

POWER AND AUTHORITY IN THE STUDENT–INSTRUCTOR RELATIONSHIP IN A  
RESTORATIVE PRACTICES–BASED GRADUATE PROGRAM

A DISSERTATION

Submitted by

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## **Abstract**

This study examined power and authority in the student–instructor relationship in a restorative practices–based graduate program. This qualitative investigation utilized a narrative approach. Ten alumni of the International Institute for Restorative Practices master’s degree programs were engaged in a one-time face-to-face interview and document review of their final master’s degree capstone papers. A listening guide voice-centered method was used as the primary data analysis method. This study found that participants used highly consistent language when describing the teachers and professors who were most meaningful to them, regardless of life stage. The second finding was that participants had meaningful personal experiences in this program, which they described using therapeutic language. The participants’ narratives often centered on reconciling past conflict, hardship, or trauma. The third finding was that relationships with the classroom group as a whole were more important to participants than relationships with professors alone. Finally, this study discovered that many of these participants were drawn to this program out of a desire to make change in the world and that this desire was driven by conflicts and other elements of their personal life stories. This study has implications for adult learning institutions implementing participatory and collaborative models of instruction.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Rationale for Study and Research Question

This study involved adult learners who had graduated from the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) master's degree program. The IIRP is a graduate school that employs an explicit model for the exercise of power and authority with their students. The IIRP is the first graduate school to systematically employ the restorative power and authority model in instruction, group processes, and student relations. This approach to human relationships was developed by Wachtel (2004) and is based on the hypothesis that human beings are happier, healthier, more productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when people in positions of authority do things *with* them rather than *to* them or *for* them. The goal of the field of restorative practices is to positively influence society by improving the quality of relationships and developing social connectedness through intentional and systemic implementation of practices that reflect this hypothesis (Wachtel, 2004). This approach is being applied in K–12 education, social work, organizational management, criminal justice, counseling, and with the advent of the IIRP graduate school, higher education. At the moment, the restorative practices approach is probably best categorized as an emerging practice as its application in the aforementioned fields remains confined to small-scale institutional efforts.

All instructors at the IIRP have been trained in and are required to adhere to this relational philosophy in their informal interactions with students as well as in the formal design of their classroom activities. Although a growing body of evidence has documented the effects of this approach in areas such as K–12 education (Morrison, 2003), criminal justice (Masters, 1997a), and family services (Merkel-Holguin, Nixon, & Burford, 2002), only one other study has investigated the application of this philosophy in graduate education. Adamson (2012)

investigated the IIRP student experience and found that this type of learning environment cultivated emotional and relational learning and that students evidenced transformative learning experiences related to their participation in restorative processes. Whereas Adamson's study focused on the transformative learning experience, this study sought to examine the student–instructor relationship, particularly through the lens of restorative practices as a power and authority model. Little is known concerning how adult learners experience this approach and how it affects their learning experience. This study investigated the question, what are the experiences of adult learners in a restorative practices–based graduate program with regard to aspects of power and authority in relationships with instructors?

### **Sociocultural Context and Researcher Positioning**

The IIRP is a new higher education institution and nonprofit that evolved from two other nonprofit organizations: the Community Service Foundation and Buxmont Academy. These two organizations have provided day-treatment alternative schools, counseling, and foster-group homes to troubled youth in Southeastern Pennsylvania since 1977. Both organizations were founded by two former public school teachers, Ted and Susan Wachtel. Susan Wachtel is the IIRP's former dean of students and is now retired. Ted Wachtel continues as the IIRP's current president. The IIRP was founded in 2000 as a nonprofit organization with a mission to provide restorative practices training and consulting to schools, youth-serving organizations, and criminal justice agencies. The IIRP president and directors have also collaborated with other professionals around the world who were sympathetic to the restorative practices approach to found offices and affiliates in Europe, the UK, Central and South America, Asia, and Australia. The IIRP was instrumental in creating a unified rationale that restorative practices, although including existing concepts from many academic fields, constituted a new field of study worthy of graduate-level

