Disrupting the Status Quo:

Case Study of Paladin Career and Technical High School's Use of Restorative Practices

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Jennifer K. Blevins

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Dedication: In Memory of Miss Alice Lynch

My first day in January, I joined the Paladin staff in circle. I sat down and looked to my left; there was Alice Lynch, preparing to lead the circle. Our paths first crossed about fifteen years ago when she was the Executive Director of Black Indian Hispanic and Asian Women in Action and I was Community and Systems Change Director for another nonprofit. As we looked into each other's eyes, a moment of pause led to a sense of familiarity. She smiled big and said, "Oh, I know you!" I said, "I know you too!" We laughed and were instantly reconnected.

Preparing for my dissertation research at Paladin, I wasn't aware Miss Alice had been their restorative practices trainer, coach and mentor for many years. I was aware, however, of her leadership in bringing restorative practices to schools and communities, and the powerful impact she had. It was a welcomed connection. We talked briefly, so I learned she worked at Paladin on Mondays. The following Monday I was in a meeting with three staff to talk about the research process. Miss Alice poked her head in to wish us all a great week as she was leaving. I remember the sparkle in her eyes and how her spirit radiated beauty.

On Thursday of that week, Miss Alice left this world unexpectedly. In the short time we reconnected, the impact she had on me was significant. I dedicate this dissertation in memory of Miss Alice Lynch in honor of all the people she touched with her big heart and vision for a more loving and just world.

Abstract

This dissertation research is a qualitative case study to describe and explore the experiences of staff and students using restorative practices at Paladin Career and Technical High School (Paladin), a 9-12 grade charter school in Blaine, Minnesota. Restorative practices were introduced in schools as an alternative means of handling problems as they arise; however have expanded as a whole school approach to build community, develop empathy, improve school climate and prevent problems before they occur.

The aim of this study was to describe, 1) The process and turning points in integrating restorative practices at Paladin, 2) The students and staff understandings of restorative practices and the impact, 3) The implications for future school-based restorative practices at Paladin, and 4) What this case study analysis suggests about school-based restorative practices, policies and impact in general. All phases of the research were carried out through a critical race lens. Data at Paladin was collected through the review of archival documents and school policies, participant observations and interviews with seven staff and seven students.

The research suggests Paladin disrupts the status quo for students and staff by making the system fit the individual not the individual fit the system, restoring self, strengthening interpersonal relationships, being a safer school, and focusing on solutions not suspensions. Key findings and potential implications are discussed for Paladin, restorative practitioners, other school stakeholders and for public policy.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

When restorative justice was conceptualized in the mid-1970's, its advocates who were critical of the existing state of the adult and juvenile court systems saw it as having the potential to change the status quo. Over-crowded prisons, lack of offender rehabilitation, high rates of re-offending and racial disparities in sentencing all were raised as existing evidence calling for systems change. As an alternative to the overarching framework of retributive, punishment-focused justice, restorative justice provided a more humanistic response to harm that brought the promise of accountability to victims, reparations of harms done, and the restoration of relationships between offenders and their communities. Many of the principles central to restorative justice are rooted in long and deep cultural practices for resolving conflict in indigenous cultures pre-dating the development of governmental judicial institutions throughout the world (Daly, 2001; McCold, 2001; Umbreit & Armour, 2010).

Believing in the promise of restorative justice, change agents have spread its application beyond the criminal justice system into communities and organizations, including schools. Restorative justice, more broadly called restorative practices in schools, is the focus of this research.

This introductory chapter provides the context for my dissertation research. It touches on the background of restorative justice and the newer field of school-based restorative practices, which serve as the rationale for this research. The history of both applications are more fully developed in chapters one and two, drawing on the literature on restorative justice and the emerging field of school-based restorative practices. A brief overview is provided of the research purpose, questions, and theoretical lens through which the research is approached.

The research is a single case study of Paladin Career and Technical High School's use of restorative practices. General information about Paladin is offered in this chapter, followed by a summary of the research approach, namely the methodology and data analysis undertaken. This chapter concludes with a statement on researcher reflexivity, research collaboration and significance. All are more fully developed in chapter four.

Restorative Justice and Unmet Expectations

Changing the status quo with the alternative of restorative justice could mean reversing the negative trends in the existing judicial system. Yet, paralleling the restorative justice movement from 1978 to 2015, the United States saw an alarming growth in numbers of people incarcerated and budgets of court/criminal systems at all levels (The Sentencing Project, 2017). African American males under the age of 40, as well as Hispanics and American Indians are disproportionately impacted by this trend. Nationally, African American youth represent seventeen percent of the juvenile population, yet make up 31% of all arrests and 40% of all imprisoned in a recent analysis (Rovner, 2014). State and Federal policy mandates were the primary cause - requiring prison sentences for many non-violent offenses, especially for drug-related offenses under President Nixon's "war on drugs," and lengthening the time of prison sentences (Travis and Western, 2014). Research on restorative justice during this period showed high satisfaction among participants and positive outcomes on an individual level. From a macro-systems change perspective, however, restorative justice was not living up to expectations. Restorative justice did not replace or reduce the embedded retributive justice system, did not make the system fairer for people of color and did not reduce the number of adults or youth adjudicated.

Schools and the Call for Restorative Practices

Just as federal and state legislation ignited the prison boom disproportionately for African Americans, Hispanics and American Indians, school policies meant to crack down on unwanted behaviors have resulted in disproportionate exclusion from education for the same population. Zero tolerance policies along with reliance on school suspension and expulsion became the disciplinary status quo. Consequently, students receiving exclusionary discipline experience lower academic achievement and higher drop-out rates, which increase their likelihood of incarceration (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008; Bazemore & Schiff, 2012).

The link between the prison population, education and racial disparities has been termed the *school to prison pipeline;* the new target for change. With a deepened understanding of the school to prison pipeline and disproportionate minority contact within schools and courts, advocates and educators have been diligent about bringing restorative justice (more commonly referred to as restorative practices in schools) to schools as an alternative means of handling problems as they arise (Swayze & Buskovick, 2012).

Rather than using restorative practices solely as a stand-alone intervention after harm has been done, prevention of future harm is a growing focus in many schools (Wachtel, Costello & Wachtel, 2009). Schools utilizing restorative practices are showing promising results, even though empirical research is at the infancy stage (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Numerous studies are currently underway across the nation on school-based restorative practices. Researchers seek to scientifically measure the impact of restorative practices on a number of indicators; racial disparities in student outcomes, school discipline, student and teacher relations, academic achievement, community

building, and overall school climate (Gregory, Clawson, Davis & Gerewitz, 2015; Hurley, Guckenburg, Persson, Fronius & Petrosino, 2015). Surveys have been used to measure such outcomes as change in attitude about restorative practices, change in understanding of its application, and participant satisfaction. The literature review chapter on restorative practices in schools will provide more explanation of the current state of implementation and evaluation research.

Beyond quantitative outcome analysis, a gap exists in qualitative inquiry to understand the daily experience of incorporating restorative practices in schools. Enthusiasm for school-based restorative practices is high and spreading faster than the research. Unanswered questions are plentiful. More research is needed that explores the impact of school-based restorative practices from the perspective of administrators, staff and most of all students.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

To contribute to the base of knowledge, a single case study has been conducted to describe the experiences of staff and students using restorative practices in a school environment. The single case, Paladin Career and Technical High School (Paladin), is a grade nine through 12 charter school in Blaine, Minnesota. The study has focused on exploring and describing,

- The process and turning points in integrating restorative practices in the school,
- The student and staff understandings of restorative practices and the impact,
- The implications for future school-based restorative practice at Paladin and the impact, and
- What this case study analysis suggests about school-based restorative practices, policies and impact in general.

Questions to Guide Inquiry

The questions for inquiry were open ended, so the experiences of students and staff integrating restorative practices at Paladin could unfold naturally and unabridged (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative researcher John Creswell (2007) recommends crafting one overarching question to guide inquiry, followed by a set of five to seven sub-questions. He suggests it is helpful to design research questions with two interests in mind; the first being issue oriented to more closely explore the specific phenomenon of focus in the central research question, and the second to procedurally allow the narrative to unfold fitting with the chosen qualitative research approach. For this case study, the central question was - how have students and staff experienced restorative practices at Paladin? Paladin has applied restorative practices for over five years, so this question is posed with an understanding from the literature that integrating restorative practices in a school is a systems change process that takes time (Hurley et al., 2015). Consequently, asking staff and students about their experiences with restorative practices undoubtedly surfaced explanation about the change process. Sub-questions were prepared in alignment with Creswell's thoughts on issue orientation and procedural flow to allow for the greatest understanding to come from the research.

Sub-questions:

- How do students and staff describe restorative practices at Paladin?
- What have been the turning points and obstacles in the process of integrating restorative practices at Paladin?
- How do staff and students describe Paladin's use of restorative practices along the gamut from strictly discipline focused to a whole school way of being?
- What is different as a result and for whom?

- How do race, power and privilege intersect with restorative practice experiences at Paladin?
- How do students and staff describe the ideal use of restorative practices in the future?
- What are the underlying themes and contexts that account for how restorative practices are experienced at Paladin?

Through the Lens of Critical Race Theory

Social scientist Michael Patton (2002) describes *orientational* qualitative inquiry as beginning with a theoretical or ideological perspective held by the researcher, which informs the field work, data collection and analysis (p.129). This use of theory differs from how it is applied in a deductive research process. Deductive research and analysis begins with theory in the form of hypotheses that assert certain relationships among variables (Creswell, 2009). The researcher then seeks to prove or disprove by measuring significance of the relationship between variables, in other words test the theory.

Claiming an orientation to an ideological perspective, on the other hand, can be understood as a lens through which the researcher approaches all aspects of the research. In this case, critical race theory has been applied as an ideological perspective.

Critical race theory was developed along the same timeline as the conceptualization of restorative justice. Its trajectory began on the heels of the civil rights movement when activists, lawyers and educators realized the depths of entrenched prejudices backed by power governing society. Scholar and law professor Richard Delgado founded critical race theory as a movement in the mid-1980's (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2001). The basic premise is that racism is undeniably central to American society, which counters any claims of neutrality or colorblindness in policies, practices or societal structures.

Critical race theorists use an analytical lens in examining the intersections of power, white privilege, and institutional/structural racism in all micro and macro-level inquiry. Further, critical race theory upholds a commitment to social action with a broad goal of eliminating racial oppression, and ending all forms of societal injustice, recognizing the intersectionality of all forms of oppression.

Using a critical race lens in generating knowledge through research inquiry links research findings to action that challenges the status quo. Therefore, the research questions for this case study not only uncovered the lived experiences of those at Paladin, but also explicitly explored the importance of power in relationships, the intersectionality between the personal and political, and the link to a systems change agenda. Research questions thus guided a fluid process moving from inquiry, evaluation, critique, and comprehensive understanding, to recommending changes believed to bring greater equity.

Paladin Career and Technical High School

To demonstrate the breadth of experience and information the school brought to a single case study, general background information about Paladin has been retrieved from the school's website (Paladin Career and Technical High School, 2017) and the 2016-17 annual report, which is also found on their website. This information provides a snapshot of Paladin rather than an in-depth description of the school and its functioning.

Paladin was founded as a charter high school in the fall of 2003 with the intent of providing an experiential learning environment and nontraditional curriculum. The school's original name was Liberty High Charter School. Its mission was, "to educate

students and to empower them and support them with skills in academics, technology, work habits and economic literacy to become full participants in America's system of free enterprise" (p.6). Between 2003 and 2014, the school changed its name twice, significantly revised its mission twice and underwent an expansion of the physical space from 7,500 to 15,000 square feet.

Paladin's current mission is to, "Empower students in their pursuit of social, emotional, and academic growth, creating a foundation for a successful future after high school" (p. 5). Since 2014, Paladin's vision has focused on building a trauma-informed, caring school community that fosters knowledge and resilience to overcome adversities. According to Paladin's annual report, a decision was made in 2015 to reduce the number of students enrolled in order to better meet the multiple needs of students (p. 60). Student enrollment decreased from 411 in 2014-15 to 372 in 2015-16, and again decreased to 316 in 2016-17.

Paladin's teaching model has included experiential and project-based learning since its inception. From a strengths perspective, each student is supported with an individualized learning plan based on what they need to graduate. Paladin's literature specifically acknowledges the need for a comprehensive support system for students who have had difficulties succeeding in education. Restorative practice is described in the Paladin annual report (2017) as a way of addressing conflicts instead of traditional disciplinary action, building relationships and discussing various topics, specifically with circles and peer mediation (p.46).

Since 2012, Paladin has used a number of survey tools and descriptive statistics to internally understand their population, measure academic progress and set future goals. They use the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACEs) assessment administered by the Centers for Disease Control and have supplemented it with their

own questions related to school success. They call the assessment ACEs Plus (p. 12). Results are made public in the Paladin annual report, along with student descriptive statistics, family and student feedback results, and academic outcome measures. Last, a detailed report on the degree to which Paladin met academic goals for the year is provided, followed by goals set for the next year.

Paladin's students are majority African American (47%), 35% Caucasian, 11% Multi-Ethnic, 4% Hispanic, and 3% American Indian. One-third is homeless, and 77% free/reduced lunch qualified (Paladin Career and Technical High School, 2017). Compared to Minnesota schools in general, Paladin students are twice as likely to qualify for free lunch and 40 times more likely to be homeless. According to the previous Dean of Students, 1/3 of Paladin students are also court involved (A. Goffe, personal communication, November 14, 2017).

With attention on restorative practices to potentially interrupt the school to prison pipeline and structural racism, Paladin's students and staff are well qualified to share how they experience school-based restorative practices and the impact. The size of Paladin with an unduplicated enrollment of 316 students and one site located in the Minneapolis metropolitan area made a case study feasible in the given timeframe.

As a single case study, Paladin offered a wealth of information and experiences to better understand the use of restorative practices in a complex school environment. The administration and staff were also supportive and open to uninhibited inquiry as partners in knowledge building. With all that is known from previous research and practice, Paladin provided a unique case for inquiring about what has been experienced and what we don't know that matters.

Research Approach

Two important considerations in choosing which data to collect included triangulation of data, and the link between the study's aims and forms of evidence collected (Yin, 1984; Patton, 2002). Triangulation through gathering multiple forms of data as evidence allowed for the corroboration of findings, which in turn served as one safeguard of the study's validity. For this case study, three categories of data were collected and analyzed according to the evidence gained from a systems perspective: 1) staff and student interviews, 2) participant observations, and 3) policy, archival and procedural documents.

Open-ended interviews using the study research questions as a guide were conducted with seven Paladin staff and seven students. Sampling was purposeful, meaning the selection of interviewees provided relevant perspectives on Paladin's use of restorative practices. Interviewees were selected through criterion sampling; the main criteria that they had significant experience with restorative practices at Paladin, and were willing to participate. Interviews were up to three and a half hours in length and individuals were interviewed up to three times. All first interviews were in-person and were audio-recorded with permission. Information shared in repeat interviews was documented through note taking rather than using an audio recorder. A professional transcription service was identified and hired to transcribe all interview recordings after a non-disclosure agreement was signed with the company to protect data privacy.

Researcher as participant observer took many forms. A total of 72 hours were spent in observation at Paladin between January 2 and June 8, 2018. Over five months, I participated in 25 student morning circles, two staff circles, and one circle led by a Paladin student at a restorative schools conference. Thirteen hours were spent on seven occasions observing the Paladin Learning Lab, which is the open learning environment

where students work on projects and teachers' desks are situated. Four classrooms were observed, each for 40 minutes. Thirty-five hours were spent participating in Paladin staff meetings and engaging in individual conversations with staff.

It should be noted that participant observations don't represent all, or even most of my time at Paladin. Robert Bogdan and Sari Biklen (1982), experts of qualitative research in education, emphasize that good fieldwork happens when the researcher is accepted in the school environment as nonthreatening, is trusted to not use what they learn to cause harm, and establishes less formal relationships, while still being an outsider to the politics of the system. This takes time. It is a process of getting to know one another that can't be rushed or constructed unnaturally.

To build trust and be an accepted participant in the Paladin environment, I was at Paladin one day a week in January, two to three days a week February through May, concluding with two days at the end of the Paladin school year the first week of June. I was present in the school environment for ninety-six hours primarily working in an office within the administrative corridor. I also spent 38 hours volunteering as a grant writer, and co-facilitator of a girls group that met one day a week for seven weeks. In all, my experience at Paladin exceeded 200 hours.

As recommended by researchers Lincoln and Guba (1985), three sets of field notes were kept, each with a different focus and purpose. First, field notes were kept to document observations as they occurred or immediately after if note taking would interfere with the observation experience. Second, a personal log was kept to address reflexivity and record my personal reactions to the observations. Last, a log was kept to document decisions made about methodologies utilized in the research process.

Policy, archival and procedural data was collected to describe the historical context as well as the implementation of restorative practices at Paladin. Paladin

provided access to annual reports, student handbooks, employee handbooks, three reports to Innovative Quality Schools (their approved charter school authorizer), and their bullying prohibition policy. Paladin also provided access to thirteen procedural documents specific to the implementation of restorative practices, such as manuals, problem solving protocol and restorative agreement templates. Last, procedural materials, such as ground rules, agendas, and guides used in student circles, classrooms, and staff circles were reviewed.

Joe Kincheloe, renowned scholar on critical studies and education research, and his colleague Peter McLaren, advised that data analysis is the most important stage of critical theory-informed qualitative research (2002). It involves interpreting data to understand the power dynamics within a social context, building a bridge between the historical context and present, and linking the existing context to that of the others. Embracing this frame, data analysis followed a hermeneutic circle as described by Patton (2002) and similarly charted as a spiral by Creswell (2007). Data was analyzed and coded through the use of NVivo (12 Plus) software. Multiple forms of data were cross-referenced to identify any patterns, or any inconsistencies, important in knowing the Paladin experience with restorative practices.

The Reflexive Researcher

Researchers Malagon, Huber and Velez (2009) assert that the orientation of critical race theory as an ideological framework with inductive or abductive analysis has the potential to elevate otherwise silent voices. They stress two key points as necessary in the process: both researcher reflexivity and collaboration with participants throughout the process must be used to stay true to the principles of critical race theory. Qualitative research scholars propose that through reflexivity, which is an intentional effort by the researcher to be aware of their biases, experiences and world view brought to the

research process, they are equipped to account for this interaction, limit the influence of biases, and strengthen research findings (Gilgun, 2006). A reflexive researcher is also aware of their presence and what they bring to the research relationship, including the influence of past experiences. When it seems appropriate or useful, throughout this dissertation I will share information about myself in the spirit of reflexivity.

Putting the researcher in relation to the research is worthy of attention. Conducting a single case study on restorative practices, especially in collaboration, requires the researcher to be knowledgeable about restorative practices (Hurley et al., 2015) and to be skilled in collaborative engagement (Patton, 2002). Wisdom gained through practice experience is seen as a valuable contribution to knowledge building (Hartman, 1994; Imre, 1994; Reid, 1994).

Without past experience, it would be unwise for a Ph.D. candidate to embark on a collaborative case study for dissertation research. As the researcher however, I bring thirty years of practice wisdom that gives me a comfort level with this process. My tenure includes substantial community organizing and participatory action research with communities most negatively impacted by societal injustices. I have engaged youth and adults in multi-cultural community work, explicitly addressing structural racism. Additionally, I have received training in restorative practices, and my experience includes implementing and evaluating youth-focused restorative practices in Minnesota and Nebraska. I have taught undergraduate and graduate students in the use of circles, as well as used the circle process as a method of teaching in college classrooms.

With the totality of my experience, I come to the research with biases and a set of values that cannot be denied. Even so, this study provided an opportunity to further explore as well as challenge my assumptions, the lens through which I interpret experiences and preconceived notions.

The study also took me to an environment, while similar to where I've been, still quite different. My experience does not include being a teacher or staff in a high school. My work with youth has been in a community setting with different demands and intensity of a school environment. To take this further, the case study provided new opportunity to gain an understanding as an outsider with an openness to experience the school environment as it is.

In Collaboration

Adding a social work values perspective, acting *with* rather than *for* participants in any context is central to my way of being in relationship, so engaging in a collaborative research process was necessary. Qualitative inquirers have come to understand the interactions between the researcher and those in the research environment as co-creators of knowledge through the back and forth exchanges and sharing that happens.

Two meetings were held with the Paladin Director and Dean of Students to explore each party's interests and form a collaborative partnership agreement. Catherine Jordon, expert on community engaged scholarship at the University of Minnesota, and Susan Gust, who is a community development consultant, provide a process for negotiating partnerships. They recommend consideration of twelve guiding principles (2006). The groundwork they suggest for partnership development includes consideration of self-interests, shared power, undoing racism, mutual benefits and how to handle conflicts when they arise, among others. Topics for research include but are not limited to division of responsibilities, human subject protections, ownership of data, and dissemination of findings. Using Gust and Jordon's framework as a guide, a collaborative research agreement was made (see appendix A).

Rationale and Significance

As the flurry of new and unfinished research on restorative practices in schools continues to show promise, the number of schools incorporating restorative practices is exponentially increasing. Experts acknowledge that most schools implementing restorative practices are not engaged in research to generate new knowledge or contribute to sustainable development (IIRP, 2009; Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Specifically based on what we know about structural racism, the school to prison pipeline and disproportionate minority contact with the court system, this research is relevant to further understanding of how restorative practices in schools may disrupt the status quo, and what systems changes may lead to sustainable change.

Contributing to the building of knowledge from a systems perspective, this study aims to describe holistically the real-life experience of integrating restorative practices in a school, addressing the gap in previous research which has mostly been limited to individual intervention measures. Understanding the experiences of students and staff as voiced by them is a valuable contribution to building knowledge about school-based restorative practices. With growing attention on restorative practices to interrupt the school to prison pipeline and structural racism, Paladin's students are well qualified to describe how restorative practices impact their realities.

This research is also timely, since the field of school-based restorative practices is fairly young with many unanswered questions. A case study of Paladin serves to uncover what it is that we don't know that matters, especially what matters to youth who are at risk of experiencing the school to prison trajectory. The knowledge gained in turn can be used to directly benefit Paladin school, the staff and the youth who attend school there. Implications to disrupt the status quo extend to the broader field of school-based restorative practices and related public policies for sustainable change.

Definitions of Key Concepts

Throughout this dissertation, key concepts and terms are referenced. Definitions are provided in context, yet a few that are used regularly are worthy of introduction.

Circle

The circle process is rooted in the practices of American Indian and indigenous communities around the world (Pranis, 2005). Participants are gathered and seated in a circle formation, while a talking piece (an item of significance to be held by the person whose turn it is to speak) is passed around the circle. All agree to a set of ground rules, so respect, trust and safety are maintained in the circle. Only the person holding the talking piece speaks while others listen deeply. Circles may serve many purposes, such as community building, peacemaking, consensus decision making, and repairing harm.

Restorative Justice

The concept of restorative justice is also rooted in traditional conflict resolution of indigenous cultures, yet does so within the context of a colonized judicial system that does not replicate indigenous ways (Daly, 2001; McCold, 2001; Umbreit & Armour, 2010). One common definition doesn't exist; however this definition provided by British criminologist Tony Marshall (1999) has been broadly accepted and cited internationally,

> "Restorative justice is a process whereby all parties with a stake in a particular offense collectively resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future," (p.5).

Restorative Practices

Restorative justice is considered a subset of restorative practices (Wachtel. 2009). Whereas restorative justice was constructed as a response to incidents of wrongdoing and harm, restorative practices encompass preventative measures and less formal processes, including the spheres of communication and community building.

School-based Restorative Practices

Restorative practices in schools can be understood along a continuum from less formal preventive measures, such as empathy development and community building, to formal responses once a behavior incident has happened and harm has been caused, such as conferencing, mediation and re-entry circles after a suspension. A Whole School approach is to implement the full continuum. The more formal response to behavior incidents in schools is commonly referred to as restorative discipline.

School to Prison Pipeline

The disproportionate use of suspensions and expulsions as discipline for African Americans, American Indians and Hispanics has resulted in poorer academic outcomes and greater probability of becoming involved in the criminal court system (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008; Bazemore & Schiff, 2010). This trajectory has been named the school to prison pipeline.

Chapter 2 Juvenile Justice, Social Work and Restorative Justice with Juveniles

In the early 1970's, a growing number of critics of the punishment-focused juveniles courts brought attention to a failing system as evidenced by a lack of rehabilitation, high rates of recidivism and racial disparities in how courts responded to youth.[1] A study of juvenile court judges found that racial disparities were prevalent when comparing the sentences given to minority offenders to those of white offenders (Feld, 1999).

With this growing tension, advocates including social workers called for a more humanistic restorative approach to crime and delinquent behavior (Sarri, 2000; Stinchcomb & Fox, 1999; van Wormer, 2002; Weitekamp, 1999; Zehr, 1990). The term *restorative justice* has since been used to reference such approaches. Restorative justice alternatives to traditional punishment-focused criminal corrections sentencing are used in work places, communities, schools, and aligned with the criminal court processes.

To position my research within an historical context as well as explain contemporary significance, this chapter begins with background on juvenile justice, the emergence and implementation of restorative justice interventions, and summary of related research. While the case study of Paladin's use of restorative practices is school-based, its roots in restorative justice and intersectionality with juvenile justice and the school to prison pipeline call for an understanding of the related literature. My analysis includes a critical review of gaps in research and intersections with a racial justice agenda by applying critical race theory as a lens to inform future research.

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[1] The National Institute of Justice (2014) defines recidivism as a relapse to criminal behavior after receiving a sentence or intervention for a previously committed criminal act. Retrieved from https://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism/pages/welcome.aspx.

Background of Juvenile Justice and Relationship to Social Work

The relationship between social work and juvenile justice within the Unites States criminal system goes back to the child saving movement at the end of the 19th century. Social reformers argued that impoverished, neglected and delinquent children needed to be rescued by institutions that could protect their well-being and prepare them to be productive, responsible adults (Gumz, 2004; Platt, 2009). The concept of juvenile justice was built upon a foundational belief in rehabilitation. Hence, in 1899 the first juvenile court and probation services charged with overseeing juveniles being rehabilitated, separate from adult institutionalization, was created in Cook County, Chicago. The primary staff was social workers. Juvenile courts separate from adult courts have since been developed in every state.

By the late 1960's and early 70's, however, concerns about increases in crime and high rates of recidivism fueled a major shift in criminal system policy and its functioning (Stinchcomb & Fox, 1999). Strongly influencing this shift was a report released by sociologist Robert Martinson in 1974 (Lipsey, Howell, Kelly, Chapman & Carver, 2010; Gumz 2004), which called into question the effectiveness of rehabilitative treatment programs. After a critical analysis of over 200 studies on rehabilitative approaches for both court-involved juveniles and adults, Martinson is most known for his conclusion that *nothing works* when it comes to linking rehabilitative services for offenders and the reduction of recidivism. *Nothing works* became the political dogma for the next phase of reform.

Significant demographic shifts before World War II through the 1960's were also part of the forces for change. The *baby boom* After World War II and extending to 1964 created a larger population count, which meant a larger population aging from childhood to adolescence together. The aging of this population paralleled an increase in youth

crime rates, which resulted in a political agenda to get tough on crime (Feld, 1999). Second, while starting much earlier, the effects of the abolishment of slavery continued to inform race relations with an explicit political agenda through this era. Jim Crow laws that segregated African Americans from whites primarily in the south were ending. The migration of African Americans from the rural south to northern and western urban areas heightened an awareness of racial disparities exacerbated by poverty, particularly as the civil rights movement gained momentum. Race politics became inextricably linked to criminal system politics and policy, with the Supreme Court touting the need for formal procedures to ensure the rights of minorities (Feld, 1999).

Two overarching views were the frame for systems changes. First, delinquency and crime are behavior choices that require punishment and retribution; and second, it is the responsibility of the judicial system to protect society from criminals through suitable social controls (Bazemore & Walgrave, 1999). *Retributive justice*[2] became the new conceptual framework for criminal system policies and practices, including sentencing. Unfortunately this framework continues to prevail today. As the focus on rehabilitation waned and the punishment and control of offenders became more dominant, social workers played a diminishing role in both adult and juvenile justice systems (Gumz, 2004).

It should be mentioned that the separation of juveniles from the adult court system did not come without its challenges. The trend towards punishment further complicated juvenile courts which previously focused on rehabilitation and services. Unlike adults, juveniles were considered wards of the court without the ability to act on their own behalf. The concept of *parens patriae* resulting from a court case in England

[2] Retributive justice as a conceptual framework means when a crime occurs, it's the judicial system's role to take control, and adequately punish the offender (Zehr, 1990).

was borrowed by United States courts in ascertaining responsibility over youth, going back to the 1899 establishment of juvenile courts (Dunham, 1958). *Parens patriae* essentially means courts can act in the place of parents[3] who are determined to be unwilling or unable to protect their children. Juvenile court judges were functioning with sole authority over the fate of juveniles under their jurisdiction. Consequently, with a growing focus on punishment, juveniles at times were receiving even harsher sentences than they would have if they were adults.

Two Supreme Court decisions, Kent v. United States in 1966 and Gault in 1967, significantly impacted the functioning of juvenile courts by requiring due process under the 14th amendment for juveniles and upholding their constitutional rights (Juvenile Justice Bulletin, 1999; Bazemore & Walgrave, 1999). Morris Kent, a 16-year old with a criminal history since age 14, was charged with multiple counts of robbery and rape. While his attorney was arguing for consideration of severe mental illness, the judge waived Kent to adult criminal court without thorough investigation. He was sentenced to 30 to 90 years in prison. Gerald Gault, a 15 year-old boy, was taken from his home and charged with making a prank telephone call. At the hearing, without an investigation or determination of guilt, the judge sentenced Gault to detainment until he reached age 21. If he had been an adult, the maximum sentence would have been a $50 fine or two months in jail.

In both juvenile cases, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the constitutional rights of due process had been violated. Prior to these cases, the Court interpreted *parens patriae* to mean they could forego due process if justified by the benefits. However both rulings determined the unconstrained flexibility granted judges had not resulted in greater care for juveniles. This shift in court interpretation meant Juveniles would now be

[3] Also known as *loco parentis,* in place of parents.

treated as individuals entitled to fair protection under the law, rather than wards of the state with lesser due process. The prevailing focus of courts shifted during this time to *procedural justice*, essentially requiring those charged to respond to the criminal court system with representation by legal counsel (Feld, 1999). In turn, the objective of the judicial process shifted from determining and responding to the real needs of court-involved youth to proving guilt for crime committed and imparting the consequential punishment.

This created another set of problems despite the policy changes to protect juvenile rights under Supreme Court order. According to research conducted by Barry Feld (1988), one of the Nation's leading scholars on juvenile justice, less than half of court-involved juveniles received legal counsel as protected under the United States constitution and state laws. He offers as a partial explanation that courts applied adult standards of voluntarily waiving their rights to counsel to juvenile cases; however juveniles' capacity for such decision making puts them at risk of giving up their rights without understanding the consequences. Additionally, Feld found from research conducted in Minnesota that the youngest offenders were least likely to have representation as were those with charges for lesser crimes. Furthermore, the focus on procedural justice brought with it mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines in a majority of states based on the offense committed, while at the same time preserving the judge's discretionary powers in sentencing.

A finding of Feld's (1999) research was that racial disparities existed in juvenile court sentencing practices under the conditions of individualized judge discretion backed up by formal procedure. He concluded, "Formal equality results in practical procedural inequality," (p. 22). Regardless of attempts to have equality through formal procedure, the effect of human, political and social biases could not be removed from the process.

African American youth, mostly males who lived in poverty stricken, inner cities, became labeled as the perpetrators of youth violence, and thus were charged more often for crimes and received the harshest penalties (Feld, 1999).

The Development of Restorative Justice

In the early 1970's, a growing number of critics of the punishment-focused judicial system brought attention to over-crowded prisons, lack of rehabilitation and continued high rates of recidivism, along with racial disparities in sentencing. Out of this tension, a constituency of judicial reform advocates searched for alternatives to the current system's handling of criminal cases. Kitchener, Ontario is known as the starting place of victim offender reconciliation[4] in 1974, when a probation officer brought two teenagers face to face with their victims after acts of vandalism, which resulted in a co-created restitution agreement (Peachey, 1989). Following this successful experiment, the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) was created in 1975 with the support of the Mennonite Central Committee. In 1978 following the Kitchener VORP model, the first VORP in the U.S. was implemented in Elkhart, Indiana (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). The development of restorative justice took shape across Europe and North America, yet still only peripherally (Umbreit, Voss, & Coates, 2006).

The development of restorative justice is often referred to as a social movement, which has had steady growth nationally and globally as justice system research has expanded knowledge about what is not working and for whom it is not working. Evaluators of U.S. juvenile court judge practices in the mid-1980's found that racial disparities were evident when comparing the sentences given to minority offenders to

[4] Whether called victim offender reconciliation, victim offender mediation, victim offender dialogue, victim offender conferencing, or victim youth conferencing, all refer to the process of those harmed and those causing harm meeting face to face with the intent to repair harm.

those of white offenders (Feld, 1999). Additionally, an estimated 85% of juveniles prosecuted as adults were minorities, and were treated more harshly than white youths (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). With this growing tension, advocates, including social workers, called for a more humanistic restorative approach to crime and delinquent behavior (Sarri, 2000; Stinchcomb & Fox, 1999; van Wormer, 2002; Weitekamp, 1999; Zehr, 1990). Whether restorative justice advocates have addressed racial disparities through the application of restorative approaches is another matter that will be discussed later in this report. Specifically related to juvenile court systems in the U.S., the degree to which penalties had become harsher for youth and similar to adult sentencing had reached a crisis point, underscoring the need for a paradigm shift to restorative justice in policy and practice (Bazemore & Walgrave, 1999).

Definition and Conceptual Framework of Restorative Justice

The term *restorative justice* was first used by psychologist Albert Eglash in 1975 to describe the work he was doing with criminal offenders (Bazemore, 1999). Over the years, experts on restorative justice have not reached agreement on a common definition or even whether it is a movement, general life philosophy, theory, model or specific ideology; in fact what they do agree on is their lack of agreement about its meaning (Walker, 2013; McCold, 2001; Johnstone, 2004). British criminologist Tony Marshall (1999) offered this definition of restorative justice, which was also shared in chapter one of this dissertation,

> "Restorative justice is a process whereby all parties with a stake in a particular offense collectively resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future," (p. 5).

I choose to utilize this definition, since it is the most concise yet encompassing of the restorative justice construct.

Howard Zehr (2015), known across the globe for his early work in the conceptual development of restorative justice, has offered five widely accepted guiding principles that align with this definition: 1) restorative justice is a response to harm focusing on the needs of those harmed, of those who caused harm and of their communities, 2) harm creates obligations that must be addressed, 3) an inclusive process is used to find solutions to repair the harm, 4) impacted stakeholders are engaged in the process including those harmed, those who caused harm and community members, and 5) the goal is to repair harm and reconcile relationships to the degree possible (p. 43). Accountability is an important aspect of restorative justice, requiring offenders to make restitution to victims and their communities as a course for repairing harm (Coates, Umbreit, & Voss, 2000).

While restorative justice is fairly young as a movement,[5] what experts do agree on is that many of the principles central to restorative justice are rooted in long and deep cultural practices for resolving conflict in indigenous cultures pre-dating the development of governmental judicial institutions throughout the world (Daly, 2001; McCold, 2001; Umbreit & Armour, 2010). Kathleen Daly (2001), Professor of Criminal Justice who directed major research on restorative justice in Australia, wisely clarifies that restorative justice as it has developed is not the re-establishment of indigenous ways, but rather has drawn on some historical traditions within the context of contemporary judicial systems in such a manner that allows for the potential of cultural appropriateness.

It is important to be clear that restorative justice has been developed in relation to and building upon a structural judicial system with roots in power differentials of race, class, gender and economy to maintain social control. Chris Cunneen (2004), Professor

[5] For lack of a better term, "movement" is used in this report to reference the collective of restorative justice approaches; however I do so in recognition of contested views among restorative justice scholars about whether it is a social movement.

of Criminology at the University of Sydney Law School, goes further in saying the often romanticized claim that restorative justice is an indigenous practice disregards the impact historic colonial policies have had in oppressing, even exterminating aboriginal peoples, as well as lacks an understanding of the complexities of indigenous conflict resolution practices. Cunneen firmly states, “The Australian example suggests that the entrenchment of unequal treatment and racism in the criminal justice system may be exacerbated by restorative justice programs” (p.349).

Over the past 40 years, restorative justice reforms have taken many shapes related to juvenile courts and delinquency. Thirty-seven states within the U.S., including Minnesota, now include some form of restorative justice in their legislated statutes for court administration (Sliva & Lampert, 2016). Restorative justice practices are rapidly growing in schools, as well as being offered in community settings for both prevention and intervention in cases of harm caused by youth. Social workers are re-emerging in the field of juvenile justice paralleling the growth in restorative prevention and intervention measures (Umbreit & Armour, 2011).

Common Restorative Justice Interventions

Four common ways in which restorative justice is integrated into the handling of crime and harm done, either as delinquency prevention or intervention, include, 1) victim-offender mediation, 2) group conferencing, 3) circle dialogue, and 4) other hybrid approaches that bring the victim and offender together to find an appropriate method of restitution (Umbreit et al., 2006). In the case of school-based restorative justice, hybrid models include different forms of peer accountability to repair harm and restore relationships. A commonality among these practices is the inclusion of those harmed and those responsible for harm in direct dialogue often led by a trained mediator or facilitator. What occurred and its impact is discussed, with the goal of reaching

agreement about how the harm will be repaired. As restorative justice is being used proactively with youth as a prevention to misconduct (or to prevent a systems response of excessive punishment), practitioners are recognizing conflicts as encounters without one or the other being a victim or an offender, rather both as contributors to a potential escalating conflict.

Use of restorative processes can take place at any point in a criminal case progression, including pre-arrest, pre-court referral, pre-adjudication (court diversion), or post-adjudication and even during incarceration. Restorative approaches have also extended beyond criminal cases to address civil disputes. With greater emphasis on preventing recidivism, aligned with the need to successfully integrate past offenders into community life, restorative approaches are also increasing in popularity for post-incarceration re-entry support. As asserted by Coates, Miller and Ohlin (1978), recidivism is more a reflection of how well youth offenders are reintegrated back into community than it is a reflection of their involvement with the juvenile criminal justice system.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Restorative Justice

After considering what restorative justice is not, I'll describe the central theories underscoring restorative justice approaches and the subsequent impacts. Leaders of the restorative justice movement have come from the fields of psychology, sociology, public health, social work and criminology to establish a theoretical foundation for its application.

Social Bonding Theory

Criminologist Gordon Bazemore and social work professor Mark Umbreit, both scholarly experts of restorative justice, offer the need for social bonding among youth as a call for a balanced restorative response (Bazemore & Umbreit, 1998). The theory of

social bonding offered in the context of youth development asserts that adolescent youth have a greater need for feeling they belong, to be part of the in-group, and be bonded to others in a meaningful way (Erickson, 1968). Youth who don't get this need met and lack positive bonds through school, work, religious institutions or recreational community centers are more likely to engage in criminal or delinquent behavior. Going a step further, social integration theory asserts that if people feel cut off or rejected from society, they will pursue acceptance in subcultures, regardless if perceived as deviant or criminal by the broader society (Allan, 2005).

Social bonding combined with social control theory. The work of criminologist and psychologist Travis Hirschi (1969) expanded on the application of social bonding theory with the supplement of social control theory relevant to juvenile delinquency. He took the stance that juveniles are not motivated to commit acts of deviance, yet all youth as well as adults are capable of deviant behavior. When engaged in a meaningful network of relationships through which bonds are created, social control occurs, providing the reason or motivation to not act defiantly from the expectations placed on them.

Hirschi argued that those who commit crimes lack the social bonds that serve as controlling mediators of their behavioral choices. According to Hirschi, social bonding occurs on four levels which determines the degree to which social control is upheld; attachment to others, commitment to others, involvement with others, and beliefs shared with others. Bazemore and Umbreit (1998) conclude that a restorative and balanced response to juvenile delinquency will occur through a restorative justice model that breaks down isolation, strengthens connections with others, requires commitment and accountability by youth to the community, and holistically involves youth in community relationships.

Symbolic Interactionism

Robert Coates, Alden Miller and Lloyd Ohlin, sociologists and researchers with the Center for Criminal Justice, Harvard Law School, applied symbolic interactionism theory developed by sociologist Herbert Blumer (1969) as the theoretical framework for understanding youth deviance and evaluating systems responses. They conducted a longitudinal evaluative research study of the Massachusetts Division of Youth Services (DYS) from 1969-1976, a time of major reform moving away from the institutionalization of youth in corrections to youth receiving community-based services. Their theoretical premise was that youth are not only influenced by others but also are the actors that impact others (Coates, Miller & Ohlin, 1978).

With this notion applied to the concept of juvenile delinquency, the perception of what is delinquent behavior is dependent on a complicated set of relationships between youth, their environment and others. It is not defined the same in all situations, nor is it handled the same or warrants the same consequence. The deviance itself is a consequence of an interactive ongoing process.

Labeling theory as developed by sociologist Howard Becker (2014) expands on symbolic interactionism with attention to minorities or those deviating from the status quo being negatively labeled by the majority. In turn, those negatively labeled begin to identify with that label and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy, so to speak. Symbolic interactionism applied to the context of youth delinquency supports the use of restorative approaches, which have the flexibility to be responsive to specific situations while upholding Zehr's (2015) guiding principles. An important consideration, however, is the degree to which political, racial, class and gender realities are explicitly acknowledged and addressed up front in the development and application of restorative processes in order to lead us toward a more equitable and just society.

Social Contract Theory

Building upon the theories of social bonding, social control and symbolic interactionism is the notion that people decide how they will behave and how they expect others to behave, which is ratified with an agreed upon social contract, whether written, implicit or codified in formal laws (Sharpe, 2004). This reciprocal social contract allows each person the choice to act on their own well-being while allowing others the same right. A sense of fairness results when a social contract is mutually developed and accepted. Sharpe goes a step further by drawing on the work of John Rawls, political philosopher and Professor Emeritus at Harvard University, who is known for his theory of justice. Rawls (1971) concludes that justice is fairness when a reciprocal agreement is reached with parties being equally engaged and accepting of their contractual obligations and benefits for themselves in relation to others. Restorative justice embraces social contract theory with the tenet that parties come together to create a mutually agreed upon plan to repair harm.

Empowerment Theory and Efficacy

Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) have asserted that the framework for personal empowerment includes three interrelated components: intrapersonal (perceived control and self-efficacy), interactional (perceived collective efficacy) and behavioral (participatory actions taken). Similarly, psychologist Alfred Bandura and colleagues (2000) describe the three levels of efficacy as personal efficacy, social efficacy and collective social efficacy. Psychology scholars Tyler and Lind (1992) stress there's strong evidence supporting the more people have a voice and feel heard in groups, the higher they rate the outcomes as just and fair, contrary to situations and outcomes where they had no opportunity to be heard.

The significance of this research is that it defined psychological empowerment as a connection between a personal sense of competence, having voice, and a willingness to get involved in collective public action, both components of restorative justice approaches. Gordon Bazemore (2000) specifically makes the case for restorative justice conferencing as a means to achieve collective efficacy. Participation in restorative approaches is voluntary; only moving forward when those impacted choose through their own cognizance to engage with others. When people choose to engage with each other for mutual fairness and well-being, healing and relationships built on mutual respect can happen.

These theoretical frames are at the core of restorative justice; however they do not constitute an exhaustive list of social theories that have some relation to the concept of restoration of the human spirit and interdependent community relations. I provide them in the context of understanding the framework of restorative justice, and do not set out to prove or disprove their relevance in this dissertation.

Measuring Results of Restorative Justice with Youth Offenders

Measuring the impact of restorative justice approaches with youth, namely victim offender mediation and group conferencing, researchers have generally looked at the impact on individuals rather than systemic change. Restorative justice circles and circle conferencing have also received less attention from researchers; however this is changing with the growth of circles in school interventions and the desire to document impact (Umbreit et al., 2006; Schiff, 2013; Jain, Bassey, Brown, & Kalra, 2014). Research and evaluation measures generally fit in three categories: participant satisfaction, recidivism rates, and to a lesser degree cost-benefit analysis. Qualitative research has focused more on the process aspects of restorative interventions to determine best practices.

Participant satisfaction

Victim and offender satisfaction has been most often measured and generally demonstrates high positive impact for both parties. Factors typically self-reported in evaluation studies include perceived support and fairness of the mediators, feeling prepared by mediators prior to face to face meetings, fairness and satisfaction with a (restitution) reparations agreement, victim feelings of increased safety, victim and offender satisfaction with the judicial system, satisfaction of speaking with each other face to face, and whether the reparations agreement is fulfilled (Galaway, 1988; Umbreit & Coates, 1992; Bradshaw & Umbreit, 1998; Umbreit, Coates & Voss, 2000).

Umbreit et al. (2006) in their review of 85 studies including three meta-analyses, summarized that 90% of participants in Victim Offender Mediation (VOM) would recommend it to others, reflecting a high level of satisfaction.

Recidivism rates

Recidivism has been the priority measure of whether a criminal correctional intervention, restorative or otherwise, has been effective. Since reduced recidivism is one of the judicial system's primary measures, those in the field of restorative justice also use it as a primary outcome measure for victim offender mediation and conferencing (Roy, 1993; Niemeyer & Schichor, 1996; Nugent, Umbreit, Wiinmaki & Paddock, 2001; Cottle, Lee & Heilbrun, 2001).

In four studies conducted by Nugent et al. (2001), recidivism was measured as an adjudicated re-offense within one year after the VOM was held. These four researchers conducted an analysis of their combined VOM research to determine the replicability of impact. Based on statistical analysis, they concluded a significant association exits between participation in VOM and a reduced likelihood of a juvenile to

re-offend in the one year following VOM. However, the researchers also point out this analysis did not determine a causal relationship between VOM and lowered recidivism.

Cost-benefit Analysis

The high costs of institutionalizing offenders as a way of keeping communities safe has been under scrutiny in the United States for some time, calling for investigation into more cost effective methods of preventing and responding to crime. Cost-benefit analysis that compares criminal institutionalization and court involvement costs to alternatives is difficult, but has been a growing interest among researchers and public agencies (Greenwood, Model, Rydell, & Chiesa, 1996). Coates and Gehm (1985) in their study of 73 youth and adult offenders who participated in VOM compared to a control sample interpreted a reduction in the length of incarceration for those who participated in VOM to mean significant cost savings. They also found those who participated in VOM who spent time incarcerated tended to be held in county jails rather than state prisons, which also reduced costs. An evaluative study conducted by Bradbury (2002) documented the impact of a restorative juvenile intervention demonstration project in Oregon. Bradbury found that even though recidivism remained the same for juveniles participating in VOM and those in a comparison group who did not, the cost of the restorative demonstration project was 27% less than the institutionalization of juveniles in the comparison group, thus still a more cost effective intervention.

Challenges in Measuring Restorative Justice Impact in Youth Cases

In most studies, empirical research designs have lacked the ability to determine causal relationships between restorative justice approaches and outcomes (Bradshaw & Umbreit, 1998; Nugent et al., 2001). Additionally, meta-analysis and comparing studies to increase validity of findings is difficult. Umbreit et al. (2000) in analysis of thirty-six victim impact studies noted that no two programs asked the same questions to measure

satisfaction. Researchers also note the overall attention in most studies is to measure change in individual offender behavior and less so on the impact on victims. Lack of comparative data between various types of restorative approaches as well as in different communities thwarts the discernment of which model may be best fitted to different situations. Or conversely, which practices may have a detrimental impact and in which communities may this be the case?

