THE ONES WHO NEED THE MOST: RACE, ABILITY, AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines how the intersection of race and ability impact an urban school's implementation of restorative justice. Because restorative justice can ideally be used in any setting with any group of people, its generalization often overlooks exceptionally vulnerable or traditionally silenced populations. As such, using Critical Race Theory and related frameworks such as Dis/ability Critical Race Studies and Critical Race Parenting, this work specifically highlights how Black students with disabilities, their teachers, and their parents are impacted by, and engaged with restorative justice at school. This dissertation is written in the form of three papers. In paper one, I conduct an interview study in order to examine insights from special education teachers about their role in using restorative justice and how it impacts their students, particularly in terms of how race and ability are pivotal factors. In paper two, I conceptualize restorative justice literacies. This entails an examination of how reading, writing, and speaking play a role in how marginalized populations are able to understand and participate in restorative justice practices. This research took place in the form of case study, with student observation, interviews, and document analysis being primary sources of data. Finally, in paper three, I analyze the perspectives of the parents of students from paper two regarding their engagement with restorative justice. Findings from my research highlight aspects of the experiences and needs of students with disabilities that have yet to be addressed within literature on restorative justice, and has positive implications for the ways that school communities can

better understand and accommodate students with disabilities within both general and special education settings.

This is dedicated to Ollie Mae Presberry.

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INTRODUCTION

I have come to this work as a single mother of a beautiful Black son. There are stars in his eyes and his heart and mind are an ever-expanding galaxy of wonder, hope, and love. There are times when I want the world for him, but lately it feels as if the world is not enough. So we have created one of our own, one where he is free to let his imagination--and often, his busy body--run wild. We have co-constructed this world by remaining true to ourselves and true to each other. In our world, we learn from and with each other. I wish this world that we have created was not bound to the confines of our home, that wherever we went, we would be safe knowing that the world was ours and that we could immediately shape and adjust it as we saw fit. Given the ways that single Black mothers and their sons are perceived, it is clear that the world outside of the one we have created for ourselves is not our own. And while that may be the case, we can still use our words and our ways to show our worth to the rest of the world.

I am finishing this dissertation during a time of uncertainty, while Black people are fighting for their lives in more ways than one. While this trivializes my work in some ways, as writing a dissertation is the least urgent course of action, in other ways I am hopeful that my words contribute to the change that is being demanded. In light of the current call for the defunding of police departments and subsequent re-funding of communities, a restorative approach to addressing the needs of citizens is crucial. And as school and society are ever intertwined, this push for an end to carceral methods extends to classrooms as well.

While restorative justice has been touted as an approach to dismantling the school to prison pipeline, I make little mention of this throughout this dissertation. I am aware of the effects of zero tolerance policies and the disproportionate rate at which students of color and students with disabilities are subject to punitive disciplinary measures that can have a detrimental

effect on school success and subsequent post-secondary endeavors. I am aware of the parallels between schools' codes of conduct and tough-on-crime legislation, both of which over-police and oppress members of vulnerable communities. My choice not to dwell on these circumstances does not make them any less real. Because we already know what Black students with disabilities are up against, I believe that my work should center these students in ways that highlight their brilliance and offer implications for a future that is based on their freedom. Freedom, as Love (2019) puts it, "to create your own reality, where uplifting humanity is at the center of all decisions" (p. 89).

Therefore, this dissertation is not an evaluation of the effectiveness of restorative justice. Rather, it is an attempt to highlight the voices of members of a particular school community as they make sense of and participate in restorative justice while simultaneously navigating issues of race and ability. There are many ways to equitably address issues of harm within school communities and restorative justice is just one of them. Focusing on the ways that actual people interact within this mindset offers a chance to consider how schools can function without relying on traditional notions of discipline, and instead forge communities rooted in equity, empathy, and care.

Overview of Three Papers

This work takes place as a case study of one charter school in a large midwestern city where I was formerly employed. Ailey School for the Arts (or ASA, a pseudonym) began using restorative justice nearly six years ago. With an almost entirely Black student population, and a staff composed of more Black educators than most schools, my decision to center race within this work was based on a goal of highlighting the ways that a predominantly Black school community functions within a system that was not designed for them. Writing the dissertation as

three papers allowed for a closer analysis of how specific populations understand and participate in restorative justice. Teachers, students, and parents all have different perspectives and roles within educational communities. When highlighted properly, these insights offer a myriad of implications for instruction, educational research, and teacher education. Though various frameworks are used for each of the three papers, they are all grounded in Critical Race Theory, which offers a means of acknowledging the pervasiveness of racism within institutions, while also centering the voices and perspectives of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Paper 1: Special Education Teachers' Perspectives on Race and Restorative Justice

In paper 1, I explore the perspectives of special education teachers in regard to race and restorative justice. As a former special education teacher, I often witnessed the ways that students with disabilities were pushed out of classrooms at much higher rates than their peers. This actually led to my interest in studying restorative justice throughout my graduate program. In this paper, I ask: How do teachers examine the role of race in the implementation of restorative justice for Black students with disabilities in an urban school? This study was conducted via interpretivist interviews with three of ASA's special education teachers. Learning their perspectives offered implications for examining bias within the implementation of restorative justice, as well as opportunities for professional development in K12 schools that centers the perspectives and expertise of special education teachers.

Paper 2: Restorative Justice Literacies

Paper 2 centers the experiences and perspectives of Black students with disabilities in regard to their school's use of restorative justice. The research questions for this paper are: 1. In what ways do Black students' language and literacies illuminate their understanding of and engagement with restorative justice in an urban school? And 2: How can restorative justice

impact language arts curriculum and instruction for Black students with disabilities in an urban school? Four students were recruited as participants and data was collected via interview, observation, and document analysis. Examining the ways that students understand and take part in restorative justice at ASA offered implications for the ways that schools include students in professional development or training for restorative justice. Their experiences in the classroom also highlight the ways that restorative justice can be incorporated into classroom norms and instruction.

Paper 3: Restorative Justice and Black Parent Engagement

Finally, paper 3 examines the perspectives of parents of students with disabilities. This study asks the following questions: 1. How do Black parents of students with disabilities describe their experiences with restorative justice at an urban school? And 2. In what ways does restorative justice offer implications for Black parent engagement within schools' special education programs? Relying on responses from parent interviews, in this study I center parent engagement as an integral component of restorative justice, especially for students with disabilities. Parent insights point toward new considerations for how restorative justice and schools' special education programs can potentially serve as spaces for parents of students with disabilities to engage in ways that help foster the community that their students deserve.

Significance

Throughout each of the papers, teachers, students, and parents reflected on restorative justice as a promising approach to stepping away from punitive measures and moving toward a more equitable community. However, their perspectives also highlighted the fact that, as with any new approach in schools, there should be input from all stakeholders. Assuming that restorative justice will have a substantial impact in schools without considering the unique needs

of everyone involved could result in a fruitless endeavor. If Black students with disabilities have continuously faced marginalization in schools, implementing restorative justice in the same way as traditional instruction and disciple methods will continue to perpetuate the harm that these students and their families have already incurred.

Ultimately, this work is a step toward envisioning a new future for Black students with disabilities, one that is not based on academic achievement or assimilating into structures that have, by design, pushed them out of classrooms. Efforts to address the needs of these students are often derived from deficit narratives and seek to improve students instead of improving schools. As such, students find themselves up against academic standards and behavioral policies that do little to address their needs and instead, offer more opportunities for them to be marginalized. Moving forward, educators and educational researchers should consider how these students are well aware of their needs and strengths. In turn, our approaches to improving their educational experiences should be based upon work that we do *with* them as well as for them. Restorative justice is not a balm that will make schools the equitable learning spaces that they should be, but it is an effort that requires the input of everyone involved. It also offers a chance for schools to step away from and make amends for the ways that Black students have been underserved.

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PAPER 1: SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON RACE AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

The irony of the focus on inclusion in schools is that it often sets students apart. Though many public schools make attempts to educate students with disabilities in the same ways as their non-disabled peers, the results are often mixed, with some students thriving and others facing further discrimination. One of the most egregious errors of schools' special education programs is the attempt to assimilate students with disabilities, to fix them, without attempting to fix the structural and societal barriers that warrant students having the label of disability in the first place. Instead of solely examining students for deficits and devising plans to help them reach certain standards, teachers and teacher educators should be examining their own roles in educating students with disabilities in order to address their own shortcomings.

More recently, restorative justice has been implemented in schools where it is usually considered an alternative to traditional disciplinary measures. Though the use of restorative justice in schools is becoming more common, literature in this area is still emerging. Some of the earliest documented research featuring cases of using restorative justice in schools took place in countries such as Australia and New Zealand (Drewery, 2004). Since then, the ways it has been taken up in schools throughout the United States has varied. Schools and scholars have reported different purposes for pursuing restorative justice. Some schools use restorative justice as an alternative to punitive measures (Mirsky, 2007). Others view restorative justice as an option for building school culture, not necessarily as a behavioral intervention (Morrison, 2002; Russell & Crocker, 2016). In this case, restorative justice is viewed as a program that helps build relationships among all stakeholders in the school: students, families, teachers, administrators, and community members.

In a detailed review of the literature on restorative justice in schools, Schiff (2018) highlights the ways that the topic has been taken up thus far and notes that much of the literature published is in the form of non-peer reviewed articles, reports, and book chapters (p. 126). Within educational research, this makes it difficult to ascertain how restorative justice is implemented and what impact it has on schools. Nonetheless, several scholars have written on the use of restorative justice within urban schools (Anyon, et al, 2016; Gregory, et al., 2016; Payne & Welch, 2015, 2010). While their work may not explicitly provide evidence of restorative justice being used with fidelity in urban schools, they do offer further insight into how it is being taken up and offer implications for improvement. An important aspect of the research on restorative justice in urban schools is the voices of the teachers that are charged with upholding the philosophy. Some scholars have highlighted the perspectives of teachers in their work on restorative justice (Ingraham et al., 2016; Rainbolt et al., 2019). However, few studies, if any, have inquired about how both race and disability factor into the ways that teachers in urban schools view and implement restorative justice. With these issues in mind, this study seeks to better understand the ways in which restorative justice is used for students with disabilities in a predominantly Black school based on the following research question: How do special education teachers examine the role of race in the implementation of restorative justice for Black students with disabilities in an urban school?

Relevant Literature

Restorative justice has roots in communities from around the globe, making its origin difficult to trace (Meyer, 1998; Wanda, 2013). While many people may associate its use with the criminal justice system, restorative justice has become a focal point of schools' attempts to build culture and distance themselves from traditionally punitive measures such as zero tolerance. This

association with the criminal justice system has prompted some to opt for the term restorative practices instead of restorative justice. However, in her stance on using the term restorative justice instead of restorative practices, Winn (2018) has argued that, "The omission of 'justice' for the safer term 'practices' undermines the potential to get educators to consider how racist ideas permeate the education system in both implicit and explicit ways" (p. 7). Still, some opt for the term restorative practices because it allows for further interpretation of the philosophy and implies that it requires consistent action (McCluskey et al., 2008; Mirsky, 2011).

In more recent decades, scholars have studied the implementation of restorative justice in schools and its impact on suspension and expulsion rates (Davis, 2018; Gonzalez, 2012; McCluskey et al., 2008). While research and written work on restorative justice is expanding, this review of literature will focus more closely on its use in urban schools and with students with disabilities. Also, as special education teachers are the primary participants in this study, I will review literature that highlights how teacher perspectives play a role in instruction for students in urban schools.

Restorative Justice in Urban Schools

The term "urban" has taken up different meanings within the realm of education, many of them coded and containing a connotation that follows a deficit narrative. I use the term to refer to schools in major metropolitan areas that serve students that are marginalized by race and class. As more scholars dissect and critique the term, it is becoming more apparent that urban has become a term that is used for schools that are underperforming, or a catchall phrase for schools and students that need to be "fixed" in some way. However, it is important to recognize the assets of these schools and the communities in which they are situated, as well as structural inequalities that have created gaps in opportunities for them. Milner (2012) notes that, aside from

location, mention of urban education usually focuses on the people that make up a particular school community. My work will be situated within an urban intensive school (Milner, 2012) which I will describe in my methods section.

From media to educational research, urban schools have been presented in ways that are less than desirable. Instead of focusing on the institutionalized forms of oppression that have shaped the communities in which they are situated, a common scapegoat for this depiction of urban schools is the student body. There is a misconception that urban schools are filled with unruly, defiant children and that they either need to conform to hegemonic ideals of "successful" students, or they simply should be removed from the classroom altogether. However, Duncan-Andrade (2009) states:

> We may think that if we send out the "disobedient" child, we have removed the pain from our system. It simply does not work that way. Rather, when we exclude a child, we introduce another social stressor into the micro-ecosystem. We rationalize the exclusion by telling ourselves that we have pulled a weed from the garden, allowing for a healthier environment for the other children to grow. This ignores the fact that every student in our classroom is part of a delicate balance built on interdependency. (p. 190).

This excerpt from Duncan-Andrade's (2009) work on critical hope captures the essence of restorative justice. Though it may seem as if removing students from the classroom contributes to the overall well-being of other learners, it actually does more harm. As schools are communities in and of themselves, utilizing exclusion as a means of addressing behavior does nothing to help students understand the ways in which their well-being is actually contingent upon the inclusion of their peers. In order for any group to thrive, there must be support for everyone.

Though the use of restorative justice in urban schools is becoming more common, literature in this area is still emerging. In a detailed review of the literature on restorative justice in schools, Schiff (2018) highlights the ways that the topic has been taken up thus far and notes

that much of the literature published is in the form of non-peer reviewed articles, reports, and book chapters (p. 126). Within educational research, this makes it difficult to ascertain the effectiveness of restorative justice. Nonetheless, several scholars have written on the use of restorative justice within urban schools. While their work may not explicitly provide evidence of restorative justice being used with fidelity in urban schools, they do offer further insight into how it is being taken up and offer implications for improvement.

In her analysis of reasons for the disproportionality of students of color among disciplinary action in Denver Public Schools, Wadhwa (2010) uses Critical Race Theory as a framework for examining restorative justice practices. During this study, district officials and community members shared their perspectives on discipline and race in schools. Among the interviews she conducted, there was a contrast in the perspectives of the school district officials and of the community members. While members of the community organization acknowledged the roles of racism and in school discipline policies, district officials attributed the high numbers of suspension for students of color to their home lives.

Anyon, et. al, (2016) also examined disciplinary practices in Denver Public Schools, specifically regarding the implementation of a reformed discipline policy in 2008 that incorporated restorative intervention along with traditional exclusionary practices. They examined behavior statistics from the 2012-2013 school year, quite some time after the program had been implemented, and found that Black students were still disproportionately suspended. They point out that, while restorative interventions are valuable resources for decreasing suspensions, there should be a deeper engagement with these practices in order to help school staff shift their ideology around students of color and punitive disciplinary practices.

Using data from the National Study of Delinquency Prevention in Schools, Payne and Welch (2010) examined the likelihood of whether punitive or restorative measures would be taken based on the racial composure of schools. Controlling for factors such as concentrated disadvantage (income, unemployment, divorce rates) and urbanicity (population size and the proportion of people living within an urban area according to the US census), they found that schools with a higher population of Black students were less likely to engage in a restorative justice program featuring the use of student conferences, peer mediation, restitution, or community service.

Race and Disability

There is much research that exists focusing on the overrepresentation of Black students within schools' special education programs (Ahram, Fergus & Noguera, 2011; Cruz & Rodi, 2018; Thrasher, 1999). These studies acknowledge the ways that culturally biased evaluation tools, school personnel, and achievement standards (Anyon, 2009) can many times play a larger role in whether or not a student is found to have a disability than their actual capabilities or needs. However, Adams and Erevelles (2016) point out that it is important to be careful about how disproportionality among Black students is taken up. Viewing disability in ways that focus solely on deficit and exclusion only add to ableist rhetoric. In expressing their frustrations with Black students being overrepresented among special education referrals, scholars are inadvertently portraying disability as a defect rather than a social construct that affects the ways that students with disabilities are able to navigate schools in the same ways as their peers. It is important to distinguish between the fact that a student has a disability and the ways that this student is treated once the disability has been acknowledged. Unfortunately, when considering disability within the context of education, the outcomes for white students and Black students

can be vastly different. White students and their parents may feel a sense of relief upon diagnosis, due to access to resources and the ways that they can now negotiate and navigate society based on the students' needs (Rehm, et al., 2013). However, once considered disabled, Black students face an additional degree of marginalization and are tracked in ways that lead to lower academic expectations and higher chances of disciplinary infractions.

Though schools have taken up restorative justice as a means of addressing the disproportionate rate at which students with disabilities and students of color face exclusionary punishment, there is little research that explores what this looks like. Further, there is little consideration of how the intersecting identities of race and ability factor into students' participation in restorative justice practices. Without an examination of how restorative justice is used for and with students of color with disabilities, schools and researchers may be taking up this approach without any consideration of how they can better serve these targeted populations.

Restorative Justice and Special Education

One of the few works in regard to restorative justice and special education is Burnett and Thorsborne's (2015) extensive guide to working with students with special needs within the realm of restorative justice. With regard to terminology, they use the term "restorative practice" and define it as "the *practice* of the philosophy and process of restorative justice, an approach in response to wrongdoing that places the focus of problem-solving on harm done and how it might be repaired" (p. 24). In *Restorative Practice and Special Needs* (2015), Burnett and Thorsborne describe various disabilities and how they may impact students' progress within the school setting. They offer suggestions for adapting restorative practice and making it more accessible for students with special needs and also offer guidance for working with parents and various members of school staff. Their work serves as a very useful guide for framing my research.

However, because they write from their perspectives as Australian educators, there are aspects of the work that may not be fitting for Black students in urban schools in the United States. In their mention of the importance of using restorative justice, they do point out the disparities that exist for students with disabilities, students of color, and LGBTQ+ students in terms of school suspension. However, there is little mention of how these other identity markers (aside from disability) play a role in how restorative justice is pursued.