scholarship in its own right. In 2006 the school obtained approval to operate and grant master's degrees in the State of Pennsylvania, and in 2011 the school was accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Approximately 80% of the IIRP student body and alumni are female, and approximately 37% are minorities, with African Americans being the largest minority group at the time of this study. The IIRP faculty is also largely female, though not as racially diverse as the student body. Among the five full-time faculty, one is a man, one has a minority ethnic background (Palestinian), and one is a White African who recently emigrated to the US. As a very new and relatively small program, the IIRP student and alumni populations change with each new cohort of students. New efforts to draw larger numbers of international students from a number of regions in Asia, Latin America, and Europe are sure to dramatically affect the demographics of this population in the coming years. As such, there is not yet a predictable demographic portrait of the student body and alumni.

I am an administrator at IIRP (the director of continuing education) and a part-time lecturer in the graduate program. I do not supervise faculty, but I am a public figure in the field. I manage the IIRP's noncredit professional development and implementation projects. As discussed in the Method section in this dissertation, I am an inside researcher and biased in favor of restorative practices as an approach in education. Throughout this report and in my study design I have sought to discuss my bias openly and observe its impact on my research. Anderson and Jones (2000) noted that insider administrator research has great potential to inform institutional practice but also that it presents several challenges, including the researcher's ability to take risks and potentially challenge the organization's belief and practice.

When I began this study I had many assumptions about power and authority in contemporary U.S. society. My personal experience of power and authority as they manifest in education is seen through the lens of my working-class upbringing, my biography as a learner and my identity as a 38-year-old White male. In particular, I am committed to the idea that social class ideologies and forces powerfully shape educational programming and practice in the United States. My early experience as a young learner from a working-class family and later as a first-generation college student strongly shaped my views on education and the way in which I perceive the world. Because this study approached these topics with a narrative framework, it is appropriate to briefly explore my own story as a learner to firmly position myself as a researcher.

I was raised in a working-class family during the 1970s and 1980s. This period in the United States saw the systematic rollback of New Deal social policy and the labor reforms that had followed World War II (Zinn, 2003). My family had a firm and positive sense of identity as working class—a self-identification that has become increasingly rare and invisible in U.S. society (Shor, 1996). Most of my family and extended family were wracked by labor disputes, strikes, and unemployment in the machining and manufacturing industries during this formative period of my life. Jobs were lost. Lifestyles and, in a sense, hope declined. I grew up acutely sensitive to matters of social justice and power relations, particularly those related to class. At a very young age I was instilled with a sense that, as stated by Paulo Freire (1998), “insofar as I am a conscious presence in the world, I cannot hope to escape my ethical responsibility for my action in the world” (p. 26). I approached the world and my learning as things that should lead to action and transformation. Likely stemming from the economic hardship and labor conflicts I witnessed as a child, I came to see the world as a place of struggle. But I also felt a great sense of hope that things could and should be different—that the people who had power in society and

how they wielded it could change. This has been the overarching frame for my experience as a learner and as an advocate for social change.

I attended a thoroughly working-class elementary school in the immediate suburbs of Philadelphia. Early on I was identified as gifted. This was a strange experience. I was happy to have the empowering, if limited, experience of weekly gifted classes where we were encouraged to explore our own interests and trusted to be self-directed in our learning. However, the experience led me to reflect on why the other children did not have the same experience at school. Why were other classes not facilitated in a similar manner? Why was one class participatory and student centered, while the other was passive and teacher centered?

I was experiencing two different types of education simultaneously. The one for gifted children prepared me to be self-directed, ask questions, and solve problems creatively. My other education taught me not to question adults, to follow directions, to stay in my seat, and to memorize what I was taught (Shor, 1996). Even at that age, one seemed designed to create future leaders and the other to create future workers who would be compliant and accept direction (Finn, 1999). My crisis was that I did not like either option. I did not want to be a machinist like my father, nor did I want to be a capitalist. I did not want to struggle economically like my parents, but I didn't want to be a part of oppressing others. I had become a transgressor—a student unable to make easy compromises with what I saw as a deeply flawed system of education and indoctrination (hooks, 1994).