The same challenge is evident in measuring recidivism; it is inconsistently defined across programs and governmental units, making the data on recidivism incomparable. According to a report funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2014), each state, and each intervention for that matter, differs in its structure, organization and data management methods, which effects how recidivism is defined and data interpreted. Thus it has been impossible to establish national recidivism rates or standards, and equally challenging to compare recidivism measures across programs and jurisdictions.

To the degree conclusions can be made, the research on recidivism doesn't always show positive results. Recidivism data have been inconclusive or have shown no difference between those in restorative programs and those receiving traditional court ordered sentences (Roy, 1993; Niemeyer & Schichor, 1996; Bradbury, 2002).

Last, researchers of numerous studies and meta-analyses initially intended to conduct an analysis of moderating variables, such as gender, ethnicity/race, criminal history, offense type, characteristics of the mediator, and relationship between the juvenile offender and victims; however they determined the lack of diversity among juvenile offenders (mostly white) in the various studies, along with the problem of missing data prevented such an analysis. For instance, Latimer, Dowden and Muise (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of thirty-five restorative programs, of which they

reported 94.3% of the study participants were male and 40% identified as white, while race was reported as mixed and/or unspecified for 54% of the participants.

The predominant white male study population along with missing data on important variables raises the question; what does this say about potential biases of restorative justice practitioners and researchers, and the perpetuation of racial inequity in the criminal system through restorative justice approaches?

Juvenile Restorative Justice and Intersections with Race

While the primary focus of this review is on restorative justice with juveniles, the macro level context will reference restorative justice in general, impacting both youth and adults. After all, the hope with youth is they successfully transition into adulthood within interconnecting community and societal structures. At any age, our societal context includes race. Critical race theory is offered as a lens through which the intersections between race, disparities and restorative justice measures may be better understood.

A Look at Restorative Justice through a Critical Race Lens

Advocates for restorative justice have historically pointed to structural racism in the court system as a reason to adopt a restorative response to crime, yet the link between restorative justice and systematic racial injustice has been neglected by practitioners and researchers alike.

As previously noted by researchers, the application of restorative justice has, for the most part, been limited to individual measures, rather than looking at whole systems or community impact to understand the full context and advocate for change. One such measure repeatedly used by restorative justice researchers has been recidivism, with the intent to use empirical research to prove or disprove its value to the judicial system. Reducing recidivism has become the status quo measure for any intervention aimed at

preventing future court involvement of youth and adults who have been charged with or adjudicated for a crime.

Attempting to provide evidence of restorative justice impact by adopting the status quo measures of the judicial system, even though a causal relationship cannot be proven, researchers inadvertently overlooked the systematic racial injustice working contrary to restorative justice. By accepting the status quo, have restorative justice researchers upheld rather than challenged the structural racism in U.S. Courts? In fact, racial disparities embedded in the fabric of the juvenile and adult U.S. corrections system have grown worse (Travis & Western, 2014).

Disconnect Between Restorative Justice and Impacting Systematic Racial Injustice

The number of people in state and federal prisons grew tenfold from 100,000 to more than 1.4 million between 1978 and 2015, greatly surpassing every country in the world with the per capita percent of its citizens locked up in prisons (The Sentencing Project, 2017). The total State government expenditures on incarceration were more than eight times larger in 2015 than in 1985, surpassing $58 billion dollars (National Association of State Budget Officers).

Young African American, Hispanic and American Indian males were most negatively impacted with disparities in incarceration rates based on race significantly growing (Travis & Western, 2014). African American and other minority females are also disproportionately imprisoned in comparison to Caucasian females, although not to the same degree. In a report on incarceration in the United States prepared for the National Academy of Sciences, Jeremy Travis, President of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and Bruce Western, Professor of Criminal Justice Policy at Harvard University summarize,

> "The emergence of high incarceration rates has broad significance for U.S. society. The meaning and consequences of this new reality cannot be separated from issues of social inequality and the quality of citizenship of the nation's racial and ethnic minorities" (p. 2).

Travis and Western (2014) also summarize the causes of mass incarceration and the growing racial disparities among those imprisoned.

Fueled by State and Federal policy mandates that limited the discretion of courts, incarceration grew especially for non-violent and drug-related offenses. Travis and Western (2014) point out that the research shows African Americans actually had lower levels of drug use and drug trafficking; however, related laws coupled with historically prejudicial law enforcement practices consequently increased prison sentences for African Americans and other minorities far more than Caucasians.

Minnesota, a leader in the development of restorative justice programs, still exceeds the national average in *disproportionate minority contact*[6] for the percentage of minority youth who are arrested, enter a detention facility, are sentenced to probation and are certified as adults for adjudication (Office of Justice Programs, 2012). Restorative justice practitioners and researchers are frustrated with this reality, yet question what is needed to change this course. Theo Gavrielides (2015), international expert on restorative justice, has written about the discrepancy between advocates touting restorative justice as an alternative to a structurally racist criminal corrections system, and the lack of attention to structural racism by the same advocates over the decades. He calls this the *paradox of restorative justice*.

[6]Disproportionate minority contact is a term meaning youth from communities of color have contact with the juvenile justice system at higher rates than white youth (Office of Justice Programs, 2012).

Explaining the Disconnect and Implications for Research

The ethnographic research of Elijah Anderson, Sociology professor at Yale University, provides insight into the functioning of structural racism in American society, which may explain a pattern of restorative justice research and practice that leaves racial disparities unaddressed.

Anderson et al. (2012) investigated the presence of a racial caste system and its impact on racial segregation with continued racial tensions and chronic inequities embedded structurally throughout society. In their research analysis, Anderson et al. describe differences between a white working concept of race and black working concept of race, both of which are founded on a life experience of identity development in relation to the other from a pre-existing race caste system.

According to Anderson et al. (2012) a white working concept of race may include explicitly denouncing racism, yet on an implicit level learned white privilege with an automatic step up above non-whites is unquestioned. From this world view, while racial inequities continue, they are not the responsibility of, nor need to be addressed by the white members of society. A black working concept of race contrarily starts out with an inherited one strike against you from birth – the color of skin and what that means in terms of social caste. From this world view, race is a constant and very much alive factor, in the forefront of consciousness that places a weight on every choice a person makes in their life. With the black working concept of race, it is the black person's responsibility to fix structural racism and succeed in spite of one strike from the beginning (p. 37). In both white and black conceptualizations, language is used in segregated groups, as well as mixed race groups, that is deemed acceptable in those situations, even though implicit meanings may point to race bias; diverting attention

away from any explicit discussion about race and the racial inequities maintained by the caste system.

What are the implications for research on restorative justice? I suggest that the white and black working concepts of race as explained by Anderson et al. within a segregated caste system are deeply engrained in learned identities, even for the best intentioned researchers and restorative justice practitioners. From the white world view, for example, if race data is missing from a research study and racial inequity goes unaddressed, there are no explicit consequences to the racial caste system or to the individual researchers; the status quo is maintained. There is another option however, and that is to embrace restorative practices as a path to explicit and deep conversations about race, both on a personal level and a systems level (revising the micro and macro community) as has been previously proposed by Kathleen Daly (2001). Researchers are called to move out of their comfort zones and explicitly act on a racial justice agenda linked with restorative justice.

Susan Sharp (1996) describes one purpose of restorative justice as to strengthen community, which requires addressing racial and economic injustices. By addressing injustices, future harms may be prevented; the community is strengthened and also is safer for all members. Researchers Umbreit et al. (2000) have asserted that the cross-cultural implications and differences in outcomes based on race/ethnicity should be included in restorative justice research. Ten years later, Umbreit and Armour (2010) also addressed the intersection of racism and restorative justice, given the reality of those with white privilege having a power differential within the broader structural context. They stress the importance of considering race as a variable in restorative justice programs, coupled with assurances that those involved develop cultural competence and the ability

to relate cross-culturally. This is also an important variable in the recruitment and training of restorative justice mediators/facilitators.

Restorative Justice at a Crossroads

The field of restorative justice is in need of a thorough investigation into its own roots and future direction with a critical race lens. The development of restorative practices in the U.S. has been inextricably linked to the criminal corrections system, operating as a small appendage rather than a transforming force of the U.S.'s largest and structurally racist institution of social control. Kathleen Daly (2000), hopeful about the future of restorative justice, has proposed that the criminal court system is the wrong target, if the intent is to impact racial disparities.

Social Psychologist Ronald Cohen (2001), in his analysis of restorative justice, firmly stated that it is beyond restorative justice to impact structural racism. He goes as far as saying the use of restorative practices with populations who have experienced injustices is more likely to make structural oppression worse than to create a more equitable and just system. The best case scenario from Cohen's perspective is to not add to the harms already done.

Yet, there are numerous other countries that have gone farther in their application of restorative justice for transformational change (Umbreit & Armour, 2010; van Wormer & Walker, 2013). And in today's context, activists are looking to use restorative justice to bring major change similar to truth and reconciliation processes in South Africa; addressing past harms done and changing structures of racism in the U.S. (Drucker, 2014; Davis, 2016). Gavrielides (2015) proposes the future of restorative justice should be guided by a first priority to impact racial inequity, and measure results through this lens.

Systems reforms with a return to community-based decision making is a vision, yet evaluation measurements are individually focused. A gap exists in measuring the sustainability of restorative approaches embedded in community and systems functioning. The macro-level is missing with all attention focused on the micro-level impact. It is clear from past evaluations and research that certain individual indicators are very positive. It is also perhaps the easiest data to collect and measure.

A tension exists between restorative justice movement builders who want macro-level reforms and those who believe restorative approaches are a case by case alternative within or in relation to criminal corrections systems. Law Professor Paul Robinson (2002) urges that the latter should be the agenda of restorative justice advocates, making the processes widely incorporated into public systems.

Last, when considering the degree to which space is racialized in the United States under an historical yet still prevalent racial caste system, what opportunities may exist to create real change through restorative justice and where? Anderson (2015), Sociology Professor at Yale University, offers insight into racialized spaces and the expectations of people who enter such spaces. Since the civil rights movement and end of Jim Crow laws, African Americans as well as other ethnic communities have been able to access spaces, which Anderson identifies as white spaces, far more than in history. In doing so, they must meet the expectations of white space and as seen with police incidents, are under regular scrutiny for being black in white space.

This is true of all spaces dominated by whites; neighborhoods, towns, suburbs, schools, private businesses districts and public institutions. Black spaces are also identified, however are plagued by media, news reports and public biases that categorize black spaces as unsafe, crime ridden ghettos. Restorative justice research

should include an understanding of racialized spaces and how to find nonaligned spaces on which to build mutual understanding.

A Look into the Field of School-Based Restorative Practices

The newer application of school-based restorative practices is one area showing great promise in bridging the divide between restorative justice and racial equity. The integration of restorative practices in schools ranges widely from victim offender mediation and conferencing circles, to school wide restorative discipline policies and whole school climate change, to incorporating circles for teaching math and English (Riestenberg, 2012). School-based restorative justice applications have the potential to go beyond individual measures and embrace the collective well-being of community as envisioned by Pranis (1997) and Sharpe (1998).

When looking at schools as racialized spaces (Anderson, 2015), we have white spaces, we have some black spaces, and we have a growing number of schools with the intersecting worlds of multi-ethnic youth and adults figuring out how to redefine space that is safe for everyone, while at the same time still functioning under a heavily rule based system. The lines between race and poverty are equally blurred.

Engaging school stakeholders as research partners will contribute significantly to understanding the experience and impact of restorative practices in schools. School-based restorative practices warrant greater attention and is the focus of my dissertation research.

Conclusion

Researchers and practitioners have been open in their discussions about differences and considerations in restorative justice, whether they call it a movement, an intervention or a way of being. A wealth of thoughtful writing is available from the past forty-plus years of experience in the field and in indigenous communities prior, which

provides a solid foundation for future inquiry. What has been most beneficial from the research is a deeper understanding of processes based on restorative justice principles to address harms with face to face dialogue. As a result, for example, victim offender mediation is considered an evidence based practice with standards that contribute to its success, i.e. training facilitators to develop specific skills, the importance of individual meeting with victims and offenders for adequate preparation for a face to face meeting, all parties voluntarily participating in the process, and establishing a reparations agreement jointly (Umbreit et al., 2000).

Restorative justice at a crossroads is about a question of breadth and depth of impact. Can it go any further without profoundly intersecting with a racial equity agenda? There has been a disconnect between the original arguments in support of restorative justice approaches in response to disparities and failures of the criminal corrections system, and research measures used to claim success. The status quo has been maintained. While major systems changes are way overdue, embracing critical race theory to guide future inquiry and advocate for change is an important next step. As Gavrielides (2015) has proposed, the future of restorative justice should be guided by a first priority to impact racial inequity, and measure results through this lens. Through this lens, school-based restorative practices are worthy of greater research inquiry.

Chapter 3 Literature Review: School-Based Restorative Practices

The integration of restorative practices in schools shows promise in measuring impact on broader racial disparities, school discipline changes, better academic outcomes, community building and school climate change (Riestenberg, 2012; Jain et al., 2014). More research is needed to understand the depth and breadth of what is working in schools to know how best to apply and sustain them in each unique school situation. To provide a foundation for understanding the current state of knowledge, this chapter summarizes the literature on the school to prison pipeline, application of restorative practices, current research, and unanswered questions. The conceptual framework of my research will follow in chapter four.

Understanding the School to Prison Pipeline

Prior to the 1970's, the link between low education attainment of young men and likelihood of incarceration was negligible (Travis & Western, 2014). Since then, mass incarceration and the growing racial disparities among those imprisoned have become especially common for young minorities with low education from low-wealth communities. Less educated Caucasian youth also are more often incarcerated than educated peers, although not to the same degree. Now, two-thirds of African American males that drop out of high school are expected to serve time in prison by their mid-30's (Travis & Western, 2014).

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, school related policies such as zero tolerance resulted in disproportionate exclusion from education primarily for African Americans, American Indians and Hispanics. Reliance on school suspension and expulsion for discipline became the status quo. Not surprisingly, exclusion from school participation results in poorer academic outcomes and greater probability of becoming

involved in the criminal court system (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008; Bazemore & Schiff, 2010).

Heightened concerns of educators, social workers and other social justice minded advocates brought attention to the school to prison pipeline. Concern has extended to the general population and reform efforts have begun. Federal as well as many state judicial systems have made it a priority to reduce juvenile incarceration. Yet, as the overall number of incarcerated juveniles was cut in half between 2000 and 2015, the disproportionality of minority youth incarcerated compared to white youth increased (Rovner, 2017). A greater focus on prevention has put schools in the position of closing the gap, with schools that embrace restorative practices taking the lead.

Restorative Practices in Schools: Cause for Hope

Schools utilizing restorative practices are showing promising results, even though empirical research is at the infancy stage (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Rather than using restorative practices solely as a stand-alone intervention after harm has been done, prevention of future harm is a priority focus in schools (Wachtel, Costello & Wachtel, 2009). With prevention in mind, the term *restorative practice* is more often used in school settings, distancing from the retributive connotations of and relationship with the criminal justice system. Additionally, schools have a role in preparing young people for successful transition into adulthood, which requires attention on the development of the whole person. Researchers at Rutgers University describe restorative practices in schools from a prevention and development standpoint as aiming to,

> "Strengthen relationships, increase students' investment in the community and the rules (build support and social capital) and hold students accountable to one another (implement fair process and structure). The practices themselves

also emphasize adolescents' developmental need for autonomy and decision-making," (Gregory, Gerewitz, Clawson, Davis & Korth, 2013, p.1).

This understanding creates many more opportunities for the use of restorative practices as a whole schools approach or way of being in community. At the same time, the vast scope of possibilities among varying degrees of buy-in from school stakeholders poses additional challenges to researchers and evaluators who are anxious to contribute to the field of school-based restorative practices.

Restorative Practices Continuum

From the perspective of a whole schools approach to integrating restorative practices, Wachtel (2009) found that in the broader context restorative practices can be charted along a continuum. The restorative practices continuum as a reference point for this case study is depicted in Figure 1.

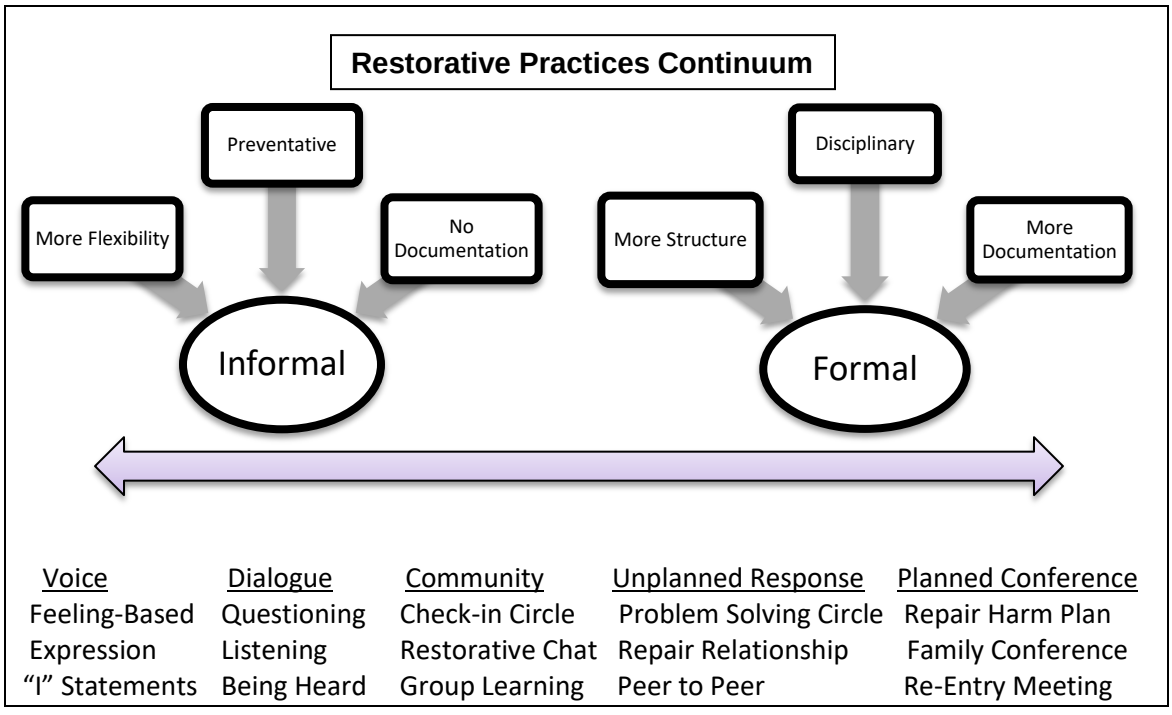


Figure 1 Restorative Practices Continuum

The figure lists only a small sampling of practices that fit along the continuum, but enough to foster understanding. Wachtel (2009) explains the continuum as moving from the informal, such as feeling-based expression and questioning, to the formal, such as a restorative conferencing or victim offender mediation. The less formal a restorative practice, the more accessible it is without needing significant preparation. A more formal restorative practice requires time to prepare all parties, plan the meeting and tends to have more structure. Understanding the restorative practices continuum is a helpful reference for research on school-based restorative practices

School-Based Restorative Practices Research: On the Cutting Edge

Research is currently underway in a handful of school districts and states across the nation. Researchers seek to scientifically measure the impact of restorative practices on a number of indicators: racial disparities in student outcomes, school discipline, student and teacher relations, academic achievement, community building, and overall school climate (Yusem, 2013; Gregory et al., 2013; Hurley, Guckenburg, Persson, Fronius & Petrosino, 2015). Oakland Unified School District, for example, is engaged in a longitudinal study of their three-tiered whole schools approach to reduce racially disproportionate discipline, reduce suspensions and improve academic outcomes (Jain et al., 2014).

On another front, researchers Gregory et al. (2013) have developed the first empirically-based tool for measuring the quality of circle processes in schools through observation of what they consider to be essential elements that indicate high quality practice. The degree to which this tool has been accepted and used in schools is not yet known, while research continues.

The International Institute for Restorative Practices is also on the cutting edge with the development of the SaferSanerSchools™ program as a two-year restorative

practices implementation model to change school climate (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2017). This program is also currently included in a number of large school-based studies across the nation.

Measuring the Impact of School-Based Restorative Practices: Oakland Case

The study of restorative practices within the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) illustrates how schools are moving beyond the status quo and measuring the impact of restorative practices on both a micro and macro level. OUSD includes 86 schools with almost 37,000 students, of which 41.3% identify as Latino/a, 26.2% African American, 13.6% Asian, 11.1% white, 3.9% multi-ethic, and 3.8% other or no response (Jain et al., 2014).

The OUSD first implemented the Whole School Restorative Justice project in 2005 in a handful of schools, using multiple restorative practices to change the school climate, reduce harm, build community and re-integrate youth offenders in school. Researchers Jain et al. (2014) conducted a mixed methods evaluative study of the OUSD integration and impact of restorative processes, and prepared a report for the U.S. Department of Education. A set of measures were identified to understand the experience of students, teachers and parents as restorative practices were integrated district wide. Surveys were developed to measure attitudes, satisfaction, preparedness, degree of implementation and consistency in implementation of restorative practices.

Restorative practices were examined according to three tiers of engagement; tier one for classroom relationship-building circles, tier two for repairing harm conferencing circles, and tier three for conflict mediation, family group conferencing and re-integration circles. Researchers accessed school-level data, district level data, and suspension and expulsion data files from the California Department of Education. Primary measurements included whether restorative justice interventions impacted school suspensions and

academic outcomes. Their study considered moderating variables of race, gender, socio-economic status, suspension rate at baseline and school type. Data from schools utilizing restorative practices was compared to schools that did not.

At the time of this evaluation of the integration of restorative approaches district-wide, 22 schools out of 86 had incorporated restorative practices to some degree; nine high schools, eleven middle schools and two elementary schools. In one year of the study, 12,000 students participated in circles or repairing harm mediations throughout the district.

During the evaluation period of three school years from 2011 to 2014, the data showed out-of-school suspensions dropped by 22.6% district-wide. Suspensions were reduced by half for students participating in restorative processes, compared to students in school that did not use restorative practices. Suspensions specifically for African American students declined by 29.1%, and the disproportionate suspension gap between white and black students reduced by 24%. For academic outcomes, middle schools using restorative practices saw a 24% reduction in chronic absenteeism, compared to an increase of 62% in non-participating middle schools. Reading levels of 9th graders doubled in restorative schools compared to an increase of 11% for non-restorative schools. High school drop-out rates declined by 56% in restorative schools compared to 17% in non-restorative schools.

Self-reporting by adults in restorative schools showed 69.1% of teachers, 100% of principals and 85.2% of other staff perceived that the use of restorative practices improved school climate. Additionally, 66.3% of teachers, 91.7% of principals and 79.6% of other staff perceived the use of restorative practices helped build better relationships between students and teachers.

More evaluation outcomes and recommendations are explained in a 71-page report written by the researchers for the U.S. Department of Education. They caution that the outcomes provide a preliminary snapshot of changes in the Oakland Unified School District, yet show very promising results both from a macro-level systems change perspective as well as for tackling difficult challenges facing schools across the country.

Unanswered Questions

As the flurry of new yet unfinished research on restorative practices in schools continues to show promise, the number of schools incorporating restorative practices is exponentially increasing. Experts acknowledge that most schools implementing restorative practices are not engaged in research to generate new knowledge or contribute to sustainable model development (IIRP, 2009; Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Also, most literature on restorative practices research does not include the engagement of school stakeholders as research partners. Understanding their experiences as voiced by them through research designed with them would be a valuable contribution to the field of restorative practices in schools.

Attempting to get a grasp on the research and practice implications, researchers from WestEd, a nonprofit educational research agency, led a qualitative study with an aim to understand the successes, challenges and gaps in knowledge regarding restorative practices in schools (Hurley et al., 2015). The researchers conducted 43 interviews with experts nationwide, and held a focus group with fifteen restorative justice practitioners.

One of their findings is that researchers and practitioners are challenged by the absence of an agreed upon definition of restorative practices to guide school-based inquiry (Hurley et al, 2015). The same dilemma has faced the restorative justice movement since its inception. At the heart of the problem lie two divergent views about

what restorative justice is. One view upholds restorative justice as a life philosophy or way of being. Applying this view to restorative practices in schools calls for a whole schools approach, integrating practices that address entire school climate and school change for overall well-being.

The other view of restorative practices upholds it as a skill-based intervention that can be applied according to situation. In this case it may look like one of many disciplinary options available to school administrators and teachers. Some refer to this application as *restorative discipline*. The two views may incorporate the same values, yet have different implications for research and implementation. Hurley et al. (2015) highlight one gap in research is the need to identify critical elements of restorative practices absolutely necessary for effectiveness in any case.

Second, experts categorized most implementation of restorative practices in schools as weak, and specifically attributed this to limited funding. The implication is a need for more funding to support quality implementation as a priority over research, according to Hurley et al. (2015). However, the perception of restorative practice implementation as weak is highly subjective. What does strong versus weak implementation look like? What does it look like to implement restorative practices without a separate source of funds? What does that mean for sustainability? Answering these questions requires an exploratory inquiry that goes beyond the typical individual impact or quantifiable measurements.

Another emerging theme is an understanding that implementation of restorative practices in schools should be viewed as a process that takes time and patience (Hurley et al., 2015). It takes time for systems to change, policies to be put in place, people to fully understand restorative practices, and for them to learn how to do it. It also takes time to understand and measure what's different as a result. Overall, the experts

interviewed acknowledged a great need for more understanding of restorative practices in schools so that effective practices can be developed and shared. Equally important is to understand what works under what conditions and with whom, so restorative practices can be custom fit to the unique school context.

Last, Hurley et al. (2015) provided a list of unanswered questions for future research of school-based restorative practices as reported by experts and practitioners. Research questions were categorized according to seven domains: Implementation Readiness, Whole-School versus Stand-Alone Models, Implementation and Effectiveness, Impacts on Racial and Ethnic Minorities and Students with Disabilities, Leadership/Training, Data and Measurement, and Sustainability. In total, experts and practitioners proposed 51 questions that have yet to be fully answered and are in need of research inquiry.

Gaps in Knowledge

In summary, further research on school-based restorative practices is needed to understand the depth and breadth of what is working or not working, for whom it is working or not working, and under what conditions so that sustainable and effective practices can be developed and tested. With all of this flurry in growth of school-based restorative practices, hopefulness about the impact, and preponderance of unanswered questions, it is important not to lose sight of a central force calling for restorative practices in the first place.

Public systems, from schools to police departments to prisons, disproportionately weigh negatively on African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians and other minorities. Or it can be said, disproportionately benefit Caucasians. Regardless of rigorous research to determine impact and establish best practices, these disparities have continued to worsen during the restorative justice era.

Conclusion

There is no shortage of questions that need answering to advance the application of school-based restorative practices. Research on restorative practices in schools should include an understanding of racialized spaces and engage those directly impacted as research partners. Continued and escalating discourse calls for inquiry through a critical race lens, confronting the blinders of bias and disrupting the status quo with a goal of achieving positive systems changes. Added insights about restorative practices in schools will come from youth and adults who are directly involved sharing their perspectives. The research design and strategies for my dissertation research are addressed in more detail in chapter five.

Chapter 4 Conceptual Framework for a Case Study

In the world of research and the land of google where it seems an infinite amount of information is available on any subject, choosing a research strategy that contributes something new was a somewhat intimidating task. Where to start? I chose the path of bridging my philosophical beliefs and values with concepts legitimized in the social research context. From there I traveled down the path of logical yet thoughtful delineations to arrive at a destination. The path ended with decisions about methodology, strategy, and research design, or so it began.

Qualitative or Quantitative Methods?

Ontological, Epistemological and Axiological Considerations

My intent here is not to debate the value of qualitative versus quantitative methods, which has been a point of contention among social work scholars for decades. The intent is to delineate the most suitable methodological fit as a researcher in relation to what is being researched. Social work scholar Ann Hartman (1994) stresses the importance for researchers to think deeply and seriously about embracing whichever means will generate the knowledge that builds effective practice. She warns social work researchers of the danger of trading an opportunity to discover valuable knowledge by sticking to the conviction of a narrow world view (research paradigm). Embracing all forms of research as part of the tool box is important, and then it is the responsibility of the researcher to be explicit about their assumptions to make the best methodological choices.

To begin, Creswell (2007) offers five philosophical assumptions for researchers to ponder when choosing methods, three of which I found most relevant and have addressed here. Ontology relates to one's philosophy on the nature of being in reality,

epistemology relates to the nature of knowing, and axiology relates to what is valued. Creswell (2007) goes on to identify common assumptions made by researchers that most align with qualitative methods and the implications for practice. Consideration of these assumptions clearly identifies my lean towards qualitative methods, which I propose is the best fit for this inquiry.

Ontological Assumptions

Qualitative researchers tend to hold the ontological assumption that reality is multi-dimensional and subjective. Each person experiences reality differently, from their own perspective, thus multiple realities co-exist within the same context. The researcher's task is to understand and make sense of these multiple realities. In the research process, methodology would include the identification of themes that represent realities and reporting of descriptions in the words used by and quotes directly from participants.

Proponents of quantitative methods tend to hold the ontological assumption that reality can be objectively defined and understood within fixed boundaries. Quantitative or scientific methodology would include experimental design with control groups, random sampling, statistical analysis of relationships between variables, and conclusions about causation (Wakefield, 1995). Advocates for qualitative research criticize the scientific paradigm for assuming the same methods used to discover universal truths (as in physical sciences) can be applied to the understanding of the complex human experience. Weick (1991) emphasizes that the human experience is intricately relational, and as such human action can't be predetermined based on a scientific interpretation of causation among variables.

My ontological philosophy has been implied in previous chapters of this dissertation, but to be explicit, the human experience is wrought with multiple and ever-

changing realities as perceived through individual lenses. This is certainly the nature of reality in the complex world of restorative practices as discovered in a review of the literature. Researchers attempting scientific inquiry of restorative practices have contributed to the base of knowledge, however to a limited degree and with recognition that restorative interventions could not be proven to cause the measured impact on the studied variables. In line with my ontological leanings, the forthcoming chapters on research findings include rich descriptions in the words used by and quotes directly from Paladin students and staff directly involved in the research.

Epistemological Assumptions

From an epistemological perspective, qualitative researchers tend to hold the view that knowledge is constructed from engaging with others to interpret the world around them (Creswell, 2009). Through this relationship, individuals are both shaped by and are shapers of the broader social context. The researcher is an active participant in the process of relating between self, others and the social environment in order to interpret what is known from lived experience. From this view, methodology includes the researcher spending time in the field to be close to and interacting with the environment being researched. Proponents of quantitative methods tend to assume that knowledge comes from scientific data collection and analysis with the belief that it will produce the most objective results when the researcher is distanced from the study subjects. Knowledge is seen as factual discoveries based on the evidence.

My epistemological assumptions align with the qualitative research paradigm. In the Paladin case study of the experiences of students and staff using restorative practices, knowledge has come from a collaborative partnership with the school and the engagement of youth as partners in the school environment. Relationships have been essential and my presence as the researcher interacting in their environment has been

necessary. Qualitative researchers such as I recognize and value the complexity of the human experience, which allows for valuable insights to surface from an inquiry, even when the research is as focused as an in-depth single case study.

Axiological Assumptions

The axiological assumption made by qualitative researchers is their values should be acknowledged and explicitly expressed. Qualitative methods have been criticized for what has been perceived as the inability to control for researcher bias (Wakefield, 1995). Hayworth (1991) acknowledges this criticism, but points out that the scientific research paradigm doesn't take into account the underlying assumptions made and subjectivity of those designing, implementing and interpreting quantitative research, which just as easily can produce manipulated or biased findings. The assumption of researchers adopting scientific inquiry is that the process of knowing is values-free, absent of bias.

Hartman (1994) adds the perspective that we need to pay attention to the lessons and stories from practice to advance the profession of social work in all its forms. Researchers must link values and action, and respect practice wisdom. She emphasizes that no one way of knowing can cover all territory of social work's concerns or interests, i.e. social justice, equity, policy, programs and human associations at all levels.

Inquiry into restorative practices at Paladin has meant adhering to the axiological belief that values are inextricably linked to my interpretation of reality and experiences with others, and should be explicitly shared. The application of critical race theory is reflective of my values and has already been expressed. It is also important to acknowledge the guiding values of the social work field, which have informed my experience as a researcher, namely the value for social justice, service, dignity and

worth of every person, human relationships, understanding person in their environment, integrity and competence (International Federation of Social Workers, 2000). I have continued the process of uncovering my values, biases and world view in relationship to others in the research environment.

Claiming an Ideology

Claiming an orientation to an ideology has implications for the research. First, the ontological and epistemological assumptions for this inquiry has meant knowing and understanding the experience of a school using restorative practices has come from an inductive process of back and forth relationship between the researcher and school stakeholders. This calls for an unwavering openness to hear other perspectives, be challenged by different arguments, and ultimately be open to changing views and letting the narrative unfold without undue influence.

Under axiological assumptions, it is explicitly understood the researcher brings their own biases and world view to the interaction with the research environment, which makes researcher reflexivity of highest importance. Social work scholar Jane Gilgun (2006) defines reflexivity as self-awareness through continuous introspection of how the researcher is affected by the research process and how they affect others in the process. A reflexive researcher is also aware of their presence and what they bring to the research relationship, including the influence of past experiences. As the researcher, one disciplined strategy I have used to maintain reflexivity is keeping personal field notes to self-reflect on the research experience and my reactions to it. The concept of collaboration and various frameworks will be explored next.

Conceptual Framework: "With, not For" Collaboration

Ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions also have implications for the role of the researcher in relationship with those in the school environment being

studied. Acknowledging the multi-dimensional interpretations of reality and co-creation of knowing through relationships, it seemed a natural progression to extend the research relationship to be that of collaboration; research in partnership *with* those in the environment being explored.

The concept of collaboration with researchers relating to non-researchers as partners throughout the process has become known as humanistic research (Paris, 2011; Patton, 2002). Django Paris, professor in Multicultural Education and director of the Banks Center for Educational Justice at the University of Washington, views humanizing research as an ethically necessary direction that builds respectful relationships and deepens meaningful dialogue among difference. Academicians are often criticized for entering environments as professionals coming in to investigate subjects that are different from themselves; research perceived as being done *to* people (Patton, 2002). As a result, in many circumstances significant damage has been done to the relationship between academic institutions and communities, particularly communities of color and low wealth communities. Furthermore, research findings have been rejected by those being studied resulting in additional negative implications for researchers, their institutions and stakeholder audiences. Paris (2011) asserts the use of humanistic inquiry prevents the further marginalization of oppressed communities and increases the validity of research findings produced through co-investigation. Patton (2002) adds that true collaboration in research requires sharing power.

Collaborative Approaches

A number of models for research collaboration have been developed, and while they have significant overlap as humanistic approaches, they vary in the degree to which power is shared. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) tends to be most equalizing in power sharing and co-inquiry (Israel, Eng, Schulz & Parker, 2005).

Participants are stakeholders equal to researchers, capacity among partners is built, and the research process is valued equal to the findings. Researchers and partners co-author and disseminate their findings, increasing its relevance to the practice environment.

Other variations on collaborative approaches include community-based research, participatory action research, empowerment research, empowerment evaluation and participatory evaluation. Scholars from the fields of youth studies and education have also applied these models specifically to engaging youth as research partners (youth participatory action research, and youth participatory evaluation). Each is nuanced by the degree power is shared and the options offered for engagement in the research. The humanistic approach chosen should be a good fit with the purpose of the research and the environment being studied, as well as the philosophical alignment with the researcher. As researchers have become familiar with these various approaches, they have continued to negotiate collaborative partnerships with customized nuances to best meet their interests in balance with the interests of partners.

Defining the Collaborative Relationship

One consideration in selecting the best collaborative approach for this study was the necessity to conduct research and produce a dissertation to meet Ph.D. requirements. As a Ph.D. candidate, my charge is to demonstrate the knowledge and capacity to implement research from beginning to end, and solely write a dissertation that publishes the results. High fidelity to community-based participatory research standards would not be possible under these conditions. However, this does not rule out the role of stakeholders in the school environment as collaborative research partners.

Collaborative researchers have looked beyond the silo-type categorization of humanist inquiry and have proposed sets of principles that can guide negotiations for

customized partnerships (Patton, 2002; Cousins, Whitmore & Shulha, 2012; Gust & Jordan, 2006). For this research, relationship building and negotiation with school stakeholders have determined which principles and parameters for partnership were important, and how stakeholders chose to be engaged in the research. Through a critical race lens, the negotiation process included explicitly addressing power, privilege, and race dynamics as realities in collaborative relationship.

Research Design: Choosing a Case Study

Robert Yin, social scientist and expert on case study research, provides guidance for discerning if a case study is the best strategy. It's a good fit when, 1) the purpose of inquiry is understanding phenomena within a current everyday context, 2) distinctions aren't overtly evident between the phenomenon and context in which it occurs, 3) the behavior of those involved in relation to the phenomenon can't be controlled by the researcher, and 4) questions framed as how or why a phenomenon happens are central to the research (Yin, 1984).

Inquiry into the use of restorative practices at Paladin was highly appropriate for a case study according to Yin's explanation. Understanding the phenomenon of restorative practices in a school provided a current every day context for exploration, one in which boundaries between students and staff involved in restorative practices and other environmental contexts were not previously evident. The inquiry was to explore and describe the complexities of restorative practices in the school context.

Selection of a Single Case or Multiple Cases

Once the decision was made to conduct a case study, the question then was whether to look at a single case as the unit of analysis or multiple cases. Yin (1984) provides three rationales for choosing a single case; when the case is critical in testing a postulated theory, is revelatory in studying a previously inaccessible phenomenon,

and/or is a unique situation worthy of analysis. A single case allows for deep holistic investigation, whereas multiple cases allow for comparison across units of analysis.

A single case seemed most fitting for this research with the unit of analysis meeting two of Yin's criteria of being a unique situation and also revelatory. The proposition of a multiple case study in order to make comparison was appealing; however a constraint that weakened this possibility was time frame. Second, since the unit of analysis was a school, the time frame of students and staff was equally limiting with their academic school year ending in June, 2018. A single case allowed for deep inquiry under these circumstances. A single case study in particular allows the flexibility to discover unexpected nuances that explain phenomenon and deepen understanding (Yin, 1984). Given the complexity of human processes, experiences and relationships, this single case study contributes to knowledge building and adding valuable understanding to the application of school-based restorative practices.

Selecting Paladin Community and Technical High School as the Case

Based on the literature and previous research on school-based restorative practices, the following criteria were used to identify the unit of analysis as unique and revelatory. A school would best contribute to knowledge that

- Has implemented restorative practices in their environment for five or more years,
- Includes a diverse student population statistically most in danger of being entangled in the school to prison trajectory,
- Is structurally bound in size to allow for holistic and deep inquiry in the allotted timeframe,

- Has been identified by an expert as a unique case that can significantly contribute to the knowledge on school-based restorative practices, and
- Is accessible for the first time allowing for revelatory inquiry.

With this criteria in mind, I consulted with Nancy Riestenberg, one of the country's leading experts on school-based restorative practices (personal conversation, July 23, 2017).

Riestenberg is School Climate Specialist for the Minnesota Department of Education, author of *Circle in the Square: Building Community and Repairing Harm in School* and has written several articles on school-based restorative practices. She has worked with school districts in Minnesota and 20 other states. Her credentials include serving on the design team for *Restorative Measures: Respecting Everyone's Ability to Resolve Problems* and the National Institute of Corrections' restorative conferencing curriculum for law enforcement and school personnel (Riestenberg, 2012). Recently, Riestenberg also served as a key informant for WestEd's study to understand the successes, challenges and gaps in knowledge regarding restorative practices in schools (Hurley et al., 2015).

Through consultation, two schools were identified that have used restorative practices for at least five years and either mostly or fully aligned with the other criteria; Paladin Career and Technical High School (Paladin), a charter high school in the Minneapolis metropolitan area, and an elementary school in northern Minnesota. Each school's website was visited to become acquainted with these cases. Paladin emerged as the option best aligning with the case criteria. Consultation with Dr. Raj Sethuraju, Professor of Criminology whose restorative work includes schools and prisons,

corroborated the choice of Paladin as worthy of inquiry (person conversation, August 18, 2017).

An initial meeting was held with the Paladin Director and Dean of Students in August of 2017 to discuss the possibility of their participation in research. While Paladin had not provided access to researchers on restorative practices in the past, they agreed to partner for this case analysis allowing for revelatory inquiry. As mentioned in the introduction, two additional meetings were held to prepare and enter into a collaborative partnership agreement (Appendix A).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an explanation of my philosophical and ideological values that are the foundation for a qualitative case study. Highest priority has been given to being in partnership with Paladin stakeholders rather than doing research on or about them. Within this partnership, the need for flexibility and deep listening is crucial, along with full attention to the complexity of human experience and relational dynamics as understood through a critical race lens.

Chapter 5 Research Design

The preceding chapters have provided the logic and arguments for this research, including the philosophical underpinnings, theoretical lens, strategies, and collaborative intentions. The focus now turns to the research design. This chapter covers the specifics of data collection, management, data analysis and validation strategies. The writing methodology and reporting of the findings are also covered. It concludes with a brief consideration of study limitations.

Data Collection and Management

Creswell (2007, p. 118) illustrates the data collection process by presenting a graphic of consecutive circles connected along the clock-wise path of a larger circle, which I've reconstructed here (Figure 2) as a visual guide.

Figure 2 Creswell's Data Collection Guide

Locating the Site and Gaining Access

Given the ontological and epistemological orientations discussed earlier, data collection weighed heavily on being in the Paladin school environment; interacting with people through interviews and observations to understand their experiences and hear their perspectives. Initial meetings with the Director and Dean of Students served to establish rapport and build trust as we each disclosed our interests, values and expectations for the research relationship. Creswell (2007) refers to the role of gatekeepers who can either allow or block access to their environment. In this case, the two administrators served as gatekeepers and could have blocked access. Fortunately our interests aligned. The collaborative research agreement includes language allowing me access to Paladin students and staff during regular school days.

Introductions and Relationship Building

The door had been opened for me to enter into relationship with Paladin staff and students. As noted in the introductory chapter, I spent approximately 96 hours in addition to participant observations and interviews at Paladin to build relationships and have my presence accepted. The first week, I completed a volunteer application and Paladin conducted a background check. This was a step required in order for me to interact with students at Paladin and hold one-on-one interviews.

Going beyond the notion of simply gaining access to Paladin is the more critical need to build trusting relationships with youth and staff in a multi-ethnic, complex school environment. Contrary to the positivist world view of the objective and neutral researcher (Creswell, 2009) is the notion of co-generating knowledge through the complex relationship between researcher, participants and environment and all that each brings to that relationship. Django Paris (2010), multicultural education expert and author, calls this *humanizing research,* in which reciprocal relationships based on integrity and care

allow for the co-creation of knowledge building and worthiness of co-interpretation of meanings. In humanistic inquiry, Paris acknowledges the power differential between researcher and youth in particular, but stresses the importance of working *with* participants rather than doing research *on* or *for* them. I have already stated this is a value I share in my own work. Paris goes further in stating humanistic research becomes a vehicle for finding common language among difference, which is crucial for qualitative inquiry of complex multi-ethnic environments. This extends to being aware of the intersections of power, identity, gender, age and race dynamics. Humanizing research thus allows for the discovery of understanding among differences.

The process of building relationships takes time. Again, reflexivity needs continuous attention to be clear about what the researcher brings to the complex relationships with and among students and staff.

Researcher Reflexivity: Entering Paladin

I'm a white, middle class, middle aged woman in the process of getting a PhD. I entered Paladin, where the student population is primarily youth of color who have had a rough time fitting into public education systems. School is where I've been successful. Coming into Paladin, I was aware of how I looked and could be perceived, wrought with power differentials. The power implications this brings to a school of young people whose identities are so different from mine and who have been most harmed by structural injustices meant I needed to be proven trustworthy. Paladin staff may have more perceived similarities with me, yet still encompass great diversity in what they bring to the environment. My social network includes many teachers, so from previous conversations with them I understood being observed in their work environment can produce stress and resistance.

My approach was from a place of humility. I came in as a guest with an interest in learning from and with the school community. I did not come in as the expert. There would be many things the students and staff would not know about me by looking at me, but I needed to suppress the urge to explain who I was, so they would understand or so I could prove my worthiness. I silenced my inner voice that wanted to be accepted. Understanding instead would come from shared experiences over time.

When I was invited to attend the afternoon of the first staff development day in January following winter break, I wasn't sure what to expect. I knew I would be introduced to share my reason for being there, but that was about it. I was prepared with a full power point presentation to explain the research. What I came into was a circle process. Fortunately I was sitting to the right of the circle facilitator, which meant when she asked each person (27 staff, one other guest and me) to share who they were and how they were feeling at that point in the day, I knew the talking piece would be passed to her left. I would be last, which gave me time to figure out my role.

What I knew for sure, it wasn't going to be a power point. The Director acknowledged my presence when it was his turn to speak and he said enough for me to know what to share. Instead of a formal research outline, I gave a short introduction, shared my feeling like everyone else and thanked them for letting me be with them. The Director announced that upon closing the circle, I would be in the conference room for anyone who wanted to talk with me about restorative practices and the research at Paladin. After the circle, eight staff approached me for individual conversation and I was introduced to nine others.

In other contexts of being introduced at Paladin, I mostly spoke when being spoken to, and quietly paid attention. In morning circles, I participated with sincerity, answering questions posed by circle facilitators and participating with students following

their norms. One caveat – I brought my authentic self, and they brought their authentic selves, which meant we used different language at times, yet came to understand each other. In staff meetings I participated fully and contributed in small groups as an equal participant.

I expressed interest in volunteering to give back to Paladin in some way – to reciprocate the relationship. I prepared two small grant proposals, $5,000 each to a family foundation. I also donated twelve books written by one of the staff, so they could be used for student groups. The staff person and I decided to co-facilitate a girls group that met once a week for seven weeks on the topic of relationships and adverse experiences.

When not observing for the research or volunteering, I would set up my laptop in an open office to prepare field notes or finish other work. Whenever possible, I kept the door open to welcome any approaching person. By the end of the first month, one sign that I had become more accepted was staff and students stopping by to talk about something going on in their day. They would be sharing an experience, a perspective related to restorative practices, or even just needing someone to talk to about a challenging situation.

Being the outside researcher while finding a place inside Paladin in the context of reciprocal relationships required clarity about boundaries. I was careful not to offer advice that could add to a power imbalance, confuse the parameters of my role or break down trust. It was important to maintain the relationship of being at Paladin with students and staff, learning from and with them.

Trust building seemed to have occurred so that students and staff felt comfortable sharing their perspectives rather than trying to meet the expectations of the researcher. Yet power dynamics could still have influence on what was said in interviews

and observations. I stayed aware and sought multiple sources to corroborate experiences.

IRB Review, Access and Informed Consent

A source of accountability in establishing data collection and management procedures is the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) with their charge to ensure the protection of human subjects (IRB, 2017). The IRB provides HRP-580 Social Template as a 26-point guide for step-by-step protocol development. After thorough investigation into the IRB parameters and procedures, a Human Research Determination form was submitted. The IRB sent a notification on January 3, 2018, stating the Paladin case study did not meet their definition of human research and was exempt from IRB oversight.

