

Undoing the Harm of Problematic School Policies:

How Restorative Practices can disrupt the School To Prison Pipeline

Rebecca Hinman McKnight

Vanderbilt University

### Abstract

One of the greatest factors affecting student academic success in our American K-12 public schools are traditional school disciplinary policies that exclude students from the classroom. Excluding students from the classroom by means of suspensions or expulsions is the largest contributing factor to students entering the school to prison pipeline. The school to prison pipeline is a phenomenon where primarily students of color are removed from educational institutions into the criminal justice system. Restorative practices are an alternative to these punitive disciplinary practices that have the potential to keep students in school. By using specific language, circles, and conferences, restorative practices aims to restore relationships and repair harm to all parties involved in a conflict. My project, “School, Interrupted” podcast, aims to share the knowledge I have learned through my literature review and my interviews with seven individuals engaged in the juvenile justice system, the Academy, and K-12 public schools. The podcast is informational and aimed at educating administrators, educators, parents, and students about the possibilities that restorative practices in their schools have on changing school culture and student academic success.

Ms. Fittz is attempting to prepare for her next class during a planning period when she stops to address an argument happening between two students in her room. Although Ms. Fittz has a hectic schedule and this planning period is her only one of the day, she granted permission to a group of students preparing for the school's "International Day" to use her room to practice their Kurdish dance to the background of very loud Kurdish music. The argument between the students was over which version of the dance to use for International Day. Ms. Fittz addressed the students and repeated back what she had heard about the argument and suggested the group engage in a restorative circle. The students, familiar with the process, rearranged the classroom, picked out a talking piece, and started the circle. Ms. Fittz went back to work.

An interaction like this is common for Ms. Fittz, but not common for most educators. Most educators are not trained in the art of restorative practices or have made them so commonplace that simply acknowledging the need for them puts students into action. So what makes Ms. Fittz so special? Ms. Fittz had an interest in restorative practices before she became an educator. During her masters program she had the opportunity to study restorative practices thoroughly and attend the International Institute of Restorative Practices training to be officially "certified" in restorative practices. Ms. Fittz was able to do her masters program while teaching part-time and when Ms. Fittz asked to have a student-led group that focuses on restorative practices, a course was created for her to teach. Ms. Fittz even got a physical space next to her classroom that would be turned into the school's "restorative center." The success Ms. Fittz has experienced is almost exclusively from her own drive and hard work alone. Although the school district that Ms. Fittz teaches in has a requirement to have restorative practices in schools, there was no restorative practices coordinator, restorative practices assistant, no restorative center, and according to other teachers, no clear sense of what restorative practices are or why they would be

helpful. While educators like Ms. Fittz should be celebrated and cherished for their commitment to restorative practices, we cannot simply wait and hope that individual educators will take enormous initiative to address an issue that cannot be avoided.

The unavoidable issue is traditional school disciplinary practices that exclude marginalized students from the classroom. The learners affected by this issue are K-12 students in urban, public schools that are primarily students of color, students with different abilities, and students who identify on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. The disproportionate treatment of these marginalized identities of students affected by traditional disciplinary policies attend to the diversity found in urban, public K-12 schools. The most common, “traditional,” harmful disciplinary practices include in-school suspension (ISS), out of school suspension (OSS), and “zero tolerance policies” that lead to expulsion. These disciplinary practices are prevalent in urban, public schools. When I reference “urban, public schools” I adhere to Milner’s definitions of “urban-intensive” and “urban-emergent” where schools are concentrated in large metropolitan cities like New York City, New York or Chicago, Illinois and those located in large cities, but not as large as New York City like Nashville, Tennessee or Austin, Texas (Milner, 2012). A common theme that runs through these harmful policies is the idea of exclusion, or the idea that the removal of a (bad) child from the other (good) children will help the other children continue to be good. The problem is that this removal process does no one any good. The removal of “bad apples” does not create a space where only “good apples” exist, but rather leaves an empty space of where the child once was and invites others to fill the role of the “bad apple” (Noguera, 2003). So what happens to the “bad apple” when they are excluded from school? Unsurprisingly, they do not excel in school. How could they when their supports in school have been removed? Students who have been suspended report that they either felt angry about the suspension and

