3-2019

Educators’ Perceptions of Restorative Justice, Care, Inclusion, and Disability: A Phenomenological Study

Jennifer Hull
National Louis University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss

Part of the Disability and Equity in Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Hull, Jennifer, "Educators’ Perceptions of Restorative Justice, Care, Inclusion, and Disability: A Phenomenological Study" (2019). Dissertations. 398.
https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss/398
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION, AND DISABILITY: A PHEN[WOMEN]OLOGICAL STUDY

Jennifer C. Hull
The Graduate College of Education at National Louis University

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Doctor of Education

National College of Education
National Louis University
March, 2019
EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION, AND DISABILITY:

A PHEN[WOMEN]OLOGICAL STUDY

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the National College of Education

Jennifer C. Hull
Disability and Equity in Education

Approved:

[Signatures]

Chair Co-Chair, Dissertation Committee

Co-Chair Member, Dissertation Committee

Member, Dissertation Committee

Dean's Representative

[Signatures]

Program Director

Director, Doctoral Programs

Dean, National College of Education

3-18-19

Date Approved
Acknowledgements

Cathy Burnham Martin has been credited with saying, “We hurt no one when we encourage them to keep on keeping on, to not give up, to recognize how far they’ve come.” I would not have been able to complete this journey without the unwavering support, guidance, humor, and compassion shown by my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Terry Jo Smith, or that of the synergistic infrastructure of care demonstrated by my entire Dissertation Committee created by Dr. Valerie Owen, Dr. Patrick Schwarz, Dr. Terry Jo Smith, and Dr. Kate Zilla. Each of you makes me want to do better, to help more, to positively contribute, to inspire change, and to work to achieve the standard of excellence that you demonstrate in your daily lives. “Thank you” seems insufficient, but I promise you that I have embraced every lesson that you have every taught me. I hope to be able to make a positive impact in the lives of others, as you have so graciously made in mine.

Thank you to those who gave of their time and of their “lived experiences” for this dissertation. Behind the pseudonyms, there are six educators who have dedicated their lives to inspiring the next generation. To Denise, Juan, Laura, Maria, Matt, and Tom, I appreciate your willingness to allow me into your world and for allowing me to expose it to others. You are gifts to the field of education.

I would like to acknowledge the substantial contributions, assistance and input from the National Louis University librarians, Amy LeFager and Toby Rajput, as well as, so many others in the University library department that assisted me in putting materials on hold, in helping to navigate online searches, and in having a sense of humor every time I called for help. Without your expertise, patience, and willingness to share your knowledge, I would have been lost on this journey before I ever started the dissertation process. I also remain indebted to Amy Gralewski for her help in editing my chapters and for not laughing at my inability to spell.

Dr. David Feingold, Dr. Margaret Higgins, Dr. Patti Forester, Shirley Drellich, and so many others have been invaluable supports, colleagues and sounding boards to me throughout this entire dissertation process. Thank you for being you and for all that you do to help positively contribute to the field. Your friendship has left an inedible mark in my life and I am grateful to each of you for your continuing contributions to the disability studies field.

Lastly, I want to thank both my mom and Ben for their unwavering support and for their unconditional love. You are my foundation, my music, my reason for being, and my definition of home. You have walked both the highs and the lows of this process with me, been my lighthouse in the darkness, and have held my heart through the laughter and the tears. I love you.

The list of people who supported me on this journey are too numerous to count. Forgive me, if I have not mentioned you on this page, but know that I hold gratitude in my heart for your support of my journey with all of its twists, curves, dusty roads, and detours. You know who you are, and I thank you. Some of the lessons that I take from this process is simply that we do not get through this life without others encourage us, supporting us to “keep on keeping on,” and being willing to remind us that we can accomplish great things when we are loved, supported, challenged, and included. I remain forever humbled and grateful to know each and every one of you. The world is a better place with each of you in it.
ABSTRACT

In the State of Illinois, changes are taking effect related to classroom culture and educational policy is moving from “safe schools/zero tolerance” policies to restorative justice practices. Through a feminist disability studies lens, the focus of this a phen[women]ological study of the lived experiences of six educators from two different schools in Illinois and their perceptions of restorative justice, care, inclusion, and disability was to ask: How are educators making sense of restorative justice practices? What are the implications for students with disabilities? Five topics of significance surfaced, including (a) caring; (b) restorative justice and inclusion; (c) impact of technology; (d) safety and guns; and (e) healing, empathy, and forgiveness. With the emerging laws, policies, and procedures currently being implemented throughout the United States, it is essential to create educational systems that encourage restorative justice practices, assist students in addressing adverse childhood experiences, promote the importance of social emotional learning (both in and outside of the classroom setting), and remain current on trauma-informed practices so all students (regardless of ability, label, background, or adversity) have the opportunity to be included and to succeed in both their education and in life. Educators, administrators, and future policy creators are in a unique position to create healing learning spaces where human rights cultures can be cultivated and everyone is valued, respected, and included.

Keywords: restorative justice, inclusion, ethic of care, disability studies, phen[women]ological
# Table of Contents

**Abstract** ......................................................................................................................... v

**Prelude** ............................................................................................................................ 1

**Chapter One: Introduction** .......................................................................................... 5  
The Importance of Ethics ........................................................................................................ 7  
Bullying: What is it? Why Does it Matter? ............................................................................ 12  
The Ethic of Justice/The Ethics of Care ............................................................................... 15  
Inclusion/Exclusion .............................................................................................................. 20  
Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory ..................................................................... 22  
Current Restorative Justice Practices in Illinois ................................................................. 27

**Chapter Two: Literature Review** ............................................................................... 34  
Historical [Ab]use of Exclusion of People with Disabilities .................................................. 34  
Bullying: A Multitude of Theoretical Perspectives ............................................................... 40  
Historical Institutional Practices/Anti-Bullying and Safe School Legislation ....................... 43  
The Circle of Courage and the Navajo Peacemaking Process .............................................. 56  
The Ethics of Care ................................................................................................................ 59  
Inclusion ................................................................................................................................ 62  
Bronfenbrenner: The Importance of Systems ...................................................................... 63  
Restorative Justice Practices ............................................................................................... 64

**Chapter Three: Methodology** ................................................................................. 69  
Phen[women]ological Research .......................................................................................... 71  
Phenomenological Interviewing ........................................................................................... 73  
Mea Culpa: Assumptions of the Researcher ......................................................................... 74  
The Role Educators Play as Change Agents ....................................................................... 79  
Study Purpose and Overview ............................................................................................... 80  
Participants .......................................................................................................................... 80  
Data Collection Procedures ................................................................................................. 81  
Potential Risks ...................................................................................................................... 81  
Benefits .................................................................................................................................. 82  
Informed Consent Procedures and Document ....................................................................... 82  
Why This Study Matters ....................................................................................................... 82

**Chapter Four: Connecting the Dots** ..................................................................... 85  
Two Schools, Six Educators ............................................................................................... 92  
The Middle School .............................................................................................................. 93  
The High School ................................................................................................................. 94  
Zero Tolerance Policies ....................................................................................................... 100  
Restorative Justice Practices .............................................................................................. 107  
Restorative Justice Laws Affecting Illinois Schools ............................................................. 112  
SB2793 ............................................................................................................................. 113  
SB100 ............................................................................................................................... 114  
HB2663 ............................................................................................................................. 114
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS
Findings: Trying to Go Beyond “What was There” ............................................................... 116
Topics of Significance ............................................................................................................. 120
   Caring (Caring “about,” caring “for,” and communities of care).................................122
   Restorative Justice and Inclusion..................................................................................128
   Impact of Technology......................................................................................................131
   Safety and Guns..............................................................................................................133
   Healing, Empathy, and Forgiveness..............................................................................136

CHAPTER SIX: WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?
The Journey............................................................................................................................. 145
Implications for Educators and Administrators (and the Rest of Us)............................. 161
“Five Faces” of Oppression...............................................................................................165
Closing Thoughts...............................................................................................................175
Epilogue..............................................................................................................................180

REFERENCES ........................................................................................................................... 182

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONS.....................................................................................................202

APPENDIX B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH ..........................................202
Prelude

It has been said that you cannot reach your final destination unless you first know where you are going. As a child, I spent a great deal of time with my family on road trips. Before we packed the car or left the driveway, we knew where we were headed. With an atlas and various folded maps in the front seat, carefully planned itineraries in tow, and a cooler packed with food, we would set out on our journey. We always had contingency plans for road construction, inclement weather, fatigue of family members, or random detours for a gas station pit stop, the occasional flea market, or to grab a fast meal at a drive-thru. Yet, even with all of these variables at play, we always seemed to know where we were headed and had a plan for how to get there. We had already researched where we could pull over for a break, to grab gas, to spend the night, to get off the beaten path, or to visit a historical landmark. We had a schedule to keep. I vividly remember trips through Canada, to the East Coast, to Wisconsin, and throughout the Southwest. The majority of my childhood memories are framed by these family trips and the learning that took place through our multitude of adventures. A common factor that cemented these family memories is the hours spent on the road together, watching the landscape whiz by, and experiencing the world around me through highway miles, dusty roads, and classical music playing in the background. It has taken me decades to realize that the rest of life is not as simple as those family road trip memories and sometimes the destination is the messy process of the journey itself.

J.R.R. Tolkien once wrote, “Not all those who wander are lost” (Tolkien, 2015). The process of writing this dissertation is reflected in the sage wisdom of his words. Despite having the proverbial “atlas” and “itinerary” in hand (e.g., well-formed research questions, thoroughly researched topics, a set of course classes, stellar professors to guide the way, etc.), things did not
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

go according to my plan. Although deeply rooted in nearly 6 years of graduate education courses in disability studies, critical theory, and well thought out methodology, where I initially started in this research process is not where I eventually ended up in my final destination. The plan did not unfold as it was written in the original itinerary. Unlike my childhood family road trips, the journey did not stay on paved roads, remain in the planned time schedule, or follow a direct path. There were numerous pitstops, flat tires, and potholes along the way. There were even a few times when my metaphorical “car” might have left the road.

In all of it, learning occurred. In the beginning of this dissertation journey, I had planned for a childhood road trip type dissertation experience. I had a plan. It was well-formulated. My directions were sound. The weather was clear. The destination was determined. Similar to my childhood road trip experiences, this dissertation process has allowed me to value the entire journey (as the journey is where the majority of lessons are learned). It was from the people I have met along the way that the greatest learning occurred. It was in growing from early adolescent notions of how things are “supposed to be” to the adult realities of how things truly “are” (or one of a multitude of ways that they can be; e.g., Truth versus truths; where “Truth” is the concept that there is an absolute truth and “truths” accepts the notion that there is a possibility of more than one truth) that I was able to fully embrace the whole research journey. I am not even sure whether there is a final destination, as this journey is continuing, but this is the research process I followed. It is a road map, of sorts. It is my hope that it will help to not only illustrate the journey I have taken, but to highlight the multitude of lessons I have learned (some intended and others, not so much), and maybe offer some additional insight into the research I undertook along the way.
Pat Croce is credited with saying, “I have a really small rear-view mirror in my life. I look at the rear-view mirror for memories and learning experience, but I’ve got a big front windshield and I’m looking at it right now” (Zwerling, 2014). Jim Steinman, writer and composer for the singer, Meatloaf, in his song, *Objects in the Rear View Mirror May Appear Closer Than They Are*, is credited with writing, “If life is just a highway, then the soul is just a car. And the objects in the rear view mirror may appear closer than they are” (Steinman, 2019). The research process is similar to the continuing childhood road trip metaphor previously referenced. Research allows for continuous reflection through both the “rear view mirror” (e.g., past experiences, research, coursework, etc.) and the “windshield” (e.g., new learning, observations, experiences, etc.). It is vital to understand the “road” (e.g., the research process, methodology, etc.), but also to never lose sight of witnessing the “landscape” (e.g., listening to the participants, allowing oneself to be changed by the process, fully experiencing the research journey, etc.) and to be willing to listen to what the “music” (e.g., truly listen to participants, fellow colleagues, committee members, input from others, etc.) has to say. In order to gain a
greater understanding of the entire research road trip process, it was imperative to take some time to frame my experiences through the process of looking in the “rear view mirror” (e.g., reflective and iterative process) to gain some needed perspective for the journey. For me, this process began with a simple photo of a dog that was brought into my home as a hospice foster. His name was Shadow (see Figure 2) and he was viewed by his previous owners as “disposable” because he was old. I was left to wonder: *Do we really care?* And so, with this simple question, I began this research journey.

*Figure 2. Shadow, the hospice foster dog. (Photos retrieved from: Hull, J. [2018] Private collection)*
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

We aren’t superheroes for God’s sake. Some kids just can’t be saved. Some children are just too broken to be repaired. The [educational] system is broken and cannot accommodate everyone. There has to be culling, of sorts. Some kids have to be exited from the system. Some simply fall through the cracks. It’s sad. I wish it wasn’t the case. It is the way it has always been, and, I have a feeling, that it is the way that it will always be. We aren’t superheroes and we sure as shit aren’t industrial grade superglue that have the capacity to put these fractured kids back together or be expected to fix a system that is endemically kaput. (R. Turnkin, personal communication, May 8, 2012)

My life’s passion, both on a personal and professional level, has always been deeply rooted in the concepts of inclusion, attachment, belonging, caring, empathy, compassion, and education. Little did I know when I began the disability studies program, that this dissertation journey would challenge both my personal and professional concepts of (T)/truth(s); shatter, shift, and reconstitute my epistemological paradigms; cause me to delve deeper into my personal understanding of the roles of social justice, feminism, and disability activism in my life (and the worlds in which I work, live, and play); and that I would be forever changed by the graduate coursework, professors, colleagues, research, and multitude of life experiences I have embraced along this research path.

Carol Hanisch first stated, *The personal is political* (Hanisch, 1970, p. 76). This philosophy is vital to understanding the foundation from which my writing evolved. I possess both a personal passion about the field of education and a professional desire to constructively contribute to the field of disability and equity in education. I aspire, through my research, to add both a political voice and a call to action for positive change into previously uncharted territories in infrastructures of inclusion and of care. My journey throughout my academic studies has taken me into researching issues surrounding the national high school dropout epidemic, helping students remain in school long enough to achieve a high school diploma, the school-to-prison pipeline, bullying in the 21st century and the Navajo Peacemaking process, safer school policies,
and restorative justice (RJ) practices. My journey, like so many others, has not led me where I
initially thought it would lead. My studies, and subsequent research around helping students
labeled with social and emotional disabilities, led me to uncover several common themes, such
as the issues surrounding power versus force, the ethics of care, belonging, and issues of
exclusion. Some of these topics and common themes are highlighted in the following chapters.
Some of these topics will frame my life’s continuing research interests.

Most significantly, my research has led me to a deeper understanding of issues
surrounding attachment, community building, inclusion/exclusion, caring, and
compassion/empathy and further honed my feminist disability studies lens. My journey initially
revolved around researching the multifaceted topic of bullying that is currently reported as being
an “epidemic” in U.S. schools. It has become a deeper disability studies, critical analysis of
issues surrounding the seemingly ever-increasing practices of exclusion, particularly of those
with disabilities, and RJ practices. Pulling from critical legal studies and the ethics of care, my
research further draws into question why we, as a society, remain so focused, despite current
policy shifts, on creating laws and legislation to affect “bullying” and create “safe schools” as
opposed to working to increase our discourse—our thoughts, our words, and our actions—
around issues of increasing attachment/belonging, strengthening communities, demanding full
inclusion for all, implementing healing RJ practices, embracing concepts of care, and nurturing
empathy and compassion within and beyond the boundaries of the nation’s educational
institutions. Historically, we are in a kaleidoscoping time when it comes to educational policies,
as we are moving from “zero tolerance polices” toward implementing RJ policies and practices,
which may create space for change in the previous social narratives surrounding the topics of
inclusion, the ethics of care, and RJ practices in our schools. It is upon this foundation, that I
argue, it is a fertile time to engage in qualitative phenomenological research “road trip(s)” to illuminate the “lived experiences” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) of educators challenged with the task of meeting the needs of all students through creating safe, inclusive, and healing learning environments.

I am keenly interested in the current changes in policy from “safe schools/zero tolerance” policies to those that embrace RJ practices. I believe educators have a unique vantage point, that is often overlooked, from which to cultivate a greater understanding of what these policy shifts might entail. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to investigate educators’ perspectives of RJ practices by conducting in-depth interviews about how these practices are actually being experienced in the classroom setting. To reach this purpose, I conducted interviews with six different educators from two different education settings (i.e., one middle school and one high school) in the State of Illinois. In this research, I explored two overarching questions: How are educators making sense of restorative justice practices? ad What are the implications for students with disabilities? The following sections offer readers the historical, theoretical, and methodological foundation needed to appreciate this research.

The Importance of Ethics

Le Guin (1973) presented the dystopian society of Omelas, a city in which happiness and prosperity are conditional upon the suffering of one child. This story and its personal metaphorical meaning to me, coupled with the multitude of congruencies, inequalities, and exclusions that I witnessed growing up in a privileged, sheltered world (which reminds me of those who lived in Omelas), inspired my desire to be an activist in the field of education; to create a meaningful ethic of caring and increase both my personal and professional awareness behind everything I try to do; and to work to help others recognize and, ultimately, “walk away”
from their own created Omelas. An analysis of this story provides an opportunity to demonstrate its relevance to disability studies, illustrates an ethical discussion on the topic of exclusion in our schools and in larger American society, and strengthens the argument for the need to implement RJ practices in educational institutions, especially within classroom settings.

Omelas is a city filled with “mature, intelligent, passionate adults whose lives were not wretched . . . a city in a fairy tale, long ago and far away, once upon a time” (Le Guin, 1973, p. 2), whose “happiness is based on a just discrimination of what is necessary, what is neither necessary nor destructive, and what is destructive” (Le Guin, 1973, p. 2). As the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that Omelas is filled with joy. As Le Guin (1973) wrote, “Joyous! How is one to tell about joy? How describe the citizens of Omelas?” (p. 1). It is a society filled with:

A boundless and generous contentment, a magnanimous triumph felt not against some outer enemy but in communion with the finest and fairest in the souls of all men everywhere and the splendor of the world’s summer: this is what swells the heart of the people of Omelas, and the victory they celebrate is that of life. (Le Guin, 1973, p. 3)

As the story continues to unfold, it becomes evident that Omelas has a secret to its seeming utopia. Le Guin (1973) wrote, “Do you believe? Do you accept the festival, the city, the joy? No? Then let me describe one more thing” (p. 4). Soon, it is revealed that the joy and prosperity within Omelas hinge on suffering. Le Guin illustrated:

In the [locked] room a child is sitting. It could be a boy or a girl. It looks about six, but actually is nearly ten. It is feeble-minded. Perhaps, it was born defective, or perhaps it has become imbecile through fear, malnutrition, and neglect. (p. 4)

Parallel to the exclusion historically perpetuated on people with disabilities (Stiker, 1999) and bearing a multitude of similarities to contemporary research issues surrounding bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2012), the story of Omelas begins to strike an all too familiar chord of exclusion, suffering, and invisibility. Le Guin (1973) continued:

The people at the door never say anything, but the child, who has not always lived in the tool room, and can remember sunlight and its mother’s voice, sometime speaks. “I will be
good,” it says. “Please let me out. I will be good!” They never answer. The child used to scream for help at night, and cry a good deal, but now it only makes a kind of whining, “eh-haa, eh-haa,” and it speaks less and less often. (p. 4)

Reflecting on the multitude of theoretical frameworks presented in disability studies, it is difficult not to draw a parallel to the historical abuses of people with disabilities and their subjection through practices such as institutionalization and being made invisible by larger social practices (e.g., institutionalization, boarding schools, special education, segregation), even to the point of silence (i.e., *it speaks less and less often*; Le Guin, 1973, p. 4; see also Foucault, 1973; Stiker, 1999). It even begins to move into the feminist ethics of care (e.g., the concept of care is foundation to morality (Noddings, 1984, 2002) as the child can “still remember sunlight and its mother’s voice” (Le Guin, 1973, p. 4; see also Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005). Le Guin (1973) continued:

They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas. Some of them come to see it, others are content merely to know it is there. They all know that it has to be there. Some of them understand why, and some do not, but they all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skills of their masters, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weathers of their skies, depend wholly on this child’s abominable misery. (p. 5)

The story begins to move through Foucault’s concepts of biopower (i.e., having power over other bodies (Foucault & Hurley, 2015)), and the “lifting of the veil” of invisibility (Foucault, 2010) and presents the ethical dilemma of having knowledge and doing nothing to prevent the continuing abuse (i.e., the intimate connections between power/knowledge; Foucault, 1973). It is here where the ethics of Kohlberg’s moral development (Kohlberg, 1968), Kant’s categorical imperative (Wolff, 1998), and even the concepts of anarchism emerge. Wolff (1998) wrote:

The fundamental assumption of moral philosophy is that men are responsible for their actions . . . The obligation to take responsibility for one’s actions does not derive from man’s freedom of will alone, for more is required in taking responsibility than freedom of
choice. Only because man has the capacity to reason about his choices can he be said to stand under a continuing obligation to take responsibility for them. (p. 49)

Despite the laws of the state, ethically, it is up to the individual to ultimately decide what to do. There are certain things that even laws cannot dictate, which becomes exceedingly important as we reflect on zero tolerance policies and the implementation of RJ practices in today’s classrooms. This is part of the dilemma in Omelas, and, arguably, often illustrates some of the issues confronting the bullying “epidemic” closer to home. Le Guin (1973) illustrated the confining terms of Omelas:

Those are the terms. To exchange all the goodness and grace of every life in Omelas for that single, small improvement: to throw away the happiness of thoughts for the chance of the happiness of one: that would be to let guilt within walls indeed. (p. 6)

Le Guin (1973) illustrated the complacency the people of Omelas demonstrated, which caused me to critically reflect upon the multitude of institutional practices that continue to subjugate historically marginalized populations (e.g., minorities, indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities) and allow the dominant class to feel “charity” or “pity” for those it deems as “other” (Stiker, 1999). Le Guin wrote:

Yet it is with tears and anger, the trying of their generosity and the acceptance of their helplessness, which are perhaps the true source of the splendor of their lives. Theirs is no vapid, irresponsible happiness. They know that they, like the child, are not free. They know compassion. It is the existence of the child, and their knowledge of its existence, that makes possible the nobility of their architecture, the poignancy of their music, the profundity of their science. It is because of the child that they are so gentle with children. They know that if the wretched one were not there sniveling in the dark, the other one, the flute-player, could make no joyful music as the young riders line up in their beauty for the race in the sunlight of the first morning of summer. (p. 6)

It seems the people of Omelas are able to be who they are because of the suffering of the one who is imprisoned, excluded, and virtually invisible. The similarities become blatant as to how systems and structures are created to allow some people to be included (i.e., the dominant class), whereas others are symbolically, or literally, as in the case of the historical treatment of
minorities or people with disabilities (Stiker, 1999), left imprisoned, hidden away, and silenced to suffer (e.g., stigmatized, labelled, and excluded). As the story draws to a conclusion, Le Guin (1973) offered hope of change for the people of Omelas. Le Guin (1973) stated:

At times one of the adolescent girls or boys who go to see the child does not go home to weep or rage, does not, in fact go home at all. Sometimes also a man or woman much older falls silent for a day or two, and then leaves home . . . They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back. The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas. (p. 7)

The importance of embracing the concept of moral autonomy is vital to understanding the symbolism behind those who walk away from Omelas and refuse to be ruled by others. It is also at the core of looking at a topic through a critical lens, especially one like the topic of systemic violence in the form of bullying, which policymakers are currently attempting to regulate through laws and increasing legislation (Bully Police USA, 2017).

Wolff further (1998) stated:

As Kant argued, moral autonomy is a combination of freedom and responsibility; it is a submission to laws which one has made for oneself. The autonomous man, insofar as he is autonomous, is not subject to the will of another. He may do what another tells him, but not because he has been told to do it. He is therefore, in the political sense of the word, “free”. (p. 50)

When I think about my ethical role as an educator and my work both personally and professionally in the field of disability studies, I continue to reflect on the fact that any one of us might be the “child locked in the room” of Omelas, or worse yet, the citizens of Omelas who have knowledge of the suffering child and choose not to walk away. In my continuing framing of the issues surrounding systemic violence in the form of bullying, I will cover its history; look at the ethics of care; touch upon the larger issues of inclusion/exclusion; review the medical, social, and feminist views on abuse of power; discuss the ever-increasing legal and legislative attempts
to control bullying-type behavior; analyze the Circle of Courage and Navajo Peacemaking processes; and illuminate the current RJ practices being implemented in Illinois.

It is through this critical lens that I ask whether we, as individuals and as institutions in the larger society, are truly strong enough to work toward not only walking away from our own Omelas, but to help expose (e.g., *lift the veil* (Foucault, 2010)) to demand the inclusion of all members of society, to heal through the implementation of RJ practices and the ethics of care, and to work to truly listen to those who have been silenced (or spoken for/over) for too long. I argue that the solutions to exclusionary behavior (often promoted through the perpetuation of systemic violence and associated with bullying) in the United States will not come from only addressing, labeling, and excluding those who are bullies or targets of such behavior. Rather, they will be created by implementing healing RJ practices in the classrooms (and beyond); working to further expose those deeply embedded, often invisible, social structures that promote exclusion that are seemingly much more difficult to change (Foucault, 1973; Freire 2005; hooks, 1994, 2003); and challenging the historical social narratives that perpetuate the acceptance that happiness for some is contingent upon the exclusion and suffering of others—eerily similar to those who continue to live in Omelas and reflective of the current political fragmentation being witnessed in the United States today.

**Bullying: What is it? Why Does it Matter?**

Working to define the term “bullying” seems to be a challenge (Boulton, 1997; Crick & Dodge, 1999; Ross, 2002; Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999). Olweus (1993) defines *bullying* as “a student is being bullied or victimized when he is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (p. 9). There seems to be some
conflict in the field about the use of “repeatedly” as part of the definition of bullying (Espelage, 2012). Espelage (2012) wrote:

An equal concern is the adoption of a definition of bullying that requires repetition. Too many times school staff assume that bullying has to happen repeatedly and will wait for a second incident of bullying before they intervene and investigate. (p. 19)

It is important to note that a leading “anti-bullying” program used throughout the United States, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus, Limber, Flerx, Mullin, Riese, & Snyder, 2007), includes the following warning for educators and staff:

Although bullying is defined as usually being carried out “repeatedly and over time,” it would be wrong to exclude from the definition serious hurtful behavior that happens only once . . . While it is essential to understand that bullying happens repeatedly over time, it is not wise (and may even be dangerous) to wait for a pattern to clearly emerge before intervening. You need to respond anytime you observe or become aware of bullying or related negative behaviors [emphasis added]. (p. 13)

Bullying is often defined as “a systemic abuse of power” (P. K. Smith & Sharp, 1994, p. 2). Sanders (2004) reports that, “Most definitions of bullying categorize it as a subset of aggressive behavior that involves an intention to hurt another person” (p. 4). Bullying has been conceptualized from a multitude of perspectives. Rigby (2003) stated:

Researchers have increasingly proposed that bullying invariably implies an imbalance of power in which the victim is less powerful than the aggressor. Bullying does not occur when there is conflict between people of equal or similar power. This distinction is important, because the effects of being repeatedly attacked or threatened by a more powerful person or group are likely to differ from the effects of being threatened or attacked by someone of equal power: in the former case, one is apt to feel more helpless. (p. 584).

This concept of the bullying victim being “less powerful than the aggressor” (Rigby, 2003, p. 584) has great significance for people with disabilities, minorities, and women, as they are often perceived as being “weaker,” and thus are more likely to be subjected by the institutional practices of the dominant members of society. Rigby (2003) further stated, “Bullying has been conceptualized globally as acting in any way that threatens or hurts someone less powerful” (p.
584). This global conceptualization of bullying is important because as these types of behaviors are permitted to be perpetuated in schools, they are often a reflection of what is deemed permissive in the larger social sphere of a community or nation (Rigby, 2006; e.g., echoing Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory and often being highlighted in many of the current political gatherings in the United States with the social undertones of “Make America Great Again” and cloaked in red hat uniforms). Historically, similar undertones have been seen in schools such as the Adolf Hitler Schools (AHS), which were used to streamline youth into Nazi conformity and promote blind obedience to the political propaganda of a specific party (Botwinick, 2001). As educators, it is vital that we understand these historical frameworks and work to ensure such abuses of power, the promotion of exclusion (in some cases to the point of extermination), and the acceptance of system violence are not permitted within our educational settings or the larger world beyond our classroom walls.

According to research, bullying is considered to be a “dyadic process involving one bully and one victim” (Sanders, 2004, p. 6) or a “group approach” (Sanders, 2004, p. 6), in which “most children are directly or indirectly involved in the bullying that occurs in their schools (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001)” (Sanders, 2004, p. 7). From this group bullying perspective, researchers have identified and categorized the roles of people who may be either directly or indirectly involved in bullying activity and have attributed names such as bully, victim, bully-victim, uninvolved, outsiders, and defenders to further categorize their individual roles in bullying behavior (Karatazias, Power, & Swanson, 2002; Menesini, Fonzi, & Sanchez, 2002). Sanders (2004) wrote:

Overall, the research literature indicates that bullying is being viewed more often as a group phenomenon as opposed to a dyadic interaction. Although many children and youth may not be playing “predominant” roles of the bully and/or the victims, they do play a role in the process. Whether their role involves defending the victim, encouraging
the bully, and/or remaining an outsider to the situation, they are being impacted by the bullying. They are influencing how the bullying is affecting others and whether the bullying will continue to occur. (p. 9)

According to Espelage (2012):

Focusing on individual bullies without considering the complex roles that all youth play in the bully dynamic keeps us from preventing bullying. There are specific roles that youth play both directly or indirectly in bullying others . . . any youth could engage in bullying directed at another student if we understand that *bullying is a group phenomenon* [emphasis added]. (p. 17)

For this reason and in light of the overwhelming amount of research literature addressing the dyadic behaviors of the bully and the bullied, I chose to expand my lens of the bullying “epidemic” and focus on the larger “group approach” (Sanders, 2004, p. 9). Later in this research, I expand on the issues surrounding bullying from this group approach (Sanders, 2004, p. 4), to encompass Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory. In Chapter 2, I elaborate on bullying from a multitude of theoretical perspectives, including the social information processing theory (SIP), Theory of Mind (TOM), moral development theory, the medical model versus the social model, the disability studies framework, and the ethics of care.

**The Ethic of Justice/The Ethics of Care**

For the purpose of my research, I focused primarily on the ethic of justice and the ethics of care, as it seems approaches to the addressing the current bullying “epidemic” have relied heavily upon the ethic of justice through the creation of laws and legislation in an attempt to control bullying behaviors (Walton, 2005, 2010), whereas the ethics of care seems to be nearly silent in the research. For bullying issue to be fully addressed, the ethics of care must be considered, and the current implementation of RJ practices may just offer that voice.

Shaprio and Stefkovich (2001) wrote, “The ethic of justice focuses on rights and law and is part of a liberal democratic tradition that, according to Delgado (1995), ‘is characterized by
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

incrementalism, faith in the legal system, and hope for progress” (p. 1). This ethic of justice is presented as being founded from:

Two schools of thought, one originating in the 17th century, including the work of Hobbes and Kant and more contemporary scholars such as Rawls and Kohlberg; the other rooted in the works of philosophers such as Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Dewey. (Shaprio & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 11)

Each school offers a different approach to the ethic of justice where, as Shaprio and Stefkovich explained:

The former school considers the individual as central and sees social relationships as a type of social contract where the individual, using human reason, gives up some rights for the good of the whole or for social justice. The latter tends to see society, rather than the individual, as central and seeks to teach individuals how to behave throughout their life within communities. In this tradition, justice emerges from “communal understandings.” (p. 11)

When looking at the ethic of justice, it is difficult not to reflect on its relevance in the bullying issue, as most of the previous “solutions” seemed to stem from increasing laws and legislation to regulate and punish bullying behavior. As the focus turns to issues of prevention, the ethics of care becomes increasingly important when discussing bullying in society. Currently, policy shifts are taking place and RJ practices are beginning to pick up momentum in Illinois schools with implementation of recent laws such as Illinois Senate Bill 100, Senate Bill 2793, and, most recently, House Bill 2663.

The ethics of care challenges the ethic of justice and becomes central to the rest of the continuing discussion around the bullying topic. Before I begin discussing the ethics of care, it is imperative to have a fundamental understanding of the feminist disability theory from which the ethics of care originates. According to Garland-Thomson (2005):

Feminist disability studies is academic cultural work with a sharp political edge and a vigorous critical punch . . . it defines disability broadly from a social rather than a medical perspective. Disability, it argues, is a cultural interpretation of human variation rather than an inherent inferiority, a pathology to cure, or an undesirable trait to eliminate
By probing the cultural meanings attributed to bodies that societies deem disabled, feminist disability studies does vast critical cultural work. (p. 1557)

Feminist disability theory “denaturalizes disability by unseating the dominant assumptions that disability is something that is wrong with people” (Garland-Thomson, 2002, p. 6). This becomes increasingly important to the feminist disability scholar because, as Young (1990b) illustrated, “Women in a sexist society are physically handicapped” (p. 153). As I begin to unpack the importance of feminist disability theory and the role of the ethics of care in the issue of bullying, it is important to remember that:

Feminist disability theory engages several fundamental premises of critical theory: 1) that representation structures reality, 2) that the margins define the center, 3) that gender (or disability) is a way of signifying relationships of power, 4) that human identity is multiple and unstable, 5) that all analysis and evaluation have political implications. (Garland-Thomson, 2002, p. 6)

It is through the continuing critical lens afforded by feminist disability studies that I will present the importance of the ethics of care while discussing bullying and, especially, the use of RJ practices to address systemic violence in schools.

According to Tong (1998):

Ever since Carol Gilligan published In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development (Gilligan, 1982) and Nel Noddings published Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education (Noddings, 1984), it has become routine for philosophers to contrast the so-called ethics of care with the so-called ethics of justice. (p. 131)

It is some of these differences I would like to illustrate throughout my discussion of bullying. Tong (1998) wrote about the six main differences between the ethics of care and the ethic of justice and summarized:

1) justice ethics takes an abstract approach, while care ethics takes a contextual approach;

2) justice ethics begins with an assumption of human separateness, while care ethics begins with an assumption of human connectedness;
3) justice ethics emphasizes individual rights, while care ethics emphasizes communal relationships;  
4) justice ethics works best in the public realm, whereas care ethics works best in the private realm;  
5) justice ethics stresses the role of reason in performing *right* actions, while care ethics stresses the role of emotions (or sentiments in constituting good character;  
6) justice ethics is male/masculine/masculinist, while care ethics is female/feminine/feminist (Clement, 1996). (p. 132)

There are a multitude of differences between the ethics of care and the ethic of justice that need to be highlighted for the sake of this dissertation research. Tanner (1996) wrote, “Work in feminist ethics continues to reflect on purported differences in moral orientation between women and men, the so-called difference between an ethic of care and an ethic of justice” (p. 171). Tanner (1996) continued to point out two main claims about the differences between these two ethics, stating:

First, the claim that women and men reason differently about moral matters . . . Second, the claim that women and men orient themselves around a different set of values in forming a sense of themselves as moral beings and in making decisions about the shape their interpersonal relations should take. Women worry more about responding adequately to the needs of others and about sustaining personal relationships, men are concerned to protect their own autonomy and meet impartial standards of equity or fairness. (p. 171)

These differences between the ethics of care and the ethic of justice may be exposing an underlying institutional practice of preferring stereotypically masculine traits, those of law and order, over historically feminine traits, those of care giving, care taking, and community building (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984). Smeyers (1999) highlighted:

As opposed to the ethic of justice, an ethic of care revolves around responsibility and relationships rather than rights and rules, and is tied to concrete circumstances rather than being formal and abstract. An ethic of care is best expressed as an activity rather than a
set of principles and, more so than virtue ethics and communitarianism, it challenges conventional borders and oppositions in moral philosophy. (p. 244)

This becomes an increasingly important issue when discussing what kinds of interventions and solutions are currently being used to address issues of systemic violence in educational settings (e.g., bullying).