Teacher Perspectives on Restorative Justice

Teachers have been the focus of several works regarding the implementation of restorative justice. Learning their perspectives of this approach helps to highlight more effective ways to serve students through restorative practices. Lustick's (2017) work presents the ways that veteran Black teachers perceived restorative justice in the same ways as traditional discipline measures, noting that there is a false dichotomy between the two; when used in school settings that permeate racist ideals and policies, either can be oppressive. This is in contrast to the ways that teachers in Short, Case, and McKenzie's (2018) study responded to questions about restorative justice. These researchers interviewed teachers at a school using restorative justice in order to examine its long-term impact. Participants reported the importance of restorative justice in that it helped cultivate more positive relationships with students, which in turn, positively influenced students' behavior and academic success. Rainbolt, Fowlder, and Mansfield (2019) surveyed teachers at a high school in a racially and economically diverse inner suburb as the first step in their research on restorative justice. While most of the survey was multiple choice, several open-ended questions gave teachers the opportunity to offer more specific accounts of their experiences with restorative justice. They noted the importance of ensuring that the entire school was on board with the use and value of restorative practices. They also acknowledged the

need for adequate training, authentic connections with students, and patience with determining whether or not restorative justice is effective.

While studies have been conducted in the area of restorative justice that focus on urban schools, its use with students of color, and students with disabilities, there is little work that currently centers the use of restorative justice with Black students with disabilities in urban schools. Still, this review of literature serves as a basis for how future work can be pursued in order to better support marginalized students. My research builds upon the aforementioned work and offers additional insights for approaching the research and implementation of restorative justice. Namely, the intersections of race and disability are examined more closely, specifically through the lens of urban special education teachers.

Dis/ability Critical Race Studies

Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2013) describe Dis/ability Critical Race Studies or DisCrit as "a framework that theorizes about the ways in which race, racism, dis/ability and ableism are built into the interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education, which affect students of color with dis/abilities qualitatively differently than white students with dis/abilities (Solórzano and Yosso 2001)" (p. 7). Their work stems from both Disability Studies, which focuses on the ways in which disability is viewed within society (Linton, 1998) and Critical Race Theory, which focuses on the ways in which race, racism, and power intersect (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). Centering race often leaves other aspects of identity such as disability ignored. Similarly, much of the work regarding disability and ableism essentializes people with disabilities, failing to consider their myriad perspectives and identities, including race. With intersectionality being a tenet of Critical Race Theory, it is important to examine how multiple marginalized identities impact students' experiences.

In their work on DisCrit, Annamma, et. al (2013) highlight the social construction of both race and disability, while acknowledging the implications these identity markers have on the ways that people of color with disabilities are treated. Describing these identity markers as social constructs is not done so in order to trivialize their importance. Though race and disability are social constructs, they do play a critical role in how students view themselves, how they are perceived, and how they navigate structures such as school. Even while some may argue that there are biological factors that may lead to the designation of having a disability, Annamma, et. al (2013) argue that it is actually the ways that people with these biological differences are categorized that determine disability (p. 9). This speaks volumes to the ways that, for many students, their disability only lies within the context of schools. The same students with specific learning disabilities in the classroom are the same students that care for younger siblings, are active within extracurricular activities, and even assume household roles after the school day is done. At school, they are considered as having a disability, but this disability essentially disappears as soon as they leave campus.

Additionally, DisCrit problematizes many other aspects of how we perceive and discuss disability. An example of this is the use of dis/ability instead of disability. According to Annamma, et. al (2013):

> We deliberately use 'dis/ability' instead of 'disability' throughout this article to call attention to ways in which the latter overwhelmingly signals a specific inability to perform culturally-defined expected tasks (such as learning or walking) that come to define the individual as primarily and generally 'unable' to navigate society. We believe the '/' in disability disrupts misleading understandings of disability, as it simultaneously conveys the mixture of ability and disability (p. 24).

Placing a focus on ability within the denotation of dis/ability underlines their position on the social construction of disability and the ways people with disabilities are perceived. Often our

discussions of students with disabilities center the ways that they are unable to function in different environments, which disregards the many capabilities they actually do have. This asset-based approach that Annamarra et. al (2013) follow will be key throughout my study as the students and teachers that I work with are in an urban district, which, as mentioned earlier, is often riddled with deficit narratives. Further, as many students with disabilities are required to be educated in the least restrictive environment possible, DisCrit also emphasizes inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education setting. Considering the ways that students with disabilities are more likely to be suspended or expelled, it is also worth considering inclusion in a way that centers not only instruction, but behavior as well. Aligning DisCrit with research on restorative justice helps to center both academic and social needs of students with disabilities.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) has origins in the field of critical legal studies. It was developed by legal scholars in order to continue the fight against racism that had peaked during the civil rights movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). According to Derrick Bell (2016), a leading scholar in this field: "critical race theory is a body of legal scholarship...whose members are both existentially people of color and ideologically committed to the struggle against racism, particularly as institutionalized in and by law" (p. 34). Though racism can, and often is, perpetuated by individuals, CRT helps scholars to analyze the ways that systems of power play a role in the oppression of people of color.

More recently, critical race theory has also been used to examine issues of race and racism within the field of education (Ladson-Billings, 2016). Examining different aspects of schooling through a critical race lens allows educators to determine whether or not school

practices work against hegemonic, oppressive ideals and better support students of color. As public schools have historically been shaped by policies and practices that continuously oppress students of color, using critical race theory in educational research is useful in that it provides an opportunity to examine aspects of schooling that have been overlooked. If educational researchers aim to examine and ultimately address different aspects of schooling, this goal cannot be reached without a closer look at the factors leading to the issues at hand, which, in many cases, involve some type of oppression.

Disability Studies in Education

Much like CRT, Disability Studies has also recently been taken up in the field of education. As such, researchers in this area have distinguished their work by identifying it as Disability Studies in Education, or DSE. Connor, et al. (2008) have noted that while DS and DSE have been taken up by different researchers in different ways, there are still elements of both that are universal to the ways that work for and with people with disabilities is taken up. They clarify that:

> the most important, indeed pivotal, unifying perspective central to DS and, subsequently, to DSE — that disability is a social construct. This perspective, as articulated in the social model of disability, diametrically opposes the medical model by virtue of its re-conceptualization of disability as inevitably values-laden and historically/culturally situated. Thus, disability is not a 'thing' or condition people have, but instead a social negation serving powerful ideological commitments and political aims (p. 447).

Their emphasis on the social construction of disability and the need for a different view of disability in general point to the importance of disability studies and disability studies in education as frameworks for addressing issues of inequity and ableism in both school and society. DSE offers a way to critique issues of ableism while also valuing the experiences and identities of people with disabilities.

While both CRT and DSE are useful frameworks, applying DisCrit to this study allows for a closer analysis of both race and ability (as well as the intersection of the two) as factors that impact student success and belonging in school. Also, as it attributes inequity to systems of power that oppress marginalized people (instead of finding fault in students and families) DisCrit serves as a tool for examining structural issues in providing special education services and using restorative justice for Black students. Throughout the study, teachers bring to light many of the issues that they and their students face, and using DisCrit helps to maintain a focus on the assets of the people involved instead of constructing a deficit narrative of the school community. This framework offers a chance to critique the ways that dominant, oppressive ideals have impacted the lives of teachers and students while ensuring that their voices are centered in ways that follow a more humanizing approach.

Methods

This study was conducted at Ailey School for the Arts, or ASA (a pseudonym), which is a public charter school in a large, Midwestern city. It serves approximately 800 students in sixth through twelfth grade. Nearly 99 percent of the student population identifies as Black. Situated in an area known as the "cultural center" of the city, the school is located near local universities and museums, some of which have established partnerships with the school. Under the leadership of a former principal, the school adopted restorative practices during the 2014-2015 school year and subsequent principals have maintained its use. Special education services are implemented with a focus on inclusion, placing students with disabilities in the general education classroom for a majority of the school day, with the exception being one hour reserved for Workshop, where students work with their assigned special education teacher in order to make progress toward

their individualized educational program goals and receive assistance with general education assignments.

Participants

Three of ASA's special educators were involved in this study. As I was formerly employed as a special education teacher at ASA, my rapport with my former co-worker, Ms. Tubman helped me to recruit her and other members of the school's special education team, whom I had met over several previous visits to the school, as participants for this study. Ms. Tubman identifies as Black and has served the school for seven years, which is also the entirety of her teaching career. She began teaching at the school one year before the implementation of restorative justice. Ms. Khan identifies as multiracial and is a veteran teacher of 14 years. She has worked for the school for six years. Ms. Wheatley identifies as Black and has been teaching for eight years, the last two of which have been at the research site.

Data Collection

After identifying my participants, I developed a set of research questions to be answered through interpretivist interviews. An interpretivist study seeks not only to provide new information about a particular topic, but to also provide new ways of approaching or understanding this topic (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2000). This approach also gave the opportunity for teachers to describe their experiences with restorative justice firsthand. These experiences could be seen as counternarratives, which are an integral aspect of both Critical Race Theory and DisCrit. Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2013) note that, "it is imperative for readers to listen carefully and respectfully to counter-narratives, and for researchers to use them as a form of academic activism to explicitly 'talk back' to master-narratives" (p. 14). Interviews were conducted individually with each teacher in their respective classroom after school hours.

Interview protocol was developed based on previous work regarding the school's restorative justice program, but revised to include information that is more pertinent to the school's special education department. Each teacher was interviewed twice. Initial interviews lasted between 40 and 55 minutes. Follow up interviews lasted for approximately thirty minutes. Each interview was audio recorded for later transcription. Interviews were semi-structured, with most of the questions being open-ended to allow for teachers to speak freely about their experiences with restorative justice. Interviewing as a means of data collection offered more insight into teacher perspectives than other qualitative methods (such as surveys). Also, within special education research, there is a need for more qualitative methodology (Pugach et al., 2014). Therefore, interviewing allows for a methodological approach that centers the lives and voices of the teachers and students involved in special education programs and avoids the reduction of their value to numbers and figures.

Data Analysis

In their work on thematic analysis, Nowell, et al., (2017) draw from Braun and Clark (2006) as well as King (2004) in order to establish their position that, "thematic analysis is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights" (p. 2). With this in mind, I employed a thematic analysis of the data for this study. After interviews were transcribed, data analysis began with "pre-coding" (Layder as cited in Saldaña, 2016). This entailed reading interview transcripts line by line and highlighting passages that answered the previously mentioned interview questions, as well as other insights that teachers shared that stood out. Then, first cycle coding was completed by "Theming the Data" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 198), which consisted of developing phrases based on the commonalities between various portions of the data

set. Questions guiding this thematic analysis were: What commonalities are there among responses to each question? How do answers relate to the literature on restorative justice? How do answers center race and disability? From there, I conducted second cycle coding by using Focused Coding. During this process, similarly coded data from the first round of analysis were combined into categories. These categories were then reviewed in order to search for inconsistencies among data and to further combine any similar codes.

Researcher Positionality

I have come to this work after spending six years working with students with disabilities in urban charter schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. During my career as a special education teacher, which actually began at ASA, student behavior was an issue for many of the general education teachers, and the students on my caseload were often suspended as a result. Though policies and laws are in place that protect students with disabilities from being suspended for behaviors that are manifestations of their disabilities, proving so is often subjective. After I accepted a position as lead special education teacher at an elementary school, an audit brought to light how often students with disabilities were being suspended compared to their non-disabled peers, which prompted the school to make an effort to keep students in class. However, the same behaviors were still occurring, frustrating teachers and leaving students with little support to address the needs that teachers were interpreting as behavioral issues. This issue led to my interest in restorative justice.

Throughout my doctoral program, I have interviewed staff and students, as well as observed training and activities related to restorative justice at ASA. Findings from these smaller projects have illuminated the successes and struggles the school has faced throughout its time implementing restorative justice. More specifically, my previous research findings showed that

while both teachers and administrators support the use of restorative justice at the school, there is room for improvement in the areas of professional development, record keeping, and providing support for students that have ongoing issues with behavior. Conversations with the school's three special education teachers during my visits to the school for other research projects led to the development of this study. They reminded me that one critical component of the school that was overlooked in my previous work was its special education department. Therefore, my research area has been narrowed down in order to better understand what works for students with disabilities and their teachers. This starts with learning more about how special education teachers as well as students with disabilities perceive and use restorative justice practices at the school.

Findings and Discussion

Throughout their interviews, participants discussed several different issues affecting the ways that students are able to navigate the school space in regard to race, ability, and restorative justice. Themes that were derived from teacher responses include a focus on how students face racial discrimination in public spaces near the school, teachers' own racial identities and their effect on their relationships with students, and how accountability and bias play a role in how restorative justice is taken up in schools. Though many of their responses did not include explicit connections between race, ability, and restorative justice, they give insight into how teacher perspectives can be a valuable tool in creating a more restorative environment for Black students with disabilities.

Racial Discrimination in Public Spaces

When asked about possible racial implications of any policies that the school has implemented, Ms. Wheatley brought up the current rules in place for how her students are able to

navigate the school space, which is situated in a public building that is also home to several businesses and non-profit organizations, as well as a private college. Each of these spaces has policies requiring students to have a parent or teacher accompany them at all times, even outside of school hours. She noted:

> ...they hate to see our kids come in. They do not want them here. And they make it very known and they treat them accordingly. They don't want our kids in their book store. They don't want our kids in the [coffee shop], they don't want our kids in their cafeteria. They don't want our kids anywhere near their stuff. And I feel if it was a bunch of non-Black children, this probably wouldn't be so much of an issue, like kids being kids. But when our kids are being kids, it's 'they're rowdy'. They're children. They are children and they're children being children.

Here, Ms. Wheatley points out that while ASA is using restorative practices, the students are often heavily policed in other areas of the building. During arrival and dismissal, students pass these spaces in the same ways that most middle and high schoolers do: walking in groups, laughing, talking loudly. However, they are described as rowdy instead of being seen as typical adolescents. Though it is highly unlikely that the other organizations in the building have explicitly expressed race as a factor in keeping the kids away, there is coded language in the description of the kids as loud and rowdy that is usually applied to Black students (Wilson et al., 2020). The ways that students have been barred from certain areas of the building also reflect the ways that businesses have historically excluded patrons on the basis of race (Horsford, 2019). Collins (2016) notes that, "DisCrit examines the ways that perceptions of race and judgments of dis/ability intersect and shape recognition of whose body, mind, language, and/or behavior is acceptable and whose is deserving of incarceration, exclusion, silencing, and/or punishment." (p. 189). To this end, it is important to consider how students being excluded from spaces associated with the school perpetuates discriminatory practices in society at large.

With the school's focus on restorative justice, it seems that this would be an opportunity to figure out how to address the concerns of the buildings' other tenants without having to resort to measures that police the students and bar them from different spaces, further marginalizing them in their own school. However, an incident that Ms. Khan shared may shed light on why some issues of racial discrimination and exclusion seem more insidious than others. When asked about issues of race and racism at the school, Ms. Khan recalled a similar situation to the one described by Ms. Wheatley. On a field trip to a local museum, despite the fact that white students from another school were also disregarding the museum's rules, her Black students were the only ones reprimanded, "it was a suburban, all white, PWI [predominantly white institution] secondary school. So their high school students were running around touching things, cursing. But yet, the security guards were following our kids and they made nasty comments to our kids*"*. Similar to Ms. Wheatley's comments about the students being barred from various places within the public building that houses the school, Ms. Khan's recollection of this experience highlights the ways that students face racism despite attending a predominantly Black school in a predominantly Black city. Fortunately, the school was able to use its relationship with their neighboring private college, which also has close ties with the museum, in order to have a conversation about the incident and its impact on the students. This was not described as a restorative circle by Ms. Khan, but it did resemble the makings of one, with the school representing those that were harmed and meeting with the museum's staff regarding the harm that had been caused and the two entities discussing how to move forward.

What is interesting about the issues of racism that each teacher described is that only the unfortunate museum visit warranted a conversation. The ways that the students are excluded from different spaces in their own building has seemingly been accepted, as the policies that Ms.

Wheatley described are still in place. Though students have been othered in both places, the incident in the museum was more salient in that teachers and students were able to witness in real time the ways that white privilege favored students from the suburban school while racial threat criminalized Black students from ASA. Because ASA is predominantly Black, the day-to-day moves of the students are not juxtaposed to their white counterparts, making it difficult to argue that any racial discrimination ever occurs within the building where the school is located. Still, a restorative approach to how the school and other organizations in the building share the space could prove to be beneficial for everyone.

As previously mentioned, restorative justice has been taken up in other facets of society, well before its implementation in schools. Criminal justice studies have highlighted the effectiveness of how restorative justice has not only helped to reduce recidivism, but to repair relationships between victims and offenders (Strang, et al., 2006). As such, the school's approach to restorative justice could be an invaluable tool in establishing consistent use of it throughout the surrounding community, especially given the unfortunate experiences students have had with racism in relation to public spaces associated with the school. According to Collins (2016):

> ...the symbolic violence of marking some (Black, Brown, and disabled) children out of place within classroom communities must be understood as part of a continuum of state-sanctioned exclusion, marginalization, dehumanization, and physical violence directed at marking some (Black, Brown, disabled) youth as out of place in community and public spaces" (p. 200).

Also, considering teachers' concerns over the ways that the school's philosophy counters what students may experience outside of the classroom, pushing for a more restorative relationship with surrounding entities could help safeguard students against the racist experiences that their peers have had in public spaces associated with the school. Along these lines, it is worth noting

that several organizations have devoted their services to finding more restorative ways to engage with communities (Murphy & Priz, 2017; Sideris, 2015; Souza & Dhami, 2008).

Teachers' Racial Identity and Relatability with Students

In addition to noting the experiences of students at the school when asked about issues of race and racism, teachers also spoke about their own racial identities. In doing so, they also reveal how their racial identities play a role in their interactions with other members of the school community. While it can be assumed that teachers having a racial identity that matched that of the students could be an advantage in developing relationships and therefore using restorative justice, teachers shared accounts that support this idea, but also bring to light how this is not always the case.

For context, it will be helpful to consider Ms. Tubman.'s recollection of how, in the past, teachers had difficulty making connections with students. When asked about issues of race or racism at the school, she commented:

> I haven't heard complaints this year of students saying that they feel teachers are being racist towards them. But we have had teachers who were racist towards students and would literally have difficulty developing relationships with students of color. They would literally say it like, "I don't know how to really work with them or how to engage or talk."