The IRB decision was expedient and allowed for the research to begin; however it did not remove the ethical considerations in ensuring staff and students are fully informed and participate willingly. Three informed consent documents were written following IRB template HRP-090 Informed Consent as a guide for researcher access to interviewees and participant observations. Consent forms were then reviewed by three staff at Paladin, who in turn provided suggestions for editing to best fit their environment.

The formality of a written consent form serves an important purpose, yet in qualitative research the degree to which a written form is used in an environment is an ethical consideration. Researchers warn of the danger of being incompatible with the culture and values of the research site if a formal consent form is rigidly applied (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). It can perpetuate power imbalances and ultimately limit the depth of sharing from key informants. The staff at Paladin who served as a team to bridge the researcher/Paladin relationship suggested the interview consent form be simplified and reduced to no more than two pages. Rather than requiring signatures on formal consent

forms of staff and student participants in circles or other observational spaces, staff recommended consent be provided verbally. Furthermore, staff and the Director felt the Paladin media release signed by all students and their parents allowed for observations and use of information within the context of this case study. I followed their expectations. Consent forms were reviewed and signed by the fourteen interviewees (see Appendix B: Consent Form). To protect the privacy of Paladin staff and students who were part of the case study in the participant observation relationship, all data has been recorded without identifiable personal information.

Data Collection and Sampling

Data collection began in January 2018 and continued through early June, coinciding with the Paladin academic calendar. Paladin administration provided me with a key to most rooms in the school and a name badge matching those worn by all staff, lending credibility to my presence. Technology and access to a number of open offices also allowed interviews and note taking to happen securely in a private space.

Conducting a single case study, especially in collaboration, requires flexibility on the part of the researcher (Yin, 1984; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2007), but also for the research partners in the school community. One challenge of a school environment is the multiple demands on people with a degree of unpredictability, so it is common for staff and students to feel they can't fit another task into a day. At the same time, it requires tenacity to stay focused on what it takes to maintain high integrity in conducting, analyzing and reporting on the research.

Researcher presence on site three days a week during the study period provided flexibility and reduced the stress of a tightly structured interview schedule. Interviews were frequently rescheduled to accommodate staff and students whose days did not go

exactly as planned. Likewise, this flexibility and accommodation extended to me as my schedule at times changed due to unforeseen circumstances. The limitation of a short timeframe for this study was somewhat mitigated by the flexibility of all involved and the extent I could be present onsite. Flexibility also meant interviews could occur off-site for those who preferred.

Sampling

Sampling for this case study was purposeful, meaning the choice of Paladin as the single case and the interviewees could add exceptionally relevant perspectives to the inquiry into school-based restorative practices. Criteria were considered for who to interview, specifically the length of experience at Paladin to shape their perspectives, and direct involvement with restorative practices; what Creswell (2007) refers to as information-rich cases (p. 127). A willingness to be interviewed was also necessary. Last, consideration was given to the sample of students and staff being representative of the overall school community to the degree possible; however specific demographic quotas were not established as a condition for interviewees.

In regard to the sample of individuals to interview, another question was sample size. The notion of sampling to the point of saturation means individual interviews continue until the point no new information is being found that contributes to a full description of the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Receiving complete information to fully describe restorative practices at Paladin was a goal. Yet, one concern in having an open-ended sample size, meaning to continue to expand the pool of interviewees, was the danger of too large a sample given the time frame and the potential for lack of focus in data analysis. Key informant interviews were one important method of data collection, however gaining a full understanding of restorative practices

at Paladin heavily encompassed participant observation and other forms of documentation.

Taking into account the multiple forms of data to corroborate findings, open-ended interviews were conducted with seven staff and seven students. The definition of staff for the purpose of this study includes all school employees. The specific positions held by interviewees were in the spheres of school leadership, the education team and support services staff. All first interviews were in-person and were audio-recorded with permission.

Second and third interviews were documented through note taking. Interviews were up to two and a half hours in length and individuals were interviewed up to three times. Interviews were not restricted to a set time, so they ended when all questions had been explored. A final open ended question was asked of interviewees; did they have anything more to add that had been missed. Last, interviewees were asked who else they thought important to be interviewed, which helped corroborate choice in interviewees.

Student demographics are shown in Table 1 as provided by Paladin leadership for the 2017-18 academic year, which is compared to the demographics of students interviewed for this study. Of the seven students interviewed, four were female and three male, five African American/students of color, and two were White/Caucasian. Three were recipients of special education services and six qualified for free/reduced lunch. Their time at Paladin ranged from one to four years, with the average being two years. For a small sample size, the demographics of the interviewees align very closely with only small variation from the Paladin student body. A sample size of seven means this degree of variation occurs with just one person.

Table 1

Paladin Students and Interviewee Comparison

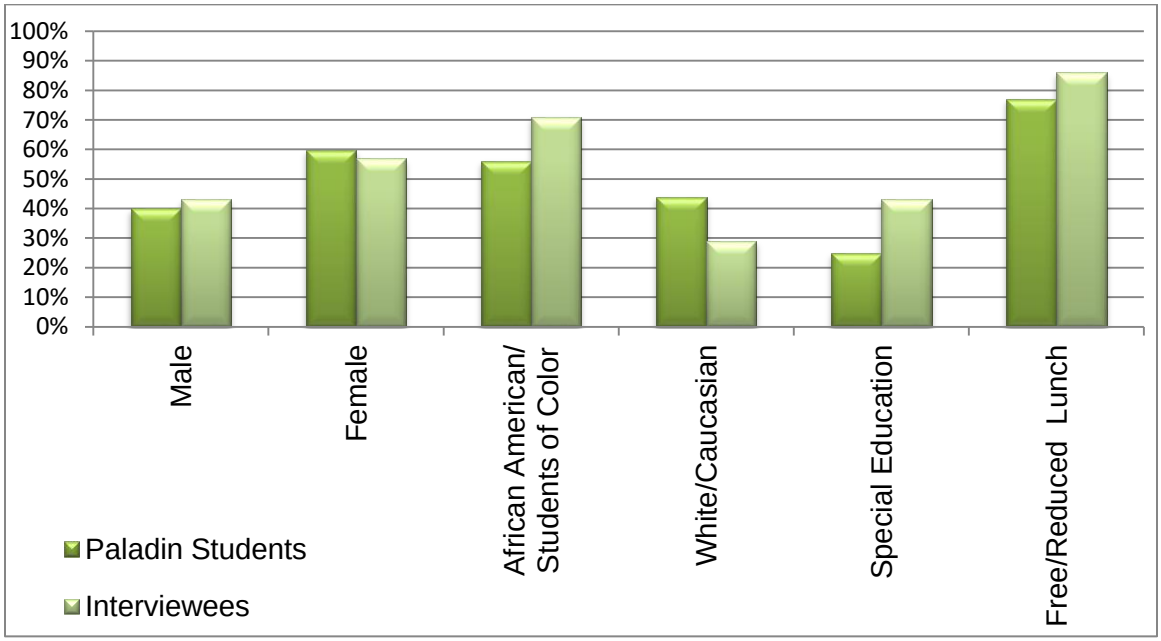
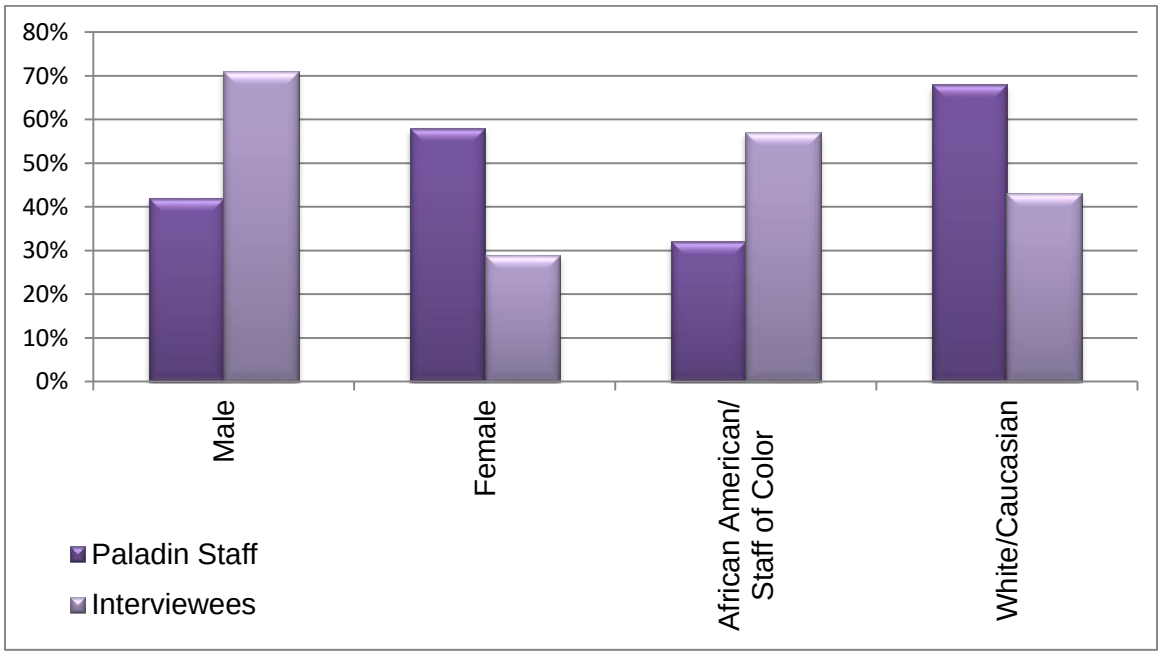


Table 2

Paladin Staff and Interviewee Comparison



The comparison of staff at Paladin to the staff interviewed is shown in Table 2. Demographics for the 45 Paladin employees were also provided by the leadership. Of the staff interviewed, 71% were male and 29% female, 57% African American/staff of Color, and 43% White/Caucasian. Two interviewees were from the sphere of school leadership, four from the education team and one support services staff.

Four of the staff interviewed had been at Paladin between six and nine years, three of whom had experience with restorative practices prior to coming to Paladin. One staff interviewed had been at Paladin for two years and came with prior restorative practices experience, and two staff interviewed had been at Paladin three to four years and came with no prior restorative practices experience. The average length of time at Paladin was five and a half years.

Staff interviewed compared to staff overall had greater variation between gender and race/ethnicity than did the students interviewed. The variation is warranted with the use of purposeful sampling, combined with the criteria of experience with restorative practices and years at Paladin, as higher priorities than demographic sampling. Again, with a small sample size, only two staff account for the variance in either direction. The interviewees were recommended by Paladin leadership based on their unique experience and perspectives on restorative practices. Additionally, all seven of the staff interviewees were directly engaged with students in their time at Paladin.

Collecting Data

Creswell (2007, p. 130) provides a summary of main sources of data relevant to case studies, three of which I've collected for this study: 1) archival and procedural documents, 2) interviews, and 3) participant observations. The study's questions drove data collection to maintain a link with the study's aims. Interviews were discussed in the previous section, so documentation and observations are covered in this section.

Collecting archival and procedural documents served a number of purposes. As Yin (1984) stresses, documentation evidence first and foremost is reviewed to corroborate evidence from other primary sources. Documents alone are not sufficient to describe the experience of restorative practices at Paladin. However they have been useful in verifying dates, times, people and decisions related to restorative practices. Documents have also been a source for identifying contrary rather than corroborating data, which has provided opportunity for deeper inquiry with Paladin staff. Forms of data collected at Paladin are outlined as follows.

Policy and archival data. I reviewed historical documents and policies to understand the move from no use of restorative practices at Paladin to the current state of implementation. Paladin provided access to,

- Student handbooks from 2011 to 2018,
- Employee handbooks from 2015 to 2018,
- Annual reports from 2009 to 2017,
- Innovative Quality Schools (approved charter school authorizer) Annual Review 2017, and State of the School addresses from January 2017, and February 2018,
- Paladin's current Section 504/ADA Manual,
- Student Bullying Prohibition policy,
- Discipline Incident Reporting System (DIRS) data report covering 2015-2018, and
- Relevant pages of Paladin's most recent contract with Innovative Quality Schools as authorizer, dated June 14, 2018.

Procedural data. As a school using restorative practices, a number of procedural documents had been developed over the past six years. Paladin provided thirteen documents for review, which included,

- Restorative Justice Guides from 2011 to 2017,
- 2015 Restorative Justice Flow Chart,
- Restorative Practice Problem Solving Outline,
- Restorative Circle Post-Evaluation form,
- Student Behavior contract,
- Restorative Agreement form,
- Template for restorative justice intervention,
- 2016-17 staff questionnaire on restorative practices and staff responses, and
- Restorative justice team meeting notes from 2015-16.

Last, procedural materials, such as circle ground rules, agendas, and guides used in student circles, classrooms, and staff circles were reviewed as they became available during observations at Paladin.

Participant observations. Direct observations of the school environment and the use of restorative practices were a significant part of data collection. Researcher as participant observer took many forms. Between January and early June, I spent over 200 hours at Paladin. My time at Paladin officially began on January 2, 2018, which was my introduction to the staff in circle. During the five months, 35 hours were spent participating in Paladin staff development days and engaging in individual conversations with staff.

A total of 72 hours were spent in observation as a participant in 25 student morning circles, two staff circles, and one circle led by a Paladin student at a school-

based restorative practices conference in St. Paul. In my first week of observing morning circles, I sat in a circle led by one staff, and then in a second circle co-facilitated by two other staff; the first became my regular circle. The plan was to regularly participate in one morning circle for my time at Paladin to experience it fully and naturally in relationship with the students and staff as they experienced it.

On seven occasions I observed the Paladin Learning Lab, which is the open learning environment in the center of the school's space where students work on projects and student success coordinator desks are situated. Each student is assigned to a success team led by staff, called student success coordinators (referred to as SSC's). The learning lab is divided into quadrants, with each quad (as they are called at Paladin) having a mix of table sizes, available computers and spaces for staff and students to interact. I made it a point to observe each quad, which meant picking a random spot to sit with my laptop as I was attentive to the environment around me.

Four classrooms were observed, each for 40 minutes. Prior to beginning research, the plan was to observe student and staff circles, and other participant observation opportunities would be identified through experience and relationships as they developed. Classroom observations were by invitation from the staff, rather than initiated by me. I was invited to observe an animal care class, for which the students and staff used principles of restorative practice to create group guidelines and ways of being together in the learning environment. I was also invited to observe three communications classes.

In the final two weeks of Paladin's academic year, I participated in a number of activities as part of the closure of my time with staff and students. A significant day for closure was Thursday, May 31, 2018, which included the wrap-up of the girls' group I had co-facilitated and the graduation event for out-going seniors. The school day ended

at 1:00 pm, so those involved in graduation that evening had time to prepare. I joined staff and a handful of students in setting up the space at the graduation site. Dinner was provided, and I shared a table with two students from the girls' group plus four staff. The graduation ceremony followed, for which the agenda included three graduating students as guest speakers. Their written speeches were given to me as additional documents for this case study.

Recording Information and Storing Data

The steps of recording information and storing data go hand in hand. Yin (1984) stresses the importance of recording data by keeping a central data base. The researcher should manage databases and document logical chains of evidence so that an audit would uphold the integrity of the study. My intent has been to uphold high standards for data recording and storage. Most data for this case study has been stored electronically; however signed consent forms are kept separately in a secure file cabinet. Three sets of field notes have been kept, also electronically, which included observation notes, reflexivity notes, and any decisions made during the research process. Each field note entry included a heading with subject, date and ability to add memos in the right column. Moreover, as previously noted, all data has been kept without identifiable information to protect the privacy of participants. Audio recordings of interviews did not include identifiable information, nor did the file names under which they are stored.

Resolving Field issues

No matter how well prepared, the process of data collection and management has unexpected twists and turns that may hinder the research. My goal has been to anticipate potential issues and be prepared to address them. One advantage of a qualitative case study is the room for flexibility when issues arise (Yin, 1984). Prior to beginning the research, one conceivable issue could have been a delay in getting

approval from the IRB. My first research proposal incorporated youth participatory action research as a methodology, which would elevate the role of youth as public research partners. It was anticipated that it would take many months longer to gain approval under IRB oversight with youth publically identified. By eliminating youth participatory action research from the case study research design, it was possible to keep all identifiable information out of data, which in turn contributed to the IRB's decision to exempt the study from IRB oversight. The research timeline stayed on course.

Another potential issue perhaps most challenging to overcome would be difficulty in building trust with staff and students at Paladin. The lack of trust could have had the greatest negative consequences for the research, and could require the most significant changes in data collection plans. The preceding section on accessing Paladin touched on my plans to build trust and gain access, which was successful.

During the months at Paladin, a number of staff and also parents were introduced to me as potential interviewees. I had also been referred to students who tended not to be at Paladin during the times my schedule allowed. Attempts were made to schedule interviews with four parents, one additional staff and two additional students. In initial conversations, all expressed interest and willingness to be interviewed. For one reason or another, delays continued to happen. The other person needed to postpone or I needed to postpone, the person missed the appointment or we simply didn't connect. Each time, the person expressed interest in finding another time for an interview.

I maintained flexibility, yet the point came where a decision needed to be made about whether to assertively pursue additional interviews. Based on the quality and depth of participant observations and interviews conducted, coupled by time constraints, the decision was made to not attempt to reschedule after two postponements. Rather,

each person had contact information for me, so I would still interview them if they initiated another time.

Data Analysis

Joe Kincheloe, renowned scholar on critical studies and education research, and his colleague Peter McLaren, advised that data analysis is the most important stage of critical theory-informed qualitative research (2002). It involves interpreting data to understand the power dynamics within a social context, building a bridge between the historical context and present, and linking the existing context to that of the others. It also involves unraveling the conceptual frames Kincheloe and McLaren (2002) refer to as the "taken for grantedness" or "what goes without saying" implicit within societal constructs (p. 288-289). In the analysis and interpretation of data, this explanation also bridges inductive with deconstructive analysis to look outside of the box for what has not been previously known that matters (Creswell, 2007).

Embracing this frame, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, data analysis followed a hermeneutic circle as described by Patton (2002) and similarly charted as a spiral by Creswell (2007). Similarly, researcher as learner overlaps with the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire's (2005) popular education praxis first proposed in 1970 can be viewed as circular, beginning with an awareness of what is already known, introducing new information and discovery, choosing action based on the whole of knowing, evaluating, and drawing deeper insights from the experience.

I used NVivo 12 Plus, qualitative data software by QSR International (2018) as a form of organization to initiate data analysis. I organized the data collected into four classifications, called files in NVivo. All procedural and archival documents were placed in one document file folder, transcribed interviews were placed in an interview file folder, all field notes were placed in an observations file folder, and an email from a staff

wanting to share an experience along with student graduation speeches were placed in a testimony file folder. Prior to any data sorting or coding, I read through all files. NVivo provides a number of tools to assist in becoming acquainted with the data, such as word frequency, text search, and word clouds, to mention a few. I used these tools to explore any patterns and look for possible sub-headings.

NVivo allows for the creation of containers, called nodes to sort what emerges as significant information. After getting acquainted with the raw data, I created eight nodes labeled to align with the study question and sub-questions. Reading again through each raw data file, I used NVivo's tool to highlight and drag/drop relevant text into nodes. Additional nodes were created when a significant text pointed to describing an emerging theme. From interview data, I was finding differences in the perspectives of students and staff, in which cases I created a node for students separate from staff. As I continued with this process, I also added a node as a container for important quotes, another for case examples/stories of change, and a third for "what else matters." In all, by the end of this process I had 24 nodes, some of which answered questions and others that appeared as emerging themes.

To deepen understanding of the data, I then read through the text within each node, often referencing back to the original text to ensure the meaning I was attributing to it was fitting the original context. In this process, overlapping ideas or meanings were found, leading again to dragging/dropping text into other nodes for cross-reference. Another tool in NVivo is auto-coding for theme identification. This was useful in seeing the language and concepts from another perspective, to consider relationships, however was not sufficient for defining emerging themes.

Much more data analysis can be done with the use of NVivo, but at this stage I chose to transfer text from the nodes into word documents to add memos and continue

coding. I used memos and coding to extract what may be meaningful in interpreting the data. After coding, themes or patterns were clarified that contributed to an understanding of the whole.

Patton (2002) describes this as constructing the meaning of the whole by making sense of its parts. To make sense of its parts, the researcher brings historical knowledge of the phenomenon and context to the interpretation (p. 497). For this case study, what is known about the history of restorative practices combined with a critical race lens is present in the process of making sense of the whole. Data collected through archival and procedural documents followed a similar process of identification of patterns or themes as they relate to the whole.

The circle of analysis continues in order to deepen understanding through the deconstruction of the whole. To do so, questions were posed that aimed at going beyond my current knowing. Thinking outside of the box (or outside of the circle with this analogy), questions included: What is it we still don't know? What isn't being said? What is being taken for granted? Exercising deconstruction strategies proposed by Creswell (2007), data analysis included attention to contradictions in information and perspectives, false distinctions and the use of metaphors.

To get neutral feedback, I consulted Dr. Helen Kivnick at the University of Minnesota, School of Social Work, who is an expert in qualitative research. Dr. Kivnick provided guidance about the data analysis process to uncover what was being missed and to deepen analysis. Meetings were held with Paladin collaborative partners for member checking; considering different lenses for questioning and further interpreting the data.

The analysis circle, which I repeated numerous times, was finished by reconciling any new interpretations and parts with the whole. It was most useful in the final stage to

abandon technology and “get physical” with the emerged themes; reverting to sheets of paper and post-it notes. Each theme was written as a heading on a separate paper. Sub-headings were written on post-it notes, so they could easily be moved if they made more sense under a different heading. Chapter outlines were created. Through this process, a rich description of Paladin’s use of restorative practices has come full circle.

One danger Yin (1994) warns case study researchers to guard against is getting off track with the wide range of flexibility and breadth of data that may be available. It is easy to lose focus, which may result in an inability to effectively analyze data. Secondly, Yin points out the focus on the review of documents in case study research is to corroborate evidence from other sources. Document *review* is much more focused than research encompassing policy and document *analysis*. With this in mind, criteria were established for the review of archival and procedural documents with a list of key words worthy of attention. Documents were scanned for references to restorative practices, circles, community, conflict, discipline and suspension.

The amount of raw data generated from Paladin interviews, observations and archival documents was overwhelming. On a daily basis I heeded Yin’s words and reminded myself to stay focused.

Validation Strategies

After an extensive review of validation strategies adopted by qualitative researchers, Creswell (2007) proposed eight methods that are most applied, of which five were appropriate for this case study. Each is addressed elsewhere, but worthy of reiteration in this context. I have provided the eight methods in a checklist to highlight the completion of each strategy.

✓	**Prolonged engagement in the field:** Over 200 hours were spent at Paladin, which allowed for trust building, learning the cultural context, and checking for accuracy of information.
✓	**Triangulation through multiple sources of data**: To cross reference data and corroborate evidence, triangulation occurred through interviews, observations and document review.
✓	**Being clear about researcher bias**: Attention to researcher bias has been daily, with written reflections kept in reflexivity field notes.
✓	**Member-checking:** Checks with collaborative partners who are also research participants have occurred through meetings during the data collection and analysis.
✓	**Transferability:** Descriptive reporting of the results has been done, including quotes and examples, to allow others the greatest opportunity to discern if it is transferable to another situation.

From a critical theory-informed perspective, Kincheloe and McLaren (2002) propose another measure of validity that is appropriate for this case study. They define *catalytic validity* as the degree to which the research moves research participants to a greater understanding of the phenomenon being studied in order for them to transform it (p. 297). While I can't control whether Paladin students and staff take action to create change as a result of greater understanding, this research provides an opportunity with a collaborative process for them to do so. The chapter on findings specifically outlines a set of recommendations relevant to Paladin. Broader systems change recommendations follow, and provide an opportunity for Paladin staff and students to advocate for change on a policy level.

Writing the Case Study Report

As stated earlier, the case study research was designed to allow for the experiences of Paladin students and staff to unfold naturally. It is my intent for the writing to do the same, letting the narrative to unfold naturally for the audience reading it. Earlier chapters reviewed the relevant restorative justice and school-based practices literature, including foundational theories. As the writing unfolded, additional theories and conceptual frameworks were added as they became relevant to the evidence uncovered in the research.

Qualitative researchers have stressed the important of writing with thick, rich description to engage the reader in the narrative (Patton, 2002). Patton refers to description as "the bedrock of all qualitative reporting," (p. 438). Thick, rich description allows the reader to have a full understanding of what has been studied and make their own determinations about its meaning. Jane Gilgun (2005) has also addressed the writing of qualitative research and the desire to engage the audience of readers, referring to "Grab and Good Science." She acknowledges the contentious relationship between formal scholarly writing, and rich, detailed narrative that *grabs* the reader, making it memorable. Gilgun advices qualitative researchers that it is not an either/or proposition. The writing style should grab the reader's attention, draw them in, and fit the context of the research - all good guidance for the dissertation writer.

Since this is a dissertation, it is written to meet the academic standards of the University of Minnesota, School of Social Work, as one audience. Bridging the grab and good science relationship, my intent is for the writing to also engage the audience of Paladin stakeholders, restorative practitioners and school personnel, who may find some meaning through my and their own interpretations. At times, I have written with less

formality than academicians may expect, yet it is appropriate for a case study report to communicate the feel of the lived experiences at Paladin. The writing is a narrative; a thick, rich description filled with quotes and examples to illuminate the experiences of Paladin students and staff with restorative practices.

One aspect of the writing that may distract from the narrative is the absence of names in telling stories and sharing quotes. The case study was determined to be exempt from IRB oversight and not human subject research with the understanding anonymity of participants would be maintained. Instead of names, people are referenced according to their general role, i.e. student, staff, SSC or leader. My intent is to maintain high integrity in protecting the privacy of participants, while lifting up their experiences and expression through detailed reporting. From my experiences at Paladin and the collaborative partnership that made this research possible, I believe most if not all would have preferred their names be present in the sharing of stories. This dissertation is only one output from the partnership. Future opportunities will allow for public co-authorship of writing and co-presenting of findings.

Reflexivity about Writing

Late in the afternoon on January 8, 2018, I met with three Paladin staff, all who were deeply invested in restorative practices. Our meeting agenda was discussing how best to proceed with the research. It was my fifth visit to the school since first meeting the Director and Dean of Students four months earlier. With each visit, I was introduced to really good people; passionate about what they do, compassionate towards each other, and thoughtful in their communications. The students were also bustling with a dynamic energy, not always expressed as thoughtfully, but passionately for sure. I was looking forward to getting to know them.

Our meeting that afternoon was briefly interrupted when Miss Alice, Paladin's restorative practices consultant at the time, poked her head in the doorway to say goodbye. She was beaming with a big smile and twinkle in her eyes as she wished everyone a great week. One staff later shared, "Miss Alice used to say, there's a spirit about Paladin." As I listened to the three staff express their heartfelt beliefs in the power of restorative practices to change lives, I was hit with a feeling of utter inadequacy. I thought, "How am I going to do this justice? How will I capture the spirit of Paladin in writing the experiences of the people in this school? The answer is; I will do the best I can. I will uphold the integrity of the research process, be as descriptive as possible and I will as fairly as possible present the findings.

Research Limitations

All research comes with limitations. Since this is a single case study, the results are not generalizable to other situations or school environments. A case study doesn't represent a sample and will not produce statistical generalizations (Yin, 1994, p. 21). Similarly, the Paladin charter school experience is not the norm of public education and the student community doesn't statistically represent the general population. While the results produced from a single case study are not generalizable, the Paladin experience is still beneficial to understand the implications for future use of restorative practices at Paladin and in other schools. The description of restorative practices at Paladin may still contribute to theoretical understandings important to the broader field.

A second limitation to this case study is the age of the participants. If school-based restorative practices are viewed as an effective intervention to prevent the school to prison trajectory, restore humanity and create community, investigating its applications with senior high school students only provides a partial picture. As research into school-based restorative practices continues, focusing on early applications in

elementary schools and longitudinal analyses through their adolescence and adulthood will contribute to the base of knowledge.

When I sought guidance from Helen Kivnick, qualitative researcher and professor, I was reminded that dissertation research is also bound by a number of limitations specific to the researcher. In the five-plus months of being immersed at Paladin, I had experienced and witnessed more than I can possibly include in this dissertation. The challenge has been to stay focused. Yet, I felt so much more could be understood if I continued my time at the school and went deeper into exploration. One of the limitations of this case study, however, is being bound by time. The school year was ending for staff and students at Paladin, and my dissertation deadline was also fast approaching. I had no more time to go deeper with staff and students in the context of dissertation research. Further bound by time, this study does not include mixed methods or secondary data analysis. It does not include inquiry into the politics and implications of Paladin being a charter rather than a general high school.

This study is missing the voices of parents. Bound by time, a decision was made to focus on the voices of staff and students who were present at Paladin. This study is also missing the voices of those who had left Paladin for one reason or another, who had little or no experience with restorative practices, or who were still in the school, but in silent opposition. The more I talked with people, the more I wanted to talk to more people, and to go back to people from Paladin's past. Time did not allow. All limitations leave open the possibility of future research.

Conclusion

Guided by a solid research plan, the next six months felt like an immersion into the Paladin environment. I maintained my role as outside researcher, yet felt welcomed and was given significant freedom to observe and be part of the community. The words

freedom and community carry significance that will be explored in chapters on research findings. As a precursor, chapter six provides a review of Paladin's experience with restorative practices over the past seven years.

Chapter 6 Paladin: Disrupting the Status Quo in Context

Since *Disrupting the Status Quo* is the lead title of this dissertation; what that means is worthy of some attention. Chapter three reviewed the literature on the status quo in schools and the field of school-based restorative practices as a beacon of hope. The status quo of education is a system that allows a certain percentage of students to not succeed, who are disproportionately youth of color. The status quo means a reliance on zero tolerance policies that weigh heavily on exclusionary discipline. Escalating dissatisfaction with entrenched inequities that are enforced through public systems has prompted the growth in alternative approaches. School-based restorative practice is an emerging field that shows promise in making change. However, much more needs to be investigated to understand the implementation, impact and sustainability of school-based restorative practices. Investigation into Paladin's use of restorative practices adds to the current base of knowledge.

Disrupting the status quo means turning it on its head; flipping the way of being. This is found at Paladin in the educational model, in the focus on social and emotional wellbeing as a priority, focus on restoration, making the system fit the individual instead of the individual fit the system, defining and measuring success, and closing the equity gap. Closing the equity gap is related perhaps to whose space it is, whose rules apply, who has flexibility to make mistakes and how they are handled, who decides, and who is equal. All of it together equals being human. Being human in relationship embraces forgiveness, caring, and empathy, not sympathy. What does it mean to truly have community, rather than simply good relations to make things easier? The depth of the Paladin community will be discussed in chapter eight.

Flipping the way of being also applies to the concept of the school to prison pipeline. The mainstream education of the United States works for many students, but doesn't work for all and disproportionately doesn't work for youth of color. While students of color are disproportionately represented on the school-to-prison trajectory, white students also have this experience if they have struggles or experiences that make the system a poor fit (i.e. poverty, disabilities, and adverse childhood experiences). What Paladin is doing to interrupt the school to prison trajectory is to not accept the trajectory, but rather to prepare every student with a plan as they leave Paladin. Instead, it could be called the school to future pipeline, the school to success, or school to wellbeing pipeline. It should be noted, this case study is not looking at academic outcomes as a measure of analysis; however it would be beneficial in future inquiry.

Before describing Paladin's present use of restorative practices and understanding its implications according to the students and staff experiencing it, this chapter provides a timeline as a way of getting centered; to delineate reference points. A first discovery in my research was that restorative practices at Paladin are not applied as a stand-alone intervention or in response to a specific problem. Restorative practices are not applied as an independent variable in isolation to result in a single, measurable change. This chapter will put restorative practices in the relational context of Paladin's primary principles of operation. It concludes with a summary of principles in place to set the stage for gleaning insights into what it means to disrupt the status quo from the case of restorative practices at Paladin.

Pre-Restorative Practices 2003-2011

Paladin was organized as a Minnesota charter school in 2003 under the name Liberty High. A basic timeline of Paladin's journey in the context of current events is provided as Figure 3.

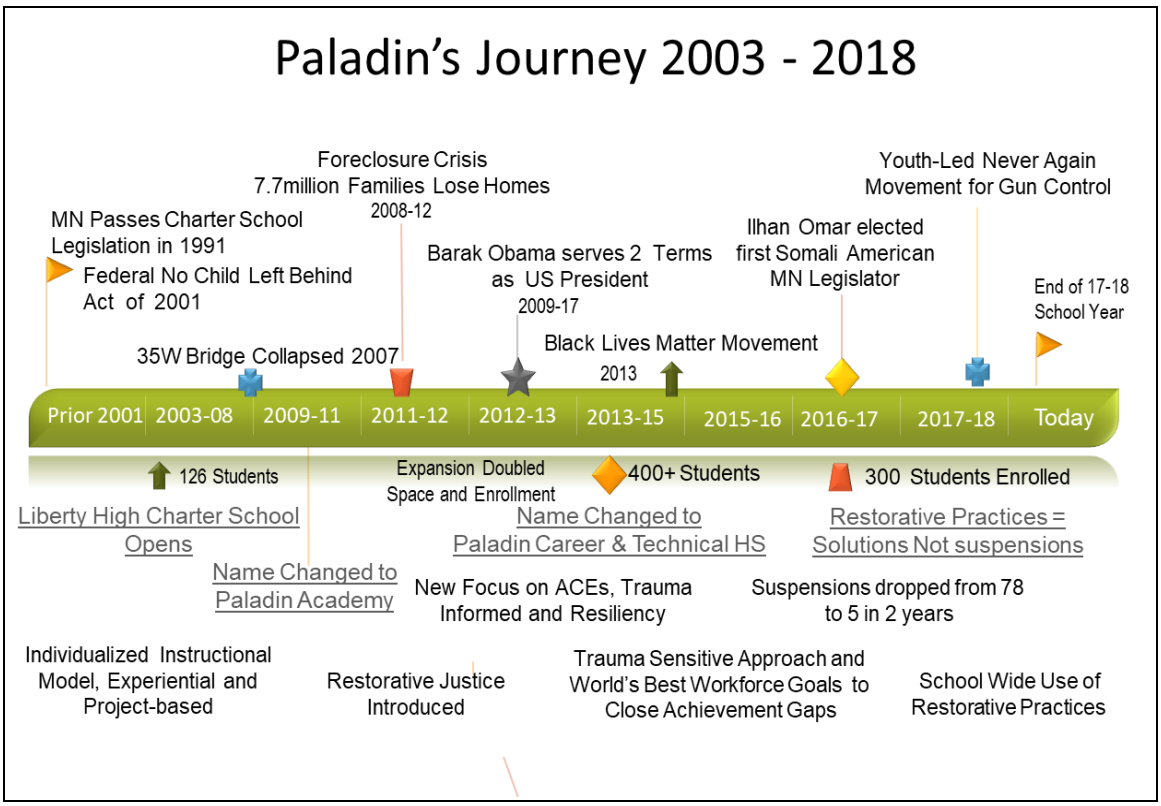


Figure 3 Paladin's Timeline 2003-2018 Mapped with Current Events

Since the beginning, the school embraced an innovative learning model centered on individualized instruction, experiential learning and project-based learning. Over the past fifteen years, this has remained the foundation of academic education. By the 2004-05 academic year, approximately 126 students attended the school. Liberty High catered to students that worked, so the school needed flexibility in meeting the demands of student work schedules. By the 2008-09 academic year, student enrollment increased to 190.

2009 to 2011

The 2009-10 academic year was a time of significant change. The Director had left, a new Director hired, and the school experienced a 15% turnover in licensed teachers. Liberty High was renamed Paladin Academy, with the tagline, "Champions for

a Cause." The student population was also shifting. Total enrollment declined from 190 the previous year to 167, and more African American students enrolled.

The annual report referenced the impact of home foreclosures and high unemployment on the mental health of students, 30% who were homeless. Recognizing the social, behavioral and academic strain experienced by students, the school developed Benchmarks for Success, a mechanism for identifying risk factors of each student, responded with individual interventions and tracked the results.

Suspensions were the main form of disciplinary action; however the school also offered mediation between students to resolve conflicts. A mediation agreement was signed by students who participated. Twenty-three student suspensions were imposed that year, most for disorderly conduct, i.e. yelling, swearing and offensive gesturing. An excerpt from the annual report about disciplinary issues is shared below (p. 14).

> Student discipline has become more of an issue in the building. We have had more suspensions, more mediations and more time being taken up with behavior issues.

In 2010-11, Paladin student enrollment declined by 10% amidst continued challenges with a population experiencing adversity. Excerpts from the annual report shared below concur (p. 12-13).

> During the 2010-2011 academic school year the counseling department again saw numerous instances of self-injurious behavior, and homelessness.
> With many of our students qualifying as homeless (according to the Anoka County criteria) and approximately 65% of our students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch, our main challenge for the coming school year is to deliver foundational programming to a transient population of students that have significant life issues. Also, to meet the attendance, math and reading goals required by the Minnesota Department of Education.

ACE's, Trauma Informed and Restorative Justice 2011-2015

Student enrollment continued to decline through 2012, and staff turnover was high. After serving four years, the Director left and Paladin was again under new leadership. In addition to a new Director, a Dean of Students was hired. Both brought with them an appreciation for restorative justice and introduced new methods to the school. Two other new staff also came with experience in restorative work.

Restorative justice was mentioned along with mediation as a heading in the annual Student Services Program report, which included mediation for resolving conflicts as in previous years, but also peer mediators and the school's first student council. More than 100 mediation sessions were held. Students received restorative justice training to be peer mediators, then given opportunity to assist with conflict resolution, including being the voice of students impacted from conflict.

The first introduction of restorative justice at Paladin resulted in a handful of staff on board, yet it was only peripherally applied. The student handbook had no references to restorative justice and discipline relied heavily on threats of suspension or expulsion. From a staff interview, it was described in this way,

> "At that time, we weren't really doing it. We started the restorative work of talking to the students about what happens but, we were still treating the act; we were still disciplining the behavior and we weren't asking, 'What happened to you?' We were still asking, 'Why did you do that?'"

2012 to 2013

In the summer of 2012, Paladin underwent a large expansion of space, basically doubling in square footage and reformatting the school with a large learning lab; an open area in the center for the school divided into quadrants for students to work on projects individually or in groups. In turn, the student population nearly doubled with 247 enrolled

by the end of the year. New staffs were hired to meet the demands of a larger student population.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

Programmatically, 2012 was a pivotal year on two fronts. First, the administrative leadership team introduced the school to the latest research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the impact on well-being. The Centers for Disease Control illustrate the hierarchy of health impacts from birth to death affected by ACEs in Figure 4 below. Adverse childhood experiences have been proven to disrupt or slow brain development affecting learning, as well as negatively impacting social and emotional development. Continued impact on physical, emotional and mental health has been proven to even result in premature death.

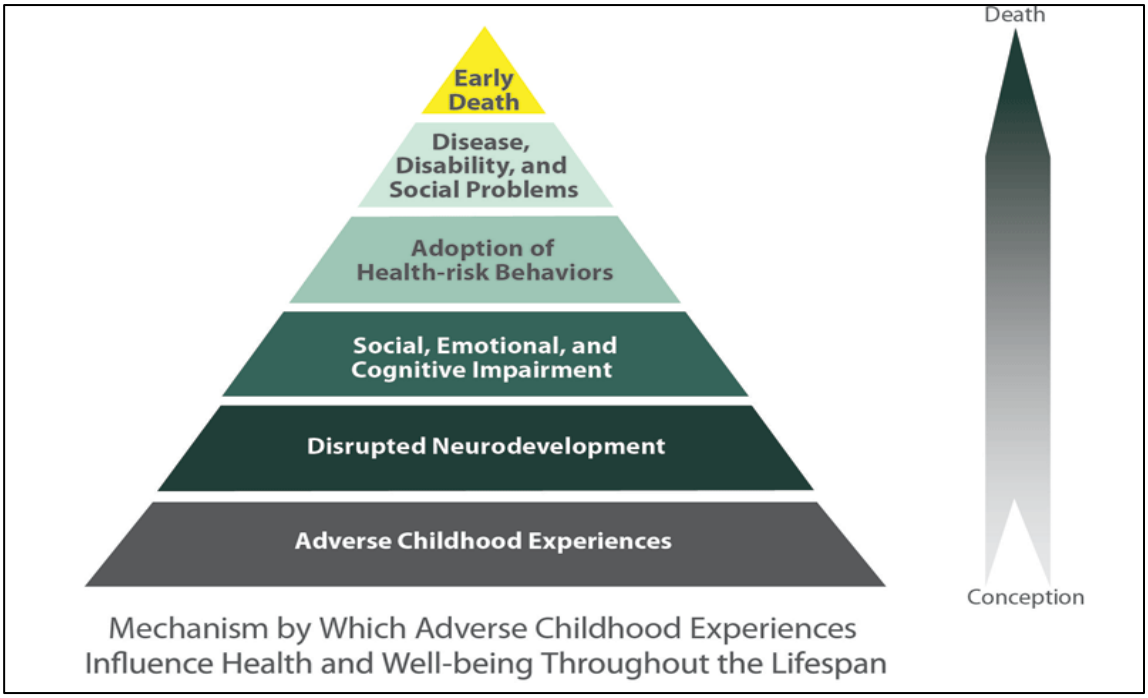


Figure 4 ACEs Health Impacts, Centers for Disease Control (2016)

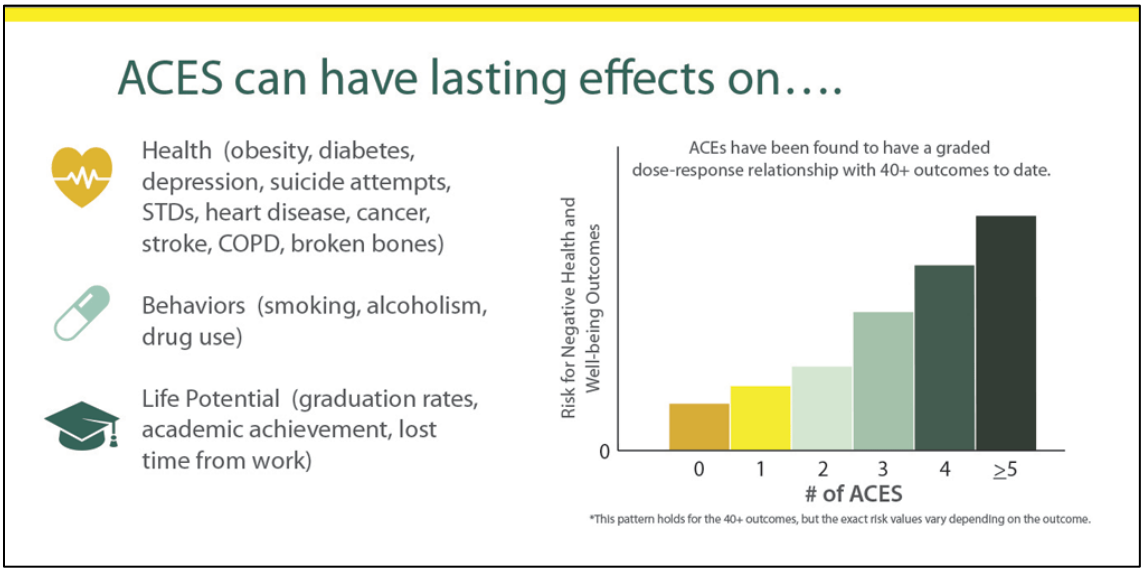


Figure 5 ACE's Risk Rating, Centers for Disease Control (2016)

A rating of 40 risks that increase the potential for negative health outcomes is depicted in Figure 5. Through an ACEs survey, the level of risk is measured and risk category assigned on a scale from one to seven. A significant amount of staff development time was devoted to understanding ACEs based on research by the Centers for Disease Control and the ACE survey. Every student at Paladin was given the ACE survey for the first time in 2012. In the words of a staff,

> "Our students have always had a high level of financial need, emotional and social, and economic barriers. Those have always been - chemical dependency, criminal justice. Our students have always been considered at-risk. We didn't know quite the level of need. A lightbulb went on—an epiphany moment. The ACEs and the direct links that the adverse childhood experiences add to behaviors and outcomes - we all knew it but, once you read it, you have this 'ah hah' moment. That was big for us."

The results of the ACEs survey for Paladin students are shown in Figure 6. All but seven percent of Paladin students had a risk rating of one or higher. Written in the Paladin 2012-13 annual report, “Compared with children with no adverse childhood experiences, youth with three or more ACEs were, three times more likely to fail, five times more likely to have severe attendance problems, six times more likely to have severe behavior problems, and four times more likely to have self-reports of poor health,” (p.19).

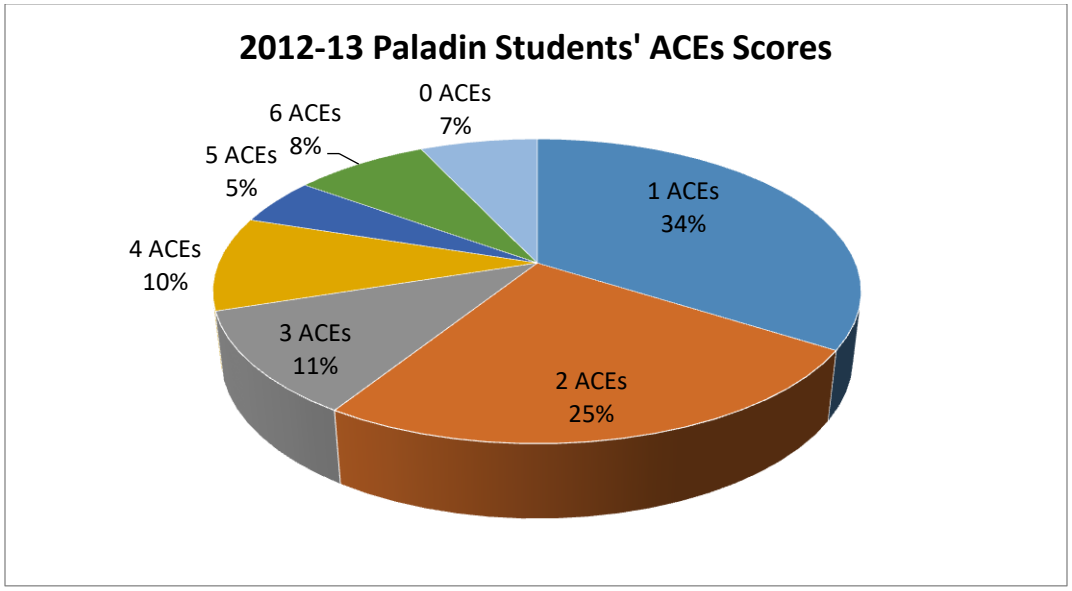


Figure 6 Paladin Students’ ACEs Scores 2012-13

Since Paladin had already been using their own Benchmarks for Success tool, they combined the ACE survey with other important measures. One academic risk measure was the years behind in credit attainment when students enrolled. According to data in the 2012-13 Paladin annual report, 98% of students were one year or more behind in credits when they enrolled, which is shown in Figure 7. As a result of a deeper understanding of ACEs and ways to address risk factors, language commonly used at Paladin changed to include trauma informed harm reduction and resiliency.