So, what is ethics of care and why am I framing my dissertation in this paradigm? The ethics of care:


Care ethics seeks to organize social and moral theory around the construct of care by centering the experiences and practices of women, replacing what it identifies as dominant masculinist values such as autonomy, independence, conflict and power. Care ethics also casts care as either a challenge or complement to the masculinism of theoretical conceptions of justice, in what is framed in terms of a “care vs. justice” debate (Gilligan, 1982, 1987; Held, 1995; Clement, 1996; Talbot, 2000). (Cloyes, 2002, p. 203)

At its most fundamental level, the ethics of care embraces the idea of the interconnectedness of people, the value of community, and the importance of caring (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994). If we, as a society, devalue acts that have historically been relegated to the private sphere of the home, such as women caring for children, and continue to value law and order type initiatives that help ensure “autonomy and meet impartial standards of equity or fairness” (Tanner, 1996, p. 171), at the very least these issues become a concern for feminist disability scholars (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994). This devaluing of stereotypically feminine roles and acts and valuing those of traditional masculine normative beliefs that are illustrated throughout the ethics of care may be one of the main reasons that bullying has historically been addressed from an ethic of justice and not from an ethics of care perspective (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994). In that
light, it is a historically vital time to be increasingly cognizant that the social narrative around a multitude of these topics may be changing, as policy shifts move toward RJ practices in Illinois schools.

**Inclusion/Exclusion**

There are a multitude of interconnections between disability and bullying. One of the main relationships between bullying and its impact on the lives of people with disabilities is found in understanding the historical, social-political structures and the roles of social institutions in the lives of people with disabilities (Foucault, 1973; Stiker, 1999; Winzer, 1993). In order to understand the foundation upon which this dissertation research is written, it is imperative to address the overarching issue of inclusion versus exclusion and the role that it plays in the disability studies discourse. It would be profoundly naive and seemingly myopic to only discuss the issues surrounding bullying without first addressing the vital role of an inclusive democratic society in meeting the needs of all of its members.

Historically, people with disabilities have been the target of oppression, objectification, exclusion, persecution, maligning, institutionalization, and social isolation, and, arguably, have been political fodder for the social-political structures that have reaped the benefits of labeling some people as “disabled” (Foucault, 1973; Stiker, 1999; Winzer, 1993). Differently abled people have been the focus of societal scapegoating, violence, social maligning, bullying, and invisibility (Foucault, 1973; Stiker, 1999; Winzer, 1993). The ancient Greeks and early Romans perceived impairments as a means of punishment or as a way to achieve atonement (Foucault, 1973; Stiker, 1999; Winzer, 1993). Early Christianity viewed disabilities as everything from a visual representation of sin or evil to proof of the sacred and the mystic (Foucault, 1973; Stiker,
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

1999; Winzer, 1993). Later, people with disabilities were marginalized and institutionalized and became targets of charity (Stiker, 1999; Winzer, 1993).

The significant role of inclusion/exclusion in the lives of people with disabilities makes it virtually impossible to begin to address the issues surrounding systemic violence (e.g., bullying) from a disability studies perspective without first illustrating the overarching topic of inclusion/exclusion. It has become increasingly clear that one of the many issues involved in bullying is the exclusion of a certain person or group of people based on being or being perceived as “other” (e.g., disability, gender, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, etc.; Foucault, 1973; Stiker, 1999; Winzer, 1993). Ravaud and Stiker (2001) illustrated how “failures of inclusions or integration” (i.e., exclusion) have affected the lives of people with disabilities:

These failures of inclusion or integration that may be experienced by disabled people are translated as the loss of or difficulty in access to a place in society, as a permanent move to the sidelines. The study of the historical treatment of disability (Stiker, 1982, 1999), as well as anthropological studies of this same theme (Ingstadt and Reynolds Whyte 1995), show that the exclusion of disabled persons through time and across civilizations has assumed and still assumes extremely diverse forms within the host society.

From the more radical forms of exclusion, such as extermination or abandonment, there is a continuum representing exclusion from society to the diverse forms of exclusion within society, through segregation, marginalization, or discrimination. We can observe that each of these types of exclusion, even if it has been characteristic of some ancient society, nonetheless displays survival in our contemporary Western societies. Moreover, it appears possible in such a typology to establish correspondences between each form of exclusion within society and a form of inclusion in it. (p. 502)

Exclusion has historically played a central role in the lives of people with disabilities. Today, it helps to frame the vital role that exclusion plays in the ever-increasing bullying “epidemic” and address the institutional practices being implemented to curb such behavior (e.g., zero tolerance polices). It is imperative that the topic of inclusion and exclusion be presented to help create an understanding of the “road map” of the research process, the roles these complex issues have historically played in the lives of people with disabilities, and to gain greater insight
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

into how our roles, as educators, may have contributed to the culpability of such acts of exclusion, stigmatizing, and bullying behaviors.

The role of exclusion has a strong historical context, particularly in the lives of people with disabilities. A greater understanding of how exclusion is defined may illuminate some of the potential power structures and other institutions that perpetuate who is included and who is, ultimately, excluded in society. Ravaud and Stiker (2001) wrote:

Exclusion needs to be perceived from a global perspective that encompasses the view of the excluded and that of the entity that rejects him or her. Because, contrary to contemporary representations, exclusion is not an abstract inexorable phenomenon, without actors, nor is it ultimately an inevitability due to entry into a new global economy. As Norbert Elias (1965) illustrated in his study of the logic of exclusion, it is clear that exclusion is also inscribed in a society’s power relationships. (p. 508)

This global perspective (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001, p. 508) of exclusion provides a better understanding of the roles that systems, particularly Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, play in working to address systemic violence (e.g., bullying) in schools. Next, we will take a look at Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory as a way to frame schools’ responses to bullying and, possibly, illuminate some ways in which staff, administrators, educators, students, and other stakeholders might be able to effectively respond by working to change systems through using RJ practices to reduce violence and work to improve the school climate for all students.

**Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory**

Much of the recent research about bullying often seems to involve an individualized approach to addressing systemic violence or increasing the coping mechanisms of those who are enduring the bullying behavior. In researching systems approaches to addressing the bullying issue, I was introduced to Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory and found it to be a natural “fit” to the systems of educational institutions and how our classrooms and schools are
positioned in the larger ecological system of communities, often at the hub of many communities, which gives schools a unique opportunity to create systems of change (particularly in the area of bullying and other aspects of systems violence). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory is often thought of as a bio-ecological systems theory and is based on the premise that there are five spheres that help to influence children as they develop (Hong & Espelage, 2012). As described by Hong and Espelage (2012), Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory five spheres consist of: the microsystem (e.g., “parent-youth relationships, inter-parental violence, relations with peers, school connectedness, and school environment” (p. 312)), the mesosystem (e.g., “teacher involvement” (p.312)), the exosystem (e.g., “exposure to media violence, neighborhood environment” (p. 312)), the macrosystem (e.g., “cultural norms and beliefs, religious affiliation” (p. 312)), and the chronosystem (e.g., “changes in family structure” (p. 312)). (See below figures 3 and 4 for a greater illustration on how these five spheres impact the individual).

Figure 3. Individual in the spheres. (Nielsen, 2011).
According to Hong and Espelage (2012):

Understanding factors that predict bullying behavior in school necessitates a close examination of the complex inter-relationships between the individual and the environment. The ecological system theory contends that bullying victims and perpetrators are part of the complex, interrelated systems levels that place them at the center and move out from the center to the various systems that shape the individual- that is micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem levels (Brofenbrenner, 1994). (p. 313)

Bullying does not occur in a cultural vacuum. It tends to be a part of a much larger system that involves individuals, communities, cultural beliefs, national agendas, and other players, which is why Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory offers an alternative method of viewing the bullying issue (Brofenbrenner, 1994; hooks, 1994, 2003). Simply working to address one aspect of the system (i.e., the bully), as in the case of current programs, laws, and legislation, will likely not completely resolve the issue (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong,
The most direct influence in bullying behavior among youth are within microsystems, which is comprised of individuals or groups of individuals within immediate setting (e.g., home, schools) with whom youth have interactions. The microsystem level of analysis suggests that assessment of risk factors for bullying behavior needs to consider parent-youth relationships, inter-parental violence, peer relationships, school connectedness, and school environment [emphasis added]. (p. 315)

The environment in which we live ultimately affects our ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Hong, Cho, Allen-Meares, and Espelage (2011) emphasized the need to address bullying from an ecological systems theory by stating:

Ending violence in school is a daunting task for educators, school officials, mental health professionals, researchers, and policy-makers in the United States and around the world. However, it is now recognized that individual psychiatric assessment and individual-based violence prevention strategies are not enough (Twemlow, 2008). There also needs to be an assessment that examines the nature and influences of the various ecological systems (i.e., family, peer group, school, and community) that affect youths’ behavior. (p. 866)

Hong and Espelage (2012) noted that some of the anti-bullying programs currently in schools “focus on shifting the school climate such that bullying is not tolerated . . . many of these programs have not considered other relevant ecological levels that have profound impact on school climate, such as neighborhood, cultural norms and beliefs, and religion” (p. 318). In illuminating some of the issues with the current focus on the ethic of justice, it becomes increasingly clear that embracing Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory may be a way to begin to emphasize the importance of the ethics of care from a systems perspective. Hong and Espelage (2012) wrote:

A social-ecological approach dictates that responses to bullies need to rely less on the traditional punitive approach, and more on targeting the patterns of behavior of both bullies and their victims, with attention to the noninvolved bystanders or the schools as
well as the classroom-school climate and other influences such as family, community, and society.

Reducing the incidence of bullying in school requires an ecological approach in intervention design and evaluation. After all, bullying is a complex social phenomenon that is embedded in a number of systems, which may inadvertently reinforce and maintain bullying interactions. (pp. 318-319)

If we begin to view bullying from a systemic approach, we are also asked to engage in the critical work of changing systems and institutional practices that are often resistant to change (i.e., demanding full inclusion for all, dismantling a patriarchal system, moving from the ethic of justice to an ethics of care paradigm, creating increased cultural collateral for caring and those who care in society, and rejecting violence [in all forms] and increasing the demand for peace as a national agenda; Freire, 2005; hooks, 1994, 2003). Hong and Espelage (2012) illustrated what these issues might suggest about our policies, not only as communities, but what they potentially say about our institutional practices at a national level:

The many dimensions and consequences of it (school-based violence), the ecological systems theory, and its importance for locating this phenomenon within a framework specific to the United States; one cannot avoid the increasing violence that engulfs countries around the world and the consequences on the behavior and development of youth (see, for example, Smith, 2003; Smith-Khuri et al., 2004). (p. 866)

As presented within Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, healthy systems (i.e., communities) are vital to every level in the system (i.e., the micro-, the meso-, the exo-, the macro-, and the chrono-). One might argue that school ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to changes. It is my perspective that educators hold valuable insights into the ecological systems of their classrooms and the larger school systems, which is why teachers’ perspectives become a vital and invaluable resource in providing insight into the lived experience of RJ practices in the school setting. This is one of main reasons why the educator’s perspective was a central focus in this research journey.
Current Restorative Justice Practices in Illinois

It is important to frame the concept of RJ practices and how these practices are being defined, most specifically in Illinois schools. According to Ashley and Burke (2009), “The Illinois restorative justice movement began in 1997 when state and local organization formed Restorative Justice for Illinois” (p. 4). This led to the formation in 1998 of “the Illinois Juvenile Justice Reform Act revised the Illinois Juvenile Court Act to include a purpose and policy statement that adopts the balanced and restorative justice (BARJ) philosophy for all juvenile delinquency cases [705 ILCS 405/5-101]” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 4). Then, in 2003, the Illinois BARJ Initiative (IBARJI) was formed and was charged with the creation of the “non-profit Illinois BARJ Project to raise and use funds to further balanced and restorative justice in Illinois” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 4). In 2009, Implementing Restorative Justice: A Guide for Schools was published, “specifically designed to provide Illinois school personnel with practical strategies to apply restorative justice” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 5).

As previously stated, research has indicated RJ “is a philosophy based on a set of principles that guide the response to conflict and harm” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 6) and “these principles are based on practices that have been used for centuries in indigenous and religious groups” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 6). Restorative justice practices revolve around three main goals: (a) accountability, whereby “strategies provide opportunities for wrongdoers to be accountable to those they have harmed, and enable them to repair harm they caused to the extent possible” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 6); (b) community safety, which “recognizes the need to keep the community safe through strategies that build relationships and empower the community to take responsibility for the well-being of its members” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 6); and (c) competency development, which “seeks to increase pro-social skills of those who have harmed
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

others, address underlying factors that lead youth to engage in delinquent behavior, and build on strengths in each young person” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 6). Research shows that, historically, school systems have followed with the criminal justice system in the implementation of policies (Van Ness & Strong, 2015). This has been the case with the trend of RJ practices emerging in Illinois schools, most significantly over the past decade (Ashley & Burke, 2009). Stevenson (2003) highlighted:

Restorative justice, in contrast to retributive and rehabilitative justice strategies that focus primarily on the offender . . . provides a framework by which the justice system can respond more holistically to offenders and those that have been harmed by their crimes. (p. 2)

Figure 5 provides a comparison between the punitive and the RJ models of response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Punitive</th>
<th>Restorative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misbehavior defined as breaking school rules or letting the school down.</td>
<td>Misbehavior defined as harm (emotional/mental/physical) done to one person/group by another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus is on what happened and establishing blame or guilt.</td>
<td>Focus on problem-solving by expressing feeling and needs and exploring how to address problems in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adversarial relationship and process. Includes an authority figure with the power to decide on penalty, in conflict with wrongdoer.</td>
<td>Dialogue and negotiation, with everyone involved in the communication and cooperation with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposition of pain or unpleasantness to punish and deter/prevent.</td>
<td>Restitution as a means of restoring both parties, the goal being reconciliation and acknowledging responsibility for choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to rules and adherence to due process.</td>
<td>Attention to relationships and achievement of mutually desired outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict/wrongdoing represented as impersonal and abstract; individual versus school</td>
<td>Conflict/wrongdoing recognized as interpersonal conflicts with opportunity for learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One social injury compounded by another.</td>
<td>Focus on repair of social injury/damage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School community as spectators, represented by member of staff dealing with the situation; those directly affected uninvolved and powerless.</td>
<td>School community involved in facilitating restoration; those affected taken into consideration; empowerment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability defined in terms of receiving punishment.</td>
<td>Accountability defined as understanding impact of actions, taking responsibility for choices, and suggesting ways to repair harm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Comparison chart of punitive and RJ (taken from Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 7).

Many proponents of RJ practices and strategies feel these practices can “help schools prevent or deal with conflict before it escalates” and promote “values of empathy, respect,
honesty, acceptance, responsibility, and accountability” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 7). Research also indicates RJ may be particularly helpful when used in the school setting as it “provides ways to effectively address behaviors and other complex school issues, offer a supportive environment that can improve learning, improve safety by preventing future harm, and offer alternatives to suspension and expulsion” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 7).

Research indicates that in Illinois, as well as across the United States, infractions of school codes and disciplinary actions historically were met with swift punitive, retributive justice (Brantley, 2017; Mullet, 2014; Teasley, 2014). According to Ashley and Burke (2009), “A trend toward zero tolerance began in the late 1980s, becoming national policy through the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. The policy mandated expulsion for no less than one academic year for bringing a weapon to school” (p. 9). Zero tolerance polices flourished during the 1990s, and “mandated harsh penalties in the form of school suspensions, expulsions, alternative schooling, and juvenile justice referrals for a wide variety of problematic student behaviors” (Teasley, 2014, p. 131). Ashley and Burke (2009) reported that “the Illinois State Board of Education, between 1991 and 2007, Illinois public school suspension rates increased 56 percent and expulsion rates more than doubled. The state’s suspension and expulsion rates reached a 16-year high by academic year 2007” (p. 9).

It is important to note that the majority of these zero tolerance policies excessively singled out minority students and those with disabilities (Ashley & Burke, 2009; Brantley, 2017; Mullet, 2014; Teasley, 2014). Teasley (2014) stated, “Minority youth, particularly African American and Hispanic youths, have borne the brunt of disproportionate school disciplinary measures since the implementation of zero tolerance policies” (p. 132). The School Discipline Consensus Report illustrated “a disproportionately large percentage of disciplined students of
color, students with disabilities, and youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LBGT)” (Morgan, Salmon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014, p. 10). Brantley (2017) concurred by stating, “Some advocates of changing this more traditional model of school discipline argue that these strict methods of discipline—most notably suspensions—disproportionally affect minority students over their white peers” (p. 78). Research conducted by Brantley (2017), indicated that students with disabilities were also disproportionately impacted (e.g., 75% of the students with disabilities) by suspension or expulsion, due to punitive zero tolerance policies.

Although zero tolerance policies continued to flourish through the country, they have seen limited success in reducing student misconduct, improving the safety of the school community, and increasing student compliance (Ashley & Burke, 2009; Mullet, 2014). Ashley and Burke (2009) stated, “There was no evidence that zero tolerance policies improve student behavior, the school climate, or overall school safety. In fact, research has found that such policies lead to more suspensions, school dropouts, and deviant behavior” (p. 9). As zero tolerance policies began to pick up ground, more minority students and students with disabilities were excluded through suspensions, which caused an increase in dropouts and contributed to both the “pushout problem” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 9) and the school-to-prison pipeline. Both the terms pushout (e.g., institutional practices that increase a student dropping out of school prior to graduating (National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline, 2014a)) and school-to-prison pipeline (e.g., zero tolerance policies that often exclude students through suspension and expulsion that cause an inevitable pathway into the criminal justice system (National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline, 2014b)) are terms that are increasingly appearing within the research literature. It has been hypothesized that the increasing trends toward applying punitive/retributive justice to school-based offenses significantly contributed to
student dropout statistics and increased juvenile incarceration rates (Ashley & Burke, 2009; Brantley, 2017). Ashley and Burke stated:

The criminalization of certain kinds of misconduct in schools has created what is referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline” or “school-to-jailhouse track.” Common adolescent misbehavior is often handled as criminal behavior by the police rather than by schools through traditional disciplinary procedures. (p. 9)

It is in this exclusion of students, particularly minority students and those with disabilities, that one begins to realize the importance of inclusion, the climate of the school (as highlighted through Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory), and the potential that the implementation of RJ practices offers to school systems, staff, teachers, administrators, other stakeholders, and, especially, students.

According to many, the concept of bullying is an ever-increasing problem in the nation’s schools (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong et al., 2003; ISBE, 2011; Walton, 2005, 2010). In response to the seemingly growing epidemic of bullying, there has been a significant increase in the dominant social discourse surrounding the best practices with which to address bullying, reduce violence, and create safe(r) schools for all students. The increasing number of polices, laws, and legislations that are being implemented in an attempt to reduce bullying and their apparent unsuccessful attempts to reduce the incidence of bullying, bullycides, and other causalities that occur from bullying behavior draw into question whether there might not be a better way to address the issue of bullying in U.S. schools. Technology and social media often amplify elements of bullying behavior that were once relegated to classroom hallways, school bathrooms, and playgrounds; access to students is seemingly unrestricted and continues to increase in both the size and the scope of being able to hurt students within the classrooms and well after they graduate from academic institutions. This dissertation research offers a qualitative phenomenological approach to delving deeper into the historical progression of bullying, its
commonalities with people with disabilities, and the importance of inclusion from a feminist disability studies perspective and through the moral lens of the ethics of care. By addressing the current topic of bullying through the ethic of justice and the ethics of care perspectives, it is argued that the concepts surrounding bullying, at its fundamental level, are about much larger institutions’ practices, power, patriarchy, and, ultimately, how much we value (or do not) inclusion as a society (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984).

In recent years, there has been a growing trend to reduce the number of punitive laws and policies surrounding creating “safer schools” in an effort to implement more RJ practices in educational settings in the hopes of creating healthier, safer systems of learning for all students. Illinois has been slower to respond to some of these policy shifts. New laws, such as Illinois Senate Bill 100, Senate Bill 2793, and HB2663, have worked toward eliminating many previous zero tolerance practices. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to investigate these changes from educators’ perspectives through in-depth interviews regarding how RJ practices are actually being experienced, the “lived experience” (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990, 1997, 2007) in the classroom setting through a feminist disability lens. Specifically, two significant research questions of overarching interest were:

1. How are educators making sense of restorative justice practices?
2. What are the implications for students with disabilities?

It is hypothesized that only when we, as a society, begin to implement programs such as the tenets of the Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2005) and matriarchal practices such as RJ practices that create fully inclusive communities that value caring for all will we collectively begin to address the issues of systemic violence that have been cloaked in terms such as bullying and begin to fully embrace the tenets of the ethics of care. It is only when
we no longer hold a place for systematic violence and practice exclusion within our institutions or within our educational policies/practices that change will fully begin to take hold and embrace the true meaning of the ethics of care and RJ practices.

The following sections expand upon previously presented topics and highlight the historical abuse of the exclusion of people with disabilities, past institutional practices/anti-bullying and safe school legislation, the importance of ethics of care, an understanding of bullying as it pertains to systemic violence in schools, and the importance of Circles of Courage and the Navajo Peacemaking process as these issues pertain to contemporary application of RJ practices in Illinois schools. Each of these sections helps provide the “map” for the research study conducted, highlight the vital role educators play in helping promote inclusion for all students, emphasize the changing shifts in educational policy from zero tolerance (i.e., retributive/punitive laws) toward the implementation of RJ practices (i.e., restorative laws), gain a greater understanding of the vital role educators play in this process, and work to understand why these issues disproportionately affect students with disabilities.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Where humans can’t leave and mustn’t complain,
There some will emerge who enjoy giving pain.
A dreary intense groove leads them to each one
they pick to torment, and the rest will then shun.
Some who might have been picked, and natural police,
do routine hurt, the catcalling, the giving-no-peace,
but dull brilliance evolves the betrayals and names
that sear dignity and life like interior flames.
Whole circles get enlisted, and blood loyalties reversed
by self-avengers and failures-getting-in-first
but this is the eye of fashion. Its sniggering stare
breeds silenced accomplices. Courage proves rare.
This powers revolution; this draws flies to sad pools;
this is the true curriculum of schools.
~ Les Murray, Where humans can’t leave and mustn’t complain (Murray, 2015)

This chapter presents a review of the research literature to bring into focus the historical
[ab]use of exclusion of people with disabilities; presents bullying from a multitude of theoretical
perspectives; gives an overview of the historical institutional practices/anti-bullying and safe
school legislation prior to the passage of Illinois Senate Bill 100, Senate Bill 2793, and House
Bill 2663; and gives a brief overview of the Circle of Courage and the Navajo Peacemaking
process, the ethics of care, and highlights the importance of inclusion. Combined, these sections
offer a deeper understanding of the interlacing concepts of systemic violence, inclusion and
exclusion, historical policy implementation, and the vital importance of ecological systems
theory when embarking upon a phenomenological study of educators’ perceptions of RJ, care,
inclusion, and disability in Illinois schools.

Historical [Ab]use of Exclusion of People with Disabilities

Ravaud and Stiker (2001) presented that, historically, exclusion has been executed
through six major methods: “1) exclusion through elimination, 2) exclusion through
abandonment, 3) exclusion through segregation or differentiated instruction, 4) exclusion
through assistance or conditional inclusion, 5) exclusion through marginalization or inclusion
through normalization, 6) exclusion through discrimination or progressive inclusion” (pp. 502-508). To understand the historical significance of exclusion, particularly as it relates to people with disabilities, it is important to look at each of these types of exclusion individually and how they may relate to the bullying.

According to Ravaud and Stiker (2001), “The most extreme form of social exclusion is death” (p. 502). Historically, exclusion through elimination has been used to justify the termination of life, particularly lives that are deemed less than valuable or challenge the social normative (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001). As Ravaud and Stiker (2001) illustrated, “Historically, this has been achieved through practices such as immolation, extermination (i.e., Nazi Germany), eugenics, abortion, and sterilization” (p. 502). By framing frame people with disabilities as being “less than,” or by allowing a society to exclude people for being different, we, as a society, might actually not have to “exclude by elimination” (p. 502), as Ravaud and Stiker (2001) suggested, but rather make death a preferential option to living in social exclusion. This can often be seen in suicide attempts and the increase in bullycides (i.e., those who kill themselves after enduring bullying). Ravaud and Stiker (2001) wrote:

What is under discussion here is not, of course, the freedom of individual choice of life or death for a severely impaired person but the fact that social pressure, by reducing disability to a dimension of personal tragedy, makes it acceptable to accommodate disabled persons in their desire for death. (p. 503)

The second way in which exclusion has been historically executed is through abandonment (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001). According to Ravaud and Stiker (2001), “To abandon something or someone is to cease to be concerned with it, to deprive it of care” (p. 503), and exclusion through abandonment “can be distinguished from elimination by the fact that they do not entail death or at least not in such direct fashion” (p. 503). It is important to note that exclusion through abandonment would presently be synonymous with “social death-social
abandonment” (p. 503), which begins to draw similarities to concerns surrounding the contemporary bullying issue. Historically, exclusion through abandonment has played a painful role in the lives of people with disabilities as demonstrated through the “transfer of parental authority to another agency, leaving in God’s hands the fate of a newborn, but the more modern fashion is anonymous delivery in view of adoption” (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001, p. 503).

Exclusion through segregation or differentiated instruction is the third method of exclusion. Ravaud and Stiker (2001) illustrated the historical significance of exclusion through segregation or differentiated instruction for people with disabilities by saying:

Segregation and the various practices of sequestration constitute one of the most widespread forms of exclusion. This geographical exclusion, in the generic sense of the word, can be found, with immediate topical relevance, across eras and cultures. This is also a form of social treatment that, by clearly setting out an inside and an outside, is very close to the basic meanings of inclusion and exclusion. (p. 504)

It is in this method of exclusion (through segregation or differentiated instruction) that the concept of the “institution” is created (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001) and is, ultimately, the “establishment that is most often structured on a residential basis to treat, train, and intern disabled people” (p. 504). From a feminist disability perspective, it is important to note that through exclusion (through segregation or differentiated instruction) and the creation of the institution, “One of the constant features of the institutionalization of disabled people has been the separation of the sexes. This repression of sexuality, thus precluding procreation, can be associated with the practices of sterilization and the eugenicist issues” (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001, p. 505). Ravaud and Stiker (2001) pointed out exclusion through segregation or differentiated instruction is often thought of as a “mediated inclusion” (p. 505). Ravaud and Stiker (2001) stated:

One of the paradoxes of that what is often seen as a segregating “detour” (e.g., in the form of temporary separate schooling) is often presented as having integration as its ultimate goal. In fact, such segregation is today most often conceived of as a provisional
bypass to regain the mainstream, to participate more fully in society, even if it should happen that this detour never does come back around. Thus, the intention is not to exclude but to include at a future date. The goal of sequestration is no longer confinement, as in the seventeenth century, but a mediated inclusion. (p. 505)

The fourth method of exclusion is exclusion through assistance or conditional inclusion, where the concepts of “employment,” “economics,” and “welfare” become the major focus (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001, p. 505). Ravaud and Stiker (2001) wrote:

The reference to employment and productive capacity permits us to address another form of exclusion- exclusion through assistance, an “economic” form of exclusion, which has permeated the entire question of social policy since the end of the Middle Ages . . . Welfare activity and good works marked the history of the social treatment of disability until the twentieth century. (pp. 505-506)

Through exclusion through assistance or conditional inclusion, people with disabilities have been and continue to be targets of “assistance,” “welfare,” and “charity” (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001). The role of religion, specifically the “church,” has historically maintained its powerful influence over the lives of people with disabilities through this type of exclusion. Ravaud and Stiker (2001) illustrated:

The church plays a major role in the development of individually targeted assistance, initially thought the intermediary of its convents, monasteries, and other religious institutions and then through specialized institutions such as hospitals, hospices, and orphanages. This protective role of the church was also an aspect of its power. (p. 505)

It is through exclusion through assistance or conditional inclusion that the notion of the importance of “work” is illuminated. Ravaud and Stiker (2001) pointed out that, “Some theorists of disability consider that exclusion from the world of work is the ultimate cause of other, differing forms of exclusion that disabled people experience (Oliver & Barnes, 1998)” (p. 506). On the importance of work, Ravaud and Stiker (2001) wrote:

If the relationship to work is a determining factor in understanding the economic role of disabled people, work represents, beyond its connection with production, a justification for inscription in the social structure. Thus, failure to participate in any productive activity and isolation from other human relationships combine their negative effects to generate exclusion or rather disaffiliation (Castel, 1995). Inversely, the combination of
stable work and solid functioning relationships creates the conditions for integration. Between the two lies a zone of social vulnerability. (p. 506)

It is important to note that those who are affected by conditional inclusion, historically people with disabilities, who reap the benefits of “assistance,” (e.g., such as “social security and welfare” (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001, p. 506)), are included in society, but at a cost of “social sub status” and dependent upon “stay(ing) in their place” (p. 506). Ravaud and Stiker (2001) elaborated:

Assistance or, to invert terminology, social security and welfare are admittedly weak forms of participation in society. They confer social sub status. Yet to assist is not to exclude because those who are helped are part of society by the very fact that society is concerned about them . . . However, those helped are part of society only on the condition that they stay in their place . . . This is why social assistance policies do not have elimination of poverty as their objective, as one might believe, but its integration into the system, to the benefit the latter. (p. 506)

The fifth method of exclusion is exclusion through marginalization or normalization, whereby people go through the process of *marginalization*, which is defined as “the process of moving to the side as a consequence of a refusal to accept or of an impossibility of accepting currently recognized rules of operation” (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001, p. 506). Exclusion through marginalization or inclusion through normalization revolves around the concepts of the marginalized and marginality, whereby “marginality is always characterized by a lifestyle that cannot be accommodated with the behavioral norms that are in force” (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001, p. 506). This type of exclusion and its role in the lives of people with disabilities and the issues surrounding bullying seem to revolve around “rights,” “rules,” and “values” (p. 506). Ravaud and Stiker (2001) elaborated on how this method of exclusion affects the lives of people with disabilities and introduced the concept of “conformity” when they stated:

Disabled persons who may find themselves rejecting norms that are applied to them or who are rejected for not “playing the game” are susceptible to being drawn into this process of marginalization. Yet this is not the general case because their desire for integration in society most often makes them accept common rules. The fundamental
problem here is that of norms. To be included, you must achieve and accept a certain degree of conformity. (p. 506)

It is in this method of exclusion that the role of “rehabilitation” (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001, p. 506) is introduced, as concerns around conformity (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001, p. 506) begin to expand. For both people with disabilities and those who are subjected to bullying, this concept of “achiev[ing] and accept[ing] a certain degree of conformity” (p. 506) begins to take on a special meaning. Ravaud and Stiker (2001) wrote:

The key concern of rehabilitation (call readaption in French) is to reduce this deviation from the norm. Action on the individual who is to be reintroduced into the mainstream is accompanied by the desire to efface any difference. The individual must act “like others,” even if this requires technical aids, various devices, or prostheses. (p. 507)

The sixth and final method of exclusion is exclusion through discrimination or progressive inclusion (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001). According to Ravaud and Stiker (2001), “To discriminate is to single out, put a social group to one side, and restrict its rights” (p. 507), which is important because “to define discrimination as the act of treating equal individuals inequitably shows to what extent this concept is tied to modern society, which puts equality at the center of its code of values” (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001, p. 507). Historically, people with disabilities have been excluded through discrimination, but this type of exclusion may actually be a further indication of what a society deems as morally permissible and how damaging all methods of exclusion can be to every member in society (Ravaud & Stiker, 2001). Ravaud and Stiker (2001) wrote:

The principle question that is posed today in Western countries is the nature of the citizenship that disabled persons may enjoy. Modern politics excludes the possibility of distinguishing among different categories of persons in the public sphere. Behind these questions of discrimination and exclusion, we discern the principle of quality of citizens before the law as the moral ideal of a democratic nation. We do well to state precisely the limits of this equality before the law: right to identical treatment, right to access, right to equal opportunities, and right to an identical quality of life. We can see to what extent, in a society that has become segmented, that the perspective that is assumed will depend on the conception that we have of justice and social inequalities. (pp. 507-508)
Bullying: A Multitude of Theoretical Perspectives

Many researchers, school psychologists, specialists, policy advocates, and educators have attempted to explain the causes of bullying from a multitude of theoretical perspectives. For the purposes of this research journey, I address bullying using the social information processing theory (SIP), Theory of Mind (TOM), moral development theory, the medical model/the social model, disability studies framework, and the ethics of care. These theoretical perspectives of bullying are interwoven throughout this research, but I will present a basic framework of SIP, TOM, and the moral development theory as “guideposts” for my research journey.

According to Sanders (2004), “Many researchers and educators have been challenged to explain theoretically the phenomenon of bullying” (p. 9) in what seems to be an attempt to control, categorize, prevent, reduce, or eliminate such behaviors. Sanders (2004) wrote, “According to Sutton (2001), bullying is strongly regulated by social cognition and environmental factors” (p. 9). Two main theories have emerged in the recent bullying research to help theoretically explain bullying: the SIP and the TOM framework (Sanders, 2004).

Strongly rooted in a medical deficit model and originally developed by Dodge (1986) and later updated by Crick and Dodge (1999), within SIP there are “six sequential stages of processing social information” (Sanders, 2004, p. 9). Sanders (2004) illustrated:

In step one, the individual encodes sensory information being taken into the “system.” Second, the individual attempts to make sense or interpret the sensory information. Next, clarification of the information and goal setting occurs. Fourth, the individual seeks ideas for possible responses or develops unique ones on his or her own. Fifth, a decision about which response is most appropriate occurs. Last, the individual follows through with the behavioral response. (p. 9)

According to Sanders, “Using this model, Crick and Dodge (1999) claimed that bullying occurs as a result of social information processing biases or deficits at one or more of the six stages” (p. 9). Some researchers, such as “Camodeca et al. (2003) reported that bully-victims exhibit deficits
in the second stage of processing (clarification/interpretation) and the fifth stage of processing (response decision making)” (Sanders, 2004, p. 9), whereas others, such as “Berkowitz (1977) found significant differences among individuals in how they interpret situational cues during conflict” (Sanders, 2004, p. 9) and “Randall (1997) argued that individuals who exhibit bullying are doing so because they do not process social information accurately” (Sanders, 2004, p. 9).

Research also shows that:

Children who are exposed to neglect or other inadequate experiences are likely to develop internal working models of human relationships that are not healthy or normal. Thus, social incompetence results. The popular stereotypes of a bully who is a social outcast and lacks social insight is implied by the SIP theoretical framework. (Sanders, 2004, p. 10)

The TOM framework offers another means by which researchers attempt to theoretically explain the phenomenon of bullying. According to Sanders (2004), “Instead of explaining bullying behavior as a result of social incompetence, Sutton and his colleagues claim that some bullies actually possess a ‘superior’ theory of the mind” (p. 10). The TOM framework is explained as “the ability of individuals to attribute mental states to themselves and others in order to explain and predict behavior” (Sutton, 2001, p. 530). Sanders (2004) added:

Individuals who possess well-developed TOM skills will be more equipped to read and understand feelings and emotions of other people. Thus, they do not lack social competence as implied by the SIP framework but instead have an advanced ability at “reading” other people. (p. 10)

According to the moral development theory, “Arsenio and Lemerise (2001) argued that bullying cannot be fully understood without considering the moral aspects involved in the phenomenon. They claimed that such issues as fairness, individuals’ welfare, and sacrifice need to be addressed” (Sanders, 2004, p. 11). According to Sanders (2004), Rest’s (1983) four-component model of morality helps to increase “moral understanding” (p.11) and highlighted:

In this cognitive-development model, Rest theorized that moral development consists of moral sensitivity (being aware that a moral problem exists), moral judgment (deciding on
a moral action), moral motivation (staying committed to one’s values and prioritizing a moral action), and moral character (implementing and following through on moral action). This model supports the notion that developmental differences in moral understanding exist partially because of the strong cognitive component of moral development. (p. 12)

Researchers disagree on whether moral behavior should be included in studying bullying behavior (Sutton, 2001). Sanders stated (2004), “Further research in the area is needed to reveal how moral development theories can add to the understanding of bullying behavior” (p. 12). The SIP, TOM framework, and the moral development theory provide a multitude of ways to theoretically explain the phenomenon of bullying. Each of these theoretical perspectives potentially gives greater insight into the seemingly ever-increasing bullying “epidemic.” Sanders (2004) summarized:

> The social information processing (SIP) theory and Theory of the Mind (TOM) have helped experts explain the bullying phenomenon . . . It is suggested that an “eclectic” theoretical approach needs to be taken to explain bullying behavior. In addition to using the SIP and TOM approaches, researchers, practitioners, and educators need to include theories of moral development to grasp a richer understanding of this serious phenomenon. (p. 13)

For the purposes of this paper, I will continue to argue that bullying is primarily a moral issue and will further discuss the issues surrounding bullying through the ethics of care.

