

THE EFFECTS OF USING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOLS

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of
California State University, Stanislaus

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts in Education

By
Lori Gattuso
April 2016

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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by
Lori Gattuso

Dr. John Borba
Professor of School Administration

Date

Dr. Susan Neufeld
Professor of Education

Date

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving husband, Anthony Gattuso, who has stood by me and supported me through every step of my journey. There are no words that can truly express my gratitude for all that you have done to encourage me to finish.

I would also like to thank my family for providing the encouragement I needed to complete my thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. John Borba for his guidance and support while I completed my thesis. He provided “tough love” which I very much needed. I would also like to thank Dr. Susan Neufeld for reviewing my thesis and being an integral part of my thesis committee. My sincerest thanks to you both.

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ABSTRACT

Improving student behavior is one of the most significant challenges schools face today. In an effort to improve student behavior and reduce suspension rates, many schools are adopting less punitive discipline programs based on the Restorative Justice principles that were established in the criminal justice system. The purpose of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of Restorative Justice in decreasing the number of suspensions in an alternative education high school setting. The study examined the total number of full and partial day, off-campus suspensions between students who attending an alternative education high school during the 2011–2012 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was not in place and the students who attended an alternative high school during the 2014–2015 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was in place. The hypotheses stated there would not be a significant difference in the reduction of full or partial day, off-campus suspensions. Through statistical analysis, this researcher discovered that the results of *t*-tests for independent samples indicated that there was a significant difference in the number of full days ($p < .01$) and partial days ($p < .05$) between students who attended when the Restorative Justice program was not in place and students who attended when the program was in place. There were significantly less full and partial day suspensions when the program was in place.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Improving student behavior is one of the most significant challenges schools face today. In an effort to improve student behavior and reduce suspension rates, many schools are adopting less punitive discipline programs based on the Restorative Justice principles that were established in the criminal justice system. Proponents of Restorative Justice principles have advocated for their adoption in schools for many years (Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010).

A Restorative Justice model is an alternative to the zero tolerance discipline policies that schools across the country adopted in the 1990s (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Zero tolerance policies afforded schools the ability to suspend and expel students for disciplinary issues such as possession and use of illicit drugs and weapons, physical altercations, and participation in gang-related activities. In 1989, Donald Batista, the superintendent of the Yonkers Public Schools, took zero tolerance to the extreme by expelling students for disruptive behaviors that were not necessarily violent or dangerous in nature (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Zero tolerance policies are considered punitive and ignore the true meaning of discipline which is to teach or train, not punish. Studies clearly show zero tolerance policies have a negative effect on students which may create disciplinary issues rather than improve behavior. These negative effects include suspension and expulsion of students which in turn, deprive

them of educational opportunities. Consequently, as a result of severe penalties for infractions, schools may report lower academic achievement and a decrease in a student's drive to stay in school and graduate on time (Gonzalez, 2012).

The Restorative Justice model is an approach to discipline that engages all parties in practices that bring together students who are impacted by an issue or behavior. This model moves away from punitive aspects to restorative approaches that are designed to build new or preserve existing relationships that may have been compromised. Restorative Justice allows members of the school community to resolve conflict, promote academic achievement and address school safety (Gonzalez, 2012).

Nurturing positive relationships between staff and students in order to create a caring school culture is an important part of a Restorative Justice program. Incidents that arise in the classroom may jeopardize these relationships. When this occurs, a process to mend the relationship is implemented. This process focuses on the impact of the harm done instead of focusing on the incident. Once the focus is shifted to the harm done, the next step is for those involved to come to a consensus on how to repair the harm. Repairing the harm through conferencing is a key component of the Restorative Justice process and assists in mending the relationship (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005).