In the gifted classroom we were encouraged to dialogue directly with the teacher. From the arrangement of the furniture to what manner of projects we wanted to pursue, we had a tremendous amount of influence over our learning experience. It was through this dialogic process that I first learned how to best approach learning in general. The gifted teachers seemed

to know that to do well students have to learn how to be learners as an integral part of the process (Shor & Freire, 1987). This classroom had a give and take of perspectives and ideas. I learned how to approach a subject or area of interest without being told what I needed to know. The teacher frequently challenged us, but not about specific points of knowledge. Instead, she might ask if we were learning what we expected to learn. She would ask if what we were learning connected in any way with previous projects. She asked if the way she was behaving as a teacher was helpful to us. She encouraged us to think critically and to consider why or why not something might be true and by whose criteria. We engaged in a dialogic process that through its give and take created new meaning instead of uncritical acceptance of prior knowledge (Shor & Freire, 1987). Ironically, it was precisely this liberating type of education that would aid me in understanding what I felt was so wrong with the rest of schooling in general.

Middle school was even more tumultuous. After a few years of unemployment and unsteady work, my father's new job took our family away from the city to a rural area. My new school was sharply divided into very affluent children from the bucolic environs of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and rural farmers whose children were destined to take over the family farm or learn a skilled trade. During my first meeting at the school, the staff recommended that I be placed in the "intermediate level"—a lower academic level despite my having been enrolled in gifted classes throughout elementary school. Parents from a more privileged background might have protested or appealed to the principal. However, being uncomfortable in the school environment, my parents acquiesced. I later wondered if this reflected their own tendency to not question the decisions of educational authority figures (Finn, 1999). At this point in my life I developed a firm sense of rebelliousness toward traditional education.

I recall one science teacher in particular. He was fond of regularly singing a version of the *Wizard of Oz* song “If I Only Had a Brain.” It went something like this: “We would teach them all their letters and teach them about science *if they only had a brain.*” He was also fond of patrolling the aisles and drilling us on content while holding various objects such as an eraser or stuffed animal. If we got the answer wrong, he would swat us on the head with the stuffed animal and shout, “Wrong!” At other times, he would simulate a negative game-show buzzer sound indicating that we had lost. I was as angered by his low expectations as I was perplexed how others students laughed along. Freire (1998) described these classrooms as authoritarian or teacher centered environments in which teachers illegitimately extend the power derived from his or her superior knowledge over the independence of individual students. Here the message was that good students will be silent, will listen, and will learn to obey. In retrospect, perhaps my science teacher had internalized a fatalistic view of these children’s futures. These were students destined for work—not leadership. Perhaps he was playing his role, consciously or not, in a process of conditioning students into a passive and disempowered position (Freire, 1998).

My resistance usually manifested by asking pointed questions around process. Do we have to do the assignment this way? Can we pick a topic we are actually interested in? Can we move around today? Can we develop a project idea ourselves? I tried to ask questions that would expose the arbitrary nature of my teachers’ use of authority. This passive resistance took many forms, as it commonly does in the dulling undemocratic classroom (Shor, 1992). I knew that I needed to do well in school in order to find a future different than the paths of my father, uncles, and brothers. But I also had a sense of distrust in school as an institution. That was how I learned to resist.

I noticed, especially in high school, that many other students rebelled by doing as little as possible. Some seemed to wear poor grades like a badge of honor in a strange war of resistance that had very little to do with their desire to learn. Being friends with many of these students, I knew that most of them loved learning—they just didn't like school. I always admired those bright D students who openly rebelled. They were very honest. Many of them went on to be very successful in later life. In his college-level classes with working-class students, Ira Shor (1996) dissected some of these methods of learned resistance to educational authority. One example is a fascinating discussion on “Siberias” that students create within the classroom. By sitting in the rear corners students act out their desire for distance from the source of authority—the front. Students avoid sitting near teachers for practical reasons (easier to nap, pay less attention, have freedom to do other things), but they also do so because they have learned to see classroom authority figures as people to resist. In short, choosing to sit in the back of the classroom is not necessarily a sign of the student not wanting to learn; rather, it may be a sign that the student does not want to learn in the traditional, passive style.