Looking at bullying from a moral perspective is a central theme within my research of the current attempts to reduce or to eliminate bullying from schools. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) wrote:

> According to John Dewey (1902), *ethics* is the science that deals with conduct insofar as this is considered to be right or wrong, good or bad. Ethics comes from the Greek word *ethos*, which means customs or usages, especially belonging to one group distinguished from another. Later, ethics came to mean disposition or character, customs, and approved ways of acting. (p. 10)
Historical Institutional Practices/Anti-Bullying and Safe School Legislation

Historically, in response to the seemingly growing epidemic of bullying, there has been a significant increase in the dominant social discourse regarding to the best practices society should take in order to address bullying, reduce violence, and create “safe[r] schools” for all students. One of the means by which institutions historically have attempted to address the bullying issue was the increased implementation of policies that target bullying and promote “safe schools” (Walton, 2005, 2010). Many of these policies are titled “anti-bullying” or “safe schools,” with the assumption that they are offering guidance into how to best address bullying in schools (Walton, 2005, 2010). One such policy, the Prevent School Violence Act (PSVA, 2010), was signed into law in Illinois on June 28, 2010, by Governor Pat Quinn. I will use this policy in an attempt to illuminate some of the historical and ideological forces at play, explain some of the systemic approaches and institutional practices that have been created and implemented to address bullying, demonstrate how they have been enacted, describe who potentially benefits from their implementation, and provide a greater understanding of some of the policy shifts currently taking place in Illinois. I further hope to illustrate the use of the ethic of justice and attempt to present some of the institutional practices that this policy might be attempting to defend under the guise of “preventing school violence” (PSVA, 2010). I also address issues surrounding the role of the dominant narrative of masculinity in society (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994) and how that role is reinforced over time through acts of bullying and “gay-baiting” (Tharinger, 2008, p. 223), the need to maintain and control socially accepted norms in a neoliberal society (Craig, Tucker, & Wagner, 2008; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong et al., 2003; Tharinger, 2008; Walton, 2005, 2010), and, arguably, the desire to reinforce the “might is right” (Rigby, 2006, p. 179) policies of much of
the Western world (Rigby, 2006). In attempting to illuminate some of the institutional practices around the implementation of Illinois’s PSVA, it becomes apparent that the issues surrounding bullying have far-reaching consequences beyond the schoolyard and, quite possibly, draws into question how the lessons that are actually being learned in the classroom and on the playground may affect our concept of democracy and create obstacles for larger discussions about peace in the larger society (hooks, 1994, 2003; Rigby, 2006).

During this critique of Illinois’s new PSVA (2010), I will attempt to examine the historical processes and the multitude of ideological forces surrounding its creation and the material conditions under which the PSVA was produced, including the complex institutional practices that are arguably being used to defend its creation and implementation. This process draws a feminist disability studies eye to policy analysis and helps to further focus the Foucauldian lens that I would like to, in part, bring to this analysis. When analyzing any policy through a Foucauldian lens, it becomes increasingly important to understand the symbolic relationship between power and knowledge, to realize that power is exercised and not possessed, and that power circulates through society and institutions in a historical context (Gabel, 2008). Furthermore, it is vital to realize that if an institution has power, it can also control what constitutes knowledge, what values are visible/invisible, and what remains the dominant discourse (Gabel, 2008). Walton (2010) explained this concept by saying:

Conventional approaches define particular problems and describe the instrument by which the problem is to be assessed (Pal, 1997). However, the ways in which problems are articulated and approached varies with degrees of power held by individuals. Whose voices are included in articulation of the “problem”? Who gets to decide how goals to resolve the stated problem are to be set and met? Who gets to state the terms of reference for the problem and how have they been informed of such terms? How might the dominant narrative of the problem belie broader social complexities, controversies, inequities, and contexts? (p. 136)
Each of these themes becomes increasingly important as we begin to uncover the layers of Illinois’s PSVA (2010) and the importance of the newer laws currently being implemented.

Olssen et al. (2004) wrote:

> A Foucauldian approach to critical policy analysis is based upon a theory of language that rejects the idealist assumptions underpinning traditional conceptions of the policy process . . . policy documents are interpreted as the expression of political purpose, that is as statements of the courses of action that policy-makers and administrators intend to follow. Within this view, the analysis of a policy document becomes a quest for the authorial intentions presumed to lie behind the text. (p. 60)

It is essential to understand that policy creation does not simply occur (Gabel, 2008). Policy is created in a political, historical, social, and cultural context that must be researched and investigated in order to understand the political and other institutional practices that are at work (Gabel, 2008). Gabel (2008) wrote, “Policy does not exist in an epistemological or value-free vacuum. On the contrary, policy and its associated practices and procedures are tangible evidence of value systems within political structures and processes” (p. 312). Walton (2010) would agree and wrote, “Educational policy does not develop in a vacuum, but it is affected by beliefs, values, and attitudes, situated in discourses, which in turn affect school policy by creating or limiting educational policy options” (p. 138). So, what are some of the values that surround the PSVA and what, if anything, does its creation and subsequent implementation tell us about the political, historical, social, cultural, and institutional practices that might be underlying the policy? What does it tell us, as educators, that new policies (e.g., Illinois Senate Bill 100, Senate Bill 2793, and House Bill 2663) that promote RJ practices are beginning to shift the discourse around school discipline?

Over the past few years, there has been a tremendous amount of research, a multitude of publications, and vast media attention surrounding bullying (ISBE, 2011; Walton, 2005, 2010). In the shadow of recent school shootings, a rash of bullycides, a new social rhetoric that demands
“safer schools,” and a mainstream media that continues to sensationalize the issues plaguing students today, it only seems natural that the issues surrounding bullying would take a center stage in the social discourse (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong et al., 2003; ISBE, 2011; Walton, 2005, 2010). Yet, the question remains, “Where did all of this bullying come from? Is bullying a new problem?” Walton (2010) attempted to provide some answers on how to proceed:

My assertion is that bullying as a problem did not just appear out of nowhere. An effect of discourse is that, over time, the historicity of discursive objects is obscured and hidden. Thus, the way that bullying is currently conceptualized appears to have always been so, which is precisely the power of the dominant narrative that is normalized in policy responses. More generally, practices of research methods and policy are predicated upon the modernist assumption that social problems exist a priori to their becoming identified and categorized. Supposedly, research merely “uncovers” and identifies problems, and policy analyst advise what to do about them. (p. 145)

In thinking about the issues surrounding bullying, which is a central focus of the PSVA (2010), it is important to understand the historical context and the ideological forces surrounding the issues in an attempt to “uncover” and, potentially, “identify problems” (Walton, 2010, p. 145). It is also important to begin to ask the question “Why?” According to Limber and Small (2003):

Historically, bullying among school children has not been a topic of significant public concern. Indeed, many adults have viewed the experience of being bullied as a rite of passage for children and youth. In recent years, however, attention to bullying among children has increased dramatically among school personnel, members of the general public, and policy makers. (p. 445)

It has been noted that the previously socially accepted concept of bullying as a “rite of passage” (Limber & Small, 2003, p. 445) indicates there might be social and political practices at play. It is often these social and political practices that begin to change the social discourse around an “identified” problem (Walton, 2010, p. 145), and it is often the infusion of media and its consumers that perpetuates these newly identified social issues (Walton, 2010). Walton (2010) wrote, “Sensationalist journalism facilitates the proliferation of fear about bullying in schools,
but such accounts happen within, are part of, and contribute to social regularities that arrange the ‘seeing’ of particular social problems” (p. 146). It is this “seeing” (Walton, 2010, p. 146), arguably, a lifting of the veil, that has caused bullying to go through both historical and ideological changes. In order to illuminate this idea, it is important to understand the history of bullying that has most recently led to the current barrage of policies that are being implemented around the topic.

The term bullying is attributed to the noted Norwegian researcher, Daniel Olweus, and his groundbreaking research on bullying (Olweus, 1978, 1993, 2001; Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Espelage and Swearer (2003) wrote:

School bullying among children and adolescents has been the focus of many international studies over the last 30 years. In his seminal research, Norwegian scholar Daniel Olweus (1972) coined bullying as “mobbing,” and defined it as an individual or a group of individuals harassing, teasing, or pestering another person. However, it was not until 1982 that school officials in Norway turned their attention to school bullying, and did so only after three 14-year-old boys committed suicide as a result of extreme harassment from classmates (Olweus, 1993). (p. 363)

Shortly after Norwegian authorities noted the tragedies involved in the multiple bullycides, a new national awareness campaign surrounding the issues involved in bullying began to gain popularity in Norway and enter into the international public discourse (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Walton, 2005). Walton (2005) illustrated this transition from bullying as a “rite of passage” (Limber & Small, 2003, p. 445) to “a national campaign against bullying/victim problems” (Walton, 2005, p. 93). It is a historical and ideological transformation of making the once seemingly socially acceptable, invisible issue of bullying to one of visibility needing to be addressed as a matter of social concern and identified deviant, anti-social behavior (Walton, 2005). Walton (2005) stated:

Olweus described the Norway suicides as resulting in a “nationwide campaign against bully/victim problems” (p. 2); in light of the triple suicide, bullying evidently could no longer be trivialized as merely incidental or as just part of growing up. Undoubtedly,
some people may continue to espouse these views, but my sense is that they are increasingly in the minority in light of the movement, particularly in Western nations, to reduce or eliminate bullying in schools. Journalists continually highlight incidents—particularly the tragic, criminal, or otherwise sensational ones—for public consumption. (p. 93)

It is this combination of Norway’s newfound “nationwide campaign against bully/victim problems” (p. 93) and the subsequent increasing journalistic interest that is seemingly feeding “public consumption” (p. 93) that makes researchers increasingly suspicious of the motives for highlighting the bullycides in Norway and the current overwhelming push to put bullying in the current spotlight of policy dialogue (Walton, 2005). For example, what if the new policies being written and implemented to help enforce “safe schools” have little to do with student safety and have more to do with paying policy writers, investing in anti-bullying programs, earning salaries for specialists, controlling the social dominant discourse, and helping to feed the “public consumption?” (Walton, 2005, p. 93).

Soon, this newfound international dialogue on bullying enters into the social discourse, due, in part, to increasing concerns over “safe schools” as a result of increasing school violence, particularly in light of the social reaction to school shootings and increased media reports of bullying in schools in the United States (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong et al., 2003; ISBE, 2011; Walton, 2005, 2010). Furlong et al. (2003) wrote:

Similarly, in response to American school shooting tragedies (many of the school shooters were suicidal), educators and policy makers began to take action (e.g., California Governor’s School Violence Task Force, 2000). After years of neglecting the bullying phenomenon, beginning in 1998, states began to pass laws using the term “bullying.” (p. 462)

Most of the laws addressing bullying among school-aged children have been passed during the past 10 years (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong et al., 2003; ISBE, 2011; Walton, 2005, 2010). Many were initiated in response to the public’s outcry to do “something” (Walton, 2005, p. 113) out of concern over the consequences of bullying for both those involved in bullying
behavior and victims of the bullying (Limber & Small, 2003; Walton, 2005, 2010). This seems to add to the increased societal pressures to implement the ethic of justice in the bullying debate.

Limber and Small (2003) added their perspective:

Most have gone into effect since 2001, and likely were motivated, at least in part, by tragic shootings at several U.S. high schools in the late 1990s and subsequent reports (Vossekuill, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002) that many perpetrators of school schools had felt persecuted, bullied, or threatened by their peers. (p. 446)

Walton (2005) framed the growth of these policies in a neoliberal society by saying:

Utilitarian policies and programs have social and political currency, especially given that the overwhelming message from parents, educators, and researchers is that “something” must be done about the problem of bullying in school. Framed as a particular kind of violence perpetrated by certain students against their peers, who could disagree? My argument is not against such utility, only that address broader issues of violence is limited by the very ways that bullying is conceptualized and by programs and policies that are anchored by such conceptualizations. A focus on statistics, characteristics, psychological profiles, and measurable events, and the like, forms the constitution of public relations and leaves unclear and unconsidered the ways in which bullying is a manifestation of larger power relations in society. (p. 113)

In addition to increasing pressure for states to pass new anti-bullying and “safe school” laws, there seemed to be an increasing focus on the causalities of the increasing violence, which included setting up task forces, hiring specialists, implementing policies and plans in schools to help address violence in schools and “protect” children, and increasing research efforts to assess the best practices for anti-bullying programming in schools (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong et al., 2003; ISBE, 2011; Walton, 2005, 2010). Walton (2010) wrote:

Filtered through a grid of social regularities, the notion of bullying is transformed from being evidence of social pathology enacted behaviorally and requiring intervention or remediation, to being a problem constructed to maintain dominant social order by delineating and labeling particular children, the “bad” ones, as bullies, and other particular children as “victims.” Discourse on bullying implicitly labels children as “good” or “bad.” Bullying thus emerges as a problem related to a broader moral panic about youth violence, that youth would enact violence of various sorts upon peers, teachers, and members of society unless they are prevented from doing so. In discourse on bullying, this represents how social problems are presented as “givens.” (p. 141)
All of these additional “givens” (Walton, 2010, p. 141) needed services, programs, and policies, which begins to draw into question the potential underlying motives behind the new policies being implemented in the sake of ensuring “safer schools.” One is left to ask: Are these policies being created to protect students or make money by feeding public demand? Who, ultimately, pays for it? Walton (2005) wrote, “Simply put, headlines about school violence, including bullying, sell newspapers. And bullying as a research specialization forms the basis for entire careers” (p. 92).

Research indicates there are significant historical and ideological forces at play in many of the anti-bullying “safe school” policies, some of which might also relate to issues in the PSVA (Craig et al., 2008; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong et al., 2003; Rigby, 2006; Tharinger, 2008; Walton, 2005, 2010). Some of these historical and ideological forces include the role of the dominant narrative of masculinity in society (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994) and how that role is reinforced over time through acts of bullying and “gay-baiting” (Tharinger, 2008, p. 223), the need to maintain and control socially accepted norms in a neoliberal society (Craig et al., 2008; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong et al., 2003; Tharinger, 2008; Walton, 2005, 2010), and, arguably, reinforce the “might is right” (Rigby, 2006, p. 179) policies of much of the Western world (Rigby, 2006). Walton (2005) wrote:

The current educational environment throughout North America that emphasizes academic achievement measured through standardized curriculum and testing, does not attend to the various needs and interests of diverse student populations. Instead, it imposes a hierarchical arrangement of students and rewards only those who, quite literally, make the grade. Such environments, combined with varieties of social oppression, and with the North American cultural obsession with might-makes-right, leave little wonder that the observation that “bullying [is] widespread” would make front-page news. (p. 114)

If these same underlying historical and ideological forces are indeed interwoven in the PSVA (2010), it begins to change the policy’s focus from keeping students safe in school to reinforcing
and maintaining social order, even on a global scale (Craig et al., 2008; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong et al., 2003; Tharinger, 2008; Walton, 2005, 2010). According to a recent Illinois School Board of Education [ISBE] (2011) memorandum, the implementation of Illinois’s PSVA was done so with the intention to ensure:

Education stakeholders in Illinois commit to engaging in overall school transformation in order to create ideal conditions for development and learning. We propose that schools do this through a process of data driven decision making and through the development of district- or school-wide bullying and school violence prevention policy and plans. (p. 3)

As with most anti-bullying or safe schools bills, this act begins by working to address the needs of the individual students through neoliberal “data driven decision making” (ISBE, 2011, p. 3) and does not address the deeper dominant social systems that might be at play that perpetuate bullying behavior in society (Craig et al., 2008; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Furlong et al., 2003; Tharinger, 2008; Walton, 2005, 2010).

Walton (2005) wrote, “A preoccupation with the role of individuals, combined with a simplistic and problematic understanding of power, does not address the ways in which social oppression gives rise to, and is threaded throughout, bullying moments and episodes” (p. 112). It is this focus on “students” (p. 3) and not on understanding the social power dynamic that draws into question the possible limitations of this policy. Walton continued, “Conceptualizations of bullying that are rooted in empirical approaches do not consider political, historical, cultural, discursive, and ideological threads that, woven together, make up the construct that is now widely known as bullying” (p. 112). It is this lack of consideration for the wider elements of social power that causes concern. Walton stated, “Bullying- more than merely an empirical matter- is a social and political construction, rooted in ideological relations of power” (p. 113). It is these “relations of power” (Walton, 2005, p. 113) that echo so many of the Foucauldian lessons about power that I have already learned throughout this Disability and Equity in
Education (DEE) journey, such as the symbolic relationship between power and knowledge, that power is exercised and not possessed, and that power circulates through society and institutions in a historical context (Gabel, 2008).

Many of these anti-bullying laws look to focus the social discourse to help define what constitutes bullying (Walton, 2005, 2010). Walton (2010) wrote, “The social regularities do not determine social problems as though they exist outside of discourse, but instead set the conditions under which the problem is constructed and by which practices related to the problem emerge (p. 142). The PSVA (2010) seems to be no different:

Bullying on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, military status, sexual orientation, gender-related identity or expression, unfavorable discharge from military service, association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics, or any other distinguishing characteristic is prohibited in all school districts and non-public, non-sectarian elementary and secondary schools. (p. 1)

Each one of these categories could be written about at length, but the common element is that the policy continues to identify and label “individuals” as the focus, as opposed to addressing the multitude of “social and political spheres” at play (PSVA, 2010). Walton (2010) argued that this continuing focus on individual behavior allows bullying to deflect and distract the power dynamics that are truly at play. Walton wrote:

Gender, race, and class are some constructs of social difference by which people are categorized, labeled, and Othered. These are dimensions and intersections of social inequalities rather than mere constructs of celebratory “diversity.” Consequences of such practices of Othering are that some students are attributed social privilege, whereas others are not. Bullying is expressed in ways that reflect constructs of difference. Incidents that might be classified as bullying are certainly behavioral, but they also constitute dynamics of difference that circulate throughout broader social and political spheres, filtered down and expressed in schoolyard interactions. (p. 141)

It is this need to define bullying in greater detail, the desire to identify those who have the power to define the terms used in this policy, and a focus to further inquire about the possible
social/political motives behind the words being used in this policy that make me want to further analyze Illinois’s PSVA. Walton (2010) wrote:

Foucault believed that discursive practices set parameters around that which can be talked about by legitimating only certain agents of knowledge and sites of knowledge production, and not others. Such practices are normalized through repetition and legitimization, and are embodied in patterns of general behavior, modes of knowledge transmission and diffusion, technical processes, and institutional practices such as policy and regulation (Foucault, 1977). (p. 137)

The PSVA seems to contextualize bullying and identify certain people as “problems” (e.g., bullies or gang members; PSVA, 2010), and offers neoliberal measurable “solutions” (e.g., task force creation and the development of instructional materials and teacher training; PSVA, 2010). Walton continued, “What is (and who are) identified as the ‘problem’ is shaped through discourse, by which I mean the definitional aspects of bullying that not only constrain understanding of the problem but also place limitations on the practices of policies to address bullying” (p. 135). Walton (2010) explained:

The given problem of bullying carries social and political weight. Neoconservative ideology, hearkening a return to the good ol’ days that never really were, further fuels law and order initiatives in schools such as zero tolerance policies. Governmentality and professionalization, then, are important regularities that shape how dominant conceptualizations of bullying have become normalized in public discourse, academic research, and educational policy. They combine to tidy up messy realities, or at least pretend to. (p. 141)

It is this desire to “tidy up messy realities” (Walton, 2010, p. 141) that prevents most policies from going beyond addressing the individual acts and revealing the magnitude of the social and political powers at play. Arguably, it is this desire that has led to the creation of policies such as Illinois’s PSVA. Walton (2010) wrote:

Bullying as a notion evolved into public discourse as an effect of interests of those in positions of authority to label and disseminate knowledge. Reconceptualized, bullying can be seen as a discursive realm that has emerged as a social problem within contexts of social politics and educational administration. Politically, pressure from journalists and parents compel administrators to adopt policies, typically in the form of zero tolerance, on safe schools to address bullying. Such contexts are important factors that explain why
bullying has become a source of social anxiety and policy regulation; they illuminate historical events that have channeled the topic of bullying to a position of high profile within discussions about problems in schools. (p. 146)

Some research supports that there might be a link between bullying behavior on the individual level and the types of behaviors that are seemingly permitted in the international arena (Rigby, 2006). Rigby (2006) wrote, “Understanding the nature of bullying in school can assist in understanding aggression between nations . . . It is suggested that school-based anti-bullying programs can have important implication for promoting world peace” (p. 175). Though Rigby (2006) made it clear that there is not likely a direct correlation between the bullying occurring in the classroom and that which might occur between nations by stating the term bullying “is sometimes applied to aggressive action undertaken by a nation as well as to schoolchildren . . . The most obvious objection to equating nations and school children is that, unlike a child, a nation is a collectivity” (p. 176), it is suggested that dominance and aggression play roles in both arenas (Rigby, 2006). Rigby (2006) commented:

The threat to world peace had often been attributed to human aggressiveness . . . “Aggression” is thus seen as the enemy. Arguably then, reduce the human tendency towards aggression and the prospects of peace and security are correspondingly enhanced. (p. 176)

Rigby (2006) discussed seven ways in which bullying between nations is similar to school bullying by saying:

(1) An individual of group of children want to hurt someone or put them under pressure . . . (2) Aversive means are deliberately employed to target an individual or group . . . (3) The would-be aggressor(s) are deemed to be more powerful than the selected target . . . (4) The action taken is not justified or provoked . . . (5) It is systematic and typically repeated . . . (6) Those targeted feel oppressed . . . (7) Perpetrators enjoy feelings of domination. (p. 181)

Many of these similarities between nations and school bullying are characteristics that are often projected by the Western world in their international political agenda (Rigby, 2006). Rigby (2006) contended that in a world that justifies actions such as, “President George W. Bush was
widely quoted as describing the Iraq leader as ‘the guy who tried to kill my dad’” (p. 179), “the bullying of prisoners at Abu Ghraib” (p. 180), or “Hitler performing a dance of delight over the surrender of Paris in 1941” (p. 181), there might be more lessons learned about the true nature of bullying, dominance, and aggression in the socially defined discursive space of school and the playground than the myopic concerns that many of the anti-bullying policies often lead us to believe. It is this belief that “might is right” (Rigby, 2006, p. 179) that often extends beyond schoolyard aggression and into the larger world spotlight. Rigby (2006) stated, “Colonization by powerful nations of parts of the world where resistance could readily be overcome was seen as justified . . . suggesting that ‘might is right’ is held by some schoolchildren and sometimes by leaders of nations” (p. 179). Rigby (2006) contended that children often mimic what they learn:

Arguably, when children have been able to satisfy their social needs without recourse to dominating others, they will develop into adults who are less inclined to initiate or support aggressive and bullying policies and actions. When children have repeatedly bullied other children at school, they are more likely to support use of aggression elsewhere. This supposition is consistent with what is known about the social development of students who have been identified as bullies at school (Olweus, 1993; Farrington, 1994). (p. 182)

Whether Illinois’s PSVA truly has benefitted those students who are seemingly most vulnerable to the consequences of bullying behavior, or if it is simply just another policy providing the social/political “smoke and mirrors” implementation of the ethic of justice in response to a sensationalistic media and political climate that demands that our dominant social powers “do something” to address the issues (Walton, 2005, p. 113) and deflects attention from the historical and ideological forces that work to reinforce and maintain social order, even on a global scale (Rigby, 2006), remains to be seen, particularly in light of current policy shifts and trends and the passage of Illinois Senate Bill 100, Senate Bill 2793, and HB2663. As in the case of bullying, it is imperative that we, as a society, particularly with a feminist disability studies perspective, begin to recognize the lessons we may be unwittingly teaching our children about
how to treat others, or ultimately suffer the consequences of our own ignorance and complacency. Rigby (2006) concluded:

> Our leaders went to school. What did they learn? What is expected of them by a population of millions that also went to school? The more democratic the regime, the more the leaders must follow. It has been suggested that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. Could it be that world peace be won in the classrooms and playgrounds where children learn not to bully? (p. 183)

**The Circle of Courage and the Navajo Peacemaking Process**

The growing anti-bullying legislation and use of the ethic of justice motivated a further exploration of the literature for alternative solutions by which to address the issues that surround and, arguably, promote bullying-type behavior. Research indicates the majority of the laws focus on the ethic of justice, but there are a few anti-bullying programs that implement programming from an ethics of care approach. One such program is “The Circle of Courage” approach (Brendtro et al., 2005). The Circle of Courage approach is a “philosophy that emerged from research on how Native American cultures reared respectful, responsible children without resorting to coercive discipline” (Brokenleg, 2005, p. 8). Drawing upon Lakota culture, the Circle of Courage is placed:

> In the image of a medicine wheel, a Lakota symbol for wholeness. This image gave is an icon to express the fundamental human needs of all youth- to be significant, capable, powerful, and virtuous and how these needs are met by the experiences of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. (Brokenleg, 2005, p. 9)

Benson (1997) wrote, “In tribal and kinship cultures, natural social relationships insured that their growth needs would be met. But in go-it-alone modern society, the youth development infrastructure has collapsed” (p. 130).

The powerful impact of Circle of Courage programs indicates they potentially offer an effective perspective in addressing the issues of bullying from an ethics of care focus. Brendtro et al. (2005) wrote:
The Circle of Courage captures what Wozner (1985) called the “unifying theme” which exists in powerful reclaiming environments. The Circle focuses attention on the critical factors by providing a big picture of “gestalt” of what all children need (Meyen, Bergeson, & Whelan, 1998). By highlighting universal goals of intervention, it transcends differences in cultures, theories and program models. The Circle of Courage provides an anchor of enduring certainty in a chaotic post-modern culture (Kauffman, 2000). (p. 134)

Interestingly enough, Edmondson and Zeman (2011) conducted an analysis of “state-levels school bully laws in the context of the four constructs of the Circle of Courage Model” (p. 35). Not surprisingly, based on the overwhelming ethic of justice focus of many of these laws, Edmondson and Zeman (2011) indicated:

Few states incorporated all the components of this model into public school laws . . . the most frequently incorporated element was independence . . . Most states relied exclusively on coercive laws, such as those authorizing expulsion or criminal indictments for bullying conduct, they have induced schools to adopt policies proven ineffective in reducing bullying. (p. 37)

Drawing on the works and research of the Circle of Courage (Brendtro et al., 2005) and driven to further study cultures that traditionally look beyond the ethic of justice and embrace the ethics of care, I was fascinated by a specific types of practice used by the Navajo (Dine) people, known as the Navajo Peacemaker process, which highlights the differences between the diverse cultural legal systems of the often adversarial “vertical justice” (Yazzie, 1992, p. 2) of the Anglo-European legal system and that of the “horizontal” justice of the Navajo system. Yazzie (1992) wrote:

A “vertical” system of justice is one which relies upon hierarchies and power . . . The Anglo-European justice system uses rank, and coercive power which goes with rank, to address conflicts. Power is the active element in the process . . . The goal of the vertical or adversarial law is to punish wrongdoers and teach them a lesson. (p. 2)

We can see a great deal of this type of “vertical” system of justice being played out in punitive remedies that laws and schools districts are relying upon to help address the bullying epidemic (ISBE, 2011; Walton, 2005, 2010). (We are slowly beginning to witness the implementation of
horizontal justice approaches, as institutional practices begin to make shifts towards RJ practices. It is also important to note that the “adjudication” (Yazzie, 1992, p. 2) process becomes increasingly important in the “vertical” system of justice. Yazzie (1992) elaborated:

Adjudication makes one party the “bad guy” and the other “the good guy;” one of them is “wrong” and the other is “right.” The vertical justice system is so concerned with winning and losing that when parties come to the end of the case, little or nothing is done to solve the underlying problems which caused the dispute in the first place . . . The needs and feelings of the victims are ignored, and as a result no real justice is done. (p. 2)

Research indicates that in the case of bullying, the growing need to make one party the “bad guy,” who is “wrong” in thoughts, words, and actions (Yazzie, 1992, p. 2), usually the bully, and the other the “good guy,” who is “right,” usually the one who is being bullied, is a growing reflection of the laws that are currently being implemented to address the bullying epidemic (Walton, 2005, 2010). It begs to question, if “the needs and feelings of the victims are ignored,” where is the “real justice” in the crime and punishment, adjudication driven, vertical justice system? (Yazzie, 1992, p. 2).

According to Yazzie (1992), “The horizontal justice model uses a horizontal line to portray equality: no person is above another” (p. 3). In a horizontal system, everyone is thought to be in a “circle” (p. 3), whereby, as Yazzie (1992) described:

There is no right or left, nor is there a beginning or an end; every point (or person) on the line of a circle looks to the same center as the focus. The circle is the symbol of Navajo justice because it is perfect, unbroken, and a simile of unity and oneness. It conveys the image of people gathering together for discussion. (p. 3)

Researchers describe that it is within this Navajo horizontal system of justice, within the community circle, where neither fault nor blame is placed, where no one is viewed as “bad/good” or “wrong/right” (Yazzie, 1992, p. 2), but rather where emotions can be expressed and where feelings can be voiced, that healing can be allowed to begin (Bluehouse & Zion, 1993; Gross, 1999; Yazzie, 1992; Zion, 1998).
As a researcher, I further investigated the idea of nurturing a culture that reveres healing as opposed to harming, that holds emotions and feelings over punishment and shame, and offers the opportunity to address the ever-increasing bullying epidemic as an issue that affects all of society, not just the individual being bullied. The answers to the bullying epidemic might require a critical look at the society in which we live, the U.S. legal system that dictates how we should act, and through a historical context of the social role bullying has played in the United States.

I anticipated this research journey would be a starting place for such inquiries and offer a historical foundation to this qualitative phenomenological study to investigate these changes from educators’ perspectives through in-depth interviews of how RJ practices are currently being experienced, the “lived experience” (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Patton, 2002; an Manen, 1990, 1997, 2007) in the classroom setting through a feminist disability lens and, possibly, offering an alternative approach to addressing, and arguably healing, America’s bullying “epidemic.”

Current research revealed the promising potential of the Navajo Peacemaking process and similar restorative practices in addressing the bullying “epidemic” facing U.S. schools (Bluehouse & Zion, 1993; Brown, 2002; Gross, 1999; Pinto, 2000; Sullivan, 2002; Yazzie, 1992; Zion, 1998). There is a certain irony that the solutions to the epidemic of bullying in U.S. schools may actually be found within the healing traditions of the Navajo Peacemaking process, a culture that has been historically marginalized and oppressed by the American culture and people. In the end, it may be the bullied who actually offer the bully the opportunity to learn, to grow, and, ultimately, to help heal.

The Ethics of Care

By addressing the current topic of bullying through the ethic of justice and the ethics of care perspectives, it can be argued that bullying, at its fundamental level, is about much larger
institutions’ practices, power, patriarchy, and, ultimately, how much we value (or do not) inclusion as a society (Freire, 2005; Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; hooks, 1994, 2003; Noddings, 1984). The ethics of care is an issue of vital importance to feminist disability studies scholars because the underlying themes are the devaluation of and subjection of women (and others, particularly those with disabilities) in society, where the private is deemed relegated to the home and the public sphere continues to be controlled by laws, hierarchical structures, violence, and men (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994). One might argue that this issue stretches well beyond the bullying topic and involves reproductive rights (i.e., genetic testing and abortion), labor rights (i.e., fair and equal pay for traditionally viewed “caring” work such as childcare, eldercare, nursing, and housework), political rights (i.e., the personal is political, emotions and caring have their place in the political sphere), legal rights (i.e., you cannot effectively legislate all human behavior), human rights (i.e., an issue of how we treat others and who is include/excluded in those discussions), and moral rights (i.e., bullying and how we deal with it is, ultimately, a moral issue of what role “caring” will play in our cultural outlook as to how it is acceptable to treat others; Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994). It is the caring issue that I have honed as my main focus, as it is hypothesized that the solutions to the current bullying “epidemic” cannot be found in legislation or the ethic of justice, as these approaches only work to address the bully and the victim but do nothing to help change the underlying issues that perpetuate bullying behavior or the systems and institutional practices at work (Freire, 2005; Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; hooks, 1994, 2003; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994). Ultimately, we need to care and increase the importance of caring in our dominant social discourse (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994). As opposed to simply working to “prevent” bullying or to increase legislation to promote “safe schools,” let us work to
reframe conversations around bullying toward “promoting” community cultures based on the ethics of care, where the community culture is based on a set of ideals surrounding solidarity, care, and relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994) and demands the respectful and full inclusion of all, which is essential to disabilities studies and positively affects people of all abilities (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994). Tronto (1994) illustrated:

Care’s absence from our core social and political values reflects many choices our society has made about what to honor. These choices, starting as far away as our conceptions of moral boundaries, operate to exclude the activities and concerns of care from a central place. Through that exclusion, those who are powerful are able to demand that others care for them, and they have been able to maintain their positions of power and privilege. To recognize the value of care calls into question the structure of values in our society. Care is not a parochial concern of women, a type of secondary moral question, or the work of the least well off in society. Care is a central concern of human life. It is time that we begin to change our political and social institutions to reflect this truth. (p. 180)

Research indicates we need to cease working within deficit models (i.e., the bully is wrong) and begin to draw upon positive, asset-based models (i.e., we have a strong community that refuses to exclude anyone) if we are truly attempting to either address or to find solutions to the bullying issue (Brokenleg, 2005). In order to address the underlying root causes of bullying, we must look to programs such as Circle of Courage or practices such as the Navajo Peacemaker process as ways to invest in and build bio-ecological, community-based solutions and to reinforce the importance of the value of caring in our communities (Bluehouse & Zion, 1993; Brendtro et al., 2005; Gross, 1999; Pinto, 2000; Yazzie, 1992; Zion, 1998). It is only by creating communities where we value caring for all and work to begin to dismantle the importance of the ethic of justice in addressing bullying that the institutional practices behind bullying can be fully addressed. This dissertation research asked, “Do we truly want to end bullying in America? Do we really want everyone to be included?” Ultimately, the question is, “Is there a better way to address issues of systemic violence (e.g., bullying)?” “Do we really care?” The answers are
difficult to find. Research seems to indicate bullying is a symptom of a society that embraces (perpetuates?) institutional practices of exclusion and the subjection of people at local, community, national, and international levels (Foucault, 1973; Freire, 2005; Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; hooks, 1994, 2003; Noddings, 1984; Ruddick, 1989, 1992; Stiker, 1999; Tronto, 1994; Winzer, 1993).