Typically in the school environment, incidents requiring a form of conferencing may be between a teacher and a student or two students. The conference may include only the two parties involved or may include a third party

mediator, such as a school administrator or counselor that facilitates the process. Students have been trained in the process to serve as facilitators as well. Peer mediation can be used for disputes between students or acts against the school, like tagging or destroying school property. Conferencing or mediation may be conducted in lieu of suspension (Claassen & Claassen, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Disciplinary issues at schools have become increasingly more violent and severe (Skiba, 2000), often leading to suspension and expulsion. There are many factors that may lead to these violent and severe behaviors, such as, lack of parent involvement, volatile home life, gang affiliation, and low socioeconomic status (Robers, Kemp, Truman, & Snyder, 2013). Many students are suspended and expelled from school for less severe disciplinary infractions. These violations may range from refusing to complete work in class to using inappropriate language in the classroom (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

Over the years, schools in California have experienced an increase in disciplinary infractions leading to expulsion or suspension. According to the California Department of Education (CDE, 2016) Dataquest report for the 2011–2012 academic year, the number of students suspended by California schools was 366,629 (5.70% of all students) and the number of students expelled was 9,553 (less than 1.00% of all students). In the 2014–2015 academic year, the number of students suspended by California schools was reduced to 243,603 (3.80% of all students) and the number of students expelled was reduced to 5,692 (less than 1.00% of students).

In an effort to reduce suspensions and expulsions, California Assembly Bill 1729 was written. The bill, which took effect on January 1 of 2013, amended sections 48900 and 48900.5 of the California Education Code regarding incidents that may lead up to suspension and expulsion of students. Assembly Bill 1729 requires schools in California to decrease suspensions, including in-school suspensions, and expulsions. In addition, schools are required to find other means of correcting discipline incidents. Assembly Bill 1729 refers to Restorative Justice as an alternative approach to reducing suspensions and expulsions.

Research Question

Do Restorative Justice programs improve student behavior in alternative education schools?

Hypotheses

H₁: There is no significant difference in the total number of full day, off-campus suspensions between students who attended an alternative education high school during the 2011–2012 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was not in place and the students who attended an alternative education high school during the 2014–2015 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was in place.

H₂: There is no significant difference in the total number of partial day, off-campus suspensions between students who attended an alternative education high school during the 2011–2012 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was not in place and the students who attended an alternative education high school

during the 2014–2015 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was in place.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of Restorative Justice in improving student behavior in an alternative education high school setting. This study may reveal that utilizing Restorative Justice principles, such as building and restoring relationships in the school environment, reduces off-campus suspensions at the Central Valley alternative high school that was selected for this study. In addition, the results of the study will provide useful information to policy makers and educators on the benefits of utilizing Restorative Justice programs in an alternative school setting.

Limitations

This study will be limited to ninth through twelfth-grade students who completed the entire 2011–2012 academic year and did not participate in the Restorative Justice program at an alternative high school located in the Central Valley of California and ninth through twelfth-grade students who completed the entire 2014–2015 academic year and did participated in the Restorative Justice program at the same alternative high school.

Delimitations

Ethnicity, gender and the socioeconomic status of the students will not be taken into consideration.

Operational Definitions

Conferencing or mediation. A meeting between individuals in order to resolve a conflict.

Restorative justice. A set of principles and practices used by schools to respond to student misconduct with the intent to restore relationships and repair any harm that has been done.

Suspension. A mandatory leave from a school site assigned to a student as a form of punishment that can last from a partial day to several days off campus.

Zero tolerance. A policy that involves taking punitive actions for offenses or disciplinary infractions that may include the possession or use of drugs or weapons, fighting and gang-related activity.

Summary

The increase of severe disciplinary problems in schools makes it clear that alternative ways must be identified to improve student behavior. In Chapter II, this researcher will present a review of the literature related to the topic of this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This study will determine the effectiveness of a Restorative Justice approach to discipline regarding improvement of student behavior in an alternative educational environment. Currently, little research has been done to determine if Restorative Justice approaches to discipline help reduce suspension and improve behavior of students in an alternative education school. The findings of this study may show that over time, a Restorative Justice program in an alternative education school decreases suspensions and improves student behavior. Chapter II will review literature based on restorative practices in schools.

History and Development of Restorative Justice in Schools

Restorative Justice programs in schools have been gaining momentum over the past several years. Even though the concept of Restorative Justice dates back to 2060 B.C., the expression “Restorative Justice” was widely used in the late 1990s with increased popularity beginning in 2006 (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007). Restorative Justice addresses discipline issues in a way that promotes healthy relationships and supports positive conflict resolution. This process for addressing discipline is unlike the punitive approaches used to correct student behavior in the past (Claassen & Claassen, 2008).