Shor (1996) experimented with “moving to Siberia”—sitting in the back of the room, moving around, generally disrupting the usual patterns of behavior. Students reacted with countermoves such as twisting their body language away from him or moving to the front. Shor reported feeling the students' palpable discomfort. He had to confront not only this conditioning in his students but also how his educational values learned at elite Ivy League institutions could be translated to his working-class students. The difference between Shor and my middle school science teacher was that Shor ascribed his students' resistance to their conditioning instead of their inherent potential.



This dynamic of praxis and resistance persisted with me throughout my high school, college, and graduate-school experiences outside the IIRP. In my personal experience there wasn't much difference in the teacher- or professor-centered classroom in my K–12 experience and my higher education experience. Throughout my life I have always gauged the quality of my relationships with educators by how they exercised their power and authority in the classroom. A deep sense of alienation from formal education never left me. In college and graduate school I witnessed the same types of educators and the same behaviors among students. Most professors, however bright or well intentioned, led a very authoritarian, educator-centered classroom. Most students, having rather low expectations for engagement, acquiesced and did their work without much passion. Other students rebelled. Still other students dreamed, however vaguely, about how education could be transformed. After college, I worked as a community organizer and labor activist, but after several years I was ready for a change. One of my childhood friends recommended that I apply to work with one of the IIRP's sister organizations serving troubled youth. I approached the work with very little thought of where it might lead or how it connected with my past experience. I just needed a job until I figured out what I wanted to do next with my life. As my first year progressed, I began to understand that the work we were engaged in was a part of a larger social movement with an increasingly distinct philosophy. I did not have a clear vision for how educational institutions could be different until my experience with restorative practices. This new field put into concrete language a power and authority model for educators that matched and made explicit the practices of the most empowering educators from my life. My work in helping institutions implement this approach and my own experience as an IIRP graduate student and later a lecturer have been personally transformative.

It was not only personal dissatisfaction with much of my own experience that drove me, but a deep sense of solidarity with the poor and working class, especially youth. As I discuss below, I believe that restorative practices have the potential to transform educational practice at all levels. My work with the IIRP is representative of that commitment. That commitment is at the same time ideological, experiential and personal. It is representative of my positioning as a researcher and instructive as to my biases and the motivating factors behind my research, which are rooted in my own unique story as a learner.

Many of the fundamental theoretical commitments of restorative practices are not new. In education, restorative practices is probably best viewed as a modern multidisciplinary formulation of the strand of progressive education that recognized education as something that should be student centered, problem oriented, and rooted in the here and now of the student's life, rather than only as preparation for some future social activity (Ryan, 1995). In this respect restorative practices shares the intellectual inheritance of John Dewey (1997), who, similar to the restorative practices critique (Wachtel, 2004), regarded traditional education as a scheme "of imposition from above and outside" that sought to inculcate habits of "docility, receptivity, and obedience" (Dewey, 1997, p. 18). Restorative practices theory (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009) shares Dewey's (1997) commitment to a form of education that values free expression, learning through experience, and present-centered problem-solving. However, Dewey's philosophy is primarily situated within the 20th-century liberal tradition and its particular goal of negotiating class conflict through government programming and democratic social control (Ryan, 1995). As such, Dewey's liberal education philosophy fell more in line with the instrumental progressives who hoped to ameliorate the effects of class conflict through reforming large social systems and the widening of opportunities for prosperity (Norris, 2004). However, I

argue below that restorative practices as a field is more appropriately situated within the more radical progressive tradition of Friere (1998) and Shor (1996), who viewed education as being in need of fundamental reform that would ultimately require a societal power shift in favor of nonelite, middle- and working-class learners.