Inclusion

Critically researching the topic of bullying ultimately leads one to question many of the institutional practices we hold sacred when living in a democracy (i.e., inclusion; Allen, 2005). Allen (2005) wrote:

Inclusion starts with the premise that an individual has a right to belong to society and its institutions, which therefore implies that others have obligations to ensure that this happens. In particular, inclusion necessitates the removal of barriers that may prevent individuals from belonging. These barriers may deny individuals access to buildings or material or cultural resources, or may convey messages to individuals according to which they do not really belong. Removing these barriers implies major structural and attitudinal changes and a fundamental shift away from the deficit-oriented thinking that has for so long driven educational practices. (p. 282)

How do we allow some people to be included and others excluded? Who decides? These are the questions that are inspired by landmark inclusion educators and researchers who continue push for positive changes within our classrooms, require us as educators to do more for all of our students, promote inclusion both in and outside of the classroom setting, and continue to remind us of the vital importance that no student is ever left behind (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Sapon-Shevin, 2007; Schwarz, 2006; Schwarz & Kluth, 2007; Villa & Thousand, 2005). As educators, we play an invaluable role in supporting students and promoting inclusion. The role of education plays a vital role in answering this question and creating these culturally held beliefs. As illustrated by Barton and Armstrong (2001):

In proposing the significance of inclusively in relation to education, it is essential that the values, priorities, and desired outcomes informing existing policy and practice are
carefully identified and critically examined. This examination will also provide us with some insights into the nature of exclusion within educational systems. The assumptions influencing our perspective in relation to this task include, first, that education must not be viewed in a vacuum. Educational institutions play a major role in social and cultural reproduction . . . Second, educational issues are contentious and thus involve struggles between different interest groups over purposes, meanings, and functions in relation to education . . . Finally, educational decision making is fundamentally political in that, for example, it involves governments making choices about resource allocation supported by a vision of desirable outcomes and of wider concerns such as the relationship between the individual and society. (p. 694)

**Bronfenbrenner: The Importance of Systems**

As I continued to apply Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) ecological systems theory to the topics surrounding bullying, it became increasing apparent that bullying cannot be addressed through a single intervention focused on the individual (i.e., the bully or those being bullied). In order to be effective, interventions must address the entire ecological system and arguably the institutional practices in which it is occurring. This is not only an issue of bullying, but encompasses a larger paradigm of feminist disabilities studies, which includes those who have been historically oppressed, subjugated, and excluded by these institutional practices (Foucault, 1973; Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Ruddick, 1989, 1992; Stiker, 1999; Tronto, 1994; Winzer, 1993). This brings into question the much larger issues of how we value inclusion in society, how we embrace human rights, and how we want our democracy to be run. Olweus (2001) wrote, “It is a fundamental democratic or human right for a child to feel safe in school and to be spared the oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation implied in peer victimization or bullying” (pp. 11-12). It is up to us, as educators, to do the work that is necessary to implement change, to create inclusive environments for all, and to promote an ethics of care, where all children “feel safe” (Olweus, 2001, p. 11). This cannot be created through the implementation of any law, policy, or legislation. If we are unwilling to critically look at the institutional practices at play and make the invisible, visible for others to see, then, ultimately, we have no one else to
blame but ourselves for continuing to perpetuate the bullying “epidemic” in the United States (Foucault, 1973). I, for one, cannot and will not continue to live happily, joyful, quietly, and complacently with the knowledge that even one child may be “locked away” to suffer exclusion, subjection, neglect, violence, and abuse by the institutional practices of our own self-created Omelas (Le Guin, 1973). It is time that the ethics of care is heard and its contribution to the dismantling of the institutional practices that contribute to bullying is seen (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Ruddick, 1989, 1992; Tronto, 1994). It is time to care.

Restorative Justice Practices

It imperative to understand the interweaving of themes such as ecological systems theory as it pertains to educational institutions, the historical relevance of systemic violence (e.g., progression of the bullying epidemic) and its commonalities with people with disabilities, and to further illustrate the importance of inclusion from a feminist disabilities studies perspective by highlighting the moral lens of the ethics of care. By addressing the current topic of bullying through the ethic of justice and the ethics of care perspectives, it can be argued that the concepts surrounding bullying, at its fundamental level, are about much larger institutions’ practices, power, patriarchy, and, ultimately, how much we value (or do not) inclusion as a society (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984). As educational and social policies are currently undergoing an historical shift from punitive laws and policies surrounding creating “safer schools,” more room is being created for changing the social discourse surrounding RJ practices in educational settings. Illinois has been slower to respond to some of these policy shifts. New laws such as Illinois Senate Bill 100, Senate Bill 2793, and House Bill 2663 have worked toward eliminating many of the previous zero tolerance practices. Yet, many educators, administrators,
and policy advocates often do not know how to define RJ practices. So, what do we mean when we talk about RJ practices? According to Mullet (2014):

Restorative justice, as empathy-based philosophy gaining ground in juvenile justice initiative, offers a fresh perspective on school discipline. By focusing on the harm done to relationships, restorative justice practitioners view discipline as an opportunity to understand the relational nature of misbehavior, mend relationships, and make restitution. (p. 157)

Historically, research shows school discipline has taken a punitive, zero tolerance approach that seemed to replicate the larger practices found in the criminal justice system (Mullet, 2014; Van Ness & Strong, 2015). It is also important to note that traditional criminal justice models remove the victim of the crime from the judicial process, often entirely excluding him or her from the court process and leaving little, if any, opportunity to be included in the judicial proceedings (Van Ness & Strong, 2015). Research demonstrates the historical institutional practices within the “pain-for-pain” judicial system “can actually increase anger and resentment that can trigger future harm, yet we act to get even, in the name of ‘correction’” (Mullet, 2014, p. 157; see also Bandura, 1977). This type of “increased anger and resentment” (Mullet, 2014, p. 157) has often been seen as foundational tinder for the “school-to-prison” pipeline (Brantley, 2017), perpetuated by an “alarming national trend of punishing and criminalizing our youth instead of educating and nurturing them” (Davis, 2014, p. 39). Van Ness and Strong (2015) defined restorative justice as “a theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused or revealed by criminal behavior. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that include all stakeholders” (p. 44).

As RJ practices make the move from the institutional practices of the criminal justice system into schools, it is important to understand some of the changes that have taken place. Ashley and Burke (2009) highlighted, “Inclusion in the disciplinary process is the basic tenet of restorative justice . . . Restorative disciplinary practices within schools are more supportive, inclusive, and educational than other approaches” (p. 11). Research indicates schools have
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

varying degrees of implementation of such restorative practices (Ashley & Burke, 2009), but “good restorative practices in schools” (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 12) often include the following:

- Fostering awareness of how all have been affected by behavior and encouraging expression of feelings.
- Avoiding scolding or lecturing. Allowing individuals to share with each other.
- Actively involving students.
- Accepting ambiguity. Fault and responsibility may be unclear.
- Separating the deed from the doer, recognize students’ worth, and disapprove of their wrongdoing.
- Seeing every instance of wrongdoing and conflict as an opportunity for learning. Turn negative incidents into constructive ones by building empathy and a sense of community. (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 12)

There are seemingly numerous RJ practices and programs being implemented in schools. Some of these include restorative discussions, circles, peer jury, and mediation and conferencing. Below is a comparison of some of the practices and programs that are currently being implemented in schools throughout Illinois and the rest of the United States:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restorative Justice Practices</th>
<th>Involves:</th>
<th>Responds to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Restorative discussions**  | Peer mentors  
Teachers and other school staff  
Members of the school community | Minor student worries  
Minor disruptions  
Need to debrief and discuss issues  
Challenging situations  
Troubled parents  
Disruptions  
Interpersonal conflicts |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Restorative Justice Programs</strong></th>
<th>Involves:</th>
<th>Responds to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Circles**  | Class groups  
School council  
Whole staff | Class issues/harm within class |
| **Peer Jury**  | Peer jurors  
Teachers and other school staff  
Restorative justice coordinator | Student conflicts  
Staff conflicts  
Staff-student conflicts  
Class issues/harm within class |
| **Mediation & conferencing**  | Peer mediators  
Teachers and other school staff  
Trained facilitators  
Family members | Student conflicts  
Staff conflicts  
Staff-student conflicts  
Staff-parent conflicts  
Concerns about a student or behavior |
| **** | **** | **Minor issues involving harm caused in a group of students**  
**Minor issues involving harm/disruption in a group of students**  
**Issues needing parental involvement**  
**Exclusion issues** |

*Figure 5. Restorative Justice Practices Versus Restorative Justice Programs (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 17).*

Each of these RJ practices (e.g., restorative discussions) and programs (e.g., circles, peer jury, and mediation & conferencing) are often implemented at differing levels in schools that use these practices. They are often not consistently used in the same manner or degree in each school. For this reason, each school system involved in the current study had a deeper definition/explanation...
for the practices being implemented in its particular educational setting and richer descriptions of the practices are elaborated in greater detail later in the findings.

In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology of this dissertation research study, present the theoretical framework and methods of inquiry, and further delve into my qualitative phenomenological study of educators’ perceptions of RJ, care, inclusion, and disability by exploring several questions. First, what are teachers’ perceptions of RJ practices? What is their “lived experience” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) with these RJ practices? How are educators making sense of RJ practices? What are the implications for students with disabilities?
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

If I were to tell you where my greatest feeling, my universal feeling, the bliss of my earthly existence has been, I would have to confess: It has always, here and there, Been in this kind of in-seeing, in the indescribably swift, deep, timeless moments Of this divine seeing in the heart of things. (Rilke, p. 77, 1987)

This chapter contains a focus on the theoretical framework and methods of inquiry that guided this qualitative phenomenological study of the current RJ practices being implemented in educational settings in Illinois, how these practices affect people with diverse abilities both in and out of the classroom setting, and to gain a greater appreciation of the unexplored educators’ perceptions. Specifically, in my phenomenological research I sought to understand and to explore several questions: What are teachers’ perceptions of RJ practices? What is their “lived experience” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) with these practices? How are educators making sense of RJ practices? What are the implications for students with disabilities? Van Manen (2007) wrote:

Phenomenology is a project of sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence—sober, in the sense that reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxication. But, phenomenology us also a project that is driven by fascination: being swept up in a spell of wonder, a fascination with meaning. (p. 12)

It was in this opportunity to be “swept up in a spell or wonder, a fascination with meaning” (van Manen, 2007, p. 12) that I initially proposed this research with the sincere desire and genuine curiosity to learn more about what the “lived experience” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) had to offer those within the field of disability studies in education.

Phenomenology “is an inductive qualitative research tradition rooted in the 20th century philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl (descriptive) and Martin Heidegger (interpretive)” (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). Though Husserl “believed that phenomenology suspended all suppositions, was related to consciousness, and was based on the meaning of the individual’s experience”
(Reiners, 2012, p. 1), Heidegger “broadened hermeneutics by studying the concept of being in the world rather than knowing the world” (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). One of the main tenets of phenomenological research is the use of bracketing (or epoché), “The scientific process in which a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance his or her presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1430).

For the sake of this dissertation research study and in remaining true to my feminist disability studies authenticity, it is important to note that my research followed Heidegger’s legacy, where:

Hermeneutics moves beyond the descriptions or core concepts of the experience and seeks meanings that are embedded in everyday occurrences. Thus, the critical question for Heidegger was: What is being? Heidegger, who was interested in interpreting and describing human experience, believed that bracketing was not warranted because hermeneutic presumed prior understanding. (Reiners, 2012, p. 2)

Reiners (2012) elaborated, “Heidegger believed it was impossible to negate our experiences related to the phenomenon under study, for he believed personal awareness was intrinsic to phenomenological research” (p. 2). Staying rooted in my feminist disability foundations, I concur with Lester (1999), who stated:

Feminist researchers refute the possibility of starting without preconceptions or bias, and emphasizes the importance of making clear how interpretations and meanings have been placed on findings, as well as making the research visible in the “frame” of the research as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer. (p. 1)

For the framing of my dissertation research study, I used hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology, whereby “the research question asks for the meaning of the phenomenon and the researcher does not bracket their biases and prior engagement with the questions under study” (Reiners, 2012, p. 2). Taking this one step further, my research was deeply embedded in hermeneutic phenomenology. According to Finlay (2009):

Any understandings we gain, they say, are founded on our experience and depend on our perspective. These understandings necessarily involve interpretation. For hermeneutic phenomenologists, meanings can never be fixed—they are always emergent, contextual
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

and historical. These meanings shape our understanding and need to be taken into account. (p. 479)

When taking this stance, it is imperative that the reader understands that my research involved significant reflexivity, whereby I was continuously reflective “about how [my] previous experience, knowledge and assumptions might have impacted on the research” (Finlay, 2009, p. 479). Fischer (2009) added:

Reflexivity goes beyond just being circumspect, following procedures carefully, and reflecting rationally. Being in touch with data through one’s own life, being affected by data, and attending to associations are all tools in qualitative research . . . Reflexivity allows us to be more fully open to data through our lives and to identity how our lives and interests are participating in what we have to understand. (p. 588)

Finlay (2009) highlighted the importance of phenomenological research by saying, “It can capture some of the ambiguity, poignancy, complexity and richness of lived experience, allowing readers to see the worlds of others in possibly new and deeper ways” (p. 480). I continually looked for the surfacing of my beliefs and assumptions throughout my research. I viewed this process as dynamic, and throughout the research I was involved in reflexivity and remained excited by the prospects of being involved in dynamic phenomenological research, where, as Finlay (2009) stated, “likened to going on a voyage, we should expect to be touched, surprised and enchanted along the way as new vista open before our very eyes” (p. 480).

Phen[women]ological Research

Van Manen (1990) stated, “Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some- ‘thing’ what it is- and without which it could not be what it is” (p. 10). Stake (2010) wrote “things work in certain contexts, at certain times, and with certain people” (p. 14), which describes my initial interest in engaging in phenomenological research. At its core, phenomenology “seeks to grasp and elucidate meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or a group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 482).
Creswell (2007) emphasized that such a phenomenological study can offer a “deep[er] understanding” (p. 62) of an experience by researching “persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Based on Vagle’s (2014) keen observations that phenomenology “is not a singular, unified philosophy and methodology” (p. 14) and there is no “single, crystal clear, and unified way to craft phenomenological research” (p. 52), I was drawn to phenomenological research. The ideas that there are multiple Truths/truths, numerous paths to follow and voices to listen to, and that there is “no single, crystal clear, and unified way” (Vagle, 2014, p. 52) remained authentic to my research style and ethic. Vagle (2014) further suggested the phenomenological approach offers the researcher flexibility in designing a research study, and van Manen (1990) supported the idea that phenomenological research allows for greater opportunities to create unique research that is “uniquely suited to [a] particular project and [an] individual researcher” (p. 163). With a focus on critical, feminist disability studies, I took much of this phenomenological liberty to heart in my research. This unique paradigm of phenomenological research is reflected throughout my research as a play on words “phen[women]ological” research, highlighting van Manen’s (1990) “uniquely suited to [a] particular project and [an] individual researcher” (p. 163) for the essence of my feminist disability studies paradigm.

So much of who I am, as a person and as a researcher, is framed by the importance of the “essence of the lived experience” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617). It is in search of learning about other experiences, finding value in diversity and difference, being able to share with others, and having the opportunity to reflect and frame diverse Truths/truths that I find my research framework through a critical, postmodern, humanistic, feminist disability scholar set of paradigms. The realization that this dissertation did not occur in cultural vacuum devoid of
historical context, a multitude of power dynamics, or diverse lived experiences made it increasingly relevant to be explored through phenomenological research. As Patton (2002) illustrated:

Methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judgment, remember it, makes sense of it, and talk about it with themselves. Together such data, one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is, they have “lived experience” as opposed to secondhand experience. (p. 115)

This focus on being able to gain a greater understanding of one’s “lived experience” (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990, 1997, 2007) is what initially drew my interest in conducting phenomenological research about RJ practices through the eyes of educators. Van den Berg, as translated by van Manen (1997), wrote:

[Phenomena] have something to say to us — this is common knowledge among poets and painters. Therefore, poets and painters are born phenomenologists. Or rather, we are all born phenomenologists; the poets and painters among us, however, understand very well their task of sharing, by means of word and image, their insights with others — an artfulness that is also laboriously practiced by the professional phenomenologist. (p. 41)

I hold a natural curiosity about what this phenomenon has to “say” (van Manen, 1997, p. 41) and bias in believing that there are a multitude of answers regarding reducing systemic violence in schools and working to address the bullying epidemic may come from within our institutional practices, from within educators themselves, and, possibly, not from policies attempting to be implemented from the outside. At the core of my research is an innate curiosity about the phenomena of systemic violence and whether, we, as educators and policy advocates (activists?), are willing to listen to what it has to “say” (van Manen, 1997, p. 41).

**Phenomenological Interviewing**

According to Vandermause and Fleming (2011), “A philosophical hermeneutic interview is a common source of gathering data for qualitative research that is grounded in the
philosophical hermeneutic tradition” (p. 369), where “the interviewer seeks to uncover what it means to be as it shows up or reveals itself through story” (p. 369). The formation of my interview questions (see Appendix A) considered the opportunity to give space for personal stories, attentive listening, disrupting the interviewee’s narrative, and being genuinely curious about educators’ perceptions of RJ practices. They included inquiries such as, “How do you make sense of your experiences?” “What should I be asking you that I didn’t?” and “Are there any stories that you would like to share about your experiences with RJ practices?” I formulated the interview questions as a series of open-ended, semi-structured questions that provided ample opportunities for giving space for the active responses from the interviewees. As a qualitative feminist disability researcher, allowing my interviewees to have ample opportunity for their voices to truly be heard is deeply rooted in my ethics of care and a central core to the ethical foundation of my research.

**Mea Culpa: Assumptions of the Researcher**

I was born and raised in a privileged, predominantly Caucasian, northern suburb of Chicago during the early 1970s. Both of my parents were educators. My father held an EdD from Harvard University and my mother was a second-generation Wellesley College woman, who was gifted with an innate ability to make any (and every) life experience an educational one—whether I wanted it to be or not. I was born with a love of learning, of pushing personal boundaries, of questioning things, of embracing new experiences, and of truly believing I was only limited by my beliefs. I was also myopically raised to believe in the genuine goodness of people; that schools were endemically safe places in which to learn, question, and grow; that “sticks and stones would break my bones, but words will never harm (down) me;” and that basic resources were abundant (or at least sufficient) for all people in this country, regardless of their
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity, or ability. My earliest recollections of school involve invested teachers who held both an innate gift for teaching and a true desire to infuse their students with skills that would afford them a lifetime capacity to flourish in the world in which they lived. I remember going to the library on a school fieldtrip and receiving my first library card. Before I could even read a chapter book, I held the ability to access books on tape and find refuge in the library stacks. I continue to hold dear the memories of my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Betty Weeks, and her incredible storytelling skills and belief in the importance of play. She instilled within me the love of the narrative and the belief that stories matter, people matter, and caring relationships are vital to a meaningful life. Through each of these experiences, I wholeheartedly embraced the concept that, despite often being the target of bullying behavior by fellow classmates, I could find small, safe spaces, both in and outside of the classroom setting, where I would be accepted by educators (and a few peers) who were invested in my emotional development, my academic successes, and my personal feelings of self-worth. I belonged and had a community of people who authentically cared about me.

As I grew older, the realities of my bubble-wrapped, snow globe, utopic-like community and idealistic, naïve concepts of the world in which I lived were shattered, most significantly when Laurie Dann walked into a neighboring elementary school and shot six children, killing one on May 20, 1988. I was in eighth grade at the time. The event shattered my concept of schools being endemically safe environments and burst the (de)illusion of the innocence of youth and privilege.

I have spent the majority of the last three decades trying to assemble the shards to increase my knowledge of the world (and my place in it), to listen to other peoples’ stories, to promote the importance of caring about oneself and others, to advocate for inclusion for others,
and to work to increase my understandings of some of these experiences. Most importantly, I have spent a great deal of effort reflecting on and researching the concept of creating safe spaces; issues surrounding infrastructures of care, inclusion, and belonging; and the role of education (and educators) in that narrative. Suffice to say, it feels like the majority of what I have done in my life thus far has been a result of the direct trajectory of things set in motion during many of my early childhood experiences that cumulated in this dissertation research.

When I started my doctorial journey, I was unaware that I had found both a personal and professional home in the field of disability studies. I plunged into my graduate studies with a strong background in the fields of sociology, urban studies, women’s studies, counseling/human services, forensic psychology, prehospital medicine, and special education. When I stepped into my first Disability and Equity in Education (DEE) class, I already held master’s degrees in counseling/psychology and special education. I was deeply rooted in the medical model (deficiency model) of viewing the world and people. I was engrossed in the labels offered by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–IV–TR, at the time) and the multitude of acronyms spewed among and between colleagues during IEP/504 meetings, and becoming increasingly adept at using labeling (stigmatizing) vernacular to identify children in my classroom who might need greater academic or emotional assistance than what the general education curriculum could offer. Every day, despite my best efforts to contribute positive change to the systems I felt were not working for students, I felt greater pressures to conform to the demands of the larger systems at play. District rules regulated what I could teach. Union contracts limited my conduct if I wanted to offer more time or resources to my students before or after school hours. Seemingly endless and ever-changing federal and state policies dictated what I could teach, the materials I would use to convey the lessons being taught, and the tests I had to
administer in order to demonstrate proficiency of the knowledge of my students. During the school days, I would usually work through my lunch hour or remain in my resource room because I found the conversations in the teachers’ lounge to be emotionally draining, almost toxic, as teachers were often talking about children they viewed as “difficult,” “awkward,” or “unteachable.” After work, I often wanted to simply return home to take a shower because I felt I had become complicit in becoming a “bystander” to a part of an educational system that ethically violated my internal code of “doing no harm.” In some way, I needed to wash away the heaviness of the guilt I was feeling so I would have the emotional energy to continue to teach my students the next day. Soon, I found my own voice in these educational spaces and worked to rekindle my desire to make sure that, in my role as an educator, particularly as a special education teacher, I was doing everything in my power to ensure safe spaces existed for all of my students. I slowly worked my way back into the teachers’ lounge with a desire to reconcile the cognitive dissonance between what I had been taught in theory about teachers’ concerns for children with what I was witnessing in its application in quiet moments behind closed doors. It was in these small moments that I found my voice would shake and my palms would sweat, but I experienced a personal transition of my professional intolerance to continue to contribute to being a part of an imperfect institution, where children can be exposed to untold harm that can last a lifetime. In that moment, I learned individual teachers, faults and all, can and do have the capacity to make a significant impact in the lives of the children they reach, both in the classroom and beyond.

During that time, I fell in love with teaching. I embraced the challenges of working with the “excluded” kids, became a silent defender of “different” kids in what I found to be the toxic environment of the teachers’ lounge, and grew to understand that there is a unique opportunity to
make healing, meaningful connections with children in the classroom setting. Teachers had amazing insight into “their” students. The school environment created a rather surreal snow globe of outer communities and systems. Students did not leave their problems, concerns, strengths, challenges, desires, or dreams at the door when they walked into the school at the early morning school bell. Teachers were not neutral in areas of school politics, children’s abilities, or teacher union concerns. Each of us held biases. Every one of us had faults, albeit some were more visible than others. Each of us had our stories that highlighted or shadowed our strengths and weaknesses from those around us. Some of our masks would slip during conversations about “difficult kids” behind closed doors in the teachers’ lounge. Sometimes, I believed I was witnessing a student’s true nature out on the playground or sports field. Through each of these experiences, I learned a multitude of things about myself, my students, and my colleagues. With each chapter, every student, and the time spent working with juvenile offenders in a therapeutic day school, and even dodging the toxic environment of the teachers’ lounge, I embraced a few indelible lessons—No one is without flaws. Each of us has our own strengths and areas of challenges. In that light, no one should ever be deemed disposable, damaged, or beyond repair.

Children do not live in vacuums. Our students bring with them more than backpacks when they cross the school threshold. As educators, we need to be cognizant of the complex issues that affect our students on a daily basis. Schools play a vital role in creating and promoting the cultures that are reflected in and outside of the classroom setting. We need to assist in promoting healthy school cultures so our students can thrive. Educators have a lot of untold stories that might offer meaningful, potentially healing insights to students, schools, and communities. It is time that we work to reveal some of the wisdom of these gatekeepers. Last, and maybe most importantly, no one, especially students, should ever be viewed or be treated as objects of
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

Exclusion or disposability. I designed this phenomenological study to bring many of these issues into focus and to further investigate how educators are making sense of RJ practices, expose some of the implications of RJ practices for students with disabilities, and, hopefully, reveal ways in which RJ practices can work to create the capacity for authentic, inclusive learning communities for all students.

The Role Educators Play as Change Agents

I designed this dissertation research to investigate the contemporary RJ practices currently being implemented in four schools in the Midwest. Pulling from a systems perspective, educational systems are not immune to changes in social policies, politics, or cultural shifts (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Teachers play a significant role as active change agents and daily mediators in conveying changes in institutional practices to their students. In essence, teachers are the messengers in their classrooms regarding shifts in policies, educational mandates from administrators, and meeting the day-to-day demands of moving their learning classroom communities forward to reach learning objectives. I proposed that when it comes to the issues surrounding systemic violence in the classroom, educators are often overlooked for their “insider” knowledge and wisdom surrounding how to best address issues of bullying or handle aspects of misconduct in their classrooms. Educators are left as passive conveyors of policy shifts and legal mandates, yet they are often the most exposed to the “frontline” of their students. Therefore, my research focus was on how teachers experience laws such as Illinois Senate Bill 100, Senate Bill 2793, and HB2663 in the classroom as schools work to eliminate many previous zero tolerance practices. How do teachers experience the “lived experience” of RJ practices in their classroom? How are educators making sense of RJ practices? What are the implications for students with disabilities? Ultimately, what do RJ practices offer communities of learning
looking to reduce issues of systematic violence (e.g., bullying) in their classrooms and what role do teachers play this process?

In the following sections, I present the dissertation research study’s purpose and overview. I also expand on the process of gathering participants and the data collection procedures. Finally, I address issues surrounding potential risks, benefits, and informed consent.

**Study Purpose and Overview**

Over the last few years, there has been a growing trend toward reducing the number of punitive laws and policies surrounding creating safer schools in an effort to implement more RJ practices in educational settings and create healthier, safer systems of learning for all students. Illinois has been slower to respond to some of these policy shifts. New laws such as Illinois Senate Bill 100, Senate Bill 2793, and HB2663 have worked toward eliminating many previous zero tolerance practices. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to investigate these changes from educators’ perspectives through in-depth interviews regarding how RJ practices are actually being experienced in the classroom setting. Specifically, two significant research questions of interest were:


2. *What are the implications for students with disabilities?*

**Participants**

Pulling from recent studies highlighting the significant shift in disciplinary practices within school systems from zero policy to alternative dispute resolutions (Burke, 2013; Coldren,
Haring, Lueke, Sintic, & Balgoyen, 2011; Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016), I compiled an up-to-date list of schools that were currently implementing RJ practices. It was from this list of schools that a created a new list of randomly selected potential interview candidates. I sent e-mails to the leaders of schools currently implementing RJ practices to inquire about potential teachers who might be interested in participating in a research study. Six interviewees from four different education settings replied and expressed an interest in participating in the research study. They were adult educators in both elementary and high school settings in the State of Illinois. Upon successfully obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I e-mailed the prospective interviewees to determine a time and a location that was convenient to meet to conduct the interviews.

Data Collection Procedures

All participants received a letter of informed consent (see Appendix A) and were asked to participate in an interview of approximately 1 hour. A request for audiotaping the interview was made, and when granted, interviews were recorded for transcription purposes only. A copy of the questions used for the interviews is attached in Appendix A.

Potential Risks

This research was grounded in an overreaching ethical framework (rooted in the ethics of care). As noticed in both CITI training and through the IRB process, the safety and well-being of my research participants were (and continue to be) my highest priority. Through informed consent, the removal of identifying personal information (and the use of pseudonyms), the participants’ ability to withdraw at any point during the research process, and the assurances of confidentiality throughout the research process, the potential risk of harm to the participants for participating in this study was minimal.
Benefits

Participants were neither paid nor received any other type of compensation in exchange for taking part in this research study, yet they participated with the understanding that their contributions might be of benefit to the growing body of knowledge regarding educators’ experiences using RJ practices in their classrooms and the growing field of disability studies in education.

Informed Consent Procedures and Document

Once I received confirmation of interest in engaging in the interview process, I sent participants a copy of the attached Consent to Participate in Research form (see Appendix A) prior to our scheduled interview so the interviewees could review the form. At the time of the meeting for the interview, I presented two hard copies of the Consent to Participate in Research form to the interviewee and we reviewed all sections and addressed any areas of questions or concerns. Prior to the interview taking place, and with the willing participation of the interviewee, two copies of the informed consent were signed. The interviewee retained a copy and I retained a copy for my research files.

Why This Study Matters

PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center (2017) indicated one of every five students will be affected by bullying in 2018. For students with diverse abilities, the statistic is much higher. Recent shifts in educational policies and laws are changing how schools are responding to issues of systemic violence in the classrooms. There is a cultural shift taking place in Illinois schools. Years ago, punitive zero tolerance laws were implemented that followed closely with criminal justice mandates (Van Ness & Strong, 2015). If a student was involved in bullying-type behavior, he or she was identified, labelled, isolated from the general education
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

classroom, and, often, eliminated from regular classrooms and relegated to special education classrooms, placed in alternative schools, or simply banned (e.g., suspended/expelled) from schools entirely. Today, many schools are working to implement a different approach to addressing and working to reduce systemic expressions of violence in their classrooms through the use of RJ practices. Through this research, I worked to investigate this policy shift through the lens of the teachers being asked to implement these changes with a keen eye on disability studies in education and a curiosity to see what there was to learn from those who are challenged with the everyday goal of creating safe, inclusive spaces for all students—the teachers themselves.

Teachers offer unique insight into the ecosystems of their classrooms. I would argue that students are often the most sensitive elements in the educational ecosystem and respond quickly to changes in their surrounding environments. From an ecological systems theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner), students are exposed to vast and dynamics elements of much larger systems (e.g., macrosystems – ideologies & social structures; exosystem – education policies; mesosystem – interactions between students and those between teachers and parents; and microsystems – family and peer relations). Students do not exist in vacuums devoid of other elements affecting their environments. Students are exceedingly sensitive barometers to changes in larger systems and often help to illuminate problems in larger environments. By researching schools’ responses to systemic violence, particularly bullying-type behaviors through the lens of the “lived experiences” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) of the teachers who are being asked to mediate these alternative approaches (i.e., RJ approaches), I hoped to provide insight into how educators make sense of these practices, reveal some of the potential implications for students
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

with disabilities, and explore the capacities and limitations of RJ practices in promoting authentic and inclusive learning communities for all students.
CHAPTER FOUR: CONNECTING THE DOTS

As a child, I spent a great deal of time at the Art Institute of Chicago. I enjoyed the large displays, the grand hallways, the light, the sound of people moving through the space and its multitude of galleries, and the people watching. Everyone seemed to have a story to tell, if I looked and listened carefully enough. I have vivid memories of walking into the Medieval room filled with armor, pushing my face up into glass of the Thorne Miniature Rooms, and spending hours sitting in front of Georges Seurat’s, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. I was always amazed at the complexity of the process of dots (i.e., chromoluminarism and pointillism) creating a simplistic, iconic image of people enjoying a relaxing Sunday afternoon.

![Image of Seurat's painting](image-url)

*Figure 6. Seurat’s *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (Boha Glass, n.d.).*

Throughout the years, I often imagined myself as different people depicted in the painting. I have imagined myself as the little girl walking while holding hands with her mother. In later years, I imagined what it would be like to be the girl sitting in the shade with a bouquet of flowers in her hands. Each person represented in the painting seemingly has a different story to be told, a dynamic life lived, and diverse “lived experiences” to share. As a child sitting in the
gallery, I was amazed by the different story being told from a distance than the story being illustrated once I stepped closer to the painting to notice the individual “dots.” There were secrets to be told that this painting held within the connecting dots and blurred edges. I was fascinated by the dots and all of the complexities of the skill it must have taken to create such a simplistic, calm scene in such chaos of light, color, and bush stroke. I had a limited understanding of words such as chromoluminarism and pointillism at the time. Colorblind from birth, I even had a limited understanding that what I was able to “see” and interpret in the colors before me might be dull in comparison to what others sitting around me saw in the same vivid painting, each of us gaining something different from the same object in the frame in front of us. All I knew at the time was that I enjoyed the painting in front of me and the endless stories the dots created. The Art Institute of Chicago (n.d.), in discussing Seurat’s *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jattee*, stated that it:

> Resembles scientific precision, the artist [Georges Seurat] tackled the issues of color, light, and form. Inspired by research in optical and color theory, he juxtaposed tiny dabs of colors that, through optical blending, form a single and, he believed, more brilliantly luminous hue. To make the experience of the painting even more intense, he surrounded the canvas with a frame of painted dashes and dots, which he, in turn, enclosed with a pure white wood frame, similar to the one with which the painting is exhibited today. (para. 1)

It is the frame that matters. How we view things matter. This continuing idea of “optical blending” (The Art Institute of Chicago, n.d.) matters when trying to create meaning and understanding of larger themes. There was incredible meaning of being able to take a “canvas with a frame of painted dashes and dots” (The Art Institute of Chicago, n.d., para. 1) and contextualize it within a frame to form a single, cohesive moment in time. There was something timeless about the process, about making links of meaning to larger contexts, about offering a process that, despite being deeply rooted in the foundation of a type of artistic science (e.g., chromoluminarism and pointillism), was also significantly influenced by those who were
viewing the art. The art, in and of itself, was arguably changing the person who was viewing it, simply by stepping closer to the dots.

Figure 7. Finding meaning in the dots (Boha Glass, n.d.; Seurat photo, n.d.).

As I grew older, I became increasingly interested in the works of Georges Seurat and the artistic style of chromoluminarism and pointillism. Years later, I had the opportunity to watch Stephan Sondheim’s musical interpretation of Seurat’s *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* in a production entitled, *Sunday in the Park with George*. It was through this musical adaptation that many of the images from the iconic painting were “brought to life,” often with vastly different interpretations from those I had spent my childhood creating in my mind. It allowed me to experience and learn, firsthand, that not everyone’s interpretation of what they see, or experience is the same. We do not all share the same *Truth*. A person’s personal, historical, educational, and “lived experiences” can alter the way in which art, science, literature, music, and life is experienced, valued, contextualized, and interpreted, which in turn, can create a multitude of *truths*, as opposed to a single, absolute *Truth*. As a critical theorist, this was a pivotal moment in my dynamic understanding of the world in which I lived and significantly altered my understanding of myself in my own “lived experiences.” I found increasing value in the experiences of others, even (and especially) if they vastly differed from my own. I began to
seek out people, experiences, art, music, and education that challenged my understanding and my beliefs. Beyond the frame, the context matters.

Figure 8. Sondheim’s Sunday in the Park with George (Murphy, 2017; Playbill, n.d.).

Decades later, I have learned that iconic artwork has its place in offering a theoretical perspective and foundations for growing appreciation for the “art and science” behind its creation. Seurat’s A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte has been recreated and imitated to illustrate changes in historical times and to convey different “lived experiences.” Each of these different interpretations offers a greater opportunity to understand that experiences change over time, when filtered through different “lenses,” and when lived through diverse contexts. These contexts change over time and do not occur in historical or cultural vacuums devoid of “color, light, and form” (The Art Institute of Chicago, n.d.). The type of frame used, the quality of the canvas stretched over the frame, and the oils that are applied are just as important as the topic being highlighted in the final product. It is imperative to be able to take a “step back” (e.g., see
the “big picture”) or a “step forward” (e.g., to appreciate the “dots”) into the work to truly understand what has taken place in its creation.

Figure 9. The Office’s interpretation of Seurat’s *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jattee* (NBC, n.d.).