Prior to Restorative Justice, schools tried various methods to address discipline issues. Zero tolerance was one of the methods used by schools across the nation (Skiba, 2000). Zero tolerance was implemented as a way for schools to battle serious disciplinary issues, such as violent acts, and possession of drugs and weapons. Often, students were automatically suspended and recommended for expulsion for these types of offenses. Over time, zero tolerance policies led to suspension and expulsion of students for reasons that extended beyond drugs, violence and weapons to minor offenses like unauthorized use of electronic devices, disrespectful acts, or defiance (Skiba, 2000). Zero tolerance has been viewed as a punitive approach to discipline that deprives students of their education. In addition, research indicated zero tolerance failed in making safer school environments. The negative effect of zero tolerance increased the likelihood of students becoming involved with the juvenile justice system (Gonzalez, 2012). Currently, the focus for many schools has shifted from zero tolerance policies to approaches that have been based on the Restorative Justice principles that were established in the criminal justice system (Claassen & Claassen, 2008).

Restorative Justice was originated in the criminal justice system as a way to address punishment of crimes using alternative methods (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007). Historically, the crime was the focus. With Restorative Justice, the focus is on the individual or group harmed and the harmer with the goal of decreasing the chances of reoccurrence of the crime committed by the harmer. According to Braithwaite (2004), Restorative Justice was a process where those hurt by the crime

communicate how the crime personally affected them and how the harm can be healed or repaired. Restorative Justice recognized that crime hurts and justice heals.

There are several components to a successful Restorative Justice program. Two of those components are the student-teacher relationship and mediation (or alternatively identified as conferencing). The student-teacher and student-student relationship components should include a set of principles and practices that center on respect, taking responsibility for one's actions and strengthening relationships (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007). The conferencing component should include a meaningful meeting between the ones involved. Professional development for staff and students on the proper steps is a vital element to the success of the conferencing process and a Restorative Justice program (Claassen & Claassen, 2008).

School districts, such as Los Angeles Unified, Vallejo City Unified and Napa Valley Unified, have implemented Restorative Justice programs. Although there are several effective programs that support positive behavior in students, programs based on Restorative Justice principles are not all alike. Restorative Justice programs commonly focus on building positive relationships, and offer a mediation component, but these elements may be implemented in different ways. For example, some schools use conferencing circles as a mediation technique, while others use more traditional forms of mediation. Common mediation styles may consist of peer-to-peer mediation, staff and student mediation, or mediation with a neutral third party (Claassen & Claassen, 2008).

Studies

Nelson, Young, Young, and Cox (2009) conducted a study to determine if praise notes would decrease the number of office discipline referrals that led to suspension. The school was in its third year of a program called School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) which featured many of the same components of a Restorative Justice program. The school incorporated praise notes to their SWPBS program. Data were collected on office referrals for the 2005–2006 and the 2006–2007 academic school years. A correlation analysis was used to test the hypothesis of the study.

Seventy teachers (48 females and 22 males) and 1,809 sixth- and seventh-grade students participated in the study. Fifty-one percent of the students were boys and 49% were girls. Caucasian students made up 86% of the participants and 11% were Hispanic. Approximately 39% of the participating students qualified for the National Free or Reduced Price School Meals program (Nelson et al., 2009).

Over the course of the 2-year study, 14,527 praise notes to students were written by teachers and 2,143 office discipline referrals were recorded. There was a significant negative correlation between the total number of praise notes distributed to students and the number of office referrals ($r = -.551, p < .05$) as determined by the analysis of the data. This negative correlation indicated that as praise notes increased, office referral rates decreased. Also, as praise notes increased among students with one or more office discipline referrals, their referrals decreased ($r = -.553, p < .05$) which indicated a negative correlation (Nelson et al., 2009).

The results of this study suggested that writing praise notes to students and acknowledging their positive behavior decreased office discipline referrals that led to suspension. However, writing praise notes was just one component of the SWPBS. Praise notes, in combination with other SWPBS strategies may help in promoting a positive school environment (Nelson et al., 2009).

A quantitative study on SWPBS systems conducted by Caldarella, Shatzer, Gray, Young, and Young (2011) examined the effects of the program on the behavior of middle school students. One of the two middle schools (treatment group) used in the study implemented SWPBS over a 4-year period, while the other school did not (control group). The demographics between the treatment and control schools were very similar. Both schools had approximately 52% male students and 48% female students. In addition, both schools had approximately 89% Caucasian students and 30% participated in the National Free or Reduced Price School Meals program.