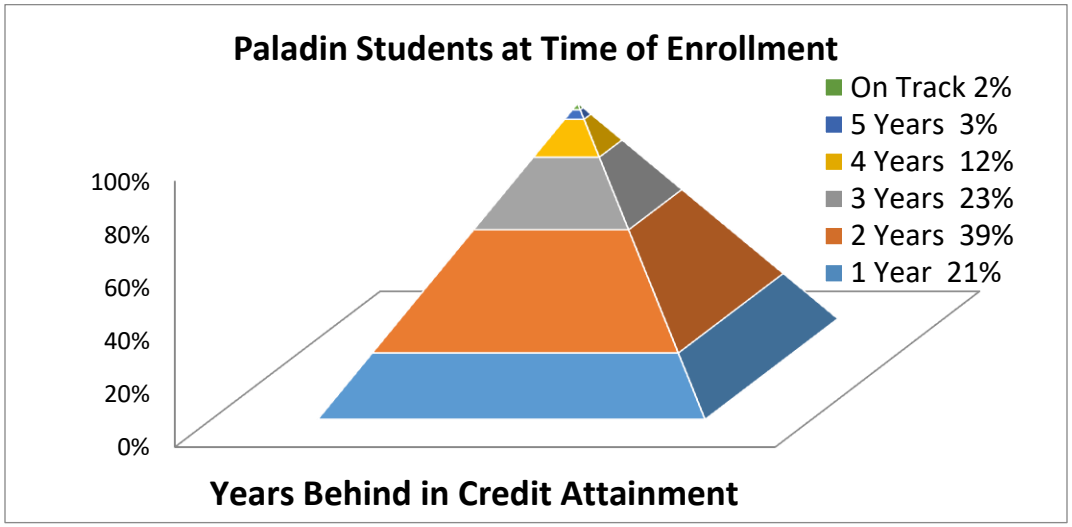


Figure 7 Paladin Students' Credit Attainment at Time of Enrollment 2012-13

An excerpt from the 2012-13 annual report demonstrates this change.

> "The interventions used by the school to address these obstacles, with the intent to prevent additional ACEs or Benchmarks for Success Obstacles, and to increase a student's resiliency are embedded into every aspect of the program at Paladin Academy" (p. 12).

Restorative Justice

The second pivotal change was broadening the understanding of restorative justice in the school. New references to restorative justice included the use of circles. The student handbook was revised to include a Restorative Justice program to its behavior management plan. Under the heading Restorative Justice, the handbook had four pages of explanation about what restorative justice was and how it could be applied in certain situations.

The 2012-13 student handbook included this general statement,

> "As a school serving an economically, racially, and socially diverse population, Restorative Justice provides an ongoing program to resolve conflict, build

> community, reduce recidivism, build interpersonal skills, and provide students with mediation and conflict resolution tools that will be valuable in their futures beyond high school" (p. 23).

The student handbook also explained, "Restorative Justice at Paladin Academy is used to supplement, and in some cases substitute, other means of behavior management," (p. 24). Restorative justice was thus added, but did not replace suspension and expulsion as disciplinary options.

2013 to 2015

For two academic years, Paladin operated under the same leadership, expanded its use of ACEs and attempted to deepen its application of restorative justice. Student enrollment exceeded 400 each year. To better support students and form relationships, educators received the title School Success Coordinators, and every student was assigned to a school success team. Another noteworthy change was the school's security officer no longer wearing a uniform and badge, instead was in plain clothes. The primary goals of the school were to increase graduation rates, decrease student mobility, increase social skills and resiliency, and increase attendance rates.

Following the passage of the "Striving for the World's Best Workforce" bill by the Minnesota legislature, Paladin also explicitly addressed goals to close achievement gaps in the school's 2014-15 annual report. ACEs and the "Benchmarks for Success" measures were combined and called ACEs Plus. The school's name was changed to Paladin Career and Technical High School, which was seen as a better alignment with the mission and vision. The mission and vision now read,

> "Mission: Paladin Career & Technical High School empowers students in their pursuit of social, emotional and academic growth, creating a foundation for a successful future after high school.

> Vision: Paladin Career & Technical High School envisions an education system where adverse childhood experiences, childhood trauma, and other hardships are mitigated by knowledgeable, caring, trauma-informed communities that build resiliency for all."

Key words or phrases from the research on which Paladin founded change became central in the mission and vision, such as social and emotional growth, adverse childhood experiences, trauma-informed; and resiliency.

Restorative justice was another innovation receiving priority attention. A full-time restorative justice coordinator was hired to train and coach staff, as well as lead restorative justice implementation. Yet, the well intentioned leadership seemingly dictated specific applications, limiting the degree to which restorative justice was embraced at Paladin. Staff interviewed for this case study provided insight into implementation realisms that created backlash.

First, training in circles and restorative justice in general was offered for staff development, however it was optional. Not all staff chose to participate in training. At the same time, a strict schedule of staff leading student circles three times a day was mandated. One staff interviewed explained it like this,

> "2013-14 had another error. We had three circles a day, every single day and they were forced. So, we had three circles; one in the morning, one after lunch and right at the end of the day. We had a check-in, check-out circle and we did a mid-day check-in. Again, students and staff were forced. Staff were forced to lead a circle, not being circle trained. We didn't do a great job of training all of our staff to do circles. It backfired because staff weren't bought in."

Another staff shared their perspective on the impact,

> "The other thing I noticed, I asked for the most recent reports done by - or surveys by students, teachers, staff. A major theme was circles always came up as, 'We don't want that anymore.' I asked about that and the major reason, I believe, was we were doing circles three times a day."

Staff turnover was high during this time, which presented additional challenges to an already difficult situation. Keeping up with restorative justice training for new staff was difficult. Amidst growing tensions and strained relationships as well as financial hardships, the restorative justice coordinator was one of the staff who left Paladin.

Second, restorative justice was talked about holistically, from a relationship building approach to a way of handling behaviors, conflicts and discipline, yet how it was utilized did not fully match the rhetoric. A staff explained it like this,

> "If you did something or said something, you were punished in some way and suspended. Here's how we did restorative, when you came back, we had a restorative meeting. In that meeting, after you've already paid for the crime or you were punished, then you came back, then we had you work on a restorative piece of how you were going to repair the harm with the community."

Another staff perspective was similarly described,

> "We were doing restorative justice, especially for larger behavioral incidents, and were having restorative circles with families, with the students and community members, always after a suspension that happened. It was at the tail end on the student's return to the school, Paladin. That was when we were doing it, and we were saying that we thought we were doing it."

By the end of 2014-15 academic year, the Director left Paladin and the Assistant Director took the helm moving into the next year.

Deepening PBIS, Trauma Sensitive and Restorative Practices 2015-17

Student enrollment was slightly down but still strong with 372 students attending Paladin. Under the new Director, the previous restorative justice coordinator returned and a restorative practices team was created. A new positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS) program called The Court of Honor was implemented to incentivize improved student behavior. The Court of Honor logo is shown in Figure 8. Once a month, students are publically recognized at Paladin for their social and academic successes under the categories of duty, civility and achievement during a Court of Honor Ceremony.

Figure 8 Paladin's Court of Honor Logo

During that time, language in the 2015-16 annual report and student handbook changed to restorative *practices* from restorative *justice* and to trauma *sensitive* approach from trauma *informed*. The explanation of restorative practices was also expanded in the student handbook and annual report. A new sentence in the annual report stated, "Instead of using a prescribed punishment (suspension, expulsion, etc.) a Restorative Practice team member will meet with the student and others involved in the conflict" (p. 46). Pertaining to Paladin's use of restorative practices, one staff interviewed said, "The '15-'16 school year is when things really started to change. Once we started asking, 'What happened to you,' versus, 'Why did you do that?"

A new description of the school's trauma-sensitive approach in the annual report was as follows.

> "Trauma-Sensitive Approach: Paladin has created a student - centered, trauma sensitive care community. By understanding the educational impacts of trauma, we have developed a safe and supportive environment where students create strong relationships with staff and their peers" (p.46).

A staff had this to say about the evolving changes,

> "We didn't know what trauma-informed meant until 2015-16. We knew that our students were traumatized. We were always doing some of the trauma-informed ideas, already. For example, resiliency, the research says, is one of the best ways to overcome trauma."

Another staff added,

> "We're trying to create a physical and emotional safe space; we redesigned our learning lab, where we created hallways. We did visual and sound barriers and, I think, that helped create spaces and had more structure. I think that was helpful; at the same time, we were getting less staff turnover.

2016 to 2017

The Dean of Students left after five years, and a new Dean of Students who had substantial restorative practices experience was hired. This provided continuity, but also an opportunity to evaluate and deepen the use of restorative practices. Total enrollment was 316 students. A new slogan was highlighted in the Paladin 2016-17 annual report - "solutions not suspensions" by embracing restorative practices - as Paladin was intentional about changing the way student behavior incidents were handled (p. 6). Prior to 2016, the staff interviewed noted that restorative practices were used after suspension, not instead of suspensions, but the new goal was prevention. Restorative practices now were instead of suspensions. A morning circle was offered to every

student, however not mandated. By the end of the school year, staff circles had become an accepted practice, even requested by staff when conflicts arose.

Paladin's annual reports have consistently included the results of the ACEs survey for students compared to national scores, among other student demographics and results of family and student satisfaction surveys. The 2016-17 ACEs survey results for Paladin students are included in the annual report and shared here in Table 3. The 2016-17 report added suspension reduction data along with a detailed outline of behavior incidents and responses to them.

Table 3

Paladin Students' ACEs Results 2016-17

ACEs Score	Paladin Students	National*
0	18%	36.1%
1	19%	26%
2	12%	15.9%
3	16%	9.5%
4+	36%	12.5%

Suspensions in 2016-17 were down by 85% from the previous year; from a total of 78 to 12. An excerpt from the *Restorative Approaches* section in the annual report states,

> "Since its inception [restorative practices] in the 2012 - 2013 academic school year, we have had ups and downs in the process. However, over the 16-17 school year we feel we truly have embraced what it means to be a restorative school," (p.15).

Closing the achievement gap benchmarks, including graduations rates, were reported with comparisons of students by gender, race, homeless status, special education and whether qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Paladin's Whole School Culture 2017 to Present

Paladin leadership made the decision to reduce enrollment to better support students in achieving goals. Midway through the academic year, at which time this case

study was conducted, staff changes were again made that affected the implementation of restorative practices. A restructuring removed the position of Dean of Students and replaced it with two restorative practice coordinators. Rather than having a restorative practices committee that held the responsibility of implementation for the school, the committee was dissolved and the responsibility became shared among all staff.
As one staff put it, “When [the dean of students] left, it was hard, but it actually resulted in us going from one staff being restorative to all staff.” Restorative practices became more broadly used and more frequent at the staff level.

The number of suspensions dropped to an all-time low of four for the school year. Reflecting on the solutions rather than suspensions shift, one staff had this to say,

> “So we have to meet as SSCs, and really come up with the best plan for that particular student, that’s going to show them ownership, where they have to be responsible for their actions. And without pushing them away, because what’s most important for these students is being here in school for their education. If we take that away from them, then we’re not able to do our jobs.”

Paladin’s Culture 2018

Paladin’s use of restorative practices has come to be one approach in a relational ethos, the way of operating as a school. Each of these approaches works hand in hand, not as a stand-alone program or intervention. As one staff described, “It’s really a culmination of the ACEs, the trauma informed, and the restorative practice; all a part of a culture.”

These three approaches have come together as Paladin’s relational ethos as shown in Figure 9. On Paladin’s website, restorative practices are explained as a sub-heading under the heading Trauma-Sensitive. These three overlapping approaches support and build on each other. In proceeding chapters, rich description is provided to

deepen understanding based on the experiences of Paladin staff and students. In brief summary of Paladin's overlapping approaches, one staff explained,

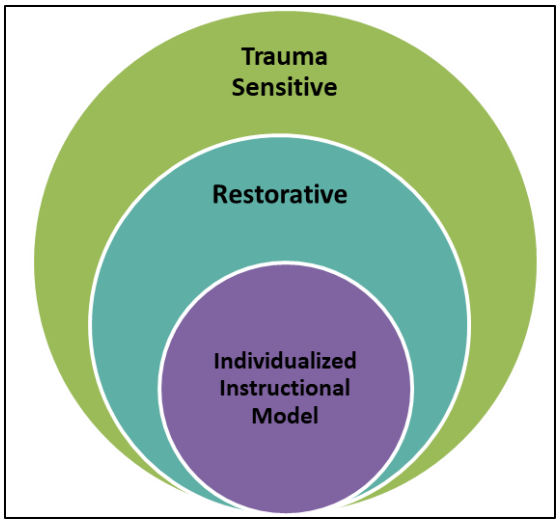


Figure 9 Paladin's Relational Ethos

> "That trauma informed approach, and everything we do needs to be through that lens. And the restorative practice is a major piece of that. But if you look at our academic model, project-based learning is student voice, student choice. And trauma is all about giving choice, giving options, for those who have been traumatized. So our academic model does that, and our behavioral model does that. If a student is harmed or creates harm, the restorative process allows for a student voice, and they get also options and choice of how it's repaired - to teach resiliency, to build relationships, to build back up that trust, and to let them know that people care."

The Foundation for Change

Arriving at Paladin's present culture with restorative practices as part of the relational ethos has occurred through a change process. The school's guiding principles and values adopted since its inception made change possible. Researchers on restorative practices as a whole school approach point out that change first requires understanding the underpinnings of culture (Morrison, Blood & Thorsborne, 2005). They describe school culture as the culmination of values, messages, symbols and systems that reinforce the rules of human relationships (p. 340). A school is fertile for change

when conditions have been intentionally created to achieve the vision and are values-based.

Karen Seashore Louis, expert on school improvement at the University of Minnesota, lays out a number of conditions that make school change possible (2006). She starts with being a learning organization, meaning to cultivate a culture where staff are involved with each other on an ongoing basis to process and evaluate their experiences. The staff understands past practices and interprets meaning so they can discern what they want to change for the future. Based on this processing, the staff is empowered to make innovative practice improvements together. School leadership must be visionary, yet have the ability to be collaborative and share power, so staff buy in and are involved in decision making. Last, the environment must be highly relational so people can learn from each other as they practice innovations and continue to evaluate what works and what needs adjusting. Morrison et al. (2005) add that staff must be allowed the individual freedom to try new methods and experience positive results, which provides evidence the change works and reinforces the shift to new practices.

Fitting with school change literature, Paladin's culture meets the conditions necessary for change, which has facilitated the integration of restorative practices in their relational ethos:

- Being a learning organization: evaluating, interpreting and adjusting for continuous improvement and innovation.
- Change leadership: visionary, leading change, yet collaborative.
- Individualized, experiential learning: Staff empowered to be trained in new methods and practice in their own way.
- Relational environment

Emphasizing the importance of relationships, one staff noted, “One of the things we’ve always been good at, at Paladin, which makes Paladin so special is that we’re really good at building relationships.”

Conclusion

Paladin’s use of restorative practices began with a brief introduction in 2011 and has since followed a change process that continues today. Laying the foundation for change, Paladin already had guiding values and a focus on relationships. It had leadership with a vision, and persistency in communicating that vision as well as implementing change throughout the school. The focus on innovation was explicit and overlapping in support of what’s different at Paladin as a result. It is a learning organization, not just for student academic outcomes but as a way of operating, which is institutionalized. To explain this sentiment, one staff expressed in an interview,

> “I know we are, and we always will be, trying to move in the right direction. I think that’s what is a good part of us - that we don’t stick with just one thing that works. We try to perfect multiple things, because we know that our student body, in particular, there’s not any one thing that works for every single student in our building. So we need to be open to that opportunity of relearning ourselves.”

The brief overview in this chapter of Paladin’s timeline and the implementation of restorative practices has touched on cultural and systems change. Paladin is moving in the direction of being a whole restorative school. Some staff and students believe it has already achieved whole school implementation; others do not. What is certain – Paladin has shown a deepening of restorative practices on the path from punitive discipline to repairing harm, and from situation-focused to whole school way of being. As will be described further in the next chapters, restorative practice has become one of several overlapping approaches central to the Paladin culture.

Chapter 7 How Staff and Students Experience Restorative Practices

"Letting it Take Over"

Paladin's use of restorative practices has changed significantly over the course of seven years, as noted in chapter six. It was first introduced in 2011 as restorative justice, an alternative approach to re-entry after discipline. Once it was more broadly applied in 2015, Paladin changed its reference to restorative practices. Ted Wachtel, founder of the International Institute for Restorative Practices, has shed some light on the meaning of language in the world of everything restorative, as noted in chapter three. His delineations of restorative practices along a continuum from informal to formal are helpful in understanding how Paladin students and staff explain their experiences. I have included the chart of the restorative practices continuum again in Figure 10 as a reference point.

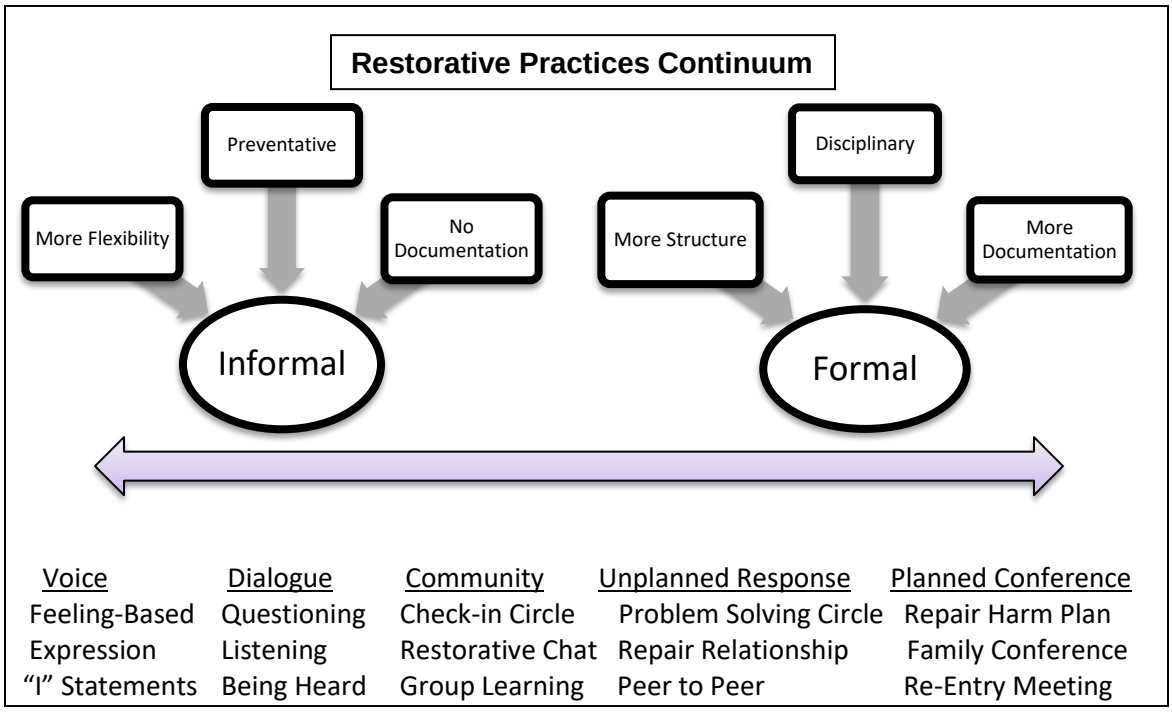


Figure 10 Restorative Practices Continuum

Restorative practices at Paladin encompass the full spectrum from the most informal day to day interactions to formal conferencing. Student and staff interviews, along with my observations are the sources of evidence supporting the description of experiences in this chapter. Case examples bring these experiences to life. Paladin in many ways confirms the body of research about restorative practices in schools, and in many ways uncovers unique experiences from which to learn. Restorative practices at Paladin most closely represent a whole school way of being rather than a separate program or disciplinary intervention.

Staff I interviewed, who came to Paladin with prior experience in restorative practices describe it as a process not to be taken lightly. Their prior experiences are grounded in an understanding of restorative justice as it has been applied in relation to the US court system, requiring the formality found on the continuum's far right. When asked about their experience of restorative practices at Paladin, however, the common sentiment was, as one of the staff said, "Looking at the world, and discipline, and interactions with students through a restorative lens, I feel like that is more of an immersive experience in being at Paladin; just looking at things differently." A student expressed,

> "At least one time in everybody's school year at Paladin, we've been in a circle or started circle, restorative discipline or just a restorative trip sort of. I've been on all of them. Restorative on a trip is connecting more with your team. It's sort of, like, brought us way more close."

My intent in this chapter is to uncover what staff and students experience at Paladin that is unique and different. What does it mean to disrupt the status quo?

"Make the System Fit the Individual, Not the Individual Fit the System"

A main theme in Paladin's context that emerged from the experiences of staff and students, and from my observations, is individualized custom-fitted treatment of each person, each situation and each incident rather than upholding a one size fits all structure. The focus on restoring the whole individual and handling each situation differently was felt by all staff and students interviewed. It starts from day one, when a student first walks in the door to enroll at Paladin.

Acceleration

When a student enrolls at Paladin, they begin their journey through a process called Acceleration. Specific staff serves as the acceleration team, assigned to build relationships with new students, get them acclimated, assess their academic achievement, assist with developing their individualized learning plan and welcome them to the Paladin community. In the words of a staff, "We're like, slowly, fitting them into the crowd and making sure they feel comfortable." The term *acceleration* is not uncommon to elementary and secondary education; however it's applied a bit differently at Paladin. Acceleration in the education field generally is used in the context of students, identified as especially gifted and talented, being moved up in their education at a faster rate than they would if they followed the mainstream trajectory.

In the report, *A Nation Empowered Volume 1: Evidence Trumps the Excuses Holding Back America's Brightest Students*, the authors highlight twenty approaches supported by research evidence to accelerate high-ability children (Assouline, Colangelo, & VanTassel-Baska, 2015). Paradoxically, this report and others suggest a disparity exists in education for gifted students if they are not provided the opportunity to excel beyond their typical grade level, predicated on age. The Acceleration Institute of the College of Education, University of Iowa serves as a clearinghouse for acceleration

research and public policy, which lists Minnesota as one of many states statutorily allowing school districts to adopt procedures for acceleration.

The research and literature on acceleration clearly points to a focus on the individual child and customizing an acceleration plan to best challenge their abilities. By focusing on the individual abilities of each student, their learning opportunities can be optimized. This is where Paladin comes in. The Paladin approach embraces the notion of every student being unique in their experiences and abilities, thus deserving of an individual learning plan to accelerate their education. What's different about Paladin, what goes against the status quo of acceleration in education, is that the majority of Paladin students are at least one year behind in credit attainment at the time they enroll. Acceleration seems very appropriately applied to optimize their chances for success, even though it goes against the status quo of how acceleration is understood by the education mainstream.

Acceleration at Paladin is not a typical orientation process to a new school. It can take anywhere from a couple days to many weeks, which as one would expect at Paladin is based on the unique situation of each student. No judgment is attached to the amount of time it takes to finish Acceleration. It is what it is; nothing more, nothing less. What matters is that the student is prepared and comfortably immersed in their new environment.

One of the atypical steps in the acceleration process is "resetting." For Paladin students already behind and not finding a fit in mainstream public education, starting their new school with at least a year against them means the road to success is rough. Resetting is the process of assessing each new student's educational attainment and what they still need to meet graduation standards, then setting a new graduation target that puts success in reach. Sticking with the road metaphor, resetting will not change the

hills and valleys of the road, but the path is straighter and the surface smoother. The destination is in sight.

Paladin is bound by the Minnesota Department of Education data reporting matrices, which requires tracking graduation data according to the projected graduation year from students' secondary education trajectory. The choice to reset students means while Paladin changes their system internally to fit the students, to set them up for success, Paladin must also track graduation data to fit the State reporting system. In choosing to put the wellbeing of students first, Paladin must hold the tension between two parallel systems, like the tension between two magnets repelling when one is turned up and the other down.

What does Acceleration and resetting have to do with student and staff experiences of restorative practices at Paladin? The answer is - everything. From the moment students are greeted at the door, it is the very beginning of being restorative. Expressed by a staff, "We start with the restorative process at the beginning, not at the end. We as staff are really trying to use restorative as a way of being."

Introduction to Community in Circle

New students in the acceleration process are assigned an SSC and are introduced to the circle. One staff explained it,

> "I'm a part of our Acceleration team. Every Monday or Tuesday when we have new students start, we will have a circle those first couple of days to get them used to the idea of going to circle, checking in for attendance reasons, and just building a community. Which even goes with, when we assign them an SSC, we don't do it based on keeping all the SSCs at the same number [of students]. We do it based on the student's need."

New students are assigned an SSC and join their student team based on a number of considerations. The student may have an academic subject with which they need more help or a subject they're especially passionate about, and one SSC more closely aligns with their needs or interests. It may be they already know an SSC or have a friend at Paladin, so being with those relationships will help their immersion. Or students may find a new relationship that feels like a good fit when they're introduced to all staff during acceleration, and choose, as this student explains,

> "You have to start off in Acceleration. And [she] was the first teacher to help me and my sister. She'll make sure you have everything you need, and you're getting your stuff done to get out of Acceleration. So I was like, yeah, we were just talking and stuff. She was the first person to help me, and ever since - I said, I need to go where she's going. I said don't put me on nobody's success team if it's not with her. And they put me on hers, and I've been there ever since."

Case by Case: Flexibility before Structure

Starting from the first day at Paladin, moving through the acceleration process, joining a student success team, and following through to graduation, every step of the way Paladin maintains a focus on the uniqueness of every student and of every situation. When students were asked about their experience with restorative practices, the consensus is summed up with this one quote, "I want to say it's different for each student." I will explore what it means to be restorative from the students' perspective in more detail in another section. When staff answered the same question, their responses were similar yet more focused on their role in ensuring every situation is handled in its unique context. As one staff shared,

> "Every incident has to be individualized. That's the cool thing about restorative practices - that you can treat things differently."

"I Have a Voice Now"

Having Voice and Being Heard

On the far left of the restorative practices continuum is creating space for, and developing skill in healthy self-expression. Paladin's trauma-sensitive and restorative culture is a result of intentionality in supporting and respecting voices, as well as ensuring students and staff feel heard. Students in particular have shared stories with me of being able to express themselves and feeling heard at Paladin. On a personal level, a student shared,

> "I've been through too much in my past. And [this staff], Oh, I love her. She's one of the most wonderful people I've ever met. Because sometimes I'll come into school, and it's just one of those bad days. She'll come talk to me, and be like, it's okay to talk about what you're feeling, how you're feeling. It's okay, because you're here. You're in a safe spot. It's okay to talk about it. It's not going anywhere, and it's not necessarily going to keep affecting you once you get it off your chest. I'll talk to [her], and be fine the rest of the day."

As this student's perspective suggests, creating a safe environment for having voice is one part of Paladin's intentions. Rather than a focus solely on having voice in relationship to others, healthy self-talk is the beginning. Being there to help students in expressing themselves in healthy ways with others follows the process of self-healing talk. It's about embracing the whole person. The writing and illustration by Rupi Kaur (2017) is posted on a Paladin wall as a reminder that healing and restoration starts as an internal journey, shown in Figure 11. This is central to the trauma sensitive approach the school embodies.

A staff explained,

> "Once you open the door of trauma, once you start talking about trauma - we could have gone on with our day, pretending that it didn't exist, that it's not there, that it's safer to not talk about. Or, we decided, and the research is going to support this, of you know what? Talking about trauma is okay. And a way to overcome trauma is to know about it, and to talk about it."

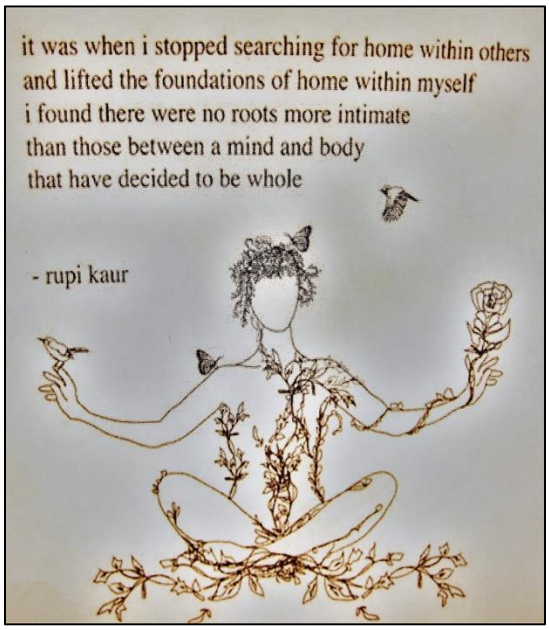


Figure 11 Quote and Illustration, Rupi Kaur (2017)

Creating a safe environment involves healthy expression of feelings, as well as good communication *with* self and *among* others as a means of preventing problems; the escalation of either internal or interpersonal conflicts that may harm self or others. A staff commented, "It has helped when we change from just restoring the harm that happened to really looking at preventing it." Having voice, being heard and being safe go hand in hand. One-on-one conversations allowing self-expression and emotional processing are integral to Paladin student and staff experiences.

Voice in Circle

A staff at Paladin put it simply, "Circles allow a space for individuals to be heard." Every student is offered a morning circle, and staff circles have become a regular practice on staff development days. I participated in 28 circles in my time at Paladin;

one is described next to give the flavor of a morning circle. Yet in my experience, every circle was different.

It was a Monday morning, which meant a 9:30 am late start instead of the usual 8:30 am on Tuesdays through Fridays. I had time to get to Paladin early and help serve breakfast before joining the morning circle. Starting late on Mondays was also a stress reliever for me; not being a morning person, it meant I surely would get there on time. When I first walked into the dimly lit "quiet" room, I noticed a poster on the left wall that had the names of students each framed in a star cut from brightly colored construction paper, a nice quote about the meaning of circles, and the circle guidelines pictured in Figure 12.

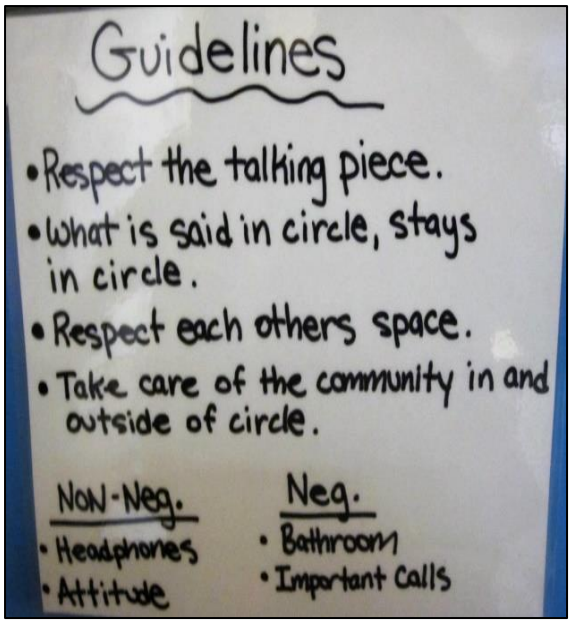


Figure 12 Morning Circle Guidelines

My First Circle: Respect the Talking Piece

The SSC, another staff and I sat with seven students in what was an arrangement of chairs not quite a circle shape. A desk at the far end of the rectangular office and a square table pushed against the wall in the middle were physical obstacles to a true circle, yet everyone sat so all could see each other. I squinted to read a word on a plastic container the SSC had picked up. Written in marker it read cirle, circle misspelled, and the SSC gave it to one of the female students who was sitting at the table.

The student proudly stated it was her circle, while pulling a couple supplies out of the container. Before she started the circle, the SSC made a couple general announcements and mentioned she had all of the students' schedules and would copy them so they each had their own.

Being given the go-ahead for the circle to start, the student held a small stuffed animal as a talking piece, along with a couple laminated papers with inspirational quotes

she pulled out of the container. She introduced herself saying she was pretty much the mother of the group and would lead the circle. Her demeanor was calm and thoughtful as she stated the expectations of the circle and pointed to the sign on the wall; what's said in the circle stays in the circle, respect each other, no ear buds and phones; but it's ok to leave to use the bathroom and to answer an important call. She began by reading a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. her favorite; "If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward."

She asked each person to share a goal they were working on at the moment, passing the stuffed animal to the student on her left. Starting it off she said her goal is to graduate, and as much as she didn't want to leave everyone, it was what she will do. The talking piece continued on. A couple students passed. Most took the opportunity to share something about themselves. When it got to a student who couldn't reach the boy sitting across the desk, she tossed the talking piece to him. And he tossed it to the next person. The other staff moved forward in her chair and spoke for the first time, "Hey that's not ok in the circle. You need to handle the talking piece with respect and hand it to each other, not just throw it around." They listened, and from that moment on it was respectfully handed to the next person, not tossed. The other staff leaned back, resuming her role as an observer in the circle. Incidentally, the students continued to respect the talking piece remembering the guidance they received during all of my months at Paladin.

For the most part students stayed on task, but it reminded me of something the Director said during my first tour of Paladin. He called Paladin organized chaos. I felt it in circle and I was fine with it; desensitized to the bustle of teenage energy after years of youth work. Fidgeting, looking down at phones and talking out were followed by regular reminders of the circle guidelines from the SSC and student leader. One student left the room for a brief time then came back. A second question was posed by the leader, and the circle concluded with her reading another inspirational quote.

All but one student headed out to the learning lab. As I was picking up my stuff to leave, the one female student still in the room moved over by the SSC to talk. She was speaking of a boy and started to cry. I left the room and closed the door behind me.

The Restorative Chat

Nancy Riestenberg, in her book, *The Circle in the Square: Building Community and Repairing Harm in School* (2012), puts the restorative chat in the context of early intervention; those on the spot moments where the response to a behavior is immediate and conversational to restore and reconnect in the moment (p. 54). Such conversations appear to be the norm at Paladin. "It has now become, everyone does it. Where a teacher could hold a restorative chat, and do it on their own," one staff explained.

Another shared, “I walk around and if I can catch a kid that’s emotional, I can pull them to the side and have a one on one chat with them.” From my observations and interviews, Paladin staff is regularly on alert for the student in need of a restorative chat. A student shared with me a corroborating perspective,

> “If I’m having off days with my anxiety or something, there are teachers that just see me and they’re like, “Come on. Let’s go.” It’s like that for every student. There’s staff that just know them better than they know themselves, and I think that’s a good thing to have.”

Walking around the learning lab or in the halls, I noticed certain cues that seemed to communicate a restorative chat was in process of happening or about to happen. Since the learning lab is an open space rather than enclosed classrooms, staff and students are interacting without physical boundaries. Everyone is in it together.

One morning when I first arrived at Paladin, I walked into the learning lab and saw an SSC talking with a student I knew fairly well. The student’s back was toward me and I could see the SSC was having eye contact with him as she listened. I approached and greeted them with a “Hi, good morning,” as I had done most mornings. No response came; the student didn’t turn around and the SSC didn’t move her eyes away from him. That was my cue to walk away. Voices weren’t raised. I heard nothing, but I took it as the conversation was important and not to be interrupted.

Being Heard in Times of Trouble: Restorative Dialogue

Moving along the restorative practices continuum, Paladin students and staff spoke with conviction about the transformative power of having voice, listening and being heard when they experienced restorative dialogue in times of trouble. The trouble could be a disagreement with the potential to escalate. It could be a misunderstanding about something said that left to fester will damage relationships, perhaps even

permanently. It could be real harm has already been done and those impacted have a desire to make things right. Whatever the trouble may be, students and staff at Paladin have had profound experiences in responding to situations through restorative dialogue.

Like the chat, restorative dialogue may be a spontaneous response when a situation calls for immediate action; however the skills of speaking from the heart, listening and hearing what needs to be said carries across the continuum to the most formal of restorative practices. A student shared with me, “I had a fight with another student in the circle, just a little while ago. And it was restoring for us to work something out together.” Shortly after, I heard more detail about what happened from a staff.

> “We had a fight between a couple of the kids in the circle, and there was still a lot of drama going on, so she [the staff] just grabbed her whole team and took them off-site and we had a great circle. It was refreshing. Some of the kids learned some stuff that was going on in other kids’ lives, out of school. And then they understood why they were so emotional and so it helped the process. The two kids, who did fight, did apologize to each other and saw each other’s side. It was a great circle.”

In this situation, a conflict interrupted the planned course of the day, and a decision was made to stop the conflict from escalating into something more serious. This is just one of many examples I heard at Paladin. When describing the experience of being heard in restorative dialogue, another student offered this reflection.

> “It’s opportunity for you to speak on how you feel about the situation. How you feel about anything involving what happened. And they’ll sit down and listen. Actually listen. And you can notice that they’re listening; paying attention to everything. It’s a great feeling, especially to know that there’s someone else out there that cares that isn’t related to you.”

The transformative power students and staff attribute to restorative dialogue at Paladin has been expressed many times over. For the purpose of this dissertation, I've selected one last testimonial to share from a staff about the experience at Paladin.

> "I believe if you understand each other better, if you know each other better, you know where the person's coming from. Then, we can get along better and we can start working with each other versus against each other. So it opens up a dialogue, where I think when you don't have that, you have people wondering and making assumptions about each other, and it hardens the feelings, which could ruin somebody else's life moving forward. If it wasn't for that open dialogue, for that restorative justice, for those mediations, we probably - I probably would have left by now because of how I felt I was being treated. So I'm really appreciative that we practice that here."

Youth Voice - Youth Leadership

The idea of staff initiating restorative chats or dialogue seemed fitting to me, but who did the initiating may have been an assumption based on my own bias. Perhaps it was the student not the staff. It was unexpected when I heard the stories students shared about their role in initiating restorative chats, yet it should not have been given my prior experience with youth being the leaders in restorative dialogue. I had taken for granted the power of youth voices at Paladin to make change outside of formal structures and hierarchical relationships usually found in schools.

Some students described themselves as being peer mediators. The Paladin website also includes reference to peer mediators, though a formal structure of peer mediation is not in place. One student explained, "In my circle, I think all of us are peer mediators, because we kind of know how to take the steps. It's really frickin' cool

because everybody's acting like a mature person and not a tenth grader or an eleventh grader."

Students had received training from staff in circle keeping and restorative practices in general. Another student expressed,

> ""In a conversation - a general conversation can just go into an argument at any time. When that happens, restorative practices and peer mediating is what taught me how to handle when that happens and how to get the most out of the conversation."

Paladin does not have a formal structure for peer mediation, yet informally and naturally it happens without adult interference. Perhaps staff may not even be aware when it happens most of the time. Restorative chats transpire under the radar as students prevent problems from happening before it becomes known to others. I certainly didn't witness it, but the students shared their experiences. A student explained,

> "I'm usually one of those go-to people, like, whenever they have an actual problem and they need to restore it by themselves. So they'll come to me asking, like, how do I go about this? Like, what do I do? And I will just tell them what it is. I don't like to talk to people around other people because it's more intimate and more - it's just better talking to people one-on-one instead of trying to school them in front of everybody."

The student was referring to situations where peers sought her out for guidance or where she initiated a restorative chat.

Other times the restorative conversations are initiated by students and involve both staff and students. On one occasion, a staff came to me with an experience of being harmed. The story was made complete when a student told me the situation from

their perspective. In both conversations, no names were used and confidentiality was maintained, so it was serendipitous that I was apprised of the one experience from two corroborating sources.

"Getting Right" Hurt Feelings Restored

A staff came to talk with me after an incident with a student. She was in tears and visibly shaken. The girl had said all of the students find her annoying and don't like her. The staff was confused and hurt. She felt the situation had gotten worse when another student overheard and was going to talk to the girl; fearing now it could become a fight. I consoled her for about 45 minutes. We talked about what would help her go on with her day, and I encouraged her to give it some space. At the end of the day I saw the staff again and asked how she was. She said it wall all good, with a sense of calm in her voice.

From a Student's Perspective

"There was this teacher, she came to her desk looking like she's about to cry. I asked, what's wrong? And she said I just never knew that a student could be so rude. So I'm like, what happened? So she told me this student told her that she's annoying, and she needs to stop coming up to her and nobody likes her in the school. Me being me, I went to go find the girl. I really wanted to go and slap her, but I didn't. I really don't like when people hurt people's feelings.

So I went over there, and I asked her in a polite, nice way. I said, did you say something to [the staff]? She was like, yeah, I was just talking to her. And I was like, well, you know you made her cry. She was like, well, I was just telling her how everyone feels. And I said that's not your call. Does anybody ever tell you how annoying you are? Or that you don't belong here?

I said- we're all annoying. Everybody gets annoying. We all want to be cool. We all want to fit in. We all want to be just like everybody. She was like, well, you don't know, because she… I said - that's her. That's how she works. That's what she does. That's her being her. Let her be her.

Because at the end of the day, she still is a staff member. She's a human being. She has feelings. And [the girl] was like, just trying to play the mean girl. And I was like, look. I feel like you should go apologize to her, because that was really messed up, I don't know what else to say to you. And I walked away.

Then [the girl] came up to me later that day and I thought she was coming up to me to curse me out. [But] she was like, I wanted to tell you that I didn't mean it like that, and I know I did hurt her feelings. I was going through something this morning, and I didn't mean to take out my anger on her. I was just surprised. She was explaining herself to me, and she was like, and I did apologize. Not because you told me to. Because I know it was wrong, but I didn't know anyone was going to care to come up to me and talk to me and tell me what I should have done, and what I did wrong. So I'm sorry about that, and I thank you for coming and talking to me.

> I was just so shocked. Wow. The girl is coming to tell me that she said sorry to the staff. And I felt good, like I did something that was really good. I always feel like, when people come up to me and tell me what they did to make the situation better, that's what really makes me want to stay in this restorative thing. I feel like it helps me, as a person, help other people get right.

Having Voice in Decision Making

The last sub-theme of having voice as a restorative practice at Paladin, being heard and having a say in decision making was identified through both staff and student interviews. It starts with organizational leadership that values collaboration and respects the voices of others. Applying the continuum of restorative practices interwoven with problem solving and decision making in all relationships has resulted in a cultural shift at Paladin. Students and staff have opportunity to make decisions together on a daily basis. One staff explained,

> "We have shifted the disciplinary model of our students, to being, that's how we make decisions as a school and community - collaborative and restorative, hearing from everybody."

When faced with a decision or an ethical dilemma, I've observed the Director of Paladin say on a number of occasions, "There's what is right versus what is right, and without all the information, how can you make a right decision?" On one hand, what is right is about the status quo in management based on man-made policies and procedures to protect organization liability. Contrarily, what is right is based on a moral code; how you choose to be in relationship with others. Finding the balance between the two is an unceasing tension at Paladin.

The leadership management style may set the tone, yet having voice in decision making at Paladin is broader than the typical relationship between formal position and

hierarchy. Whether staff is fully satisfied with the way Paladin is led and what decisions are made, it seems they share a perspective on how their voice matters. One staff expressed,

> "It's comforting to know that these issues won't be the end of the world and that we're going to have an opportunity to be heard and that there's never going to be a time where administration is making decisions without having heard everyone's experience fully. It leaves you feeling like kind of no matter what, everyone's going to get a fair shake of things which is, as an employee, very comforting."

Asking Differently

Paladin's staff made a shift in moving from restorative discipline to embracing restorative as a way of being when they began to ask questions differently (briefly mentioned in chapter six). Restorative practices are predicated on asking questions. This is not new. Nevertheless, a major cultural change for a school occurs by making this shift together as a whole staff rather than in isolated cases.

One staff explained it like this,

> "Restorative practices here are really centered on trying to get to the why in things I think at least and giving everyone the benefit of the doubt in any situation as much as is possible, asking questions before making decisions, allowing students their own voice and their own - the opportunity to share their own experiences and to kind of work through some of those things more organically instead of like, 'You did wrong and you need to see it. This is what's going to happen, and then you'll know better next time,' because it's more like, 'Why was that wrong? What happened there? How do you think that affected everyone else around you?' and kind of trying to pull that empathy out of them in those experiences."

Another staff, explaining the difference between past responses and asking differently, shared,

> "If there was a fight, you broke it up. You did that with any means necessary. I had the training of ask, tell, make. You ask. If they don't listen, you tell them. If they don't listen, you make them. You can't have that mindset here. Mindset now is definitely shifted to a - ask, ask again, ask politely, and repeat."

DRAWO2

As part of the shift in asking questions differently, all Paladin staff attended training on communication methods based on the book, *Verbal Judo* by Dr. George Thompson and Jerry Jenkins (2013). Dr. Thomson was an English professor, who interestingly changed careers to train police in de-escalating potentially violent situations and redirecting negative behavior. Paladin leadership developed DRAWO2 borrowing from the authors' five universal truths of human interaction. The intent was to give staff a tool to remember and practice responsive communications rather than reacting to situations as they arose. I took a picture of the poster shown in Figure 13, which hangs above a staff's desk. A staff explained,

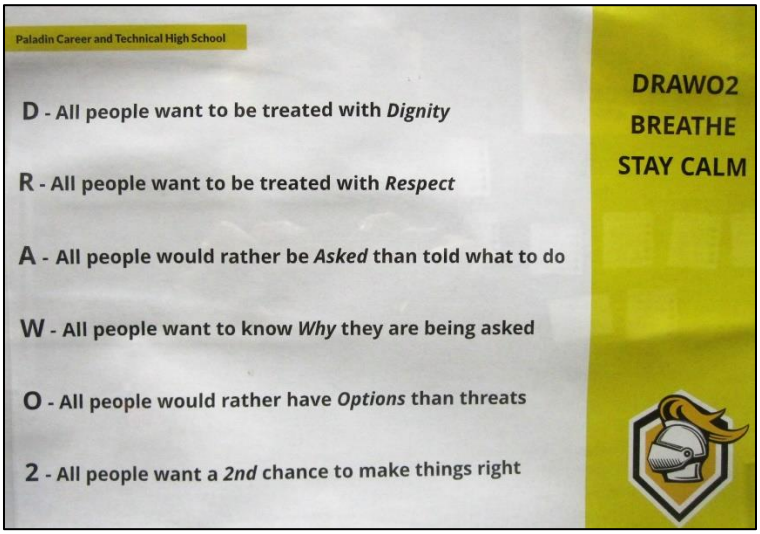


Figure 13 Paladin's DRAWO2 Poster

> "This is how we approach our students. DrawO2. The D and the R stands for, 'Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.' The A of DrawO2 stands for, 'All people would rather be asked than told.' The W of Draw stands

> for, ‘All people, when asked, want to be told the why.’ And the O stands for, ‘All people would like to have options.’ And the 2 is, ‘Everyone deserves a second chance.’ So DrawO2. Treat everyone with dignity and respect. Ask, don’t tell. When you ask, provide the why. Give options. But if we do this approach with our kids, and if we remember to use it, and again it takes a little bit longer, I would say that in a way, by doing that one simple thing DRAWO2, you’re being trauma informed. You’re being restorative. It’s really that one simple thing. If you can master that skill. I use it all the time.”

I did not observe students or staff referencing the acronym DRAWO2 as they talked about their experiences at Paladin; however I did see the poster with guidelines on a wall in the learning lab and in the staff office as mentioned. Like restorative practices, DRAWO2 is a principle-based guide not a program. Another staff said it like this,

> “It is definitely the expectation of staff that we are, when at all possible, expected to ask our students to do things instead of telling them to do them, acknowledging their humanity, and that they want to be treated with that dignity and respect - yeah, that they’re sentient and independent humans who have a right to understand why they’re being asked to do something and kind of removing the power structure in, ‘Well, because I said so.”

Without using the acronym DRAWO2, the staff shared an understanding of the core principles in her own words.

I did have the opportunity to observe the use of DRAWO2 in a classroom for which the students and SSC applied restorative practices to their learning environment. Again, the acronym DRAWO2 was not directly referenced, but the process fit the principles. The animal care class at Paladin cooperatively developed classroom

guidelines and community responsibilities for their restorative classroom, shown in Figures 14 and 15.