Figure 10. A modern day comparison of Seurat’s *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jattee* (“Seurat photo: Comparison,” n.d.).
So, why does any of this matter? Why have I taken time in my dissertation to write about Seurat’s *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* and attempted to bore you with details from my childhood? I have taken this time to offer a framework by which to understand some of my background and my love of the critical dance with art and with life. Ultimately, it has affected how I engage in research. I cannot simply “conduct” research. I am not a passive participant in my research. My research changes me. I find many similarities in my experiences with appreciating Seurat’s work and my own research. Much of this appreciation has led to a personal love for my own palette knife painting, which is admittedly a far cry from the skill, artistry, or innate ability of Seurat. Yet, I take great enjoyment in stretching canvas and placing color to the framed surface. I work to frame my research (e.g., metaphorically, stretch my research on a frame). I enjoy the process of adding color and creating texture (e.g., how I form my questions and methodologies). I take pride in being able to give an idea an opportunity to be placed within a frame for others to experience and attempt to offer others the chance to “step into
the dots” of other people’s lived experiences, while holding large frames of interpretative meaning and a chance to “step away,” giving distance to larger meanings.

In the research, as presented, I have attempted to remain engaged in the research process. This has been a difficult process, as I have had to allow myself to become engaged with the interconnections of the “dots.” Meaning comes from, both literally and metaphorically, “connecting the dots.” My interpretations of the participants are only one interpretation of the potential interconnections and larger meanings of these six interviewees’ “lived experiences” with RJ practices. They are by no means intended to be the only way of “interpreting the data.” This research has become a part of me in the process of engaging in it. I have let it change me and I have attempted to demonstrate reverence for the thoughts, the words, and the actions of the six educators, who allowed me to have a glimpse into their lived experiences. The following sections include some of the highlighted findings and reoccurring patterns that surfaced during my interviews. I present the information in an attempt to “connect the dots” of meaning to larger concepts that are discussed. Stephen Sondheim ended his production of *Sunday in the Park with George* with the character George (i.e., Georges Seurat) looking toward a blank, white canvas and saying, “White: a blank page or canvas. [Her]/His favorite – so many possibilities” (Goodhart, 2013, p. 207). I concur. As a critical researcher, engaging in the research process is certainly learning to dance with dots, to find meaning in interconnections and blurred lines, and working to surface some of the possibilities that a blank page or canvas of research allows. In the following section, I hope to connect the dots between the two schools, to lean into the smaller pixels and appreciate the fine details, and to take the opportunity to give distance to and appreciate the larger shapes of the six educators and the multitude of issues that surfaced in their “lived experiences” with restorative justice, care, inclusion, and disability.
Two Schools, Six Educators

I began this research by reviewing schools using RJ practices as identified by several organizations that monitor and assess RJ programming in schools since the implementation of SB2793 (Public Act 98-1102; August 26, 2014), SB100 (Public Act 099-0456; September 15, 2016), and HB 2663 (Public Act 100-0105; January 1, 2018) in Illinois. These organizations included the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA), and Illinois Balanced and Restorative Justice (IBARJ). Working from an updated resource list, I compiled a list of schools that were currently implementing RJ practices and randomly selected potential interview candidates. Eight potential interviewees from two different education settings, one middle school and one high school, replied and expressed an interest in participating in the research study. All of the potential interviews were adult educators in elementary and high school settings in the State of Illinois and had a minimum of 8 years of teaching experience. Upon successfully obtaining IRB approval, I e-mailed each of the prospective interviewees to determine a time and a location that was convenient to meet and to conduct the interviews. Each of the potential interviewees expressed differing concerns regarding meeting on or around their school campus and each stated they preferred to meet at a “convenient” location where they were least likely to be recognized by coworkers, friends, or administrators. Six of the initial interviews took place during after school hours (i.e., 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.) at local establishments (e.g., a coffee shop, a restaurant), and the remaining two interviews took place before school hours (i.e., 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.) at a nearby café. As the research process unfolded, two interviewees dropped out of the research. Both participants cited concerns with their job security should they continue to participate in research. To further understand the framing of my research and my findings, it is imperative to understand the
environments in which my interviewees worked. Here is a small overview of the two school locations that offer the backdrop to the six interviewees’ perspectives.

**The middle school: Sandoval Middle School.** Sandoval Middle School is the pseudonym chosen for the mid-sized middle school (i.e., enrollment of 418 students) in which three of the participants were currently employed. Maria, Tom, and Laura were all experienced teachers who offered significant insight into their perspectives on Sandoval Middle School. Some information (e.g., the school’s actual name) about the school was changed to help offer anonymity to the participants in this research, but the demographics, size, and student body information remains accurate to the best of 2017 information, as reported to the Illinois Report Card. I obtained limited information about Sandoval Middle School during the course of the actual interview process, which is cited as one of the limitations of this research in a later chapter; this is one reason I used the Illinois Report Card’s (2018) website to gain specific demographics for research reporting purposes.

Sandoval Middle School is a suburban middle school with a current enrollment of 418 students and an average class size of 19 students per class. Student characteristics for the composition of the school community are reported as follows: White (31%), Black (48%), Hispanic (13%), Asian (3%), American Indian (1%), two or more races (4%), and Pacific Islander (1%). Further student characteristics include low income (42%), English language learners (4%), students with disabilities (17%), and homeless (3%). Academic success is reported at 11% for “met” or “exceeded” Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) standards, which translates to 10.5% of students being “ready for the next level” (Illinois Report Card, 2018) compared to district “academic success” standards of 15% and Illinois state “academic success” standards of 34% (Illinois Report Card, 2018). Success by
student group indicates 19% of White students, 4% of Black students, and 8% of Hispanic students “met” or “exceeded” PARCC performance levels. It is also important to note that low-income students demonstrated 5% on PARCC performance levels, but both English learners and students with disabilities reached 10% and 1% of “approached” PARCC standards (Illinois Report Card, 2018). The attendance rate for Sandoval Middle School is 93% with a chronic truancy rate of 21% and student mobility of 14% (Illinois Report Card, 2018). The teacher retention rate is noted as being 84% and instructional spending per student was reported as being $7,853 in 2016 (Illinois Report Card, 2018). Sandoval Middle School has implemented RJ practices for nearly 8 years but intensified its use of such practices after the passing of Illinois SB100 in its final form on September 15, 2016.

The high school: Piedmont High School. Piedmont High School is the pseudonym chosen for a smaller high school (i.e., enrollment of 226 students) in which three participants were currently employed. Denise, Juan, and Matt were all experienced teachers who offered significant insight into their perspectives on Piedmont High School. Some information (e.g., the school’s actual name) about the school was changed to offer anonymity to the participants in this research, but the demographics, size, and student body information remains accurate to the best of 2017 information, as reported to the Illinois Report Card. I obtained limited information about Piedmont High School during the course of the actual interview process, which is cited as one of the limitations of this research in a later chapter; this is one reason I used the Illinois Report Card’s website to gain further specific demographics for research reporting purposes.

Piedmont High School is an urban high school with a current enrollment of 226 students and an average class size of 16 students per class. Student characteristics for the composition of the school community are reported as follows: White (0%), Black (86%), Hispanic (11%), and
two or more races (3%). Further student characteristics include low income (98%), English learners (4%), students with disabilities (17%), and homeless (60%). Academic success is reported at 7% for exceeds” in math and English/language arts by the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) standards, which translates to 6.7% proficiency (Illinois Report Card, 2018) compared to district “meets” or “exceeds” SAT standards of 26% and Illinois state “meets” or “exceeds” SAT standards of 39% (Illinois Report Card, 2018). Success by student group indicates 7% of Black students and 8% of Hispanic students “meet” or “exceed” SAT performance levels. It is also important to note that low-income students demonstrated a “meets” or “exceeds” SAT standard of 7%, but there was limited information on either English language learners and students with disabilities as there were “fewer than 10 students reporting” (Illinois Report Card, 2018). The attendance rate for Piedmont High School is 86% with a chronic truancy rate of 58.6% and student mobility of 33% (Illinois Report Card, 2018). The teacher retention rate is noted as being 78.6% and instructional spending per student was reported as being $7,853 in 2016 (Illinois Report Card, 2018). It is further important to note that “College Readiness” standards reflect that 3% of Piedmont High School’s students “meet or exceed ACT college readiness benchmarks” (Illinois Report Card, 2018). Piedmont High School has worked from a community response team in direct response to growing concerns of increasing violence within the community (e.g., referred to as “gang-related” in interviews), and worked to implement RJ practices in response to the school-to-prison pipeline concerns over the past decade. This community work slowly made its way into Piedmont High School through the initial creation of a peer jury and was significantly influenced by changing trends in the juvenile justice system in the hopes of achieving state compliance of both Illinois SB 100 (enacted on September 15, 2016) and Illinois SB 2793 (enacted July 1, 2014).
The six participants. Table 1 depicted below shows the demographics of the six participants from Sandoval Middle School and Piedmont High School.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years in education</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Area taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sandoval</td>
<td>General education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Italian American</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Sandoval</td>
<td>Special education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sandoval</td>
<td>General education w/ special education endorsement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Irish American</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Piedmont</td>
<td>General education w/ school counselor endorsement/soccer coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Piedmont</td>
<td>General education &amp; coach (senior varsity boys’ soccer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Piedmont</td>
<td>Special education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maria was a self-described “educator from birth.” She self-identified as a married, Caucasian, 32-year-old mother of two who lived in the Northern suburbs of Chicago. She was quick to add that her husband was a lawyer and did not like the fact that she worked, but she felt it was important to be viewed by her children and others as a “working mom.” She had been a general education teacher for 8 years. She stated she came from a family of educators and “it sort of runs in my blood” and “when I was asked in college what did I want to be when I grew up, it was just natural to say, ‘I’m going to be a teacher’” (Maria, personal communication, March 9, 2018). She disclosed that her personal background in education came from a predominantly private, parochial school education and those early childhood experiences dramatically influenced how she viewed education and her role as an educator. Maria had spent her entire
teaching career teaching at Sandoval Middle School and was hired at the school after successfully completing her student teaching there in 2010.

Tom self-identified as a second-generation Italian American, 53-year-old, divorced father of three grown children. He lived in the same neighborhood in which the school was located and all three of his children attended Sandoval Middle School. He had been a special education teacher for nearly 24 years and “felt the need to come into education as a calling” (Tom, personal communication, March 10, 2018). He had taught at Sandoval Middle School for the past 12 years. He stated the majority of his teaching experience had been with middle school special education teaching, mostly boys, in a self-contained resource room. He disclosed that he was raised in a family by a single mom after his father tragically died in the line of duty (as a firefighter), and that he was the middle child of three boys. Tom spent a significant amount of time assisting in several of the after school programs at Sandoval Middle School to have a greater opportunity to connect with his students and other staff members. He was a self-described “animal lover” and dedicated “martial artist” (Tom, personal communication, March 10, 2018). He was a third-degree blackbelt and cited his time spent in martial arts as leading to a greater appreciation for RJ practices in the classroom. He disclosed prior to and at the end of the interview that he planned to retire at the end of this school year.

Laura self-identified as a 46-year-old, African American woman who recently remarried. She was a foster mother to two children, whom she referred to as her “reason for getting up in the morning” (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018). She had spent 16 years as both a general education and special education teacher. She had taught at Sandoval Middle School for the past 10 years. She stated she “came into education because I came from a family of teachers and really always wanted to be one” (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018). She was
a self-described “animal lover” and “bibliophile,” and stated that both “education and disciple were always a priority in my family” (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018). She emphasized throughout her interview that she remained intently dedicated to special education and helping everyone feel safe in the classroom. She cited her early church foundation and her unwavering faith as the strength that kept her in the classroom and wanting to continue to contribute in a meaningful manner to her students.

Denise self-identified as a 47-year-old, Irish American who was married with three children. She had been teaching for 15 years and had been at Piedmont High School for the past 6 years. She stated she worked as a general education teacher, but also held a school counselor endorsement and the added credential gave her a “kind of a unique perspective on the regular classroom” (Denise, personal communication, March 12, 2018). She also emphasized that she was “drawn to education because it allowed me to connect with my students in a way that working in other fields didn’t” (Denise, personal communication, March 12, 2018). She also was an assistant soccer coach and an after school support staff. She highlighted in her interview that she was raised in a military family and a “very stringent Catholic family . . . [where] God is always watching” (Denise, personal communication, March 12, 2018). She cited that her close relationship with her family and subsequent community gave her a unique appreciation for RJ practices and the essential need for everyone to feel a part of a larger, caring community.

Juan self-described as a 48-year-old, Hispanic American, who was a proud father of two. His wife passed away 4 years ago, and his primary responsibilities were his extended family. Both of his children were grown and serving in different branches of the U.S. military. He had been teaching for the past 12 years as a general education teacher and as a soccer coach. He had been at Piedmont High School for the past 10 years and his students fondly referred to him as
“Coach.” He took great pride in being multicultural and believed strongly in the motto, “You don’t get through this life without others—Your family—Your community” (Juan, personal communication, March 14, 2018). He was significantly invested in his students’ lives, both in the classroom and on the field. He stated he was getting tired of teaching and had thought about changing careers recently, but “his kids” (as he referred to his students) continued to bring him back to the classroom.

Matt was a self-described 32-year-old “all-American White kid from the suburbs” (Matt, personal communication, March 14, 2018) who wanted to be a doctor but was unable to pass the MCATs. He grew up in the surrounding Northwestern suburbs of Chicago, but always thought he would move to California after graduating from college. He was recently engaged to be married and was considering a job change at the end of this year, citing his concern for increasing violence and the uptick in recent school shootings. When asked what he might want to do for a living, he replied, “I haven’t figured it out yet. Maybe something where I have a lower probability of getting shot” (Matt, personal communication, March 14, 2018). He expressed concerns about participating in research and the potential repercussions from administrators for doing so. Matt was adamant that schools should be safe environments for everyone. His main concerns were on his upcoming wedding, starting a family, and the type of world his child (or children) might have to someday face if students are not currently safe in their classrooms. He also seemed to support RJ practices as a means to help create safer school environments. Although he was apprehensive about his future as an educator, he was hopeful that positive changes were taking place in the classroom setting to help all students succeed and believed RJ practices helped keep students included in school, which might offer a healthier and safer school environment for everyone.
The two schools offered diverse backgrounds to the research (e.g., similar to different settings in a painting) and the six interviewees expressed a multitude of “lived experiences” with RJ practices (e.g., larger subjects framed in the research “painting”). In order to fully understand the context of the research, it is imperative to also have an appreciation for the multitude of brush strokes, an eye for the color palette, and a willingness to “dance with the dots” (e.g., the details that make the art unique) and to listen to the narratives of the interviewees who offered their voices to the interpretative forms being presented (e.g., the intrinsic value in the words). As in all fine art, there is a balance between form and function, in connecting contrasting colors and shapes, and in making connections (both subtle and pronounced) in an attempt to convey meaning. The follow sections are an attempt to do just that as I work to present the dots, the patterns, the smears, and the smudges of the six educators’ experiences with RJ practices.

**Zero Tolerance Policies**

It is exceedingly difficult to discuss RJ practices in education without first explaining the policies, laws, and cultural shifts that educational systems in Illinois have been navigating over the past decade. To understand the significance of these paradigm shifts, it is important to discuss the zero tolerance policies that proceeded RJ practices.

Historically, in the United States, public schools have followed the trends set by the juvenile justice system (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Mallett, 2018). According to Mallett (2018), “Schools have always had a focus on control of students, particularly those difficult or troubling to manage” (p. 353). In order to maintain control over students, school administrators have often used a diverse array of tactics to manage discipline in the classroom setting (e.g., exclusionary practices, threats, and corporal punishment; Mallett, 2018). “Many remnants of these discipline techniques were still utilized in regular classroom and school management practices into the
1960s and 1970s” (Mallett, 2018, p. 353). It was also during this time that there was a noticeable increase in the use of isolation, expulsion, and suspension in schools across the United States (Mallett, 2018). As laws changed, so did many of the public school policies regarding school discipline, the role of punishment, and which students were most “at-risk” of being subjected to the consequences of such educational policy changes (e.g., minority students, students with disabilities, etc.). In 1975, the Supreme Court, in its decision in *Gross v. Lopez* (419 U.S. 565), stated:

> Due process violations in the suspension and expulsion of students without hearings, schools altered their policies to include in-school suspensions . . . After this court decision, due process protocols were put in place across school districts, though in-school and out-of-school suspensions were increasingly utilized. (Mallett, 2018, p. 353)

This produced a *Breakfast Club* type approach to school discipline in which students were often required to “do their time” in in-school suspensions (e.g., Saturday morning suspension, early morning detention before school, or after school detention) as opposed to being suspended or expelled from school for minor infractions. It is out of this fertile ground of school discipline that zero tolerance policies began to thrive. During the 1990s, another shift in public school discipline policies began to emerge (Mallett, 2018). Mallett (2018) wrote, “During this tough on crime juvenile justice era movement, schools were impacted by federal laws, state policies, and tragic school events that unduly moved the schools toward criminalizing student behaviors and, for some groups of students, their educational experience” (p. 354). As a teacher, if you truly cared about your students, you demonstrated “tough love.” Students needed to be disciplined and “taught a lesson,” and zero tolerance policies were the tool used by many educators and administrators to deliver that message. Many of these educational policies shifted once again during the mid-to-late 1990s, when despite crime actually decreasing, a multitude of school
In the late 1990s, the seemingly new epidemic of school shootings began to gain national attention (Mallett, 2018). The evening news began to highlight school shootings, particularly the tragedies that occurred during the Columbine High School shooting, and national discourse turned toward topics of bullying, school safety, and creating safer schools for all students (Mallett, 2018). Mallett (2018) highlighted this time by saying:

The Columbine High School incident was not the first school shooting of this era, but was the most deadly of the tragedies at the time, and had the greatest impact on public perceptions, was covered more extensively by the media, and reinforced and spurred on the security environment movement within schools. (p. 354)

One of the main issues raised by the Columbine High School tragedy involved the idea that “if a school shooting could happen here, it can happen anywhere.” Despite the Columbine High School shooting gaining the majority of national attention regarding school safety issues, research indicates that in years prior there had actually been numerous school shootings across the country with the only significant difference being in the media coverage and the socioeconomic and racial demographics of the students attending the school. Mallett (2018) wrote:

In the decades before the Columbine tragedy there were other high school incidents with far less media coverage. These included Bethel Regional High School in Alaska, Pearl High School in Mississippi, Health High School in Kentucky, Frontier Middle School in Washington, and Thurston High School in Oregon (Hirschfield, 2010; Kupchik & Bracy, 2009). Most of these shootings occurred in what many families considered to be “safe” school districts - white, suburban, and middle-class, leading to the increased fear that these tragic incidents could happen anywhere. (p. 354).

This increasing fear surrounding school shootings (and the increasing “it could happen to anyone” vulnerability) prompted school districts across the country, policy leaders, school administrators, and legislators to promote zero tolerance laws with the intention of working to
keep kids safe (Mallett, 2018). School districts across the country strongly embraced zero
tolerance policies, amendments (e.g., Gun-Free Schools Act), and increasing exclusionary
practices (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) to address even minor infractions in schools (Mallett, 2018). Teachers were no longer able to use their discretion in determining disciplinary
consequences. There were mandated consequences for students that further placed a wedge
between teachers and students. Schools across the country began to align themselves with
judicial system trends, exclusionary practices were revamped and fully supported, and increases
were made in the use of school resource officers (Mallett, 2018). Mallett (2018) highlighted:

Since 1996, the percentage of schools that subsequently enacted strict and punitive
discipline policies has never fallen below 75 percent, with some estimates as high as 90
percent. These policies established mandatory suspensions or expulsions for an expansive
range of student incidents, including violent behavior, fighting, assault, harassment,
indecency, exposure, vandalism, and destruction of school property, among others.
However, these policies also included non-violent student behaviors, such as verbal
harassment, disobedience, obscene language, and truancy (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009;
Kupchik & Monahan, 2006; Muschert & Peguero, 2010; U.S. Department of Education,
2013). (p. 355)

During this time, the main policy shifts in educational environments included a focus on creating
“safer” schools and punitive discipline, even if that meant excluding some students (through
federally mandated use of suspensions and expulsions legislation; Mallett, 2018). It was also
during this time, and through newly implemented federal laws (e.g., the Safe School Act of
1994; 1998 Amendment Act), that schools were reinforced with increased security measures,
armed with police officers (e.g., school resource personnel/officers), and became similar in
appearance to a minimum security penitentiary (e.g., fully equipped with cameras and metal
detectors) to help ensure “safe” schools for all students (Mallett, 2018). Evans and Vaandering
(2016) stated it was during this time that the “school-to-prison pipeline” was actively fed, citing
that “the application of zero-tolerance policies escalated to include a host of school behaviors,
increasing the use of suspensions and expulsions and laying the foundation for what has often
been called the school-to-prison pipeline” (pp. 19-20). Mallett (2018) highlighted the initiatives at this time:

With expansion of police officers in schools and subsequent amendments and funding from federal laws, police in schools became the norm, with nearly 1 billion dollars spent from 1994 to 2012 and employing over 17,000 officers annually. 42 percent of high schools across the country have school resource officers (with 51 percent of high schools that have a majority black or Hispanic student population) as well as 24 percent elementary schools (Rich- Shea & Fox, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). (p. 358)

The increase in the implementation of zero tolerance policies and in the significant use of school resource officers in schools throughout the United States reinforced the notion that schools, by their nature, were safe places for all students. Mallett (2018) stated:

School resource officers are well thought of by stakeholders and generally provide a feeling of safety for many inside the school leading to some increases in crime reporting by students and some school personnel and students reporting decreases in fighting and bullying. (p. 358)

As much as school resource officers may have assisted in creating a feeling of a “safer” school community in the shadows of an epidemic of school shootings, research indicates:

Police officers in schools have reinforced zero tolerance policies and the utilization of more formal methods of discipline is a concern in reinforcing involvement in the juvenile justice system . . . there are wide suspension and expulsion discrepancies across school districts, as well as a disproportionate impact on other student populations. (Mallett, 2018, p. 359)

Many of these “other student populations” include minority students, students with disabilities, and students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, who are often highly targeted by zero tolerance educational policies (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

It is important to note that current research indicates minority students (e.g., especially Black and Hispanic students), students with disabilities (e.g., significantly higher with students with emotional/behavioral and physical disabilities), LGBTQ+ students, and students from
diverse (i.e., lower) socioeconomic backgrounds are significantly affected by zero tolerance policies (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Mallett (2018) stated:

Students with special education disabilities are also disproportionately involved with school discipline protocols. A student with any special education disability is more than two times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions (11-13 percent) compared to those without a disability (5-6 percent), with the most, disability types for suspended students being learning disabilities and severe emotional disturbances. (p. 360)

Research further indicates these statistics become exceedingly higher when compounded with factors such as minority status or lower socioeconomic status (Mallett, 2018). Mallett expanded upon this concerning disparity of discipline implementation by stating, “Students of color with special education disabilities (black, Hispanic, and multi-racial), so not Asian-American students, experienced much higher suspension rates - from 22 to 25 percent for males and 20 percent for females” (p. 361). The statistics for disciplinary action are higher in the LGBT student demographic as well. Mallett (2018) stated:

These punitive school discipline policies have also, based on more recent data collection, directly or indirectly targeted a disproportionate number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students. LGBT students are up to three times more likely to experience harsh disciplinary treatment then non-LGBT peers, even though misbehavior and disobedience to school rules among these two groups is not significantly different. (p. 351)

It is through current research that it becomes increasingly apparent that there are specific demographics of students who are disproportionately negatively affected by past zero tolerance educational policies (APA, 2008; Mallett, 2018).

Although zero tolerance educational policies were put in place to improve the overall safety of school environments for all students and to keep students in school, the research shows the truth of these implemented policies may be quite the reverse. By implementing such punitive policies, the school-to-prison pipeline has had a continuous, increasing flow of students over the decades, most of whom have been historically marginalized, targeted, and excluded (e.g.,
minority students, students with disabilities, LGBT students, and students coming from lower socioeconomic status households) (Mallett, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

According to Evans and Vaandering (2016), this was also a time of a potential “zero-tolerance frenzy . . . backfir[ing]” (p. 20), as “the general population began to seriously question the effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies, and many schools began to back off of some of the more extreme applications” (p. 20). Mallett (2018) highlighted these findings by saying:

Counter-intuitively for many policymakers, schools that have increased their student exclusionary discipline, hoping for the suspension and expulsion of problems students will improve School environments, have often found the opposite to be true: School and student body cohesion has become more fragile, satisfaction with the school and its governance structures has decreased, and the academic achievement of non suspended students is harmed. Additionally, increase in school suspensions has been found to increase student misbehavior and recidivism for both those students removed from school but who returned and for those non-offending students who remain in the classroom. There is little evidence showing the effectiveness of harsh punishments in deterring future student behavior in schools (American Psychological Association, 2008; Justice Policy Institute, 2011; Losen, Hewitt, & Toldson, 2014; Perry & Morris, 2014). (p. 362)

To gain a better perspective on educational policies today, it is imperative to understand the zero tolerance policies of the past that have been shown to increase punitive and exclusionary practices within classroom settings. Suffice to say, if students are not in the classrooms (e.g., the application of harsh disciplinary practices, such as suspension or expulsion), if they are not able to be included in the educational process (e.g., mandatory suspensions, alternative placements, and expulsions), they will have fewer opportunities to learn. Students who do not feel as if they are part of a larger community, due, in part, to being historically marginalized, will often find different avenues for gaining their education outside of the classroom setting (e.g., joining a gang, becoming involved in illicit activity, or withdrawing completely), which perpetuates the school-to-prison pipeline. Mallett (2018) summarized these concerns:

These discipline measures brought about by Zero Tolerance policies increase student exclusion through school suspensions and explosions, decreasing the chances for the students to succeed in school and increasing their risk for juvenile court involvement . . .
Ironically, and unexpectedly, it has been found that school environments are actually made less safe due to policies that promote little rehabilitation and focus on school discipline and removal. In other words, school violence can increase through harsh school policies. (p. 362)

The idea that zero tolerance policies might actually be contributing to school violence and actively perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline caused yet another shift in educational policy. This shift turned away from the previously punitive and exclusionary practices of the zero tolerance policies and toward one of inclusion, peacebuilding, responsibility, and healing, known as RJ practices. The next section contains a closer look at RJ practices in their introduction to school educational policies; the dynamic potential they offer school systems, staff, and students; and the recent laws that have been enacted in Illinois to help promote RJ practices within schools.

**Restorative Justice Practices**

Prior to discussing educators’ lived experiences with the RJ practices that are currently being implemented in Illinois schools, it is imperative to understand the significant historical, political, and ideological shifts that have taken place over the past decade from the previously accepted exclusionary, punitive zero tolerance policies of the 1990s to the inclusive RJ practices being introduced with the recent implementation of laws such as SB2793 (Public Act 98-1102), SB100 (Public Act 099-0456), and HB 2663 (Public Act 100-0105).
Howard Zehr is considered by many researchers to be the founding “father” of RJ (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Zehr (1990) published his text, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*, which is often referred to as the foundational resource for RJ practices (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The American Bar Association (ABA) embraced RJ practices in 1994, following closely behind was the United Nations in 1999 in the acceptance and promotion of these practices (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Research indicates many of these educational laws and policies closely pattern with past and current trends in the legal system; as the legal system has shifted to a restorative model of “justice” (e.g., mediation, peer juries, alternative sentencing, etc.) over the past decade, the policies and laws affecting the educational system have followed suit (Fabelo et al., 2001; Gonzalez, 2012; Skiba et al., 2003; Teasley, 2014). It is important to note that numerous studies have indicated punitive school polices that rely solely on “punishment” as a means of student compliance (e.g., suspensions, alternative schools, and expulsions) are often counterproductive to changing student behavior and lead to increasing the
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

school-to-prison pipeline (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Fabelo et al., 2001; Gonzalez, 2012; Skiba et al., 2003; Teasley, 2014). Even the American Psychological Association (APA), in reviewing over a decade of research regarding zero tolerance policies, concluded that the implementation of these policies only furthered student exclusion and did little to increase the overall safety of schools (Gonzalez, 2012). According to Evans and Vaandering (2016), these school climate shifts were significantly pushed by a coordinated effort between the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education:

In 2014, the US Department of Justice and the US Department of Education issued a joint statement that exclusionary discipline was being overused and applied in discriminatory ways. They recommended the use of restorative justice as one of many alternatives to suspensions and expulsions. (p. 20)

Significant research in this area revealed zero tolerance polices added to negative behavioral outcomes, were detrimental to creating a healthy learning environment, often eroded issues of trust between teachers and students (Gonzalez, 2012), and “increase[d] the likelihood that students will engage in future disciplinary problems, including school disengagement, noncompliance, tardiness, absence, truancy, and disrespect for authority figures in school” (Teasley, 2014, p. 132). Research further indicated the historical use of corporal punishment (e.g., spanking, boarding, etc.) in the educational system might actually have contributed to increasing violence rates and bullying within education settings (Miller, 2015). Miller (1998) stated:

In the short term, corporal punishment may produce obedience. But it is a fact documented by research that in the long term the results are: inability to learn, violence and rage, bullying and cruelty, inability to feel another’s pain, especially that of one’s own children, even drug addiction and suicide–unless there are enlightened, or at least helping, witnesses on hand to prevent that development. (p. 1)

Researchers have highlighted the importance of working to keep students included in the learning process, improving teacher–student relationships, and forming healthier, healing,
inclusive educational environments as opposed to simply working to eventually feed the criminal justice system with students who are excluded through punitive policies regarding student conduct (i.e., school-to-prison pipeline; Gonzalez, 2012). Armour (2013) stated, “Restorative justice can have a significant impact on redirecting the school-to-prison pipeline” (p. 14). Research further indicates these punitive educational policies have disproportionately negatively affected historically marginalized students (e.g., minority youth, LGBTQ, students with disabilities), which further draws into question their uses and requires a critical examination of the consequences (both intended and unintended) of their implementation in the educational setting (Gonzalez, 2012; Howarth, 2008; Morgan et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2003). Research indicates that for RJ practices to succeed, there needs to continue to be significant and permanent changes throughout our schools, in our educational and support staff and administrators, and in our larger communities (Sumner et al., 2010). Teasley (2014) highlighted this point by saying, “Community-based relationship building and inclusion are key to the implementation and success of restorative justice methods. Therefore, an understanding of community culture, norms, and values is important in developing content” (p. 132). Researchers further emphasize the need for increasing bonds, connections, and relationships with, between, and among everyone affected by students, as their attitudes, beliefs, values, and participation (or lack thereof) will either assist students in RJ approaches or bend toward past exclusionary practices of retributive zero tolerance polices (Fabelo et al., 2001; Gonsoulin, Zablocki, & Leone, 2012). Teasley (2014) concluded:

Important in this endeavor is that educators, parents, students, and other community-based entities address factors contributing to the disproportionality of school suspension and expulsion for minority public school youths. Creating strong school and community relations is important in establishing a plan of actions for dealing with problem behaviors and subsequent intervention. (p. 133)
It becomes increasingly evident, and supported by research, that teachers strive to teach students, which cannot successfully occur if the students are persistently being excluded through punitive, exclusionary, and retributive means (Gonzalez, 2012; Teasley, 2014). Miller (2015) spoke of “Roots of Violence” in 12 concise points that we will continue to look at throughout this research, but as an introduction to the power of violence and the potential framing of RJ practices to help “heal” the harm caused by systemic violence, policies that perpetuate such violence (e.g., zero tolerance, school-to-prison pathways), and truly embrace education system changes needed to “buy into” RJ in education, she wrote:

For some years now, there has been proof that the devastating effects of the traumatization of children take their inevitable toll on society – a fact that we are still forbidden to recognize. This knowledge concerns every single one of us and – if disseminated widely enough – should lead to fundamental changes in society; above all, to a halt in the blind escalation of violence. (p. 1)

As educators in the field, as educational leadership helping to direct the future course of our policies, as disability studies advocates, and as legislatures looking to implement new laws, it is imperative that we look at the past role of exclusion (e.g., who we have excluded and why), the historical abuses of “violence” (e.g., through thoughts, words, [in]actions), and contemporary “best practices” (e.g., “best practices” that benefit who?) that have negatively harmed our students. As educators, it is our role to help guide the next generations to better futures. Freire (2000) highlighted:

The humanist, revolutionary educator cannot wait for this possibility to materialize. From the outset, [her]his efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. [Her]His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in [wo]men and their creative power. To achieve this, [s]he must be a partner of the students in [her]his relations with them. (p. 164)

It appears an educational shift is taking place from zero tolerance policies to RJ initiatives that may encourage a “quest for mutual humanization” (Freire, 2000, p. 164). It is in this hope that we look at recent laws that have been implemented in Illinois (i.e., SB2793 [Public Act 98-
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

1102], SB100 [Public Act 099-0456], and HB2663 [Public Act 100-0105]), as we work to embrace the educational shifts from punitive to RJ practices in classrooms. Below in figure 13 is one illustration of how these two types of initiatives (i.e., from zero tolerance policies to RJ practices) play out in everyday classrooms.

![Figure 13. A tale of two schools: Comparison between restorative practices and zero tolerance policies (Flannery, 2014). Restorative Justice Laws Affecting Illinois Schools](image)

Numerous laws have been enacted in Illinois to reduce zero tolerance policies and work to implement and promote RJ practices throughout school systems in the state. The three most recent and prevalent to the topics being researched include SB2793 (Public Act 98-1102), which
was enacted on August 26, 2014; SB100 (Public Act 099-0456), which was enacted on September 15, 2016; and HB2663 (Public Act 100-0105), which was enacted on January 1, 2018. In the following sections, we will look at all three laws, but for the scope of this research, we will not be delving too deeply into HB2663 as it relates to early childhood programs within Illinois and, therefore, falls outside of the educational settings in which this research took place (e.g., middle school and high school).

SB2793 (Public Act 98-1102; August 26, 2014). One of the first laws that was implemented to help assist with this educational cultural shift from zero tolerance policies to a more RJ approach was SB2793 (Public Act 98-1102), which was enacted on August 26, 2014. SB2793 is summarized by the Illinois General Assembly (n.d.-a) as:

Amends the School Code. As part of the annual school report card, requires every school to provide (i) data on the issuance of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and removals to alternative settings, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, age, grade level, limited English proficiency status, length of exclusion, reason for exclusion, and whether alternative educational options were provided; (ii) data on the use of arrests or criminal citations, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, age, grade level, disability status, limited English proficiency status, and alleged criminal offense; and (iii) data on student retention during and between academic years, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, gender, age, grade level, disability status, limited English proficiency status, and the reason for the student’s departure. Sets forth requirements and exemptions concerning the data, including requiring the State Board of Education to analyze the data on an annual basis and determine the top quartile of school districts for specified metrics. Requires certain districts identified by the State Board to submit a school discipline improvement plan identifying the strategies it will implement to reduce the use of harsh disciplinary practices or reduce the disproportionality evident in its disciplinary practices; sets forth other requirements. (Synapsis as Introduced)

It is through SB2793 that “certain school identified by the State board to submit a school discipline improvement plan identifying the strategies it will implement to reduce the use of harsh disciplinary practices or reduce the disproportionality evident in its disciplinary practices” (Illinois General Assembly, n.d.-a, Synapsis as Introduced). Both schools included in my
research had been “identified” by the State Board as needing to implement such RJ practice strategies.

SB100 (Public Act 099-0456; September 15, 2016). The second RJ practices law that was implemented in Illinois was SB100 (Public Act 099-0456), which was enacted on September 15, 2016. According to the Illinois General Assembly (n.d.-b) this law is cited as:

Amends the School Code. Makes changes concerning student discipline policies and the parent-teacher advisory committee; the creation of memoranda of understanding with local law enforcement agencies that clearly define law enforcement’s role in schools; what a written expulsion or suspension decision must include; the use of school exclusions by school officials; a prohibition on zero-tolerance policies; when out-of-school suspensions of 3 days or less may be used; when out-of-school suspensions of longer than 3 days, expulsions, and disciplinary removals to alternative schools may be used; the provision of appropriate and available support services; the re-engagement of students; the opportunity for a student to make up work; professional development on the adverse consequences of school exclusion and justice-system involvement, effective classroom management strategies, culturally responsive discipline, and developmentally appropriate disciplinary methods that promote positive and healthy school climates; a prohibition on school officials advising or encouraging students to drop out voluntarily due to behavioral or academic difficulties; and a prohibition on issuing a monetary fine or fee as a disciplinary consequence. (Synapsis as Introduced)

SB100 had (arguably) a stronger impact on school districts, as it directly addressed issues of historically accepted zero tolerance and exclusionary practices that often removed “problem” students from educational environments. The passage of SB100 marked the “prohibition of zero-tolerance policies” (Illinois General Assembly, n.d.-b, Synapsis as Introduced) and helped to hone “culturally responsive discipline” and create “developmentally appropriate disciplinary methods that promote positive and healthy school climates” (Illinois General Assembly, n.d.-b, Synapsis as Introduced).