angry at the school or the administrators, or felt happy about the situation (Costenbader & Markson, 1998). Trends have been to try to steer clear of OSS and expulsion and try to focus on ISS. This is because schools have started to notice that students who commit school infractions are usually unhappy at school, therefore, they enjoy not being forced to go to school. They do not take advantage of the time away from school to get caught up on schoolwork or think about their actions. They stay at home and enjoy not being in an environment they dread. This has turned schools to looking at ISS for refuge, thinking that if the student is forced to come to school, but not participate their classes, they will achieve more academically. If one looks at just ISS, the least punitive out of ISS, OSS, or expulsion, the research shows the correlation between ISS and disengagement with school. Not only are those who receive ISS disproportionately Black, from a lower-socioeconomic status than their peers, or “special needs” students, but students who receive ISS have lower grade point averages and increased likelihood not to graduate (Cholewa, Hull, Babcock, & Smith, 2018; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). Being absent from school, especially if mandated by the school, can put a struggling student even further behind in their classwork without the necessary supports to help them succeed. Suspensions have “been proven to adversely impact reading ability, increase potential for student dropout, and lower college entrance scores” (Kirkman, McNees, Stickl, Banner, & Hewitt, 2016, p. 1). Suspensions, more than any other student demographic, have the largest negative impact on student educational outcome and increase high school drop out rates (Kirkman et al., 2016). A student’s perception of school climate has a direct correlation to the student’s academic achievement and success (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2017). A culture of suspensions, especially the disproportionate suspension of Black or Latinx students is something students notice. When school becomes just another place they will be disproportionately targeted because of the color

of their skin, students of color are far less likely to continue coming to school. Students who have incurred suspensions are significantly more likely to end up in the adult criminal justice system (Costenbader & Markson, 1998). Absence from school, caused by school disciplinary practices, is a leading contributor in the school to prison pipeline (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2010).

The school to prison pipeline can be defined as “a complex network of relations that naturalize the movement of youth of color from our schools and communities...into permanent detention” (Meiners, as cited in Scott, 2017, p. 42). This pipeline is created through implementation of “traditional” school disciplinary policies, as previously mentioned, and continues to involve truancy, the juvenile justice system, and eventually the adult criminal justice system. Instead of exclusionary school practices instilling a sense of remorse, embarrassment, or willingness to do better, they often have the opposite effect. Noguera notes that an administrator, particularly in urban schools when faced with a student who committed a school infraction, “he contemplates the course of action to take to discipline the student, removal is the only option that comes to mind even though he knows this will not help him and may, in fact, make matters worse” (Noguera, 2003, p. 349). How this makes matters worse is that students who are punished in K-12 systems often need the most help (Scott, 2017). If students are acting out, coming into school late, or not completing assignments, it is not usually a student’s rejection of school but a complicated mixture of factors including difficult home lives, developmental/intellectual disabilities, or the student is receiving some kind of difficult treatment by their peers. Black and Latinx students are the most likely to receive disciplinary actions in schools, but outside of racial factors, students with disabilities, and those who identify as LGBTQIA+ are disproportionately disciplined as opposed to their peers (Scott, 2017). This can be explained by the phenomenon of

“subjective” disciplinary actions in which a student does not break a specific violation but rather an authority figure in the school determines that the student’s manner of speech or dress is inappropriate (Morris, 2016). Considering the large number of white, female public school educators, a misunderstanding of culture and dress occur more often than it should (Peters, 2016; Warren, 2013). This increasing gap between the understandings of primarily white teachers in a more ethnically diverse public school system, especially in urban districts, calls for action.

The school to prison pipeline is a failure of many supposedly American ideals. First, these policies can prevent students from graduating from high school. In today’s age in America, few living wage jobs can be held without a high school diploma or GED equivalent. Even with a high school diploma, there are few available jobs that offer consistent, full-time employment or benefits. Preventing students from graduating high school is preventing students from basic entry into the work force and a shot at a self-sustaining life as an adult. Secondly, failure to graduate from high school, or even obtaining a GED but ending up in prison, requires the public to subsidize the former student’s living expenses. Students who do not obtain a high school diploma will be forced to take jobs that will not cover the full cost of living. Many of these individuals will take advantage of social safety net programs, such as Section Eight housing, SNAP benefits, or WIC benefits. While our society has these programs put in place for those who are working hard, but are unable to make ends meet, many Americans criminalize those who take advantage of these programs because the programs are funded by taxes. The American idealization of “pulling one up by their bootstraps” is hardly possible today, especially if you are, or were, incarcerated or lack a high school diploma. If Americans value self-sufficiency, Americans should value initiatives that help students graduate and should be outraged by policies

that prevent them from doing so. Restorative practices are a viable alternative to these harmful disciplinary policies that can help keep students in school.