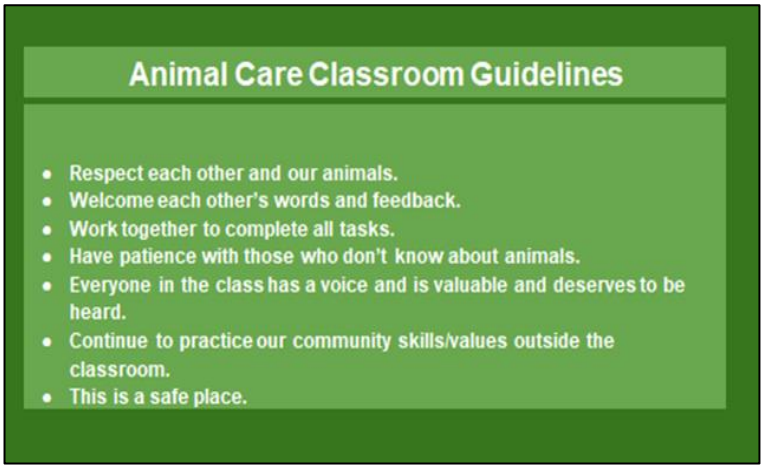


Figure 14 Restorative Animal Care Classroom Guidelines

Figure 15 Restorative Animal Care Classroom Responsibilities

DRAWO2 and the Restorative Classroom

One February day, I was invited to join the animal care class with a number of students I met in the morning circle. In the center of the room, students were taking seats around a high-top square table as the SSC was dragging a poster board from behind a stack of boxes set along a wall. The back of the room was lined with varying shapes and sizes of animal cages and marine tanks. Guinea pigs, fish, frogs and hermit crabs were among the little creatures at home in the classroom.

I had heard in a previous meeting a situation had happened not too long before; a situation of neglect that resulted in the loss of a few animals. Since then, replacements had been brought in, but the class still had some learning and talking to do to prevent it from happening again.

The SSC took out a talking piece and held up a poster board that showed how they together designed the class as a restorative process. She started by asking students what they needed in their life to be healthy, and passed the talking piece to the student on her right. Each student shared something – sleep, water, food, love… Intermittently as students offered answers and the talking piece was passed, the SSC would tie in what a student said with what the animals in the room also needed to be healthy.

The talking piece made it around the circle and everyone had a chance to speak. Respectfully and without shaming she raised the issue of losing some animals in the recent past due to lack of care. She acknowledged that it was an accident, no one is to blame, then asked the students what can be done in the future to prevent it from happening again. The students engaged in discussion, no longer with the talking piece.

When all options were sufficiently discussed and a consensus on animal care reached, the students were asked which care area they wanted to be in, and they divided into teams. I floated between teams to observe students working together and to see how they cared for the animals. One group played with guinea pigs, one group cleaned the fish tanks, and one group cleaned another area, and so on. The environment had a positive energy of cooperation as students chatted, laughed and took care of the animals together.

"I Got to Apologize" Righting Wrongs

Restorative practices at Paladin began as a re-entry process to repair harm after a student had been suspended for an incident. It has expanded with greater focus on prevention; however restorative processes for righting wrongs remain and will continue to be experienced by students and staff. A staff described, "You can actually go back to the person you harmed, tell them sorry, and try to work out, give them an understanding of why you did what you did."

Repairing harms occurs at every level; from interpersonal misunderstands as already mentioned, to community harms and more serious conflict. Student and staff have experienced the positive impact of intervening early to prevent greater harm. A student expressed,

> "The biggest need for restorative practices is in tense situations and when people are arguing, or when somebody low-key feels like they have to worry about somebody. That's the way we use it here - it just gives you the ability to sit with the victim or the aggressor, either/or. And they sit and they can talk. There might be a teacher there or a student there or whoever, and they can talk and work out something to where they're on good ground so they can function within the school."

With more preventative and restorative options, suspensions are at an all-time low; now the last resort. A student explained,

> "So the whole not suspending - no expelling. Yeah. Our school is great with that. There's been physical altercations, verbal altercations, a lot of altercations in the school, in general. I mean, for 200 kids in a small space, it's bound to happen. But usually when it does happen, they're really good with it. Because if the students don't want to fix it at that moment, they usually, most of the time, send them home or just let them leave, or call their parents, or whatever they have to do. They let the kids have their time and have their space until they're prepared themselves to come fix, and to be able to have that relationship back with whoever they had a problem with."

When asked about how they experience restorative practices, another student added if an incident happens,

> "Paladin will come talk to you about it – will come, instead of just kicking you out, to fix things without making more drama out of it. And not causing more hassle for their lives, or your lives. So it fixes things, without suspending, I guess."

While conducting research at Paladin, I had hoped to observe circles, mediations or conferences held to repair harm, yet incidents were few and far between. Instead I

relied heavily on the experiences shared by students and staff through interviews and conversations. I first heard of the following case from a staff who knew I was interested in real scenarios to better understand how incidents were handled. It again was a coincidence that I had already scheduled an interview with the involved student. Without me asking, he also shared the incident when describing his experience with restorative practices.

The Case of the Broken Chrome Books

Just before spring break, a student experimented with a broken cable resulting in damage to two chrome books, rendering them unusable. Here's how it was resolved from the student's perspective.

"I recently broke a Chromebook, and they're letting me fix it, and then pay for what needs to be fixed, instead of suspending me and making me pay for it. They just let me help fix it, and make it, and then pay for it. They don't want to suspend. They want to [handle] it restoratively. I probably would have got suspended for maybe a week, at my old schools. And then still would have had to repay the damage."

The staff involved added this perspective:

"He was really nervous about the consequences that could come with the damage he had inadvertently caused. I explained to him that the systems were likely damaged beyond repair. So, faced with a looming charge of up to $300, I discussed with him alternative means of taking care of his responsibility in this matter.

We arrived upon the option that he could disassemble both defective Chromebooks to try and identify the problem. The hope was that, if the damage was to a secondary component (not the motherboard), perhaps that part could be replaced for a lower cost. After a couple hours of poking and prodding, sure enough, he was able to isolate the issue at the battery! We tried installing a battery from a functional Chromebook into his damaged one, and it booted up with no issues at all.

The batteries are $50 each, coming to a total of $100 for repairs. Additionally, the time he spent investigating the problem and repairing the Chromebooks would count as community service hours, and that would cut down on the money he owed. Intrigued about how he could continue to work off his fee, I showed him the stack of Chromebooks I need to diagnose and repair, and he offered to help me. With any luck, this experience will end with him needing to not pay anything, Paladin having more available Chromebooks that have been fixed, and [the student] gaining a lot of valuable knowledge regarding the maintenance and repair of computers. Talk about a win-win outcome!"

In the case of the broken chrome books, suspension was not involved. However, students in interviews often referenced suspensions at Paladin. I heard two distinctions that still signaled a different approach from the typical school suspension. First, every reference to suspensions was in the context of a restorative process to repair harm and restore relationships. Suspensions were not perceived as a one-time punishment with no follow-up reparations. A student explained, “When somebody gets suspended for anything, in order to come back to the school they have to have a mediation. And in the mediation, restorative practice is basically used the whole time.”

Second, the sentiment among students interviewed is that most Paladin students have had an incident for which they believe they would have been suspended or expelled in their previous schools. Each student interviewed provided personal examples. What has been different for them at Paladin? They have been given options and second chances. They have felt cared for, and part of a community. They have also experienced significant personal transformation as a result. I will address each of these experiences in detail in the next chapters, but to summarize, a student explained,

> “I’ve had - me and my sisters have had quite a few altercations at Paladin. I mean, we could have gotten expelled, but Paladin loves us, so - yeah, they spared us thankfully. We’ve had altercations with teachers, students, staff members, principal; all of them. The problems I’ve had at Paladin have happened with my other schools - they would have expelled me.”

Conclusion “Letting it Take Over”

The continuum of restorative practices is a useful reference point for understanding the many informal and formal ways Paladin students and staff experience restorative practices, yet it doesn’t encompass the totality of restorative as a whole school way of being. A number of themes have been uncovered through Paladin

experiences that are a part of disrupting the status quo; starting with making the system fit the individual and ending with what it means to have options for righting wrongs. Much of the emphasis is on the individual, but different from American individualism “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” mentality, which at the same time structurally holds some people down.

Paladin has made many changes to instill restorative practices into their culture. Staff and students have experienced turning points and obstacles along the way, yet the school is on the path of sustaining restorative as a way of being. Staff in explaining restorative practices at Paladin said,

> “I think it’s kind of our go-to. There's not really another option in our school. If something happens, it will be assumed that there will be a restorative process. They’re trying to do this with you, with people, with students in every moment; that is how we are as a way of being.”

The next chapter explores the theme of freedom that has emerged from the research.

Chapter 8 How Staff and Students Experience Restorative Practices

"It's About Freedom"

From interviews and observations, an emerging theme which sets Paladin apart from the status quo is the experience of freedom. I was having a conversation at the data analysis and member-checking stage of the research with one of the staff interviewed. I asked her questions and she shared deeper insights about the underlying meaning. She asserted, "It's about freedom!" It was one of those "aha" moments when we both said, yes, it's about freedom.

We have been taught to value freedom. It's a word often used in public contexts, and is central to the United States national identity; in documents like the US Constitution and Declaration of Independence. Reflecting on freedom as a white privileged researcher, I realize it's something I take for granted, yet would not want to be without. Freedom warrants more attention. What is the meaning of freedom, and how is it relevant in the context of the lived experiences of Paladin students and staff with restorative practices?

Freedom in Context

To explore further, I looked for a definition of freedom. Interestingly, use of the word freedom was hard to find in restorative justice and school-based restorative practices literature. The meaning offered by the Oxford University Press (2018) encompasses the power to act as one wishes without being subjected to domination, having the ability to move easily without restriction and not being imprisoned or enslaved. In a global context, researchers have provided analysis in support of adding indicators of freedom to the United Nations Human Development Index (Biggeri & Mauro, 2018). They define freedom as, "The opportunity to act spontaneously in a variety of fields outside the control of the government and other centers of potential

domination," (p. 223). Civil freedoms include self-expression, personal beliefs and autonomy without government interference. Both definitions rest on the ability to act on one's own desires.

Freedom as having the power to act means self-determination in making choices, which implies a person understands more than one option is open to them. Neuroscience researchers (Ren, Bode & Cunningham, 2018) have recently investigated whether perceived freedom of choice is influenced by the availability of options. They conducted an experiment in which individuals were allowed a choice between options to start. After making the choice, one group had all but the option they chose removed; while the other group continued to have the unchosen option available to them. As the experiment continued, neural transmissions in the subjects' frontal cortex were analyzed. The subjects, who had an alternative option even when they chose to stay with their original choice, had more positive activity in their frontal cortex. The researchers found a positive correlation between the availability of options from which to choose and the perception of freedom. They concluded having options and the prospect to choose nurtures a sense of freedom.

What social psychology researchers have theorized for decades is now scientifically supported by neuroscience. Researchers from Rutgers and Columbia University (Leotti, Lyengar & Ochsner, 2010) have bridged the relationship between the freedom to choose and a sense of control over one's environment, building on what is known about constructs of perceived control and self-efficacy (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Bandura et al., 2002). Restorative justice is founded on these theories among others, explained in chapter two. Leotti et al. (2010) conclude, "The evidence suggests that the desire to exercise control, and thus the desire to make choices, is important for

well-being and even necessary for survival (p. 462).” Likewise, having the opportunity to choose allows for the exercise of control, thus enhancing well-being.

Envision the beginning of a concentric circle. Freedom is linked to self-determination in making choices, which is linked to the power to act and self-efficacy, which is linked to perceived control over one’s environment, all which contributes to well-being, even survival. The opposite of freedom is oppression; choices removed by others holding power, forced action, no control over one’s environment, imprisonment, enslavement, and even death. Although I didn’t find references linking the paradigm of freedom and oppression to that of adverse childhood experiences, it is not surprising the consequences are similarly explained. In Paladin’s context, an understanding of freedom and its opposite, oppression, is very relevant to being a trauma-sensitive, restorative school.

Freedom to Choose

At Paladin, freedom of choice and availability of options are inextricably linked to the school’s trauma-sensitive, restorative and individually-focus instruction relational ethos. Students are given freedom to choose when and how to participate in their own learning, when and how to be restorative, and when and how to right wrongs. Staff also has freedom to choose, yet both students and staff are impacted by external forces that prescribe expectations of them, which may affect their options and choices.

Students are bound to meeting statutory and regulatory expectations of the public education system if they want to graduate. Staff, are also bound by the expectations of that system, as well as personnel laws as they are applied at Paladin, if they want to be employed at the school. In either case, the intent is to explore the freedom to choose as it is experienced at Paladin. What gets in the way will be explored in another chapter.

The Paladin space has just four classrooms. Most of the space is the open learning lab where students have freedom to choose where they sit, with whom they interact and what projects they work on in that space. Projects are self-designed with support from a staff. From my observations, students are expected to be in the quad where their assigned SSC has a desk, yet they often cross over into other quads to socialize or work on projects with others. Every day in the learning lab is different. How many students choose to show up, what they do, who they talk to, and how they choose to be present changes in the space.

Students have freedom to come and go from the learning lab into the halls and Paladin entry, where the reception area and front door is always staffed with at least two people. Numerous spaces are also available for students if they ask permission, such as bathrooms, the quiet room, restorative room and meditation room. In her experience at Paladin, a student expressed, “Knowing that if I need a break, or need to remove myself from the situation, that that’s a possibility. That all I have to do is ask or talk to somebody about it.” A staff corroborated,

> “We don’t force the student to do anything. If they’re not feeling that they can go in that [space], we don’t want that to be a trigger for them, or their anxiety. They don’t want to go in a room. They don’t like someone that’s in that room. They don’t feel that it’s important. That’s where our restorative team would step in now.”

As previously said, staff are looking out for students and checking in to support and encourage them, yet as this staff explains, the students’ freedom to choose comes first. Another staff shared this story as an example to explain students’ choices when given options.

> “Last year we would end school on Fridays at one o’clock and then this year, at the beginning of the school year, I got wind of the report - our boss let me know that we were going to be doing school until 3:30 on Fridays. And I said, ‘Are you - you’ve got to be kidding me. What are you doing? These kids are not going to be here on a Friday at three o’clock.’ And they’re here, you know? And that said volumes to me, because a Friday at one o’clock and you can leave? We’re not a prison here. I mean, if a kid walks out and leaves for the day, he leaves for the day. And we’re a work-based learning school, so some of them have got to work, too. But again, they’re still here on a Friday afternoon. I’ve still got a hundred kids. That to me speaks volumes about our school.”

Going back to the neuroscience and social science research, Paladin’s experience is evidence that having options and freedom to choose are factors contributing to well-being. Another staff added, “Maybe the option is as simple as, hey, why don’t you just sit in here with your head down for the first half hour, and then let’s retry.”

Starting with Morning Circles

Morning circles are a part of the Paladin restorative environment. I have been told every student is offered a morning circle. Freedom to choose at Paladin extends to participation in morning circles. A student explained, “If you want to participate - you don’t have to, but there’s always someone nudging you to do it.” A staff added,

> ”Being in morning circle it will be asked of. It’s going to be part of their schedule, and it’s part of their duty points for the Court of Honor. So there’s a lot of incentives to go in there. We always give them, there’s always a choice - we’re never going to make a student go.”

As mentioned in chapter six, the Court of Honor is a monthly all-school meeting held in the center of the learning lab, which lasts about twenty minutes. Attention is shifted to

the central area that can be seen at least in part from each of the quads. Most, but not all staff and students in the lab will give attention to the agenda. Many continue on with whatever they were doing; working on projects, socializing or resting their head on a table for a needed break. Students are recognized for earning points based on the Court of Honor; achievement (learning goals and credits), civility (actions toward others) and duty (attendance).

Attending morning circles is incentivized by acquiring duty points, yet student choice prevails. Students choose if they show up and how they show up. It appeared from my observations at Paladin, two to three SSC's would regularly hold morning circles with their students. Attendance would be one-fourth to half of the students assigned to that SSC team, and of those who showed up, not all participated fully all of the time. When asked about morning circles, one staff expressed,

> "The nature of the beast of the kids I work with, they don't sit in a circle often. They have to buy into it. I've learned over the years here, if you force them into it, they're not going to do it. So you have to work your way into it, but there's been times we have done the circle, yes."

Another staff similarly shared,

> "On my team, I have about four of 25 students that show up in the morning. They stagger in as they please. Six on a good day, and just because there's six in the building doesn't mean six will come to circle and just because they come to circle doesn't mean they'll participate in the circle. Yeah, the building - I've found a lot of success in building independent relationships with my students, but building that interconnected community amongst them in our smaller circle community has been very difficult which leads to them not feeling a part of a larger school community and something that I'm still struggling with."

From document review and interviews, students are always the priority at Paladin, so the focus has been on student choice. It's important to recognize the struggles along the way. The challenge of engaging students who have not had the most positive experiences in school, while also giving them the choice to not engage is real. It is not easy. Yet interviews and observations corroborate that along with students being given options and having choices, staff in turn, have freedom to choose options they think best for themselves in relation to students. I did not observe or hear anyone say they must lead a morning circle and it must be done a certain way at a certain time. The varying experiences I observed in 25 morning circles and in the learning lab suggest staff freedoms are valued as well.

Keeping options open and offering encouragement to give something new a try allows staff and students the freedom to go at their own pace. One student testified,

> "In the beginning of the school year - I didn't care. I was, like, why are a bunch of people just sitting in a circle talking about nothing? And then one time I go into circle. And when I was in circle I actually realized, like, hey, it's not that bad. All you have to do is sit in a circle and just talk. I didn't really participate in there in the beginning of it, even when I started going to circle. But I got more comfortable with the people around me."

Giving something new a try, like morning circles, is a human change process. Change can be uncomfortable. It may mean taking risks. Along with the freedom to choose, the experience of staff and students at Paladin also uncovered the freedom to make mistakes.

Freedom to Make Mistakes: Second Chances

The poster on "expecting mistakes" shown in Figure 16 is prominently displayed on a wall in the math classroom, which also serves as the location for staff meetings. It

simply sums up the experiences of students and staff in having freedom to make mistakes as a trauma-sensitive, restorative, learning community. Mistakes happen. They happen in all contexts, including on the restorative practices continuum. A staff related the experience of restorative practices at Paladin as a self-taught journey,

> "I want to, and try to be, honest with our journey, because it wasn't just a one-day training, and we weren't just saying that we did it. Fortunately, it was a grassroots effort from our staff. And trainings, a lot of it was self-taught, and we screwed up a lot of times along the way."

Recognizing and valuing mistakes goes hand in hand with accepting each other's humanness, which is central to having empathy. The whole of Paladin's experience embodies empathy, which as one staff described in the context of being restorative,

Figure 16 Paladin "Mistakes" Poster

> "If I could flip the script and put myself in that student's position or put myself in that person who's at odds with one another's position, and how would I want to be treated, and how much respect would I ask for myself. When I can put myself in their shoes, switch spots with them and just say, 'Let's do this. I'm free with this.' That's what I see. If we can get to that level of experience and then that level of trust, then I'm ready for restorative practices at the heart and core of my being."

Both students and staff in interviews described their experience at Paladin as centered in recognizing each other's humanness, and being in it together. Not only recognition of students' reality, but also staff with each other, trying to be a restorative school. A staff, referencing the conversations being held in staff circles, expressed it like this,

> "That's why I think the circle, the acknowledgement that we're not perfect by any means, to having circle among staff, and vulnerability of admin, allows the conversation for, 'I feel like this is tough.' One doesn't have to be gung-ho about it all the time; that's not human, I think, is key to this."

Another staff shared honest feelings about student-staff situations and trying to handle them restoratively.

> "You're wanting to smack that kid up the side of the head, have that kid leave this room or throw them out, or whatever. It's legit in that moment; thank God I didn't. It is legit; it is human reaction. How can we move forward with that? The kid still needs his education. What does supporting you look like?"

Along with being human and the freedom to make mistakes come second chances. For students, they start Paladin with a new chance to be successful, with the hope of limiting the baggage they carry from their past. Along with the acceleration process and resetting a student's graduation target, past behavior issues are also set aside as much as possible. A staff explained,

> "Every student that chooses to go to Paladin does come because the large, traditional model didn't work, for a number of reasons. A lot of those reasons comes down to relationships or feeling unaccepted or respected. Basically, when a student comes to Paladin, they get a fresh start. A redo. I do think the restorative model, the trauma-informed model, allows for a second chance. I

> think that everyone deserves a second chance - sometimes more than a second chance."

Stories of second chances have already been touched on in other case examples and quotes in this chapter. One last scenario shared be a staff illustrates how second chances are in the context of the individual, and perhaps go beyond second chances if it is believed the person is choosing to make different choices. The staff shared,

> "I'll give you an example of a student who was swearing and cussing, angry at a staff, because they basically told him that he couldn't go up front. That student had had a mediation meeting, and one of the parts of their agreement was that they were going to be more respectful towards staff, and not swear and cuss at them. But it was also written as, they were going to *try*. And if that happens, the parent was going to be contacted. It would be expected that they would, on their own, apologize, and that there has to be a sign of growth. We've had that with students, and that's the part that I was bringing up where I've seen the growth. We've had students where maybe they would blow up ten out of ten times before, and now they're down to four out of ten times."

This example leads to my next finding about Freedom as a theme of students and staff experiencing restorative practices; freedom to choose and make change.

Freedom to Make Change, or Not

"I'm feeling empowered to make change and lead change and it's a pretty cool place. It has many, many faults, but it is a pretty incredible place. I feel pretty lucky to be here," are the words expressed by a staff. The theme of making change will continue to be a significant focus in the proceeding chapters, since disrupting the status quo of education is all about change, what's different as a result and who benefits.

Having the freedom to choose change can only be held in balance with the option of choosing not to change, not to participate, not to respect mistakes or not to right wrongs. Sometimes a person's choice may not align with the wellbeing of the individual or those impacted, yet all options are still available to them. Staff at Paladin seems clear on this point, "We don't make the change. They make the change. We just offer solutions or choices and everybody likes choice." Further, staff stressed, "In this process, we never have forced an apology. The only thing worse than the incident, is a fake apology to follow up." Students also expressed understanding the freedom to choose and the power they have to make change, for better or worse. When sharing an experience of another student leaving Paladin, the student said,

> "The reason it wasn't working for her is because she didn't want it to work. In order for the restorative practices to work, you have to want it. If you don't want it, or if you don't want anything to get better, then it's not going to get better."

The freedom to make change, or choose not to make change, has a ripple effect beyond the individual. Going back to the indigenous roots of restorative practices, freedom is in the context of self among all our relations. My search for freedom in restorative justice/practices literature led me to the writings of Chief Justice Robert Yazzie and James Zion of the Navajo Nation (2005). They write, indigenous cultures believe in individual freedom, but quoting Navajo Nation Supreme Court Justice Raymond D. Austin, the translation in their language is "freedom with responsibility," (p. 70; p.123).

When a person causes harm, the impact ripples like waves through the community. And once a person behaves in a harmful manner, the Navajo response is, "he acts as if he has no relatives" (p. 123). The next chapter explores deeper into the

experience of community and restorative practices at Paladin, but the words of a student touch on the understanding of freedom with responsibility among others,

> "I'm one of our main leaders for my team circle. I am usually the one who asks the questions. Once you get the community and get the vibe off our humanness, like, just as humans - Once you know the atmosphere of the crowd that you're gonna be restoring, then that's basically it. I figured out our - Paladin's motive and how we are, so that's how I became one of our leaders. It's sort of just our struggle that motivates us to be better people because everybody ends up at Paladin for a reason. We're all here to just figure out who we are, with the help of other people. So then when we do have the sit downs and the mediations and the communications, when the altercations come, you feel as if you're being heard as a person."

Freedom to Be Yourself and Do it Your Way

Paladin provides the freedom for people to bring their authentic selves to the environment. Staff relate to students bringing their whole selves rather than maintaining a professional façade, and again with the freedom to make mistakes. Staff appeared to have the freedom to do what they believe works, while also taking risks to overcome fear of making mistakes when trying something new. I observed staff teaching, leading circles and interacting with the freedom to do it their way. Sometimes classes were held at the scheduled time, and sometimes they were not. Sometimes circles were held at the scheduled time and sometimes they were not.

For the most part, student learning does not happen in the traditional classroom environment. It appeared staff made choices based on their experience and relationships with students thus had developed an intuition about what may or may not

be possible in a given situation. I offer an experience in one morning circle to illustrate staff freedom to do it their way and decide what will work best in a situation.

Circle of Silence

After general announcements, the SSC began the circle with a question about what people had planned for the weekend. There were six students in the room, a balance of males and females. Everyone followed the circle guidelines, including technology, which was not the norm. The group was unusually quiet. When the talking piece was handed to each student, most passed, a couple had their heads down, and the one student that spoke said their plan was to sleep. The SSC tried again, passing her favorite stuffed dragon as the talking piece, and again the same response.

The SSC paused for a bit, then said given the low energy in the room we'll stop passing the talking piece and have quiet time for the remaining 10 minutes. The room was silent. After a few minutes, the SSC played some calm instrumental music on her computer to fill the silence. One boy left quietly.

Two girls came in and created some noise, not realizing the room would be in a quiet mode. One of the girls dropped her banana and talked to herself about she and the other girl should have just stayed in the cafeteria had they known, rather than coming to circle with their breakfast in hand. After a couple minutes they left. The SSC concluded the silent time and students slowly exited the room.

Students have greater privilege to be themselves and do things their way, as observed in circles and the learning lab. I regularly observed students socializing in groups, while others had their heads down resting on tables, were spread out in hallways, talking on phones, and even laying under tables. I heard a lot of conversational swearing among students, which did not seem to be affected by the presence of staff or me. The most common phrase in student interactions was, "What the f _ _ _," followed by a few sentences that included the "N" word, and the "B" word. Yet, the language was used conversationally, not directed in a derogatory manner towards another person.

Being Curious, Not Judgmental

As the reflexive researcher, I struggled at times with the degree of freedom afforded to people in expressing themselves and doing things their way. I left the learning lab on occasion when my perception of vulgarity exceeded my comfort level. Morning circles didn't always go the way I thought they should. I was reminded at a Paladin staff meeting to be curious, not judgmental, when the Director included the topic on the agenda. His objective was to improve staff relations by curbing the tendency to judge first, which has a snowball effect of gossiping and dividing people. Being curious, on the other hand, could open conversation and build relationships.

I stayed aware of my internal judgements, and suppressed my urge to coach staff and students on how to improve. Yet, I related to a staff who said, "Sometimes I'm here and we do circles in the morning, but sometimes, to me, it's not that real circle, you know? It's kind of a watered-down version, but it still works." The key point is that it still works, even if done differently than how the perfect circle is taught or how another would do it. I would have missed out on so many wonderful experiences with students and staff being their authentic selves had I acted on my judgments. A student shared these words of wisdom,

> "There's so much talent here, and it's so raw and untapped. People look at these kids like, 'Oh, these are the kids that nobody wants to deal with; these are the bad kids.' Really, there's so much here; if people would stop looking with these pre-judgment goggles that they have on, all the time. I can't lie and say I'm not one of those people, because at the end of the day, throughout our day walking, we've judged somebody. We're all at fault of it; I can't say, 'I'm not at fault,' because I'll walk past somebody and if they've got an outfit on that looks weird to me. Everybody has that moment."

Reminiscent of Freedom Schools and Liberating Education

Freedom as a theme and lived experience at Paladin brought me back to the freedom schools of the civil rights movement, as well as Paulo Friere's liberating education. Freedom schools began in Mississippi with the students of families who participated in freedom summer, 1964. While adults were organizing for civil rights and registering African American voters as part of the movement, young people were being educated a different way in freedom schools (Hale, 2011). Education was envisioned as the vehicle to equip youth with skills and knowledge to be change agents, continuing the movement for freedom and civil rights. Students attending freedom schools were taught culturally relevant history and academics, about race relations, and also about non-violent organizing for change and civic leadership. Even though non-violent resistance was taught, African American youth and their families took great risks to participate in freedom schools with the violence they experienced in Mississippi. The possibility of being brutally attacked, even murdered was very real.

According to Jon Hale (2011), researcher of education during the civil rights movement, the organizers of freedom schools significantly changed the way African American youth received education. Instead of the status quo focus on memorization to meet the rules of white authorities, freedom school education engaged students as active participants in their own learning, and then in applying their learning to public action. Current issues were discussed and debated. Freedom school students joined in protests. School projects became part of an organizing strategy, with students creating their own newspapers to voice their opinions and educate the broader community on current issues.

Paladin's project-based individualized instructional learning is very similar to the praxis of freedom schools. Both focus on students' active participation in their learning.

Both provide a safe space for young people most harmed by structural racism to debate and stretch learning on current issues and human rights. In my observations at Paladin, I also was made aware of Paladin students going beyond school walls to take action on public issues. Students spoke with legislators at the Minnesota State Capitol to advocate for school funding. In March, they joined youth across the country walking out of school to protest gun violence.

In addition to students I met through interviews and circles, three students were introduced to me who were interested in having conversations about social justice. They were searching for ways to have a greater voice and be change agents beyond Paladin. I observed student project posters and books on racial and social justice themes. The poster about freedom and public protest in figure 17 was made by a Paladin student and is now displayed on a staff's office wall. I looked at it often, each time finding something new in the collage pictures that gave me a glimpse into the students' values for racial justice.

Figure 17 Student's Freedom Poster

Liberating Education

Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator, elevated the praxis of liberating education (also known as popular education) in his renowned book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005) first published in 1970. Education, according to Freire, is a revelation of self-discovery to become fully human. Education is the path to freedom, starting with self-discovery from present condition, building knowledge and learning through dialogue, taking collective action and deepening understanding through reflection. The process of self-discovery and dialogue results in communal liberation that breaks down systems of oppression.

Freire asserted, “The great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (p. 44). Liberating education is humanizing for everyone. All are teachers and learners, *with,* not *for* others. Liberating education is a continuous and co-created experience that cannot be prescribed. Freire explains the importance of both the oppressed and oppressors overcoming their fears in the process in order to dismantle oppressive structures and relationships. The oppressed must be brave in becoming restored and equal in humanity. Oppressors must let go of fear of losing the ability to control others, so they too become restored and equal in humanity.

The experience of freedom in Paladin’s relational ethos was not described with references to freedom schools or liberating education; however lived experience of Paladin students and staff embraces both pedagogies. Freedom schools crossed color lines by bringing African American youth and their families together with majority white, privileged teachers who volunteered as civil rights supporters (Hale, 2011). Teachers looked to students as the hope for creating a more just society, while students helped teachers see beyond their privilege to discover what it means to be human and equal. Stereotypes were disproven and empathy developed across color lines.

Similarly Paladin has a majority African American student body and majority white privileged licensed teachers who all are learners and all are teachers in the community. Together they hold the tension between contradictory paradigms; public education as a form of prescribed social control that reinforces oppression on the one hand and an experiential learning environment with the freedom for self-discovery and becoming fully human and equal on the other.

Conclusion "It's About Freedom"

Freedom is a major theme as staff and students experience Paladin's use of restorative practices. People have freedom to make choices and make mistakes. This supports a learning community where risk taking allows for new innovations like restorative practices to be tried. New skills are developed as people test the waters of innovation; however each at his or her own pace. Without the degree of freedom afforded students and staff, it is possible restorative practices would be embraced less than they are now.

Reminiscent of freedom schools and liberating education, staff and students join in an experiential learning process that supports self-discovery, becoming fully human and equal. Upholding fidelity to a specific restorative practices model may have deterred staff and students from embracing it. Even so, as a learning organization Paladin is best served by continuing to question and evaluate what is working and what can be done differently as a community. Accountability within this environment is also important and is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 9 How Paladin Staff and Students Describe Restorative Practices

"Not a Normal School"

Explanations of restorative approaches are always centered in relationship. Howard Zehr (1990) wrote that through a restorative lens crime is a violation of people and relationships (p. 181). Injustice is a gamut of types and degrees of harms, ranging in varying degrees of conflict, crime and structural forms of oppression. Harm is done to self, to others, to interpersonal relationships and to the community. Justice then is in the restoration - to make things right for, with and between people (p.186).

When asked about experiencing restorative practices at Paladin, a student explained,

> "They're trying to stop us from being criminals and stop our antisocial behaviors, repair harm, and restore relationships. They're trying to help develop our leadership skills and organizational skills."

The student's answer supports Zehr's assertions. Going beyond the intellectual understanding, when asked how they would describe restorative practices at Paladin, the student answered, "Honestly, it's not a normal school." The answer was given in the context of people relating to each other differently. Paladin was described many times as not a normal school, while students referred to their past schools as normal or being regular schools.

This chapter explores how students and staff describe the relational foundation, the community of Paladin through which restorative practices contribute to being different. It begins with a brief introduction and literature on community building in schools to help frame my research findings. What it means to be a community at Paladin follows. Last, the role of compassionate accountability in the context of community is described as it contributes to the restorative way of being at Paladin.

Freedom in Community

Freedom has emerged as a major theme in understanding Paladin student and staff experiences of restorative practices. Going back to the indigenous roots of restorative practices, freedom with responsibility means individual freedoms are nurtured in relationship to others; in community. This calls for deeper exploration into the experience of cultivating individual freedoms with responsibility in community at Paladin.

Community and community building are terms often used in restorative literature. My work over the past thirty years has relied heavily on the word community; as a community organizer, community builder, community developer, and community-based researcher. In fact, I have used the word community at least 80 times already in this dissertation. Reflecting on community, my interviews and observations at Paladin again reminded me of Kincheloe and McLaren's (2002) reference to the "taken for grantedness" or "what goes without saying" implicit within societal constructs. In this case, I suggest what is meant by community has been taken for granted. What it means to be a community and how it is relevant to understanding Paladin's use of restorative practices has been an important and unexpected discovery.

"Not Our Graffiti"

My first trip to Paladin was on September 8, 2017, to propose a research relationship for this case study. The Director gave me a tour of the school, including the learning lab, great room and a couple empty classrooms. He proudly explained the upgrades to the science room as we walked through; pointing to the tables they had gotten used from another school. Guiding me to look beneath the tops of the tables, he said, "The graffiti you see on these tables, that's the only graffiti in the whole school and it came with the tables. Our students don't do that here, because they know this is their community. That says something about our school."

His comment reminded me of my experience at the Brian Coyle Center in Minneapolis. As a staff, we worked hard to be in community with the youth and prevent graffiti, but on occasion it still happened. I didn't give it much more thought that day, but more observations and interviews led to an emerging theme.

A Theory of School as Community

Thomas Sergiovanni (1994), renowned author and expert on educational leadership, put forth a theory of schools as communities rather than as organizations. He asserted schools better serve their purpose as communities, which requires school leadership and staff to think and behave differently. School is a construction of space through which people relate based on intersecting interests. It can become a caring community when all in the environment are strongly committed to a shared purpose, ideology and understanding of their interdependency. In this way it is a purposeful community (p. 72).

Being a community is a choice requiring effort; community building. Community building is the process of deepening the relationships among individuals who come together by choice, moving from the "I" to "we-ness" of being in it together as the lived experience. School as community can become family-like as relationships deepen. According to Sergiovanni, the intention is not to replace family or friends. Instead, the school as community can better engage the family and support networks of its members in a caring web of relationships.

The social control structure of schools with all the rules and regulations used as enforcement contradict the basic need for people to be in community. Sergiovanni's vision was that the school as community allows for dismantling formal systems of control, from personnel management to the classroom. A final point made by Sergiovanni that is fitting in understanding Paladin's environment, making the shift to

being a community rather than an organization requires freedom for teachers and students to create their own learning objectives and outcomes. As a prerequisite, I have covered in previous chapters how such freedom is already built into Paladin's culture. This notion of school as community provides a reference point as I explore next how Paladin students and staff describe their experience as a restorative school.

Community "Like Family"

By January 31, 2018, references to community became more evident in my observations at Paladin. I was invited to join a meeting of an SSC and another staff who were preparing a one-hour workshop for the Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs annual conference. The topic of their workshop was *Normalizing Restorative Practices: Improving School Climate and Culture*. As they were discussing what and how to present together, the SSC asked if she should talk about their community. She went on to reference community, not in a theoretical or conceptual way, but in a deeply relational way of being together with students. Not as the school community or the student community as associations only through common place and purpose. Not as having a "sense" of community.

As the neutral researcher and observer, yet with expertise in community work, the SSC's descriptive language about "the community" struck me as being different. She spoke with a feeling and heartfelt conviction more suggestive of how one would reference their family. Shortly after this conversation, I was walking through the school and came across a poster on the wall with, "We are Paladin family," as its concluding statement, shown in Figure 18.

During interviews and observations, I found Paladin students were more explicit in using the word family to explain their experience. I offer many quotes to communicate the shared significance of the students' voices. One student expressed, "I like how it's

more of a community than a - like a regular old school, which is pretty sad. We're more connected, family like." Another student stated, "I'm at home in my school."

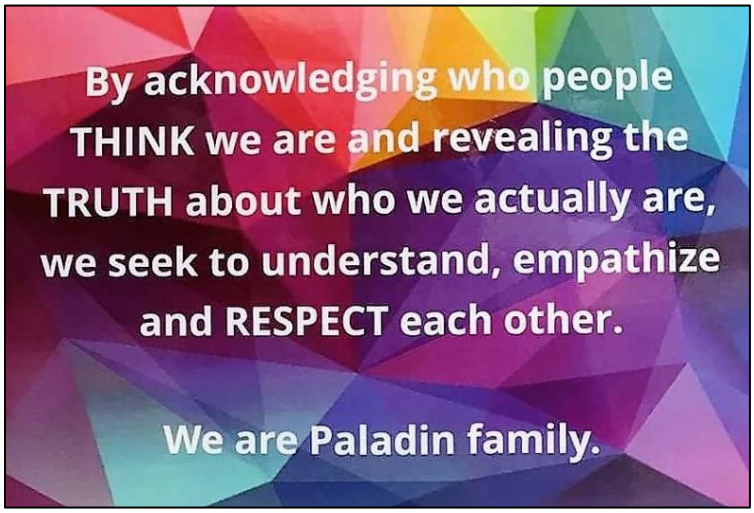


Figure 18 Paladin Family Poster

And yet another student said,

> "This girl - I call her my little sister but, she's not actually my little sister. But, that's my little sister, point blank, period. If anybody mess with her, they're going to have to see me."

Relating to students who may come to school bringing anxiety with them from a situation at home, a student explained how Paladin staff respond, "If you had a disagreement with your sister or brother, they're like, 'We're dealing with this'." Being in community like family means the whole person is considered, along with the family relationships important to their wellbeing beyond Paladin walls.

Circle in Community or Community in Circle

Paladin has embraced the use of circles for many purposes, one is to create community. Kay Pranis, author of *The Little Book of Circle Practices* (2005), emphasizes the impact of circles in building community through strengthening the web of relationships. She writes,

> "Relationships are like the threads in the fabric of a community, and the shared values of the culture and community create the framework, or loom, for weaving the relationships together," (p. 59).

Figure 19 Community Quote by Ryan Albright

Community has been referenced during most morning circles in which I've participated. The quote by Ryan Albright, shown in Figure 19 is posted on the quiet room wall and read often during morning circles. I share my notes from one morning circle as an example.

Community Conversation in Morning Circle

Walking into the room, the SSC asked students to be kind to her today as she had a migraine headache. Before beginning the circle of the morning, she spent about 20 minutes checking in with each student about the work they need to finish by Thursday, the end of the block. The Paladin calendar is divided by learning blocks, each a month long for which students set project learning goals. Five students were in the room. Each sat patiently as the SSC helped them one by one.

The SSC introduced a girl who was new to the community. She was sitting in to become acquainted before joining the group with the beginning of the new block after spring break. The SSC checked in with her occasionally to see if she was ok. She said yes each time. While being task focused with the students, one of them made a comment under their breath that I missed, but the SSC heard it. Her response was, "Good, I'm here to help you get it done, not to be liked."

Once the circle time came, she opened with her favorite quote, "When I came here I was looking for community. Then I realized I was helping to create one." She asked each person to share what this means to them. The group was unusually calm and attentive for the circle - very few interruptions. One boy said something positive about being supportive and helping others in community, which got an affirming response from the SSC. She said that earned him civility points, so he could expect to get an email from her later in the day.

One girl said some people are helping make it a community for everyone, and named about five other Paladin staff who she felt are there creating community. The SSC asked her what was her role in community, and she responded, "I could do better." The SSC

encouraged her to say more with a question, "How?" The girl thoughtfully and reflectively continued, "Sometimes I have a bad attitude. I can do better in community when I change my attitude." Another girl playfully chimed in as she turned to the girl and smiled, "just spritz it," meaning just spritz away her bad attitude. It made me smile too. I welcomed the moment of silliness I had come to expect in morning circles. The circle continued.

At one point the SSC put on her sunglasses in an already dimly lit room; the only indication she was in pain from the migraine. For the second question, one girl asked if she could come up with the question, so the SSC passed her the talking piece. The question was, "How do you feel coming to this group?" It was positively received as each answered with heartfelt affirmations. No one passed. The circle concluded and everyone went on to their assigned tasks for the day.

When asked to describe their experiences with restorative practices at Paladin, all students interviewed talked about being in circle. A student described her experience,

> "So it was just like circle - is like we are a family. And I mean we had each other's backs in circle and I was just like, kind of like when everywhere else was awkward, it was not awkward in our circle."

As in any community or family, people are not always at their best when relating to each other. Students expressed the importance of community in their circles as a place where they were accepted and supported, even when they had bad days. Another student shared,

> "The circles - that's the biggest way. In the circles, it's like a family. And all the time, 24/7, people are feeling some type of stress. People are arguing or people are nitpicking or shade is being thrown. When everybody knows about restorative practices, they kind of know how to deal with the situation. So that's the way, in my circle, we do it."

Implicit in the circle experience I shared in this section and the comments made by students is the accountability that comes with being in community. This brings me

back to the wisdom from indigenous cultures; freedom with responsibility to all our relations is about accountability.

Accountability = Love

I was invited to join in a staff development day on February 2nd starting with yoga at 8:00 am, followed by a staff meeting, then lunch. The staff meeting was led in a traditional format with the Director leading the agenda. As I searched for an open chair near the back of the room, I noticed positive statements posted on the walls. One was on the white board in the front of the room, written in marker which said *Accountability = Love* (shown in Figure 20). I went back to this classroom every few weeks until the last day of school to see if it was still there, and it seemed to be a permanent message saved on the board.

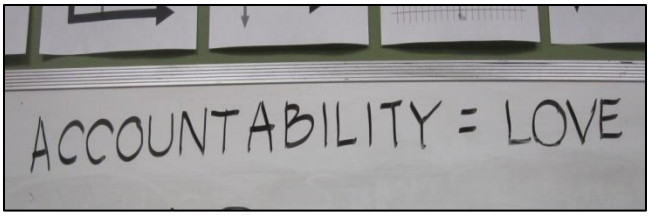


Figure 20 Accountability = Love on the White Board

Accountability is a word commonly heard in spaces where people are responsible to each other, but seeing the word love on the board caught my attention. Through my observations and interviews, I witnessed the word love being used by staff and students often, which continued to peak my curiosity. Before exploring the context of love in relation to the lived experiences of Paladin staff and students, I'll focus on accountability.

Restorative Practices = Accountability

Accountability is significant, if not the most important foundation of restorative practices since it is focused on repairing harms in relationship. It is also often a source of tension; the debate being whether restorative practices hold people accountable for their actions or inadvertently remove them from experiencing any consequences. Paladin is

not exempt from this debate. One staff made the comment, “Staff aren’t seeing students being suspended as much. So I think there’s a belief that we’re not holding students as accountable.” Another staff put it in context,

> “I still think that the challenge for our staff, in the past, and still is that accountability piece. Here’s an example that happens often in schools. A student will say some choice words to a staff member; it happens all the time. Even at Paladin; it happens all the time at all schools. I think it’s hard not to take things personally when you’re the one being impacted. Again, we can’t take it personal; you can treat the behavior and suspend, or in-school, or kick the student out of the class - whatever. Or, you can try to figure out what happened—the reason behind it, and the restorative practice, done correctly, the student ideally helps come up with the way to make it right. Of course, we have to hold the student accountable. Again, holding a student accountable by kicking him out is not holding him accountable. Working through the issue, teaching social skills, trying to teach empathy, to me, is holding the student accountable.”

“Opening a Can of Worms”

My observation of a discussion among staff explicitly brings attention to the accountability debate. At another staff meeting in the same room, an issue was raised about students not picking up after themselves at lunch and leaving trays and garbage everywhere. A staff said it’s really embarrassing to give school tours at the end of the day, because it’s such a mess. Another mentioned a couple staff would go around and pick up trays, but this just keeps the problem from being solved.

A third staff chimed in, “Ok I know I’m opening a can of worms, but I need to say this - restorative practice shouldn’t mean not having expectations.” A fourth staff spoke up, “I was just having this conversation with another staff; restorative does not mean no

expectations or no consequences. There still needs to be consequences." People agreed. Pointing to the whiteboard in the front of the room, one of the staff referred to and read the words, "Accountability = Love." Staff continued with good discussion about changing the way this situation is handled with the students.

What's Love Got to Do with It?

Around 4:00 am on a sleepless night, I was pondering the themes emerging from the research when the song performed by Tina Turner entered my thoughts; the title borrowed for this sub-heading. What does love mean in the Paladin context and how is it relevant to being a restorative school? I observed the word love used between people often, which seemed different. Here are some examples.

In Morning Circle. It was nearing the end of the school year, so the morning circle again was delayed by student check-ins. The SSC apologized for it not being a regular circle. She spoke to the students with a tone of authority, one-by-one holding them accountable for getting assignments done. She repeated with a couple students, they could get their work done now or they can come back for summer school, it's up to them, but she preferred they get it done now. She was pushing one girl in particular to get her math credits completed, because the girl was scheduled to graduate. After a little back and forth challenging with the girl, the SSC in a compassionate tone said, "Ok, you know I love you." "I love you too," the girl reciprocated. Graduation night, the girl walked proudly on stage. She got it done.

Court of Honor. Students and staff gathered in the center of the learning lab for the Court of Honor recognition before lunch. It was like a school assembly with student recognition as the main focus, followed by general announcements and pep talks. Students with high points were recognized and applauded. The director, a couple staff

and a couple students spoke. When finished addressing the students, one staff concluded with a big, “I love you,” to the group. A student shouted back, “Love you too.”

Staff in Circle. The staff development day in April began with circles on the topic of gratitude, the theme for the school for the next month. Staff were divided into groups of ten, each having co-circle keepers. I was assigned to the group in the sunset room, so I went in and found a seat. To begin, the circle keeper read a quote from Thich Nhat Hanh about expanding our hearts so acceptance and compassion can grow, allowing others chance to transform. A round of questions about gratitude followed, passing the talking piece one by one: What does gratitude mean to you? How does it look/feel for us to be a “gratitude” community? How can we get better at creating a “gratitude” community? And, what can I do to show gratitude in community? The circle was full of expressions of gratitude and comradery. Numerous staff said how they wouldn’t want to be in any other school. Love for each other and for students was shared.