What is interesting here is that Ms. Tubman is making connections between teachers being racist toward students and failing to establish relationships with students. Also, despite the question being pointed toward race, Ms. Tubman's position as a special education teacher implies that ability is also a factor in how teachers have (or have not) been able to develop relationships with students. In schools that follow inclusion models for serving students with disabilities, as ASA does, it is not uncommon to hear of teachers expressing concerns about not knowing how to

teach or engage with students with disabilities (Abbas & Al Qaryouti, 2009; Everett, 2017; Love et al., 2019).

In contrast to the teachers that Ms. Tubman recalled, Ms. Wheatley has had little difficulty connecting with students. Race seems to play a significant role in how she is perceived and how she develops relationships with teachers, parents, and students. Though Ms. Wheatley credits her racial identity when considering factors that have helped her connect with students, she explained that it has also been a barrier when establishing herself as a professional:

> I think that when it pertains to students, it is very easy for me to form relationships with them because they can relate to me. I'm young and I'm Black, so they really gravitate toward me. With other teachers, it's kind of tricky because I feel some teachers, non-Black teachers, in a lot of ways they sometimes feel you are less than… And then sometimes the parents are like, until I really start building a relationship with the parents and they get to know me, at first they'll be like, "You the teacher?" And I'm like, "Uh, yeah."

Despite being underestimated by teachers due to her race, she has been able to form relationships with students who instead find her relatable because of her race. While she knows that her race and age are assets in pursuing her work, she also knows that these identity markers are seen as a deficit to some. With her having a similar background as the students, it has been easier to develop relationships with them, which is key to using restorative justice. In this case, Ms. Wheatley's race also seemed to be tied to her ability. As a young, Black teacher, other staff members and parents have questioned her expertise and whether or not she is capable of being an effective educator.

While DisCrit centers students in its analysis of race as a factor in how disabling occurs, it is worth noting that this happens to professionals as well. Collins (2003) describes *ability profiling* as reading one's "actions and interactions through the lens of deficiency" (xiii). In her descriptions of her early interactions with parents and teachers, Ms. Wheatley is highlighting

how the racial profiling of teachers also leads to a form of ability profiling, where their expertise and knowledge are overshadowed by deficit perspectives.

Though Ms. Wheatley noted that her racial identity was a positive factor in her ability to develop relationships with her students, Ms. Tubman shared countering examples of how race impacted relationships in the classroom. She briefly recalled the case of a former Black teacher at ASA that had an adverse relationship with students at the predominantly Black school, who often highlighted students' deficits and questioned their ability to succeed. She also shared an experience that showed how her own racial identity seemed to have been taken advantage of by one of her students, whom also identifies as Black:

> I can remember saying this to a kid once like, "You go in here, this young lady could care less about you and you would never raise your voice to this [white] teacher. But with me, I'm sitting here and I work with you every single day and you're going to turn and yell at me in my face? How do you disrespect me? I look like you. I look like your mama. How dare you stand here before me and disrespect me in my space that I share with you daily?" He was like, "It's not even like that." I said, "That's how I feel." I said, "This [white] teacher over here, you're bending over backwards to please. I'm in here breaking my neck trying to help you understand her work. You go in her class and sit there quiet. Don't say a mumbling word. Yet, you failed in her class because she won't talk to you. But you placed her on a pedestal and won't say two words to her. Open your mouth. Tell her you need help. You come in here and I'm trying to help you. You yelling at me." I was hot.

These two instances show how issues of race and racism are often complex and require more than an assumption that Black students will succeed if they have Black teachers. Because race and ability are often associated with each other in ways that oppress and stigmatize Black people (Annamma et al., 2013), and because these notions are embedded in nearly every facet of school environments, situations can and do arise where conflict occurs between Black teachers and students. The assumption that a person has limited ability, intellect, or expertise because of their race leaves these two aforementioned groups in a precarious position when it comes to establishing classrooms that center asset-based pedagogy. Just as it is important to uphold the

funds of knowledge of Black students, the same can be said for Black teachers as well. Ms. Tubman tied this disrespect to issues of anti-intellectualism, which she noted that the previous principal had addressed with students and staff:

> [The previous principal] called it out, said this is something we're going to stop. They're going to stop this whole anti-intellectualism in terms of Blacks thinking other Blacks don't know anything. And that whites are the epitome of knowledge. We're going to stop this. So that was something that we've had to deal with, but that's gone.

This parallels Ms. Wheatley's experiences with parents and faculty questioning her credentials and expertise. In Ms. Tubman's case, however, another way to view this situation has to do with the fact that the student may have been more comfortable expressing his frustrations with her because she is Black. Webb-Johnson (2010) notes that Black male students with disabilities can at times enact coping skills when in an environment that is culturally incongruent with their own, one of which is dissembling, which, "offers pretense to outside world; conceals true feelings; [and] camouflages subversive acts" (p. 658). Webb-Johnson juxtaposes these coping skills with Boykin's (1983) dimensions of African American cultural life. One particular dimension that most likely applies to Ms. Tubman's situation with her student is affect, which includes an "emphasis on emotion and feelings", "sensitivity to emotional cues", and a "tendency to be emotionally expressive" (as cited in Webb-Johnson, 2010, p. 657). Ms. Tubman's comment to the student that, "I look like you. I look like your mama" may be truer than she believed. Therefore, her student was perhaps employing coping mechanisms in his white teacher's class and felt more comfortable expressing himself with Ms. Tubman.

With the other teachers noting how their experience is shaped by the fact that their racial identities mirror the student population, Ms. Khan points out that "in terms of race, in and of itself, it doesn't really factor into my daily interactions." Ms. Khan identifies as multiracial (of South Asian, European, and Native American descent), but has also noted that students have

mistaken her for being a biracial Black woman. When asked about any connections she has with students, she pointed out that she was born and raised in the city in which the school is located, which is uncommon for many of ASA's non-Black teachers. In turn, she believes that this aspect of her identity has helped her to better understand and resonate with students. She noted that, "I think the kids acknowledge it and the families acknowledged it, that I'm not some outsider, gentrifier coming in like a white savior. I'm not coming in with any of those mentalities". Subsequently, she has been able to establish and maintain positive relationships with parents and students. She stated,

> Honestly, I don't feel race necessarily plays a factor so much as it as culture. And I think culture is more of the dominating thing than race at this school…And when I speak to culture, there's subcultures within any race. And I think predominantly most of the population that we're working here with are from [the city].

Though she does not necessarily identify as Black, growing up in the predominantly Black city in which the school is situated has afforded Ms. Khan insight into the students' backgrounds and experiences. This, in addition to her own experiences with the race and culture of her own family, has played an essential role in her ability to consider the students' backgrounds during her instruction and interactions within her classroom. Ms. Khan's connection to students through their shared culture of growing up in the same city, as well as her experiences with an immigrant parent have been integral in the ways she has established positive relationships with students and families.

Studies have shown that teachers' racial identities can have an impact on the ways that they are able to connect to and establish relationships with students of color (Carrol, 2017; Milner, 2006). Though their experiences varied, some of the findings from teacher participants in this study support these claims. As relationship building is a key component of restorative justice, taking a closer look at how teachers' identities are constructed, especially in terms of

which identity markers they share with students, can have an impact on how restorative justice is used by special education teachers. This also allows teachers to consider how students' racial identities can impact their engagement in restorative practices. Without consideration of different privileged or oppressed aspects of our identities, attempting to use restorative justice in schools could be futile.

Also, considering their own identities may help teachers to be more empathic toward students. Though she does not make an explicit connection between the ways that her qualifications have been questioned and the ways that students with disabilities have been marginalized, Ms. Wheatley's position as a Black special education teacher seems to influence her will to ensure that her students receive the appropriate services:

> I have seen over the years, I've seen a lot of people who are really not all that qualified to be working with my kids, they're my kids. And it really bothers me because they're the ones who need the most. They're the ones who need the most qualified people. They're the ones who need the most attention. They're the ones who need intentional instruction. They're the ones who need it the most, but they're the ones who don't get it the most. And so that is why I am doing what I am doing.

Here "my kids" are students with disabilities and Ms. Wheatley is pointing out the obligation she has to support them, knowing that in many cases, despite the fact that their needs often exceed those of their peers, they have yet to receive the services they are due. While she did not explicitly name race or ability, describing her students as "the ones who need the most" speaks to the ways that they have been marginalized. Despite having her credentials questioned by parents and other teachers, Ms. Wheatley has stood firm in her ability to teach and connect with students.

Accountability

With its opposition to retribution or punishment, restorative justice can be seen by some as too lenient. As the outcome of any restorative circle is dependent upon the parties involved, issues of accountability may vary depending on how harm is to be addressed. With this in mind,

teacher participants brought up concerns over the possibility of focusing too heavily on forgiveness instead of holding students accountable for their actions. However, it is important to remember that restorative justice does not necessitate forgiveness, only restoration. According to Zehr (1999), "A restorative approach to justice would ask 'Who has been hurt? What can be done to make things right, and whose responsibility is it?' True justice would have as its goals restoration, reconciliation and responsibility rather than retribution" (p. 11). Those who have caused harm are not necessarily pardoned. Rather, they are given the chance to make amends. However, the concept of accountability can have various meanings that, at times, contradict the act of restoration. While addressing issues of accountability, Ms. Tubman stated:

> And then what about group work? What about accountability? What about partnership? It snowballs. It's not just this just impacts this kid in one way, it impacts them multiple ways. Especially in a school like this where everything is experiential learning, where we have small groups...So it's much bigger than that. And then when do we expect students to realize time matters? If it doesn't matter at any grade level, elementary, middle, or high, we're setting them up for something as an adult.

When asked about issues of racism or complacency with policies that might be considered racist, Ms. Tubman brought up the fact that the school does not enforce a tardy policy for students. She believes this may stem from the stereotypical assumption that Black people will be late, so there is no need to hold them accountable. While she does not advocate for punishment for being tardy, she does feel that some accountability should be taken for getting students to class on time. She goes on to connect this to the fact that school should be preparing students to function as responsible adults and that they will be in spaces in the future where they will be required to adhere to various time constraints and deadlines.

Because restorative justice requires those involved to address harm, some accountability is needed, but it seems as if a focus solely on accountability instead of focusing on ways to move forward may have teachers veering toward blaming or punishing students and parents. Students

with IEPs often have accommodations related to time (i.e.: more time to take tests or turn in assignments). Perhaps this could be extended to attendance, just so teachers and parents are able to clearly lay out expectations and acknowledge any issues families may have. Ms. Khan noted:

> But when I was talking about like the whole accountability [thing], it could be something as simple as like grades and deadlines. There'll be some people that are like, "Oh, well it's not restorative to give a kid a zero". And then deadlines are never firm. But then how does that translate to a collegiate setting when deadlines are very firm? Like so where does the line get drawn and where's the accountability and what does that look like? And preparation and looking at the grand scope, the end goal, meaning we want our kids to go to college. Or even have jobs and be successful in a workforce.

Considering the ways that Black students, especially those with disabilities are treated outside of the classroom, it is understanding that teachers would be concerned about preparing students for life outside of school. Unfortunately, because of the ways that society has used different expectations and policies to police and subsequently punish people (and people of color, to a larger extent), having guiding principles for students is viewed as oppressive. These two contrasting ideals -- preparing students for the "real world" and countering the ways that marginalized people are often policed in various ways -- give some insight into how aspects of restorative justice need to be examined more closely in order to ensure that they are implemented in ways that are appropriate for different populations. Being mindful of the fact that marginalized students are held to certain societal standards in ways that others are not should not negate the need for accountability within restorative practices. Ms. Khan clarified, "the accountability factor is also part of being restorative and taking those moments to lift and to teach that in the moment. Things can be teachable moments". Ms. Khan is noting that often, what others consider to be restorative (extending or ignoring deadlines, leniency with grades, etc.) actually impedes students from accepting or working towards accountability. Like Ms. Tubman, she is concerned about students being able to accept responsibilities as adults if they have not had the proper

guidance due to the school's reliance on what they view as restorative practices. Ms. Khan's comments emphasize the importance of accountability within restorative justice. It seems that in some cases, issues with students are avoided altogether without any opportunity to help them understand how they could approach particular situations differently.

Researchers have noted that continuing the use of traditional discipline practices can undermine the value and effectiveness of restorative justice if both are followed in tandem (Winn, 2018). Payne and Welch (2015) point out that disproportionality still exists within schools' behavioral approaches when using restorative justice. Schools have inadvertently substituted restorative circles for detention and suspension, leading to restorative justice being taken up in ways that perpetuate the harm that it is supposed to ameliorate. Further, the continuation of traditional discipline practices undermines the validity of restorative justice. This binary consisting of exclusionary practices and punishment as "real" approaches and restorative justice as "a slap on the wrist" does little to help schools establish a more equitable community. Scholars have written on the ineffectiveness of suspension and expulsion (McNeal & Dunbar 2010; Kang-Brown, Jacob, et al. 2013). With that being the case, it may be possible for schools to move to an entirely restorative approach to address issues of harm. Doing so would not only foster inclusion for students, but also help members of the school community to realize the importance of restorative justice as a viable method when it comes to addressing issues of harm.

Though restorative justice is often viewed as the counter to traditional discipline policies, ASA still relies on such procedures in order to address student behavior. As such, teachers frequently discussed the concepts of discipline and consequences. Notably, though none of the interview questions asked specifically about the concept of discipline, each of the teachers brought up issues of discipline on their own. This required me to ask follow up questions with

teachers when the topic arose: When asked what discipline would look like, Ms. Khan described it as:

> just something where they see their immediate consequence and how it affected that immediate community and attaching that meaning to it. Because we talk about code switching. When kids walk out of this building, there's consequences. It's a real world, right? There's no circles with police officers and there's no circles with people in the community. Right? So understanding and attaching consequences to behaviors is important.

Ms. Khan's response factored in individual accountability and focusing on ways in which the community is affected, which are at the core of restorative justice. However, by emphasizing the need for consequences while placing student behavior within the context of the "real world" and noting the lack of restorative justice outside of school, she does not seem to fully embrace the idea of restorative justice having a substantial impact on the lives of students outside of school. Instead, she emphasizes a need for having specific consequences for different behavioral infractions as a way to prepare students for life outside of the classroom.

When asked if she could change anything about the restorative justice program, Ms. Wheatley also focused on the need for consequences for behavioral infractions:

> I think that the whole premise is great until the point with the consequences. I feel like there are no consequences and so that to me is a fatal flaw in the logic because it's like, "Okay, we're doing all this to try to minimize the behavior, but if I just go through this process and don't get a consequence for that initial behavior, then I can go through the process as many times as you want me to because it doesn't affect me in any way." I feel like that's really the only way to extinguish behavior. You have to set some kind of consequence whether it's a positive or a negative...Because for everything that you do, there is a response. They need to learn that, too.

Again, there is a notion of students needing to learn to deal with consequences. While Ms. Wheatley notes that said consequences can be positive or negative, she also advocates for them in the context of trying to "extinguish behavior". However, it is rare that positive consequences are the result of teachers' attempts to curb unwanted behavior. Usually, consequences that occur

after behavioral infractions are in the form of a punishment. While Ms. Wheatley did not explicitly refer to punishment, Ms. Tubman did, stating that, “it's so unbalanced because we're not looking at everything being equal even though we want it to be equitable but everything is not equal. Every punishment is not dealt the same here.” While her point pertained more closely to the issue of responding to student behavior more equitably and consistently, referring to these responses as punishment also upholds ideals of traditional behavior methods.

Ms. Wheatley also pointed out issues of consistency with consequences for behavior among students with disabilities:

> They'll let them, in my opinion, get away with it a little bit more rather than giving them the same consequence. That's where my issue in consistency comes because if I'm doing the same thing that this person is doing, then I should receive the same consequence. It shouldn't be any easier on me than anyone else. In other words, then I'm gonna keep doing what I'm doing because I'm not even getting the same consequences as everyone else.

Within the realm of special education, the focus on serving students is often based in equity, not equality. Students are provided the necessary tools and services in order to fully access a free and appropriate education. Often, this is not necessarily consistent with the instruction of their peers without disabilities. Thus, the idea that behavioral expectations should be consistent among all students, regardless of disability, runs counter to the ways in which students with disabilities are supported.

Though they pointed out the lenience afforded to students with disabilities in terms of school discipline, teachers also acknowledged the ways in which their disabilities may impact their behavior. Ms. Tubman stated,

> Their behavior is a checkout behavior…It's so clear. If a teacher is teaching and a student doesn't understand and they're trying to have a discussion with someone else or they're looking on someone else's paper and it's time for them to actually do the work and they're like "can I go to the restroom?" Or something like that and all of a sudden they have an attitude because you won't let them go to the bathroom and you're like, "No, it's the first

> ten minutes of class do your ‘do now’." And then they cut you off. You've checked out. You just don't want to do it. You'd rather pick a fight to get out of classroom than to do the work.

While these behaviors may not necessarily be *manifestations* of students’ disabilities, they are behaviors that are *influenced* by their disabilities. Therefore, it is important to be mindful of how students with disabilities may exhibit avoidance behaviors when faced with academic situations that could pose a challenge for them.

Considering my former role as a special education teacher at the school, Ms. Khan colloquially referred to the students with disabilities as “our” kids when describing their behavior:

> ...you already know how our kids are, right? So when our kids are frustrated in the classroom because they learn differently and the material’s not being presented in a way that's feasible or conducive to their learning, they're going to act out and then the teacher just looks at it as a behavior issue. So I think a lot of times, the learning component gets overlooked and then they focus on the behavior, which then results in them to going into some sort of [restorative] circle.

Here, she acknowledges the role that students’ abilities may play in their classroom engagement. An important aspect of this quote is the way she frames the issue. Instead of describing students’ needs in a deficit-minded way, she notes that they “learn differently” and places their ability to do so within the context of how material is being taught.