HB 2663 (Public Act 100-0105; January 1, 2018). HB 2663 (Public Act 100-0105) was enacted on January 1, 2018 and focuses on early childhood programs and the use (overuse?) of exclusionary practices (e.g., suspensions and expulsions from early childhood programming,
such as childcare centers, day care centers, etc.). The Illinois General Assembly (n.d.-c) summarizes HB 2663 (Public Act 100-0105) as:

Amends the School Code. Provides that early childhood programs receiving State Board of Education grants for preschool educational programs shall prohibit the expulsion of children. Provides instead that when persistent and serious challenging behaviors emerge, the early childhood program shall document steps taken to ensure that the child can participate safely in the program and utilize a range of community resources. Sets forth provisions concerning the creation of a transition plan if there is documented evidence that all available interventions and supports recommended by a qualified professional have been exhausted; temporary removal of a child; the utilization of training, technical support, and professional development resources; and annually reporting to the State Board. Makes related changes. Amends the Child Care Act of 1969 to require the Department of Children and Family Services, in consultation with the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development and the State Board of Education, to adopt rules prohibiting the use of expulsion due to a child’s persistent and serious challenging behaviors in licensed day care centers, day care homes, and group day care homes. (Synopsis as Introduced)

For the purposes of this research, I did not focus on HB 2663 (Public Act 100-0105), as it falls outside of the two educational settings in which my research took place (e.g., a middle school and a high school). This is a noted limitation to my research (i.e., not including an early childhood program) and a suggested area for future research in RJ practices. How are early childhood educational settings being affected by such changes in laws and policies? How do early childhood educational settings differ from elementary school, middle, and high school environments? Are there differences related to developmental issues, funding issues, etc.? How do these differences affect RJ practices in terms of inclusion, students with disabilities, and how these younger students progress through the educational system? Does it matter how early we start to implement such inclusionary practices? How are educators making sense of RJ practices? What are their “lived experiences” in these environments? What are the implications for students with disabilities? Based on the nature of this research and the ever kaleidoscoping landscape of educational policies, HB2663 (Public Act 100-0105) might offer fertile ground for future research in RJ practices.
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

Findings: Trying to Go Beyond “What was There”

Initially, there were numerous conflicts in the interview process. Many of these internal conflicts resided in the critical paradigm I brought to my research. Rubin and Rubin (2005) highlighted some of my concerns with my critical approach, stating, “Rather than advocating neutrality, critical researchers emphasize action research, arguing that research should redress past oppression, bring problems to light, and help minorities, the poor, the sidelined, and the silenced” (p. 26). My focus throughout this research was to be respectful of the interviewing process, the perspectives I was being offered, and the multitude of lenses through which I was filtering what I was witnessing and experiencing. Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated that what is said by others is viewed as only one type of “truth,” as “knowledge is subjective, what you see depends on whose perspective you take, whose eyes view it” (p. 26). Through a critical lens, I worked to be respectful of potential power imbalances in the research process, honored interviewees who wanted to step out of the research process (due, in part, to concerns for potential ramifications from educational administrators and fears regarding their job security) and worked to promote transparent communication. Critical researchers bring a specific role to their research. I attempted to do by engaging in a research process as “a means of empowering the oppressed” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 26) and embracing a feminist research stance by working to “humanize both the research and the interviewee” through an inclusive and gentler research approach (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 26). Ultimately, it is the researcher’s responsibility to “connect the everyday troubles individuals face to public issues of power, justice and democracy” (Kincheloe & McLaren 2005, p. 289). I attempted to connect some of the dots involved in my research.
Another aspect to the research is that I embrace a feminist stance that works to be “more open, loosely structured research methodology . . . to learn more about wo[men], to capture their words and the importance they place on the events in their world” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 27). In this manner, the interview process, the interview itself, was not a stagnant aspect to the research process. There is an understanding that, according to Rubin and Rubin (2005), “An interview should not involve applying a sterile instrument to a passive object, but should resemble normal conversation in which the interviewee influences the exchanges” (p. 27). With that in mind, I allowed the interview process to be an active exchange of ideas and remained aware of my role in the process. Further complicating my research was the incorporation of a postmodernist approach that “assumes that reality is not fully knowable, and that truth is impossible to define” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 28). This only further emphasizes that my research approach was one that posited “neutrality is impossible because everyone has interests and attitudes that influence how topics are selected, what questions are deemed appropriate, how they are asked, and what means of analysis are considered appropriate” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 28). As a result, my findings, analysis, and subsequent interpretation are only one “path” of many that could have been taken in this research process. Rubin and Rubin (2005) highlighted this point by saying, “Postmodernists argue that the researcher’s view is only one among many and has no more legitimacy than the views of the people being studied” (p. 28). My research is no exception.

One other area of my research that is important to understand is that it is not neutral, nor does it attempt to be. As with embodied critical, feminist (and I would argue activist) theory, my research reflects my own instrumentation. Steinberg and Kincheloe (2012) emphasized that feminist research:
In injects feeling, empathy, and the body into the act of inquiry, blurring the distinction between knower and known, viewer and viewed—looking at truth as a process of construction in which knowers and viewers play an active role, and embedding passion into the bricolage. (p. 1491)

Steinberg and Kincheloe (2012) continued by saying, “Researchers in this context see themselves as passionate scholars who connect themselves emotionally to what they are seeking to know and understand” (p. 1491). I was no exception in my research and have remained a “passionate scholar who connect[ed] [herself] . . . emotionally to what [I was] seeking to know and understand” (p. 1491).

There were times in my research when I attempted, unsuccessfully, to separate myself from my “findings” and from my “analysis,” where I sought to artificially “surface” themes, but I found myself stuck and feeling extraordinarily inauthentic to my interviewees, to my readers, and, ultimately, to myself. The reality is that I am unable to participate in inauthentic research. There is no hierarchy of structure to my findings. The findings I am presenting are simply one of many possible interpretations of the six interviewees who gave of their time, perspectives, and experiences. For the sake of the limitations of this research and for the pragmatics of reporting findings, I have attempted to present some organization to the themes and patterns within, between, and among the six interviewees’ responses. Some of these themes and patterns have felt artificially placed upon the research, but for the sake of the reader, I felt it was necessary to present my research in this way (e.g., the choice of canvas I have pulled onto the research frame). The emotional contact of this research matters. Steinberg and Kincheloe (2012) expressed this awkward balance of the artificial presentation of findings, devoid of emotions, by saying:

Feminist theorists argued that modernist pseudo-objectivity demands the separation of thought and feeling, the devaluation of any perspective maintained with emotional conviction. Feeling is designated as an inferior form of human consciousness—those who...
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

rely on thought or logic operating within this framework can justify their repression of those associated with emotion or feeling. (p. 1491)

Somewhere analytical findings were deemed “more legitimate” than those of findings framed within emotional content. I argue, in my research, through a feminist disability model, that it is the emotional content that gives power to the systems and humanizes the research. Steinberg and Kincheloe (2012) highlighted, “Feminist theorists have pointed out that the thought-feeling hierarchy is one of the structures historically used by men to oppress women” (p. 1491). I am hoping to work to address this one area of potential oppression and it is part of the reason that portions of my interviewees’ responses are not summarized, but rather, presented in text responses.

Finally, I would like to highlight the role of “humanness” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2012, p. 1491) in my research. When I became a teacher, I did so out of a love of students, of being a life-long learner, of teaching others, and of a desire to help people connect with each other in meaningful ways. As a researcher, I have been moved by the concepts of humanness and humanization. As Freire (2000) stated:

This movement of inquiry must be directed towards humanization . . . Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become Subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. The world—no longer something to be described with deceptive words—becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization. (p. 83)

As a researcher, I have tried to remain true to this foundational focus on humanness and humanization. According to Steinberg and Kincheloe (2012):

Critical poststructuralists have learned that inquiry should be informed by our “humanness,” that we can use the human as a research instrument . . . Utilizing his or her own empathetic understandings, the observer can watch educational phenomena from within— that is, the observer can know directly, he or she can watch and experience. (p. 1942)
Through the six interviews, I have attempted to open up a dialogue about “lived experiences” and tried to present some of my interpretive findings through my own “empathetic understandings” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2012, p. 1942). Steinberg and Kincheloe (2012) concluded that:

> By revealing what can be learned from the every-day, the mundane, feminist scholars have opened a whole new area of inquiry and insight. They have uncovered the existence of silences and absences where traditional scholars had seen only “what was there”. (p. 1492)

In the following findings, as presented, I sought to engage actively in the research and in the interviewees’ responses, hold the emotional content of the findings intact in my research, embrace the humanness/humanization of the participants, and challenge the role of traditional researchers to strive beyond “what was there” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2012, p. 1942). The following section contains a review of some of the patterns that surfaced in the interviews, their meaning as they relate to my research questions, an analysis of the findings, and some suggestions for future research.

**Topics of Significance**

Upon completing all six interviews with educators from two different educational settings, one a middle school and one a high school, I was left with a tremendous amount of data. In searching for answers to questions such as, How are educators making sense of RJ practices? What are educators’ “lived experiences” in these environments? What are the implications for students with disabilities? I was a bit overwhelmed by the willingness of my interviewees to allow me small glimpses into their experiences, their stories, and their perspectives. As I finished each interview, I followed the same procedure with the audio taped responses, meaning I separately transcribed and coded each interview. This became a bit of a falsified and an ethical dilemma for me in my research process as I attempted to separate
dynamic emotional script and narratives from the audio tapes to the stagnant “canvas” of printed text. This move from emotionally-laden audio recordings to the printed transcript echoed of the “thought-feeling hierarchy” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2012, p. 1491), whereby “feeling is designated as an inferior form of human consciousness—those who rely on thought or logic operating within this framework can justify their repression of those associated with emotion or feeling” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2012, p. 1491). It was the first step in my attempt to critically evaluate the means by which I was accessing my data and working to ensure I did not sterilize them from the emotions expressed by the interviewees or the humanness/humanization I was attempting to protect. It was one of the first ways in which I tried to embrace the value of “emotion” in my research.

An initial reading of all six interview transcriptions began to surface numerous themes and patterns in the responses from all interviewees. This process, again, was a structured attempt to place artificial parameters around my findings.

Figure 14. Initial word wall created from research topics that surfaced through the interviews.
For the sake of expediency and for the pragmatics of the research process, I attempted to find patterns in the coded data to help further understand the “lived experiences” of the interviewees and work to surface answers regarding several of the research questions, including: How are educators making sense of RJ practices? What are their “lived experiences” in these environments? What are the implications for students with disabilities? As artificial as the research process appeared, it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of several common elements (e.g., “patterns”) to the six interviews. These patterns were noted, and numerous hard copies of the transcribed interviews were made. Three additional re-readings of the transcribed interviews allowed for ample time to highlight and apply different sign or symbol codes to the interviewees’ transcribed responses. Upon a fifth reevaluation of the transcriptions, five topics of significance began to emerge in the data. These five topics of significance between and among the interviewees included: (a) caring (caring about, caring for, and communities of care); (b) restorative justice and inclusion; (c) the impact of technology; (d) safety and guns; and (e) healing, empathy, and forgiveness. We will take a closer look at each of these findings and delve further into each participant’s “lived experience” with a multitude of these issues in the subsequent sections.

Caring (Caring “about,” caring “for,” and communities of care). Fisher and Tronto (1990) stated, “Care is a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair the world so that we may live in it as well as possible” (p. 40). Care remains a controversial topic in disability studies and continues to be a topic of contention at the intersectionality of the ethics of care and disability research (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1994). Research indicates there are four stages to caring that involve issues of “caring about, caring for, care giving, and care receiving” (Tronto, 2015, p. 27), though
there is also a fifth type of care that is often overlooked, that of “caring with” (Tronto, 2015, p. 27). According to Tronto (2015):

Democratic caring required a specifically democratic fifth phase of caring, “caring with”. . . while in an integrated care process they would all fit together, the fifth phase builds expectations around the “feed-back loop that works among the four phases. (pp. 27-28) This becomes an important aspect when talking about RJ practices. According to Hughes, McKie, Hopkins, and Watson (2005), “For feminist scholars, the emphasis is on the giver of care (usually female), whilst in disability studies the recipient of care (male or female) is the locus of interest” (p. 260). Considerable research in the disability studies field demonstrates that both feminist scholars and disability studies activists regard individuals who are cared about and for (e.g., those involved in caring) as controlled (e.g., colonized) by these caring interactions, politics, and agendas (Bowden, 1997; Cancian & Oliker, 1999; Morris, 1993). As Hughes et al. (2005) highlighted, “For the Disabled People’s Movement (DPM), care is often demonized, and its organization is regularly represented as a significant barrier to the emancipation and independence of disabled people” (p. 260). Though many feminist researchers view women’s roles and societal identities (e.g., mothers, nurse, teachers, etc.) as evolving from care (Graham, 1983) and believe many of the created social policies are built upon the idea that caring is women’s work (McKie, Gregory, & Bowlby, 2001), disability studies researchers often view disability as genderless (Hughes et al., 2005). Hughes et al. (2005) highlighted this concept by saying:

Care constructs disability first and foremost as a dependent, rather than a gendered, status. Care is associated with institutional confinement, limited social engagement, partial citizenship, disempowerment and exclusion. To be cared for is to be in deficit and to have one’s competence as a social actor denied or questioned. (p. 261)

There are numerous reasons to highlight the issues surrounding care in the framing of this research, as it is a point of tension in writing through the feminist disability lens. Hughes et al.
elaborated on these tensions by saying, “Where feminists see care in terms of its role in the making of men and women, disability activists see it primarily in terms of the infantilization and disempowerment of disabled people” (p. 261). The concept of caring becomes increasingly important, as it was a repetitive theme in the six interviewees’ responses. Whether taking the form of working to create “communities of care” or expressing concern regarding “caring about” or “caring for” students, staff, and others, the concept of caring was a highlighted topic in all six interviews.

Noddings (2002) expressed that care is a basic need in human life, that all people want to be cared about, and that “natural caring” is “a longing for goodness that arises out of the experience of memory of being care for” (Flinders, 2001, p. 211). Noddings (2002) wrote extensively on the role of education in a greater caring society. She stated school/education is “a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisitions of knowledge, skills, understanding and appreciation” (p. 283). The key to much of natural caring is ethical caring, as Noddings (1984) highlighted:

Ethical caring, the relation in which we so meet the other morally . . . [arises] . . . out of natural caring – that relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination. The relation of natural caring. . . [is] . . . the human condition that we, consciously or unconsciously, perceive as “good”. It is that conditions toward which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring – to be in that special relationship – that provides motivation for us to be moral. We want to be more in order to remain in the caring relation and to enhance the ideal of ourselves as one caring. (pp. 4-5)

The importance of care was a surfacing theme, a series of dots on the metaphorical white canvas of research. Several of these “caring” aspects were highlighted in several interviewees’ responses. Maria stated:

There is an element of care that has to be involved with restorative justice practices. You have to really be invested, not only in the students, and in the school, and in the practices themselves but you also have to be invested in the time, and the energy, and the effort involved in listening to and working through the different stages of the practices. (Maria, personal communication, March 9, 2018)
Tom highlighted the importance of care, about being “cared about and cared for,” when he stated:

When they [the students] feel included, when they feel like they are a part of something special, when they feel that they are cared about and cared for, they come back in the center. I think sometimes when kids don’t feel like they belong, they’re a little like one of those hurt animals. They are just looking for their place and part of that place means that they feel safe. (Tom, personal communication, March 10, 2018)

Tom continued to illustrate the vital importance of making moves within the classroom setting to help change the larger school community. He stated:

It not only matters within the classroom setting but it matters within the school community. And, it matters within the larger community once they leave the classroom. Once a child feels as if they are a part of something bigger than themselves—It’s almost as if I’m reflecting back on my own childhood—they begin to understand the importance of their thoughts and their words and their actions because they see how those thoughts, words and actions impact others, and they begin to care. (Tom, personal communication, March 10, 2018)

This concept of caring was further highlighted in Laura’s interview, where she built upon the concept of care (being cared for and about) and expressed the idea of creating a “caring community,” one that seemingly embraces inclusion. She stated:

It might change in high school. But, right now we’re trying to formulate a framework for kids so that they don’t just have to follow the rules and follow directions, but rather that they grow some level of internal empathy for others and an understanding that we are a caring community and that everybody has the opportunity to be a part of this community, whether they’d be physically disabled or emotionally disabled or cognitively disabled. But everybody has some part in being a contributing member to the community and that the community cares about them. In this world where we have an increasing amount of violence and an increasing amount of concern for the safety and well-being of others, it’s nice to know that somewhere along the way our kids are at least being given some formula to understand that somebody cares about them. (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018)

Denise also emphasized the concept of care in her interview nearly 16 times and further highlighted its importance in her experiences. She expressed:

I think it’s important to give them the opportunity to know that restorative justice practices only work with some level of care in community. If I can give my students one lesson, one life meaning lesson, it’s that you get through life because somebody
somewhere cared about you and that somebody somewhere cared for you. And they’re not necessarily the same thing. (Denise, personal communication, March 12, 2018)

Juan discussed the importance of caring from the perspective of being part of a “community,” a family,” and a “team.” He stated:

And, there is this concept of “it’s important to me, but we should make it also important to all of us.” It’s this concept of a caring community; what happens between the two of us or what happens in this classroom also impacts what happens in the school . . . More importantly, what happens outside of the school. You see, it’s a ripple effect. It can go either direction. If I don’t give a shit about myself, how can I care for you? If I care for my community, or about my team, how can I not care about you? Mi familia. (Juan, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

These interwoven aspects of care draw into question who we care about (and who we do not) in our classrooms, communities, in policies, in systems, and society. Are some people more deserving of care than others? Research indicates the cultural framing of care occurs through the Western world of autonomy, whereby the individual is often revered as being favored over the community (Berghs, 2017). In contrast, African culture embraces the concept of ubuntu, which “is an African humanist and ethical world view where disability, as part of a common humanity, is necessarily part of what makes us human” (Berghs, 2017, p. 2). Ubuntu, as it relates to disability, plays an important role. Berghs (2017) stated:

In an ubuntu model of disability, impairment becomes cognitive, sensory, mental, physical (inclusive biological) and spiritual diversity that can have a multitude of shared meaning that society, as human collective, constantly (re)make together. Ubuntu can change over time and recognizes difference or experiences of diversity of humanness (as positive or negative), which are a part of our shared humanity. (p. 2)

When discussing the role of RJ through the lens of ubuntu, it becomes exceedingly clear that when individuals are caring for others, they are, in fact, caring for themselves (and visa versa; e.g., “If I am, because we are, then ensuring your well-being, dignity, and rights as citizen, will also ensure mine”; Berghs, 2017, p. 4). Berghs (2017) wrote, “Oppression occurs when an individual, collective or the (physical or spiritual) environment of what allows ubuntu, our
common humanity, is being threatened by inhuman actions that cause harm, such as forms of exploitation, degradation or violence” (p. 2). This is a vital aspect in RJ practices, as there is an aspect of “common humanity” (Berghs, 2017, p. 2):

The victim and perpetrator are viewed as interlinked, part of ubuntu, with both necessitating healing. Ultimately, they are implicated in terms of the strength of the group that depends on a social ethics of humanness or ubuntu that has been harmed. (p. 2)

Research indicates there are numerous examples of “collective humanness” and “common humanity” in the research literature that highlight cultures that value connections and shared humanity. Barnes, Brannelly, Ward, and Ward (2015) illustrated this point by stating:

But the devaluing of indigenous knowledge and values that are grounded in humanness and the importance of connection is a consequence of Western imperialism across the globe. Such values are being reasserted. The African concept of Ubuntu; suma qamana, a collective concept of well-being that was adopted as a central value in the Bolivian constitution of 2009; and the Maori principles of whanaungatanga or relationship building all share an affinity with care ethics and offer a challenge to the rational individualism dominating Western thinking. (p. 11)

The interviewees seemed to echo this feeling of “common humanity” (Berghs, 2017, p. 2), of ubuntu (e.g., “they feel like they are a part of something special,” “If I care for my community, or about my team, how can I not care about you?,” “the community cares about them”).

It is important to note that not all of the interviewees referenced a “common humanity” (Berghs, 2017, p. 2) within their classroom settings. Matt referred ideas surrounding the concept of care numerous times throughout his interview, but he talked critically about how schools often reference the concept of care, but rarely demonstrate these attributes once school is over. He stated:

We are always taking about caring more about our students. The administrators profess that we are a caring community, but teachers have been fired because they do not have enough sick days to cover their absences and we are a school that expects our students to engage in high-stakes testing on empty stomachs. I don’t mean to be cynical, but to be caring, you have to be willing to keep a box of cereal in your classroom cabinet and listen to your students. To be a caring school, you cannot be selective who you care about and when it’s convenient to care. You either care about people and are willing to demonstrate
that in how you act, or you don’t. It is as simple and as complicated as that. (Matt, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

The concept of care, whether it was in the form of caring for, caring about, caring communities, communities of care, or being a caring person, was enumerated numerous times over the course of the six interviews. Many of these concepts are examined further as they relate to common elements related the ethics of care, its role in disability studies, and changing views surrounding caring about others in our larger communities.

**Restorative justice and inclusion.** Another reoccurring theme in the interviewees’ responses was RJ practices and the importance of inclusion within the classroom setting. Some of the reasons for the significant amount of information about RJ practices may have been the result of the numerous specific questions framed to further delve into each educator’s “lived experiences” with RJ in the classroom. To pull specific themes or topics from the words of the participants felt inauthentic and artificial to the larger process. It became important to search for findings, where some of these artificially created boxes of findings began to tell their own stories. The area of RJ practices and inclusion offered that opportunity. Tom stated:

> When I think about trying to share a story about restorative justice practices, I always think back to the kids that I’ve had in my classrooms that are angry, excluded, hurt students. And then, I reflect about how restorative justice practices, in their proper implementation, given the opportunity to work, can really help not just the student address that anger, or that hurt, or that harm, but can also help the entire school community learn to care about the excluded student and form a web of inclusion, of caring, of compassion, and ultimately of healing for a student who otherwise would not feel as if he or she had a place in our community. I think that’s one of the greatest strengths of restorative justice practices. It’s the promise and the hope, in its proper implementation, to give students the opportunity to create caring environments in which they can grow. (Tom, personal communication, March 10, 2018)

Maria stressed the importance of how inclusion in a community and RJ practices might help to create inclusive learning environments. She expressed:

> But, I think very specifically, I think in its essence, restorative justice practices have the potential to support the inclusion of all students. That, it sorts of, sells itself on being a
warmer, fussier way of creating community and the importance of community. That’s important. Community and learning environment are very important. A lot of my students are very concerned about what others think, and how they look, and whether they fit in, and whether they’re liked. Their parents are concerned about a lot of the same things. Community helps a student fit in or stand out. It is community that helps to include someone or exclude them. (Maria, personal communication, March 9, 2018)

Some of the interviewees highlighted the importance of connections and relationships in RJ practices and the role of inclusion in helping students feel safe. Laura illustrated this vital connection between inclusion, RJ practices, and future success in life. She stated:

Restorative justice practices have radically changed how I think about teaching. As opposed to teaching to kids, I’m teaching with them. As opposed to caring for kids, although I do, I’m caring about kids. As opposed to doing something to my kids, going forward it’s an understanding of, as a community we are building together something. We are all included. We are all valued.

I think with restorative justice practices, it just builds upon that edict of some kind of saying that, “you matter,” “people care,” “we forgive you,” “healing is important,” “that social and emotional learning piece is vital” and “there’s a place for you here.”

I think a lot of times, a student just needs a relationship. And, a positive relationship with one teacher and that can make a monumental difference in that child’s experience growing up. When a student is in sixth or seventh or eighth grade, sometimes those monumental relationships with another teacher, those are the relationships that create the foundation for that child to be able to spring board into a life of health and excellence. (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018)

Several participants also highlighted the direct role of RJ in the lives of students with disabilities and working to help everyone feel included in the school environment. Denise illustrated this point when she stated:

Students with disabilities are included in all aspects. A lot of our students, because of their visible disabilities are often targets of violence or bullying in the classroom setting and therefore they’re often identified in our restorative justice processes as being the “victim.” The student where amends need to be made and therefore, it’s imperative that students with disabilities are included in the restorative justice process. And that they had advocates that work with them to help promote restorative justice practices and it’s this element of inclusion for all students. (Denise, personal communication, March 12, 2018)
Several educators emphasized the vital role that RJ practices play in helping all students feel included, increasing the “visibility” of all students, and increasing the sense of community and acceptance. Juan stated:

I would say that in this school, students regardless of their abilities are included. We work very hard to try to make sure that all students are able to contribute to the community of learners here . . . as the story I was telling about this student who felt disrespected. You know, respect plays a huge role. That, if there is a culture of inclusion at the school and if we as educators show an intolerance towards anything other than inclusion and the acceptance of inclusion, that culture permeates every aspect of the school.

So, when we talk about all students are welcome, we have to talk about all students being welcomed. This became a huge issue last year when we posted a gender-neutral bathroom over by the gym. There was this concept of students who might not be included in the conversation, particularly at this school where aspects of gender and aspects of culture and aspects of race have discrimination behind them.

They are both aspects of visible and invisible inclusion. It’s our responsibility as educators to bring about the visibility of students, regardless of whether or not they’re being included or excluded in environments and see to it that there is an opportunity for students, regardless of their backgrounds, to be included in all things at school and beyond. Restorative justice practices often give us the tools to help everyone feel included . . . that they matter in our community. (Juan, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

Matt illustrated the point that RJ practices play a vital role in building inclusive school communities. He stated:

Restorative justice practices are practices. They allow all of us the opportunity to get better each day at creating inclusive practices. It isn’t perfect. That’s why it is called “practice.” We are each learning to be better . . . to be better students . . . to be better educators . . . to be better people. (Matt, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

Other significant aspects of RJ practices and inclusion were discussed throughout all six of the interviews, which highlighted the importance of these topics for each of these educators and allowed for a greater understanding of these educators’ lived experiences through their own narratives. A key aspect to many of the participants’ experiences was that RJ practices, through
their eyes, offered tools to students to create healthier communities. The next topic that surfaced throughout the interviews was the impact of technology.

**Impact of technology.** Technology, and its growing use, seems to be gaining significant ground as both a tool to increase community and, at times, as a weapon to destroy the fragile fabric that RJ practices weave to help people heal from past harm and gain a sense of inclusion in their classrooms. Several educators highlighted the uses of technology in the classroom and outside of the classroom setting. Tom stated:

I think one of the biggest challenges facing my students in today’s classroom tends to be really fitting in and the role of technology and finding a place where a child’s identity can be found within their social structure and being able to feel included in things in the classroom or on the field or during art class. Kids today are really lost and looking for guidance in ways that years ago they didn’t really have to, there were other places where kids could go and feel as if they were being heard. Today, it’s almost as if kids are lost in the system and looking just for somebody to care about them.

Technology has played a huge role in reducing social emotional learning. I see that in the classroom. I see that in the dojo. I see that when I’m working with kids. And, I see that when I’m working with administrators who think somewhere along the way that the social emotional learning grows just as quickly as classroom expectations. That’s not always the case. I have kids in my classroom now that have aged into practices but emotionally, they’re very young. I think technology has played a huge role in almost emotionally numbing kids in their social emotional growth. They are connected with people half-way around the world via their computer, but they have no idea how to connect with each other when they are sitting across from each other. (Tom, personal communication, March 10, 2018)

The proper use of technology to allow people to connect and the emphasis on “safe use” often surfaced as concerns. The need to regulate technology in the classroom setting was also expressed. The growing uses of technology as entertainment and as weapons were also raised by several of the participants. Laura stated:

A part of that role is also the aspect of cellphones and leaving cellphones outside of the classroom setting and talking about the safe use of technology. Parents today don’t necessarily regulate the use of cellphones and most parents want their children to be able to have access to cellphones at all times during the school day. That creates a problem if we have a child who’s having difficulty inside the classroom or outside of the classroom.
and turns to social media, such as Facebook or Snapchat, to air their grievances. (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018)

One educator even illustrated the difficulties with the growing use of technology by calling it a “necessary evil” (Matt, personal communication, March 14, 2018), and one that students and educators cannot avoid. Matt stated:

Technology isn’t going anywhere. You either learn to use it properly, or it will likely be used against you. I love that technology can be used to connect people. Some of my quietest students come alive in online platforms, but technology can also be toxic. We had a situation a few weeks ago when a student was bullied on a Friday afternoon. As a teacher, I should have addressed the situation right away, but it was Friday and one of the involved students had already left on the bus for the day. We waited to implement our restorative justice protocols that day. Over the weekend, students jumped on their social media accounts and there was a bullying contagion that occurred. The snowball effect of social media can be terrifying. By Monday, the isolated bullying situation that had occurred on Friday was magnified to the point of needing to call an all-school conference to try and heal the hurt. We all need to understand that technology is both a blessing and a curse. It is a necessary evil. (Matt, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

Several interviewees also discussed the entertainment aspect of technology and how distracting its overuse could be in meeting educational requirements. Distraction, social influencing of technology (e.g., social media) and “likes,” and technological safety were all themes in the interviews. Maria stated:

Well, the kids in my class come from a lot of different backgrounds. But, most of them have a lot of technology and a lot of games that they like to play. Fortnite has really created a lot of challenges for getting homework done in the past year. I would say, probably just based on current events, questions of school safety have become an issue. Am I going to be safe in the classroom? Is the influence of what’s happening on Snapchat or in Facebook going to influence what people think of me the next day?

There are a lot of challenges facing my students. But, I teach an age group right now where mostly the challenges are whether or not so and so likes me, or whether or not I have enough money to be able to buy the next video game. We’re pretty lucky in this school. (Maria, personal communication, March 9, 2018)

Later in her interview, Maria elaborated on aspects of technological privilege at Sandoval Middle School and alluded to the level of socioeconomic privilege in her school. She stated:
They [The students] come from two-parent income households, multiple cars, vacations on breaks . . . lots of resources. They spend their entire day worried about whether they are liked by the person sitting next to them, or whether their selfie is liked with a thumbs up. They understand emoticons and emoji characters better than they can spell on their spelling test. (Maria, personal communication, March 9, 2018)

The growing role of technology was mentioned in all six interviews. The aspects of technology were both cautiously embraced and respected for potential. Parents want their children to have cellphones to increase safety. Teachers do not want cellphones used in school out of concern regarding cheating and the potential to weaponize social media platforms as fertile ground for cyberbullying type behaviors. It stands to reason that technology will continue to infiltrate all aspects of education and safe use practices remain a central concern of educators today. Another topic that surfaced throughout the interviews included aspects of safety (in a multitude of forms), school shootings, and guns.

**Safety and guns.** Safety has taken a major role in today’s educational landscape and the six interviews reflected this historical reality. Concerns revolving around safety (e.g., physical safety, emotional safety, etc.) and the real fears exacerbated by recent school shootings surfaced throughout the six interviews. Framed in contemporary educational verbiage of “school safety” and “safe spaces,” all of the participants emphasized the importance of students feeling safe in school. Tom stated:

I think one of the big things that has changed over time is this concept of safety. They just want to make sure that their kids are safe. And, for the most part, everybody’s on board with making sure that that happens. Kids’ safety seems to be paramount here. (Tom, personal communication, March 10, 2018)

Maria illustrated the importance of schools being safe places. She expressed:

Schools should be safe places and traditionally have been safe places where everybody is included. When a kid is excluded from a circumstance, even if they don’t just fit in and there’s a good reason behind it—that there’s a reason why kids needs to be given the opportunity to see through a different experience and be trained to behave differently towards other people.
When I went to school and when I became a teacher, for the most part schools were considered safe places. It is becoming increasingly a targeted environment for people to feel as if it’s okay to harm other people in traditionally safe spaces. It’s not okay. It’s not okay to harm people. It’s not okay to exclude people. Somewhere along the way, we need to work at creating environments where people can be forgiven for the harm that they cause. Schools need to be safe for everyone. (Maria, personal communication, March 9, 2018)

Several interviewees mentioned the growing concern surrounding students’ safety as one of the most daunting challenges facing educators today. Several school shootings had happened prior to the interviews taking place and the Parkland School shooting (that occurred on February 14, 2018, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida) seemed to be on the minds of many of the six educators interviewed. As Laura stated:

I think one of the most delicate challenges today happens to fall into the category of safety in the classroom and safety outside of the classroom. Most of our kids feel safe in school and they feel safe outside of school. But, the majority of the conversations that I have today are kids concerned about coming into school and not being safe.

The biggest thing that comes to mind when I think about contributing factors being, that to prevent a student from being in the classroom environment at this point in time, is safety. If there is a question of a child being safe or a child presenting the potential of causing harm to other children, we really do not have a place for that student in the classroom environment at this point in time. Safety is such a hot topic right now, which mean guns in school and school safety, bullying, school shootings, the element of self-harming behavior, the lack of empathy. Kids need to feel safe, if learning is going to take place.

We really work to see to it that the school is a safe environment for everybody who enters the doors and remains a safe environment to try to create a safer community for everybody who leaves once the school day is over. But I would say that the contributing factor that would prevent a student from being included in a classroom setting would be if that child for some reason is a risk to themselves or other people. (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018)

An interesting finding was in the discrepancy between the two schools, Sandoval Middle School and Piedmont High School, and the educators’ perspectives of the concepts surrounding safety. The educators at Sandoval Middle School expressed that the school often felt unsafe to many students (e.g., bullying, emotionally unsafe spaces, the abuse of social media to exclude others,
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

etc.), whereas at Piedmont High School, students often felt safe coming to and attending school because their community environments were often unsafe (e.g., active gang activity, neighborhood shootings, physically unsafe environments, etc.). Denise highlighted this finding by saying:

I’ve spent a lot of time working in coaching and soccer, after school programming, and really found that students often come to school, at least in this area, to feel safe. They [students] often come from homes or communities where safety is not a guarantee. Therefore, coming to school is a place where they feel they can be safe. (Denise, personal communication, March 12, 2018)

Juan emphasized the notion that “school is safe” by saying:

Safety. I would say that being able to stay safe in school and being able to stay safe out of school is without question the biggest challenge facing my students today. I just think back about the fact that over the last 2 years, I’ve lost three students. Two have died and one has gone to prison. Safety tends to be one of the biggest areas and everyone has a role to play in that, not just creating safe schools but also in mandating that schools are safe places to be.

A lot of my students have ended up in prison, over time. We talk about the role of being in community and having something to contribute to community. We talk about the importance of safety and feeling safe. There is a huge role of what do you do with the element of guns and safety. A lot of my students have carried guns because it makes them feel safe.

In today’s world, the concept of schools being safe, for some of my students being in the school makes it a safe place. For some of my students, school hasn’t been a safe place. I think restorative justice practices offers the opportunity to create safe space for everybody and that holds promise to me. (Juan, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

Safety remained a major consideration of the lived experiences of the six educators. All six educators interviewed remained concerned about the safety of their students and several were certain that students needed to feel safe prior to any learning being able to commence. The diverse meaning behind “what it means to be safe in school” surfaced numerous aspects not previously considered. Why does one school fear school safety (e.g., potential school shootings, increasing threats of cyberbullying) and the other view school as a “safe harbor” to systemic
community violence? These insights begin to draw into question: How do we define safe schools? What does it mean to be safe? What role do outside influences (e.g., gun policy, gang activity, etc.) have on students in the classroom? As the topic of safety was emphasized by each of the interviewees, so were the concepts of the importance of healing, empathy, and forgiveness.