Student and Staff Perspectives. My curiosity about what it meant to be a loving community grew. During one of my student interviews, a student also used the word love often when sharing her experiences, so I asked, what does it mean when people say they love each other at Paladin? She answered,

> “I feel like it’s more of, just a general love. Peace. To be able to have peace, especially with all that’s going on in the world, to be able to have peace with everybody that surrounds you, it’s a nice thing. To get from a friendship to a caring relationship, it’s not really a big jump. But it’s a lot of effort. You’re putting a lot into it. So then as you’re doing that, or while you’re doing that, or as it’s happening, I should say, you start to feel it. You feel like this is really family. This person cares about me. They’re worried about me. They’re, not necessarily taking care of me, but taking care of me. All of the things that you would think of

> when you hear the word love. I can picture almost every definition that I could think of in the school. I could show an example in the school. It's nice. It's a big family, in all reality. We may not all know each other, but we're one big family at the school."

In my interviews with staff, references to caring deeply were also shared. One staff expressed,

> "We care at a different level. Sometimes people may say, 'Well, you care too much.' How can you say you care too much when you have children who are falling through so many cracks that they feel they don't have a voice, you know, and we changed that, and we don't make the change. They make the change. Because it shows in the youth I believe going on to make better lives for themselves and better choices."

Revisiting Sergiovanni's (1994) theory of school as community, the creation of a deeply caring community, like family, makes school a different experience for Paladin staff and students. A student explained, "They basically show us we're all in this together. They don't make us feel like we're not able to do something just because of us being a student." All are accepted and supported in who they are individually, and valued as a member of the community. When students talk about Paladin as not a normal school, they describe being treated human and equal. Quite simply put, one student described Paladin's use of restorative practices, "I'd really say showing equality, if that makes sense." Another student shared, "We're all just one big circle of people." Sharing her experience at Paladin, another student said she felt like,

> "An actual human, [rather] than a student that has less authority than a teacher. If we can help, we're going to do it in any way we can - most of the time - any risk

> or any chance that we have to take. So I think it's really restorative to all, with the whole school."

For Paladin students, being in a deeply caring community where they feel accepted for who they are, equal to others, and being human, sets the stage for success different than they experienced in their past schools. Freedom with responsibility is cultivated through compassionate accountability, which is intentional at Paladin. This aligns with the culture of being a trauma sensitive, restorative school with an individualized instructional model, supporting the individual in relationship with others.

Compassionate Accountability

Cimmarusti and GameroIt (2009), social work researchers in the field of trauma informed care, define compassionate accountability as simultaneously strengthening the youth and building the connection between youth and staff to teach taking personal responsibility (p. 183). Self-compassion allows for compassionate accountability among others. The original research on self-compassion by Kristin Neff adds insight. Neff (2003) identified three cornerstones of self-compassion: 1) kindness towards self, 2) perceived humanness and part of humanity, and 3) holding painful thoughts and feelings in mindful balance, not underestimating or exaggerating their significance.

Learning and being accountable in community at Paladin starts with an understanding that each person must value themselves first. Staff is intentional in how they interact with students to care about themselves, build their resiliency and foster responsibility.

> "We get a lot of kids who have dealt with corrections, who have gotten through systems, who sometimes will throw themselves away, but we have to keep coming back to that same youth and saying, 'We value you, but we're not going to value you more than you're going to value yourself because we'd be doing you

a disservice if we did,' because community is not going to receive you that way," was a sentiment expressed repeatedly by staff. Having self-worth is the precursor to valuing others, yet both valuing self and others grows in community. The quote from S. Kelly Harrel, "We don't heal in isolation, but in community," is posted on a wall at Paladin, shown in Figure 21.

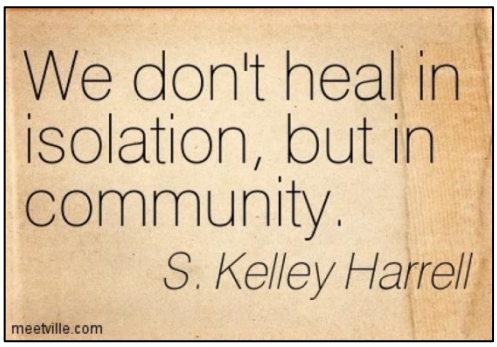


Figure 21 Quote by S. Kelley Harrell

The Paladin context of a trauma sensitive and restorative school supports students in finding value in self and others, as well as identifying the humanness all share in common. A student made this point,

> ""Honestly, it's not a normal school. We have so many. There's so many people who have been through too much different shit; there's too much past trauma in this school to run it like a normal school, because it can go as far as a smell. Somebody could be wearing a cologne and walk past somebody and trigger somebody. It gets that deep."

The students I interviewed all described having self-compassion, even though they didn't name it as such, and extending this compassion to others. Teaching responsibility is interwoven with what I saw as compassionate accountability. A Paladin staff, in relating to the debate about whether students are held accountable with restorative practices, explained,

> "I'm not giving them the right answers; they're going to define it for themselves. I'm not making them come to the consensus. They're going to learn how to agree or beg to disagree on their own levels, because when they hold themselves accountable, we're not doing the work for them; they're doing the work that's

> needed to get them to the next level outside Paladin because we're not always going to be there for them. So how do we hold them accountable while at the same time teach them to have dialogue, teach them how to deescalate their own selves, how to mirror their own triggers and identify what that trigger is because every youth - I call it a fuse - is different depending on the environment in which they were raised, and that all of those kinds of things are going to come into play. So, how do you hold them accountable at that level? It is not just saying, 'Well, whatever you do, because you've been through trauma, I'm okay with."

My observations between staff and students, and their explanations in interviews provided evidence that the depth of relationships in the context of a caring community means difficult conversations can happen. Another staff shared about the tension of holding students accountable,

> "A kid said to me in one of my earlier years when things were a little bit different, 'I can do whatever I want. What are they going to do? Talk to me? And then they're going to buy me lunch later.' So frustrating. So, I think we are trying to find that line on how to hold our kids accountable and keeping in mind that it doesn't have to be penal but that there are consequences and—yes. So, I think we're very much struggling with that."

Freedom with responsibility is taught with compassionate accountability. Conversations I observed between students and staff about accountability and expectations were held with mutual respect. Conversations during staff development days exemplified compassionate accountability among staff as well. Even when being challenged to do better for themselves and others, it was done in a deeply caring way. A staff shared,

> "When students on [this SSC's] team would have some incident take place, and there was a restorative process, the process tended to be really awesome, even

> if it was hard, because they understood the concepts of 'my actions have an impact on someone else, as well; I take responsibility for what I need to take responsibility for,' and it's something that I can make it right. It tends to be more actions than words."

Most discussion in this chapter has been student-centered, since that is the experience of students and staff at Paladin. Yet in the context of being a deeply caring community, it is important to note self-care among staff is also given attention. What is available to support students is also available to staff. Once a week, a meditation practitioner comes in for individual consultations with staff and students. In staff meetings, staff is encouraged to take time off, and to support each other when they see someone is overwhelmed. At the same time, staff expressed a need for more conversation about what they need to be well. A staff explained,

> "What are ways to make sure that you're taking care of yourself, and identifying when educators aren't practicing self-care. Making sure that we're helping each other, to hold each other accountable, to make sure we're taking care of ourselves. As staff, as a team, to continually talk about self-care and what does that mean?"

Being in a deeply caring, family-like community means attention is given to everyone being well, having self-compassion, learning freedom with responsibility, and engaging in compassionate accountability. At Paladin, this is part of the journey in being a restorative school.

Conclusion

"Not a Normal School"

Looking at the taken for grantedness, I find the word community is often used to mean striving for a "sense" of community, without truly cultivating the depth of

interpersonal relationships to be a community. Without a deeply caring community as conceptualized by Sergiovanni (1994) as the context, restorative practices will have its limits. The degree to which Paladin has created a deeply caring community contributes to students describing it as “not a normal school.” A staff summed up what it means to be community in a restorative school,

> “It puts relationship first, is understanding that we move at the speed of trust and at the speed of relationship, and that that is from your receptionist, your teachers, your education assistants, your bus drivers, your janitors, your lunch people, your parents - always get forgotten - parent, students. Everybody in that school.”

Paladin has come a long way in its use of restorative practices. The depth of being a truly caring community as uncovered in this chapter is a theme contributing to becoming a fully restorative school. The next chapter will describe what is different as a result.

Chapter 10 What is different as a Result

The School to Success Pipeline

Change has occurred on many fronts at Paladin with restorative practices taking greater hold. Ultimately the goal is for students to graduate and be prepared for their future. A student summarized, “They’re trying to help me get out of here and graduate; that’s pretty much the whole gist of everything.” To make that happen, however, requires a safe school climate, supportive relationships, educational and support staff working with students, individual resilience to overcome adversity, and effort on the part of students. It also requires showing up. Students need to be present in their learning and stay in school. Families need to ensure students come prepared for the school day. When problems happen, staff, students and parents/caregivers must be collaboratively engaged to repair harm and restore relationships.

This chapter focuses on what is different at Paladin, how change is measured at Paladin and who benefits. The use of restorative practices is one cog in the wheel that makes success possible. When students and staff shared their perspectives, they reported change on the personal, interpersonal and school community level. Academic outcomes broken down by gender, race, income and special education status were presented by administrators and found in Paladin reports. This case study does not provide an analysis or evaluation of academic outcomes. Information I provide is for descriptive purposes, representing the perspective of Paladin staff as they answered the question of what is different as a result of restorative practices within their relational ethos of trauma sensitive and focused on individual learning instruction. The theme, *make the system fit the individual not the individual fit the system* discussed in chapter seven is also relevant to what is different at Paladin. Likewise, disciplinary and suspension data was made available through reports. The status quo is disrupted by

rejecting the school to prison pipeline analogy for students who are most vulnerable; replacing it with a school to success trajectory.

"Restoring Myself"

When asking students what was different as a result of restorative practices at Paladin, the most striking and repeated answer was their sense of being personally restored. A student shared what being restored means to her,

> "Restore yourself as a human being. I sort of had a struggle already coming into Paladin. Not just an, oh, I have parent issues, oh I have school issues. I had my own personal issues and stuff that I had to take care of. So going to school and trying to figure that all out was pretty hard actually. It was - when I think about it, I think about it more as a struggle for me. But now it's more of a blessing, which is pretty nice. I actually enjoy going to school now, seeing everybody, not feeling like the girl who everybody thinks is going to pop off on anybody in a second. So it's really - it's a relief. Because I don't want to be a violent person anymore. I don't want to talk bad on somebody. I don't want to put my hands on anybody. It's different for me personally because I don't feel like I have - somebody has to contain me anymore."

Students referred to restorative practices as feeling a sense of control in their own lives and being empowered to make changes for their personal wellbeing. The note handwritten

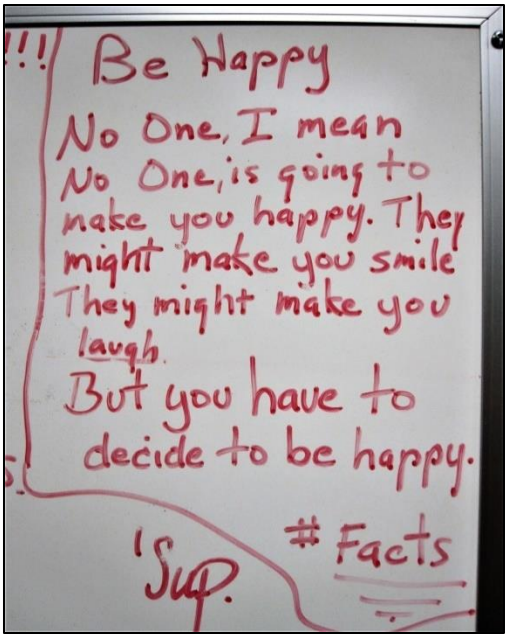


Figure 22 Decide to be Happy Message

on a Paladin white board in the learning lab shown in Figure 22 is one of many with messaging in support of personal choice and change.

Answering the question, what is different as a result of restorative practices, another student explained it as a personal awakening. She said,

> "I really would say restoring myself, if that makes any sense. Remember how earlier, I told you about waking up? That's what I feel like it is. You definitely can restore yourself at this school."

The student's reference to, "telling me earlier," goes back to a morning circle. I had been in the circle on the day she offered a question and passed the talking piece. My notes from the morning circle provide more detail.

"Becoming Awoke"

The morning circle started with the SSC, me, four boys and one girl. Three of the boys I hadn't met before. The SSC led the circle after making basic announcements. Reading from the poster on the wall, she reminded everyone of the guidelines. The talking piece was passed with the first question - What did you do this weekend; followed by another light, second question. As the SSC was about to pass the talking piece a third time, two girls came in and joined the circle.

The SSC held out the talking piece and asked if one of the girls who just joined would like to offer the final question. One of the girls, the eldest and most experienced in the circle, reached over for the talking piece. She opened up to general conversation with people as she was getting settled with the group. The SSC gently interrupted, "now we'll unsuspend the circle," so the girl got back on track.

She offered the question to her peers, "At what point in your life did you become awoke?" She started the circle by explaining what the question meant to her and then shared when she first became awake to her life, which was about a year ago. It was a point when she realized she needed to care about herself and not get her value through other people, or through a relationship. Now she was o.k. being her and didn't rely on what other people think or judge.

She passed the talking piece and most responded, while a couple passed. A couple shared their awakenings and a couple students were not sure if they felt awake yet. She completed the circle and the group adjourned to go to their classes. The girl ended with a saying – live today as if it was your last.

In addition to Paladin students explicitly describing personal change from their experience, the language they used to reference restorative practices in interviews reinforced the impact of being simply restorative. I noticed when I asked questions about restorative practices, students would reference when they first heard of restorative justice, or when they had training on restorative practices; however, neither term linguistically fit as a lived experience. The conceptual frame of restorative justice perhaps was too distant from real experience. The term restorative practice also felt awkward in conversation, sounding more like going to a gym to play basketball, a task set aside for a specific place and time. When students answered interview questions, they referred simply to being restorative at Paladin and being restored as a human being. Staff commented on seeing change in students,

> "A lot of growth that happens - sometimes we see that with a student over a couple years, but sometimes we see it within just a month or two. They also can relate to other students, and they don't want to harm anybody else. And they don't want to upset others. Sometimes they don't want to upset staff."

In the context of what is different at Paladin, A staff shared having purpose, "To see a person's self-esteem rise or see a person's traumatic journey change as we are vested in the deliverance and the growth of the students that we serve." Interpersonal relationships are also changed for the positive when personal growth happens.

Improving Interpersonal Relationships

Students and staff felt their use of restorative practices contributed to improved relationships with others. A student said, "I'm not going to lie. I've had some hot-head moments where I was pretty harmful to some kid. I was - I could have been harmful but, this school helped stop that." Through gaining self-compassion, students developed

empathy. Through listening and restorative dialogue, they improved their relationships with others. Another student explained,

> "I realized that, hey, I'm not the only person with problems. Yeah, so what, I have anger issues. What can I do about them? It's better to love them than to fight them because it's going to just be worse on myself and worse on other people. So sort of - it was just an eye opener. I was bullied a lot during my old schools. So I just didn't want to be a bully no more. I didn't want to be that negative person who likes to fight, who likes to argue. I just opened my eyes, like, hey, so what if they said something? I wouldn't want anybody talking to my little sister like that. Wouldn't want anybody talking to my little brother like that, any of my family members. So why should I do it? It doesn't give me a reason to be a negative person."

Staff has put significant time into building relationships with and among students, which is confirmed by evidence shared in earlier chapters. A staff, explaining the impact of being there for students, shared,

> "A lot of them have had so much let down that they just need to feel supported. And because of that, they are more respectful towards—they understand their consequences more. They really understand how it could affect others."

Another shared, "We definitely have our students taking ownership more than ever."

Each year, Paladin asks students and family members to complete a satisfaction survey, and the results are shared in the annual report. I have not conducted secondary data analysis in my research, so I share Paladin's survey information as the school presents it to the public. The number of people asked to complete the survey is not known, so significance cannot be determined; however the total number of responses is noted for each survey answer shared in this dissertation. In the 2016-17 annual report,

responses of students who did complete the survey suggest a high degree of success in forming student-staff relationships. Of the 68 students who responded to the question about trusting a staff member, 94% agreed they had at least one staff member who they trusted and could go to with any concerns as shown in Figure 23.

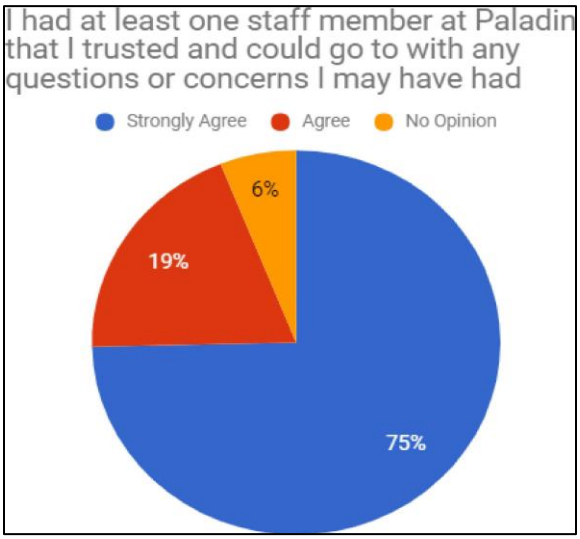


Figure 23 Paladin Student Survey Responses: Trust in Staff

In interviews, students and staff shared a sense of deepening interpersonal relationships as a result of conversations about difficult issues. Students and staff shared experiences in the past year of having difficult conversations on topics of racism, sexual harassment, Islamophobia, transgender prejudice and political affiliations. In a staff meeting, I observed a thoughtful yet challenging conversation about Paladin expectations of students and how to hold them as well as each other accountable. Staff also shared experiences of difficult conversations after one of their peers had left or been terminated from their employment. With each difficult conversation using restorative practices, staff and students described a growing sense of competency to break down walls between people. A student explained,

> ""That's one thing they get strong on. When they go, how do you feel about Republicans? And then, how do you feel about Democrats? And then it will start. There goes the two hour, three hour debate with the whole school, and we're not even in class doing it. The open area. The big space. With just a whole big group of kids and staff, just talking about it. This school is a really relatable school, and

> the staff are, too. It makes it comfortable, and it makes it a great safe spot. I feel like, especially if you've been bullied or you have a fear of being in certain places, or anxiety, or depression."

Having difficult conversations can only happen when people first feel safe enough to share their perspective and experience with others, especially among differing beliefs and understandings. It also takes trust, as well as bravery to speak up. In this regard, a staff shared,

> "There are more staff and students that are speaking their truth – more so than last year; that's huge. I think that there are more staff striving to do this with confidence, in a good way. I think the fact that there are more people standing up to - this is how we need to do things; this is how we should be doing things. We need to name that these things are issues and problems - is a big deal."

Another staff shared, "My own skills and interpersonal communication have really developed through my time at Paladin - empathizing, and I've been able to hone all of these skills." Evidence that restorative practices are having a positive impact on interpersonal relationships is also found in requests for its use by students. A staff explained,

> "We're now, in '17-'18; we've, actually, had to change our referral system because students are coming to us, "Can we do that circle thing?" They are coming to us asking to mediate with a peer because they mean-mugged them or gave them evil eyes, or whatever, or looked at them goofy. Holding these mediations in a proactive measure, and our students are so, now, used to, if there's a dispute, they know that, eventually, there's a high probability that they're going to be in the same room together, working it out."

The staff is speaking of the referral process for students who have had a behavior incident worthy of intervention, which requires a significant amount of documentation by the school for reporting, especially if the student is special education qualified. More will be said about this in the next chapter. Another staff similarly shared, “I think it’s phenomenal - that a seventeen-year old boy, can say, hey, I think we need to set up a mediation between myself and so-and-so because I don’t want to go off on them.” Another staff adds, “Some of our most challenging students are some of our best students today.”

Developing skills and being able to hold tension while speaking truth in difficult conversations does not mean all issues are resolved, all harms repaired and all wounds healed. Yet, the above evidence suggests Paladin’s use of restorative practices has had a positive impact on interpersonal relationships and making difficult conversations possible.

School Climate and Safety

Paladin becoming a safer school was another theme of what is different with the use of restorative practices reported by staff and students alike. Their testimony provides the strongest evidence. A student expressed, ““With all that’s going on, I feel like this is probably the only place I feel safe.” Another student shared, ““It’s a safe place, as a school, a community where I’m supported by staff and students.” A staff simply said, “We’re a much safer place.” In Paladin’s 2016-17 annual

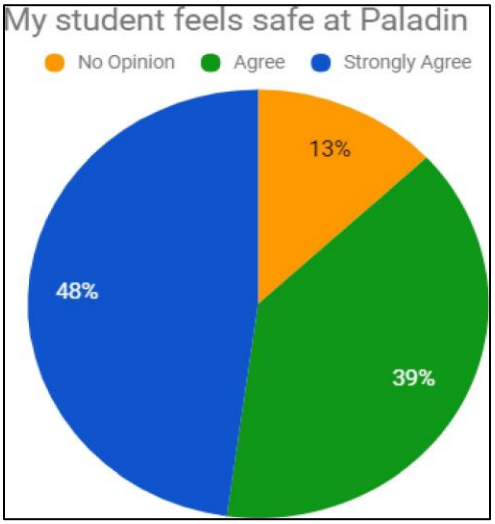


Figure 24 Paladin Family Survey Responses: Safety

report, 87% of 23 family members taking the satisfaction survey responded their students feel safe at Paladin, while 13% gave no opinion and none disagreed, shown in Figure 24. Explaining why the school is safer, a staff stated,

> "It was how we were dealing with the student behaviors changed how students behaved. We went from multiple fights in a year to physical altercations being the exception, not the rule."

Another staff shared, "Physical altercations are now a thing of the past. They still happen, they have but, they're so rare; where, before, that's what happened." Through my observations, I perceived Paladin to be safe. Only one escalating argument required intervention to prevent violence while I was at the school. I share my observation in "Fight Averted."

"Fight Averted"

Paladin is located on the east side of Northtown Mall in Blaine, Minnesota. The school rents space from the mall, and has negotiated to have only one entrance so that students can't exit directly from the school into the mall. Coming and going from Paladin, at least one staff, usually a man, is a greeter at the entrance. The door is locked but the feeling of being an institution is avoided with the human welcoming. This first space upon entering is an open reception area with a couch, chair and coffee table, which almost always has a newspaper and bowl of fruit on it, free for the taking.

A staff is seated to the left at a work area with a high top counter, where guests and staff are expected to sign in. The Director's office opens to the reception area, as does a conference room, and one door to a hallway of administrative offices, which is a secured entrance. Students are often in the administrative area, yet with supervision. All other rooms when empty are locked including bathrooms. Students need to ask a staff to let them in.

All spaces appear clean and welcoming. Cheerful posters and pictures of students together at various activities are proudly displayed on the walls. Students appear comfortable and freely socialize throughout the learning lab. On occasion I'm surprised by a student who notices my presence and assertively, yet respectfully asks who I am. Sitting in the learning lab, I'm also surprised by how close students will sit by me. It's their space and my presence does not seem to concern them in any way.

One January afternoon about 2:40 pm, an incident erupted between students. I could hear yelling voices that sounded to be moving to the front entry from the learning lab, bursting with loud billowing deep male voices. They were escalating to louder and more frantic. I was in an administrative office with the door open. People ran past me, while others shut doors. I heard a woman say, they're not coming in here. I heard another woman from the center of the noise say - she's just a little girl. After about 5 minutes the noise quieted, at which time I re-introduced myself to a staff in the hall and asked how she was doing. She said it had been quiet a day. A girl and staff came out of the next office. The girl looked like she had been crying. By 3:00 pm, still some rumblings were heard in the background, but mostly all was calm. One male staff came into the hall holding his hand. He said it hurt from stepping into the thick of things to keep the kids from fighting. No one else was hurt – fight averted. The boys in the conflict had been escorted out, and the Northtown mall security had been called.

I learned more about the incident and follow-up actions from a staff as time went on. The primary instigator was not a student at the school, however was able to involve a student who had to be held back from physically hitting another person. It was about a girl. As a result of the incident, a family meeting was held to explore options with the mother and student. According to the Paladin Director, no other incident occurred that involved threat of physical violence the remainder of the school year.

School safety, like restorative practices, has many degrees of measure along a continuum, from the direct threat of physical violence on one end to a climate of respectful language on the other. Even though students and staff overwhelmingly expressed feeling safe; it is perhaps relative to the degree physical altercations were a reality in their past experience at Paladin or in other schools. "Bullying, that's not anywhere near this school. Everyone's accepting," was also expressed by a student.

A number of staff expressed concern about the amount of disrespectful language, meaning swearing among students in general and towards each other. Responding to this concern, as staff commented, "Talking about students swearing is a great relief, because we use to have weekly lock downs." Another staff acknowledged,

> "From little small things like swearing or cussing, we obviously don't want that to continue. We will have conversations with the student. We'll make sure that, it

doesn't always need to be restored. Sometimes, in different situations, but it needs to stop happening."

Another staff, talking about safety and school climate, summarized, "We're definitely moving in the right area, because my job hasn't really gotten easier. It's gotten less physical."

"Solutions not Suspensions"

A commitment to reducing exclusionary discipline, namely suspensions and expulsions, has been felt throughout Paladin. As reported earlier, suspensions in the 2017-18 academic year hit an all-time low of four. The focus on reducing suspensions became a priority in tandem with finding better options, hence being given the heading "Solutions not Suspensions" in the 2016-17 Paladin annual report. One main impetus for nationwide conversations on reducing suspensions has been the disproportionate impact on students of color and the analogy of the school to prison pipeline (Gonzalez, 2012). A Paladin staff shared this awareness, "It keeps the peace. It keeps the students in school. So many students here miss so much school, and that's why they're so far behind - from their suspensions."

Schools that have sought to reduce suspensions without a solid plan for how behaviors are handled have been highly criticized by school personnel and brought to the attention of the public through media. Chicago Public Schools, for example, changed their disciplinary policy in an attempt to close the disparity gap and put resources into restorative practices as an alternative. Yet the district was criticized for not having a solid plan; not appropriating sufficient resources or targeting them to areas with the most need. In a Chicago Tribune article (Perez, 2015), school teachers were quoted speaking against the district and described the school environment as, "lawless."

Paladin has gone about this change a different way. Restorative practices were introduced before the intention of reducing suspensions or addressing disproportionality in school discipline. Critics may come forward, however it can be argued Paladin has achieved better results by taking the time to integrate restorative practices as a foundation for disciplinary change rather than in reaction to political pressure to change.

Student surveys at the end of the 2016-17 academic year shared in Paladin's annual report showed 75% of 20 students who responded to a question about behavior incidents strongly agreed or agreed their behavior incidents were handled in a manner that built respect, community and empowerment, 20% had no opinion, and 5% disagreed, shown in Figure 25.

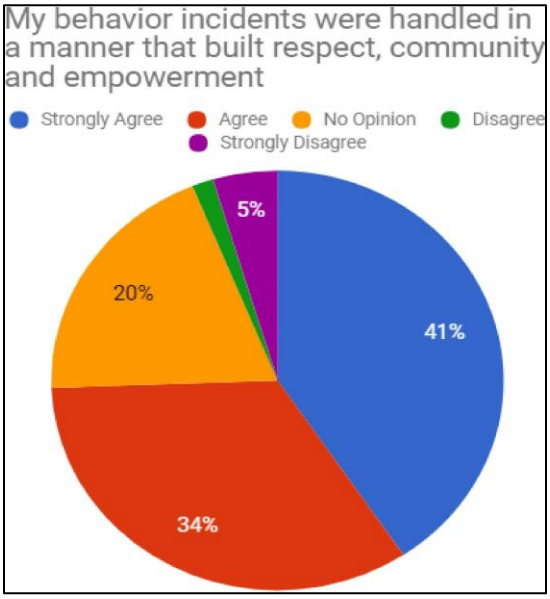


Figure 25 Paladin Student Survey: Behavior Incidents Handled with Respect

A student affirmed,

> "Whenever there's a problem, there's usually a solution in this school. For sure. No matter who you are, or what your problems are, what you think your problems are, you can get help. And they're going to help you here."

Sharing a story of a student, who had a past incident but was about to graduate, a staff explained,

> "It was through the relationships, and the restorative process, that allowed that to happen. I think if we were just with the suspension, that first of all, that student probably wouldn't be a student anymore."

Suspensions are down and the feeling of school safety is up, which is only part of the story. Paladin data on school suspensions and other responses to behavior incidents

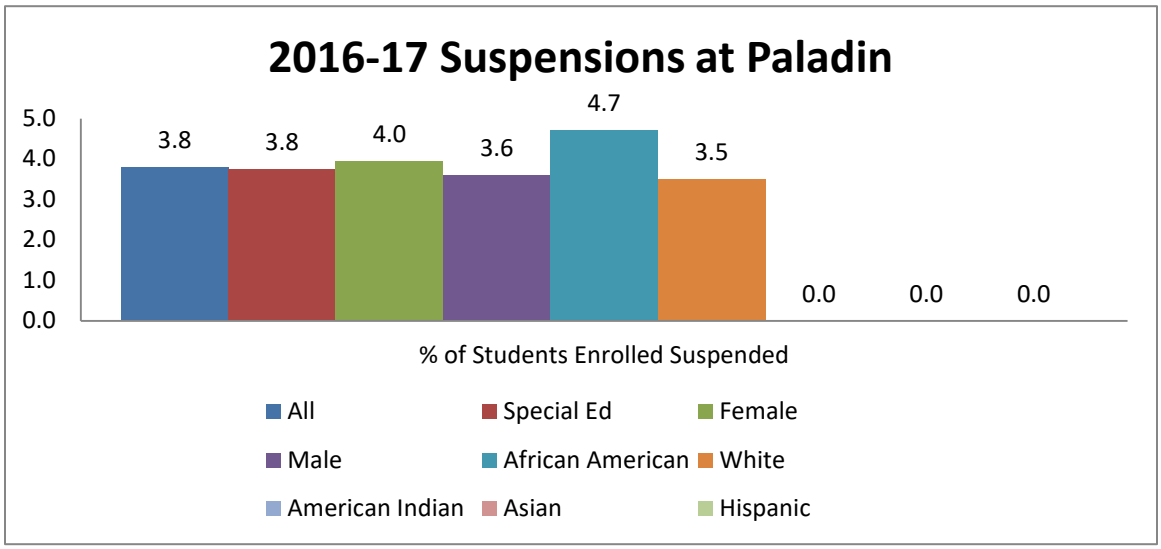


Figure 26 Paladin Suspensions 2016-17

provide a more complete picture. Descriptive data was not yet available for 2017-18, so the chart in Figure 26 is based on 12 suspensions in 2016-17. I did not review descriptive data for student suspensions for years prior to 2016-17.

A low percent of suspensions occurred overall. American Indian, Asian and Hispanic students received no suspensions. White students and male students had a slightly lower rate of suspensions, while African American and female students had a slightly higher rate. The disparity between the lowest group receiving suspensions, White, and the highest group, African American is 1.2%, which is very small. Included in the 2016-17 annual report is a breakdown of all referrals made by staff to the Dean of Students and restorative practices team for behavior incidents, along with 17 categories of responses. The highest number of referrals was for attendance issues (25.5%) and disorderly conduct (40.4%). The highest responses to referrals were parental involvement (36.6% of cases), which means a parent was engaged with the school in

resolving the situation ether by phone or in person, and restorative processes, mediation, and apologies (31.4%).

Other Forms of Exclusion

What the data do not show is the degree to which students may be excluded from learning due to an incident even if not suspended. Exclusionary discipline encompasses any form of action that removes the student from their usual educational setting (National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline, 2014). The data on responses to student behavior referrals in Paladin's 2016-17 annual report included the student ending their school day early, either by their choice (1.7% of referrals) or by administration (0.5% of referrals). These numbers are low.

In my experience at Paladin, I witnessed one student being sent home after an incident, for which the school administration contacted the parent, who agreed to bring the student home. Secondly, the physical altercation in January described in "Averting a Fight" resulted in the student not returning to school after the incident, even though he was not suspended or expelled.

Given the degree of freedom afforded to students at Paladin it is difficult to assess when or if students are excluded from learning even if they stay in the building. An administrative staff offered this story to illustrate how they try to keep kids learning even when a behavior warrants a response. The story also demonstrates what is different in the school's response with the use of restorative practices.

"Coming to School High"

"I was talking to a student yesterday her first day back to school; she had to go pick up her mom from jail for stabbing her boyfriend. She was in jail; she was getting beat up, stabbed her boyfriend, got in a car, was drunk and got a DUI. This student, who is 17,

who doesn't have her driver's license, took her mom's car to go pick her up from jail, yesterday. With all that, she decided it was time to come back to school.

I could have gotten mad at her for being high at school because she was, and I wasn't okay with that. I asked her - I checked in. I started asking, "What's going on? What happened? How have you been?" I started, instead of bringing her in and being, "You're high; I'm pissed. Don't ever come to school under the influence," which I was going to get to but, I wanted to build that relationship first. I haven't seen her for a while. That was her first day back. She had a pretty darn good reason not to be at school, with all that going on.

At the same time, she shouldn't be coming to school high; we got to a point where we were able to talk about that and come to some agreements and ways to overcome that and make sure she we kept her in school. What would that look like in the future? I created a safe place for her to work; she had to be in my office the rest of the day and work on some things. She wasn't able to be in a larger community; she hung out in my office. I didn't kick her out—didn't send her home. Got her back into school and, eventually, working on something she needed to, back in school.

Before, we would have treated, just, the behavior. A couple of years ago, we started asking, "What happened to you?" I think that mind shift changed everything. At the same time, not every staff bought into it, at the time."

The sentiment expressed in this story of going beyond the status quo to keep students in school was shared among staff. My observations also corroborated this sentiment; however even the most staunch believers in restorative practices felt there is a time when behaviors are so harmful, students must be removed from the environment. Congruently, Paladin has not removed suspension or expulsion from their disciplinary options. Recognizing the tension between restorative practices as a way of being, while holding exclusionary discipline as an option, a staff shared,

> "We're better at understanding our students. We're better fitting their needs. We got to have some structure, but we have a lot of freedom. That's difficult sometimes, when you need structure, but you got to give them the freedom, as well, because that's what our school is based off."

Staying in School and Graduating

The majority of students are at least one year behind in their credit attainment at the time of enrollment at Paladin, and they have a difficult time finding a school where they feel successful. The pressure is on to not only catch up, but graduate with a plan for a healthy future. Commitment to the goal of preparing students for their future consistently aligned with this staff's comment,

> "In the long run the growth, the experience, the expectancy, the college readiness - those kinds of things matter to us, because we're not always going to be there to pick them up, so they have to know transferable skills to do it for themselves."

How do restorative practices contribute to students staying in school and graduating? Since this is a qualitative study, a causal relationship cannot be proven and academic outcomes are not the focus of this research, yet many of the views expressed by students and staff I interviewed indicated positive change from their perspective.

> "I'm not complaining to my mom about going to school. I'm okay with going to school every day. I'm able to, well, most of the time I stay calm. But I'm calm at school. I can be focused at school."

Another student asserted,

> "I've learned a lot being here. I don't think I ever learned so much at one school. They even - what school do you know makes sure you have a set plan by the time you're ready to get out of here?"

And another student shared,

> "I know a lot more. At my old schools, they didn't teach me math or reading, mostly. It just wasn't very good. And I think that Paladin helps me understand

and learn. Like understand everything, and work through it to make my future better."

Even so, the mobility rate of Paladin students, which means the rate students enter or leave the school other than for moving up a grade or graduating, is still high. This has been a reality for Paladin since its start. Data provided by Paladin administration shows the 2016-17 mobility rate to be 64%, indicating more than half of the students come and go during the school year. Student mobility occurs for many reasons outside the control of Paladin, yet it has an impact on the school's graduation rates and makes it difficult to find correlations between success indicators and potentially confounding variables. Whether the use of restorative practices has an impact on students staying in school and graduating cannot be proven through this case study, but a closer look into what is known may add insight. While a 64% mobility rate may be alarming, Paladin staff pointed out that a significant reduction in mobility rate has occurred since 2009, as shown in Figure 27.

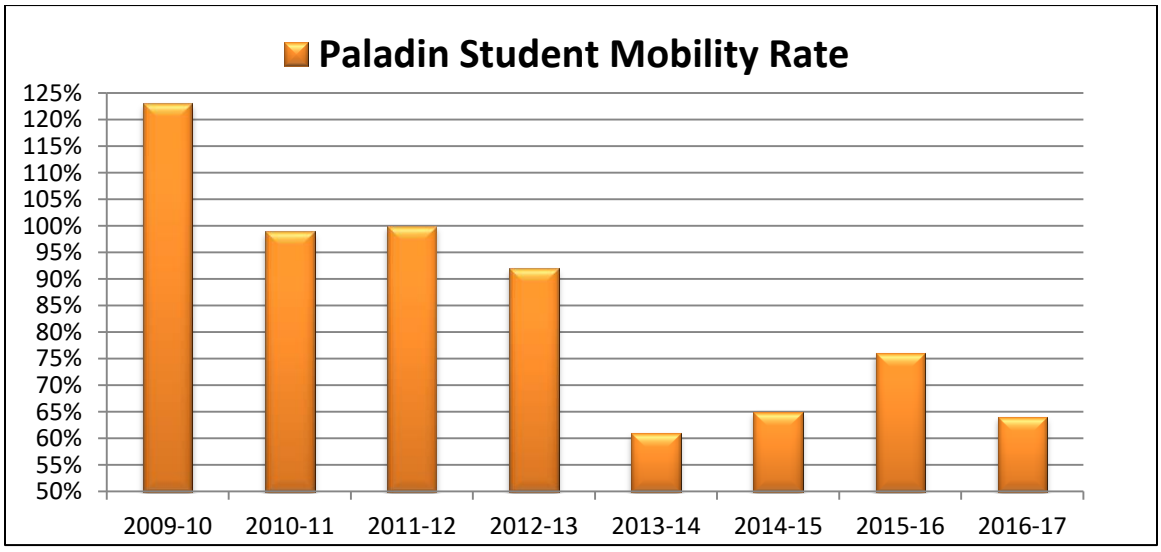


Figure 27 Paladin Student Mobility Rate 2009-2017

Graduation

Following the Minnesota Department of Education graduation reporting formula, 39% of continuously enrolled Paladin seniors graduated on time at the end of the 2016-17 academic year. This percent is very low compared to the state graduation rate of 82.7% (MN Department of Education, 2017). However, Paladin also takes into account the number of credits students need to reach graduation and resets their graduation targets, as explained previously. As Paladin makes the system fit the individual rather than the individual fit the system, the numbers look quite different.

Making the Graduation System fit the Individual

Paladin reports 85% of continuously enrolled students graduated in 2016-17 according to their reset target date. At a staff meeting on February 2, 2018, Paladin administrators reviewed school data based on the reset graduation target, shown in Figure 28, which paints a much different picture than if student graduation is measured according the state's four-year time limit.

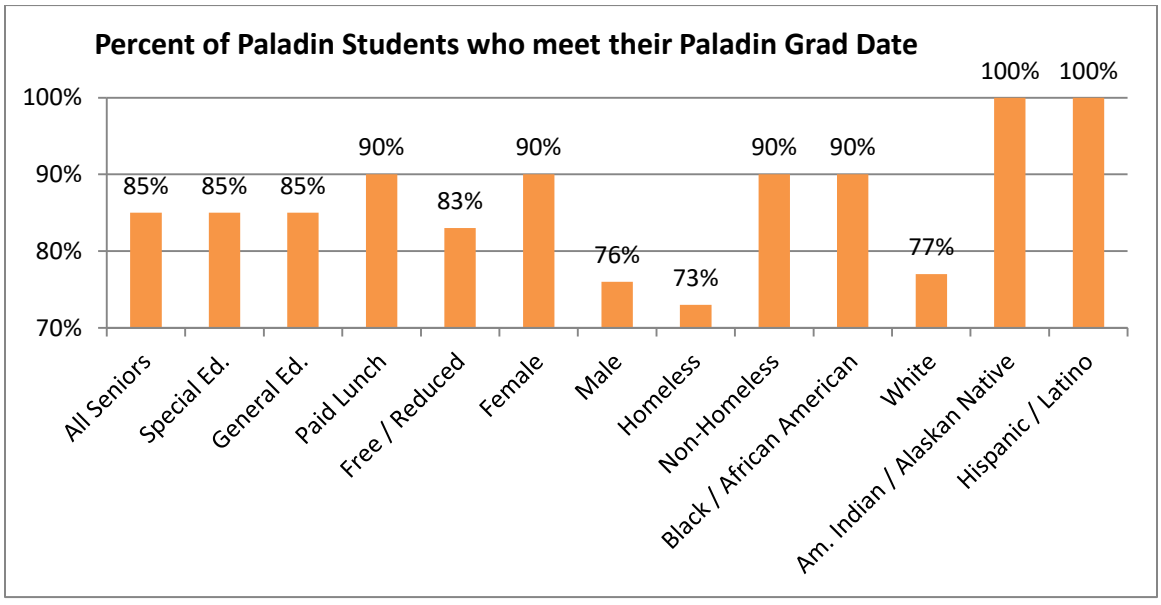


Figure 28 Percent of Paladin Graduates who meet their Paladin Graduation Date

Administrators walked through the data and displayed the figures provided here with all present staff. They reported, across all demographic categories tracked by the state but with the reset targets, the percent of Paladin graduates who meet their reset graduation date ranges from a low of 73% for homeless students to 100% for American Indian and Hispanic students.

If Paladin is strictly bound by state 4-year standards, Paladin graduation rates range from a low of 25% for American Indian students to a high of 42% for white students as shown in Figure 29. The comparison of the two methods of measuring graduation success beg the question, what benefit comes from the constructed measure of success according to time rather than outcome? Paladin has chosen to be different, to support students in being and feeling successful for what they achieve not when they achieve it.

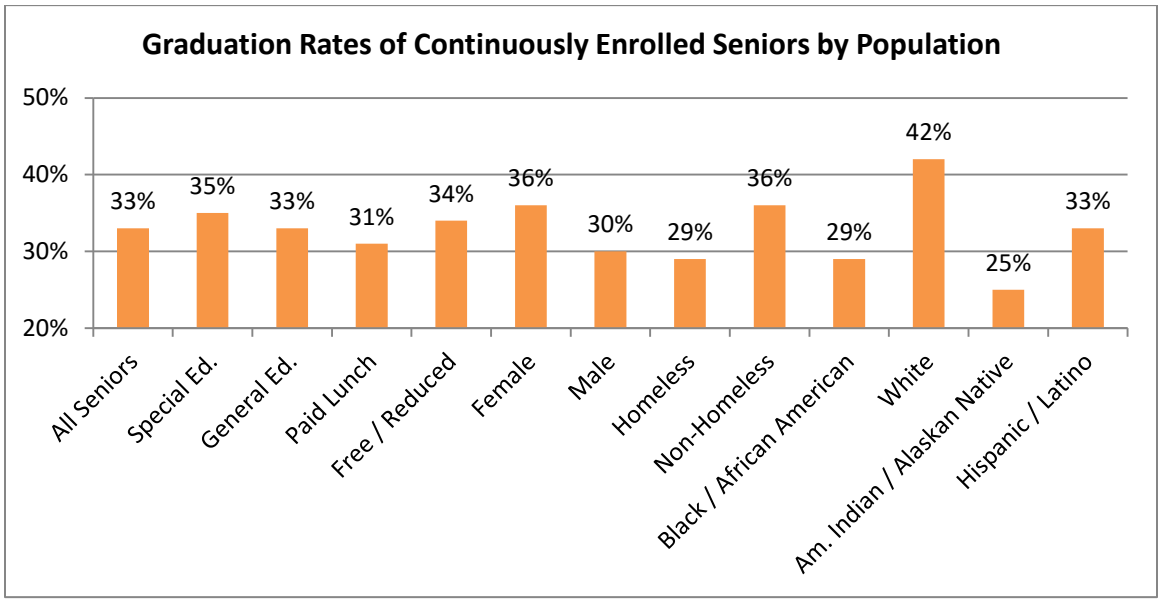


Figure 29 Graduation Rates of Continuously Enrolled Paladin Seniors by Population

Paladin administrators then shared data on disparities in graduation rates. Using the state graduation standards, the disparity gap based on race is 7% for Paladin students compared to 15% for the state as a whole, 2% for Paladin free/reduced lunch qualified students compared to 10% for the state as a whole, and 1% for Paladin special education students compared to 15% to the state as a whole, shown in Figure 30.

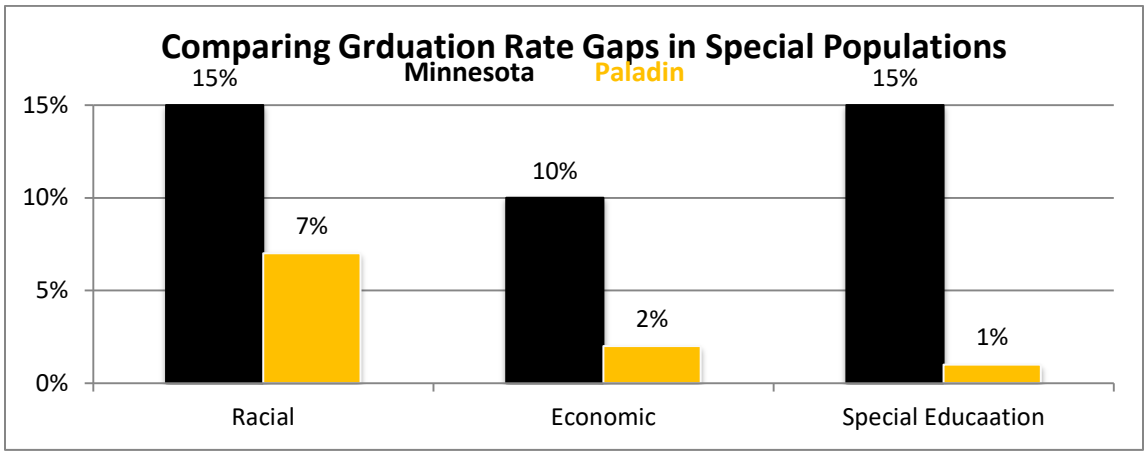


Figure 29 Comparing Graduation Rate Gaps in Special Populations

It appears Paladin is doing a better job at closing gaps in graduation rates across populations than the state as a whole, according to the data provided by the school, compared with the Minnesota Department of Education (2017). A staff in an interview concurred,

> "I can tell you in the short time that we've been doing this [restorative practices] at Paladin, the academic disparities between students of color and white students, there is little to none. The academic difference between students who are special ed. and students who are general ed. is little to none. There are very little achievement gaps with our students, and I do believe it is the culture that we have set. At the same time, to be fully transparent, overall, our school is struggling academically."

Administrators also reviewed trends in math and reading assessments for Paladin students since 2014. Significant improvements in math and reading assessments had been made for students in all grades with the exception of a small decline for current 11th graders. By state standards, however, their assessments were low. Yet, staff stayed focused on student growth, not on how far behind they may be.

Staff seemed intrigued with the numbers. One staff commented, “That's really big. That's a big culture change.” Others nodded in kind. As staff investigated the charts, their conversation quickly turned to who is not doing as well at Paladin; what disparities were unique to them. A staff spoke about males not doing as well as females. Another staff said it would be helpful to see the breakdown of graduation rates for males by race and white students by gender. Staff seemed engaged and curious in understanding what is different for Paladin students, what positive change was happening for them and what more needed to be done.

Forty-nine Paladin students graduated at the end of the 2017-18 school year, three of whom gave speeches on stage at the graduation ceremony. Their speeches were heartfelt about their struggles and triumphs in getting to graduation. Excerpts from two speeches give a feel for what it means to students to be a part of the Paladin community and achieving graduation.