Based on the remarks from teacher participants, it seems that there is a conflict between properly addressing the needs of students with disabilities and upholding measures of accountability (with accountability seemingly being an allusion to retribution). Rather than assuming that special education teachers are contradicting themselves, it would be worth considering the bigger picture. In her work with juvenile justice teachers of students of color with disabilities, Annamma (2015) noted a similar finding: “Instead of a status that elicited support, teachers socially constructed racialized disability as another thing to surveil,

perpetuating the commitment to whiteness as an identity and property in the [School to Prison] Pipeline" (p. 308).While restorative justice is being used as a means of addressing behavior and building community within this individual school, the system upon which the school is established is not restorative. Therefore, notions of discipline and punishment, as well as racism and ableism, still permeate the ways that the school operates.

Bias and Restorative Justice

With the misconception that today's society is more post-racial than ever, issues of bias or racism seem to be an afterthought when establishing school policies (Diamond, 2013). During interviews, teachers were asked if they believed that any of the restorative justice practices at the school were biased. Ms. Wheatley posited:

> I think that if it is followed with fidelity and consistently, then there's no need [to address identity markers within RJ] because I don't think that it's biased in that way. But if, when you're going through the things and you're giving certain people passes on things and other people not, then I feel it's an individual bias that will cause an issue. So the program, from what I've seen and when we went through training in and of itself is, I don't think it's biased. But it's the implementation that can be biased. Because that's when people come in and bring their biases.

This relates to the idea that, when policies are color-evasive (Annamma & Morrison, 2018), they can do more harm than good (Bell, 2004). While Ms. Wheatley's remarks are ideal, having more explicit approaches regarding race and ability in restorative justice practices may help to avoid bias, especially considering the ways that school policies and personnel are already steeped in biases that continuously oppress students that are already marginalized. Restorative justice itself may not be biased, but when used within schools, which are incredibly biased, the current ways that it is taken up (without consideration of students' needs and identities) can reproduce some of the harm that Black students with disabilities encounter.

Teachers were also asked if the race of the student population was a factor in the school choosing to use restorative justice and Ms. Khan noted that using the philosophy with fidelity was especially important for students of color. She stated:

> The reality is, restorative practices is like, it's a hot topic within education in recent years. And there's so much data that substantiates like how impactful it can be. But particularly when it's dealing with students that are black and brown, it's even of a higher importance, I would say, in terms of like implementing them with fidelity. So I would love to say, yes, it was created because our students are almost a hundred percent black, but I don't know for sure what the thought process was behind that.

Ms. Khan's remarks highlight the importance of considering race within the use of restorative justice. This speaks to the fact that many initiatives can have superficial results if implemented in ways that don't take into account students' identities, such as race or ability. Current school policies rarely, if ever, make any allusion to race, yet many students of color still receive subpar education. Therefore, disregarding race when implementing school policy actually serves no one. However, recognizing bias within restorative justice is only the first step. According to Ms. Wheatley:

> I think that they don't know that certain policies or procedures are oppressive, and so they won't speak up because they don't know. I think that, that then for us as teachers, there are some things that we know we don't agree with, but at the end of the day, we try to say what we can. But it's a point where you have to be like, yeah, I need this job. I got to feed my kid

Ms. Wheatley was noting that there was a chance that students or parents did not recognize oppressive policies or procedures within the school and that teachers could speak up, but that they could only do so to a certain point. Though teachers had many insights regarding how restorative justice has been used as well as some recommendations for moving forward, there seems to be few opportunities for them to openly express their ideas and concerns without reprimand.

Implications and Conclusion

Findings from this study show that special education teachers' perspectives are valuable in establishing and improving restorative justice in schools. Given their proximity to students, they are able to witness firsthand the successes and shortcomings that come with creating a more restorative school environment. With race and disability at the center of this study, findings also show how these identity markers play a role in how both teachers and students are able to establish and sustain relationships. Experiences that special education teachers shared also have implications for how restorative justice should be considered beyond the classroom.

Therefore, focusing on more culturally relevant ways to use restorative justice will be important. Lustick (2017) and Utheim (2014) warn of the pitfalls that schools may face when implementing restorative justice without consideration of students' specific needs and identities. Surveillance, interrogation, and punishment are already prominent aspects of traditional discipline approaches that marginalized students have been subjected to. These practices have no place alongside restorative justice. Instead, schools should employ a culturally relevant approach to restorative justice. This could also help educators to be mindful of their own identities and how they might impact their interactions and relationships with students.

Teacher perspectives are also instrumental in how schools establish a restorative approach. Mayworm et al. (2016) outline several approaches for implementing consultation based professional development. Also, Ingraham, et al. (2016) describe how teacher input is instrumental in using restorative justice within schools with diverse populations. In each of these studies, teachers brought to light many aspects of professional development and restorative justice that have the potential to positively impact how their schools move forward with restorative justice. Both studies highlight the use of teacher consultation in developing a plan for

restorative justice that is specific to the needs of individual schools and their respective populations.

In their descriptions of the ways that restorative justice is used for and with students with disabilities, teacher participants in this study were very mindful of students' lives outside of the classroom and what implications a restorative school has within a world that is usually retributive. Rather than "preparing students for the real world", however, schools can help students shape the real world by partnering with local communities to take steps toward a more restorative approach when addressing issues of harm. Doing so can not only benefit students as they engage with others outside of the classroom, but it also helps to set a standard for the ways that schools envision preparing students to be agents of change. Rather than replicating the harm that entities have caused by over-policing and discriminating against Black students, schools can help students to realize the power and worth they have by facilitating ways for them to engage with their own communities in ways that they deserve.

Considering the ways that students with disabilities are excluded from general education classrooms in more ways than one, restorative justice can serve as a means of ensuring that they receive the education that they deserve. Unless the needs and identities of students are properly addressed, however, efforts to implement restorative justice may be in vain. A key component of effectively implementing restorative justice is seeking the input of teachers. Moving forward, it will also be important to consider the needs and perspectives of students. More specifically, learning about restorative justice from students with disabilities could highlight many aspects of this philosophy that may be overlooked.

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PAPER 2: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE LITERACIES

As more schools resort to restorative justice as a means of addressing harm and reducing exclusionary practices, it is imperative that especially vulnerable populations are considered in how schools approach its implementation. Simply curbing school suspensions is not enough. Restorative justice should go beyond the circles that are held in instances of harm; it should also be a part of teachers' daily interaction with students and other members of the school community. In doing so, it has the potential to positively influence the ways that curriculum, instruction, and relationship building are approached in classroom spaces. This is especially important for Black students with disabilities, as the ways that they are marginalized in the classroom can have a detrimental effect on their school success and well-being (Ahram, Fergus & Noguera, 2011; Anyon, 2009).

This relationship between restorative justice and instruction is reciprocal as teaching and learning can also influence the ways that restorative justice is implemented. With most instruction being based on students' literacy skills, it is important to examine how literacy or, more importantly, *literacies* are taken up. In terms of how the term literacy is used, Collins and Blot (2003) note that, "'literacy' as a key word in our culture, has a status in the current era rather like that of 'science' in the nineteenth: it refers loosely to any body of systematic useful knowledge" (p. 3). Further, Mkandwire (2018) notes that, "Reading and writing skills and language are so intertwined that the former is embedded in the latter and vice versa. For instance, one can only read and write (literacy) meaningfully, in a language that they understand" (p. 44). Additionally, various scholars have pointed out multiple aspects of literacy that have just as much of an impact on students' learning and ways of being as traditional notions of the topic. Pushing the definition of "literacies" beyond the bounds of simply reading and writing has

helped to push back against dominant perspectives that standardize literacy in ways that exclude the assets and epistemologies of marginalized or oppressed groups (Collins & Blot, 2003; Kinloch, 2011; Paris & Alim, 2017).

In the context of restorative justice, this more nuanced approach to literacies can serve as a way to better address the needs of Black students with disabilities. The language that we use, and the way that we use it, whether written or oral, has a profound impact on how ideas are communicated and either taken up or resisted (Paris, 2012). Drawing upon Freire's (1970) concept of reading the word and the world, in this project I explore restorative justice literacies as a means of establishing more inclusive classroom environments for Black students with disabilities. Further, as much of the discussion on ability in schools is based on literacy, it is important to examine how other aspects of schooling outside of academic curriculum have been structured in ways that may or may not meet the needs of students with disabilities. Therefore, I am asking the following research questions:

1. In what ways do Black students' language and literacies illuminate their understanding of and engagement with restorative justice in an urban school?
2. How can restorative justice impact language arts curriculum and instruction for Black students with disabilities in an urban school?

Relevant Literature

Restorative Justice, Language, and Instruction

At the heart of Winn's (2018) four pedagogical stances for restorative justice is the notion that language matters (p. 33). As so much of restorative justice is based on the ways that people talk to, about, and with one another, the words that are chosen and the ways that they are expressed are quintessential to the end goal of addressing and eventually preventing harm. To

that end, Winn (2018) has also introduced what she calls "restorative justice discourse", which focuses on more humanizing approaches for speaking with students. Such discourse "disrupts retributive mind-sets and processes in order to help participants discover new ways of talking about what Howard Zehr identifies as the three pillars of restorative justice: harms, needs, and obligations" (p. 41).

This study on restorative justice literacies is also influenced by the work of Winn, Graham, and Alfred (2019), who provide guidance for using restorative justice within language arts classrooms. They note that a restorative English education classroom "seeks to foster understanding and community, build and reinforce relationships, and create places where all human beings are seen, heard, and valued" (p. 44). My project builds on the aforementioned ideals by taking a closer look at how disability plays a role in teachers' instructional approaches and their use of restorative justice.

Literacies and Student Voice

It is important to note that, though literacy is often associated with some form of assessment in schools, its application in this paper is not meant to be evaluative. An examination of restorative justice literacies requires a closer look at the literacy practices of students. However, I am not interested in measuring how well students have mastered dominant concepts of literacy. Rather, I am seeking to understand how they employ literacy in their understanding of and participation within the school's implementation of restorative justice.

Several scholars have taken up the term *literacies* in their studies of the language, lives, and ways of knowing among particular groups. In *Urban Literacies*, Kinloch (2011) asks, "How can educational research in urban settings account for dynamic interactions, practices, and literate engagements of children, youth, and adults in ways that critique popular and often unfounded notions that they are disengaged from learning?" (p. 3). This question captures the

ways that literacies can be understood as the approaches that one takes in making sense of and either participating in or pushing back against particular systems. Kirkland and Austin (2009) take up the notion of Black Masculine Literacies in their ethnographic work with Black male adolescents. In doing so, they examine the students' literacy practices in order to determine what makes them "cool". In an additional study, Kirkland (2009) also examines the tattoos of a participant as text. He notes that, the recognition of "Derrick's tattoos as literacy artifacts, if taken seriously, can help English educators better understand literacy as a practice not limited to technical, prescribed, or academic functions that privilege and serve only specific forms of texts and groups of people" (p. 376). In both of these studies, the idea of literacy is expanded by incorporating the actions, identities, and ideas of participants instead of relying on traditional notions of reading and writing.

Considering the ways that literacy has been taken up in regard to working with students of color and within the use of restorative justice, it is clear that work is being done to address the traditional notions of what literacy entails in order to create space for more liberatory forms of pedagogy. With more nuanced understandings of and approaches to literacy, educators and educational researchers can begin to properly address the needs of students with literacy practices that have not been included in previous conversations on this topic. Namely, examining the intersections of disability, restorative justice, and literacy can add to the expanding research in each of these areas while also offering insight on how students themselves are able to navigate and understand school practices based on their lived experiences and the language that it entails. Doing so also places an emphasis on student voice, which is a critical component of any work featuring students' understanding of and interaction with restorative justice. However, Winn (2011) cautions:

> *Voice* or the notion of voice, is often overused if not misunderstood. Literacy research has helped shift the idea of educators giving voice to youth (and marginalized youth in particular) to a more nuanced understanding that youth come to formal and informal spaces of learning with powerful voices and ideas. Rather than needing "voice", most youth need a space, an opportunity and an engaged audience so they can share their voices. (p. 20)

This sentiment is an important reminder that the notion that any young person is voiceless is most likely perpetuated by those that simply are not listening. Winn's remarks also allude to the necessity of following a more assets-based approach to engaging with student voice, which is especially crucial when working with students with disabilities. Research featuring student voice regularly highlights the perspectives of neuro-typical, able-bodied students. However, who better to learn from than students that have managed to navigate schools despite ableist policies and ideologies that continuously marginalize them? The voices and perspectives of students with disabilities are an incredibly underutilized tool within literacy research. Centering their epistemologies can offer insights that not only have implications for special education, but for general education as well.

Theoretical Frameworks

Dis/ability Critical Race Studies

Dis/ability Critical Race Studies or DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013) has roots in Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and Disability Studies (DS) (Linton, 1998). Each of these frameworks highlight the social construction of the identity markers of race and disability. However, only DisCrit emphasizes the impact of the intersection of race and disability as marginalized identities. This framework also "exposes how ability is distributed and withheld based on race through policies and practices. Additionally, DisCrit recognizes interlocking marginalizing processes which target multiple dimensions of identity" (Annamma & Morrison,

2018, p. 72). While race and disability have a profound impact on the ways that people are able to function, the intersection of these two marginalized identities has more specific ramifications.

Though DisCrit consists of seven tenets that highlight the ways that the framework can address issues of marginalization, this study focuses on tenets 1 and 4. Tenet 1 of DisCrit states that, "DisCrit focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy" (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11). "Notions of normalcy" applies to the ways that schools uphold notions of good behavior or academic achievement that are usually rooted in racist or ableist policies. Many of the race-neutral policies outlined in school codes of conduct feature coded language that disproportionately affects students of color. The same can be said for students with disabilities. Additionally, many of the approaches to using restorative justice feature no mention of race or ability, leaving the needs of students of color and those with disabilities unmet. This framework also allows for the analysis of how issues of power are (or are not) apparent within the implementation of restorative justice. Tenet 4 states that, "DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research" (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11). Given this study's focus on the literacies of Black students with disabilities, this tenet illuminates the importance of using DisCrit as a theoretical framework. Doing so provides an opportunity to center the voices of students whose marginalized identities have a profound impact on how they navigate and participate in school structures.

Critically Caring Literacies

In his work with autoethnographies of youth in urban schools, Patrick Camangian (2010) focuses on the use of *critically caring literacies* to better understand students and build authentic relationships with them. He notes:

> Critical literacy happens as students are guided to interrogate their multiple identities, the social conditions that define their world views, and communicate transformative ratings of the word in the world. Through these practices, critically caring literacy pedagogies draw from students' cultural frameworks and lived experiences to engage them in learning that nurtures caring relationships reflecting concern for their lives outside of the classroom while illuminating and disrupting existing power relations. (p. 180)

Camangian's focus on using students' experiences in order to establish caring relationships is crucial to this study as relationships are a central component of participating in restorative justice practices. Using critically caring literacies as a framework allows for a focus on the ideas and experiences of students, with issues of schooling as a backdrop, rather than focusing on issues of schooling with students' ideas as an aside. Also, critically caring literacies puts an emphasis on issues of power. Therefore, this framework allows for a closer analysis of how students are able to voice their responses to issues of power within their school. Using critically caring literacies is also important for this work because the Black students that participated in the study are from an urban district where certain relations of power are apparent, but not often critiqued or analyzed by students. Using this framework is especially helpful in addressing the many ways they may be marginalized.

Methods

This study takes place as part of a larger case study on restorative justice at Ailey School for the Arts, during which, interviews were conducted with several of the school's special education teachers as well as the parents of the students featured in this particular study.

Centering students for this article allowed for a closer analysis of the ways that the actions and decisions of others in the school community directly impact students' experiences with restorative justice.

Site and Participants

Ailey School for the Arts, or ASA (a pseudonym), is a sixth through twelfth grade public charter school in a large, Midwestern city. Nearly 99 percent of the 800 students it serves identify as Black. It is situated in an area known as the "cultural center" of the city, located near local universities and museums, some of which have established partnerships with the school. Restorative justice was introduced during the 2014-2015 school year under the leadership of a former principal and subsequent principals have maintained its use.

Each of the participants interviewed and observed for this study are Black students that have been diagnosed with various learning disabilities which have a substantial enough impact on their instructional needs that they warrant special education services. Because their parents and teachers were also interviewed for separate studies from this one, official information about their specific learning disabilities was available, but not requested. In light of the ways that students with disabilities are often presented in ways that focus on their deficits instead of their insights, this omission was intentional.

Though various members of the school community are involved in the use of restorative justice, centering student voices is a priority as they are the primary participants in restorative justice circles. Therefore, interview participants included four students (one young man and three young women) with disabilities. A smaller sample of students allowed for observations to be conducted more thoroughly. These students were recruited through convenience sampling by asking the school's special education teachers for recommendations.

Brooklyn is an eighth-grade student that has attended the school for three years. She has formed genuine relationships with other students. However, she seems to get along with her special education teacher better than many of her peers, often coming to class early or staying after to converse about her day.

Cree is a graduating senior who has attended ASA since sixth grade, which is rare, considering the transient student population of most charter schools. As such, she has a positive rapport with much of the school community. Despite her seemingly quiet demeanor, she was often observed engaging in banter with other students, and even some staff members.

Jabari is also a graduating senior. He has attended ASA since seventh grade. Previously a member of the school's basketball team, he had opted not to play this year in order to focus on his studies in order to graduate on time. A year older than many of his peers, Jabari is selective about who he forms close bonds with, and at times is at odds with staff and students, though these issues seem to be resolved quickly.

Lou is an eighth-grade student that has attended the school for three years. During instruction, she was very engaged and social, frequently volunteering answers to questions while also attempting to hold conversations with her peers.

Though only students were interviewed for this study, two of the school's special education teachers were instrumental in its implementation: Ms. Tubman and Ms. Khan. Middle school students (Brooklyn and Lou) were observed during their time with Ms. Tubman, and high school students (Cree and Jabari) were observed during Ms. Khan's class. Ms. Tubman is a former coworker of mine; we taught together for a year at ASA. She and Ms. Khan have maintained contact with me throughout my graduate program and graciously opened their classrooms and helped recruit students for the study.

Data Collection

Data was collected via case study, which included document analysis, observations, and interviews. According to Yin (2009):

> the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events--such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial practices, neighborhood change, school performance, and international relations, and the maturation of industries (p. 4).

