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Restorative practices and exclusionary school discipline: An integrative review

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Abstract

This study used integrative review methodology to synthesize research on the relationship between school-based restorative practices and exclusionary discipline outcomes in the United States. Exclusionary discipline outcomes were defined as out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement. A literature search produced 5,764 publications, and 11 studies were included in the final sample. Peacemaking circles were the most common restorative practice implemented, and secondary analysis of school records was the most common method utilized. Findings indicated that restorative practices are associated with reduced suspension rates, which suggest that school-based restorative practices are a promising approach to reducing exclusionary discipline outcomes.

Keywords

Restorative practices, restorative justice, school discipline, exclusionary discipline, United States

Exclusionary discipline is a disciplinary action which results in a student's removal from the typical educational setting (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010) and is often conceptualized as referral to law enforcement (arrest), expulsion or out-of-school-suspension (Noltemeyer, Ward, & McLoughlin, 2015; Valdebenito, Eisner, Farrington, Ttofi, & Sutherland, 2018). These sanctions are imposed by an authority figure in response to a student's actual or perceived misbehavior. Advocates assert that exclusionary discipline measures contribute to the likelihood of various negative outcomes, including adversely impacting school climate, influencing dropout and school disengagement, and increasing youth contact with the juvenile justice system (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014).

The term "school-to-prison pipeline" (STPP) has become shorthand to encompass how the educational system fails too many students through policies that push them out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (National Education Association, 2018). While the term school-to-prison pipeline is relatively new, the connections between school discipline, students of color, and the criminal justice system are long-standing (Cloward, 1966). Wald and Losen (2003, p.3) describe the STPP as:

A journey through school that is increasingly punitive and isolating for its travelers—many of whom will be placed in restrictive special education programs, repeatedly suspended, held back in grade, and banished to alternative, "outplacements" before finally dropping or getting "pushed out" of school altogether.

In turn, policymakers and educators have called for a shift away from exclusionary discipline practices in favor of alternatives that allow students to remain in school. In 2011, the Supportive School Discipline Initiative was launched by the Obama Administration as a joint effort between the Department of Education and the Department of Justice and aimed to decrease the use of exclusionary discipline practices (Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017). One of the positive approaches encouraged by this initiative is restorative justice, which is often referred to as restorative practices in school settings.

It is important to emphasize that the STPP represents a nationwide pattern that disproportionately impacts Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students (Landon & Meiners, 2021; Strayhorn, 2021). For example, during the 2015-16 school year, Black students represented 15% of K-12 enrollment but 31% of law enforcement referrals and arrests, a 31% disparity (U. S. Department of Education, 2020). According to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, during the 2013–2014 school year approximately 2.6 million students were suspended at least once and another 110,000 were expelled from school (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Nearly 63% of the suspended students were Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or two or more races.

The STPP is also gendered; while much of the literature examining the impacts of the STPP focuses on Black boys, Black girls are also targeted (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020; Morris, 2016).

Restorative practices in school settings are increasing in popularity, and empirical research on the topic has grown in recent years (Joseph, Hnilica, and Hanson 2021; Song & Swearer, 2016; Zakszeki & Rutherford, 2021). Additionally, scholars and advocates have called for the use of restorative practices as one way to increase racial equity in schools (Kline, 2016; Mansfield et al, 2018; Song, et al, 2020) As a result, a comprehensive analysis of how restorative practices relate to suspensions, expulsions, and law enforcement referrals is warranted.

The current study used integrative review methods to identify and appraise empirical evidence on the relationship between restorative practices and exclusionary school discipline outcomes in U.S. public schools. Specifically, this review summarized findings from 11 studies of restorative justice interventions implemented in K-12 (kindergarten-12th grade) schools across the United States. Implications for restorative practice interventions in schools are discussed.