The authors collected disciplinary data on 10,000 students at both middle schools over a 4-year period to determine if disciplinary issues would decrease through the implementation of SWPBS. Using a *t*-test of independent samples, the results indicated a statistically significant difference in student misbehavior between the treatment group and the control group ($p < .001$). The behavior of the treatment group was significantly better than the behavior of the control group. Grade point averages (GPA) of the students were also collected and analyzed during the study. The author concluded that SWPBS was an effective program in reducing disciplinary issues, but there were no statistically significant differences in GPA between the two

groups. The author concluded that SWPBS was focused on student behavior and little direct attention was placed on academic learning (Caldarella et al., 2011).

Stinchcomb, Bazemore, and Riestenberg (2006) conducted a study involving two Minnesota elementary schools and a junior high school that implemented a variety of Restorative Justice practices. The schools were also encouraged to incorporate the practices into the curriculum. The study focused on changes in the office discipline referrals as well as suspension and expulsion rates of students. Data were collected from the three schools and analyzed. The researchers did a simple descriptive analysis of the rates over time (compared by school years).

Comparing the pre-implementation of restorative practices in 1999–2000 to the first academic year of implementation in 2000–2001, one elementary school showed a 66% decrease in in-school suspensions from 126 to 42 and a 63% decrease in home suspensions from 30 to 11. The school also showed an 80% decrease in behavior referrals from 773 to 153 with no changes in expulsions. The second elementary school in the study showed a 30% increase in in-school suspensions (25 to 36), while home suspensions and expulsions showed no change. The junior high school in the study showed a 50% decrease in home suspensions (110 to 55). The junior high school did not have an in-school suspension component. Overall, the use of Restorative Justice practices at two of the three schools produced a reduction in suspensions (Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

Hanhan (2013) examined the efficacy of a Restorative Justice model in reducing peer bullying and violence among students. The data were collected

through a survey given to 145 students. A descriptive analysis addressed 31 restorative practices involving bullying and violence. When asked if they would recommend restorative practices in order to restore relations and arrive at a constructive solution, 23% of the girls and 20% of the boys stated they would recommend Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice allows students the ability to express themselves. Consequently, 30% of the girls and 20% of the boys indicated it was the most important aspect of Restorative Justice. Forty percent of the boys felt Restorative Justice was a more professional approach; only 8% of the girls chose this survey response. Eight percent of the girls felt honesty was dominant in Restorative Justice programs and provided the opportunity to correct mistakes while none of the boys agreed with this statement.

Also, the effective use of conferencing or mediation, an integral part of the Restorative Justice model, was analyzed in the study. The results indicated 93% of the girls and 87% of the boys felt that conferencing was effective. The researcher concluded that the use of Restorative Justice was an effective solution in reducing bullying and violence in schools (Hanhan, 2013).

Garrigle (2005) conducted a qualitative study on the impact of Restorative Justice practices in a vocational school. The researcher selected six groups to respond to interview questions regarding Restorative Justice practices. The six groups used in the research included six staff members, three parents and three sets of students from Grades 6 through 12. The size of the student sets were not provided in the study.

A descriptive analysis of the data indicated 96% of all respondents perceived the Restorative Justice practices used at the school to be successful. The data also indicated that 98% of the students who were harmed believed the students who did the harming listened to them during the mediation conferences. Ninety-five percent of students who harmed others believed the students who were harmed listened to them during the mediation conferences and 74% of the students who harmed others did not re-offend. The researcher concluded that the Restorative Justice practices were successfully implemented. However, these practices were new and refinement would be needed to continue on a successful path (Garrigle, 2005).

Varley (2008) conducted a qualitative study to find if Restorative Justice practices in schools helped reduce suspension rates. Seven students from a British Columbia secondary school participated in interviews that focused on their experiences involving school suspensions and the effectiveness of Restorative Justice practices. Four male students and three female students were interviewed for this study. Five of the seven students were suspended multiple times. In order to obtain valid responses, building trust with the students who participated in the interviews was an important component.