With the various aspects of schooling that affect the lives and experiences of students, case study allows for an in-depth analysis of multiple sources of data in order to better understand how participants in the study make sense of and engage in restorative justice practices.

Documents collected for analysis included the school's code of conduct, student and parent handbooks, handouts from school events, the school's website, and classroom and hallway posters in order to analyze what written language is used by the school. Select writing from students was also analyzed in order to understand how they engage with restorative justice. While analyzing documents, I referred to tenets of DisCrit as well as Critical Discourse Analysis in order to understand what issues of race, power, or ability are implicitly or explicitly communicated.

Before interviews and observations, I made visits to the school in order to develop a rapport with students. This was done during Crew, which I have taken part in during other visits to the school before and during other research projects. Throughout the week, students participate in Crew for thirty minutes per day. The name for this aspect of the school day is based on the school's philosophy that ASA's "culture is planned for, developed, and sustained through practices that bring the community together, promote shared understandings, and

encourage all community members to become crew, not passengers" (ASA Student-Parent Handbook, p. 16). During this time, they engage in proactive restorative circles and emphasize relationship building within their Crew, a homeroom of sorts that usually includes around twenty students and one or two teachers. My participation with Crew took place in Ms. Khan's class as well.

Interviews were conducted with students in order to get a better understanding of what they see as critical components of restorative justice and were semi-structured in order to allow for flexibility in student responses or their desire to steer the direction of the conversations. I developed a protocol for introductory, semi-structured interviews that were conducted with students individually that features questions about their identities and their understanding of restorative justice. Protocols for two subsequent interviews that took place during the middle and end of the semester were developed based on observations of student interactions with the school community and participation in activities pertaining to restorative justice.

Students were shadowed (Bøe, Hognestad, & Waniganayake, 2017) throughout the fall semester during classroom instruction in the special education setting in order to note what instances result in the use of restorative justice and to observe how teachers and students follow expectations. Students were shadowed during Workshop, which is a class that has sections led by each of the school's special education teachers. During this course, students with disabilities receive instruction that helps them make progress toward the academic goals from their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) as well as assistance with select assignments from general education courses. Jottings (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011) were recorded during observation in order to quickly note significant events or interactions, with more descriptive field notes being developed after (Bernard, 2011).

Data Analysis

Both field notes and interviews were analyzed via open coding (Saldaña, 2016). Coding was initially guided by my research questions. After reading through data, categories were developed based on connections made among quotes from interviews and interactions recorded in field notes. These categories were then collapsed into major themes. As this paper uses literacy to study relationships and issues of power in restorative justice, Critical Discourse Analysis was employed to examine data (Fairclough, 1995). According to Bartlett and Vavrus, 2017):

> Critical Discourse Analysis invites us to consider how influential representations of certain people, places, or issues come into being through language. It asserts that this is a form of power - the ability to exercise control over how something is represented...CDA assumes that there is a fundamental relationship between social structures in society and the discourse structures of influential texts, such as the speeches of political candidates, a national policy like NCLB, or even a widely circulated meme" (p. 81).

With this in mind, CDA would allow for an analysis of both oral and written discourse pertaining to restorative justice. Within this analysis, more can be learned about how restorative justice either perpetuates or helps to dismantle hierarchies within school communities. Often, students are viewed as those with the least power, followed by teachers and other non-academic staff, leaving school administrators in positions with the most authority. CDA can help to highlight how language plays a critical role in how students are able to make sense of, value, and critique restorative justice.

Findings

Though the school has established various terminology, guidelines, and staff positions dedicated to the use of restorative justice, learning about the practice from the experiences of students has illuminated many other factors that are instrumental in its implementation. As these

findings center the experiences of Black students with disabilities, learning their perspectives is an invaluable step toward establishing a more equitable approach to building school community and addressing issues of harm. While students did not use the same language as school staff in describing restorative justice, their explanations of the practice showed their understanding of it and gave implications for how students might be able to learn about restorative justice in the future. Also, students were more likely to engage in restorative practices when they were incorporated into instruction and daily classroom routines. Students also cited their relationships with special education teachers as key factors in shaping positive educational experiences. Though the findings from this study are organized according to each student's perspective, the aforementioned themes of students' interpretation of restorative justice, their engagement in restorative justice practices during instruction, and their relationships with teachers are prominent.

Brooklyn

> *So like a lot of kids here, well not really a lot, but it's some kids in here that are like very shy so they don't, so things they see, like bullying or things that are not fair, they don't really have a say-so or really don't say anything cause they're shy and I feel like some kids are shy because they're thinking of like, 'Oh, what is she going to stay about it?' 'What is he going to say about it?' 'Is anybody gonna do anything about it?' So I feel like they just stay quiet. And then there's the kids that do have a say so who speak up like me. And really, you still don't get a big action, but just to know that you said something about a situation, I guess that would make you feel good*

This quote from Brooklyn highlights the way that she interacts with others at the school. Throughout her interviews, she often spoke about student voice and how students were able to express themselves, whether through conversations with staff, engagement in restorative circles, or in their choice of attire, with the school's new uniform policy giving students their choice of clothing (as long as they wear a school-approved shirt). Her insights emphasize the ways that, within school communities that follow a restorative approach, opportunities for student

engagement could be increased. In some ways, her sentiments reflect the school's stance on restorative justice. The school handbook states:

> Through Restorative Practices, members of the [Ailey School for the Arts] community will understand that relationships are central to building community. In addition, it's our intention that community members will make positive changes when those in a position of authority do things WITH them rather than TO them or FOR them. This approach allows for [Ailey School for the Arts] to establish a culture of HIGH expectations with HIGH support for all community members. Using Restorative Practices benefits our school by having a more efficient teaching and learning environment. Lastly, Restorative Practices puts a greater emphasis on responses to inappropriate behavior that seek to reconnect and restore relationships with young people versus creating disconnections (Student-Parent Handbook, p. 13).

Brooklyn's confidence in expressing herself is most likely based on her own personality and upbringing. However, the ways that the school emphasizes working with students lends itself to an interpretation of their restorative approach as one that is more collaborative, which could, for many students, be a catalyst in encouraging them to speak freely and advocate for their voices to be heard. Though she was unfamiliar with the term restorative justice when I first asked her about it, after some discussion, she was able to share the various ways that students are involved in restorative circles at the school:

> We all just get in a circle and we basically talk about like, sometimes it can be a good thing. Sometimes it could be a bad thing. We could be talking about things that the staff doesn't accept or doesn't like that's happening, like fights or things, we're not getting to our classes on time or students playing around in the hall. They talk about things like that. Or sometimes it could be fun. Like, we do like a game, and see what Crew can win, or we have this thing that's called shout outs and you shout out a person that you think was a good person or that was doing good in that week or basically a person that you just see doing good.

Her inclusion of both "good" and "bad" reasons for participating in circles show that, while her initial recollection of the term "restorative justice" escaped her, she is very much aware of the ways that restorative justice is used in schools to repair harm *and* sustain relationships. Often, it

is seen only as a substitute for traditional discipline practices, leaving many to believe that restorative justice should only be relied upon to address conflict.

An example of how restorative circles are used in order to sustain relationships could be seen during an observation of Brooklyn while in her Workshop class, taught by Ms. Tubman. During the last few minutes of class, students gathered around a table in the center of the room. Ms. Tubman asked them to name someone with whom they have a really good relationship. Students went around the circle and everyone answered the question. Then, Ms. Tubman asked them to describe how they communicate with the person they just named. A few students answered, including Brooklyn, who shared that she usually jokes with her mom and friends when communicating with them. Ms. Tubman encouraged students to think about how they communicate with others and to find at least one person to share their day with after school. She also promised to check in with them about it the following day.

This circle was not convened after any instance of harm or conflict. Class had gone smoothly, with students engaging in instruction and turning in assignments as expected. Ms. Tubman simply wanted to check in with students. Doing so presumably helps her to improve and sustain relationships with them. To this point, Brooklyn agreed that she does have a good relationship with Ms. Tubman. When asked why, she replied,

> Well like Ms. [Tubman] says, she reminds me of a mini her. That's what she says all the time. So I guess that's why. Maybe because we act similar. Kind of like how she was I guess as a younger child. I feel like she gets me more than any other teacher. We just have a closer bond. I don't know.

She also went on to comment that, “She lets me have a voice. She's understanding. She's nice. And she's teaching me a lot of stuff. And I feel like I could talk to her about things. Things that go on in school and stuff like that”. Brooklyn emphasizes quite a few reasons for her positive relationship with Ms. Tubman, including having similar personalities, Ms. Tubman’s emphasis

on student voice, as well as being understanding and approachable, and effective instruction. This emphasis on student voice connects with how the language of teachers and students is instrumental in how they build relationships with each other.

Based on her explanation of restorative circles and her experiences and relationship with Ms. Tubman, it seems that Brooklyn's perspective of restorative justice highlights its ways of countering retribution. However, when describing in further detail what the restorative justice process looked like for students addressing issues of harm, Brooklyn also included punitive measures that are not necessarily a form of restorative justice:

> so like say if you got into a fight, you would basically be talking to one of the staff members that's in charge of that type of stuff, like our Dean here or basically someone that's staff. Um, and you'll basically go into their room and talk about like, why it happened or you have bystanders that write like a little paper and what they see to give to the staff member that's handling that situation to determine who was wrong and who's going to get suspended. And who did this first and who did the first punch, who really just went out of pocket with it. So you have stuff like that and they take you to a room and they, you just talk face to face with that person or you could talk separately and then I guess you get suspended afterwards. I dunno. I've never been suspended here, so...

Still, Brooklyn's assertion that, "you get suspended afterwards" does not negate her understanding of restorative justice. Rather, it reflects the fact that the school remains reliant on exclusionary practices in order to address student behavior issues. With this being the case, one missing piece of Brooklyn's description is the restoration of relationships. If restorative circles end in suspension, chances of sustaining relationships with students are slim.

Cree

After students had completed their warm up for the day, Ms. Khan excitedly asked Cree if she could share her work with me. It was a response to the prompt, "I wish my teachers knew…" (See Appendix A). Cree's response to the writing prompt is a pretty accurate depiction of their daily interaction, with their regular banter and affection. We talked about this assignment

in an interview and Cree said she wrote such affirming words about her teacher because Ms. Khan is the only teacher with whom she has a close bond. She also noted that Ms. Khan is one of the only teachers that she has worked with consistently throughout high school. Though they have a close bond, they usually do not articulate how much they appreciate each other in the ways that Cree did in her writing. Having the chance to write about her teacher seems to have prompted Cree to be more thorough and sincere. By using these types of writing prompts, Ms. Khan is inviting the students to share how they feel supported (or not). This could be considered restorative, in the sense that it helps to foster relationships between teachers and students.

Toward the end of class on the same day, Ms. Khan had the students circle up. Some students scooted their chairs near each other, others chose to stand. Ms. Khan took these last few minutes to check in with students about their engagement in the class. Some of the school's administrators had been concerned about the way that students' scores were displayed on the smartboard at the end of virtual games and practice quizzes that the class participated in together, so Ms. Khan was checking to gauge how students felt about it. They all agreed that it was fine, and that it actually kept them more engaged. Ms. Khan also discussed a new system for checking out of class each day. Students were to use a designated touchscreen computer to find their name and choose 1 of 4 emojis (ranging from smiling, to ambivalent, to frowning) to describe their day. Throughout the circle, Ms. Khan reiterated its purpose: that she wanted to make sure that the students' voices were heard. After the circle, Ms. Khan whispered to me that her latest teacher evaluation had trivial suggestions she is trying to address, hence her decision to have a circle.

Much of the focus on restorative justice only has to do with restorative circles that take place after conflict. Ms. Khan has used them as a proactive measure as well, to get a feel of

students' needs and experiences. This circle can serve as an example of what it looks like to build community in order to avoid relying solely on restorative circles after harm is caused.

When I first asked Cree about restorative justice, she asked, "What you mean by that?". After a brief explanation, she described it from her perspective:

> ... when they sit all of us down to like, not have conflict with each other, they'll put a group of people that's like having an issue with each other in a circle, in a separate room, and they'll talk to them, and then they'll ask the people like questions, what should they do to stop all the conflict against each other. And we have a talking piece, and we will pass it around, each person say something. And they try to resolve the problem by having all of us sit down and talk, instead of being in a hallway and being all loud and trying to fight each other. So like, yeah. And they'd rather for it to be like, they stay in the room where it's at, instead of it going outside the room and let everybody know your business.

Even though Cree was not sure of what I was talking about when I initially referred to restorative justice, she gave a pretty thorough description of what restorative circles look like when addressing conflict. Though the language that Cree and the other students used was not exactly in line with how the school described restorative justice in its handbook, they could accurately describe different components (circles, meeting with restorative justice practitioners, passing the talking piece). While Brooklyn's description of restorative justice ended with suspension, Cree's description at least mentions that restorative circles include using conversation to resolve problems between the parties involved. Still, however, the focus on the relationships between those involved in the circle is a component that should also be emphasized.

Jabari

"We is not doing the circle shit. Not today.", Jabari announced as he entered the classroom and noticed everyone shifting chairs and tables in place. When he noticed me observing him, he quickly added, "'Scuse my language". Apparently, the day before, Jabari and another student had been involved in an altercation during Workshop. Mostly verbal, it ended

with the other student throwing a binder that hit Jabari in the leg. Instead of sending them to school administrators, Ms. Khan had decided to conduct a whole-class restorative circle to address the issue on the following day. In contrast to the previous circle where Ms. Khan solicited student input about how class was going, students begrudgingly joined. All except for Jabari, who immediately left the room. Ms. Khan sent one of Jabari's teachers after him, but when they returned, Jabari sat alone at a table with his back to the rest of the class. In an interview later, Jabari admitted his frustration with the circle involving the entire class. He noted that it would have been better to have a one-on-one conversation between him and the other student. Also worth noting is the fact that neither student was written up or punished for the incident that occurred. His refusal to join the circle could be seen as Jabari being defiant, but also about him questioning the entire approach.

In his work on Critically Caring Literacies, Camangian (2010) discusses his students' ways of critiquing societal or structural entities or people in power. Perhaps Jabari was doing just that. While he was ignoring the rest of the class during the circle, it turned out that Jabari was actually writing a letter to Ms. Khan about his frustration with how the circle was handled and asking her to speak with him privately (See Appendix B). This note to Ms. Khan was scathing, but given the fact that the circle was held at the beginning of class, Jabari may not have had a real opportunity to express his frustration in any other way. Ms. Khan provided space for him to converse with her the next day, but Jabari decided not to speak. However, during the following class sessions, his relationship with Ms. Khan seemed to be intact, as he participated during instruction and spoke with her as if it was a normal day.

Each of our interviews followed the aforementioned incident, and I asked Jabari about restorative justice during his initial interview:

Cierra: So how would you define restorative justice?
Jabari: You're talking about for the advocate thing?
Cierra: No, moving onto thinking about restorative practices.
Jabari: Can you explain it a little more?

"The advocate thing" is the language arts unit in Ms. Khan's class where students read about advocating for themselves and other people with disabilities. While introducing a new language arts unit on study skills, Ms. Khan asked students why they read their IEPs with her earlier in the school year. When they did not immediately respond, she reminded them that they needed to know their accommodations so that they could advocate for themselves in the event that a teacher does not provide them. Though the goal of the unit was for students to learn study skills, each of the readings used within the unit centered people with disabilities in ways that acknowledged the barriers they faced, but highlighted the ways that they used their skills to advocate for themselves and succeed.

Often, students' IEPs are shrouded in secrecy, even from the students themselves. Because disability still has such a negative connotation, schools often forego important conversations with students about their needs in the classroom. What Ms. Khan is doing with students differs from how many special education teachers approach the topic of disability and special education. By speaking openly with students (as openly as possible, considering confidentiality), she is pushing back against common notions that disability is something to be ashamed of. Also, she is encouraging students to advocate for themselves. This is key for them as general education teachers often forget to provide accommodations, but it is especially important as the students are seniors and will have to report their own needs when they are in post-secondary institutions. Ms. Khan's work with students in recognizing their disabilities and advocating for themselves is a way to help them access and use language in ways that affirm their needs and identities. As many behavioral issues associated with students with disabilities

are actually a matter of academic needs that are not being met (Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera, 2010), teaching students to advocate for themselves makes them less likely to incur disciplinary action in general education settings.

Though he had mistaken restorative justice for the language arts unit focused on advocacy, Jabari's connection between the two speaks volumes. Considering the ways that students with disabilities have been marginalized, restorative justice should, in fact, have a stronger connection to disability advocacy. Using DisCrit as a framework, Adams and Everelles (2013) describe what they have coined "dis/respectability politics", which highlights the ways that ableism is upheld throughout various facets of society (namely schools) when disability is viewed as a problem to be fixed:

> ...scholars argue for intersectional analyses that foreground the negative associations of disability for students in nondominant cultural groups in the United States and argue for culturally responsive interventions to reduce the detrimental effects of these associations with disability. And yet, in making what we believe are empowering moves for culturally responsive educational practices, we nevertheless continue to locate disability within the problematic view of dis/respectability politics (p. 135).

While advocating for instruction that is culturally relevant in order to address the needs of students from various backgrounds and deter their placement in special education programs, many have inadvertently framed disability in a way that reinforces ableist notions. Rather than seeking to address the overrepresentation of Black students receiving special education services, educators should be reimagining special education and disrupting the ways that it has further marginalized students due to schools' misguided conceptions of disability. The ways that Ms. Khan is addressing disability in her classroom is a step toward this reimagination.

After clarifying how the aforementioned language arts unit on advocacy differed from the question I was asking, I used literature from the school's curriculum night in order to describe restorative justice to Jabari:

> At [Ailey School for the Arts] we use Restorative Practices in our learning studios for peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and peacemaking. Our teachers and support staff have been trained to use restorative practices and we also have three restorative practitioners who support our administration in creating a school community that is truly restorative in all aspects. The use of restorative practices allows our students to experience these important aspects of community:
> -Respect and Safety
> -Consideration and Appreciation
> -Encouragement and Belonging
> -Empathy and Inclusion

Jabari agreed that some of his teachers did uphold the aspects of community, but disagreed with the act of participating in restorative circles. When asked why, he replied:

> that's not for me. They just ... I can stay there for so long. I don't want to keep being in circles and hearing the same stuff I've been hearing, saying they're going to help but don't help. It's going to keep going back and forth. So that's why I don't want to be in a circle.