**Healing, empathy, and forgiveness.** The vast concepts of healing, empathy, and forgiveness played key themes throughout all six interviews. Many of the interviewees framed healing from a holistic perspective and talked about how it helped with the school community.

Juan stated:

> I think healing takes place all the time. I think every day we’re given opportunities to heal and help others heal from experiences. If the school community is seen as a healing place, kids will work to not protect it as a safe space. (Juan, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

Matt stated:

> Healing and forgiveness are key. If a kid truly thinks that another person cares, is willing to listen, truly “hears” what he’s saying, then, the school community functions. Kids know when other people truly care. They know when they have made a mistake and most of them really do care about one another. (Matt, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

These three interwoven concepts of healing, empathy, and forgiveness emerged in numerous ways through the interviews and in the self-reflections of the interviewees. Denise highlighted the importance of healing in her school by saying:

> As an educator, I think healing takes place all the time in my life and in my classroom. Whether it’s turning to student who’s having a rough morning and asking her whether or not she’d had breakfast or turning to one of my students who hasn’t been able to get a paper in on time and asking him how things are going on at home. Healing plays a huge role.

> At the school, this concept of we’re a community and we’re all in it together one way or the other creates a bond where healing is a natural consequence for being part of a community. There is an essence, one student walk through the door and that, this is their safe space.
And, they can be whoever they really are and there will be support on that. It, by its nature, is a healing place and a healing community were students are able to feel safe and they basically work to leave their baggage at the threshold. (Denise, personal communication, March 12, 2018)

Maria echoed Denise’s reflections on the role of healing in her life and emphasized the role of her upbringing (e.g., “belief system”) in embracing concerns of healing and forgiveness. She stated:

I think healing plays, and continuous to play, a huge role in my life. I think that with my background and my beliefs, that the concept of being able to heal and forgive plays a role that is imperative as to who I am as a person, and what I do, and with everything comes forgiveness. My belief system requires me to embrace forgiveness and to offer it to others. And it’s hard. It’s a hard role to take. (Maria, personal communication, March 9, 2018)

Laura offered her reflections on the role healing played in her life growing up and the role religion (e.g., “I grew up in the church”) played in forming those beliefs. She said:

Healing plays an awfully important role in my life. I grew up in the church and we believe very, very strongly in the power of healing, power of prayer, power of caring about people caring for them. Concept of not doing any harm to begin with often takes away the need to make amends for problems afterwards. The reality is that harm happens. People get hurt. When people get hurt, it’s important to be responsible and play a role in helping them heal. (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018)

One area where the concepts of healing, empathy, and forgiveness were magnified occurred when the interview questions began to inquire about specific experiences with RJ practices within their schools. Tom expressed several key points about the power of RJ practices when he stated:

My experience with restorative justice has been simply that, people want to heal. Sometimes, people don’t know how to heal. Sometimes in that, it takes two elements that are very important: One, is for somebody who has created harm to take responsibility for the harm that’s been caused. And two, for the person or kids that have been harmed to be put into a position where they can ask for and receive an apology to any harm that’s been caused and allow healing to begin . . . In my opinion, restorative justice practices happen to be a hopeful practice, because they hold the individual accountable for their role within that community. And, they hold the community responsible for including the individual. That’s a very powerful, hopeful healing practice if done correctly. (Tom, personal communication, March 10, 2018)
Maria emphasized many similar points regarding the healing potential RJ practices offer. She also highlighted that many of the aspects of both healing and forgiveness played a role in her personal “belief system” (Maria, personal communication, March 9, 2018). She said:

It is becoming increasingly a targeted environment for people to feel as if it’s okay to harm other people in traditionally safe spaces. It’s not okay. It’s not okay to harm people. It’s not okay to exclude people. Somewhere along the way, we need to work at creating environments where people can be forgiven for the harm that they cost. I think it’s all about forgiveness. We have to offer people, the opportunity to forgive and we have to offer people the opportunity to find healing. We have to offer the opportunity for people to be included in those discussions, and how deeply they want to be involved in those discussions.

I think restorative justice practices can offer the opportunity for students to find some level of forgiveness for infractions that occur throughout the school year. I’d like to think one of the strengths of restorative justice practices is being able to find, sort of, that forgiveness aspect that was so important and is—continues to be so important in my life and my belief system. (Maria, personal communication, March 9, 2018)

Laura illustrated the role of RJ practices in offering “alternative” approaches to previous behavior modifications (e.g., PBIS) and prior “interventions” (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018). She stated:

Restorative justice practices had been a very healing alternative to conventional behavioral modifications and interventions. This concept of being able to teach students that they have choices and they have choices that come with responsibility is a huge element at the elementary school level.

I think with restorative justice practices, it just builds upon that edict of some kind of saying that, “you matter,” “people care,” “we forgive you,” “healing is important,” “that social and emotional learning piece is vital,” and “there’s a place for you here.”

There is also a conversation. And, part of that conversation is to grow the experience, so that everybody learns and has the opportunity for forgiveness and for healing in the process. This aspect for reconciliation is huge for restorative justice practices. (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018)

Beyond the important role of RJ practices in helping to promote aspects of healing, empathy, and forgiveness within the school community, it is vital to note that several interviewees made
special comments regarding RJ practices with students with disabilities within their classrooms. Both Tom and Laura had several comments regarding the specific areas in which RJ practices might be of benefit to all students. Tom commented:

Restorative justice practices have had a lot of impact on students with disabilities. As I was saying beforehand, a lot of students have been the targets of bullying behavior, particularly if they have been identified as having disabilities. Therefore, they become central to restorative justice practices and the healing that has to take place, in order for the community to move forward. All of our kids matter. (Tom, personal communication, March 10, 2018)

Laura highlighted that students with disabilities are often “targeted” by other students in the school and, therefore, often benefit from the RJ practices that are implemented within the school community. Laura stated:

Students with disabilities are always included in the restorative justice process and the practices that we model in this school. Unfortunately, often times students with disabilities are often targeted because of their visible disabilities as being the focal point for behaviors that require restorative justice practices to be implemented.

For examples, if a student who has a physical disability is being targeted in gym class because she is the last person to be chosen for a team, then there is a question as to how we maintain a level of empathy within our school and grow that level of empathy so that everybody feels as if they are included, regardless of ability. (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018)

The degree to which healing, empathy, and forgiveness were common expressions throughout the six interviews and how they are intrinsically interwoven with the RJ practices being practiced in the two school environments further emphasizes the important role RJ may play in future disability studies research. Research indicates students with disabilities are more likely to be excluded, stigmatized, labelled, and bullied (Rembis, Kudlick, & Nielsen, 2018). The role of inclusive school practices; the promotion of healing, empathy, and forgiveness within the school environment; and working to ensure safety for all students becomes a main focus in RJ practices and disability studies alike. Although these may be topics of interest to educators and school administrators, these issues are of significant concern to those in the disability studies field, as
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

issues surrounding exclusionary practices, stigmatizing labels, historically marginalized, and targets of systemic harm (e.g., medical institutions, educational systems, legal policies, etc.) are particularly poignant for those in the disability studies field (Rembis et al., 2018).

In the next chapter, we will take a broader look at the research questions: How are educators making sense of RJ practices? What are their “lived experiences” in these environments? What are the implications for students with disabilities? In Chapter 5, I summarize the research findings, discuss some of the limitations of this research, make recommendations for potential future research, and offer suggestions to educators in the field.
CHAPTER SIX: WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

This research has been a widening and dynamic process. There were numerous twists and
turns, dead ends, detours, and stop lights along the way. Each change in research course, every
spiral turn in my research questions, and all the stop lights to accessing my participants in this
research process allowed me to hone what I was researching (and why) and reinforced the
importance of RJ practices, the ethics of care, and the individual perspectives of the “lived
experiences” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) of the people with whom I was engaging.

There is a symbol of the Tohono O’odham Nation (once known as the Papago Indians) referred
to as the “Man in the maze.” In this symbol, a figure is seen entering an extensive labyrinth that
is supposed to depict the journey through life and the numerous choices made along the path.
Similar to concepts of Buddhist enlightenment, the goal is to eventually make it through the
multitudes of switchbacks, dead ends, stops, and turns to a higher level of understanding (e.g., to
light) at the end of the journey (e.g., life). There is happiness, pain, sadness, laughter, and
learning along the way. This research process exemplified this journey. Suffice to say, this
dissertation journey changed me, and, in my own way, I became the [wo]man in the maze of this
research labyrinth.
My original plan, when I started this dissertation journey, was to focus my research on the Navajo (e.g., Dine) Peacemaking process, to which we (e.g., educators, policymakers, and legal representatives) all owe a debt of gratitude for giving us the foundation for contemporary RJ practices. As a result of historical (and unforeseen events) such as the Animas River Spill on August 5, 2015 (the damage of which continues to negatively affect the lives of those who live on the reservation and their livestock); the Standing Rock protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline during September of 2016 (and continuing today); and Hurricane Harvey that hit Texas on August 17, 2017, my experiences with each of these turns in the “maze” created a greater desire to focus my research on the ethics of care and further reflexively think about the multitude of aspects of this research. Why does it all matter? Do we care anyway? Who do we care about and who do we care for? Do we care more about some people in society than others? Why?
Each of these experiences drastically affected my views about my research, the communities in which I work, and the role that education (and being an educator) ultimately plays in helping people feel connected (or disconnected) with others in society. These questions have a profound impact in what we value as a society, who we value as being included in that ecological system, and how we find value in the inherent interconnectedness of people within society.

The process of engaging in this phenomenological study on educators’ perceptions of RJ, care, and disability has been a lengthy, tenuous journey filled with numerous changes in
direction (e.g., difficulties with accessing participants), several challenging pitstops (e.g., changes in national events, deaths in the family), unplanned potholes (e.g., denied continuation of the initial research by the elimination of participants and sponsoring research site, citing safety concerns), and a multitude of unexpected discoveries (e.g., new findings and future directions for further studies). Orison Swett Marden (2009) is cited as stating:

When we are sure that we are on the right road there is no need to plan our journey too far ahead. No need to burden ourselves with doubts and fears as to the obstacles that may bar our progress. We cannot take more than one step at a time. (p. 75)

Similar to Campbell’s (2004) hero’s journey, this research process led me on a path over time and with numerous challenges, and at times it was not possible to do anything other than “take more than one step at a time,” simply trust the process, and listen to the sage advice of my mentors (e.g., my dissertation committee, fellow academics/scholars, and current classmates). Learning to quiet my mind and listen, to stop (and rest) when necessary, to allow myself to be changed by the journey (the process and the participants), to maintain faith throughout the process (in myself and in those around me), and to continue to take “one step at a time” regardless of the fatigue, illness, or life’s distraction allowed me to continue on my own Hero’s Journey. In the hero’s journey, Campbell (2004) discussed three main phases: departure, initiation, and return. There are numerous other stages involved in this process that have been illustrated in a multitude of ways and incorporated in numerous traditions. One such illustration of The Hero’s Journey is depicted below in figure 18.
Similar to the woman in the maze of the Tohono O’odham Nation, in Campbell’s (2004) hero’s journey, the process begins with a “hero” (e.g., researcher in my case) entering into a first stage entitled the “departure” with a “calling.” Infused with “the personal is political” (Hanisch, 1970, p. 76) philosophy, a professional desire to constructively contribute to the field of disability and equity in education, and working to add both a political voice and social action of positive change into previously uncharted territories in infrastructures of inclusion and care, I started on my initial steps on my “call to adventure.” “The Call,” as framed by Campbell (2004), is the moment in time when an individual (e.g., researcher) identifies a “quest” (e.g., research) and makes a “deliberate decision” (e.g., defines research interests and engages in doctoral
coursework) to engage in the process. The “calling” is something that was always present in the work I did, grounded in critical consciousness (Freire, 2005), and was the driving force that pushed me to continue to “put one foot in front of the other” and have faith that my path was not leading me off a cliff. As I completed my coursework and successfully defended my dissertation proposal, I formally answered, “The Call,” and worked to prepare for my journey ahead.

My previous academic studies had offered me, metaphorically speaking, solid hiking boots (e.g., strong academic foundation) and a backpack (e.g., research skills, pilot studies, outlines of paradigms, numerous resources to support my research, etc.) filled with foundational knowledge of issues surrounding the national high school dropout epidemic, the school-to-prison pipeline, bullying in the 21st century, the Navajo Peacemaking process, a plethora of disability studies frameworks, safer school policies, and RJ practices. As I began this response to “The Call” of the research journey, I worked to form significant “allies” (e.g., mentors, educators, support people) to assist me in my process and engaged in formal “preparations” (e.g., working to increase my knowledge and strengthen my courage for the journey before me). My “preparations” led me to research and uncover several common themes such as some of the issues surrounding power versus force, the ethics of care, belonging, and issues of exclusion. They also allowed me to surface gaps in current research regarding educators’ “lived experiences” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617). Significant research reported findings that spoke about educators (but not to/with them), discussed “best practices,” and offered insights to novice administrators as to how to implement innovative policies, laws, and programs, but few studies offered the opportunity for educators to offer their own contributions to the culture or climate of schools currently implementing RJ practices in the classrooms.
The gaps in the research with regard to the importance of listening to educators’ experiences was notable and the lack of these vital voices (and the potential solutions they might be able to offer) created a deafening silence that was reminiscent of historically marginalized groups being silenced by the majority (e.g., Civil Rights Movement, disability rights, women’s rights). This is a central theme in disability studies in education, as those who have been labeled as “disabled,” “other,” or “different,” typically students who have been labeled as “special” (e.g., special education), have historically been targets of oppression, objectification, exclusion, persecution, social maligning, institutionalization, social isolation, societal scapegoating, violence, bullying, made invisible and, arguably, continue to be political fodder for the social-political structures that reap the benefits of labeling some people as “disabled” (Foucault, 1973; Stiker, 1999; Winzer, 1993).

So, in the United States, who is being silenced, marginalized, stigmatized, labelled, or made invisible? Who controls the social narrative (e.g., Who is being spoken about and who is being spoken for)? Who is being included and who is being excluded from conversations, policies, laws, and communities within our educational institutions, in our greater communities, and in our larger society, as a whole? Does it matter? Do we care? What, as educators, are our “lived experiences” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) with these issues?

Seemingly, educational institutions themselves and the systems they perpetuate are “medical model” focused (e.g., segregate, label, marginalize, “othering,” silencing; Berryman, Ford, Nevin, & SooHoo, 2015). Arguably, the criminal justice model follows suit, where convicts are culled, quantified, and labelled based on their crime, time to be served, health conditions, and threat levels to the greater society. As I began my research, I attempted to research the “social” and “transformational” models of disability studies in education and
worked to identify potential “obstacles in the path” of my proposed journey. Berryman et al. (2015) illustrated this “obstacle” when they stated:

Within the medical model, the educational response has been to assess and categorize students according to the level of severity of the condition and then provide a response (often resource dependent) to remediate or fix students up. Thus educators who are positioned within the medical model might adhere to discourses such as special needs, problems, difficulties, intervention, disorder and diagnosis; discourses such as these have the power to pathologize and exclude (Ballard, 2004). (p. 42)

It became exceedingly apparent that in the field of education, there continues to be an ongoing tension between the “medical model” of historical segregation, stigmatizing, labeling, and excluding of students and the need for a “social model” to offer collaborative, inclusive, communities of care, and restorative healing environments (e.g., RJ practices), where students can gain the social/emotional foundations that they need to flourish (and help others to do the same) in today’s changing educational landscape. Berryman et al. (2015) highlighted the vital need for the social model of disability and inclusive practices in schools:

Within a social model for disability, school personnel and their communities commit to an inclusive set of values such as equity, participation and respect for diversity as the important foundation for inclusion (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006). They also broaden their approached to education to embrace a strengths based capacity approach (Florian, Devecchi & Dee, 2008) and adopt inclusive pedagogy that is responsive to the student’s progress and needs and where teachers frame teaching and learning as the task of developing a rich learning community with multiple and different learning opportunities available for everyone (Florian & Linkletter, 2010). (p. 42)

I witnessed these tensions during my research within the context of participants’ responses with the concepts such as the term “training” or “to train.” For most of the six educators interviewed, the term “training” was only used to reference current certification or RJ “trainings” the educators and staff at their schools had received, but for two of the educators interviewed, the concept of “to train” took the form of something students needed. To illustrate this tension, Maria stated:
Some kids in the school just don’t fit in. Kids need to be given the opportunity to know what is asked of them. They need to be trained. They need to have discipline and they need to know right from wrong. It’s the responsibility of the teacher to break these kids of their bad habits that they’re learning at home. (Maria, personal communication, March 9, 2018)

Matt further emphasized the tension between the “trainings” teachers engaged in to increase their proficiencies and the need “to train” students, when he stated:

You see there are some kids that are labeled. When they are labeled by experts, the label often ostracizes them as untouchable. They are the kids that we talk about in the lunchroom and in staffings. These are the kids that need to be taught differently, are the last ones to be picked for being included on a team and are the first ones to be targeted in the hallways. They are “special.” We offer them services to help them improve their skills and increase their confidence, but once labelled, all we have are referrals and resources. These are the kids that need to be trained differently. If you are a teacher who wants to step in and change it, you are viewed as challenging the system and, all of a sudden, you get identified and labelled, just like the kid that you are trying to help . . . and the cycle continues. It seems like it’s always been that way. (Matt, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

This common theme of “training” for teachers or students who needed “training” was indicative of historical educators who felt students were “empty vessels” that need to be filled with knowledge or likening students to animals that needed to be broken and trained in the ways of civilized [wo]men (e.g., traditional positivist classrooms, historical uses of boarding schools of indigenous populations, etc.). As educators, especially those who are focused on disability studies in education paradigms, it is imperative that we recognize these contexts, listen for them (and look for healing opportunities when they emerge), and work to reduce the historical marginalization of students (and colleagues) and to embrace social models that embrace inclusion, not as the exception to the rule (e.g., not as “special), but as an ecological system of care (e.g., echoing Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory and Gilligan and Tronto’s ethics of care frameworks) that espouses the inherent self-agency and respect of everyone within that system (and those beyond it). These are the foundational ethical frameworks of seminal works such as *Reverence for Life*, in which Schweitzer (1993) stated, “Ethics is nothing other than
Reverence for Life. Reverence for Life affords me my fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, assisting and enhancing life, and to destroy, to harm or to hinder life is evil” (p. 262) and the rights afford by United Nation’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (n.d.) that stated the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (United Nations, n.d., preamble).

Within these frameworks of ecological systems of care, the ethics of care, and the “inherent dignity” (United Nations, n.d., preamble) of others, the role of inclusion becomes the key to this continuing research discussion. In the United States, where the current political rhetoric continues to lament the “tables over walls” in our Southern borders, or we identity some individuals within our country as “illegal” or “alien,” these are often difficult discussions to initiate, but educators play a key role in increasing the capacity to have these vital conversations. Berryman et al. (2015) highlighted the important role teachers play in the promotion of inclusion in the lives of their students, their educational institutions, and even their larger communities when they stated:

> Education and educators play a critical part in shaping students’ self-efficiency, or as Bruner (1996) describes their ability, responsibility and skill in initiating and completing actions tasks, and therefore, often in their inclusion or exclusion from education (Wearmouth & Berryman, 2009). Whatever particular education settings, pedagogies, or activities are employed and one is included in, it is important to ensure that the practices that are utilized contribute to a young person’s sense of self efficacy and, therefore, to the construction of positive feelings about being able to cope with the world of school (Bruner, 1996) and in turn the global community (Wearmouth & Berryman, 2009). (p. 44)

This element of inclusion, especially as it relates to RJ practices, was a vital finding in the responses of the educators who were interviewed throughout the course of this research. Juan highlighted this vital part of educators’ understanding of the importance of inclusion when he stated:
Restorative justice practices have the potential to support inclusion of all students. It does not take a specific form to the point where it promotes exclusion . . . No one is excluded. That’s kinda of the point . . . If anything, restorative justice practices by its elements are based on inclusion. (Juan, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

Laura added to the importance of the understanding of the role of inclusion as it relates to RJ practices and students with disabilities when she stated:

Restorative justice practices have the potential to support inclusion and probably offer a framework by which inclusion becomes the normative as opposed to the exception to the rule. Because kids at the school see that every kid has a place. Disabilities become an afterthought to a large degree. (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018)

The majority of the educators interviewed for this research expressed an understanding and emphasized the important role of inclusion in creating safe, caring, and productive environments for all students.

It is important to note that this journey toward inclusive practices is an imperfect and continuous process (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006). Ainscow et al. (2006) stated, “The active combating of exclusions; [that] inclusion is a never ending process. Thus, an inclusive school is one that is on the move, rather than one that has reached a perfect state” (p. 25). As educators, we are called upon to make meaningful changes and continue to improve our practice. We come from a history riddled with systems, processes, policies, and procedures that have marginalized access for many (e.g., boarding school for indigenous people, segregated schools for minorities, self-contained special education programs, zero tolerance policies, privatization of schools, etc.). Freire (1985, 2005) stated educators must be willing to enter the areas of “conflict between the powerful and the powerless” (Freire, 1985, p. 122), and, if we choose not to, we have taken sides with those who historically marginalize others. Elie Wiese (1986) is cited as stating:

We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men and women are persecuted because of their race,
As educators, it is essential that we remain at the center of many of these conversations and not remain silent or neutral when the care and safety of our students are at stake. In the interviews, a multitude of these concerns were illuminated in the form of tensions between “doing the right thing” (e.g., speaking up for a student, “closing the door,” etc.) or “following the rules” (e.g., doing what administrators ordered, following “the book,” etc.), which often placed the educators in the fray between “the powerful and the powerless” (Freire, 1985, p. 122). Denise highlighted this tension when she stated:

I think restorative justice practices definitely have the potential to support inclusion of students with disabilities. But, part of that inclusion isn’t just because there’s a law that says, “Okay, this is the school. This is what we’re going do. This has been required of us because of administrators.”

I think it’s being done because, we as educators are working with administrators, who potentially have outside pressures, but internally have a school desire to create a culture of inclusion. We are situated in this community and in an environment where there’s a lot of disposability, where there are a lot of kids who make bad choices, as I’m sure we’ve all made bad choices growing up as kids. (Denise, personal communication, March 12, 2018)

Juan added to the commentary of the “chain of command” type tension between educators, administrators, and students when he stated:

I would say most of the teachers are open to the [restorative justice] process because it’s expected of them by the administration. I would say most of the students are open to the process because the teachers expect them to be. (Juan, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

Laura identified some of the additional pressures facing teachers and students in today’s classroom when she stated, “Our kids are pretty much over scheduled and over privileged in a lot of ways. It’s not about pencils and textbooks and erasers, it’s more along the lines of test scores and meeting the needs of administrators and parents” (Laura, personal communication, March
11, 2018). Tom expounded upon these everyday tensions in working to meet the needs of all stakeholders in an RJ school when he stated:

Administrators think that restorative justice practices can simply be implemented. I would say that most teachers are frustrated with having to take the time to actually go through the process because it takes energy, and it takes effort, and it takes focus and you have to care.

Students, particularly at this age, tend to be more open to the concept of fixing something that’s going wrong or helping people feel included.

There are lot of different reactions to the restorative justice practices. Administrators, who feel like they’re just clicking a box and fulfilling responsibilities. Teachers, that want to participate but don’t have the time to. Students, that don’t necessarily understand why they have to go through the process.

And parents, who are just beside themselves that kids even have to think about things like this. They want to know more about what’s being taught in math class and whether their kids are going to be able to apply to Harvard than they are worrying about a kid fitting in or a kid being excluded. (Tom, personal communication, March 10, 2018)

Each of these aspects highlights the growing need for educators and administrators to honestly reflect upon expectations, practice, and the policies, interventions, and programming being introduced within educational settings, especially in light of the changing educational laws that have been implemented (and will likely continue to be created, proposed, and passed in the future; e.g., SB2793, SB100, and HB2663).

Campbell’s (2004) second phase of the hero’s journey is that of initiation. I faced numerous obstacles and “guardian(s) of the threshold” (e.g., aspects of this process where I encountered obstacles) and “crossing the threshold” (e.g., entering into a new world and needing to gain/grow skills to survive). I took each of these trials and tests as challenges and learning opportunities to hone my research skills, to improve my research questions, to gain greater insight into my topics, and to strengthen my tenacity for the grueling research journey. My initial research intentions were centered on the healing practices of the Navajo (e.g., Dine) Peacemaking process, as so much of contemporary RJ practices center around indigenous
practices of working to ensure healthy living communities. Historical events occurred (e.g., involving the “guardian(s) of the threshold” and “crossing the threshold”; Campbell, 2004) of sorts), when the Animas River Spill on August 5, 2015. Then, shortly afterwards, the Standing Rock protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline during September of 2016 escalated and, then, Hurricane Harvey hit Texas on August 17, 2017; each of these events catapulted my research into quagmire of chaos (e.g., lost my research sites, participants dropped from the research, etc.), but out of the chaos and while moving through the multitude of “obstacles,” I was able to learn new skills, further develop my innate passion for disability studies in education, embrace the difficult work involved in RJ practices, fully embrace my appreciation of inclusion, and gain greater insight into the ethics of care. I participated in research conferences, furthered my academic studies, and used the time to regroup, refocus, and prepare for the next stage in my research journey. Ultimately, it was by going through each of these events (e.g., Campbell’s [2004] “road of trials”) that I gained the necessary skills, resiliency, and internal fortitude; reignited my dedication to the field of disability studies; and gathered greater support from mentors (e.g., my dissertation committee, many of whom had helped to seed my initial interest in special education years earlier). Through each of these experiences, I began to make a multitude of important connections about what we value as a society (e.g., Do we actually value caring?), who we value as being included in that society system (e.g., inclusion), and how we determine value in the inherent interconnectedness of people within society (i.e., Bronfenbrenner’s systems theory). Each of these “road of trials” tested me at times, disheartened me, and almost sidelined the research process, but with the assistance of a multitude of people (including my mentors, participants, and friends, who patiently listened and quietly walked with me), I was granted the opportunity to continue on this research path and delve deeply into finding answers to three main
research questions of: How are educators making sense of RJ practices? What are their “lived experiences” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) in these environments? What are the implications for students with disabilities? With these three questions at the heart of my journey, I continued on my path to find answers and remain open to the learning taking place along the way.

Campbell (2004) alluded to this process of interacting with a special item, person, or experience during the worst part of the hero’s journey as being “The Saving Experience.” I can attest to the fact that numerous experiences, items, and people allowed me to continue through this research process, especially when the prospects of continuing seemed dim because of unforeseen and overwhelming circumstances (e.g., the death of my father). Without the support of these experiences, items, and, especially, people, I never would have been able to continue on my path. In an ironic way, I became a part of the research and learned as my research unfolded, firsthand, the importance of the ethics of care, Bronfenbrenner’s systems theory, and the power of RJ practices in their fullest healing capacities, as if each one of these experiences was intended to offer a different layer of understanding to process.

As a phenomenological study, the focus of this research was on studying RJ practices in two different schools, one middle school and one high school, in Illinois through the “lived experiences” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) of six different educators. Illinois is in a flux of policy changes moving from a previous zero tolerance policy direction to one that has recently started to implement RJ policies (e.g., SB2793, SB100, HB2663) that require students to remain in schools and not be excluded. Time will tell whether the national politics might move these policies back toward “justice” focused practices and away from the restorative practices of the policies, laws, and initiatives currently being enforced. Mallet (2018), in his extensive research
on the school-to-prison pipeline, noted numerous concerns with how these types of punitive policies disproportionately exclude historically marginalized students, stating:

The young people affected by harsh school discipline protocols and involved formally with the juvenile courts share a number of common vulnerabilities. A review of these common risk factors that children and adolescents experience is presented first. This is followed by identification of which child and adolescent groups are disproportionately involved in the pipeline: the impoverished, those of color, maltreatment victims, students with special education disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. (p. 563)

Policy creation is important. Remaining current on policies being presented at the national and the state levels is vital. Policy permeates everything we do as educators within classrooms. As we, as educators, continue to grapple with injustices within our educational systems, an overcrowded criminal justice system, and a discrepancy as to who is most targeted by these types of exclusionary practices, it is imperative that we look at the importance of RJ practices in educational settings. Although RJ practices may initially require more effort from everyone in the school community, it can be argued that the return on that investment in the form of a greater quality of life for students well outweighs the time spent in training, talking circles, or creating safe communities of care within our educational settings. Results of a recent study conducted by Augustine et al. (2018) demonstrated that although RJ practices have helped to stem exclusion rates and led to safer schools overall, lower test score for some of its students might be connected to such practices, which possibly creates further tensions for teachers, who are often focused on demands of administrators to help produce higher test scores in their classrooms. It is vital that educators and administrators continue to navigate the changing currents of educational policy and work to embrace laws, policies, and procedures that take into consideration RJ practices, students’ adverse childhood experiences and the importance of social emotional learning, and remain current on trauma-informed practices that can affect students’ abilities to remain in school, engage in meaningful learning, and succeed in other aspects of their lives.
This research highlights the importance of teachers being able to balance school expectations with the growing demands of administrators, students, and parents; that administrators gain a greater understanding of implementing RJ policies (e.g., “it is not a one-size-fits-all” process and it takes time, resources, and entire school “buy in” to work); further research regarding the “lived experiences” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) of educators who are being expected to implement these new laws and policies; careful consideration of emerging political trends and criminal justice initiatives for all those working in education; be willing to listen to all stakeholders within a school’s environment (and larger social context); understand that culture and context matter (e.g., a lot gets lost in translation); be willing to advocate for those who are targeted, marginalized, and silenced; and never lose sight of the reason why we teach in the first place. This research revolved around the recommendations around students, care, and RJ practices. According to B. Fisher and Tronto (1990), care is “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair the world so that we may live in it as well as possible” (p. 40). As educators, it is our responsibility to help convey this to our students. As policymakers, it is imperative that we make phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, 1994; Swick & Williams, 2006) a focus in our understanding of how both internal (e.g., self-identity) and external factors (e.g., racism, systems of oppression) affect the individual (e.g., student) in specific situations.

In my research, I initially attempted (miserably) to place my educators in a metaphorically sterile chambers, whereby I could “conduct research.” Assuming that I could neutralize my biases, instrumentalize their responses to my semi-structured interview questions, and somehow hone my “findings” into a clear cut piece of research, I initially engaged in this research. Suffice to say, I was wrong. The reality is that research is messy, painful (at times),
enlightening (usually), and does not always lead where the “researcher” wants it to go. That, in itself, is part of the beauty of phenomenological research. It is in the messy, in the grey zones, in the smearing of colors on white canvas that I was able to ask questions that were not on the page and explore the truly “lived experiences” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) of my interviewees. I was able to ask difficult questions and was given the rare opportunity to gain insight into their individual concerns about RJ practices (and their participation in such policies). I was able to listen to their voices shake. I held space as I watched tears fill in their eyes as they discussed the losses of students, their helplessness, their multitude of frustrations regarding current teaching practices, and their hope for their students’ future successes.

Lester (1999) stated, “The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illustrate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in the situation” (p. 1). In my research, my “actors” were the teachers themselves with the “stage” of their classrooms and the educational settings in which they interacted with their students. Lester stated that phenomenology, by its nature, “is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual, ‘bracketing’ taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving” (p. 1). Throughout my research, I attempted to take into consideration each individual educator’s “lived experiences.” One of the greatest difficulties in conducting this research was ensuring I was maintaining the highest regard (reverence) for the experiences being shared. The instrumentation I brought to this research encompassed every course I have ever taken, every text I have ever had the opportunity to read, each teacher with whom I have ever interacted, and all the lessons (e.g., twists and turns along the labyrinth) I have ever learned along the way. I was not neutral in my research, nor were those who volunteered to participate in my work. Lester (1999) stated:
Phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity and emphasize the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. As such, they are powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people’s motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom. (p. 1)

This research is no exception.

Leedy and Ormrod (2019) highlighted that all research can be improved and stated, “No research study can be perfect, and its imperfections inevitably cast at least a hint of doubt on its findings; good researchers know- and also report- the weaknesses along with the strengths of their research” (p. 377). By interviewing six different educators and engaging in personal interviews, I was offered the unique opportunity to gain some insights into their specific “lived experiences” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617). Each of these experiences took into consideration that they too bring their biases, perspectives, and voices to RJ practices. Heidegger in discussing phenomenological research, emphasized that there can never be one way of defining “Truth” in an interpretive phenomenological research and researchers (and readers of the research alike) must be open to more than one interpretation of the research findings (Heidegger & Hofstadter, 2005). My research is only one of many interpretations of the findings and has been presented through a lens of critical disability studies and an ethics of care framework. There are endless possibilities to the potential interpretative lenses that could be applied to the responses in my research and I want to be careful that I am not implying in my research that there is ever only “one way.” As I have framed much of my research, and a good deal of my life experiences, I feel it is imperative that we continue to embrace diversity in how we experience the worlds in which we live and that we find value in the multitude of differences our worlds contain. Educators have incredible insight into their experiences and can offer a valuable perspective that is often overlooked by researchers. It is recommended that future
researchers continue to work to investigate the wisdom and insight that educators are willing to reveal through phenomenological research and work to share that knowledge with others.

Campbell’s (2004) the hero’s journey culminates with the hero’s (e.g., researcher) “transformation” (e.g., changes that have taken place on the journey), “the return” (e.g., by having endured the journey, new perspective has been gained), and the “sharing of the gift” (e.g., with this newfound knowledge, it must be shared with others). Leedy and Ormrod (2019) stated, similarly, “Researchers must eventually come full circle to their starting point- why they conducted a research study in the first place and what they hoped to discover- and translate their results to the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 337). As with all good road trips, there is a time when the journey draws to an end (or the driver takes a break, or the method of transportation breaks down). There is a time when the driver (e.g., the researcher) has to take an honest reflection of both the experiences viewed through the “rearview” mirror and the front “windshield” of the research process, a stepping into the tiny pixelated dots or stepping away and looking at the larger picture. I started this journey searching for answers to questions such as: How are educators making sense of RJ practices? What are educators’ “lived experiences” (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 617) in these educational environments? Maybe, most importantly, what are the implications for students with disabilities? The answers to some of these questions led to more unanswered questions that are deserving of their own separate voyages with new “drivers in the seat” (e.g., new researchers). These drivers will have new maps (e.g., new questions, methodologies, and frameworks). Some of these drivers will be driven by GPS (e.g., new laws, policies, and procedures will dictate where the journey goes), as opposed to taking dusty roads (e.g., following the researcher’s gut/heart) or using sage advice from previous travelers (e.g., listening to/learning from academics in the field and those who have “travelled
similar roads”). As a critical theorist, I hold true to the belief that there are multiple “truths” in this world and numerous paths to same and similar journeys. As with this research, this is only one research process designed to give a voice to educators in the field working to make sense of their own journeys with RJ practices.

**Implications for Educators and Administrators (and the Rest of Us)**

It is important to note that the critical feminist (disability studies) paradigm allows issues, such as RJs practices, inclusion for all students, and systemic violence, to be analyzed through a lens of complex social, cultural, and historical frameworks. Young (2011) addressed a multitude of these complex elements in her writings about women and others who are marginalized (e.g., those with disabilities) and highlighted the importance of including historically marginalized populations in working to change systems. By doing so, people in a community can gain a greater understanding of differences and diverse experiences and offer opportunities for change to occur within society (Young, 2000). Similar to Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) ecological systems theory or reflected in our classroom cultures (Hong & Espelage, 2012), as educators, we are in a unique position to help address issues of inclusion and RJ practices within the classroom setting.