Literature Review

The School Discipline Process

Exclusionary discipline practices. Although exclusionary discipline is intended to promote positive behavior and safety (Skiba & Knesting, 2001), it is associated with poor student achievement outcomes (Civil Rights Project, 2000; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Rausch & Skiba, 2004). Exclusionary school discipline increases missed instruction time, and results in students falling farther behind once they have returned to school (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016). In

addition, Osher, Morrison, and Bailey (2003) reported that out-of-school suspensions frequently result in intensifying behavior issues among students, who then tend to be suspended more frequently, which creates a self-sustaining cycle. Consequently, exclusionary school discipline also decreases the likelihood of school completion (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2013; Suh & Suh, 2007). Balfanz et al. (2013) found that one suspension in ninth grade increased the likelihood of not completing school from 16% to 32% and that two suspensions increased the likelihood to 42%, while Suh and Suh (2007) found that suspension increased the likelihood of not completing school by 77.5%. Additionally, a meta-analysis by Noltemeyer et al. (2015) found not only an inverse relationship between suspensions and academic achievement, but also found a positive relationship between suspension and not completing school. Exclusionary school discipline has also been linked to substance abuse (Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, & Catalano, 2006; McCrystal, Percy, & Higgins, 2007) and increased involvement in the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011; Mowen & Brent, 2016; Rosenbaum, 2020; Skiba et al., 2014). A study by the Council of State Governments Justice Center revealed that students who committed a school offense were three times more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011). That same report found that suspended or expelled students were nearly three times as likely to have contact with the justice system within a year of their suspension or expulsion.

Despite evidence of negative outcomes, the use of exclusionary discipline has increased over time. In the late 1990s, districts across the country adopted zero-

tolerance school discipline policies, which stemmed from the “tough on crime” movement and expanded into school discipline (Casella, 2001; Heitzeg, 2009; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). With these policies came an increased reliance on exclusionary discipline, such as the use of expulsions and suspensions (Heitzeg, 2009, Losen & Gillespie, 2012, Wald & Losen, 2007).

Data collected by the U.S. Department of Education shows that student suspension and expulsion rates nearly doubled between 1974 and 2010 (Wald & Losen, 2003) from 1.7 million students to over 3 million (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). However, this increase does not reflect an increase in violent behaviors or major offenses. Students are most often suspended for infractions considered minor or moderate, such as disobedience or disrespect (Skiba et al., 2014). Additionally, law enforcement referrals and arrests in schools became more common as U.S. schools relied on school resource officers to maintain order and safety within the school environment (Fisher & Hennessey, 2016). In 1994 the Safe Schools Act supported school-police partnerships (Kupchik & Bracy, 2010; Monahan & Torres, 2010; Heizeg, 2009). In 2018, The American Civil Liberties Union reported that approximately half of all students within the United States attend a school with one or more full-time police officers stationed at their school (Losen & Whitaker, 2018). Police presence in schools is often linked to the STPP and criminalization of typical student behavior, which may be termed disruptive behavior or disorderly conduct (Pigott, Stearns, & Khey, 2018).

Restorative justice/restorative practices. The National Center for Restorative Approaches in Youth Settings defines restorative justice as “an innovative approach to offending and inappropriate behavior which puts repairing the harm done to relationships and people over and above the need for assigning blame and punishment” (Hopkins, 2015, p. 144). Restorative justice is gaining popularity as a possible solution to disproportionate school discipline (Gluckenberg, 2016) and can be implemented through a variety of methodologies. Often termed restorative practices, these include whole school measures, such as school-wide community events, conferencing, peace and talking circles, and re-entry processes. For definitions of restorative practices discussed in this paper, refer to Appendix A. Although the nature of restorative practices may be abstract in definition, it is generally understood that restorative practices in schools include a variety of practices and techniques that are grounded in the restorative principles of reconciliation, responsibility, respect, relationship building, and reparation (Colorado Coordinating Council on Restorative Justice, 2016).

Study Aims

The current study used integrative review methods to identify and appraise quantitative evidence of the relationship between restorative practices and exclusionary school discipline outcomes in U.S. public schools. This review summarized findings from 11 reports and articles reviewing restorative justice interventions from K-12 schools across the United States. We found no qualitative literature that reported discipline outcomes. As scholars, we value multiple ways of

knowing and believe that this value is consistent with restorative philosophy. Our intent was to be inclusive in the literature search so we prioritized study outcomes over methods.