Prompted further, he noted that if he ever has an issue with somebody, he would rather, "Literally just have a one-on-one conversation, because we getting too old to be fighting and sneak dissing and post stuff on social media and telling other teachers and principals." His sentiments on participating in circles highlight the ways that schools should be cautious in their approach when conducting restorative circles. Often, these practices can inadvertently mirror surveillance and interrogation techniques (Lustick, 2017). Also, as school staff may not be directly involved in incidents, students could be suspicious of having them participate in circles with them (Utheim, 2014). Though Jabari's approach is not one that is typically heeded, his insights on restorative justice give educators much to consider when it comes to using strategies for addressing student behavior.

Lou

"Did my momma tell you I gotta do this?", Lou asked me before our first interview. I explained that her mother had given me permission to work with her, but that she had also signed the assent form as well, which meant that she could always change her mind. I also explained the

goal of the study again (we had a conversation about it a few weeks prior, during which, Lou seemed to be on board). Eventually Lou decided to proceed “because it’s for education”. This agreement however, did not make her any more enthusiastic about the interview, during which, we primarily discussed her experience with restorative justice:

Cierra: So how would you define restorative practices if somebody didn't know what it was and you were trying to explain it to them?
[No response from Lou.]
Cierra: You don't know?
Lou: Uh uh. (negative)
Cierra: Do you know anything about it? Have you ever done any of the circles, like the restorative circles? Have you ever had an incident with another teacher or a student where you had to get somebody else to intervene? So you never had an issue with anybody here at this school?
Lou: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Cierra: You have. And what happened?
Lou: Oh we fought and that was it.
Cierra: You just physically fought another student and then y'all just was chilling after that?
Lou: No, I ain't talked to that kid.
Cierra: What did the teachers do about you fighting?
Lou: Suspended us.
Cierra: That was it? So they found out y'all was fighting and they was like "y'all got to be suspended for a few days."
Lou: Yeah. Yeah, we went to the people. Mr. [Jordan].
Cierra: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well that's one of the restorative justice people. So what y'all do with [Jordan]?
Lou: We had to talk to him about the situation.
Cierra: Okay. So that's part of restorative practices is trying to figure out how to resolve different situations. So do you think that that was helpful when y'all met with [Jordan]?
Lou: I mean the kid got expelled, so... I didn't have to see his face no more, so…

Instead of describing restorative justice, Lou described all of the events surrounding an incident she had with another student at school, including subsequent suspension for her and expulsion for the boy (This expulsion, however, was not confirmed. In some cases, parents choose to transfer students to avoid expulsion). It was not until I asked further questions that she revealed that they did, in fact, have a conversation with the school’s restorative justice practitioner immediately after the incident. Because they also participated in traditional discipline

procedures, suspension and expulsion seemed to overshadow restorative justice. Considering Lou's comment that, "I ain't have to see his face no more", there is an implication that, as long as one party feels vindicated, justice is served and the outcome for the other is of little importance.

I asked Lou about the difference in her demeanor at the end of our first interview, during which, she gave short answers or replied with shrugs or nods. She also occupied herself with drawing and made minimal eye contact. This contrasted our previous interactions during my observation. Lou admitted that she was uncomfortable with her interview being recorded. Therefore, subsequent interviews took place informally, which allowed Lou to answer questions freely.

After observing her in class one afternoon, Lou approached me and asked if I had a brush or comb that she could use for her hair. She laughed when I jokingly pointed out that, with my short, tight coils, I did not have enough hair to carry either of those styling tools with me. I tried to look for hairpins in my bag, but was unable to find any. We asked Ms. Tubman and she found a rubber band in her desk drawer and put Lou's hair up for her. During observation of class that day, I had noticed that Lou took a bathroom break that lasted nearly twenty minutes. As all of the other students had left the classroom, I wondered if Ms. Tubman would finally question Lou about being out of class for so long, but she did not. Instead, she calmly talked to Lou about her grades and asked how her family was doing. Lou thanked Ms. Tubman and headed to her next class. After Lou left, Ms. Tubman shared that Lou often gets very frustrated about her hair being out of place; this is something that her mother has even brought up in meetings when addressing Lou's issues with anxiety. Apparently when she was in the bathroom during class earlier, Lou had been trying to get her hair just right.

In most classrooms, if any student missed 20 minutes of class in the bathroom, they would hear about themselves from their teacher. However, Ms. Tubman knows about Lou's anxiety and the struggles that she has with her appearance and keeping her hair the way she likes it, which most likely informed her decision to be patient with her. Even after Lou had only asked for tools to fix her hair, Ms. Tubman went above and beyond this request by actually putting her hair into a ponytail and taking time to talk with her about how she was doing. Instead of focusing on rules (i.e. bathroom or hall pass procedures) Ms. Tubman was more focused on her relationship with Lou by helping her resolve an issue (doing her hair) that she was frustrated with. In this case, helping her with her hair was more appropriate than chastising her for being out of class for 20 minutes.

This incident shows how teachers can be restorative without focusing so closely on prescribed measures. It also shows that harm can look different to different people. Ms. Tubman's way of addressing harm in this case was to help ease some of the anxiety Lou was facing regarding her appearance. At times, addressing issues of perceived misconduct does not require punishment or accountability, instead it requires empathy. In this case, Ms. Tubman was able to understand that Lou's time outside of class was not a matter of truancy, and was able to react accordingly. Subsequently, her relationship with Lou remained rooted in care instead of authority. Over the next few observations, Lou seemed to no longer have the need to take extended breaks from class. Instead of threatening Lou about missing class, Ms. Tubman was able to keep her in class by showing that she cared for her.

During our last interview (which took place without the use of a recording device), when asked what she would change about the school, Lou replied, "I just wish it was a whole bunch more Ms. [Tubman]'s". When asked why she felt this way, she added, "Ms. [Tubman] talks to us

different. It's like a different language". From observation, it was clear that Lou and Ms. Tubman have a solid relationship. Ms. Tubman's approach to Lou's behavior was less punitive and often involved a more caring approach instead of focusing on her wellbeing instead of a violation of rules, which is a key component of restorative justice.

Discussion and Implications

Students' perspectives--as well as the ways that they expressed them--revealed many insights into how ASA is establishing a more restorative school environment. Rather than relying on school suspension data (which rarely conveys an accurate sense of school culture), student literacies serve as more humanizing depiction of this school's successes and shortcomings with restorative justice. Their insights offer implications for engaging students with disabilities with restorative justice as well as guidance for future qualitative studies centering students with disabilities.

Students' Engagement and Understanding of Restorative Justice

Considering the ways that their teachers have cultivated positive relationships with them and their peers, while also finding more restorative approaches to classroom instruction, it is no surprise that the way that the students explain their concept of restorative justice differs from the specific language used by the school. Based on the ways that they have interacted with members of the school staff, restorative justice is more than a behavior program or a strict set of ideals. It is a mindset that has been incorporated into various aspects of the school day.

Because there is no prescriptive plan for restorative justice, many aspects of the practice will vary based on who chooses to use it and how they interpret and implement the approach. Similarly, many descriptions and components of restorative justice feature different terminology. Restorative circles can be referred to as peacemaking circles or talking circles (Schumacher,

2014). School staff members designated for restorative circles may be referred to as restorative justice practitioners or simply have the title of school monitors. In any case, what matters most is whether or not relationships are actually restored and instances of harm are acknowledged and resolved. In every one of the interviews with students, they were unable to initially give their own definition of restorative justice. However, when probed further, each of them could articulate an instance where they engaged in some type of restorative practice at the school. While the ways that the school is relaying information on restorative justice through printed handouts or parent meetings is still important and necessary, what seems to matter more is whether or not they are actually engaging in the practices. For students with disabilities in particular, traditional ways of relaying information may not be the most appropriate approach (Burnett & Thorsborne, 2015).

Students seemed to recall the actual engagement required for restorative justice instead of the vocabulary associated with it. Their recollection of restorative justice centered the people involved, the harm that occurred, and its resolution. These are all critical components of engaging in restorative justice, proving that, although students were not necessarily familiar with the terminology, they were very familiar with the practice itself. This has implications for how students are taught about restorative justice. In addition to written and oral explanations, engaging in circles, or seeing them acted out by others could be beneficial for students whose instructional needs differ from traditional approaches.

Also, because the school still uses exclusionary practices alongside restorative justice, when some students describe their experience with it, they still use language and ideas that are actually antithesis to restorative justice. In the student handbook, for example, restorative practices are listed as one of nearly a dozen options for "disciplinary action in response to

various community disruptions" (pp. 22-26). Suspension is included in this same list. Therefore, while students understand *how* restorative justice works, the continued use of exclusionary practices and traditional approaches to discipline undermine *why* restorative justice is needed. As such, it is just as necessary for students to understand the *significance* of restorative justice as it is for them to understand the components of it.

Restorative Justice, Instruction, and Classroom Routines

Camangian's (2010) work on critically caring literacies took place as a research project he conducted while still teaching high school. As such, all of the ways that students were able to critique structures of power while engaging in more trusting relationships took place during a typical school day. This work was not separate from the daily instruction that students receive. The same can be said for restorative justice. While certain instances may warrant a restorative justice circle that should take place outside of the classroom, proactive circles, affective language, and justice-centered instruction can occur during daily interactions with students.

Though some students recalled facing punitive measures for past incidents, throughout the time of the study, their special education teachers were able to find restorative approaches to issues they faced. With the push for classroom management in many urban classrooms (Milner, 2019), the ways that teachers and students interacted with each other at ASA could serve as an example of how pursuing a restorative approach may be a better option. Instead of structuring classroom environments according to rules and consequences, with restorative justice, teachers have the opportunity to focus more closely on engaged instruction and meaningful relationships with students.

Qualitative Special Education Research

My role as a former special education teacher offered some insight into how the students engaged with their peers and teachers throughout the school day. This made it easier to prepare for my role as a researcher. However, because the roles of educator and researcher can differ greatly, my former role did not automatically qualify me to do research with students with disabilities. A glaring example of this is Lou's change in demeanor during her initial interview and subsequent refusal to be recorded during later conversations, despite the fact that we had developed a positive rapport. This occurrence--in addition to interviews with other students where I needed to rephrase questions and provide examples of topics--has reminded me to be mindful of the needs of students while conducting research. Just as traditional classroom instruction may not be appropriate for students with disabilities, the same can be said for traditional interviewing methods. Still, there is much to learn from students that receive special education services, as qualitative research that centers their perspectives is scarce. Therefore, it will be important to continue to pursue qualitative special education research, but in ways that do not perpetuate the marginalization that already occurs in schools.

Conclusion

While the efficacy of restorative justice has been in question since its application in schools, schools have attempted to justify its use by presenting figures representing decreased suspensions and expulsions or increased student participation. However, seeking to understand restorative justice through students' literacies showed many insights that may have otherwise been overlooked. The ways that students interpret and engage in restorative justice practices, as well as the ways that they express this interpretation and engagement is key in making sure that they are centered in schools' attempts to create a more restorative environment. Statistics on

suspension and expulsion cannot accurately portray the ways that restorative justice impacts relationships between students and teachers, or how it aids in the establishment of a more equitable and inclusive classroom environment.

Figure 1: Cree's Writing Assignment

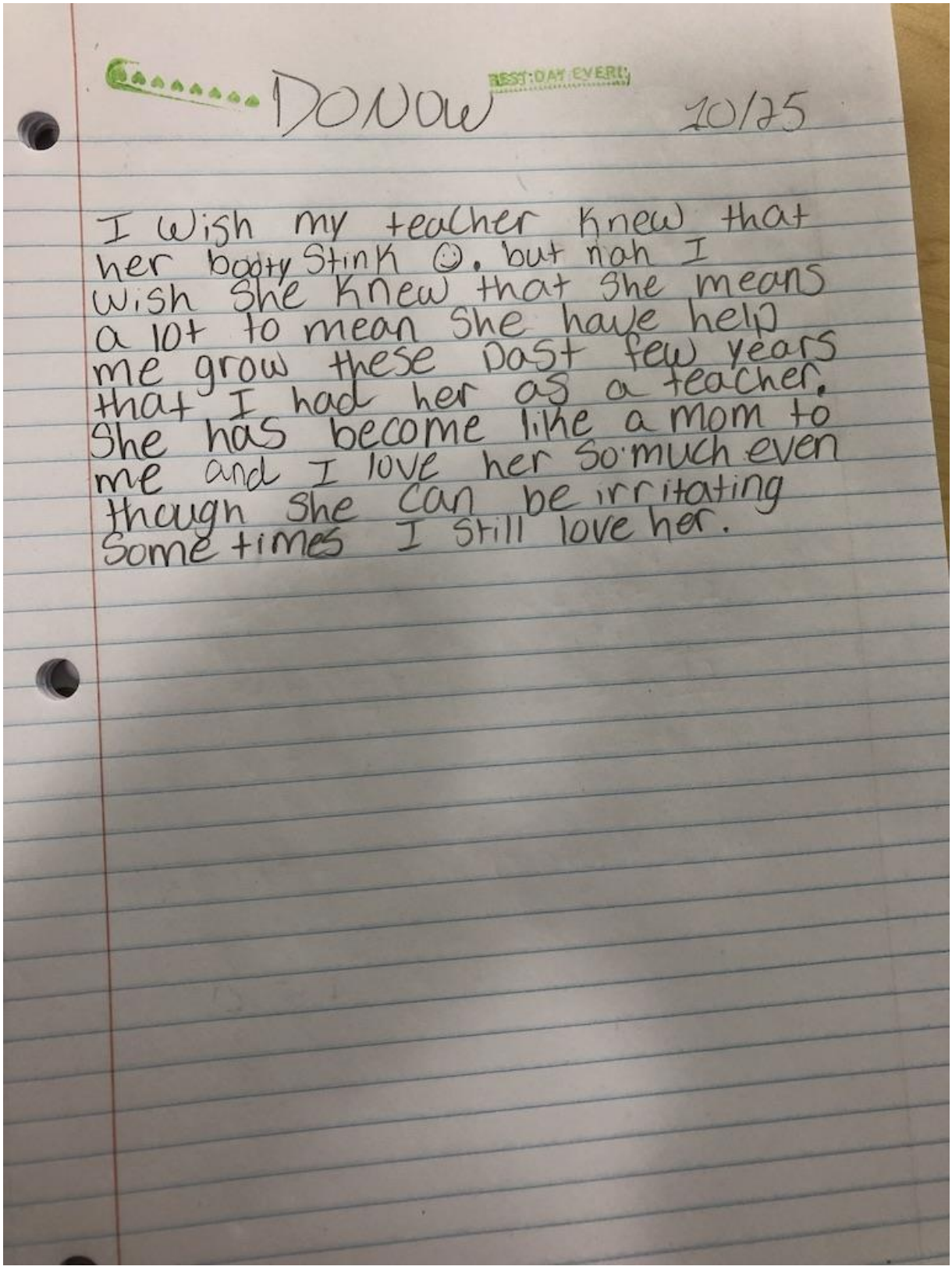
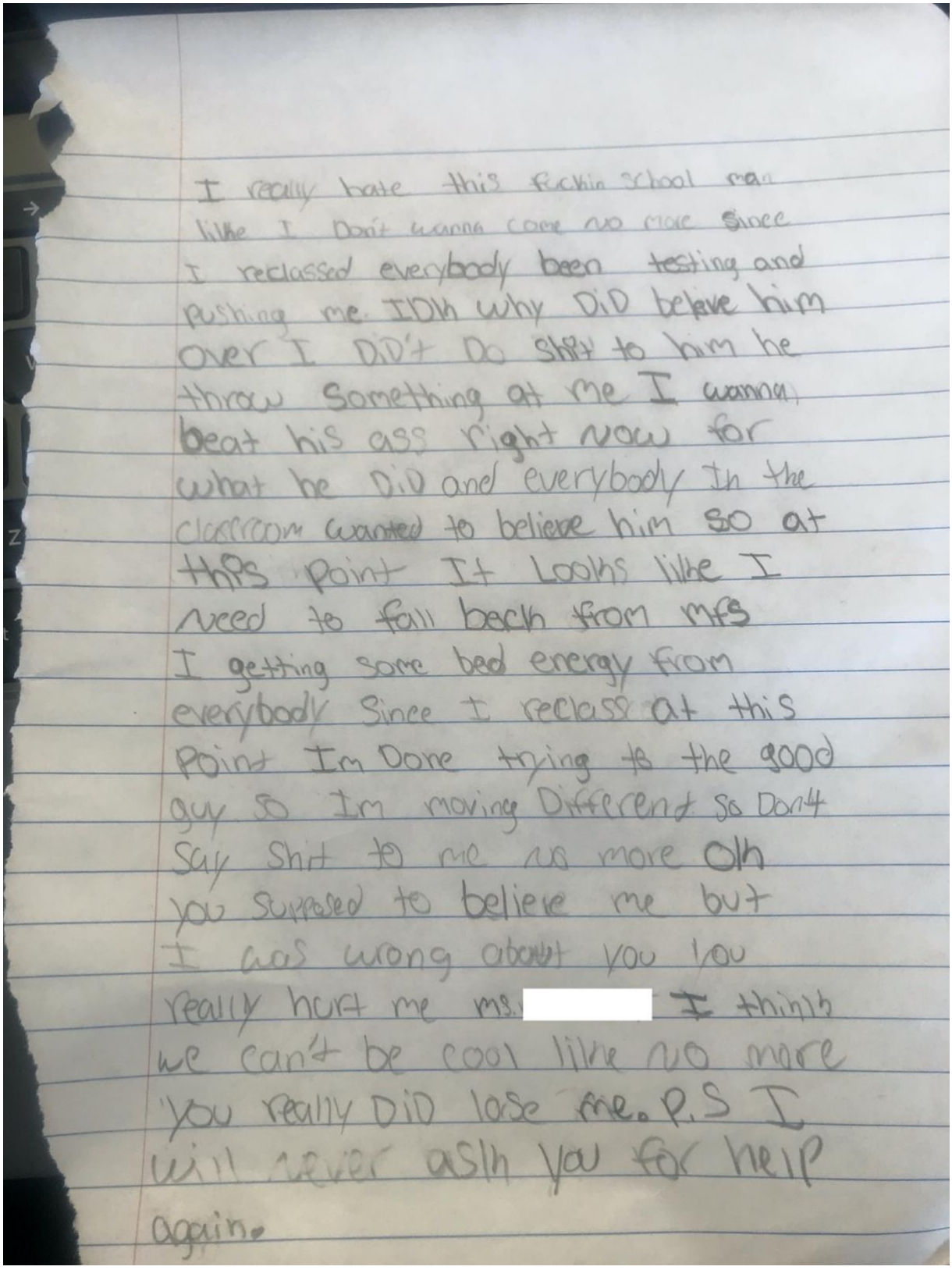


Figure 2: Jabari's Note to Ms. Khan


I really hate this fuckin school man
like I don't wanna come no more since
I reclassed everybody been testing and
pushing me IDK why DiD believe him
over I DiD't Do shit to him he
throw something at me I wanna
beat his ass right now for
what he DiD and everybody In the
classroom wanted to believe him so at
this point It Looks like I
need to fall back from mfs
I getting some bad energy from
everybody Since I reclass at this
point Im Done trying to the good
guy so Im moving Different so Don't
say shit to me no more Oh
you supposed to believe me but
I was wrong about you You
really hurt me ms. [redacted] I think
we can't be cool like no more
you really DiD lose me. P.S I
will never ask you for help
again.

