take an incredibly narrow view of marginalization and disempowerment. Teachers and schools who implement culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogy, for instance, are actively working to empower students through pedagogical techniques (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Paris & Alim, 2014).

School social workers are often in a position to find and create professional development opportunities. With some careful research, social workers can find promising and evidence-based practices, whether restorative or otherwise, to help empower faculty and students. Some schools, like Riverside High, welcome and encourage faculty input in professional development options. In schools and districts that operate within a top-down rulemaking framework, social workers may need to employ their advocacy skills. In districts and states where there is forceful pushback against efforts to combat marginalization, social workers may need to artfully use their framing and organizing skills.

**Recommendation #1:** To combat marginalization, school social workers should research and present professional development opportunities based upon empowering faculty members and students.

_Schools can, however, intentionally attend to the implementation of restorative practices in a way that both utilizes and supports the development and stability of positive relationships._
As we saw at Birdsong K-8, proper implementation of restorative practices takes time and requires a good amount of effort and energy from everyone involved. For this reason, although studies show that restorative practices are more effective in cases of long-term implementation (Glenn et al., 2020), schools may abandon restorative practices before they have a chance to become fully effective, or they may pair restorative practices with exclusionary discipline as we saw at Cherrywood High. The damage to relationships and attachments that can occur in cases of exclusionary discipline should not be taken lightly. Therefore, administrators should support school faculty in their efforts to implement and maintain restorative practices.

**Recommendation #2:** School social workers should provide educational materials and trainings for faculty members on the implications of attachments and trauma in child and adolescent development.

**Recommendation #3:** School social workers should undergo training in facilitating restorative practices, and they should work to bring those training opportunities to other faculty members and to students.

*These relationships, in turn, can promote feelings of a secure and safe environment…*

The school-prison nexus is a well-researched and documented phenomenon. When the primary means of dealing with behavior infractions is exclusionary, even to the point of involving law enforcement, students who are struggling the most with issues related to trauma and attachments may feel *less* secure rather than *more* secure (Bracy, 2011). Faculty who rely primarily upon exclusionary discipline forfeit meaningful relationships with the students who need them the most, often leading to more behavior
infractions, which in turn can affect faculty feelings of security as well (Kline, 2016). Strong relationships though, as we have seen in this study, promote feelings of physical and emotional security for students and faculty.

**Recommendation #4:** School social workers should focus on increasing feelings of safety on a schoolwide level by promoting relationship-building skills and facilitating restorative conversations and circles.

... in which students and faculty can raise their critical consciousness...

Students and faculty may be unaware of the ways in which traditional exclusionary discipline upholds oppressive systems through effects on individual, school, community, structural, and systemic levels. Providing an environment that promotes emotional and physical security through strong relationships can encourage critical exploration of issues that directly affect students and faculty.

... foster their autonomy...

If one of the purposes of education is to teach students the skills they need to pursue happiness and success, one of the ways to increase the potential to realize these goals is to encourage autonomous thought and action. Through attention to socioemotional skills, which restorative approaches encourage, students can exercise self-reliance and autonomy in resolving conflict and in self-expression in general.

... gain a sense of worth of their own narratives and voices...
When schools rely upon punitive and exclusionary measures to address conflict, they fail to honor the narratives and voices of all involved parties, implying that these narratives are not important. To resolve conflict in an equitable and just manner, schools must honor these narratives in a way that indicates that the narratives are important.

... work together to procure and maintain resources...

Resources refer not only to material resources, but also to nonmaterial resources such as relationships and community support. When one has the resource of a strong relationship with a peer, colleague, mentor, or larger community, they are better positioned to contribute to the maintenance of individual and community resources, both material and nonmaterial.

...and raise their awareness of how they can have an impact on various ecological levels, from communities to systems.

Restorative practices foster empathy, an essential component for healthy relationships. Empathy allows a person to view an issue from another person’s perspective, which in turn allows a person to understand how their actions impact other community members.

Recommendation #5: School social workers should use their understanding of bioecological systems theory to promote exploration of critical consciousness so that faculty and students can provide thoughtful support and encouragement for each other’s narratives and pursuits of autonomy. Such support would allow students and faculty to
build a community that works together to procure and maintain both material and nonmaterial resources for the betterment of all community members’ lives.

*In this way, faculty and students can move from restorative practices to restorative justice.*

As Eagle (2005) expressed, for restorative practices to promote justice, there must be a paradigm shift. Such a shift takes time and effort. It requires not only a shift in practices, but also a shift in mindset. Faculty members must be willing to use their own mistakes as teachable moments by owning up to them and working toward an equitable solution that repairs the damaged relationships and strengthens the overall community. As bell hooks (1994) wrote, “*The power of the liberatory classroom is in fact the power of the learning process, the work we do to establish a community*” (p. 153).

**Recommendation #6:** Social workers should not only guide faculty and students toward social justice in the school and beyond, but they must also be willing to model humility, power sharing, and willingness to learn by owning up to, and learning from, their own mistakes as they actively work toward justice.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation journey began as an attempt to answer my own questions about what I saw and experienced during my time as a special education teacher in New Orleans. From my very first foray into the literature around school discipline, it became clear that the problem was not unique to New Orleans or its school system, although the market-based nature of the school system certainly increased opportunities for
marginalization. Many of the study participants spoke with a sense of urgency regarding the marginalization they had felt and witnessed, but the hope they expressed often counterbalanced the despair they felt. They dared to hope for stronger, more nurturing relationships; for bright futures with opportunities to positively impact others; for emotional and physical safety for themselves and others; and for justice. It is my hope that this dissertation has honored the voices of the participants with integrity, and that it may in some small way contribute to their dreams for justice.
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Biography

Estilla S. Lightfoot is originally from Albuquerque, New Mexico. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theater Performance at the University of New Mexico. She taught high school Special Education for three years in post-Katrina New Orleans. Estilla received her Master of Social Work at Tulane University, where she served a year-long internship in the Mayor's Office of Constituent Studies. She received her Master of Social Work degree with a Disaster Mental Health Certificate in 2011. Following her MSW graduation, she returned to New Mexico, where she spent three years as a bilingual child, adolescent, and family therapist, and earned her LCSW. Estilla moved back to New Orleans in 2015 to pursue her PhD in social work. She currently holds a LCSW license in both New Mexico and Louisiana. Her intersecting areas of interest are children and youth, disability diagnoses, race, public policy, trauma and resilience, and school discipline.