Methods

Search Strategy

Nine bibliographic databases were searched: ERIC, PsycINFO, NCJRS, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Restorative Justice Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts, IBSS, Sociological Abstracts, and AASIA. The search was limited to English articles and studies published within a 15-year period between 2002-2018. The time period selected reflects when restorative practices began to emerge and to be evaluated in schools. To identify records of interest, three key terms were used in the search: “restorative justice,” “school,” and “discipline.” These key terms were searched in each database using Boolean operators: restorative AND practice* OR restorative AND approach* OR restorative AND justice OR restorative AND intervention* OR restorative AND mediation OR restorative AND dialogue OR restorative AND conferencing AND school* OR classroom* OR student* OR education OR discipline. Following searches of bibliographic databases, additional articles were obtained through reference lists, web searches, and personal correspondence.

Study Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they met the following eligibility criteria: (1) conducted in United States, (2) took place in K-12 schools, (3) reported outcome measures that included out-of-school suspension, expulsion, and/or referral

to law enforcement, and (4) published between 2002-2018. No restrictions on inclusion were applied on the basis of sample size, participant demographics, research design, duration of study, or specifics related to the restorative justice interventions examined. Study quality was not a criterion for inclusion and was not assessed as part of this review. Our goal is not to make a positivist statement about which methods create truth, and we have included studies with small sample sizes as a reflection of that intention.

Study Selection

The study selection process included two phases led by a team of five researchers, including three doctoral students, one restorative justice practitioner, and one faculty member. Database searches and other sources identified 5,734 and 30 studies, respectively, for a total of 5,764 studies. Of the studies identified, 2,524 were retained after screening for duplicates. Phase 1 of the study selection process involved preliminary screening of titles and abstracts to determine whether they met inclusion criteria. As shown in Figure 1, 2,486 records were screened out for failing to meet inclusion criteria. In cases where insufficient information was provided in the abstract, articles were retained and advanced to Phase 2.

In Phase 2, full-text articles were retrieved and further assessed for meeting the same inclusion criteria. To reduce bias, screening criteria were thoroughly defined in a spreadsheet, and the entire team used this spreadsheet together to screen a subsample of two articles. When discrepancies occurred, the team discussed them until they reached consensus, and the screening criteria were further refined in the

spreadsheet. Once screening criteria were finalized, the remaining articles were independently screened by a pair of researchers who met weekly to compare results and to resolve discrepancies, consulting the larger team of researchers if needed. An additional 27 records were screened out for failing to meet inclusion criteria during this phase, resulting in the retention of 11 articles and reports for analysis in the current study.

Figure 1 near here

Data Extraction Process

A data extraction spreadsheet was developed to capture study characteristics, participant demographics, restorative justice intervention characteristics, and school discipline outcomes. This spreadsheet was piloted with two articles, with data from each article being extracted by all five independent coders. Discrepancies were discussed, and the spreadsheet was refined. Once the data extraction spreadsheet was finalized, data was extracted from the remaining eligible articles and coded independently by a pair of two researchers who met weekly to reach consensus on any discrepant responses.

Data Items

Study characteristics. Study design, duration measured in years, and setting were recorded for each study. Study design was coded by type of analysis used, when available. Study setting was coded as type of school (elementary, middle, high, or other). Sample characteristics, including sample size, age, gender (e.g., male, female,

transgender), sexual identity, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (e.g., eligibility for free and reduced lunch) were also included for each study.

Restorative practice intervention characteristics. Intervention characteristics included the specific name of the restorative practice intervention used, description of the intervention, when provided, and training received. Examples of restorative justice interventions include peace circles, community building circles, and re-entry conferences (see Appendix A). Training in restorative practices was coded as who received training (i.e., teachers, staff, students, parents, and others) and method of training, if available.

Exclusionary discipline outcomes. The current review focused on out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and law enforcement referrals. Each outcome, how it was measured (e.g., self-report by student or parent, school records), and the magnitude of any changes were recorded for each study.

Synthesis of Results

The diversity of samples, interventions, and outcomes assessed in the included studies did not allow for a quantitative synthesis. Therefore, a narrative synthesis is provided. Study results were classified as positive or negative depending on whether or not the intervention was associated with positive impacts (decreases) on exclusionary discipline. Because so few studies reported statistical significance of the differences, and all study results were positive, studies were classified on their characteristics and study design.