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PAPER 3: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND BLACK PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Historically, Black families have had a major stake in the educational opportunities of their children. Having initially been denied the right to education, schools for Black students were made a priority by their communities during Reconstruction (Anderson, 1988). However, with the ruling of *Brown v. Board*, school integration was one-sided, sending Black students to white schools and ignoring the plight of schools in Black communities. This essentially left many Black educators jobless and placed Black students in schools where they were further marginalized (Roberts & Carter Andrews, 2013). Scholars have even traced the disproportionate rate at which Black students are referred for special education services to this period (Ferri & Connor, 2005). Very little has changed among today's schools, with the teaching force being primarily white and many aspects of Black life and language left out of educators' beliefs of what constitutes a good student. The same can be said for the plight of students with disabilities, as they face school discipline measures at disproportionate rates. Myths that Black students and families are disengaged from school communities fail to consider the ways that they have been historically and systematically pushed out of schools. As parent engagement is integral to student success (Howard & Reynolds, 2008), it is imperative that schools find better ways to engage Black parents. At the same time, schools should seek better ways to support Black students with disabilities.

Restorative justice has been taken up by many schools in order to address the ways that Black students and student with disabilities have been marginalized in schools. More recently, however, scholars have taken up a critique of restorative justice in order to remind schools and scholars of the importance of centering the needs and identities of Black students within restorative approaches (Daneshzadeh & Sirrakos, 2018; Lustick, 2017). Often, schools are places

that counter the lived experiences of Black students with disabilities. Perceptions of the ways that these students speak, dress, and interact with authority are often misinterpreted as willful violations of school codes of conduct. Similarly, the ways that Black parents communicate and interact with school communities, as well as the frequency of this interaction, may be misconstrued as disengagement. Dominant ideas of parental involvement are considered the norm, while the ways marginalized parents support their students have been dismissed in many instances (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Lopez, 2001). Considering the use of restorative justice for Black students with disabilities and the ways that Black parent engagement is often misperceived, the central questions for this paper are:

1. How do Black parents of students with disabilities describe their experiences with restorative justice at an urban school?
2. In what ways does restorative justice offer implications for Black parent engagement within schools' special education programs?

Critical Race Parenting

This work is grounded in Critical Race Theory, which focuses on the ways in which race, racism, and power intersect (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). More specifically, I employ Critical Race Parenting (CRP) throughout my analysis. Also known as ParentCrit, DePouw and Matias (2016), describe Critical Race Parenting as, "a term we employ to capture how parenting happens amidst contemporary societal contexts rife with unpunished police violence against Black and Brown youth, all occurring amidst contentions that we now live in a postracial U.S. society" (p. 237). Not only does ParentCrit simply examine parenting of Black and Brown children, it does so within the context of the myriad challenges that parents face at the hands of a society that is often violent and oppressive. CRP "is about relationships of teaching and learning

in historical, social, and institutional contexts with a focus on healthy identity development, resilience, and action toward the elimination of racism and other systems of oppression" (DePouw & Matias, 2016, p. 241). This framework also draws on an important aspect of critical race theory, that of experiential knowledge Black parents possess (Reynolds, 2010). This notion emphasizes the legitimacy of the experiences, perspectives, and voices of people of color, especially as they are often in contrast with dominant narratives. Therefore, CRP has the potential to emphasize the experiential knowledge of not only people of color, but parents of color as well. As parents of Black students with disabilities, participants in this study possess insights and experience that is yet to be found anywhere else. As such, it is important to remember that, while educational scholars have produced thought and literature that is often revered and consulted when seeking to improve the lives of students, oftentimes, the voices and input we need the most comes from the communities we are seeking to serve.

As Critical Race Theory emphasizes the impact of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995), Critical Race Parenting does the same. Depauw and Matias note:

> Intersectional approaches to critical race analyses that move beyond essentialized, binary conceptualizations of race and other forms of oppression (CRF, LatCrit, AAPI Crit, Tribal Crit) are particularly helpful to us in theorizing critical race parenting, because they allow for complex and contextual treatments of social and material conditions related to inequity (p. 240).

As other aspects of identity, such as ability, gender, religion, language, sexuality, and ethnicity intersect with race, considering these intersecting identities within the context of parenting children of color is vital. Though several examples of intersectional approaches to Critical Race Theory were alluded to in the aforementioned quote, frameworks addressing issues of ability and antiblackness were excluded. Therefore, this study takes up ParentCrit in a way that more explicitly examines the intersection of Blackness and disability. In order to do so, I rely on

BlackCrit, which, according to Dumas and ross (2016), "promises to help us more incisively analyze how social and education policy are informed by antiblackness" (p. 419). Additionally, DisCrit is employed in order to acknowledge the ways that race and disability simultaneously impact the ways the experiences of students (Annamma, et al., 2013).

Within many schools, parental engagement is defined in ways that parallel student engagement--with no consideration of the lives and experiences of marginalized people. Just as students of color are often presumed to be defiant when not adhering to these expectations, it is no surprise that their parents are also accused of being disengaged or uninvolved when it comes to supporting their own children. CRP allows for a new lens for examining parent engagement in ways that are more inclusive of the lived experiences of parents of color and how they view and enact their roles within school communities.

Relevant Literature

Though sometimes used interchangeably, parent involvement and parent engagement denote different types of interaction between families and schools. Therefore, this paper employs Ecologies of Parent Engagement (Barton, et al., 2004) in order to delineate parent involvement from parent engagement. The authors of this framework note that it,

> enables us to understand engagement in relation to many things, not just those things traditionally deemed important in schools. Parental engagement is a desire, an expression, and an attempt by parents to have an impact on what actually transpires around their children in schools and on the kinds of human, social, and material resources that are valued within schools (p. 11).

While any and all positive exchanges between parents and school staff should be welcome, schools truly seeking to foster community should focus on engaging parents rather than simply involving them in school affairs. Engagement entails placing an emphasis on the needs and perspectives of parents and incorporating these ideals into the school's approach for establishing

an inclusive community. Because restorative justice places an emphasis on establishing and sustaining relationships between members of communities, focusing on parent engagement within this study allows for an analysis of how parents are able to make authentic connections within their children's schools and how these connections have an impact on the ways that the school supports Black students with disabilities.

Searches for literature explicitly connecting Black parent engagement and restorative justice among published research yielded few results. However, a small number focused on the roles of Latino parents within restorative justice (Cavanaugh, Vigil & Garcia, 2014; Wadhwa, 2010). In terms of Black parent engagement, some literature highlights the role of Black parents as knowledge-holders and advocates (McCarthy Foubert, 2019). Additional literature also features Black parents' views of and involvement with school discipline, but does not necessarily emphasize the use of restorative justice (Ball Cooper, et al., 2018; Golann, Debs, & Weiss, 2019; Kourea & Owens, 2016; Pinderhughes, et al., 2000). This section elaborates on the aforementioned literature in order to give context for this study and emphasize its significance. Because literature pertaining to the topic of this study was scarce, studies centering parent involvement were also included in this review of literature in order to offer implications for how involvement might be analyzed in order to take steps toward engagement.

Restorative Justice and Parent Engagement

Restorative justice refers to the acknowledgement of harm and the steps taken toward repair. A key component of restorative justice is the restorative circle, where those who have been harmed and those that have caused harm engage in dialogue and act together to move past harm (Van Ness & Strong, 2014). Though the concept of restorative justice has mostly been associated with the criminal justice system, it has recently been taken up in schools where it is

usually considered an alternative to traditional disciplinary measures that often focus on retribution instead, such as detention, suspension, and expulsion. With its relatively recent application in school, literature centering the use of restorative justice within the field of education is still emerging, especially work that centers disability and Black parent engagement among schools' restorative approaches.

Cavanaugh, Vigil, and Garcia (2014) worked with a racially diverse high school in Denver conducting research that initially focused on the effects of implementing a culture of care (Cavanaugh, 2003) in order to address issues of retention among Latino students. While students, school staff, and parents were all involved in the study, it was the mothers of previously suspended students that advocated for the use of restorative justice. Though the school's principal was familiar with the concept of restorative justice, this push from parents served as the catalyst for securing training for school staff and actually implementing the practice.

In her analysis of reasons for the disproportionate suspensions among Latino students in Denver Public Schools, Wadhwa (2010) specifically uses Critical Race Theory as a framework for examining restorative justice practices. While conducting interviews with members of the committee tasked with writing the district's policy for restorative justice, she found that there was a disconnect between community representatives of the committee (which included a parent, a lawyer, a student, and a community organizer) and the district representatives who had traditionally overseen discipline within the district. While community representatives acknowledged the roles of racism in school discipline policies, district officials attributed the high numbers of suspension for students of color to their home lives and a lack of parental engagement. This disparity between what district officials perceived and what community representatives expressed highlights the need for more research on race and restorative justice, as

Wadhwa suggests, but it also has implications for the ways that parent perspectives can be instrumental in clarifying what engagement actually entails.

Black Parent Engagement

McCarthy Foubert (2019) theorizes Racial Realist Parent Engagement during their work with Black parents' efforts to combat antiblackness at their children's school. This framework "pushes on traditional parent involvement discourse, which frames Black and Brown parents as under-engaged and apathetic about education and/or emphasizes an overly-simplified assumption that increased engagement leads to educational equity" (p. 2). In addition to problematizing the notion of Black and Brown parents as under-engaged, McCarthy Foubert also makes clear that the solution is not increased engagement. Rather, schools should rethink what engagement looks like and focus on genuine relationships with parents. An emphasis on relationships within approaches to parent engagement aligns with a more restorative approach to parent engagement as well. Efforts to improve relationships with parents could start with proactive restorative circles that establish more integral roles for parents as part of the school community.

Approaches to studies centering Black parent engagement varied. Some focused specifically on the epistemologies of Black mothers, highlighting their cultural wealth (Allen & White-Smith, 2018) and the ways that they use notions of care to counter deficit perspectives of themselves and their children (Cooper, 2009). Similarly, Marchand, A., Reynolds, R., Diemer, M., Rowley, S. (2019) urged educators and researchers to consider the ways race, racism, and critical consciousness affect and mediate Black parents' engagement with schools officials. Others noted the ways that Black parents have forged support amongst themselves (Posey-Maddox, 2017) and advocated for models of parent engagement that specifically center race. This can be seen within Yull and Wilson's (2018) work featuring a Parent Mentoring Program,

in which Black parents worked with a school district in order to establish a model of engagement that centered their experience and insight.

With race being a significant factor in the use of exclusionary practices such as suspension and expulsion (Skiba, et al., 2011), several studies centering the voices and perspectives of Black parents did so within the context of school discipline. Golann, Debs, and Weiss (2019) study examining the experiences of Black and Latino parents of students enrolled in charter and Montessori schools found that, though parents of students enrolled in both schools had critiques of school discipline, self-advocacy and self-discipline were priorities for them, and they expected schools to support their students' development in these areas. Mowen (2017) also addressed school discipline and noted the effects that behavioral policies have on the home lives of Black students. With parents forced to adjust work schedules due to school suspensions, the punitive measures currently in place impact families financially as well as emotionally, giving yet another reason to call for the elimination of zero tolerance policies. Kourea, Lo, and Owens (2016) not only centered the perspectives of Black parents, but also used the findings from their interviews to assist their partnering school with developing a culturally relevant social skills curriculum aimed at supporting Black students in meeting school expectations. By using parent interview data to develop culturally relevant curriculum, they provide an example of how parent engagement can have immediate impact and emphasize the value of parents' perspectives. Also, in this case, parent engagement helped to restore relationships between school staff and students.

Engagement among Parents of Students with Disabilities

Several studies highlight the parental involvement of students with disabilities, but without any mention of marginalized identities. Still, they noted the importance of parent feedback in establishing more authentic relationships with special education teachers (Carlson, et

al., 2020). Dinnesen and Kroeger (2018) discuss a need for revised special education documents that state parents' rights and responsibilities more clearly, with parent participants from the study agreeing that this would help to foster engagement. They note that current documents, such as the Notice for Procedural Safeguards that outlines parents' and students' rights and responsibilities are written in a way that is considered inaccessible and impractical. Having literature that features explicit examples of how schools can engage parents in the special education process as well as actual resources for doing so would be beneficial. Using data from longitudinal studies, Wagner, et al. (2012) found that a majority of parents are engaged in meetings with special education staff, with some noting that they want more opportunities for engagement.

Other studies provide implications for working with culturally and linguistically diverse families of students with disabilities (Whitford & Addis, 2017; Miller, 2019; Wilt & Morningstar, 2018). However, this work does not center the perspectives of Black parents in particular. Though Gibson and Martin's (2019) study also included a diverse array of families, they did highlight the barriers to involvement that Black parents described. While the authors found that school information is often withheld from parents of students with disabilities, Black parents of students with disabilities felt that their race exacerbated this issue. Other scholars offer meta analyses of literature on Black parent engagement with implications for families of students with disabilities (Brandon & Brown, 2009; Davis, et al., 2002).

Of the empirical literature that does explicitly focus on the engagement of Black parents of students with disabilities many researchers note the barriers that Black parents face in doing so and provide implications based on their experiences and perspectives. One such study is an autoethnographic account of a Black father's attempts to advocate for his son with Autism

(Hannon, 2017). His insights shed light on the ways that Black parents' advocacy for their students can be misconstrued as combative. In a much larger study, Brandon, et al. (2010) administered a revised version of the Barriers to School Involvement Survey to Black parents in order to learn more about barriers to their engagement. Within the sample of over four hundred Black parents however, researchers found that barriers previously listed in other studies (such as economic status, family composition, parent education level, student placement in special education classes) did not have a substantial impact on parent engagement.

Waitoller, Nguyen, and Super (2019) partnered with disability advocates to recruit and interview Black and Brown parents of students with disabilities regarding their choice to enroll their students in "rigorous" (p. 282) charter schools. They note, "Although no-excuses charter schools may create new forms of acceptance, they have also created new methods to exclude and punish 'unfit' populations" (p. 294). While many charter schools often tout academic success for pupils, they can, in many cases, further marginalize students with disabilities (Stern, et al., 2015).

While there is work that acknowledges the role of parents within restorative justice, and more specifically, parents of color, as well as studies that examine Black parent engagement, virtually no literature exists that specifically centers the importance of Black parent engagement or disability within schools' use of restorative justice. Given the importance of parental engagement in the ways that schools serve students, as well as the experiential knowledge that Black parents possess, including them in restorative justice in schools is imperative. Therefore, it is crucial that educators and researchers consider the substantial role that Black parents have in contributing to the use of restorative justice. This study examines the ways that Black parents of students with disabilities engage in restorative justice practices and presents opportunities for rethinking parent engagement in order to better support such families moving forward.

Data collection and analysis

Ailey School for the Arts, or ASA (a pseudonym), is a sixth through twelfth grade public charter school in a large, Midwestern city. Nearly 99 percent of the 800 students it serves identify as Black. It is situated in an area known as the "cultural center" of the city, located near local universities and museums, some of which have established partnerships with the school. Restorative justice was introduced during the 2014-2015 school year under the leadership of a former principal and subsequent principals have maintained its use. Since the school's inception, it has followed an inclusion model for special education that requires students with disabilities to receive a majority of their instruction in the general education setting, with the appropriate individual accommodations. Most students with disabilities receive one hour of special education support each day in order to receive instruction that helps them make progress toward their goals as outlined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

This work is part of a larger case study focusing on the effects of restorative justice for students with disabilities. Other components of the study centered the experiences of special education teachers and their students. Parents were recruited via opportunity sampling (Creswell, 2013) and are introduced in the table below. When students were recruited for the study (with the help of the school's special education teachers), parents were asked to participate in separate interviews. This allowed for a closer analysis of the parents' perspectives and an opportunity to center them within this work.

Data collection entailed semi-structured, collaborative interviews that focused on the ways in which parents were involved with the school's restorative justice program. Collaborative interviewing allowed for parents and I to "approach equality in questioning, interpreting, and reporting" (Louvale & Brinkmann, 2009, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 173). As the school and

the parents have different perspectives and expectations, learning the perspectives of parents through interviews was instrumental in answering my first research question. Their remarks also helped to conceptualize answers to my second research question, as parents presented insights that called for a closer examination of the ways that restorative justice, parent engagement, race, and disability intersect.

Table 1: Parent Participants

Parent	Student	Grade	Years at ASA
Ms. Gill	Jabari	12	6
Ms. Jones	Cree	12	7
Ms. Langston	Brooklyn	8	3
Ms. Reeves	Lou	8	3

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis of interview data was employed for this study, which allowed for an examination of parents' individual experiences while also noting commonalities among their perspectives (Nowell, et al., 2017, p. 2). Data analysis began by reading each interview transcript line by line and noting passages that related to the study's research questions and theoretical framework. Then, first cycle coding was completed by developing phrases based on the commonalities between various portions of the data set, also known as "theming the data" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 198). From there, I conducted second cycle coding by using Focused Coding. During this process, similarly coded data from the first round of analysis were combined into

categories. These categories were then reviewed in order to search for inconsistencies among data and to further combine any similar codes. Data analysis concluded with the establishment of several themes, as outlined in the findings of this study.