Restorative practices derive from ancient, indigenous cultures as a matter of solving matters of justice in communities (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009; Manassah, Roderick, & Gregory, 2018; McCluskey et al., 2008; Rideout, G., Roland, K., Salinitri, G., & Frey, 2010). Studying the “Aboriginal Peoples of North America, the Maori of New Zealand, and the peoples of Japan and Africa” revealed systems of justice that focused more on healing principles than disciplinary trends (Rideout, G., Roland, K., Salinitri, G., & Frey, 2010, p. 35). New Zealand to this day uses Restorative Justice exclusively in their criminal justice system in place of systems, like in America, that focus primarily on the harm caused to a victim and the punishment necessary to match the harm. It has not been until relatively recent in American history that K-12 public schools began to recognize restorative practices as an alternative to traditional disciplinary school practices. The connection was made when looking at how disciplinary trends between criminal offenders and juvenile offenders in K-12 systems were similar when it came to outcomes of punishment and exclusion from society. This view became quite evident when the phenomenon of the “school to prison pipeline” became a topic of conversation.

According to the International Institute of Restorative Practices, the restorative practices movement “seeks to develop good relationships and restore a sense of community in an increasingly disconnected world” (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009, p. 7). The focus on relationships within schools can be termed as “relational equity.” Relational equity was defined by Jo Boaler in 2006 as “equitable [social] relations in classrooms; relations that include students treating each other with respect and considering different viewpoints fairly” (Brown & Alibali, 2016, p. 563). Boaler came to focus on relational equity in mathematics classrooms where the

opportunity for students to interact with one another on math group problems, in a heterogeneous classroom produced opportunities for equitable achievement in the classroom and opportunities for student personal growth (Boaler, 2006). This notion of equity within a classroom is what restorative practices aims for. Equity between all parties involved in the educational system, not just equitable relationships between students. Students who are suffering academically need advocates within their academic institution to be their champions. By showing students that educators and administrators are in fact their advocate, pushing them to achieve their academic goals, students are more likely to reach their goals (Good & Adams, 2008). Better relationships in the classroom produce better results and higher satisfaction rates for students and educators (Good & Adams, 2008). Quality, trusting student-teacher relationships have been shown to improve academic achievement, increase motivation to study, and even change the perception of workloads assigned by teachers (Xerri, Radford, & Shacklock, 2018).

The International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) is now a graduate school for those seeking certification in world-recognized restorative practices, but began as a consulting community for those introducing restorative practices into their schools, workplaces, or communities. IIRP offers trainings to become certified in restorative practices and trainings for those who would like to be an official IRRP trainer for those in their community. Restorative practices, as by definition provided by IRRP are not defined into one action or inaction, but rather exist on a continuum (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009). The Restorative Practices Continuum ranges from “informal” to “formal” restorative practices including from informal to formal, respectively, affective statements, affective questions, small impromptu conference, group or circle, and formal conference (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009). The continuum is helpful because it allows access to restorative practices, regardless of formal training or

resources. While K-12 schools would ideally have formal restorative practices in place, a restorative center in each school along, a restorative coordinator or assistant, and trainings for all adults involved with you in the schools, this is rarely a reality. Having everything in place require not only extensive coordination between the district, schools, administrators, and teachers, but money and time—two things we know public schools do not have a lot of. Besides the communication necessary, the money needed for an ideal restorative school would be costly. You would need the salary for at least one, full-time, paid staff member to act in a restorative coordinator or restorative assistant capacity. You would also need to find physical space in a building that is likely already over-crowded with rooms already being used for multiple purposes. You would need paid staff training days and you would need to pay an official trainer to do the training. All of this adds up and is not cheap. It would not be a quick process either. All of the things previously mentioned that cost money have time associated with them that would draw away from the already mounting tasks a school administrator has. You would need time to find, recruit, and train someone for the restorative position, find time to re-organize school activities to create an open space for a restorative room, and find time in an already full staff development schedule to introduce restorative practices, let alone find the time to continually update staff. The task of implementing all of these things may seem too much to handle, but that is no excuse to not to give it a try. The benefits far outweigh the cost, especially if you are operating somewhere on the continuum. Knowing that a full implementation of an “ideal” restorative school may not be an option at first, using the Restorative Practices Continuum is a good place to start.