Results

The initial literature search yielded 5,764 publications of possible interest. Of these, 38 were selected for additional review. Twenty-seven studies were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. The most common reason for exclusion was not reporting on the discipline outcomes of interest (i.e., out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and law enforcement referrals). A total of 11 studies met all inclusion criteria. The characteristics of these 11 studies are shown in Table 1. This review included multi-year evaluations; two out of three evaluation years from Armour (2013, 2014) and two out of four evaluation years from Baker (2009, 2010) were available. Two of the studies were peer-reviewed, and the other nine are grey literature. In total, these 11 studies examine seven restorative practice interventions.

Study Characteristics

Sampling and design. Ten of the 11 studies relied on secondary data from school- or district-level discipline records to assess the impact of restorative practices on exclusionary discipline outcomes. The International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP, 2014) did not report a study design. Anyon et al. (2016) used multilevel regression in their analysis of discipline outcomes, while Jain, Bassey, Brown, and Kalra (2014) used multilevel regression in addition to descriptive analysis that the other eight studies used. One study used a pretest-posttest design (McMorris, Beckman, Shea, Baumgartner, & Eggert, 2013).

The publishing year of the studies ranged from 2006-2018. Seven of these were released in the last six years (Alternatives, 2018; Anyon et al., 2016; Armour,

2013, 2014; IIRP, 2014; Jain et al., 2014; McMorris et al., 2013), which suggests that this area of study is becoming increasingly relevant.

All studies focused on restorative practices in the K-12th grade public school settings. The majority of studies included mixed samples of elementary, middle, and high schools, and the most common school setting was middle school. Four studies included an elementary school in their sample (Anyon et al., 2016; IIRP, 2014; Jain et al., 2014; Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006), ten included a middle school (Anyon et al., 2016; Armour, 2013, 2014; Baker, 2009, 2010; IIRP, 2014; Jain et al., 2014; McMorris et al., 2013; Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010; Stinchcomb et al., 2006), and seven included a high school (Alternatives, 2018; Anyon et al., 2016; Baker, 2009, 2019; IIRP, 2014; Jain et al., 2014; McMorris et al., 2013). While Armour (2013, 2014) and Sumner et al. (2010) only included middle schools in their sample and Alternatives (2018) only included a high school, none of the studies focused exclusively on elementary schools.

Sample characteristics. There was great variability in the sample size of the studies, which ranged from 83 students in one program (McMorris et al., 2013) to all 17,650 students in the district (Jain et al., 2014). Two studies did not report a sample size (IIRP, 2014; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). The mean number of participants was calculated for only nine studies in our sample; therefore, it is not representative of all the included studies. This mean of reported sample sizes is 3,302 with a standard deviation of 6,251.

Age, gender, and sexuality. Age of the students was reported in only one of the 11 studies (McMorris et al., 2013). This evaluation included students who ranged in age from 11 to 17 years old, with a mean age of 14.37 years and a standard deviation of 1.72 years.

Seven studies reported information on student gender (Anyon et al., 2016; Armour, 2013, 2014; Baker, 2009, 2010; Jain et al., 2014; McMorris et al., 2013). One study reported district-level data on gender (Anyon et al., 2016), five provided the gender of the sample (Armour, 2013, 2014; Baker, 2009, 2010; McMorris et al., 2013), and one provided information on one of the programs in their sample (Jain et al., 2014). These studies restricted their gender categories to female and male. Two studies had samples that were comprised of almost 60% female students (Baker, 2009, 2010), and two studies had samples composed of over 65% male students (Anyon et al., 2016; McMorris et al., 2013). The three remaining studies that provided information on gender had roughly an equal number of female and male students (Armour, 2013, 2014; Jain et al., 2014). The least reported demographic variable in this review was sexual orientation, with none of the 11 studies providing this information.

Race/ethnicity. Eight studies reported on race or ethnicity (Anyon et al., 2016; Armour, 2013, 2014; Baker, 2009, 2010; Jain et al., 2014; McMorris et al., 2013; Sumner et al., 2011). The majority of participants were students of color, primarily African American and Latino. The percentage of students identified as Black or African American ranged from 11% (Baker, 2010) to 63% (Sumner et al.,