Findings and Discussion

While a protocol that featured questions focusing primarily on the school's implementation of restorative justice and opportunities for parent engagement was utilized for interviews, responses from parents covered a broader range of topics. Parents did share their perspectives of restorative justice, but also discussed their relationships with school staff, their experience with the school's special education program, and opportunities for engagement throughout the school year. Much of their discussion did not explicitly name restorative justice. However, if restorative justice is a means of addressing harm or conflict and finding ways to move forward, then parents' perspectives illuminate a need for certain issues to be addressed in order to sustain parent engagement at the school.

Perspectives of Restorative Justice

Parents' experiences with restorative justice occurred only after their students were involved in an incident that warranted a restorative circle. Some seemed to appreciate the time that school staff took in order to help students resolve issues. Because the school still uses exclusionary practices alongside restorative justice, however, it was difficult to ascertain whether or not parents distinguished restorative justice from traditional forms of discipline. Still, parents seemed to have generally positive perspectives of restorative justice based on their previous experiences.

When asked about any involvement with the school's restorative justice process, Ms. Gill recounted a major incident in which her son Jabari was accused of making a bomb threat during

the school day, “He talked out of turn and said, you know you have to be careful what you say, and they was in the lunch room playing and he was like, ‘I'll blow this school up!’". In most cases, such a threat would have resulted in suspension or expulsion. However, Ms. Gill shared that they resolved the issue with a restorative circle:

> No, he didn't get suspended but we had a big old forum. I think two hours we was talking because they was telling me this, the security guard here, the head security guard was saying like, "We can't do that." Because she's like, "Just think, if we really didn't know you like that, and you said that”, she said, "we all would've went, took you home, police would've came to your mom and them house, ransacked y'all to see if you have any bombs and stuff like that," and she was like, "if we found something, your parents going to jail."

With the school being situated in a public space in a busy area of the city--sharing a building with an art college and various small businesses and organizations--the amount of security present is higher than most schools (though it is worth noting that security only monitor shared spaces; the school has a set of mentors and restorative justice practitioners that help monitor their educational space). With the school cafeteria being a shared space, security was involved. However, the school was still able to utilize its own process for addressing issues of harm. Ms. Gill noted that, “I was happy [about the restorative circle] because he needed to hear from everyone and his teachers. How it can affect him, his classmates, and his teachers”. Had members of the school community not established a relationship with Jabari, or been insistent on the use of restorative justice, the reaction to his perceived threat may have been very different. The school’s reliance on a restorative circle to address this issue emphasizes the aspect of restorative justice that views harm as a violation of relationships instead of a violation of rules (Zehr, 1999). In most cases, bomb threats (whether real or not) made by students result in suspension or even expulsion from school. While Jabari’s status as a student with an IEP requires the school to consider his disability when making disciplinary decisions, he is still susceptible to

the same exclusionary practices as his non-disabled peers. Had the school considered him a threat, he could have been asked to leave.

Ms. Gill's description of the restorative circle as "a big old forum" is a theme present throughout other interviews as well. Parents were familiar with the procedure of restorative justice, but often used different language than what the school uses to describe it. Ms. Jones, when recounting an incident with her daughter Cree, describes the circle as "a little group meeting":

> they had like a little group meeting with all of them because I said something in the meeting because I'm like, 'she got to go to school here. I don't have time for her to keep on getting into it with these little girls'. So what happened was, they ended up having a group meeting and now her and the little girls are friends.

Regardless of the way that she named it, Ms. Jones did emphasize that the restorative circle gave Cree and her friends a chance to make amends and repair their relationship, which is the goal of restorative justice. Also, Ms. Jones's sentiments during the circle emphasize the ways that her voice is integral to Cree's inclusion at ASA. Though in some cases Black parents face barriers when attempting to voice concerns, the restorative process ameliorates this by ensuring that all parties involved in restorative circles are valued and included.

Though parents seemed to find little fault with the school's approach to restorative justice, or ASA's efforts in ensuring they were engaged throughout the process, it seems that, for the most part, parents' engagement with restorative justice often only occurs after a student has violated school policy. While conversations with parents are vital in such an instance, engaging parents this way conflates restorative circles with traditional disciplinary meetings that have always occurred when students have problems in the classroom. In some cases, schools and scholars are pushing for restorative justice to be an integral part of the ways that schools operate whether harm occurs or not (Gregory, et al., 2016). This entails regular activities and

conversations that help to build relationships and sustain community. While students and staff are primarily involved in these proactive restorative measures, including parents could be an integral step in improving efforts to sustain their engagement.

Relationships with School Staff

Recalling what they appreciate most about the school, parents often noted the relationships that they and their students have with school staff. Though communication was an issue for some, others were grateful for the ways that staff, namely the school's special education teachers, make themselves available to address their students' needs. With its emphasis on restorative justice, it is clear that ASA has made an effort to emphasize the importance of relationships.

In his time at the school, Jabari's family has dealt with the loss of several family members. Understandably, this impacted his progress in the classroom. His mother noted, "It bothers him and I be trying to talk to him like, 'You can let it out, talk or whatever', but he tends to keep it in". When he first attended ASA, these issues were unbeknownst to his teachers, and as a result, his behavior was perceived as a violation of school conduct. Ms. Gill recalled, "I was getting a call every other week. '[Jabari] has to come home'". In order to address the grief Jabari has faced, Ms. Gill has reached out to members of her church community, but also noted that, once they were made aware of his circumstances, the school was instrumental in supporting him as well,

> They just grabbed him by the hand and just took him with them...it's like once they knew about my son and then they knew, you know what was going on or whatever, they would call me and talk to me about him, or I'll come in just to come observe and they'll have a seat for me, and it's like a family.

Her account of the ways that members of the school staff are "like a family" speaks to the importance of the relationships that Ms. Gill and Jabari have with school staff. Sometimes

teachers' perception of defiance or insubordination can be trauma or grief that students are still learning to deal with (or haven't been able to deal with at all) (Love, 2019). At his previous school, Ms. Gill noted that, "for any little thing, they would suspend him". At ASA, however, she pointed out that, "they really took care of my son as role models and took him with them". Though Ms. Jones now considers some of the staff members role models, it was only after multiple suspensions that the school found a better way to support Jabari. Ms. Gill did not confirm whether or not Jabari's grief subsided once he developed more positive relationships with school staff members, she did note the difference that was made by the support he received from male staff members. While Ms. Gill is only sharing an account of the ways that she and her son have navigated life at ASA, their position is not unique. Scholars have written extensively about the ways that Black male students--particularly those with disabilities--are pushed out of classrooms for perceived defiance (Skiba, et al., 2008). Also, it has been found that grief and trauma have a substantial impact on the ways that students are able to engage in classrooms (Goldman, et al., 2017). Fortunately, Jabari has found mentors in many of the Black male staff members at the school, but this is not the case for many students that attend schools with few teachers that look like them (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Watson, 2014). Though their identities do not necessarily lend themselves to a universal experience (as is the case with Jabari's navigation of race, disability, and grief), Black male students face a particular set of misconceptions within the classroom that requires schools to actively push back against deficit-minded approaches (Howard, Flennaugh, and Terry, 2012). Along with ASA's commitment to restorative justice, their staffing of Black educators cultivates an environment that deliberately takes into account the needs and identities of Black students. As can be seen with Jabari, such an approach has positive outcomes for students.

Ms. Reeves also compared her child's previous school to the ways that ASA approaches discipline and relationships. Her daughter Lou faces anxiety that was often misinterpreted at her previous school. Regarding Lou's relationships with staff, Ms. Reeves notes, "I feel like it's a more proactive school...you know, they, cause they know her now. So they take her, and they kinda talk to her a little bit, calm her down". Ms. Reeves seems grateful for the relationship Lou has with staff members and their ability to address any issues she is facing in a way that is helpful and not punitive or negligent. Her sentiments mirror those of other parents of students with disabilities that have expressed concerns over schools' approaches to discipline (Carlson, et al., 2020). When educators take time to develop positive relationships with parents and students, perceived issues of misconduct can be met with patience and understanding instead of immediate retribution. Doing so upholds restorative principles that, in Lou's case, ensure her inclusion in the general education classroom. For many students with disabilities, retributive reactions to the ways that they communicate and express themselves often exacerbate the issue at hand. This could have been the case with Lou's anxiety, had her teachers not pursued a more restorative approach.

While some parents were grateful for the support they receive from the school, they also noted difficulties in engaging in ways that schools usually expect. According to Ms. Langston,

> sometimes you can't really always express yourself or you could come off the wrong way when you send an email. So I'd like to be able to maybe, schedule some times and say, "Hey, can I talk to you a few moments?"...the times that they usually have these parent-teacher conferences, I don't even get off 'til 5:30. And if it's at 5:30 or 6:00, I'm not going to make it.

Ms. Langston's predicament reflects the experience of many working parents, especially those who are single and co-parenting, such as herself. Perceived issues of disengagement may actually be scheduling conflicts (Brandon, et al., 2010). While ASA has made attempts to

accommodate the work schedules of both teachers and parents when it comes to parent-teacher conferences or other programming after school, it is clear that some parents may not be able to participate. With this being the case, it seems that Ms. Langston is looking for the school to provide other opportunities for engagement. Her vocalization of this plight challenges the traditional notion of parent involvement in which schools set expectations and opportunities for interactions with parents, and highlights the need for more authentic engagement that centers parents' opportunities to create space within schools in order to advocate for their children (Barton, et al., 2004, p. 7).

Ms. Gill also noted the difficulties she has had with engaging with the school regularly, due to her health:

> when they started asking to volunteer, I was doing chemo then. And then I go to dialysis three days a week so I be tired. But yeah, they did offer like, "You can come and volunteer or visit this and that." But they send me literature on when they have different things like field trips. But when they have trips, I be at dialysis.

Ms. Gill seems to have developed relationships with members of the school staff that make up for the fact that she is often unable to attend school functions. However, her perspective raises an important question: while schools are working to support students with disabilities, how are they also supporting the engagement of parents that have disabilities or physical health restrictions themselves? Extending invitations for parent volunteers is a start, but in order to ensure continuous parent engagement requires schools to take further consideration of parents' lives and livelihoods.

Experiences with Special Education Program

One topic of conversation that permeated each of the parent interviews was the ways that the school is administering special education services. Some seem to appreciate the school's inclusive environment more than others, so parents' sentiments are not exactly aligned. For

example, Ms. Langston appreciates the assistance that her daughter Brooklyn receives through the school's special education program, while Ms. Jones advocates for the ways that Cree is encouraged to work more independently. However, they all brought up their student's progress within the context of their disability, even when interview questions were primarily focused on restorative justice and the ways that parents have been able to engage with the rest of the school community.

Though their students are primarily taught in the general education setting, the fact that they also receive special education services seems to take precedent over parents' concerns about other aspects of their students' experiences at school. Receiving the appropriate special education services has a substantial impact on students' behavior and academic progress. Therefore, it seems that parents' remarks reflected how crucial special education is for their students' success.

Depending on a student's disability, inclusion can be a point of contention for some parents (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Some prefer more instruction within the special education setting, while others advocate for as much time in the general education classroom as students without disabilities. Ms. Langston seems to agree with the ASA's model of inclusion. She stressed the importance of her daughter having the opportunity to learn with other students in the general education classroom, "instead of being in the class with everyone who has the same disability as them", and also noted that students with disabilities "have the opportunity to get the assistance that they need and still be able to interact with the rest of the class and their peers. I really like that". Because special education programs can sometimes worsen the divide between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Carson, 2015), schools are required by law to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2004). In some

cases, however, this guideline is used as an excuse for providing inadequate special education services, which charter schools have been accused of doing (Morando Rhim, Ahearn, and Lange, 2007). With a focus on college-readiness, exceptional student achievement, and the like, many charter schools often dismiss students with disabilities because of the ways that they would presumably require more resources while failing to meet schools' expectations (Waitoller, et al., 2019).

Receiving the appropriate support is crucial for students with disabilities, but it is important to remember that this support should be tailored to students' needs and parents' expectations. When considering what she appreciated about ASA's special education program, Ms. Jones noted that:

> they was working with them over there [at her previous school]. The IEP teachers was working with them, but I felt like over here they was more stronger with them. Like, making them do the work, telling them they can do it. Making them try for themselves...and ever since then, I just left her here because she pushed herself. She made sure she tried to do the best she can in class.

At times, schools may have lower expectations for students with disabilities, leading students to rely more on special education services than they should (Peterson, 2010). Conversely, some special education programs emphasize independence and self-advocacy (Rosetti & Henderson, 2013). Cultivating a balance between the two is a delicate act that can rarely be achieved without parent input. While some parents may interpret this 'push' Ms. Jones mentions a disregard of their child's disability, she views it as an opportunity for Cree to realize and act upon her own strengths. ASA's position as a charter school places it among many educational institutions that place expectations for discipline and academic achievement over the needs of students, especially those with disabilities (Waitoller, et al., 2019). However, as parents have noted the positive impact of their relationships with school staff throughout this study, it seems that the

ways that they are able to engage with members of the school's special education team have helped them to shape their children's experiences according to their individual needs.

When asked about the ways that they engaged with the school, most of the experiences that parents have had are with the school's special education team. In fact, when asked about involvement with restorative justice, some parents inadvertently shared examples of their meetings with special education staff. Because special education teachers play such a pivotal role in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, their responsibilities often include finding ways to resolve issues with general education staff in order to ensure that students are receiving the proper accommodations. With this in mind, it is no surprise that the parents in this study have associated the work of special education teachers with restorative justice.

Implications

Rethinking Restorative Justice

Though restorative justice is often used to address instances of harm, schools have taken up this ideology to also build relationships and strengthen community. This often takes place in the form of proactive circles (Evanovich, et al., 2020) and is even incorporated into instruction (Winn, Graham, and Alfred, 2019). However, these aspects of restorative justice only take place between teachers and students. As noted by each of the parent participants, their involvement with restorative justice only occurred in regard to disciplinary measures. While they did not necessarily express any frustration over the ways that they had been involved with restorative justice, they did note other issues, such as barriers to their opportunities to engage with school staff. Still, they also noted occasions where they felt supported by school staff based on the relationships they had developed and the appropriate provision of special education services for their children. These insights from parents--the challenges they face in regard to engaging with

the school, as well as their appreciation of school staff--provide a basis for establishing a more restorative approach to parent engagement.

Because restorative justice can be taken up in a variety of ways, schools have the opportunity to tailor aspects of their implementation to center the experiences of parents. This can be done by incorporating practices such as restorative circles that address grievances that parents have. Schools can also pursue more proactive measures that build and sustain relationships with parents by offering opportunities for engagement that are more tailored to their needs. These attempts may not mirror the typical ways that schools use restorative justice, however, the end goal should be the same. While many schools have taken up restorative justice as an attempt to ensure the inclusion of marginalized students that have traditionally been pushed out of the classroom, it is just as vital to consider restorative justice as an option for engaging the parents of these students, who have traditionally been pushed out of schools as well.

Restorative Special Education

For the most part, parents seemed to be primarily concerned with their students' special education services, which leads to questions for future research: What would a restorative special education look like? Considering the ways that students with disabilities are often marginalized within schools, how can steps be taken to ensure that they actually receive the equitable education that they deserve? Attempting to answer these questions starts with paying close attention to the ways that parents in this study illuminated their experiences with special education and restorative justice.

Students' Individualized Education Programs usually last for one year, requiring special education teachers to develop new ones each school year. This requires input from the IEP team, which usually includes school administrators, general education teachers, other service providers

(such as social workers and speech pathologists), and parents. During meetings convened for students' IEPs, team members have the opportunity to talk at length about students' needs and steps for ensuring their progress. In some ways, these meetings mirror the makings of a restorative circle. With restorative circles, there is discussion regarding what harm was caused, who caused the harm, and how to mend relationships and move forward. As Winn (2018) puts it, "The RJ circle provides a forum for exploring histories, futures, tensions, and paths forward" (p. 26). Considering the connection between IEP meetings and restorative circles, there is room for the two to intertwine.

Future Research with Black Parents and Restorative Justice

Considering Ms. Langston's concerns regarding her work schedule as a single parent, or Ms. Gill's experiences with grief and maintaining her health, parent participants shed light on aspects of their lives that were not initially considered when developing the interview protocol for this study. Because Black parents are not a monolith, their perspectives and experiences will vary. As such, future research regarding Black parent engagement should take into account the different ways that the intersecting identities of Black parents impact their experiences with their children's schools. This would not only offer a more precise depiction of their perspectives, but it could also provide better insight for schools as they improve their attempts to include parents as part of school communities.

Attempts to use a specific framework for this study proved difficult. While ParentCrit takes into account the effort required to parent students of color, it does not necessarily take into account the identity of parents of color, with several scholars that have that have taken up the framework being white parents of multiracial children. Though frameworks such as BlackCrit and Black Parent Racial Realism center the perspectives of Black parents, other aspects of

identity, such as disability, are not explicitly forefronted. Considering race, disability, parent engagement, and restorative justice at once may seem contrived, but doing so captures the actual schooling experiences of many marginalized families. This study is not solely about race, restorative justice, disability, or parent engagement, nor does it seek to highlight any aspect of the study over another. It is important to consider the multiple ways that both Black students *and* Black parents may be marginalized.

Conclusion

Much of the research conducted on restorative justice in schools refers to ways that teachers and administrators are addressing issues of harm with and among students. Parents are rarely part of the equation, and if they are included, it is usually due to a discipline issue with their child that they are being made aware of (Reynolds, 2010). However, just as restorative justice can be used to build relationships between teachers and students, the same can be said for building relationships with parents. An integral part of the school community, parents are often the last to engage in restorative practices. With that in mind, schools should rethink the ways that they approach restorative justice in order to include students' families as well.

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