Restorative practices theory could also be said to form part of the landscape of collaborative learning theory. This growing body of theory reflects the thinking of Piaget and Vygotsky, who acknowledge that group learning involves cognitive developmental processes that create sociocognitive conflict and stimulate the learning process (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998). Practices such as circles (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2010) and “fair process” (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997) evidence the influence of collaborative learning theory over the course of the 20th century. Circles aim to enable a group to make learning an interactive and interpersonal experience as well as a private intellectual activity (Adamson, 2012). Kim and Mauborgne’s (1997) research into fair process revealed that collaborative decision making enhanced not only productivity but also individual and group development. By acknowledging the interpersonal dimension of learning, restorative practices brings students into creative tension with the views, thoughts, and life experiences of their colearners. As a new multidisciplinary field, restorative practices offers a distinct formulation of these ideas as a cohesive hypothesis of human behavior and combines them with an explicit focus on the practical application of specific restorative processes.

### **Definition of Terms**

Restorative practices is a relatively new field of study. It was first articulated as a field by Wachtel (2004) and its modern Western roots go only as far back as the restorative justice movement of the 1970s (Zehr, 2002). The field of restorative practices is undergoing a rapid

evolution in theory development and practice innovation. As such, it is important to discuss the origins of restorative practices theory, its early practitioners, and its intellectual predecessors. As discussed below, restorative practices theory draws from developments in many fields, all of which share a commitment to a collaborative and participatory model of authority.

**The origins of restorative practices.** Restorative practices is a new transdisciplinary field that draws on scholarship and practice from the fields of psychology, education, criminal justice and organizational management. This field has its roots in restorative justice. Beginning with experiments by mediators and conflict resolution experts in the 1970s, proponents of restorative justice sought to reframe the social view of crime. Instead of viewing crime as an offense against the state, restorative justice theorists held that crime is more accurately viewed as harm done to people and relationships (Zehr, 2002). Through this new lens, the goal of justice becomes the need to restore connectedness and relationships (Zehr, 2002). Thus, the goal of restorative justice processes is to actively involve those directly affected by an offense (i.e., victims, offenders, and those who care about them) in repairing the harm that has been done. This new way of viewing wrongdoing challenges the traditional role of authorities and professionals serving those affected by crime and wrongdoing. Instead of professionals “stealing conflicts” from direct stakeholders by imposing sanctions and impersonal judicial processes, the approach with restorative justice is for those in authority to take a secondary role by providing opportunities for stakeholders to communicate directly, share their stories, and discuss how the harm might be repaired (Christie, 1977, p. 1).

Multiple studies from the 1990s to the present have found that this approach results in much higher levels of satisfaction, perception of fairness among victims and offenders, and reduced offending when compared to traditional justice (Abramson & Moore, 2002; Masters,

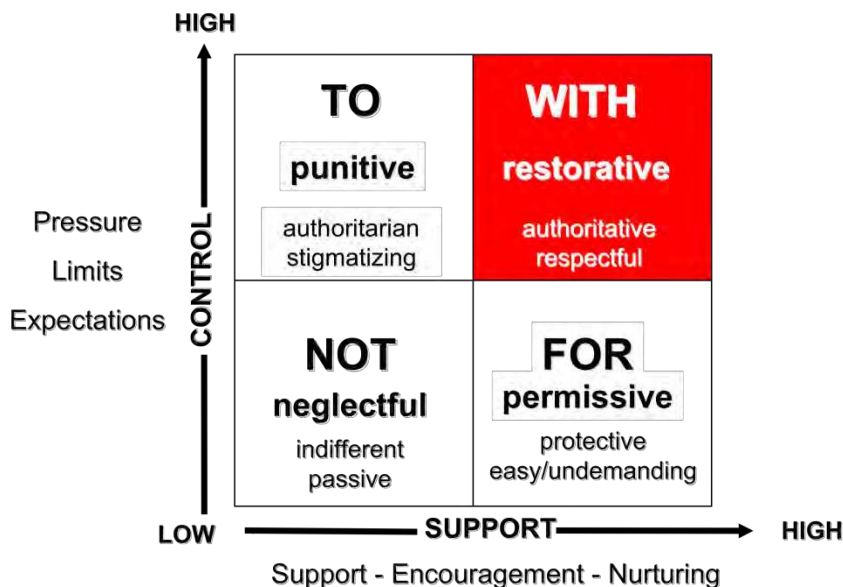
1997a; Masters, 1997b; McCold, 1999; McCold & Wachtel, 2003; Pennell & Burford, 1994). This led many restorative justice practitioners and criminologists to investigate why restorative justice seemed to provide a more satisfying personal and emotional experience of reparation than traditional responses to wrongdoing. In *Crime, Shame and Reintegration* Australian criminologist John Braithwaite (1989) posited that the most potent normative force in society is the prosocial influence of those with whom we have the most intimate relationships. Braithwaite (1989) suggested that the stronger these relationships the less likely people are to offend in the first place. If this assertion is true, then a truly effective system of justice would not only seek to repair harm done to relationships after an offense but also encourage the proactive building of community and relationships in the broader society prior to any wrongdoing.