2011), and the percentage of students identified as Hispanic or Latino ranged from 10% (McMorris et al., 2013) to 79% (Baker, 2010). While three studies had distinct categories for Asian and Pacific Islander students (Anyon et al., 2016; Armour, 2013, 2014), two studies reported Asian/Pacific Islander as a single category (Jain et al., 2014; Sumner et al., 2011). Among the studies that separated the groups into different categories, the percentage of students identified as Asian ranged from 1.5% (Anyon et al., 2016) to 4% (Armour, 2013), and the percentage of students identified as Pacific Islander ranged from 0.14% (Anyon et al., 2016) to 1.6% (Armour, 2013). Similarly, one study had a single category for American Indian students (McMorris et al., 2013), while three combined American Indian and Alaska Native students into one category (Anyon et al., 2016; Armour, 2013, 2014). As a whole, Indigenous students were least represented in the samples, with a range of 0.99% (Anyon et al., 2016) to 12% (McMorris et al., 2013). The percentage of multiracial students ranged from 2.9% (Anyon et al., 2016) to 15% (McMorris et al., 2013), while the percentage of students identified as White ranged from 7% (Baker, 2009; McMorris et al., 2013) to 43% (Armour, 2013).

Socioeconomic status. Four studies provided socioeconomic information for the students, which was operationalized by the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch (Anyon et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2014; McMorris et al., 2013; Sumner et al., 2010). This ranged from 78% (Jain et al., 2014) to 90% (McMorris et al., 2013). Additionally, McMorris et al. (2013) also provided socioeconomic

information for students' families, with 73% reporting a family income of 125% below the federal poverty level.

Table 1 near here

Restorative Practice Intervention Characteristics

Type of restorative practice intervention. Nine of the eleven studies identified the types of restorative practices that were implemented in the schools, while Baker (2010) and IIRP (2014) did not provide information on specific practices. As illustrated in Table 2, the most common practice used in schools were restorative conferences or peace circles, which were mentioned in eight of the nine studies reporting on restorative practices (Alternatives, 2018; Anyon et al., 2016; Armour, 2013, 2014; Baker, 2009; Jain et al., 2014; Stinchcomb et al., 2006; Sumner et al., 2010). Seven out of 11 studies used community building circles (Alternatives, 2018; Anyon et al., 2016; Armour, 2013, 2014; Jain et al., 2014; Stinchcomb et al., 2006; Sumner et al., 2010), which are not typically connected to a discipline intervention or conflict (Pranis & Boyes-Watson, 2015). Four studies identified the use of restorative conversations (Alternatives, 2018; Anyon et al., 2016; Baker, 2009; Jain et al., 2014), and two described the use of school-wide community events to support the implementation of restorative practices (Alternatives, 2018; Baker, 2009). Three studies implemented family group conferences (Baker, 2009; Jain et al., 2014; McMorris et al., 2013). This practice is structured similarly to restorative conferencing and a re-entry process (McMorris et al., 2013). Less common restorative

practice interventions were talking circles (Alternatives, 2018; Baker, 2009) and re-entry processes (Jain et al., 2014).

Table 2 near here

Restorative practices training. In addition to describing the restorative practice intervention, the majority of studies discussed restorative practices training for school staff and students. Four studies described training and leadership opportunities for students (Alternatives, 2018; Baker, 2009; Jain et al., 2014; Summer et al., 2010). For example, one study reported students taking part in student leadership around restorative practice implementation through an elective class (Summer et al., 2010). Six studies described utilizing staff trainings to support capacity to implement restorative practices (Alternatives, 2018; Anyon et al., 2016; Armour, 2013, 2014; Jain et al., 2014; Summer et al., 2010). In one study, administrators and staff associated with the discipline team received training on restorative practices, and an outside consultant was used to coordinate and coach restorative practices (Armour, 2013). During the second year of implementation, all sixth and seventh grade teachers also received training (Armour, 2014). Anyon et al., (2016) described district-wide voluntary staff trainings on restorative practices with optional coaching and support. These trainings included community-building circles, restorative conferencing, and restorative values and implementation strategy. Finally, six studies described having an on-site restorative practice coordinator or a designated team to support the implementation and facilitation of restorative practices in the school (Alternatives, 2018; Anyon et al., 2016; Armour, 2013, 2014; Jain et al., 2014;

Summer et al., 2010). For one study, each of the seven schools had a full-time, on-site coordinator (Baker, 2009).