Graduating student: “Crashed but Never Burned”

> The human tendency, especially when we’re this young, is to focus on our shortcomings instead of our accomplishments. For the last few months I couldn’t concentrate on the fact I’m graduating, I could only think about how I’m graduating late. Couldn’t think about how long I stayed out of trouble, I could only think about all the times I was right in the middle of it. We all tend to think of our mistakes, how we could’ve done better, what we could’ve done differently. I tend to compare myself to so-called “normal” people - people who’ve been on the honor roll since birth instead of failing classes, or people who can spend time on 15 or 20 credits every semester because they don’t have to work 40 hours a week. I’ve always been under the impression that that’s

what you're "supposed" to do, and I failed at what you're "supposed" to do more times than I can count. I always felt less than everyone else because I'd accomplished less - but it doesn't mean I did less. You can do so much more than a majority of the population ever has and feel like you never accomplished a thing because what you've gained isn't quantifiable by a grade or a degree.

My mom used to tell me "you could've quit". And though I hate to finally admit it, she was absolutely right. We all could've quit. We all had a thousand chances to not make it here tonight, and some of us weren't expected to make it at all. We've all fallen down. But the fact that you're sitting here tonight means that you got back up. It means that you crashed but never burned, and you found the surface again after drowning in your own mistakes for a while. A person is not defined by their mistakes. The true testament to one's character lies in the actions they take to right their wrongs, and in how they strive to do better than before.

Graduating student: "I Have Survived"

Most of you guys know who I am, but you don't really know me. I came to Paladin four years ago lost. I had no intention of graduating, no hope for my future. I started here broken, I was in and out of homes, my family had fallen apart, I was partying all the time, my depression was at an all-time high, I didn't trust anyone; overall I was just numb.

Over the last four years I have been through hell and back, but I am proud to say that after years of pain, lies, betrayal, heartbreak, stress, family struggles, and so much more, I have survived past 18, which is something I didn't think was possible. I have accomplished what so many people, including myself, thought I wouldn't be able to do. I can honestly say that this last year has been the absolute best and worst year of my life. I have fought and overcame battles that people in their thirties have never had to face. I have loved and lost myself time and time again.

I have realized that it is okay to let go and breathe, to take it one step at a time, to always push myself to do better, to love and allow myself to be loved, to push negativity out of my life no matter who or what the situation is. I have learned that it is okay to fall apart as long as I can pick myself up when it's over. The lessons I have learned are endless and I could go on for days but I won't.

Standing in front of all of you tonight, I can say that I made it, that I feel things again, that it got better and I am truly happy. I wouldn't be where I am today without some of the teachers, students, and family in this room. I wouldn't be where I am without Paladin High School in general, so I want to thank all of you for being a part of my story.

So to the class of 2018, I am beyond proud of us and nobody can tell us nothing because no matter what you went through, no matter where you came from, no matter how much you doubted yourself, WE MADE IT and this is just the beginning of our story.

Conclusion

The impact of restorative practices at Paladin most clearly is articulated by students and staff in the areas of being personally restored and improving interpersonal relationships. School safety has also significantly improved as a result. As restorative practices have taken greater hold, the school has made strides in reducing school suspensions and empowering students to have a voice in finding solutions. The impact on students staying in school and graduating is less clear and outside the bounds of this case study, yet students and staff sentiment suggest restorative practices are one piece contributing to student success as a whole. Reflecting on the 2017-18 school year, a staff expressed,

> "We've had one of our most successful years of credits given out, and that has to do with every aspect of it. From restorative to the teachers bonding to everything really coming into place."

Paladin is disrupting the status quo by rejecting the school to prison pipeline analogy for students who are most vulnerable; replacing it with a school to success trajectory. The integration of restorative practices may play a positive role, yet does not make it easier, or more perfect. Making the system fit the individual rather than the individual fit the system brings unique challenges as well as benefits. The next chapter will explore turning points and challenges experienced as Paladin has integrated restorative practices in recent years and strived to make positive changes.

Chapter 11 Turning Points and Obstacles to Becoming Restorative

"From a Lake to a Pond"

Integrating the continuum of restorative practices into the relational ethos of Paladin's culture has been a process of change. Whether called systems change, culture change or paradigm shift, school improvement expert Thomas Sergiovanni (2000) critiques that too often the focus becomes developing the most effective process of change rather than on the results. According to Sergiovanni, it is often taken for granted that schools are more effective if the prescribed change process is successful, without asking if the school is improving its effectiveness overall and by what measures. He also emphasizes, if a school attempts to transplant a change model from another organization's experience, it will eventually fall to the wayside and not be sustainable. Each school needs to invent its own praxis. Likewise, restorative practice experts acknowledge each school or entity must find their own way to be restorative based on their unique community (Huculak, 2005; Brown, 2018).

Paladin's change process has been and continues to be uniquely theirs. The degree of freedom afforded to people has led to "aha" moments and personal change. Asking questions differently in relating to others was a turning point. Fortunately, the school has not attempted to graft a restorative practice model or change process from another source. One intention of my inquiry into Paladin is to gain insights from the staff and student experiences with restorative practices that may have implications for others experiencing their own change journey.

"It's All about Relationships"

Early in my case study, I met with two Paladin staff to talk about the school's use of restorative practices and what they have experienced in the process of change. Two main insights were stressed. First, it's messy. Just as Sergiovanni contended about

school change, there is no perfect recipe for becoming a restorative school and no easy way to make it happen, so the process is an experience of trial and error. “Very messy,” one staff emphasized. Second, what makes it messy, as stated by a staff, “It’s all about relationships.” Relationships are messy. Relationships matter. School change requires people to change; change their personal way of being and how they relate to others in the school community. Dipak Bhattacharyya (2013), organizational change expert, clearly surmises,

> “We have to understand that change always invites disagreement and contradictions. The role of the change leader is to address those issues successfully as they arise, as our success is possible only through collaborative inquiry and teamwork,” (p.341).

Disagreements, contradictions, collaboration and teamwork all happen in the context of relationships. In this chapter, I explore the experiences of Paladin staff and students in the relational process of becoming a restorative school and what they identify as turning points and challenges or obstacles to change. Obstacles and challenges are merely temporary blocks that present more opportunity for turning points as they are evaluated and addressed. For this reason, I do not discuss challenges and obstacles under these specific headings. Additionally, through a critical race lens, I address student and staff experiences of race and structures of power at Paladin. Last, this chapter will discuss what Paladin staff and students believe will continue to deepen and sustain being a restorative school in the future.

The Positive of Conflict in Community: Experiencing “It Works”

When staff and students were asked about turning points that deepened the use of restorative practices at Paladin, each shared stories that started with some degree of conflict among people. The Oxford University Press (2018) offers one definition of

conflict as, “A serious incompatibility between two or more opinions, principles, or interests.” Situations at Paladin that challenged people’s expectations of being committed to a shared set of principles exposed interpersonal conflict. Rather than avoiding conflicts and letting them simmer under the surface, the conflicts presented opportunities to use restorative processes for voices to be heard and people to better understand each other. Relationships were strengthened in many cases. Staff and students shared experiences of taking ownership in voicing their concerns and listening to others. A staff shared, “A major turning point—the realization that if this is really community and relationship-based, we all have a part.”

Two prime examples of staff and student conflict best illustrate the deepened value for restorative practices as a result of how they were handled. First, the situation of a student making an Islamophobic comment in November, 2016, spurred a restorative response.

“Islamophobia Exposed”

Staff Perspective

We had an incident that took place a day after Trump came to Minnesota and spoke at the Sun Country hangar, and made disparaging comments around Somali people, in Cedar Riverside. He named that area. We had a student call one of our Somali students a terrorist, the day after. It was a big incident that took place; no fight or anything but, very verbal stuff in the learning lab. Everybody wanted that student who had said, ‘terrorist,’ to be suspended and moved to expulsion. The Somali student was not wanting this person to be kicked out. As pissed as she was, that’s not what she was asking for, at all.

He needed to learn. What learning takes place if this kid—if we, just, say, ‘Peace out?’ This kid is going to do this again, or whatever. That’s a whole different story. We did a restorative process for that; that was a really interesting restorative process that made us start to say that we need to do more. People started to say, ‘We need to learn more.’ Now, offer more spaces, more diversity, multicultural training, culture competency—all this stuff. That, to me, is way more proactive, and we could be creating way more proactive spaces of just building community and learning about each other.”

Student Perspective

It doesn’t matter what color you are or what you look like. You’re human, right? You should be treated the same way. And this presidency, oh geez. That one’s just blown up. We all sit and talk about it, and of course there’s going to be disagreements, and

probably start a little problem. But at the end of the day, as a school, we always end up fixing it together by the end of the day.

A precursor to the restorative process in the above example was a realization by staff that their current system was not working. A staff reflected, “There was consensus of, ‘Yeah, we can’t be doing what we were doing before, open-end to suspensions.’ There was consensus around that.” Recognizing the need for change and having restorative practices as another option created an openness to respond to conflict differently. As staff and students had experiences with restorative practices that worked, a major shift happened. A staff explained,

> “2016-’17, there was a huge cultural shift. This is last year where we really started, I feel, doing restorative practices, where instead of an old model of suspension and restorative piece being part of a suspension, it was involved in everything we do. It wasn’t, just, involved in behaviors. This goes back to how we learn at our whole school, of making community buy-in, the restorative like having a collaboration of teams and teachers and students. I think a lot of that collaboration really helped change the culture of our school and our suspensions and the behaviors.”

Another staff explained,

> “Somewhere along the line, it clicks, and you think, ‘This works. This does work.’ And you have to be in one or two circles that you see work for you to really buy into the concept. When I see two kids who clearly don’t get along here, and then they sit in a circle with each other and agree - either agree that whatever they’re doing was silly and seeing another person’s side of it, or come in the circle and

agreeing to disagree, ‘You stay on your side of school. I’m gonna stay over here. We’ll still co-exist here, but just don’t talk to me.”

Staff saw restorative practices starting to work with students, but it took more time for staff to buy into using it with each other. A human resource management decision at the end of the 2016-17 school year prompted a staff circle that again was a turning point.

“From Human Resource Management to Humanizing Staff”

“Humanizing - this was a huge turning point, ‘Oh, I have a role in all of this, too,’ as a staff. A big turning point was at the end of last year; we let go three or four staff on the last day of school. It wasn’t restorative, at all. We don’t have mid-year evaluations and all this kind of stuff so, Friday, that took place. Half-day of school with students; Monday, Tuesday the next week was supposed to be the end-of-year staff development, and Monday was supposed to be a picnic.

We’re going to have a picnic? We’ve had four co-workers, colleagues, friends. We don’t know - we’re sad for them, for sure. Some of us are pissed off. Also, we don’t know if our jobs are in jeopardy, too. This happened so suddenly. A lot of anxiety - understandably so.

The theme was, ‘We need to be in circle.’ At the first [beginning of the 2016-17 year], those two staff development weeks did not have circle. To move from that to consensus that what we need on Monday, we need to be in circle, was huge. In that discussion, we spent, I think, all day—most of the day—in circle, for sure.

One of the things that came up in the circle and outside of the circle with conversations with people was, ‘If we’re going to be restorative with these kids, I can see where this is amazing but, we need to do this with each other, too.’ And there was consensus of, ‘I don’t love everything, because I would be inconsistent and all these things. So, of course, I don’t love it, but I can see where this works.’

That, to me - really tough time, the call for circle and then, naming and a call for human resource model through restorative for us adults, was probably, the biggest turnaround, more so than the students. So, for me, for sure, as hard as all of that period was, difficult as hell, I had to remember, also - we maintained all staff from last year.

That was, probably, the biggest thing for me, last year. The staff, us, being in this mind frame of looking at this through how humans should be with each other and what would be useful for us, and that this is not just for our students but, how we should be with each other. Having it come very organically out of a really rough situation—really hard situation. It was a huge turnaround, a huge moment.

Staff interviewed for this case study, as well as students, made comments about the power of being in circle to build relationships and respond to conflicts as they arose. Another staff, acknowledging conflict as a real part of human relations and the realization a restorative process works, expressed,

> "There is going to be tension and there's going to be toxicity; there's going to be conflict among staff. I think the best way that we're going to all do this and do this in a good way is, if we all experience it. I can't be mad at you and come in sideways at you or talk behind your back, or all these things as adult to adult. I don't expect my kids to do this in circle process - we have to be vulnerable in that, too."

Comfort in the Status Quo

Obstacles can come in the form of personal resistance, even when people have experienced restorative practices having a positive impact. Some staff and students reflected on this obstacle, noting it could come from a lack of confidence, being conflict avoidant or still committed to old ways of doing things. It could come from being comfortable in the status quo. One staff expressed,

> "Unwillingness to validate or to recognize or confront the tough things that have gone on for the sense of comfort and the decision to focus on the positives rather than what I say, is focus on the exceptions rather than the rule."

Another staff shared,

> "People need to practice what they're trained to do. We all are learning different techniques, different skills, different things to do, but sometimes people don't do what they've been trained to do. They're comfortable staying out of conflict. They're comfortable not compromising something that they may feel they were

not trained to do it that way. We're asking that you do it this way and no, it's not always comfortable."

Sometimes overcoming personal obstacles requires an act of bravery.

Brave and Safe Space: Through a Critical Race Lens

Authors Brian Arao, University of California, Santa Cruz, and Kristi Clemens, Dartmouth College, (2013) write about the importance of creating brave spaces for uncomfortable conversations on difficult subjects, like racial equity, power and privilege. They warn, the danger of setting "safe for everyone" as a ground rule for difficult conversations is that implicit bias and power imbalance result in space being perceived as safe for some and not for others. Through a critical race lens, those who have the power in the space will influence how people participate or don't participate, regardless if ground rules and processes explicitly appear equal. To intentionally create brave space requires a shared understanding among participants that conversations on race, power and privilege involve risk taking, courage, and a willingness to be uncomfortable.

Anderson's (2015) research on racialized spaces referenced in chapter two corroborates their assertion. According to Anderson, explicit and implicit expectations come with who has dominion over the space. Specifically, white space and black space carry different rules for different people. Safety is one factor, yet being intentional about creating a brave space is critical for people to take risks and be vulnerable, especially across differences in difficult conversations (Arao & Clemens, 2013).

For Paladin staff, the space is racialized with a majority white administrative team that has the power to hire and fire, majority white school board and majority white staff, with majority white licensed teachers who have the power to issue students' credit. The student experience appears to be different, which I'll explain later. Anderson (2015), Arao and Clemens (2013) would argue this power dynamic likely impedes staff of color

from feeling safe to speak their truth, even if a ground rule of safety for all was set. Given power dynamics present in Paladin as a majority white space, being brave takes extra work, risk taking and extra bravery on the part of staff to address difficult subjects.

This leads to another significant turning point, finding balance between safe and brave space for staff, so that very difficult conversations can happen in a restorative way. Again, conflict situations have been the impetus pushing people to be brave in broaching difficult conversations, and then experiencing a new way of being restorative. I offer this example shared by a number of staff from two days of staff meetings and a circle process the next day. It was a turning point for staff, resulting in a deeper appreciation for restorative practices and for each other.

Staff had already returned to work in preparation for the start of the 2017-18 school year and had two staff development days planned. From the perspective of several staff, underlying tensions already existed prior to the first meeting. On the second day, one staff showed bravery by being honest with the group about what they saw as inconsistencies in what the staff believes they should be doing to support all students versus what they actually do on a regular basis. The staff went further in speaking truthfully about different expectations placed on African American staff to handle difficult situations, while white staff had the privilege to avoid what made them uncomfortable, especially when it was behavior of African American students. After full disclosure by the staff of tensions felt about a racial divide with unbalanced expectations and commitment to each other, coworkers responded with applause. From there, staff expressed the need to spend time in circle, to continue honest conversation and have all voices heard.

A staff reflecting on this turning point shared,

> "It was an intense conversation and it was necessary and it hasn't solved any of our - or maybe. Who knows? I guess I can't say any of our problems, but it certainly has not been a fix-all, but it definitely got the conversation going. It gave us some common language, a common understanding. It removed the ability to plead the fifth from white staff. You can't say you didn't know. You can't say you weren't aware, you weren't conscious of what was going on because - it was an intense conversation. It was a full day of circle and a lot of our staff of color sharing some of the pain that they've been experiencing and - yeah. If that didn't open your eyes, then it's probably not the place for you to be. It was not planned ahead of time. Staff development time was together, but it came up and then it was dealt with in circle."

One of the challenges of being a school community is making decisions about who is welcomed and invited to stay as a member of the community. The staff quote above suggests some people are not the right fit for Paladin. Staff and students have bought in to restorative practices when they experienced it working. Relationships are strengthened, the community becomes more cohesive, core values are clarified, and commitment to shared values becomes stronger. People who do not fully align with the restated values and are less accountable to the community based on those values may no longer fit at Paladin.

Getting the Right People on the Bus (and in the right seats)

As I was hearing from staff and students about their experiences with each other, and observing at Paladin, I recalled the book *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* (Collins, 2005). Jim Collins (2005) organizational management expert and consultant, proposes a four-stage framework for achieving greatness in the social sectors, i.e. nonprofits, schools, and healthcare. For the first stage, having disciplined people, Collins

writes, “Those who build great organizations make sure they have the right people on the bus, and the right people in the key seats before they figure out where to drive the bus,” (p.34).

Paladin has experienced a number of transitions in leadership, in staff and in restorative practice consultants, which have moved the school further along the restorative continuum. With each change in Director, restorative practices became a higher priority. Students and staff alike who were interviewed attributed the current Director with positive changes in the school, including the whole school becoming more restorative, safer and proactive in preventing problems before they happen. Staff with have significant experience in restorative practices were intentionally recruited to join the Paladin community since 2011, and have been instrumental in deepening its use. Staff and students also attributed positive changes to the leadership of the past Dean of Students, and Alice Lynch, longtime restorative practices trainer and circle keeper, who passed on unexpectedly in January. A staff expressed,

> “Some personnel changes have led to a more generally restorative environment than a reactively restorative. People have come in who are really pushing that, and [the director’s] leadership is working in that direction and [the former dean of students] brought a ton of that into our school.”

Choosing to engage with outside experts as trainers, staff and consultants was also noted as a turning point at Paladin. A staff explained,

> “Without a lot of outside resources or knowledge, we were spinning our wheels doing the best that we could. It wasn’t until we started branching out; learning from others, finding out who the experts are, in the field, bringing them in, and challenging our own ideas were flipped. I would say that we were doing a good job for three to four years but, in the last two years, we’ve really flipped it. I

> think that's the dramatic change. The relationship with Nancy Riestenberg was definitely helpful. Miss Alice - she left Paladin, for a while and then, she came back and it was 2016 -17."

As Paladin has integrated restorative practices for community building, preventing problems and having difficult, brave conversations, the sense of being in it together with a commitment to shared values has deepened. From my staff and student interviews as well as observations in staff meetings and circles, people certainly expressed care for each other and commitment to the community as well as being restorative in their interactions. A staff shared in a morning circle how they loved the community and wouldn't want to work anywhere else, while co-workers affirmatively nodded. Students notice the difference. A student shared, "In the beginning, the staff weren't taking [restorative practices] as seriously, so it only worked if they wanted it to work. In the last two years it's really come around."

Not Everyone on the Right Bus or In the Right Seats

When staff and students were asked what have been the challenges or obstacles to being a fully restorative school, a common answer was feeling some people are not a good fit for Paladin, or perhaps are not in the right position. A staff shared,

> "You may be a good teacher, but you may not be the right teacher for Paladin. But when it gets to that level, then I think it's sometimes people need to be pointed in a different direction because maybe it's not as perfect a fit is they thought it was going to be here or we thought it should be."

Staff shared perspectives with caution, not identifying any one person. Students, on the other hand, spoke candidly about who they felt are not good fits with the school or with restorative practices. What makes a person a good fit, when is a person embraced as part of the community when they're not a perfect fit, when does a person need to leave,

and who decides? These questions are difficult, but complicated further by being a community that values freedom as discussed in chapter nine, along with being trauma-sensitive and restorative.

Student sentiments provide important insight, so I include a couple of quotes with identifiable information removed. One student explained,

> "We need all the teachers, and not just some of the teachers, to understand where the students are coming from. Some of these students don't really like dealing with some of these teachers, because not all these teachers know struggle. Some of them, you can see, have more of a silver spoon than us, so it's hard to connect with them. They look at us with all this sadness and sympathy. We don't like that. I don't want your sympathy."

Another student shared about a small number of staff,

> "I feel like it's not the right people right now. And that's the only thing I would change, because I know from there, it'll go so much better. The restorative part of this school would be done right, the right way. They don't understand it. They don't use it. They don't do anything when it comes to being restorative. They're the opposite of being restorative. They don't think about what they say before they say it. None of that. They don't think about other people's feelings. They're not the right people. But see, again, who am I to say - well, I've kind of witnessed certain things, so I know for a fact that that's not the right people. But I just can't tell them, you shouldn't be, or you can't do this. Because anybody could do anything they put their mind to. But they're not putting their mind to it. So it's like, the wrong people."

The right people on the bus, based on student perspectives, are those who have respect, empathy rather than sympathy, cultural competency, relatability to students and

understand how to be restorative in their interactions. Furthermore, students in interviews stressed the importance of being treated as human and equal without unnecessary use of power and authority over others.

I provided one example above of staff engaging in a circle at the end of the 2016-17 school year after a number of co-workers had been let go, although the circumstances of their departure were not shared with me. Another situation of a staff leaving Paladin provides insight into a value that is important to who stays on the bus. Both students and staff shared a situation where an SSC made and continued to repeat racist comments. A student shared,

> "We had this one teacher, [who] said that they'd buy a student for $50. We were talking about slavery. The teacher looked over, like, 'I'd buy you for $50," like - . That isn't something you say in a room full of black kids. Paladin did handle what they needed to handle with that certain individual."

Most but not all staff and students who shared this situation in interviews agreed with the decision that the SSC needed to leave. A student who was part of the SSC's student team, however, said he became more isolated and did less work when his SSC left. He was newer to the school at the time and didn't know others, so the decision negatively impacted him. Additionally, one staff questioned what learning could take place for the SSC who left rather than what could have been learned through a restorative circle process. Staff and students shared other examples of explicit racism being unacceptable at Paladin; although staff in particular felt there were contradictions in decision making about them. Their expressed views are that some continue to be a part of the Paladin community even though they have spoken explicitly about their racist beliefs.

In community, actions have a ripple effect, and freedom with responsibility is complicated. A staff commented, “Making those kinds of hard decisions I think would be hard for anybody in that situation, but sometimes that's what had to happen.”

Communication bounded by Bureaucracy

When it’s all about relationships, but difficult decisions about inclusion or exclusion need to be made, a bureaucracy that is the antithesis of community is set into motion. As much as Paladin has created community, laws still protect the privacy of students as well as staff, and these laws act as a shield protecting the power of a structured system at the same time as protecting the privacy of individuals. For a restorative school, the implications are significant.

On the staff side, employment is at-will, meaning the employer, Paladin, can hire and fire at their discretion. Employees have contracts and are supervised through the enforcement of an employee handbook, which is written in accordance with personnel laws and has punitive disciplinary language. Unlike the student handbook that has restorative practices as the main approach, the employee handbook has not been revised to include restorative language. Last, personnel law that has protections of employee privacy puts employers at risk of legal action against them if unfavorable information or private information is shared.

All of this bureaucracy creates an obstacle to being restorative as a staff community. Centralized information and power to make employment decisions is in the hands of a couple people at Paladin. At the same time, staff that created community and are in it together don’t have all of the information when a decision about one of their peers is made. It is a double-edged sword; yet presents opportunity for change.

On the student side, Paladin has gone much farther in pushing the boundaries of bureaucracy to be a student-centered restorative community. Still bound by privacy laws

and protections, even more for students receiving special education services, Paladin has found ways to challenge the status quo in the best interests of the students. The price in doing so means a heavier focus on documentation and paper work than if the school stuck with zero tolerance discipline policies. Every behavior incident requires documentation of how it was handled and the outcome.

Given the school treats every individual and every situation different according to the specifics, the documentation not only needs to accurately report what happened and the outcome, it must also be able to pass the test of fairness when compared to other cases. One case can end up being a stack of many files filled with relevant documentation, according to staff. Lastly, the protection of privacy also has meant only those directly involved have all of the information. In both staff and student realities, not everyone has all of the information and that potentially impedes the restorative community.

Behind the Scenes

It is difficult to be in community and be impacted by decisions without fully knowing or understanding the reasons for those decisions. The more restorative practices are utilized, the more equal and human the environment, the less easy it is to hold the tension of not knowing, and the more people feel a power imbalance. A staff shared,

> “Not everyone sees the behind the scenes. A lot of times eye witnesses or bystanders see the behavior, not the process. Sometimes, restorative process, so far, anyway, it’s hard to make sure everyone’s always involved in it. One of our challenges is making sure that those who are impacted are involved in the process, and they should be.”

Another staff, feeling Paladin has had a turning point in being more inclusive this year, shared,

> "One turning point was the level of communication. We shift to, also, that the folks that witnessed it, or were involved in it, are also important in this process. There was a lot of conflict beforehand, where a student would come to the dean's office and go back to class and the teacher be, 'What the hell? I have no idea what took place. I'm still pissed about this' There had to be an intentional - a lot of time and effort in acknowledging who was involved in this. Who needs to be a part of this process? Inviting them into this process and also communicating what this process looks like to everyone. There was a shift in the consciousness of many of our staff that was like, 'Okay, I can be down with this because I do have a role in this; I should be a part of this process if I was in this classroom where this incident happened."

Both are referring to communications and inclusiveness in situations involving student behavior. Inclusivity and information sharing about personnel matters is still a greater challenge at Paladin due to the employee contractual relationship and centralized decision making on disciplinary action and termination. The complexities of race and implicit bias come into play, which impact staff and students in different ways.

Through a Critical Race Lens:

Why Race Matters, Still Matters, Always Matters

W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk*, "The problem with the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," (p.9). Almost a full century later, Cornell West wrote the bestselling book *Race Matters* (1994), in which he provides a descriptive account of the construct of race in America and its impact. After detailing

American history of systematized white domination, black rage that ensued and white retaliation, West (1994) writes,

> "My aim in this book is to revitalize our public conversation about race (p. 158)…we must accent the best of each other even as we point out the vicious effects of our racial divide and the pernicious consequences of the maldistribution of wealth and power. We simply cannot enter the twenty-first century at each other's throats even as we acknowledge the weighty forces of racism, patriarchy, economic inequality, homophobia, and ecological abuse at our necks," (p. 159).

Now eighteen years into the twenty-first century, I have come to understand race always matters. I have also found the sentiment in Cornell West's words is shared by staff and students at Paladin. Moving forward from this premise is most realistic, if change is to happen as West and others have envisioned. I have been forthcoming about approaching this case study of Paladin's use of restorative practices from a critical race lens, yet have also been careful and thoughtful about keeping my biases in check as I listened to the experiences of students and staff. I've done the best I can and have consulted with others along the way. Talking about racism is difficult for many people. Some background on neuroscience, race and implicit bias is provided to frame the discussion.

Neuroscience research now supports what W.E.B. Du Bois understood about color lines over a century ago. It has been known for some time from brain science that humans have the fight, flight, or freeze circuitry as a survival response to perceived threat. Newer research on empathy conducted with college students found that subjects responded with more empathy when seeing pain in others who were similar to

themselves, but the empathy response was lower for those of other races receiving the same pain stimuli (Xu, Zuo, Wang, & Han, 2009)

Further studies found that human empathy responses to in-group members utilize more developed brain circuitry than when responding to people identified as different or not known (Rock & Rodecky, 2012). The implication is people react with less thought and more impulse when responding to those perceived as different from themselves. Neuroscience experts (Rock & Rodecky, 2012) conclude race still matters, even in civil society, because bias is implicit, without conscious choice. However, the state of unconscious thought is not static, so a responsibility falls on everyone to become more conscious in human relations and in making decisions that may adversely affect others. In other words, while race still matters, neuroscience does excuse the continuation of racism, prejudices and implicit biases, regardless of one's perceived identity.

Context of Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is defined as "the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner," (p.14), which can be either positive or negative (Staats, Capatosto, Wright, & Jackson, 2016). Based on dual systems theory, implicit bias comes from our unconscious and automatic responses whereas our conscious decisions are slow and intentional. Researchers Staats et al. (2016) stress the significance of implicit bias, because 98% of emotional reasoning occurs in the unconscious mind, thus unintended and harmful decisions result from a lack of awareness. No one is free from implicit bias, it's a human reaction; however humans have the capacity to develop awareness and change our biases. To mitigate the effects of implicit bias, it is critical to be intentional in becoming aware, slowing and changing thought patterns and relating to others differently.

Race and Implicit Bias at Paladin

Youth Perspectives

Being a trauma sensitive, relational community, Paladin has made great strides in disrupting the status quo for students. Restorative practices have played a part in this change. When asked about race, privilege and power dynamics at Paladin, students interviewed shared a common answer - that doesn't really happen here. This belief has been reinforced by their experiencing actions that made it clear racism and other forms of oppression are not tolerated. The examples previously shared of a student's Islamophobia, which was handled in a restorative process, and an SSC's slave buying comment provide evidence of turning points supporting students' perspectives. When students talked about feeling safe at Paladin, in addition to physical safety they also referenced feeling safe from forms of racism and prejudice that they have experienced in society.

A student asserted,

> "You would think in this school, we all were the same color. Or we all were the same race. Or we didn't even go by race, or we didn't go by genders. Because this is an open, this is just a safe space, in my eyes. When you come to this school, we're all, let's say, we could all be green if we really wanted to. There is never - I don't hear anyone say that you're black. I feel like in this school, they let you know that everybody's together in this. You're not separated from anyone just because of the color of your skin, or just because you can't speak good English."

Students shared experiences of racism that occurred in previous schools and in day to day life, but clarified it is different at Paladin. They explained it makes a difference to feel a part of a community where people are in it together and understand each other.

Restorative practices deepened this awareness, allowing for both brave and safe space for students. In classroom and circle observations, I witnessed students speaking and sharing equally regardless of race or gender differences. Students have also shown leadership in bridging relationships across differences. Another student explained,

> "We don't really have those issues too much, here, due to the fact that there are a lot of kids like me but, there are kids who look at me like, "Well, he's talking to them." A lot of kids are followers. Don't get me wrong; it's okay to be a follower. Everybody has a following trait; not everybody is meant to be a leader. Some people are meant to follow. Some people who see me go chop it up with the other kids, and then they go chop it up with the other kids after I leave. It's like a ripple effect. You've got to pay it forward."

Considering Anderson's (2015) description of racialized spaces, Paladin appears to have created community for students in which the value for being human and equal, and having freedoms with responsibility has made it their space; transcending the bounds of racialized white space or black space. When students talked about staff that aligned with their way of being in community, they crossed the color line; race did not matter. How they were respected as equal and human mattered. It appears students have an unwritten covenant to protect the space from forms of oppression, and focus on leading positive change in a restorative way. A poster with the words, "Trust, Unite, Act," is displayed on numerous walls throughout Paladin shown in Figure 31; perhaps symbolic of the students' unity in their space.

Figure 31 Trust Act Unite Poster

A student expressed,

> "I want to break barriers. I know at the end of the day, I'm moving toward greatness. I want to switch that around; I want everybody to rock with everybody. I'm tired of all this separation. They say that segregation ended but, we're (people of color) the ones segregating ourselves. It's just horrible. I want to break all those laws. I'm yellow; it doesn't even matter to me."

Reflecting on the role of students as leaders in creating a non-racist community, a staff shared,

> "I tell the kids all the time too, that they're the future leaders here. And they have got to fix this mess that we made. We're depending on them, because we haven't been able to figure it out. And they seem to be figuring it out, to me. I could be wrong, but from what I see here, it works. And they come here every day, they get along with each other, and they're caring about each other."

I want to be sure not to over-romanticize what it means for the youth to feel Paladin is their safe and brave space, protected from the usual forms of racism, oppression and traumas they experience in other places. Students also shared their personal struggles. It is not an easy path for them. However rare, altercations at Paladin do happen, including physical violence.

The staff perception is that not all students have bought in to restorative approaches. Even so, the foundation has been laid for restorative practices to continue and deepen, with youth leadership in the change process. What may be different for students is they have more freedoms and more protections than staff. Paladin has been very intentional about being student centered, prioritizing students having voice and choice. Staff, on the other hand are still constrained by contractual employee relationships enmeshed with decision making and power differentials

Race and Implicit Bias at Paladin

Staff Perspectives

The staff has also come a long way in building relationships and using restorative practices. In Paladin staff meetings, I observed staff having what appeared to be very open and challenging conversations about accountability to each other and for the success of students. Staff explicitly acknowledged the dynamic of licensed teachers being mostly white, while the students are not. I was impressed with the directness and what appeared to be a willingness to struggle with each other on difficult subjects. One staff shared this perspective,

> "It's very difficult to be a part of a meeting, and not be heard or listened to because you're looked at differently. It's really, I guess, it's tough for me, because I feel that I don't look at anybody differently. And that I'm going to give everybody an equal chance. I also feel that's probably a big reason why our school connects as well as we do with our staff. One of the sayings I've said before is, if I was having a get-together, there's not a single staff here I wouldn't invite. That's a pretty strong statement for having 35 plus, 40, staff. But it's truly how I feel, and I feel that a majority of the staff here is definitely on that same page, and that we work well together. We understand each other well, and I don't believe there is a race issue between the staff. Because of that, I think it reflects well on our students. We don't have any injuries or beliefs that would cause that to be different."

Even so, staff interviews presented a theme of an underlying tension and uncertainty about race relations at Paladin. If the premise of Paladin being a racialized white space is accepted, then what implications may result from implicit biases? Even if this premise is rejected, all being equal, the humanness of implicit bias presents challenges.

Imagine the possibility for misunderstandings and conflict when white leaders make decisions and not all of the information is known by those impacted, and many of those impacted are African American. Race is automatically part of the dynamic. Has implicit racial bias influenced the decision? Has implicit bias affected what and how information is shared? Has implicit bias affected how the decision was perceived? Has implicit bias changed the way people relate in the workplace after the decision has become known? Has implicit bias led to a breakdown in trust? With 98% of our emotional reasoning being in the unconscious mind, the impact on relationships can quickly spiral downward. Being a trauma sensitive school also means being aware staff bring their own past traumas as part of their identity. Racism is a real part of people's trauma experiences, which can be triggered or worsened with re-traumatization in the workplace.

Paladin staff has not been sheltered from the impact of race dynamics, although relationships have deepened in a community committed to working through the messiness together. The staff structure has been somewhat revised to try to equalize power and relationships. For example, other than the Director, position titles do not clearly delineate a hierarchy. No one is identified as a licensed teacher. Resources have been shifted to try to lessen the pay differential between licensed teachers and highly experienced non-licensed staff. I could not identify a hierarchy or who was a teacher or not, given the degree of team work with shared responsibility for working with students. Yet, staff expressed tension in the awareness of power within the school hierarchy, and race still matters.

Restorative practices in difficult times have been valuable, shifting obstacles into turning points. Developing empathy and changing implicit race biases is a journey that takes time. One staff reflected,

> “I think from that lens we have a lot to learn, and you know that. But I still believe it's in the way a person has been raised, the way they've been educated, the way they feel. You can't force a person to see through a racial lens that they weren't raised in, and I think sometimes we try to force that for people to really see how they're behaving or where they're coming from. The same as this political race we're in right now, right? People are crossing apart more than they're crossing over together, and I think that atmosphere - that's a community atmosphere comes into any area of employment or expertise or whatever, and views get blinded. But unless you're wearing the skin I'm in or I'm wearing the skin you're in, we have yet to get it to that magnitude.”

Continued or new challenges present opportunities for Paladin staff to be intentional in becoming aware of implicit biases, working together to reduce them and using restorative practices to create a more equitable community.

Not All Restorative

Similar to the complications of implicit bias and racialized space through a critical race lens, highly individualized treatment also invites misunderstandings around fairness in how situations are handled. Not all processes are restorative and not all decisions transparent. Paladin’s mobility rate with more than half of the students coming and going during the school year provides reason for questioning how many students leave by choice or feel unwelcomed after an incident, a conflict, or trauma-related experience that was not addressed in a restorative way. By keeping suspensions as an option, both in cases of student behavior and staff conduct, decisions have the potential to be punitive. Yet, as mentioned in chapter ten, even the staunchest supporters of restorative practices at Paladin have expressed a belief that there are times when a person needs to leave. Sometimes a person’s leaving needs to be permanent and sometimes a temporary time

out. When is a time out a good idea and when is staying in class or at Paladin a bad idea?

I found this to be a challenging question in my time at Paladin. As a reflexive researcher, my past experience has included running a community center that experienced significant youth on youth violence my first year. A teen who was a regular in the gym was murdered within my first month, a college student under my supervision murdered by a teen as he was leaving the building, and in all, seven young people from the community were murdered that year. The youth and police were in conflict, and I was under a lot of pressure to keep people safe.

Ultimately, we had approximately a dozen young people trespassed from the property at any given time, meaning legally banned from entering for a 12-month period. Banning a person from a property is not restorative. It's a hard decision to make. It may not always have been the right decision. It mostly rested on whether there was a threat of violence, yet threat of violence can be perceived or real. What I learned from experience was not to make decisions alone; instead include people with different perspectives yet equally impacted. As a restorative practitioner, I found myself closely watching experiences at Paladin, yet trying to stay curious, not judgmental.

Not Choosing to Restore

From interviews, staff maintained clarity that participation in restorative processes is always voluntary, so sometimes people choose not to participate. One staff, reflecting on restorative processes with students, shared,

> "The only thing that I can say where it doesn't work is when one of the parties is not ready to come to the table. Because they have to heal a little bit before they're ready to listen to the other party. And when that happens, sometimes it's

> left unfinished. And those hurt, because those are the ones you want to get back."

Another staff reflected on choice and giving options,

> "That's part of our requirement. When a student has acted out, we meet with them, and some are quick to take ownership and apologize, where others need a different way of looking at it. That's what I mean by every situation's different. As much as being out of school, we try to prevent that from happening, we've had very minimum suspensions from going back two years ago. But occasionally, sometimes that is looked at as the best option. We have contact with parents, and we bring parents in to these meetings, as well."

Not Fully Restorative

From the experiences shared by Paladin students, being given options and having less frequent or shorter suspensions is empowering. All students expressed being given options they would not have been given in their previous schools. Yet some descriptions of how options are given by staff seemed to create openings for misunderstandings and the influence of implicit bias. One staff shared,

> "I've been in a lot more of the parent reentry meetings, where if a parent does not agree with what is being brought to the table, that they're more offensive and do not want to listen to anything I have to say. Even though, we as a staff, have already discussed it, and we've already looked at what we need to do as a school for safety reasons. What the student needs. What's best for the student, as well. We try to really balance between the two and come up with equal plans."

Reentry conferences after an incident and absence are included on the far right of the restorative continuum. They often include repairing harm with the victim, communicating value for both the victim and harm doer, focusing on value for the person

rather than shaming the behavior and identifying ways to repair harm that draw on the skills and strengths of the student who caused the harm (Riestenberg, 2012). The staff experience shared above opens questions about the extent to which restorative practices are applied to reentry conferences compared to a traditional disciplinary process. The pitfall of staff coming to the table with a proposal is that it could be construed as authoritative and taking power away from the family to have a voice and choice. If staff, students, and parents in the conference are of different races, the power imbalance may be exacerbated and another level of conflict triggered.

Trauma Sensitive First

The question, when is staying in class a bad idea, is complicated by Paladin's structure. Traditional classrooms are not the norm and students have the freedom to choose where to be most of the time. In general, exclusion from the learning environment is being given more attention as schools are recognizing the negative impact of exclusionary disciplinary practices. Yet, Paladin's trauma sensitive approach also reinforces students' freedom to choose. A staff shared,

> "If you're not in the right mindset, going to class is going to do you no good. It might even be harmful to push a student in to just going and sitting through class all day. They're not only - not going to learn anything. They're going to be upset with you. They're going to be more on edge."

Letting People Go Restoratively

Sometimes difficult decisions about who stays or goes from Paladin need to be made, and not everyone will have all of the information. Considering the possibility of a co-worker needing to leave, one staff expressed, "What is right and least harmful for the students, the school and the one staff don't always align; often they conflict." Being as restorative as possible may mean creating the least harm rather than no harm. Setbacks

or obstacles to being a restorative school may result. Being transparent about how these decisions are made helps to mitigate the impact, and creates the possibility of strengthening a restorative school community. How does a school community let people go restoratively? I pursued this question in follow up interviews with staff, which resulted in the following criteria, pertaining to both staff and students at Paladin.

1) Intent and Impact: Often times when harm is done or conflict happens, the person who caused the harm did not intend the impact that resulted. Being restorative means a person is open to understanding and taking ownership for the impact.
2) Learning Curve: If a person has done harm, and the harm is exposed to them, yet they either are not ready or able to take responsibility, if they are unwilling to change the harmful behavior, the learning curve is too great.
3) Recognizing Intent is Secondary to Impact: If the impact is major without an understanding, then harm will continue to get worse. The person is not a good fit at Paladin.
4) Letting Go Restoratively: Allow for options as much as possible, have a mutually agreed upon exit plan that upholds the person's integrity, and share in how to communicate with others.

Being restorative in letting people go from Paladin was also expressed as not needing to be the end of a relationship. The transition may include mutual support and assistance, and the possibility for future interactions is left open. A staff shared, "I try to treat people they way I'd want to be treated." Also, the restorative way of valuing the human being rather than focusing on a behavior allows for a transition process that uplifts a person's strengths as they find a better fit somewhere else.

Moving Ahead: Being a Fully Restorative School

When staff and students were asked what it would look like to be a fully restorative school in the future, most were quick to answer. Like most questions in this inquiry, restorative practices are part of a relational ethos, so the answers were not all specific to restorative practices, but related.

A common theme for the future that I did not expect to hear was the vision for a different physical space. Students and staff hope for a larger, independent building with room for full circles, a gymnasium, dance studio, and not attached to the mall. A student explained,

> "Not at the mall - People who deal with police brutality - I'm not going to lie. When I first got here and I saw the securities posted with the squad cars, I didn't want to walk in this school. I was like, "I'm not walking in there." I know there's police in there; I'm on probation and I'm black and this is a white neighborhood. I don't care; I'm not walking in there. I just had to walk in there. If it happen, it happen; if it don't, it don't but, I've got to get over that. There are certain things - I always have a fear of getting stopped. I'd just be walking and I'm not ever doing really anything wrong."

Students and staff also expressed a vision for space that allowed for going outdoors for restorative practices as well as for breaks and recovery from challenging moments.

In addition to the more conducive space for being restorative and trauma sensitive, the expected themes included more training, coaching, time, and resources. A staff shared,

> "Sometimes we need to have a circle. Kids have stuff going on. It would be nice to be able to drop everything and pull people and have their circle right then. But with time and space, sometimes it gets difficult."

Paladin takes advantage of restorative practice trainings provided by the Minnesota Department of Education and local nonprofit organizations when possible, but does not have a training plan to ensure all staff are prepared and feel confident in practicing new skills. A staff commented, “It's all in practice and the more experience you have and the more training you've done, then the more equipped you are to handle any given situation.” Paladin staff expressed a desire for ongoing coaching and staff support, whether provided by an internal staff or outside consultant.

Another vision for the future is fitting with most of the content in this chapter about relationships and relating. Paladin has begun a very honest and brave journey about the messiness of human relationships, which matter when people create a community and are committed to each other for a shared purpose. A staff expressed, it is important to continue to build on the progress made. As one staff put it, “I think it’s time we need to just dig in, get all of the skeletons out of the closet.” As staff experiences a more humanizing and equal community, they are empowered to expect shared decision making and personnel policies that are written to reflect being a trauma sensitive and restorative work place as well.

Last, a wise student shared a vision for spreading restorative practices through youth leadership and education. The student advised,

> “Keep up what we’ve been doing. I think it needs time to flourish and grow and become its biggest. Right now, we’re not at the beginning but still at the beginning, and we just need to let it run its course and mingle with the people. Just keep on pushing it, keep it out there, and keep on spreading the word. Each year, I feel like they need to be picking students to give them all the knowledge and to train them and all that - just certain students. Then those students will bring it to their communities. And it will spread by itself - just figuring out ways to

> make it different; to spread the word differently. Maybe if one day, like everybody's always interested in this one thing - kind of incorporate that one thing into restorative practices. Not everybody loves to learn about that; let's just make it interesting, that's what I would say. Keep training students that come in so they're fresh, and it gives them time to have their own experience throughout their years in high school with restorative practices. Just keep it in the schools."

Conclusion

"From a Lake to a Pond"

In one of the staff interviews when I asked how they would describe Paladin's use of restorative practices on a continuum from strictly discipline focused on one end to a whole school way of being on the other end, the staff used the analogy of a lake to explain the changes that have happened at Paladin. The staff shared,

> "It was a lake. And it was a lake that, I think if you dropped me in the middle of it, I couldn't have seen shore. We have slowly drained that throughout the years. It might be deep at times. There's still some problems there, but you can throw a rock across it. We still have a lot of work to go, but we're definitely moving in the right direction, as we have been for the last couple years. Every part of it helps. The restorative part strengthens it. Our staff community has helped strengthen it."

Gaining buy in comes from experiencing restorative practices that result in humanizing relationships. When interpersonal relationships are in need of attention and improve as a result, or at a minimum allow for new understanding, staff and students at Paladin have experienced restorative practices working.

From a critical race lens, staff and students have experienced Paladin as racialized space differently. Staff experience white space with intersecting differentials of

race, power and privilege. Students on the other hand have experienced Paladin as human and equal. Even among difference people can be committed to each other in community if each feels their voice is equally heard and respected. Perfection is not the goal. Fidelity to a model is not the goal. Being a fully restorative school in a way that works for Paladin staff and students is the goal. To get there, as staff stated,

> "I'm not going to sugar coat it. It's tough. It is time consuming, especially at first. One thing that might work one school year might not the next. One week to another. We're constantly trying to improve and find out what works better for our student body. We are always re-evaluating. Trying to think of how to improve it and make it better. Now it is so engrained in our culture that if a key player were to leave, I think that it is now sustainable where it is a part of what we do and how we do it."

Chapter 12 Discussion of Findings and Implications

The central question of this case study was: how have students and staff experienced restorative practices at Paladin Career and Technical High School. Findings in chapters six through eleven are full of description, testimony and examples of how students and staff have experienced restorative practices in the Paladin context. Each reader may find meaning and value from different experiences as they journey through the narrative. The study also included a set of sub-questions to explore and deepen understanding about Paladin's use of restorative practices. Sub-questions included:

1. How do students and staff describe restorative practices at Paladin?
2. How do staff and students experience Paladin's use of restorative practices along the gamut from strictly discipline focused to a whole school way of being?
3. What have been the turning points and obstacles in the process of integrating restorative practices?
4. What is different as a result and for whom?
5. How do race, power and privilege intersect with restorative practice experiences at Paladin?
6. How do students and staff describe the ideal use of restorative practices in the future? and
7. What are the underlying themes and contexts that account for how restorative practices are experienced at Paladin?

Following Creswell's (2007) guidance in formulating research questions, the first six sub-questions were meant to more deeply explore the central question about the experience of restorative practices, whereas the seventh question about underlying themes and contexts procedurally allows the narrative to unfold.