Data were analyzed using a coding system designed by the researcher. From the analysis, the researcher concluded that the students who participated in the interview process felt the outcome of suspension adversely impacted their education and caused them to be disconnected from the school community. In addition, the researcher concluded school discipline programs that relied on punitive measures,

such as suspensions, actually exacerbated problem behavior and psychosocial issues among students (Varley, 2008).

Recent Developments in California and New York

With Restorative Justice programs gaining popularity within the past several years, this researcher has only found studies with positive outcomes in school settings. However, recent newspaper articles indicate that Restorative Justice may reduce suspensions, but may not always help improve student behavior. According to an article by Nittle (2014), the reporter found that staff at Beach High School in Long Beach, California, believes the implementation of a Restorative Justice policy has led to an increase in student behavioral issues with few consequences. Staff indicated that administrators do not apply the rules consistently and evenly as they relate to student misbehavior. Matt Saldana, the principal of Beach High School, stated that he does suspend students that are repeat offenders and may use alternative consequences for certain students when appropriate. Although the school has experienced a reduction in suspensions, staff believes the Restorative Justice policy has not improved student behavior (Nittle, 2014).

Watanabe and Blume (2015) stated teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) felt the Restorative Justice program used in their schools had eliminated consequences for student misbehavior. Several teachers observed students who were unruly and did not receive appropriate consequences, like suspension, for their actions. The teachers blamed the district for not providing professional development necessary to effectively implement the program. A student

resource officer at a school in the LAUSD stated schools in the district were more frequently calling police to intervene when a student was disruptive and defiant.

These types of incidents used to be handled through suspension by school administrators (Watanabe & Blume, 2015). Sperry (2015) stated the new progressive discipline rules of Restorative Justice at a New York public school had led to students avoiding suspension for incidents such as stealing, being under the influence of drugs and even attacking students or staff. New York City's Department of Education believed its new Restorative Justice program would decrease suspensions, specifically lowering suspension rates of black students who were suspended at a higher rate than white students. Teachers, on the other hand, were seeing an increase in classroom disruptions and violence. For these types of issues, students were asked to participate in conferencing or mediation instead of suspension. This led to fewer suspensions, but not necessarily fewer disciplinary incidents. Teachers were the ones dealing with the potential disruptive results of Restorative Justice programs (Sperry, 2015).

Summary

The history of Restorative Justice programs and their components were described in Chapter II. The literature in this chapter suggests that schools implementing Restorative Justice programs reduce suspension rates and build positive relationships. However, state wide implementation in California and New York has generated adverse consequences as perceived by teachers and other staff. In Chapter III, this researcher will describe the methodology of this study which includes the population sample, instrumentation and data collection, and the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER III
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

This study will determine the effectiveness of a Restorative Justice approach to discipline regarding improvement of student behavior in an alternative educational environment. Currently, little research has been done to determine if Restorative Justice approaches to discipline help reduce suspension and improve behavior of students in an alternative education high school. The findings of this study may show that over time, a Restorative Justice program in an alternative education high school may decrease suspensions and improve student behavior. Chapter III will describe the methodology regarding the treatment, the sample population, instrumentation, data collection and statistical analysis.

Treatment

There are several programs that mirror Restorative Justice used in the criminal system which more recently have been used in schools. Two of the programs, *Urban Essentials 101* developed by Julius Lockett and *Discipline that Restores* developed by Ron and Roxanne Claassen contain the fundamental principles of Restorative Justice used in schools. Restorative Justice requires a philosophical shift from punitive discipline to repairing the harm done, involvement of all stakeholders (harmer and ones harmed) in a mediation process to resolve conflicts, and transformation of relationships in the school community. Many of these programs focus on reducing

suspensions and expulsions while others focus on creating a safer school environment (Gonzalez, 2012). STRIVE (Safe, Trust, Respect, Inspiration, Vision and Encouragement), a Restorative Justice program, uses the fundamental restorative elements of both *Urban Essentials 101* and *Discipline that Restores* as a basis for the program that was tailored for the school that was selected for this study. STRIVE utilizes restorative components from both programs to resolve conflicts, focus on school safety, promote academic excellence and reduce suspensions. The incorporation of building positive relationships with students and the mediation process were the driving forces behind the implementation of STRIVE.