Again, when looking at the Restorative Practices Continuum, the least formal form of restorative practices are known as “affective statements” (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel,

2009). An affective statement “is just another way of saying ‘expressing your feelings’” (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009, p. 12). An example of an affective statement could be a teacher acknowledging to her class that she is feeling frustrated because she cannot continue the lesson while so many people are talking. Or, affective statements can be used to acknowledge success in a way that is more meaningful than, “good job” (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009). It could mean saying, “Sam, I was really happy that you worked for the entire class period today” (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009, p. 13). Moving towards formal on the continuum, the next step is affective questions. Affective questions, also known as “restorative questions” begin to address conflict (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009). The questions empower educators to ask questions that help those affected by the conflict instead of just challenging behavior. Helping those affected by the conflict focuses on the harm caused to everyone involved instead of focusing on who did what wrong and what punishment is deserving of the crime, which is what often happens in school because it is faster and more convenient. Instead of asking, “What happened?” when approaching two students who are in an argument, a more restorative question would be “What did you think when you realized what had happened?” (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009, p. 17). This question is less accusatory and shows concern for all involved in the conflict. Next on the continuum is “small impromptu conferences.” Small impromptu conferences can be used to address conflict by “building on the affective questions” and “can bring everyone involved in the incident together and resolve the problem relatively quickly” (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009, p. 21). These quick conferences can prevent an incident that happens in the classroom, or any public space, that affects multiple people from getting out of hand. Often times an incident between two parties can be fueled by the energy or responses by others. Addressing the parties involved quickly in an

impromptu conference can help those involved from escalating or be influenced by those outside of the conflict. Next on the continuum is a circle. Circles are “a symbol of community” and “one of the most distinctive and flexible forms of restorative practices” (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009, p. 23). Circles can be used as a response to wrongdoing or can be used as a proactive measure for building community and creating classroom norms (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009). Because circles are so flexible, they are the most common kind of restorative practice used. Many classroom teachers begin and/or end every class period with a circle as a way of addressing behavior issues, acknowledging success, or checking in with students to see how they are feeling. Simply sitting in a circle instills a sense of community. Many schools introduce restorative practices with circles because of their success in creating a sense of safety, openness, and compassion. Finally, the most formal restorative practice is formal conferences. There are two kinds of formal conferences-“restorative conferencing” and “family group decision making” or “family group conferencing” (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009). Restorative conferences are “formal responses to wrongdoing where all those involved are affected by an incident come together with a trained facilitator to explore what happened, who was affected and what needs to be done to make things right” (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009, p. 33). Those involved in restorative conferences often include those who caused harm, those who were affected by the harm, and can include family members or friends of both parties (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009). This would be used for a serious offense like a fight or drug possession in school. A trained restorative coordinator who follows a type of script to properly address the needs of all parties involved facilitates these conferences. Family group decision making or family group conferencing occurs when “decisions and plans need to be made about a young person” (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009, p. 36). These meetings

have a high level of family involved and can include extended family and friends. During the meeting there is “family alone time” when the restorative practices facilitator leaves the room so the family members and the young person work out a plan together (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009). This type of conference has three parts. First, the professionals, who could be social workers, probation officers, counselors or police, outline the problems and the various resources available to serve the child and family. Secondly, is when the “family alone time” occurs and the family and young person develop a written plan. Thirdly, the professionals re-enter the room and the family explains the plan to them (Costello, B., Wachtel, J., Wachtel, 2009). These types of conferences have a long history of working in social work and juvenile justice systems, but are starting to become popular in school settings to address issues of truancy, bullying, or behavior difficulties. All of these forms of restorative practices have worked for various communities and schools, even if they use just one form of restorative practices on the continuum (Mirsky, 2011).