Discipline Outcomes

Out-of-school suspensions. The 11 studies reported suspension data using several different indicators. The most common measure was the number of suspensions, which was reported in seven of the 11 studies (Anyon et al., 2016; Armour, 2013, 2014; Baker, 2010; IIRP, 2014; McMorris et al., 2013; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Three studies reported on the suspension rate per 100 students (Alternatives, 2018; Baker, 2009; Sumner et al., 2010). Less frequently, the number of students suspended (Anyon et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2014) and the number of days suspended (McMorris et al., 2013) were also reported.

Seven studies reported number of suspensions, several of which were multi-year evaluations of restorative practices implementation. In the first year of Armour's (2013) evaluation of the implementation of restorative practices at Ed White Middle School, the number of out-of-school suspensions decreased from 468 at baseline to 329 at the end of the first year of implementation. In the second year of that evaluation, the number of out-of-school suspensions decreased from 66 at baseline to 16 at year two for 6th graders, and from 110 at baseline to 30 for 7th graders (Armour, 2014). Similarly, Baker's 2010 report on restorative justice programs in Denver Public Schools found a decrease in suspension from an average of one or more per student in the first semester to an average of one for every six students in the second semester, an 89% reduction. The International Institute for Restorative Practices

(2014) provided data regarding number of suspensions for two schools in Baltimore, Maryland. Hampsted Hill, a pre-K-8 school, saw a decrease in suspensions from 71 in the 2008-2009 school year to 28 in the 2013-2014 school year, and suspensions at Glenmount School, a K-8 school, decreased from 76 in the 2012-2013 school year to 25 in the 2013-2014 school year (IIRP 2014). McMorris et al., (2013) conducted an evaluation of a pilot program titled the Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program (RCP), finding that the number of suspensions increased from 2.38 in the previous year to 2.75 during the RCP program, and decreased to 1.38 after.

Stinchcomb et al.'s (2006) article reported on number of suspensions in three schools in South St. Paul, Minnesota. All three of these schools saw decreases in out-of-school suspensions at the time of restorative practices implementation (from the 1998-1999 school year to the 2000-2001 school year): Lincoln Center Elementary decreased from 30 to 11, Kaposia Elementary from 11 to 4, and South St. Paul Junior High decreased from 110 to 55 (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Additionally, Anyon et al., (2016) found that students who received restorative interventions as consequences for discipline referrals during their fall semester were less likely to receive an out-of-school suspension in the second semester ($OR = .07, p < .001$).

Studies measuring the suspension rate per 100 students found that this rate decreased after implementation of a restorative intervention. Alternatives (2018) reported a 70% decrease in the suspension rate from 70.53 per 100 students at baseline to 21.08 three years later. Similarly, Sumner et al. (2010) reported an 87%

decrease in the suspension rate from 72.4 per 100 students prior to the intervention to 1.9 the following year.

Two other studies used measures other than suspension rate or number of suspensions as indicators. McMorris et al. (2013) reported the number of suspension days increased from 4.88 at baseline to 11.53 during the year of the RCP program and then decreased again the year after to 4.4. Additionally, Jain et al. (2014) reported the number of students suspended. This revealed what the authors termed “significant progress” (p. 45), showing that the overall number of out-of-school suspensions decreased from 6,150 to 4,758 during the three years of restorative practice implementation district-wide.

Expulsions. Four of 11 studies reported expulsion data (Baker, 2009, 2010; Stinchcomb et al., 2006; Sumner et al., 2010). Studies measured either the number of expulsions (Baker, 2010; Stinchcomb et al., 2006) or the expulsion rate per 100 students (Baker, 2009; Sumner et al., 2010). Three out of the four studies found positive trends between the implementation of restorative practices and decreases in expulsions. For one study, expulsions occurred so infrequently that there was only one expulsion across three schools during the three years that school records were examined (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Thus, it is difficult to say whether the implementation of restorative practices was a factor in decreasing the number of expulsions. Baker (2010) reported that across seven schools, the number of expulsions decreased from 34 to 17 from one school year to the next. In examining expulsion rates, Sumner et al. (2010) found that the expulsion rate in one middle

school decreased from 1.003 per 100 students to 0 per 100 students four years later. This is particularly noteworthy given that prior to implementation of restorative practices, the school had a higher expulsion rate than the district (0.331 per 100 students); however, at the end of the study period four years later, the school had a lower expulsion rate than the district (0.155 per 100 students).