Young (2000) made several vital points about inclusion with a focus on historically marginalized groups who are often disempowered, excluded, made invisible, and the subject of decision-making. Heeding lessons from prior disability studies (Foucault, 1973; Ravaud & Stiker, 2001; Stiker, 1999; Winzer, 1993), in a working democracy (e.g., “deliberative democracy”; Young, 2000, p. 26), each of us, especially educators, must play a role in promoting an inclusive democracy that works to embrace both justice and inclusion; one that I argue calls for a change in societal culture, of system change, of inclusion, of healing, and of RJ practices.
Young (2000) is credited with saying, “Democracy entails political equality, that all members of the polity are included equally in the decision-making process and have an equal opportunity to influence the outcome” (p. 52). Historically, those with disabilities (Foucault, 1973; Ravaud & Stiker, 2001; Stiker, 1999; Winzer, 1993), those labelled and stigmatized as “other” or “different,” and those who have had limited access to power (Foucault, 1973) have been significantly curtailed in accessing “the decision-making process” (Young, 2000, p. 52). Young argued that by increasing our circles of inclusion (e.g., of those we include in decision-making), rather than simply serving our own opinions, we will move toward a more just society. Young added that the key to increasing justice in a democracy demands that we work to address (and reduce/eliminate) social inequalities and that we can start by increasing our inclusive practices. Young emphasized this point when she stated, “Inclusive decision making might help bring about more just and wise political judgment” (p. 31). This idea that social inclusion is vital for a just and democratic society begins to embrace the systemic nature of Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) ecological systems theory, the important role of disability studies in the cultural shifts occurring in schools regarding inclusion, and the benefits that RJ practices bring to a school culture that has historically relied tremendously upon punitive and exclusionary practices to gain student compliance.

As with living systems, as in Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) ecological systems theory, both schools and society have a way of creating circles and within those circles there is movement. Young (2000) added to this idea by highlighting the movement and synergistic nature between justice and a democracy, arguing that it is through removing exclusionary and dominance related practices (often seen in punitive policies) and increasing inclusionary edicts (often seen in the implementation of RJ practices) that the end result is often a more just, healthier society (p. 34).
Central to Young’s ideas are that anyone who is affected by the decisions being made in an inclusive “deliberative” (p. 26) democratic process must be included in the decisions being implemented and this adds to the moral legitimacy of implementing changes (Young 2000, p. 23). These ideas speak directly to substantiating the important role of RJ practices within our schools and, arguably, the larger democratic society in the United States.

Strengthening the role of RJ practices in our classrooms and working to create a more just and equality laden culture, Young (2000) stated that beyond ensuring those affected by decisions are included in the process, people also have a “willingness to listen to others” and “that reasonable people enter discussions to solve collective problems with the aim of reaching agreement” (p. 24). All of these are central foundations to RJ practices, the inclusionary processes they promote, and the healing potential they create within our educational systems. Beyond these elements of ensuring those affected by decisions are included in the process, that people are listening to one another, that a central tenet of working toward a mutual solution to problems, is the idea that people are accountable to each other (Young, 2000, pp. 23-25). Each of these are central tenets of RJ practices.

One of the main goals of an inclusive society is to allow everyone access to the “conversation,” and ensure people are given the opportunity to offer their perspective/input/insight (e.g., not be silenced, marginalized, or spoken for) and to gain insight into other people’s experiences. These are similar to the requests that have been made by those within the disability studies field for decades. Each of these aspects plays a key role in a healthy “deliberative democracy” (Young, 2000, p. 26), and for this to take place, people need to feel safe enough to be open to diverse views, experiences, and perspectives (Young, 1990a, 2000, 2011), which also speaks to the need to increase issues of safety within our classrooms, school
systems, communities, and the larger democratic society in the United States. These were topics that surfaced during the interviews with educators regarding their lived experiences with RJ practices and their continuing concerns regarding aspects of safety for their students in the classroom and within their larger communities.

Young (2000) also highlighted the importance of creating a society that embraces inclusion when she stated, “A democratic public ought to be fully inclusive of all social groups because the plurality of perspectives they offer to the public helps to disclose the reality and objectivity of the world” (p. 112). Young, recognizing the power dynamics, the social inequalities, and the historical contexts of marginalized populations, emphasized that everyone within a system (and their unique experiences, gifts, perspectives, and knowledge) should be included within the social discourse (p. 83) and that this cannot be done under duress, or it may contribute to the very process of exclusion that is trying to be prevented in its attempt to promote inclusive practices (Young, 2000, 2011). This idea of mandatory RJ practices or a “one-size-fits-all” type of RJ intervention approach speaks to this concern. If RJ practices are a forced process, they become harmful and further create the potential to contribute to exclusion, stigma, and marginalization of the students most affected by the policies (often, students with disabilities). These were elements that surfaced throughout the interviews with educators regarding the need to create RJ cultures within schools, not simply to use RJ practices as an intervention, a program, or a trending educational fad.

For Young (2011), the process of inclusion is a complex one that challenges the traditional concepts surrounding access or distribution of resources because these elements do not challenge, dismantle, or improve the systems that create inequality and promote exclusion. This can only occur by uncloaking oppression (e.g., echoing Foucault’s sentiments of making the
in invisible, visible) and working toward collaborative processes that help create a stronger, healthier, freer society (e.g., one free from oppression) that embraces inclusion (Young, 2009).

“Five Faces” of Oppression

Young (2009) highlighted that there are “five faces” of oppression: violence, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism (pp. 64-83). Each face plays a significant role in the lives of people who have been historically marginalized (e.g., minorities, women, and people with disabilities). To illuminate some of these issues, Young stated that exploitation is the process by which power or resources are moved from one identified group to another, causing one group to be made less powerful in the process (p. 66), and speaks to the historical way in which women’s care work is often viewed as less valuable than men who work for pay and increasing social standing (e.g., the ethic of care [Tronto, 1994; Young, 2009, pp. 67-68]). For Young, the concept of marginalization usually involves race, but it can encompass any historically marginalized demographic, where one is excluded from being able to gain higher social status (typically through limited access to paying jobs; pp. 71-72). The marginalization of people with disabilities continues to be noted throughout the disability studies field and remains an area of concern for disability studies scholars working to promote inclusion in the workforce.

The last three of the five faces of oppression are powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 2009, pp. 64-83). Disability studies often focus on issues of power (Foucault, 1973), vulnerability, and powerlessness (Chinn, 2016). Young (2009) highlighted that historically marginalized groups are limited in their ability to engage with democratic acts because they have been made to feel disempowered by the dominant group, so eventually they cease to interact, are unable to do so, or feel that attempting to will not make a difference (pp.
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

77-78). This is similar to students who are labelled as “bad kids” or “troubled students,” as they slowly disengage from the learning process, the educational environment, and the desire to make meaningful connections with others. As they grow in their feelings of powerlessness, students who are stigmatized by labels (and through acts of bullying) are either further forced into social exclusion or the self-directed social isolation that is often seen as leading to increased school dropout rates and the potential for increased risk of the externalization of violence (i.e., school shootings; Levin & Madfis, 2009), which is why building healthy school communities where everyone feels included is vital.

The next of the five faces is cultural imperialism, whereby people in a marginalized group are viewed as invisible or referred to as “the other” (Young, 2009, p. 79), which often dictates what is acceptable behavior of members of this historically marginalized group (Young, 2009, pp. 80-81). Violence is the last of the five faces of oppression, but Young (2009) did not limit her discussion to that of interpersonal violence, but rather expanded the concept of violence to encompass systemic violence, whereby violence is often allowed to sustain within systems that not only allow violence to be perpetuated, but also may accept it as normative (e.g., “boys will be boys”; p. 82). Young might argue that when a society or culture does not respond appropriately to violence or hold those engaged in such acts as responsible, systemically the society replicates it in the form of acceptance, thus perpetuating the system violence cycle (p. 83). This form of systemic violence continues to play out in classrooms and playgrounds in our educational environments, in our homes in the form of domestic violence, and within our social media in the form of politicians spewing hate-infused rhetoric. This issue of the five faces of oppression becomes exceedingly clear when individuals are subjected to the compounding effects of all five faces (Young, 2009, p. 64), as is the case with a student with a disability who is
targeted by peers. This student, as a result of being labelled as “disabled,” is already being subjected to aspects of system marginalization, powerlessness, exploitation, violence, and cultural imperialism. Should the student be a minority, differently abled, a LGBTQ identifying youth, of a different religion, or from a different socioeconomic class, these compounding effects of the five faces of oppression will only magnify, causing greater feelings of powerlessness, becoming more excluded (e.g., cultural imperialism and marginalization), becoming a central focus of exploitation (e.g., by peers and by the educational system), and, ultimately, potentially becoming the identified target of both personal and system violence. As this cycle of oppression continues, eventually the student will become increasingly marginalized, isolated, excluded, and silenced. The power of RJ practices, as the six interviews with current educators highlighted, is to stop this cycle of oppression and begin to create scaffolds to promote inclusion and allow healing to take place where harm and isolation once were able to thrive.

So, why does this all matter? What does it have to do with educators’ perceptions of RJ, care, and disability through a phen[women]ological lens? Young (2009) presented that an inclusive “deliberative” (p. 26) democratic process is an effective way to resist oppression and help to dismantle oppressive systems (p. 83). Young echoed the work of Ravaud and Stiker (2001), who presented that historically, exclusion has been executed through six major methods: “1) exclusion through elimination, 2) exclusion through abandonment, 3) exclusion through segregation or differentiated instruction, 4) exclusion through assistance or conditional inclusion, 5) exclusion through marginalization or inclusion through normalization, 6) exclusion through discrimination or progressive inclusion” (pp. 502-508). Young (2009) argued that for an inclusive democratic society to exist, for oppression to be resisted, and for justice for all to be ensured, two values must be instilled in every person: to have the opportunity to develop, be able
to use one’s own skills/abilities, and to express one’s experiences and to have power over the ability to make decisions for oneself (Young, 2009, p. 45). These echo many of the inclusive goals discussed with the disability studies in education field when looking toward inclusive educational practices and working to guarantee inclusive ecological systems (e.g., Brofenbrenner, 1989). These are also similar principles of RJ practices when implemented as a systems approach to school culture and not simply as a “quick fix,” treatment du jour, or one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with “difficult” labelled students.

As Young (2000) expounded upon her concept of inclusion in a democratic society, it is important to recognize that, for her, the ideas and values of justice and inclusion are intimately connected because one (e.g., inclusion) cannot be attended without the presence of the other (e.g., justice). In a healthy, inclusive “deliberative” (Young, 2000, p. 26) democratic ecosystem, where we are discussing educational systems or larger societal systems, it is imperative that we work to address the five faces of oppression (i.e., violence, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism; Young, 2009, pp. 64-83), and work to promote justice, inclusion, and healing within our systems, for one cannot exist without the other. These issues are asking us, as educators, to demand cultural shifts in how we care for and about others. It is a systems approach to scaffolding students who are most vulnerable to the five faces of oppression and working to dismantle the damage that oppression and exclusions causes to students and to each other. These are the issues that are at the core of schools using punitive zero tolerance policies that further harm students, promote systems of oppression, and make educators and administrators complicit in their enforcement of such policies. When implemented appropriately (as a system wide approach), RJ practices offer an alternative approach to changing systems, challenging the five faces of oppression, and offering a healing cultural shift that embraces
inclusion, as opposed to historically perpetuating forms of oppression and injustice and allowing damaging cycles to continue (e.g., school-to-prison pipeline, restricted special education classrooms, Native American boarding schools, segregated schools, expulsions, etc.).

Young (2009) highlighted the need to challenge exclusion by assisting institutions to help citizens in an inclusive “deliberative” (p. 26) democratic ecosystem to gain the skills to become actively invested in changing systems (e.g., through getting involved in the actions and conversations that most affect them; Young, 2009, p. 45). Being part of an inclusive “deliberative” (Young, 2000, p. 26) democratic ecosystem is not a passive role, it is one that requires getting involved and remaining active. Former President Ronald Reagan is credited with saying:

The objective I propose is quite simple to state: to foster the infrastructure of democracy - the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities - which allows a people to choose their own way to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means. (Reagan, 1982)

It is through “peaceful means” that RJ practices address previous harm and work to create a healthier democratic society. Dewey (1937) is quoted as having said:

The foundation of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience. It is not belief that these things are complete but that if given a show they will grow and be able to generate progressively the knowledge and wisdom needed to guide collective action. (p. 458)

It is through this good faith of the power of “collective action” (Dewey, 1937, p. 458) that schools are working to embrace system changes to embrace inclusion, to reduce harm, and to work to look the five faces of oppression squarely in the eyes in the hopes of addressing larger systemic issues that may be cultivated in the classroom but extend far beyond the schoolroom walls.

It is important to note that, for Young (2000), two forms of exclusion exist: external and internal exclusion. External exclusion is the form most people think of when they hear the term
“exclusion” and occurs when people are prevented (through obstacle, policy, or intent) from engaging in the democratic process (e.g., participation in community, engagement with the process; Young, 2000). According to Young, this form of exclusion perpetuates elements of social inequalities, creates aspects of dominant hierarchies, and works to silence others (p. 52). In the field of disability studies, this often takes the form of access (e.g., ramp versus stair), making invisible (e.g., speaking for as opposed to speaking with), and control (e.g., lack of personal agency about what is done to one’s body and by whom). The second form of exclusion is what occurs once someone has “gotten in the door” that has typically been inaccessible to him or her (e.g., universal access has been ensured, least restrictive educational setting achieved, ADA compliance, etc.) and takes the form of what Young called “internal exclusion” (p. 55). Internal exclusion is what happens, metaphorically speaking, when an individual is invited over to dinner and can get through the door (e.g., no barriers to entry), but finds that there is no seat at the table for him or her (e.g., not invited to the meal or the conversation). Young highlighted that it is in internal exclusion where disrespect occurs (p. 55). As educators, it is imperative that we have a deeper understanding of both external exclusion and internal exclusion because so much of our training revolves around implementing laws, polices, and practices that address external exclusion but do little to meet the growing needs caused by the damage of internal exclusion (e.g., the damage done through the disrespect in the teachers’ lounge, the harm caused in the bullying occurring in the hallway, the isolation being promoted by passive aggressive acts of violence of a student sitting alone in the lunchroom, etc.). Young stated it is imperative that historically marginalized groups begin to create environments where they can cultivate communities of awareness, work to embrace inclusion, and strengthen each other in their struggles with oppressive systems (p. 165). This is seen in the disability studies field, as those
who have been historically excluded from systems (e.g., labelled, diagnosed, “othered,” etc.)
work to create systems of support, of challenge, and of change to oppressive systems. In so
doing, the field works to promote environments of inclusion in a just and “deliberative” (Young,
2000, p. 26) democratic ecosystem. It is done in the same spirit of working to update archaic and
punitive policies, laws, and procedures and offer a transformative inclusive approach to
education that is vital because it encompasses being fully included within a system, not only in
policy, procedure, and law, but in the places of the heart, in the relationships with others, and in
the healing intent of the practice of inclusion. This is a change in culture and a challenge to the
oppressive systems currently in play. It is essential to understand that changes to cultures (e.g.,
old ways of doing things) take time, effort, energy, and commitment, but the benefits to students
and to their communities far outweigh the investment. We, as educators and as administers (and
as members of a growing global society), must do our part to look the five faces of oppression in
the eyes and dismantle external and internal exclusion wherever and whenever we encounter
such practices (Young, 2009, pp. 64-83). RJ practices give us, as educators and as administrators,
beginning tools, skills, and resources to start this important work within our classrooms, our
playfields, and within our larger communities.

Sporre (1999) summarized the edicts presented by Young (2000) in working to dismantle
oppression in all of its forms demand feminist ethics. Sporre’s statements seem to indicate there
are several normative standards for feminist ethics that encompass a multitude of the values of
the ethics of care, RJ practices, healing environments, and inclusive practices. Sporre (1999)
stated:

a) No human being, or group of human beings, ought systematically to be treated in an
unfair way in the distribution of goods of a given society.
b) Every human being ought to be treated as a subject with rights, where the right to power and influence over one’s own life as well as the societal common life are crucial rights.

c) Every human being ought to be treated as an end in themselves and not be reduced to a means by other people in their strivings to meet their own ends.

d) Every human being has a unique intrinsic value, equal to that of other people, which ought to be respected by them (pp. 83-84)

As echoed in Le Guin’s (1973) writing in “the ones who walk away from Omelas,” or in listening to the sage insight from the participants who shared of their “lived experiences” (e.g., about caring [caring about, caring for, and communities of care], with RJ practices and inclusion, the role of technology in creating/destroying community, safety and guns, and healing, empathy, & forgiveness), I have come to a greater understanding as to why I began this Hero’s Journey (Campbell, 2004) so many years ago when I sought to become a special education teacher. It is deeply rooted in the edicts presented by Young (2000) in working to dismantle oppression, in Sporre’s (1999) statements on the normative standards for feminist ethics, and in almost every aspect of the values of the ethics of care, RJ practices, healing environments, and inclusive practices.

As teachers, we are called upon to help equip our students with the skills they need to become productive members of society, to be contributing members of a democracy, and, ultimately, to work to forge a better future for all of us. In that process, we often are required to conform to both internal and external pressure to promote interventions, raise test scores, and ensure our students “follow the rules” (which often involves both conformity to the norm and oppression/exclusion to ensure compliance). As educators and as administrators, we shoulder the
blame for continuing to perpetuate systems of oppression, of exclusion, of labeling, and of stigma. We carry the burden of historically ostracizing those students labelled as “different” (e.g., Native American boarding schools, racial segregation, special education rooms, etc.). We, as educators and as administrators, have often been complicit in our roles and, suffice to say, harm has been caused as a result. We often lose ourselves and our reasons for becoming educators along the way.

With educator burnout rates at an all-time high, the punitive, oppressive, exclusionary systems are not only harming our students, they are creating harm to everyone they touch. People get tired fighting. Students detach from the learning process and isolate themselves. Educators burn out and walk away from a profession that was once a “calling” for them. In this process, the school-to-prison pipeline continues to chug along with a steady supply of new inmates, classroom sizes increase (because there are not enough qualified teachers to fill the classrooms), the prevalence of school shootings magnifies (because students no longer feel connected to a caring community), and the systems of oppression and the cycles of exclusion flourish. Our media sensationalizes the horrors after a school shooting and thoughts and prayers fill Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. Politicians demands more gun control. With time, we forget, until the next school shooting occurs.

Educators and administrators are in a unique position to assist in addressing a multitude of these issues. As individuals, we are not able to dismantle historical systems of oppression, but we can teach the next generation about what we have done wrong in the past and work to make improvements in the future. As educators, we cannot prevent school shootings, but we can work to increase healthier, inclusive “deliberative” (Young, 2000, p. 26) democratic ecosystems within our classrooms. Maybe, through example, our students will learn that they have the ability to
change systems through inclusive practices and not the exclusionary, oppressive rhetoric so often spewed on Twitter accounts. My research demonstrated there are at least six caring and invested educators who offered their “lived experiences” with RJ practices in their classrooms. In the interviews, issues surrounding caring (specifically, caring about others, caring for others, and creating communities of care), the importance of RJ practices and inclusion, the increasing role of technology in creating/destroying community, concerns regarding safety and guns, and the powerful elements of healing, empathy, and forgiveness all surfaced. They are not alone. There is a growing need for healing to occur both within our schools and our larger communities.

Pulling from the research of Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) ecological systems theory and Young’s (2009) five faces of oppression (i.e., violence, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism; pp. 64-83), it becomes apparent that what we do within our classroom matters. A cultural shift is slowly taking form, one that moves slowly from the process of changing from zero tolerance punitive laws to more restorative, inclusive, healing practices (e.g., SB2793, SB100, HB2663) in Illinois. Maybe through increased awareness, by implementing (mandating?) teacher training regarding the healing aspects of RJ practices and demonstrating cost reduction savings to school safety concerns or special education budgets to administrators, we will pique the curiosity surrounding this cultural shift. My research is only one small sample of six invested teachers who are currently using RJ practices in their classroom. More research is needed in this area. One aspect to this research is I wish there had been more time in which to delve deeper into the issues that surfaced (regarding caring [caring about, caring for, and communities of care], RJ practices and inclusion, the role of technology in creating/destroying community, safety and guns, and healing, empathy, and forgiveness). There never seems to be enough time. Future researchers would benefit from conducting more research by listening to
and learning from the “lived experiences” of educators doing the work in the classrooms. They offer insight and perspective that are often lacking in the academic field. As academics, we are often caught up in our heads (e.g., theoretical frameworks, methodologies, scholars, peer-reviewed journals, etc.), but the work of RJ practices is heart work and it is hard work. As systems begin to make the cultural change from punitive laws to restorative practices, we, as educators, must also be willing to remain in our hearts (in the places that initially brought us to education and have caused us to remain in the classrooms). Being an educator today requires a different set of skills and, I would argue, that being equipped with the knowledge and ability to create, promote, and support RJ practices is a vitally prudent and necessary place to start.

**Closing Thoughts**

Conducting this research and being engaged in this research journey took numerous years. The process changed me. It has taken its toll. I have lost time, family members, and friends along the way. The process itself has moved me, added wrinkles to my face, grey hairs to my head, and weight to my waistline, and caused me to reconsider being in the field of education on a multitude of occasions. I am fully dedicated to the field of disability studies in education. I embrace the tenets of inclusion and the ethics of care. When a young mind is supported, feels safe, and is inspired, tremendous things can happen. I also feel great harm can be caused when systems control, marginalize, and silence quieter, softer spirits. You do not have to break or bully someone into compliance. Care, compassion, empathy, love, and healing are some of the most powerful forces in the world. Campbell (2004) has been quoted as saying, “The fundamental human experience is that of compassion” (Campbell, Cousineau, & Brown, 1990, p. 219). This journey through phen[women]ological research has shown me a glimpse of this in the potential
of RJ practices. Laura, in her interview, spoke of the importance of RJ practices in creating an inclusive environment:

In this school I see everybody, from other students, to educators, to administrators, utilizing restorative justice practices. I’ve seen cafeteria workers utilizing restorative justice practices in the school. I’ve seen the gym teachers utilizing restorative justice practices. I’ve seen administrators in the same room with students. I’ve seen educators in the room with janitors, working with students to see to it that the school environment in itself is seen as a healing, healthy, safe place where students can learn and grow and become their best selves. (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018)

This desire for schools to be viewed as “a healing, healthy, safe place where students can learn and grow and become their best selves” (Laura, personal communication, March 11, 2018) is a noble vision for the future. Juan reiterated the importance of RJ practices being able to change school culture when he stated, “If there is a culture of inclusion at the school and if we as educators show an intolerance towards anything other than inclusion and the acceptance of inclusion, that culture permeates every aspect of the school” (Juan, personal communication, March 14, 2018). Issues of culture and community, inclusion, healing practices, empathy, and understanding permitted this research.

My research journey took longer than expected but echoing Leedy and Ormrod’s (2019) statement that “researchers must eventually come full circle to their starting point” (p. 337), one serendipituous event took place on Friday, January 18, 2019, that seemed to be a timely intersection of my research. As a group of Covington Catholic High School students waited after the March for Life anti-abortion rally at the Lincoln Memorial for their buses to pick them up to take them home, three different groups of people converged on the same space: a large group of Covington Catholic High School students (some dressed in “Make America Great Again” attire), a group of four Black Hebrew Israelites, and a group of Native Americans closing out the Indigenous Peoples March. The details of what took place have been attempted to be pieced together from several firsthand accounts, viral videos, and witness statements, but currently
remain under investigation. Initial reports indicated the Black Hebrew Israelites may have been engaging with the Covington Catholic High School students using taunting and vulgar language, which caused the Covington Catholic High School students to begin shouting their school chants to drown out the messages being proselytized by the Black Hebrew Israelites. One of the Native Americans, an Omaha Nation elder, Nathan Phillips (Ironically, a man I had met during the Standing Rock protests in the course of this research), heard the increasing chanting from the students and the retaliation of the Black Hebrew Israelites, and chose to move toward the Covington Catholic High School students (e.g., “There was that moment when I realized I’ve put myself between beast and prey”; Wade, 2019), beating his drum and singing a song (Raymond Yellow Thunder Song) in the hopes of deescalating the rising tensions between the groups (Rolling Stone, 2019). A student from Covington Catholic High School, Nick Sandmann, ended up in a 5-minute “eye gaze” with Nathan Phillips as Phillips continued his healing chant, and a group of Covington Catholic High School students joined in a combination of high school antics and, arguably, blatant disrespectful mockery.
What unfolded after that is up to a multitude of interpretations, political spin doctoring, and, arguably, gaslighting, but social media and politicians gave these events enough power to emulate a fast moving forest fire. International media outlets covered the story throughout the weekend. Nick Sandman’s family hired a PR firm to create a counter social media campaign. Videos were released. Covington Catholic High School’s website was removed, and students did not return to classes the day after the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, citing safety concerns. The stage of the Lincoln Memorial, coupled with three diverse racial, religious, and cultural groups framed within a multitude of political beliefs, cultural representations, and social media mob mentality, made for fertile ground for civil discourse to erode. The media’s juxtaposing a Catholic schoolboy staring down an indigenous elder, framed in “Make America Great Again” costuming with a traditional healing drum and chant being performed is a metaphor for the dichotomy of “justice” (e.g., law and order style) versus the “restorative” (e.g., healing drum and chant, placing oneself in harm’s way to prevent anyone from getting hurt) practices currently playing out in our institutions. Whatever becomes of this event, it is a fitting, as Campbell (2004) would say, “sharing of the gift” (e.g., taking a piece of what I have learned and offering it to the broader community). As a country, we can do better. As a community, as a nation, and, arguably, as a world, we must do better. These are tenuous times, where the lines between the medical model/social model, justice/restorative, harm/healing, and care/callous are thin. We are more alike than different, and at any given time we may read a situation incorrectly or unintentionally cause harm to someone. As educators, we are in a unique position to help bring contexts to situations, to offer clarity to complex circumstances, to be willing to listen when others shout, to step up and stand in when others are simply bystanders to problems, and to work to do the right thing. Denise framed the important role of the educator in this process when she stated:
In this community, a lot of times, those bad choices lead kids onto a path that put them into a very difficult dynamic of “Am I going to go to school or am I going to go to jail?”

I think in terms of working to promote a school where there’s another choice, part of that other choice is “I’ve made bad choices, I’m going to take this as a learning opportunity. I’m going to turn to the people that I’ve harmed, I’m going to work and do the work that’s necessary to make amends for the damage that’s been done. And, now I’m going to do something about it.”

As opposed to an “I” thing, “what I’ve done,” “what I’m going to do,” “how it benefits me,” it turns it around as to saying, “what do we as a community look like? What is it that we’re going to do about this circumstance?” It is a community aspect. If we care about the people in this community, what do we as educators or we, as administrators, or we, as students, going to do to see to it that harm is not an option. (Denise, personal communication, March 12, 2018)

Ultimately, it falls upon educators to offer guidance to the next generation. It falls upon educators, in collaboration with administrators, to create environments that promote inclusion and do not tolerate exclusion. It is vital to support laws, policies, and procedures that help to create healing places in educational systems that encourage RJ practices, assist students in addressing adverse childhood experiences, promote the importance of social emotional learning in and outside of the classroom setting, and remain current on trauma-informed practices so all students have the opportunity to succeed in both school and in life. These events are seemingly a microcosm of the fragility we are currently facing in our homes, in our institutions, in our communities, and in our nation. A lot of damage has occurred, and a significant amount of healing needs to take place. As educators, we are in a unique position to create healing, inclusive spaces. We help to seed the importance of inclusive places that make way for working to build a human rights culture where everyone is valued and included. As educators, the onus falls upon us to work to implement RJ practices within our communities, to embrace the importance of the ethics of care in the work we do, and to be fully inclusive in our practices to ensure everyone is welcome and there is always room for healing to take place.
EPILOGUE

Educators are in a rare and unique position to help to be catalysts for positive change in the lives of the students who enter their classrooms. By their nature, educators are able to work as advocates, as mentors, as coaches, and as touchstones for students throughout the school year and the lessons that they teach their students far exceed those found in any textbook. Since completing the research for my dissertation, three of the educators interviewed in this study have left the teaching profession. That is over half of this research study’s participants. One left, due to a planned retirement, but the other two educators cited being “burned out” as their reason for leaving the field. As an educator, I am concerned. It would be a disservice to future researchers wanting to engage educators’ perceptions of lived experiences, if we do not continue to recognize the emotional, physical, financial, and, even, spiritual toll that today’s educators face. In looking at issues of restorative justice, care, inclusion, and disability, particularly through the lens of critical disability studies perspective, it is vital to look at the role that social pressures, environmental stressors, and changes in laws and policies have on our educators.

Increasing concerns regarding school safety, lowering salaries and reduced pension benefits, and ever-demanding responsibilities to meet the growing needs of students, administrators, parents, and community stakeholder; educators remain on the frontlines of our classrooms and in assisting our current (and future) students in navigating today’s complex issues. Throughout this research, it became apparent that the educators interviewed for this study were exceedingly invested in the care and well-being of each of their students. Each offered a glimpse into the importance of caring, restorative justice and inclusion, the increasing role of technology infiltrating their learning spaces, the vital necessity to ensure both physical and emotional safety within the school setting, and the essential role that educators play in offering healing, empathy, and compassion to their students. The investments of these educators in their
students continuing successes far exceeds their job requirements and, if truly broken down in its essential parts, might actually have the makings of superhero material.

The field of education is seemingly making significant cultural shifts that far exceed that of moving from punitive laws to restorative practices, but in making those shifts, educators are also being asked to give more of themselves. We are losing sound educators to “burnout” and compassion fatigue. We are slowly eroding career educators to part-time positions. When I engaged in this dissertation journey, I did so with the intention of learning more about restorative justice, care, inclusion, and disability through the *lived experiences* of six educators. What I took away from the research is that it is essential that, as educators, we work to feel empowered to help others, to recharge when necessary, to support our community of learners, educators, and administrators, and to realize that we are in a position to make significantly positive impacts in the lives of others. Pulling from Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, we can only be as healthy as the systems to which we contribute. If we are unable to contribute positively to our educational environments, or feel too disempowered to make changes for the better, or if the institutional settings become so toxic (e.g., emotionally unhealthy or physically unsafe) that progress seems futile, then, like those from Omelas (LeGuin, 1973), we, too, may have to someday walk away. That day is not today. I remain hopeful about the future, the field of education, the unwavering strength of the educators with whom I work, and the resiliency of our students. I hope that you are as well.
REFERENCES


EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

CA: RAND Corporation. doi:10.7249/rr2840


EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION


EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION


EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION


EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION


doi:10.1177/0038038505050538


EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION


EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION


Murphy, J. (2017, March 6). In the Broadway revival of Steven Sondheim’s “Sunday in the Park With George,” Georges Seurat (Jake Gyllenhaal in the left foreground) puts the finishing touches on his painting, “A Sunday on La Grande Jatte” [Photograph]. Retrieved from

192


http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/reagan-parliament.htm

Reiners, G. M. (2012). Understanding the differences between Husserl’s (descriptive) and Heidegger’s (interpretive) phenomenological research. *Journal of Nursing and Care, 1*(119), 1–3. doi:10.4172/2167-1168.1000119


EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION


EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION


Vagle, M. D. (2014). *Crafting phenomenological research*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.


EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION


doi:10.2307/j.ctvcm4g4q.7


APPENDIX A: QUESTIONS

Educators’ Perceptions of Restorative Justice Practices:
Sample Research Study Questions

1) Can you tell me a little bit about your background as an educator? What brought you to the field of education? How long have you been an educator?

2) What role did discipline play in your upbringing? Can you tell me a time when you remember being disciplined by an authority figure?

3) What role did healing play in your life? Can you tell me a time when healing took place in your life?

4) What do you see as being some of the challenges currently facing educators in today’s classrooms?

5) What do you see as being some of the challenges currently facing your students in today’s classrooms?

6) What are your professional and/or personal suggestions for working to reduce the role that stigma plays in excluding students from contributing positively to your classroom/school environment?

7) Are there any other contributing factors that support/or prevent students from being included in your classroom environment?

8) There have been several laws implemented in schools to help ensure safety in schools. How do these laws impact your classroom environment? What, if any, contributions are being made in shifting from zero tolerance laws to more restorative/transformative justice practices in the classroom environment?

9) This is a school that utilizes restorative justice practices. What kinds of training and/materials do you use to learn about restorative justice practices and how to implement its use in your classroom or school environment?

10) Can you tell me a little more about what RJ practices are used and how they are implemented in the classroom setting? How do restorative/transformative justice practices help to reduce issues surrounding systemic violence?

11) I know that we have discussed restorative practices and their implementation in your classroom. Do you see any benefits and/limitations to their use? Any stories that you would like to share?
12) I am interested in some of your experiences with students and RJ practices. How are you making sense of these practices? Can you give me some experiences or examples? Are there any stories that you would like to share?

13) How do you see others (i.e. Students, educators, administrators, other staff) utilizing RJ practices in the school environment?

14) Do RJ practices and how they are implemented at this school include all students? Can you give me a few examples of this?

15) Have I missed anything? Is there anything else that I should be asking, or that you would to share?
APPENDIX B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Introduction and Study Propose:

My name is Jennifer C. Hull, and I am a doctoral candidate at National Louis University in Wheeling, Illinois. Currently, I am conducting a research study that focuses on educators’ perceptions of restorative justice practices in school settings. There is a trend away from laws and policies of zero tolerance toward restorative justice practices in education. I am interested in how educators are responding to current changes in these policies and their implementation in their classrooms.

Procedures:

I will conduct in-depth interviews with educators who are currently implementing restorative justice practices in their classrooms. I would be honored if you would agree to be interviewed for my study. The time and location of the interview will be set to be as convenient for you as possible. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and will involve open-ended questions requesting you to reflect on current practices in your classroom and school. There may be a request for a follow-up interview.

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you are free, at any time, to discontinue participation or remove yourself from the study without penalty or bias. If you agree, the interview will be audiotape recorded. I will also take notes during the interview. The audiotape recording will only be used to accurately record, transcribe, and review what is discussed during our interview. You may choose not to be audiotape recorded, in which case I will only take notes during the interview. At any time during the interview, you may request that I turn off the recorder.
Highlighted text of your contributions to this research study will be provided to you upon request.

**Confidentiality:**

Issues of confidentiality and your personal information are of utmost importance to me. Your identity will not be revealed in the study. A pseudonym will be used. All information gathered before, during and after the interview (including any transcripts generated) will be maintained in a secure location and not be utilized by anyone except me and/or my Dissertation Committee in providing pertinent feedback to my dissertation research. I will retain the data for up to five years after the study is completed. Then, the audiotapes, transcripts, and notes will be properly destroyed.

**Risks and Benefits:**

There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study, but will likely contribute to the growing body of knowledge of educators’ experiences of utilizing restorative justice practices in their classrooms. Your contribution may indirectly benefit current and future teaching practices, policies being implied, and positively impact the lives the students.

**Consent and Questions:**

I ask that two (2) hardcopies of this, CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH form, be signed and dated in my presence. We will each retain a signed and dated copy for our records. If you have any questions and/or concerns regarding this research, and/or your participation in it, you may contact me: (309) 781-7673 (c), or my NLU Dissertation Advisor, Dr. Terry Jo Smith: (224) 233-2315, or the IRRB Chair, Dr. Shaunti Knauth: (312) 261-3526. Thank you in advance for your time and for your participation.

********************************************************************************

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
If you agree to participate in this study, please print your name, and provide your signature and today’s dates before. (You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.)
EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, CARE, INCLUSION

Participant’s Name (please print)

________________________________________________________  ___________
Participant’s Signature        Date

________________________________________________________  ___________
Researcher’s Signature        Date

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Researcher:                Jennifer C. Hull
Doct oral Candidate, Disability and Equity in Education program
National Louis University
1000 Capital Drive
Wheeling, Illinois 60090
(309) 781-7673
jhull@my.nl.edu

Dissertation Advisor:       Dr. Terry Jo Smith
Director, Disability and Equity in Education
National Louis University
1000 Capital Drive
Wheeling, Illinois 60093
(224) 233-2315
TJSmith@nl.edu

IRRB Chair:                 Dr. Shaunti Knauth
NLU Institutional Review Board Chair
National Louis University
122 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60603
(312) 261-3526
Shaunti.knauth@nl.edu