Knowing that traditional disciplinary practices can be harmful and lead into the school-to-prison-pipeline, why not give restorative practices a chance? Many schools and districts are reluctant to engage in restorative practices because they view it as a “soft” or “weak” substitute to discipline. School systems, similar to our American prison system, often believe that the success of the institution depends on the authority’s grasp of control over its inhabitants (Noguera, 2003). By offering an alternative to traditional disciplinary practices, school authority figures may feel like they are trading in some of their control for an unknown outcome (McCluskey et al., 2008). Luckily for these unsure administrators, there is ample evidence to support that restorative practices in schools work. As previously mentioned, restorative justice has been a principle that indigenous people from all over the world have practiced. Therefore, it

is unsurprising that schools worldwide are interested in trying out restorative practices in their schooling institutions. In the UK, Scotland unveiled a restorative practices program in 2004. This program was aimed at researching whether restorative practices could “reduce offending, bullying and victimisation and to improve attendance” (McCluskey et al., 2008, p. 407). Ultimately, after the two-year study was complete, restorative practices were found to be effective, especially in the schools that showed the most commitment to the values of restorative practices. The study notes that some of the key takeaways gathered through research observations and interviews with faculty and students were that there was “clear evidence of school change,” “evidence of improved relationships within the school,” and that “pupils indicated that they were listened to” (McCluskey et al., 2008, p. 411). These are all restorative outcomes that lead to improved relationships in schools, building trust and community. While Scotland’s pilot program was deemed a success and expanded, programs happening in the United States started to gain attention. Considering the sheer difference in size between Scotland and the United States, it should be no surprise that different parts of the United States, even different parts of the states themselves, have adopted restorative practices on different scales. In 2016, the Evanston/Skokie, Illinois District 65, began a restorative circle program that relied on the “group or circle” aspect of the restorative practices continuum and asked community volunteers, the local police department and social workers, along with teachers to pilot the program. Researcher, High, was struck by the students and teachers attitudes towards one another and how the restorative circles being held were focused on upholding the students’ dignity (High, 2017). After many observations and participations in circles, High found that a note from a student summed up student experience: “You taught me how we should treat each other....You taught me how to talk in front of people. What I like the most about you is you showed how you felt,

you told me personal stuff in your life. You taught me how to show feelings” (High, 2017, p. 532). This note from the student was transformative given the student’s background before the restorative circles started. The student’s teacher had previously described this student as only be capable of expressing anger and had been frustrated by his outbursts since the beginning of the school year. After implementing the restorative circles the teacher came to understand that the student was having a “very difficult and lonely time at home” which helped change the teacher’s “approach to his anger issues” (High, 2017, p. 532). The student began to speak up during circles and bravely express his emotions in ways that were not destructive or distracting. The kind of results produced from this one child in this one school district in Illinois should be the kind of transformation in classrooms that are worth fighting for. A similar program in New York City had a local community center train principals on restorative circles and assist with the implementation of restorative practices in local New York City Schools as a way to address inequities in the school system. The research found that implementing circles created a brave space to talk about race and revealed biased punishment techniques previously used in the schools (Manassah et al., 2018). Restorative circles clearly have the power to change school culture and school relationships, which is critical to student satisfaction and success with the K-12 school system (Goldys, 2016).

In conclusion, restorative practices have the ability to transform our educational system and create better outcomes for students in our urban, public K-12 schools. When examining our school disciplinary policies, students of marginalized populations are disproportionately affected. Black students in particular are suspended or expelled at a higher rate than their white counterparts for subjective offenses. Identifying bias in disciplinary practices should be a call to action considering the consequences for marginalized students. The most dangerous consequence

for students is disengagement from school and placement in the school to prison pipeline. The school to prison pipeline is a complex network of factors that pushes students from school into our criminal justice system and primarily affects students of color. It is in our society's best interest to break this pipeline, or at the very least, disrupt it in some way. Students who end up in our criminal justice system cost the American tax payer money through funding the student's prison stay in addition to any government safety net programs that the student might end up taking advantage of once released from prison. If a student does not graduate from high school, they are less likely to obtain a job that would support their household, leading to students to use programs like Section Eight housing, SNAP benefits, or WIC benefits. Restorative practices are an alternative to these traditional disciplinary practices that allow students to stay in school, repair relationships, and address the harm they have caused. Restorative practices are in no way an 'easy way out' of punitive practices, but rather a more emotionally taxing and time intensive experience since the process requires a personal inventory of why the student caused harm in the first place and to repair damage they may have caused to other students or educators. Ultimately, restorative practices would keep students in school, improving school culture and student academic achievements.