An additional component recommended by the *Urban Essentials 101* model was the In-School Suspension Classroom (ISSC). The ISSC was a place for students to cool down or discuss issues they experience with other students, staff or their families. Teachers may send a student to the ISSC to avoid or prevent a disturbance in their classroom. Students may not return to the teacher's classroom before mediation occurs (Lockett, 2006).

Sample Population

This study involved two groups of students from a Central Valley alternative education high school. The control group did not participate in a Restorative Justice program during the 2011–2012 academic year. This group was enrolled the entire academic year ($n = 37$). The total population of the school in the 2011–2012 academic year was 132 with 84.87% socioeconomically disadvantaged, 84.09% Hispanic, and 26.52% English learners (CDE, 2012).

The treatment group participated in a Restorative Justice program in the 2014-15 school year. This group was enrolled at the same high school the entire academic year ($n = 45$). The school's population was 125 with 94.40% socioeconomically disadvantaged, 84.00% Hispanic and 27.20% English learners (CDE, 2015).

The students enrolled at the Central Valley alternative education high school were referred to the school by their school district of attendance. Students could be referred to the alternative education high school for behavioral issues, truancy, credit deficiency or expulsion from their school of attendance. The school used in this study has an Independent Study program. Students from this program were not used in this study.

Control Group

The students in the control group ($n = 37$) did not participated in a Restorative Justice program at the alternative education high school during the 2011–2012 academic year.

Treatment Group

The students in the treatment group ($n = 45$) participated in the Restorative Justice program at the alternative education high school during the 2014–2015 academic year.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The data were collected using the Aeries computerized database program. The database contains personal, academic, intervention and disciplinary information on each student. Data collected for the control group was limited to 37 students that

attended the entire 2011–2012 academic year. The data collected for the treatment group was limited to 45 students that attended the entire 2014–2015 academic year. The number of full and partial day off-campus suspensions for each student was collected for the statistical analysis.

Statistical Data Analysis

The Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 was used to analyze the off-campus suspension data. A *t*-test for independent samples was used for the statistical analysis. The alpha level was set at .05.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter III was to describe the treatment, data collection process and type of statistical analysis used to test the null hypotheses stated in this study. In addition, this researcher provided information on the sample population and the instrument used to collect data. Chapter IV will present the results of the statistical analyses of the data.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This study will determine the effectiveness of a Restorative Justice approach to discipline regarding improvement of student behavior in an alternative educational environment. The data utilized in this study were collected in order to test the hypotheses. This chapter presents the analyses of the quantitative data for off-campus suspensions during the 2011–2012 and the 2014–2015 academic years.

Description of the Sample

The sample consisted of two groups of students from a Central Valley alternative education high school. The control group for the hypotheses consisted of 37 students who were enrolled the entire 2011–2012 academic year. The treatment group consisted of 45 students who were enrolled the entire 2014–2015 academic year. The students were not the same students. The independent variable for the hypotheses was the implementation of a Restorative Justice program and the dependent variable was the number of off-campus suspensions accumulated by students.

Findings Related to Hypothesis 1

H₁: There is no significant difference in the total number of full day, off-campus suspensions between students who attended an alternative education high school during the 2011–2012 academic year when a Restorative Justice was not in

place and students who attended an alternative education high school during the 2014–2015 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was in place.

A *t*-test for independent samples was used to determine if differences existed between the treatment and control groups. Significance was set at $p < .05$ for this analysis. Results indicated that there was a significant difference between the two groups regarding the number of full day, off-campus suspensions students received (see Table 1).

Table 1

Full Day, Off-Campus Suspensions

Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Treatment	45	.27	.580	-4.480	.000*
Control	37	4.05	5.642		

* $p < .01$

There was a significant difference in the mean number of full day, off-campus suspensions between students who attended an alternative education high school during the 2011–2012 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was not in place and the 2014–2015 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was in place. The results suggested that a Restorative Justice program in alternative education high schools significantly reduced the number of full day, off-campus suspensions.

Findings Related to Hypothesis 2

H₂: There is no significant difference in the total number of partial day, off-campus suspensions between students who attended an alternative education high

school during the 2011–2012 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was not in place and the students who attended an alternative education high school during the 2014–2015 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was in place.

A *t*-test for independent samples was used to determine if differences existed between the treatment and control groups. Significance was set at $p < .05$ for this analysis. Results indicated that there was a significant difference in the number of partial day, off-campus suspensions students received (see Table 2).