The preceding chapters were organized according to how the description from Paladin staff and students' experiences unfolded through interviews, observations and analysis. The answers provided by staff and students, along with researcher observations and document review, result in themes that overlap across research questions rather than fit neatly into categorized silos. The discussion of findings in this chapter has been somewhat re-organized to align with the study sub-questions to the degree possible; however still honoring the themes as they emerged. Most importantly, this chapter is written to clarify how the findings of this case study contribute to the knowledge about school-based restorative practices and what the implications may be for practice, policy and future research.

The literature review on school-based restorative practices in chapter three addresses gaps in knowledge, as well as unanswered questions identified by researchers Hurley et al. (2015). In their research on school-based restorative practices, Hurley et al. identified seven domains needing further inquiry, of which five are included in this analysis to some degree: Implementation Readiness, Whole-School versus Stand-Alone Models, Implementation and Effectiveness, Impacts on Racial and Ethnic Minorities and Students with Disabilities, and Sustainability. My discussion in this chapter includes reference to these domains where contributions from the Paladin case study findings are relevant.

Through a Critical Race Lens: Disrupting the Status Quo in Education

Discussion of findings and implications are also offered through a critical race lens. The title of this dissertation has been referenced throughout the narrative as an overarching theme of Paladin's use of restorative practices. The status quo of education is a system that allows a certain percentage of students to not succeed, who are disproportionately youth of color. A reliance on zero tolerance policies that rely heavily

on exclusionary discipline and standardized education that has prescribed measures of success is the status quo.

Through a critical race lens, structural racism intersecting with poverty, disability and other forms of oppression based on differences also factor into some students not succeeding in mainstream education. Analysis through a critical race lens is particularly relevant to this study with Paladin's student population being majority African American and youth of color, 25% receiving special education services, 77% free/reduced lunch qualified and one-third homeless. Disrupting the status quo means flipping the way of doing school; doing things differently. The discussion of findings addresses how Paladin does things differently to support the success of youth who have not fit in mainstream school systems.

Research Question:

How do Paladin Staff and Students Experience Restorative Practices?

First responses to the question posed to Paladin staff and students about how they experience restorative practices told a story of change, which has been corroborated through the review of archival documents and policies. Paladin's integration of restorative practices has taken seven years and continues today.

Hurley et al. (2015) in their research on school-based restorative practices addressed implementation readiness as the first domain needing further inquiry. The researchers assert that gaps in knowledge include understanding what structure and commitment levels are needed to implement restorative practices and what has worked to gain buy-in from school stakeholders (p. 2). The experience of Paladin's use of restorative practices contributes to answering these questions by beginning with an understanding of implementation readiness and exploring the change process as experienced by staff and students.

Implementation Readiness: Cultivating the Conditions for School Change

Restorative practices at Paladin were first introduced in 2011 as a re-entry approach after students had been suspended. Under the leadership of a past director, who believed in the potential of restorative practices, numerous staff with past restorative practice experience were hired and the use of circles mandated. Yet, most staff were unfamiliar with restorative practices and were not trained in implementation. The unintended consequence of mandates without staff buy-in or capacity to implement restorative practices was resistance and resentment from staff. At the same time, the school was able to make gains in augmenting a trauma informed approach to its already successful individualized instructional learning framework. Positive changes happened and restorative practices took root at a faster pace when a new director with a collaborative leadership style led the school in 2015.

Paladin staff and leadership cultivated the conditions that made implementation of restorative practices possible, aligned with the literature on school change (Seashore, 2006). Their experiences indicate the conditions that need to be in place for implementation readiness. Paladin functions as a learning organization: innovating, evaluating, interpreting and adjusting for continuous school improvement. The leadership is visionary and collaborative. Experiential learning is valued and staff are empowered with the freedom to practice new skills in their own way. The school is highly relational.

There is no perfect recipe for becoming a restorative school and no easy way to make it happen, so the process is an experience of trial and error. “Very messy,” one staff emphasized. Second, what makes it messy, as stated by a staff, “It’s all about relationships.” With the foundation laid for change and value on relationships, the use of restorative practices broadened and deepened each of the last three years.

Structure and Commitment Supporting Restorative Practices

Organizational change and restorative practices experts share an understanding that each organization needs to custom fit processes to their unique environment for it to be sustainable, rather than transplanting a model from another organization's experience (Sergiovanni, 2000; Huculak, 2005; Bhattacharyya et al., 2013; Brown, 2018). Paladin has not attempted to graft a restorative practice model or change process from another source. This is especially important from a critical race lens with most of Paladin students not fitting or being successful in mainstream education. Customizing restorative practices and the change process rather than attempting a prescribed model is also fitting with the work of Paulo Freire (2005), who maintained,

> "One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor," (p. 47).

The experience of Paladin's staff and students suggests prescribed methodologies are minimized, so freedom and individual self-expression can grow. Even though each school must customize their implementation of restorative practices, Paladin's experience provides insight into considerations for others cultivating readiness and attempting implementation.

Fitting with the analogy referenced by organizational management expert Jim Collins (2005), structural changes at Paladin started with people first - getting the right people on the bus and in the right seats. Paladin has gotten many of the right people in the right positions, and tapped into a network of local restorative practice experts for

training and consultation. As contrarily experienced, mandates and prescribed practices under authoritative leadership created resistance in the first three years. Accepting that the change process cannot be forced or rushed is an important realization for restorative practitioners and school change stakeholders.

Encouraging people to try restorative practices with supports, but without mandates to change planted the seeds for restorative practices to grow. Staff changed first. As a staff said, “It was how we were dealing with the student behaviors changed how students behaved.” Asking questions of students and each other differently, focused on the person not the behavior. Gaining skills in asking questions differently as a basic restorative practice led to increased commitment among staff as well as students.

Structurally, as new practices were introduced, student handbooks and Paladin annual reports were regularly updated to reflect a growing priority on restorative practices. A clear paper trail reflecting the values and uses of restorative practices is evident. The school’s mission and values statements were revised. Restorative practices have grown as a priority to the extent it is now written as a core purpose in Paladin’s contract with Innovative Quality Schools, their charter school authorizer. Paladin’s structure contributes to an understanding of restorative practices as part of a relational ethos that includes a trauma sensitive approach and individualized instructional model. The three approaches are inextricably linked to the whole school way of being rather than stand-alone programs or practices. Paladin’s charter school contract with Innovative Quality Schools also includes language to support their relational ethos.

Gaining Buy-in from School Stakeholders

Staff and student responses to the research sub-question about turning points and obstacles in implementing restorative practices contribute to understanding their experience in gaining buy-in from stakeholders. From Paladin’s experience, having

school leadership that cultivates the ground for change and has a collaborative approach is the first step. Staff received training in restorative practices is another step. Specific to restorative practices, however, Paladin's experience suggests being trained and having people who are experienced and committed to restorative practices does not ensure success in early implementation. Resistance can block even the most experienced from being able to implement school-wide change. Mandates backfire when already stretched staff is not bought in to why something new is good and what will be different by devoting valuable time to the uncomfortable process of change.

Turning points come from a real experience of it working on a personal level. When people are frustrated by what isn't working in their school or in their classroom, or in their staff relations, or with their administration, an opening is created for experiencing a restorative process. Staff and students experienced the positive impact of restorative processes first-hand. When conflict or behavior incidents occurred, restorative processes created "aha" moments as turning points and realization that it works.

Training on restorative practices is good, but it is an activity of the mind. Paladin's experience suggests restorative practices in schools are accepted and transformative when people have an experience of the heart. The degree of freedom afforded to people has led to "aha" moments and personal change. After the "aha" moments, staff and students are more ready to receive training on restorative practices with the intent to practice new skills.

A focus on continuous improvement as a learning organization allowed for Paladin staff to recognize that what had been the status quo was not working to achieve their desired results. The staff was open to change, because continuing to do what was not working was not a good option. Sticking with the status quo brought more discomfort than potential change.

Implementation Readiness through a Critical Race Lens

Findings from this case study suggest Paladin's readiness to integrate restorative practices was cultivated over time by valuing the desired results for their student population more than on perfecting the change process or one implementation model. Through a critical race lens, Paladin's relational ethos of being individual student-centered, trauma sensitive, and restorative has been intentionally broadened and deepened with a keen understanding that their student population has been impacted by adverse childhood experiences, compounded by structural racism and intersecting forms of oppression. These realities have contributed to Paladin students not being successful in mainstream education. Findings from this case study suggest a prerequisite to being a restorative school is cultivating a culture that explicitly acknowledges adverse childhood experiences, structural racism and other forms of oppression with intentionality to heal, build resiliency and repair the harm done.

How do Paladin Staff and Students Experience Restorative Practices?

Whole School Way of Being

Researchers Hurley et al. (2015) identified the need for more research within the domain of whole-school versus stand-alone models. A sub-question for this research inquiry to further explore experiences was - how do staff and students experience Paladin's use of restorative practices along the gamut from strictly discipline focused to a whole school way of being? Responses from Paladin staff and students, observations and document review clearly identify Paladin's integration of restorative practices as a whole school way of being. While this case study does not contribute to understanding whole-school versus stand-alone models in comparison, it provides insight into the possible key elements in the domain of whole school implementation and effectiveness (Hurley et al., 2015), specifically for students who have not been successful in

mainstream education. The findings from this study suggest Paladin is well on its way to becoming a fully restorative school, yet is continuing on the journey of change to deepen and broaden the impact.

Paladin staff and students experience restorative practices along a full continuum as described by Wachtel (2009); from the least formal and personal self-expression, to community-building, restorative dialogue circles and restorative chats, to formal mediations and conferences after an incident has happened. While not all staff and students are using restorative practices to the same degree or in the same way, all restorative practices along the continuum are being implemented at Paladin. All staff and students experience restorative practices in some way. Going beyond the contributions of Wachtel and past restorative practices researchers, the findings discussed next contribute to an expanded understanding of what it means to implement a whole-school restorative way of being.

Making the System Fit the Individual, Not the Individual Fit the System

A main theme in Paladin's context that emerged from the experiences of staff and students, and from my observations, is individualized custom-fitted treatment of each person, each situation and each incident rather than upholding a one size fits all structure. The focus on restoring the whole individual and handling each situation differently was felt by all staff and students interviewed. It starts from day one, when a student first walks in the door to enroll at Paladin. Each learning experience is customized to fit the individual and every behavior incident is handled differently based on the situation.

Resetting and Acceleration

At Paladin, students begin with a resetting of their graduation goal and enter an acceleration process. They begin the personal journey of being restored by having a

new graduation plan that puts them on course for success rather than stuck in a trajectory dictated by state and federal policy that already has them failing. Resetting students and setting them up for success with a new graduation target provides hope and gives students a realistic goal. It's a fresh start.

The research and literature on acceleration clearly points to a focus on the individual child and customizing an acceleration plan to best challenge their abilities. By prioritizing the unique abilities of each student, their learning opportunities can be optimized. The Paladin approach embraces the notion of every student being unique in their experiences and abilities, thus deserving of an individual learning plan to accelerate their education. What's different about Paladin, what goes against the status quo of acceleration in education, is that the majority of Paladin students are at least one year behind in credit attainment at the time they enroll. Acceleration seems very appropriately applied to optimize their chances for success, even though it goes against the status quo of how acceleration is understood by the education mainstream. Minnesota is one of many states statutorily allowing school districts to adopt procedures for acceleration. Paladin's experience suggests bridging restorative practices with acceleration for students disproportionately harmed by systems may be an appropriate course to begin to make reparations.

Having Voice and Being Heard

Making the system fit the individual combined with the use of restorative practices allows for students' voices to be heard differently than what they've experienced in other schools. This case study suggests being a trauma sensitive and restorative school community contributes to students feeling heard. They find a very supportive staff that they can trust with whom they talk about their personal experiences

and feelings. It continues with restorative chats, circles, restorative dialogue among difference and conversations to repair harm.

Fitting with empowerment and self-efficacy theories underpinning restorative justice (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992; Bazemore, 2000; Bandura et al., 2002), Paladin students experience empowerment as a connection between a personal sense of competence, having voice and being heard, and a willingness to engage with others in restorative dialogue and social action.

The Significance of Having Freedom, Options and Self-Control

Freedom as having the power to act means self-determination in making choices, which implies a person understands more than one option is open to them. Giving, receiving and creating options provide freedom to choose. Drawing on neuroscience research (Leotti et al., 2010; Ren et al., 2018) perceived freedom of choice is influenced by the availability of options. Likewise, having the opportunity to choose allows for the exercise of control over one's life experiences, thus enhancing well-being. According to Leotti et al. (2010), the need to exercise control in one's live is so significant that it is necessary for survival. The degree of freedom afforded to staff and students at Paladin is exceptional for a school as described in chapter eight.

The opposite of freedom is oppression, being enslaved, and being under the control of others. From a critical race lens, Paladin's majority students of color who are also from low wealth households, and students who are special education qualified experience school differently with the restoration of freedoms in the school context. Their previous school experiences align with labeling theory developed by sociologist Howard Becker (2014) who asserts minorities who are subject to societal racism or those deviating from the status quo are negatively labeled by the privileged class. In turn, those negatively labeled begin to identify with that label and it becomes a self-fulfilling

prophesy. Students interviewed at Paladin all shared experiences of personal transformation and making choices for their own well-being differently in the Paladin context.

Freedom and Liberating Education

The experience of Paladin's relational ethos of being trauma sensitive, restorative and individualized project-based learning as applied with freedom in a community is reminiscent of freedom schools of the civil rights movement and Freire's liberating education praxis. Education as freedom with responsibility allows the process of self-discovery. Personal and communal liberation becomes possible, breaking down systems of oppression. Youth leadership has begun to extend beyond Paladin walls with social action reminiscent of freedom schools and Freire's liberating education praxis. From a critical race lens, empowerment extending to public action to break down systems of oppression is a necessary process to gain freedoms to everyone.

How do Paladin Staff and Students Describe Restorative Practices?

When staff and students were asked the research sub-question about how they describe restorative practices at Paladin, their explanation of Paladin as not a normal school surfaces additional theory and concepts that contribute to a broader understanding of being a restorative school.

Freedom with Responsibility in Community

Fitting with Indigenous beliefs in freedom with responsibility, staff and students experience of freedom at Paladin suggests an awakened understanding of the need to care about themselves and others in community. The freedom to make change, or choose not to make change, has a ripple effect beyond the individual. Going back to the indigenous roots of restorative practices, freedom is in the context of self among all our

relations (Yazzie & Zion, 2005). The translation from Navajo to English means freedom with responsibility, rather than simply freedom without limits.

Theory of School as Community. The degree to which Paladin has created a deeply caring community is a theme contributing to becoming a fully restorative school, where freedom comes with responsibility. A theory of school as community rather than as an organization is relevant to Paladin being a restorative school (Sergiovanni, 1994). Sergiovanni asserted schools better serve their purpose as communities, which requires school leadership and staff to think and behave differently. School becomes a caring community when all in the environment are strongly committed to a shared purpose, ideology and understanding of their interdependency. Through this case study research I found Paladin staff and students experience school as community aligned with the theory. Caring relationships are exemplified through references to being like family, having each other's backs, being cared for but not *taken care of*, and having love for each other.

Compassionate Accountability

Freedom with responsibility in community is interwoven with what I observed at Paladin as compassionate accountability. Cimmarusti and GameroIt (2009), social work researchers in the field of trauma informed care, define compassionate accountability as simultaneously strengthening the youth and building the connection between youth and staff to teach taking personal responsibility (p. 183). Compassionate accountability is centered on learning to be self-kind, feeling human and part of humanity, and holding painful thoughts in mindful balance (Neff, 2003). Freedom with responsibility is cultivated through compassionate accountability, which is intentional at Paladin. This aligns with the culture of being a trauma sensitive, restorative school with an individualized instructional model, supporting the individual in relationship with others.

The students I interviewed all described having self-compassion, even though they didn't name it as such, and extended this compassion to others. Being in a deeply caring, family-like community means attention is given to everyone being well, having self-compassion, learning freedom with responsibility, and engaging in compassionate accountability. At Paladin, this is the journey toward being a restorative school. Students spoke of being human and equal as a result. Even so, some staff still questioned whether restorative practices adequately provide consequences and hold students accountable for their behavior. The student-centeredness of Paladin also left questions about staff self-kindness and care in a trauma sensitive ethos.

What's Different as a Result?

Researchers Hurley et al. (2015) pose numerous questions about the effectiveness and impact of restorative practices in schools that need further inquiry. This case study contributes to understanding impact on students as identified by them, on student and staff relationships, school climate and safety, and school disciplinary practices. While this study does not include an analysis of academic outcomes through quantitative methods or secondary data analysis, it lends some insight into graduation rates through description of Paladin's intent to make the system fit the individual rather than the individual fit the system.

Restoring Self

When students were asked what is different as a result of restorative practices at Paladin, the most striking and repeated answer was their sense of being personally restored. Students referred simply to being restorative at Paladin as a way of being, and restored as human beings. Through self-compassion, which includes self-kindness and feeling human and a part of humanity, students developed empathy. Restoring self is a significant finding of this research. White privileged researchers may take this for

granted, but in the context of a student population that is disproportionately impacted by structural racism, adverse childhood experiences, low wealth, homelessness and disability identification, as well as being court involved, restoring self is everything. Feeling human and equal as a result was a sentiment repeatedly shared by students.

Being personally restored and empowered, youth leadership stood out at Paladin. Students expressed being empowered to be restorative peace keepers among their peers and staff, even though a formal structure to do so is not in place.

Improved Interpersonal Relationships

Students and staff shared deepening interpersonal relationships as a result of restorative conversations about difficult issues. In the past year, students and staff experienced difficult conversations on topics of racism, sexual harassment, Islamophobia, transgender prejudice and political affiliations. With each difficult conversation using restorative practices, staff and students described a growing sense of competency to break down walls between people. Evidence that restorative practices are having a positive impact on interpersonal relationships is also found in requests for its use by staff and students.

School Climate and Safety

Paladin becoming a safer school was another theme found in the research through interviews and observations. Paladin staff and students believe school safety has significantly improved with much fewer threats or acts of physical violence, and fewer escalating behaviors warranting intervention. Students reported a safe climate with intolerance of racist or hate language as well as bullying. If such incidents did happen, students reported they were dealt with using restorative processes. While I was at Paladin, only one escalating argument required intervention to prevent violence. Staff expressed the significance of this change, acknowledging the school had weekly shut

downs due to threats of violence prior to being a restorative school. Not all language is perceived as respectful, however, and staff expressed concern about the need to give more attention to preventing re-traumatization.

Solutions not Suspensions

The focus on solutions not suspensions has resulted in an all-time low of just four suspensions in the 2017-18 school year. Restorative practices were introduced before the intention of reducing suspensions or addressing disproportionality in school discipline**.** It can be argued Paladin has achieved better results by taking the time to integrate restorative practices as a foundation for disciplinary change rather than in reaction to political pressure to change. The disparity between the lowest group receiving suspensions, White, and the highest group, African American is a very low 1.2%. Reducing suspensions has been a goal for all students, along with specifically reducing the disproportional use with African American students. While progress has been significant, the degree to which exclusionary practices continue beyond formal suspensions was not discovered through this research and the high mobility rate leaves room for questioning.

Graduation Rates

How do restorative practices contribute to students staying in school and graduating? Since this is a qualitative study, a causal relationship cannot be proven and academic outcomes are not the focus of this research, yet many of the views expressed by students and staff I interviewed indicated positive change from their perspective. Following the Minnesota Department of Education graduation reporting formula, 39% of continuously enrolled Paladin seniors graduated on time at the end of the 2016-17 academic year. This percent is very low compared to the state graduation rate of 82.7% (MN Department of Education, 2017).

However, when Paladin also takes into account the number of credits students need to reach graduation and resets their graduation targets, as explained previously, the numbers look quite different. They reported, across all demographic categories tracked by the state but with the reset targets, the percent of Paladin graduates who meet their reset graduation date ranges from a low of 73% for homeless students to 90% for African American students and 100% for American Indian and Hispanic students. These findings suggest measuring graduation rates with a prescribed 4-year standard in public policy is not fitting with school-based restorative practices.

One caveat to the experience at Paladin is that data provided by school administration shows the 2016-17 mobility rate to be 63.64%, indicating more than half of the students come and go during the school year. This is a concern. It is not known from this study why the mobility rate is high, what contributes to students leaving Paladin, or whether they have found a different school where they can be successful. Perhaps the mobility rate is indicative of the highly mobile student population drawn to the school and has no relationship to the school's way of being. At the same time, Paladin administration reported the mobility rate has decreased over time from a high of over 100%. It is also not known if restorative practices have contributed to a decrease in the student mobility rate. More research is needed.

Through a Critical Race Lens: How do Race, Power and Privilege Intersect with Restorative Practice Experiences at Paladin?

Researchers Hurley et al. (2015) pose a number of questions about the impact of restorative practices on the school to prison pipeline, reduction of disproportionality in exclusionary discipline and on addressing racial disparities in general. I admit I was motivated to answer these questions as well, yet have learned so much more by being open to going deeper into what is taken for granted as a member of the white privileged

researcher population. Through a critical race lens, I address student and staff experiences of race and structures of power at Paladin to the degree I was granted access to information and experiences as an outsider.

Relevance of Implicit Bias

One finding from the Paladin experience is that the context of implicit bias must be taken into account. Based on dual systems theory, implicit bias comes from our unconscious and automatic responses, whereas our conscious decisions are slow and intentional as reported in chapter eleven (Staats et al., 2016).The significance of implicit bias is that 98% of emotional reasoning occurs in the unconscious mind, thus unintended and harmful decisions result from a lack of awareness. Neuroscience research is also relevant to implicit bias and the implementation of restorative practices in schools if dismantling systems of oppression is a goal. Researchers found that subjects responded with more empathy when seeing pain in others who were similar to themselves, but the empathy response was lower for those of other races receiving the same pain stimuli (Zuo et al., 2009).

At Paladin, staff interviews and researcher observations raised questions about the possibility of unaddressed implicit biases influencing interpersonal relations, including with students and their parents as well as among staff, with privilege and power dynamics being maintained.

Racialized Space

Staff and students have a different experience of racialized space at Paladin, utilizing the explanation of racialized space asserted by Anderson (2015), Sociology Professor at Yale University, as discussed in chapter two. When asked about race, privilege and power dynamics at Paladin, students interviewed shared a common answer – that doesn't really happen here. Students feel it is their space. Students'

feelings have been reinforced by their experience of actions that made it clear racism and other forms of oppression are not tolerated. When students talked about feeling safe at Paladin, in addition to physical safety they also referenced feeling safe from forms of racism and prejudice that they have experienced in society. Students shared experiences of racism that occurred in previous schools and in day to day life, but clarified it is different at Paladin.

Staff on the other hand, have a different experience. For Paladin staff, the space is racialized with a majority white administrative team that has the power to hire and fire, majority white school board and majority white staff, with majority white licensed teachers who have the power to issue students' credit. Staff explicitly acknowledged the dynamic of licensed teachers being mostly white, while the students are not. As a result, racial tensions come to the surface when decisions are made behind the scenes, and when staff aren't a part of the decision making yet are directly impacted. The influence of implicit biases comes into question. Being a trauma sensitive school also means being aware staff bring their own past traumas as part of their identity. Racism is a real part of people's trauma experiences, which can be triggered or worsened with re-traumatization in the workplace.

Safe and Brave Space

This case study raised the relevance of creating brave spaces for uncomfortable conversations on difficult subjects, like racial equity, power and privilege (Arao & Clemens, 2013). The danger of setting "safe for everyone" as a ground rule for difficult conversations is that implicit bias and power imbalance result in space being perceived as safe for some and not for others. Through a critical race lens, those who have the power in the space will influence how people participate or don't participate, regardless if ground rules and processes explicitly appear equal.

Conflict situations at Paladin have been the impetus pushing people to be brave in having difficult conversations, and then experiencing a new way of being restorative. A deeply caring community with compassionate accountability contributes to brave and safe space. My observations with staff and students, and their explanations in interviews provided evidence that the depth of relationships in the context of a caring community meant difficult conversations can happen through restorative dialogue. Relationships were deepened as a result.

Not all Restorative

Similar to the complications of implicit bias and racialized space through a critical race lens, highly individualized treatment also invites misunderstandings around fairness in how situations are handled. Not all ways of responding to behavior incidents or conflict are restorative, not all staff is trained, not all decisions are transparent and not all choose to practice it. Perfection is not the goal, and applying another school's model is not the answer as already discussed. Not all of the right people are on the bus and in the right seats. Sometimes difficult decisions need to be made about letting people go.

One obstacle to Paladin being a whole restorative school has been bureaucracy and policy meant to protect privacy, but also protect the system. Revisiting the underpinnings of school culture sheds some light on the importance of policy. Morrison et al. (2005), describes school culture as the culmination of values, messages, symbols and systems that reinforce the rules of human relationships (pg.340) Policy is put in place to maintain some form of order in human relationships. Paulo Freire would likely consider policy a tool of the oppressor, since the intent is social control. Policy is also symbolic to the degree people look at it to represent meaning in how they want to be accountable to each other. The three core principles of Paladin's relational ethos are also important in the creation of student and staff policy. Polices pertaining to students at

Paladin have been revised prioritizing the relational ethos, which is symbolic of how the school works with students differently. The Paladin employee handbook has not been revised with prominent language remaining legalistic and punitive. How people choose to be in relationship together is more important, yet policy is symbolic of the need for more attention on equalizing the staff and student experience.

How do Students and Staff Describe Restorative Practices in the Future?

Sustainability of Restorative Practices

The last domain or research inquiry proposed by Hurley et al. (2015) is the sustainability of restorative practices. From Paladin's staff and student experiences in implementing restorative practices and their visions for the future, some insights can be gained about sustainability. First, from the change process Paladin's experience suggests a deep commitment to being a restorative school which is a requirement for its sustainability. Paladin has shifted resources from the school general budget to do things differently, even though the use of restorative practices takes more time and documentation to implement. Thus, relying on special funding does not impact sustainability. Second, Paladin has decentralized leadership responsibility for restorative practices throughout the school, so that it's not bound to the expertise or structural position of any particular staff. Yet, two restorative practices coordinator positions have been defined in order to clarify the path for student behavior referrals and who is responsible for documentation required by law. This also supports sustainability.

Identifying restorative space as important for the future was an unexpected finding. Staff and students prioritized having a school space that allowed for being in nature, allowing for physical movement, maintaining safe space, and being comfortable in circle. Staff and students see this as important to sustainability as well.

When specifically asked about the future of restorative practices, staff and students were confident the foundation is solid for it to continue, even if a major change, like the director leaving, would occur. Students expressed the feeling of being restorative people, which is now a part of their identity and way of being. Staff expressed being in strong relationship with each other as a school community even though tensions around race and power dynamics continue. Brave space allows for staff to confront and change biases.

Research Implications and Recommendations for Paladin

For Paladin, the outlook is positive for the change process to continue. Many opportunities to deepen the experience are presented by staff and students who are uncomfortable with the status quo. Utilizing heartfelt restorative processes for real situations will continue to foster staff and student buy-in. As students and staff expressed, keep doing what you're doing and let it take over. The danger is becoming complacent with good enough rather than being great. Continue to function as a learning community with introspection and innovating for improvements.

Research findings suggest the next step is to deepen the relational ethos of being trauma sensitive and restorative by explicitly extending this value to staff. Attention to understanding historical trauma as a community and how that carries into the present when the same oppressive systems from Unites States colonization are operating today may provide insights that deepen Paladin's trauma sensitive, restorative ethos. Second, evaluating what has worked and what still needs to be addressed to prevent re-traumatization will strengthen the school's relational ethos.

Paladin and schools incorporating restorative practices can go beyond school walls with youth and staff as change agents on issues that matter to them. Drawing from liberating education praxis creates room for restoring people as fully human and equal in

relationship. Like the freedom schools and liberated education praxis, once people go down the path of self-discovery, being restored as a human being and feeling equal, the call for compassionate accountability and freedom with responsibility can extend to all our human relations. Richard Shaull, in his forward to Pedagogy of the Oppressed, wrote,

> “There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world,” (2005, p.34).

Disrupting the status quo includes the call to engage in public discourse to create a ripple of change for all our relations.

Another implication for Paladin is the need for personnel policies to be co-created in a restorative process to represent the caring community, with commitment to each other, based on agreed upon values and an understanding of their interdependency. Compassionate accountability as described in this study provides a lens for co-creating the language and communal expectations for restorative human resource management. Continuing to equalize and share power will strengthen the use of restorative practices as a whole school way of being. This implication also applies to other restorative stakeholders beyond Paladin.

Consider opportunities to decentralize decision making with staff and student teams. This may include engaging staff and students in hiring decision making and staff capacity building. Equalizing the culture extends to being transparent in sharing information, so people understand school administration and the external forces that

bound decisions. More in the school community can join in creating solutions and strategies for making change internally as well as beyond school walls as a result.

For Paladin, continued attention on what is and is not working and for who provides an opportunity for continued improvement. Implicit bias education beginning with staff may allow for an awareness of unconscious biases that may be influencing staff and student relations as well as student outcomes, exclusionary practices, and student mobility. Paladin's change process has demonstrated when staff changes first, different results with students follow.

Ultimately, considering how to be more restorative, Paladin should do what they know works; have individual conversations for custom designed implementation to inspire individual self-expression and freedom to make it their own. Also, continue to let it take over naturally through youth and staff leadership. Intentionally apply the liberated education praxis of starting with what people already know, deepen self-discovery and build knowledge, take action, reflect/evaluate, deepen understanding, and repeat. Be clear about shard values first and commitment to a purpose to guide the process.

> "For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other," (Freire, 2005, p. 72)

Research Implications for Restorative Practices and Other Stakeholders

Implications for school stakeholders who want to introduce restorative practices to their environment are advised to first embark on a listening process. Listen to understand what people care about, what their ideal vision is, what is getting in the way of their vision becoming reality and what they see as no longer working. A true listening process in itself creates the conditions for change as previously outlined. When people

feel heard, an opening is created for potential change. Staff may or may not know of others who share their perspective, so a listening process is an intentional uncovering of common interests on which to build. A listening process also surfaces potential change leaders, who have a vision and are collaborative in their approach.

The implication for restorative practice trainers and consultants is the need to flip the order of things. If the goal is to expand the use of restorative practices in schools, instead of holding training seminars on staff development days or in the summer as the status quo, consider repackaging and offering restorative practices as a service to schools in their surroundings for staff who perhaps are experiencing conflict, share a frustration with what's not working, or are a group that has created an opening for change.

Imagine, if you will, a tree that has taken root in the small bit of soil settling in the crack of a rock. Hiking along Lake Superior, I'm struck with amazement by the resolute of a burly old tree leaning over the edge of a cliff, as strong as can be with a rock as its foundation. Change happened when a seed found a crack, an opening for it to take root. Any situation that taps people's emotions and spurs a discomfort that something isn't working creates the opening for a heartfelt restorative process to let the seed take root.

Once staff and students experience restorative practices working, the mind centered training can be added to build knowledge, because the seed has been planted and "aha" moments experienced. Freedom then needs to be given for practice with staff and students empowered to do it their way, learn from experience, evaluate what worked and what didn't and continue to practice.

For restorative practitioners and educators, Paladin has demonstrated success in adjoining trauma-sensitive, restorative and individualized project-based instruction as a relational ethos. The result of students feeling restored as human beings and hopeful

about the future is a significant change. Schools and restorative practice educators should seek ways to incorporate these value-based approaches together from day one of the school and student relationship.

For Paladin, restorative practitioners, educators and other interested school stakeholders, Paladin's experience suggests choosing to engage with outside experts as trainers, staff and consultants creates opportunity for turning points to occur in the change process. Building, maintaining and utilizing relationships based on skills and strengths should be ongoing. It is highly recommended for all interested in being a restorative community to incorporate understanding implicit bias, create self-awareness and commit with intentionality to change biases, again with compassionate accountability.

Paladin's experience suggests an emphasis on fidelity in restorative practices implementation may create more harm than benefit during the change process. More is less when it comes to prescribed structures or models. As much as some may perceive it to be easier or a higher quality to prescribe fidelity to a model, practitioners need to let go of the fear of losing control over human behavior. In the continuing context of racialized spaces with unequal privilege and power realities, freedom with responsibility is essential. The idea of co-creation of restorative approaches with freedom more aligned with liberating education is a valuable construct.

Changing the mindset to making the system fit the individual rather than the individual fit the system may disrupt the status quo by reducing disproportionate school discipline, and improving graduations outcomes, school safety, and student overall well-being. Making this shift requires allocating resources differently as well, for individualized learning, trauma sensitive support and restorative processes to fit the unique situation. All take more time, with more care, and require more documentation.

Research Implications for Policy

For policy makers and advocates, Paladin's experience supports the arguments against legislation or school policy that standardizes learning assessments, graduation dates and disciplinary practices. An investigation into policies, like those supporting student acceleration, should consider how resources can shift to making reparations for students most harmed from structural racism and other forms of oppression as a priority before benefiting the already privileged class.

From a critical race lens, the continuation of standardized policies will be detrimental for the children who are already losing under these policies. Shifting attention and resources to school innovation, like Paladin in its relational ethos of being restorative, trauma sensitive and focused in individual student instruction, as well as other alternative education approaches, certainly would be beneficial. Policy makers are cautioned to not replace existing policy with equally demanding mandates. Even the best intentions in policy will bring unintended consequences.

Future Research

While the research on restorative practices at Paladin is not generalizable, it has relevance to a specific set of restorative practice stakeholders who may find meaning specific to their applications. Inquiry into Paladin's use of restorative practices provides insight that others may find beneficial in their implementation of restorative practices, training, policies or in forming future research. As interesting as it was to conduct this research and analysis, it may inspire more questions than answers. Longitudinal study to understand the impact of restorative practices as students move into adulthood would be informative. This study did not include a thorough policy analysis and the implications for broader systems changes to disrupt the status quo, which also is needed.

Additionally, I became curious about the current movement and research to decolonize schools and potential intersections with being a restorative community.

More research is needed to understand the outcomes and success measures of restorative practices. This case study touches on the possibility of measuring success differently by making the system fit the individual rather than the individual fit the system. What the implications may be for measuring broader systems change is a question. Engaging parents in inquiry, as well as students from a youth participatory actin research approach would add to the base of knowledge on school-based restorative practices.

Ripple effect mapping is a tool for knowledge building that identifies the web or relationships and impacts that occur from the people directly involved in restorative practices to those indirectly related. I hope to incorporate ripple effect mapping into my future research. Last, research into the social justice implications when those involved in restorative practices are empowered to be change agents on a broader scale would be an important focus for future inquiry.

Conclusion

Inquiry into the field of school-based restorative practices is exploding. While this dissertation was being written, a wealth of knowledge-building research was being conducted and published. I offer this dissertation with humility, recognizing many people have come before me contributing as researchers, practitioners and restorative human beings, and many will come after me. What I have written may already have been experienced, discussed or written by others. Certainly this is true for indigenous cultures around the world that were restorative in their way of being with all their relations prior to the development of systematic structures that maintain inequity.

Paladin's experience contributes to understanding how a school community can become fully restorative, yet leaves many unanswered questions. I am confident the

movement will continue as more is learned about the restorative way of being a school community and what it means to disrupt the status quo.

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Appendix A

Paladin Career and Technical High School and Jennifer Blevins

Collaborative Research Agreement

Who are we:

Paladin Career and Technical High School (PCTHS): is a small public charter high school in Blaine, MN serving students aged 14 to 21 years old. We serve more than 210 high school aged students, a majority of whom identify as Black or African American, 77% qualify for free/reduced priced lunch and at least a third who do not have stable housing. It is our belief that students need more than academic knowledge to be successful after school. With this in mind, we believe building strong relationships is at the core of each student's educational success.

Jennifer Blevins: Is a PhD candidate at the University of Minnesota, School of Social Work, who is at the stage of fulfilling the dissertation requirements in order to receive a doctorate. Jennifer works for the Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking at the University of Minnesota. With passion for racial/social equity, her background includes engaging diverse communities to create positive changes through community organizing, policy advocacy, and youth work. Along with Raj Sethuraju, she led the audit of the St. Paul Police Civilian Internal Affairs Review Commission, and engaged 150 people in circle conversations about police and community relations. Jennifer currently leads strategic planning for, and evaluation of youth victim-offender mediation services statewide for the Nebraska Supreme Court, Office of Dispute Resolution. As a teacher and researcher, Jennifer approaches her work through the lens of critical race theory.

Purpose of Research

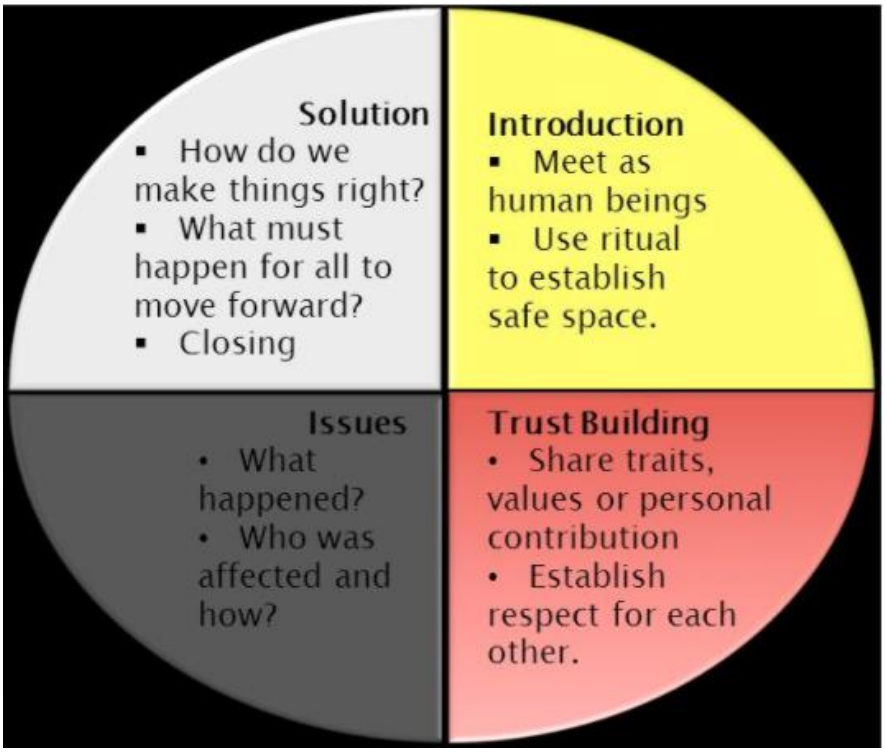
The purpose of this case study is to explore the lived experience of integrating restorative practices at Paladin CTHS, and share the narrative so those at Paladin and others may benefit. Additionally, the purpose is to satisfy the University's requirements of Jennifer as a researcher for her dissertation in order to receive a Ph.D.

Purpose of Collaborative Partnership

In collaboration, it is our intent to have high integrity and accountability with shared power in the research process, and to ensure mutual interests are met.

Guiding Principles

We will use the Medicine Wheel as our foundation for working together. Recognizing that this is a sacred teaching for many First Nation People to hold differences in balance within a whole. The diagram below describes our process through the teachings of the Medicine Wheel.



- We will get to know each other outside of our professional titles and responsibilities.
- We will collaborate with mutual trust, respect, authenticity, and commitment to follow through.
- We value each other's strengths and assets, and recognize each has the intention of doing the best they can to achieve mutual goals.
- We place high value on relationships and uphold the building and maintaining of relationships as a priority. By the same token, we will be intentional to not cause harm.

- Communication is open and ongoing for as long as the partnership continues.

- We value multiple kinds of knowledge, life experiences and identities so that all perspectives are considered.

- We maintain open space for courageous conversations, understanding difficult topics can be better understood when we're open to perspectives that challenge us.

- Flexibility allows for us to make revisions as needed to improve our collaborative experience and outcomes.

- We will build each other's strengths and will also work to address identified needs and areas for capacity building of all partners as seen fit.
- Language used in the case study analysis and recommendations will not perpetuate harmful stereotypes.
- We will develop an intentional process for closure of this partnership.

Responsibilities of Each Partner

<u>Paladin</u>

- Identify who will represent Paladin for partnering on mutual tasks and decision making in this collaborative.

- Identify potential stakeholders for case study interviews, including Paladin staff, students, and parents.

- Identify a student's experience with restorative practices to be a focus of the embedded case study, and identify who could be interviewed to document the experience.

- Provide a supportive environment for case study interviews and observation at Paladin, allowing agreed upon interviews/observations to take place during regular hours.

- Provide access to relevant Paladin documents and information for case study analysis for review by Jennifer.

- Will ensure that student's involvement in this process can be a way to earn credit.

Jennifer Blevins

- Prepare written documents, including research proposal, outline, and protocol, and share with Brandon Wait, Paladin's Principal, and Alexis Goffe, Dean of Students.

- Get approval for the research from the dissertation committee.

- Prepare all documents for the University of MN Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects, and get their approval.

- Be present at Paladin at times specified by partners and agreed to, so to limit disruption. These times may not all be with the specific objective of data collection but may also be to build relationships with staff and students as well.

- Conduct all research through document analysis, interviews and observations. (data collection can be shared if there's an interest)

- Prepare a summary of case study analysis for collaborative review and dialogue.

- Identify resources internal and external to the University of Minnesota that may support Paladin's involvement.
- Prepare the written dissertation as a single-authored document to disseminate results.

Shared

- Ensure this is centered around Paladin students and is ultimately in their best interest.
- Mutually consider and agree on research questions and methods.
- Establish a schedule for collaborative meetings, research process and interviews/observations.
- Review and discuss case study analysis to test validity and ensure integrity in interpretation.
- Maintain confidentiality of individuals and private information shared, protecting their identity.
- We will be mindful about setting deadlines realistically with time to review being incorporated as needed.
- Any funding pursued and received for the purpose of this collaborative will be disclosed to the partners, and funds will be allocated based on mutual agreement.
- Remain vigilant and accountable in ensuring power balance and wary of the potential disconnect that may exist between academia and practitioners.

Decision Making Process

Consensus decision making will be used as the preferred method, face to face, and in circle when possible.

Data Ownership and Sharing

- All data provided by Paladin staff is owned by Paladin and will only be used with permission.
- All data collected through interviews and observation will be handled according to human subjects protections as approved by the Institutional Review Board.
- Jennifer will be the sole author of the dissertation, maintaining intellectual property rights.
- Once the dissertation is approved by Jennifer's PhD committee, it will be shared with Paladin to distribute and use as they choose.

Sustainability (how may this continue to serve each partner)

- After the dissertation is approved, collaborative partners may choose to co-author articles, make presentations together, or share findings in other collaborative ways.
- Manuscripts and articles may involve Paladin stakeholders as co-authors (to be defined). Interested Paladin staff should contact Jennifer.
- If Jennifer's presentations include the case study from Paladin, she will reach out to Paladin and invite a student (preferably) or staff to co-present with her.
- In all presentations, articles, reports - all persons who contributed to the research who are not authors should be named in acknowledgements.
- Any models or templates developed from this research which could benefit Paladin will be shared.
- We commit to notifying each other when this research has been or will be used in presentations, promotional material or podcasts.

Conflict Resolution

- We recognize no relationships are conflict or challenge free. At any time one of the collaborators feels tensions rising or perceives a potential conflict, we support that person to raise their concern.
- If the tension is minimal and can be addressed through one-on-one dialogue, we support the parties to pursue the conversation together.

- We prioritize a face to face meeting and utilize the circle process when conflicts arise that are not addressed in a one-on-one conversation.
- To open space for addressing conflicts on a regular basis, we will set aside time at each meeting for this purpose.
- No less than once every three months, an evaluation of the collaborative process will be held in circle to gain insight and allow flexibility for any adjustments that will improve the collaborative process.

This agreement will be in effect from the time it is signed until August 31, 2018.

We consider this agreement a living document to be revised as needed throughout the course of this project.

Signatures:

Jennifer Blevins Brandon Wait Alexis Goffe

9.21.2017 - First completion of this agreement.

Appendix B

Consent Form

Title of Research Study: Case study of Paladin CTHS's Use of Restorative Practices

Researcher: Jennifer Blevins, Ph.D. Student Investigator, University of MN, School of Social Work

Why am I being asked to take part in this study? Because you are an employee, student or parent of a student at Paladin CTHS who has experience with restorative practices at the school.

What should I know about a research study? Whether or not you take part is up to you. You can choose not to, and you can agree to take part and later change your mind. Your decision will not be held against you.

Who can I talk to? For questions about the research, results, or other concerns, contact:

Jennifer Blevins Phone Number: 612-819-5156 Email Address: blevi013@umn.edu

This research has been approved by the student's advisor and dissertation committee. To share feedback privately about your research experience or discuss concerns, call Dave Hollister, the student's Advisor at 651-470-2335 or email dhollist@umn.edu. You may also share feedback with Brandon Wait, Paladin Principal, at 763-786-4799 or email brandon.wait@paladincareertech.com.

Why is this research being done? The purpose of this case study is to describe the experience of restorative practices at Paladin CTHS, and share the narrative so those at Paladin and others may benefit. Most schools using restorative practices are not engaged in evaluation research to build knowledge or contribute to sustainable models. The study will focus on describing

- The process and turning points in integrating restorative practices in the school,
- The student, parent and staff understandings of restorative practices and its impact,
- The implications for future school-based restorative practice at Paladin and the impact, and
- What this study suggests about school-based restorative practices and impact in general.

How long will the research last? This study will take place January through May, 2018.

How many people will participate in this study? About 18 people here will be interviewed.

If you say yes to being interviewed,

- A meeting will be set at a time convenient for you before, during or after regular school hours.
- Interview questions will be given to you in advance of the meeting.
- Jennifer will meet with you in a private room to review this form, answer any questions you have, and interview you for about one hour.
- If more time is needed, Jennifer may ask if you're willing to meet again.
- Interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission, but is optional.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research? You can choose not to be in this research and it will not be held against you.

What happens if I say "Yes", but I change my mind later? You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you. If you decide to end your participation, contact Jennifer.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? There is very little risk to you. No private information identifying you will be kept in research files. You may have feelings about past experiences if you choose to share them with Jennifer. It is not expected for you to share personal experiences that are difficult.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include

- Students may earn credit for their participation (to be determined by Paladin CTHS administration).
- Students, parents and staff may deepen relationships, gain understanding of restorative practices at Paladin, and expand ways to use restorative practices in the future.

What happens to the information collected for the research? The researcher will share the transcribed notes and data collected with Paladin CTHS, without any private identifiable information. Signed consent forms will be kept separate from data in a locked file cabinet of the researcher and will not be shared.

What else do I need to know? Parents please be aware that under the Protection of Pupils Right Act 20 U.S.C. Section 1232 (c)(1)(A), you have the right to review a copy of the questions asked of your students.

Will I be informed of the results of the research? The research will be reported in a dissertation prepared by Jennifer and shared with Paladin CTHS. It will be available at Paladin for your review and publically shared.

Signature Your signature documents your consent/assent to take part in this research.

_____ _____
Signature of participant Date

_____ _____
Printed name of participant phone or email

_____ _____
Signature of person obtaining consent Date

_____
Printed name of person obtaining consent

Signature for Parent permission (for students under 18)

Your signature documents your permission for the named student to take part in this research.

_____ _____
Printed name of parent [ ] or individual legally authorized [ ] Date

_____ _____
Signature of parent [ ] or individual legally authorized [ ] phone or email

Only one parent has signed, because: (select one)
Second parent is: [ ] not reasonably available [ ] deceased [ ] unknown
[ ] incompetent [ ] only one parent has legal responsibility for the care and custody of the student