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## **Project Description**

My project is an informational podcast on the subject of restorative practices in K-12 public schools. The podcast, entitled “School, Interrupted,” is a podcast that focuses on equity and justice in our American Education System. I refer to the subject of restorative practices as a “segment” featured in the podcast to leave the podcast open more broadly if I later want to feature other topics. The submitted episode is the first of what I am guessing will be a total of 5 episodes on the subject of restorative practices.

The podcast is a composite of information I have gained from my literature review, components featured in my presentation for the RED Conference, and interviews with those working with restorative practices in Nashville, TN. I was already working on my literature review for my capstone and already working on my presentation for the RED Conference since it was my LDUS final project. I made a list of the variety of interviewees I hoped to get which included those working with restorative practices in middle school, high school, an academic who studies urban education, the Metropolitan Nashville Public School restorative practices coordinator, and someone from a community partner that works with schools around restorative practices. Talking to colleagues, my advisor, and my internship supervisor helped me gain connections and additional people to add to my interview list. I diligently reached out to those I hoped to interview and scheduled a convenient time to meet them at their workplace. I used audio recording equipment from the Curb Center and from Wyatt’s Technology department. I created an interview release form that both the interviewee and I signed and made a copy for each of us to retain for our records.

I came up with a standard set of questions that I would modify for each interviewee based on their relationship to restorative practices and how they engaged in the subject. I ended up

recording seven interviews. I primarily used the GarageBand application to edit clips from interviews, my own recordings, and music to put together an episode. I currently host the episode in my public, online SoundCloud account.

**Podcast episode can be found at this link:** [www.tinyurl.com/school-interrupted](http://www.tinyurl.com/school-interrupted)

## Project Write-Up

I believe that my podcast has the ability to impact educators, parents, and students. I currently have an online form that collects the information of folks who have expressed interest in receiving a link to the podcast once it has been made available. So far, the list is comprised of those who work in juvenile justice, school social workers, education students, educators, family, and friends. Many of the individuals on the list have reached out to me personally for the information that I have collected and have expressed a desire to transform their communities by using the podcast as a resource. I have an offer from the University of Memphis to return to their campus and do another, longer session on restorative practices in the fall and a request from a couple of organizations, one local and one in my hometown of Kansas City, to do informational presentations.

My podcast directly relates to my research. I incorporate some of my research into the podcast, but it also provides a background for the interviews I conducted. For example, my research informed me of the origin and evolution of restorative justice and restorative practices in schools. One of the questions I feature on the first episode of the podcast is what interviewees had to say about how *they* learned about restorative practices. The research also reinforced the need to spread the information that I learned. Restorative practices have the ability to transform schools, communities, and homes that could help improve relationships and be the basis for a more nonviolent world. Lack of information or misconceptions about the subject seem to be the leading factor to not implementing some form of restorative practices in spaces that could benefit from it. My hope is that putting out the information I have gained through my own research and

the invaluable experience-based knowledge from practitioners of restorative practices will provide the tools needed, if not just a conversation starter, for folks to give restorative practices a try.

A major challenge was to find research that “proves” the effectiveness of restorative practices. Because restorative practices in schools is a fairly recent phenomenon, there is a lack of research with statistics that, for instance, tracks students who have had a restorative encounter to measure the impact on that student’s educational outcome. The main research that I found outlined the *possibilities* of the impact restorative practices can have on students and educational systems; or described researchers’ encounters at institutions that are using restorative practices. Another challenge was contacting and keeping appointments with folks to interview. Every person I hoped for an interview with had an extremely busy schedule, as did I as a student, intern, and student-worker. A couple of folks I had to schedule months out because of the high demand of their time, and when I did interview them I had to be especially mindful of the 30 minutes I was allotted to be in conversation with them. Another challenge was technology and the podcasting itself. I have never created a podcast, or any kind of audio/visual project before. I did extensive research on what technology would be most appropriate, podcast etiquette, how to conduct a productive interview, and how to use different applications to upload and edit sound. I ended up using the Curb Center’s audio recorder, but they only had one so I shared it with Tyree Jordan for a time. I would have it available for my use Thursday and Friday and then return it to Tyree at the Bordeaux library on Mondays. Eventually we had to return the recording device and I had to use individual audio recorders with lavalier microphones for the interviewee and myself and then sync up the sound. I had to be trained on all of this technology. All of this was very

time intensive and that did not include the time I spent trying out and using different audio editing devices and services. I ended up using three different applications to edit the sound, and was never satisfied with the results. Even recording myself for sound was difficult. I had trouble finding a locale where I could record myself without extensive “background noise” and my seasonal allergies made it difficult to 1) not sound stuffed up and sick and 2) not sneeze or cough while recording. With that being said, I now have a large body of knowledge to apply to various projects.