Police referrals. Alternatives (2018) was the only study to include law enforcement referrals as an outcome measure. The study reported that the number of police notifications decreased from 21.3 per 100 students for one school year to 1.51 per 100 students the next school year, which represents a 93% decrease.

Table 3 near here

Discussion

This review examined the research on the relationship between school-based restorative practices and exclusionary discipline outcomes in the United States. This study adds to the literature by providing an inclusive overview of the studies available on this topic. Findings indicate that the implementation of restorative practices is related to a reduction in suspensions, expulsions, and police referrals. This study's results align with prior literature suggesting that restorative practices positively impact other aspects of school discipline, such as school safety (Gonzalez, 2012), development of conflict resolution skills in students (McCluskey et al, 2008), and recognizing the humanity and individuality of each student and teacher (Gregory et al, 2016). Therefore, the results of this study support the potential of restorative

practices as an effective intervention to reduce exclusionary discipline, including the racial disparities that are an essential element in the school-to-prison pipeline.

A number of studies discussed the importance of training students, as well as faculty, in the facilitation and implementation of restorative practices. For example, Jain et al. (2014) recommend expanding training and coaching to include younger students to increase capacity and pragmatic aspects of implementation and data tracking and to help navigate difficult conversations that students may be reluctant to have in front of teachers or other adults. In addition, research suggests that activities that offer students an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their school supports youth development of agency, belonging, and competence (Mitra, 2004). Restorative practices that formalize student and peer roles in reducing school discipline can provide this opportunity to students, support their developmental growth, and enhance implementation of restorative practices.

The studies in this review also suggest that policy support for restorative practices is key in supporting implementation. In the Oakland Unified School District, policy support enabled two restorative practice programs to be implemented district-wide (Jain et al., 2014). This set the framework for clear expectations, roles, and follow-up procedures. In Denver, discipline policy was reformed in 2008 to include restorative interventions and has since seen sustained reductions in exclusionary discipline (Anyon et al., 2016). Policymakers should consider policies and practices that encourage alternatives to exclusionary discipline, especially for low-level offenses.

Although findings are promising, there is a great deal of variability in the study characteristics, including the restorative practice used, implementation of the practice, methods, and measurement that makes it difficult to generalize findings. We only reported on literature published in the United States from 2002 to 2018. Additionally, each study used distinct operationalization in measurement of variables, which decreases the validity of the results. Variability in measures is reflective of the state of restorative practices as an intervention, which has not been standardized to include outcome measures. Future research could seek to develop standards for school discipline reporting.

In general, research exploring the relationship between restorative practices and exclusionary discipline outcomes is still emerging. However, the existing evidence suggests that restorative practices have positive effects on exclusionary discipline outcomes. As implementation of restorative practices expands in schools nationwide, more research is needed to examine the mechanisms of restorative practices and the potential to produce change.

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Appendix A: Definitions of Restorative Practices

Restorative conferencing A restorative conference is a structured meeting between offenders, victims and both parties' family and friends, in which they deal with the consequences of the crime or wrongdoing and decide how best to repair the harm (O'Connell, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 1999).

Restorative conversations are one-on-one conversations using restorative questioning to support a student's reflection on a specific incident of harm.

Community building circles build community between individuals. These circles are not in response to harm or a conflict.

Family group conferences A family group conference is focused on repairing harm, restoring good standing in the school, re-engagement in the school community, accountability, and connecting young person to services and/or resources (McMorris et al., 2013). This practice is structured similarly to restorative conferencing and a re-entry process (McMorris et al., 2013).

School-wide community events School-wide community events are not clearly defined in the literature. One example is cultural assemblies that celebrate the diversity of the building (Restorative Justice Partnership, 2018)

Talking circle A versatile restorative practice that can be used proactively, to develop relationships and build community or reactively, to respond to wrongdoing, conflicts and problems. Circles give people an opportunity to speak and listen to one another in an atmosphere of safety, decorum and equality (Pranis and Boyes-Watson, 2015).

Re-entry processes Used to successfully re-integrate students after they have had an extended absence, “the goal is to welcome youth to the school community in a manner that provides wraparound support and promotes student accountability and achievement.” (Jain et al. 2014, p. 8)