Table 2

Partial Day, Off-Campus Suspensions

Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Treatment	45	.91	1.379	-2.420	.019*
Control	37	2.11	2.736		

* $p < .05$

There was a significant difference in the mean number of partial day, off-campus suspensions between students who attended an alternative education high school during the 2011–2012 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was not in place and the 2014–2015 academic year when a Restorative Justice program was in place. The results suggested that a Restorative Justice program in alternative education high schools significantly reduced the number of partial day, off-campus suspensions.

Summary

In Chapter IV, the statistical analyses and the results of two independent *t*-tests failed to accept the null hypotheses of this study. Results of the independent *t*-tests suggest that Restorative Justice programs may reduce the number of off-campus suspensions at an alternative education high school. Chapter V will present the summary, conclusions, implications and recommendations for this study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of a Restorative Justice approach to discipline regarding improvement of student behavior in an alternative educational environment. Restorative Justice programs have been implemented in schools in order to help reduce the rate of suspensions or expulsions of students by using alternative methods such as building and repairing relationships. In this chapter, this researcher will present the summary, conclusions, implications and recommendations for further study.

Summary

Improving student behavior in order to reduce suspensions is difficult without addressing the cause of the behaviors leading up to infractions. Many of the students that attend an alternative education school were expelled from their district school for inappropriate behavior, drugs, truancy and poor academic achievement. Alternative education schools, along with traditional schools, have sought to reduce suspensions and expulsions. One of the programs that schools have been implementing to address the increase in violence and drugs is Restorative Justice.

First used in the criminal justice system, Restorative Justice has recently gained momentum due to Assembly Bill 1729 that requires schools to use alternative methods to suspensions and expulsions such as a Restorative Justice program. This

study sought to analyze the effectiveness of a Restorative Justice program at an alternative high school that focused on reducing off-campus suspensions of students. The program's main objective is to build strong relationships with students that will in turn help reduce behavioral issues that may lead to suspension. The school that was selected for this study implemented the STRIVE program in the 2012–2013 academic year.

This study compared off-campus suspension rates of students prior to the implementation of the Restorative Justice program, STRIVE, in the 2011–2012 academic year and off-campus suspensions in the 2014–2015 academic year when STRIVE was in place. A *t*-test for independent samples was used to analyze the number of full day, off-campus suspensions and another was used to analyze the number of partial day, off-campus suspensions.

Conclusions

The statistical analyses indicated that there was a significant difference in the number of full and partial day off-campus suspensions after implementing a Restorative Justice program at an alternative education high school. This suggests that students were significantly less likely to be suspended and may demonstrate improved behavior when participating in a Restorative Justice program.

Implications

Restorative Justice programs have been successful in reducing the number of behavioral issues that may lead to suspension or expulsion of students. Stinchcomb et al. (2006) conducted a similar study on three schools in Minnesota. The researchers

did a simple descriptive analysis of the rates over time compared over two school years. Overall, the use of Restorative Justice practices at two of the three schools used in their study produced a reduction in suspensions (Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

The present study suggests a significant reduction in off-campus suspensions of students when a Restorative Justice program is in place. The quantitative data used in this study does not reflect the perceptions and opinions of staff and students regarding the effectiveness of the Restorative Justice program nor does it reflect the use of an in-school suspension room as an alternative to off-campus suspensions.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was conducted on a small sample group at one alternative education school in the district that was selected for this study. Further study should include data on all three of the alternative education schools within the district used in this study plus a qualitative study based on perceptions of staff and students to determine if the Restorative Justice program is successful in reducing behavioral incidents leading to suspension. Continuation of the research may include the following:

1. Conduct a qualitative study in several schools or districts on the perceptions of teachers who participated in a Restorative Justice program.
2. Conduct a qualitative study in several schools or districts on the perceptions of students who participated in a Restorative Justice program.
3. Conduct a quantitative study in several schools or districts on the number of in-school suspensions when a Restorative Justice program is not in

place and in-school suspensions when a Restorative Justice program is in place.

4. Conduct a quantitative study in several schools or districts on the number of office referrals when a Restorative Justice program is not in place and the number of office referrals when a Restorative Justice program is in place.

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