I learned a lot about unfamiliar technology that I now know how to use. I am familiar with podcasting and the software to use to edit audio. I have knowledge on how to conduct a productive interview and what kind of release forms to create. I learned the stories of seven individuals who interact with restorative practices in different ways. Some of these individuals interact with restorative practices on a purely academic level, some on a criminal justice level, and some in academic settings. Somehow, when I asked them all the same question, “How would you describe restorative practices in one word?” they all came up with different responses that were also somehow the same. It taught me about applicability of restorative practices. Each person came from a different field and a different perspective so they chose words that were different, yet somehow each described the same concept. It was very fascinating and affirming to have conversations with those who were doing restorative practices in schools. They were able to describe to me different ways of using restorative practices in their settings. They described success stories and used anecdotes that backed up research I had read. The research itself taught me so much. I learned about the Restorative Practices continuum that ranges informal to formal.

I now know what each of part of the continuum is and how to use it in real life. I now know about the International Institute of Restorative Practices and all of its work to make the world a more restorative place. I now own four books directly related to restorative practices in the classroom. One of the books is just on restorative circles and how to best utilize them in a classroom setting. I learned that, like most every other space in this world, children of color, children with different abilities, and children who identify on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum are disproportionately disciplined and excluded from school. Restorative practices can be a way to keep these marginalized students in school. I learned more about the school to prison pipeline. I learned that we arrest children in school and keep them in an almost inescapable loop of our justice system. I learned that we make it so difficult for marginalized students to finish school that we should loudly celebrate their achievements. I remember when I graduated high school it was not celebrated as an “accomplishment.” Neither was my graduation from my undergraduate institution. The primarily white, middle class family and community I grew up in expected these things of me and, in reality, I had no reason *not* to achieve them. I had supports from all over to help and guide me. No one questioned my ability to achieve, and, in fact, it was nourished. I did not have to learn another language in school or work to support my family’s income. I had a stable, heterosexual parent household that was never discriminated against. In a world where the minimum wage fails to support a household and it seems like you need a master’s degree to hold a job that used to be done by high school graduates, I feel extremely passionate about helping kids stay in school. I discovered this passion through my research and experience of restorative practices.

I had only a vague idea of what restorative practices were when I began my internship in October of last year. I took the internship primarily because I wanted experience in a classroom setting, since I do not have a formal background in education. My internship supervisor's role in the school as Restorative Practices Coordinator was an added fringe benefit to me. Probably the most consistently important social justice issue to me, which plays a role in other issues that are important to me, is nonviolence. Using restorative practices in schools was an "ah ha!" moment for me. It gave me language and a space to explore how to treat relationships, especially those with inherent power dynamics, nonviolently. A phrase I try to live by is "cura personalis." Cura personalis is a Latin phrase to describe an idea of "care for the whole person." Restorative practices do just that. It provides a framework to engage another in caring for a student's whole being.

As far as what is next, there is a lot! I will continue to produce episodes of "School, Interrupted" to finish up the segment on restorative practices by the end of this summer. Time permitting, if the reception to the segment on restorative practices is good I would like to continue the podcast and do different segments on topics of justice and equity in our American Education System. Immediately following the completion of my M.Ed. in Learning, Diversity, and Urban Studies, I will start a M.Ed. in Secondary Education seeking licensure in Social Studies. I hope to apply the knowledge I have gained through my time in the Learning, Diversity, and Urban Studies cohort to my studies in Secondary Education. Upon completion of my second M.Ed., I hope to teach social studies in a middle school or high school. I do not yet know what grade or subject I would like to teach. I do not know even where I will teach. Upon

graduating in May of 2020, my husband will have been accepted into a fellowship for Pulmonary Critical Care, which could move us across the country. Wherever we end up, I hope to work in an urban, public school that is open to my pedagogy rooted in liberation and critical thinking and would allow me to use restorative practices in a meaningful way in the school and my classroom.