In the 1990s and early part of the 21st century, restorative justice theorists (McCold, 1999; Wachtel, 2004) found this key insight increasingly reflected in new practices developed independently from such diverse disciplines as organizational management (Johnson, 1998; Kim & Mauborgne, 1997), social work (Berg, 1994; Pennell & Burford, 1994), criminal justice (Masters, 1997a), education (Brookfield, 1995), and psychotherapy (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Miller & Stiver, 1997; White, 1989; Yalom, 1995). Ideas such as learning organizations (Senge, 1990), communities of practice (Wenger & Snyder, 2000), family-group decision making (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2002), restorative school discipline (Morrison, 2003), and client-centered therapy (Freedman & Combs, 1996) all seemed to recognize the power of relationships, connectedness, and giving direct stakeholders the maximum possible role in managing their own affairs. All of these ideas seemed to provide a similar critique of traditional authority-centered practices as ineffective in addressing what some scholars felt was increasing disconnectedness in society (Braithwaite, 1998; Wachtel, 2004). Many of the ideas in these fields were not new.

However, during this period there seemed to be a striking confluence of practices from diverse fields that shared a theoretical foundation regarding the right relationship between people in positions of authority and the people they serve (Zehr, 2002). The short history of restorative practices can be defined as an attempt to provide a unifying framework that clearly described this more empowering model of power and authority.

The field of restorative practices might have been named many different things. However, its founding theorists (Braithwaite, 1989; McCold, 1999; Wachtel, 2004; Zehr, 2002) were heavily influenced by the restorative justice movement. These theorists borrowed the word *restorative* (Zehr, 2002) to denote the restoration of community, connections, and relationships, but substituted the word *practices* to encompass both proactive and responsive interpersonal processes (Wachtel, 2004, p.1). Wachtel (2004) asserted that this new field was not only a collection of best practices from various fields but also stood to offer an explicit model for the optimal use of authority in any pursuit, with the goal being the proactive development of relationships and community. Viewed as such, restorative practices theory became a theoretical lens and a set of processes that could be explicitly applied to many fields. As an educational institution, the application of restorative practices to education was of great interest to the leadership of the IIRP's consortium of organizations.

**The restorative power and authority model.** Restorative practices is built around the hypothesis that “individuals function best when those in positions of authority do things *with* them rather than *to* them or *for* them” (all emphasis original; Wachtel, 2004, p.1). Wachtel's (2004) social-discipline window offers a simple and descriptive model for most forms of authority—how one exercises social power.



*Figure 1.* Social discipline window. From “From Restorative Justice to Restorative Practices: Expanding the Paradigm,” by T. Wachtel, 2004, Paper presented at the 5th International IIRP Conference, Vancouver, Canada, p. 2. Retrieved from [http://www.iirp.edu/iirpWebsites/web/uploads/article\\_pdfs/bc04\\_wachtel.pdf](http://www.iirp.edu/iirpWebsites/web/uploads/article_pdfs/bc04_wachtel.pdf). Copyright 2004 by the International Institute for Restorative Practices. Reprinted with permission.

Beginning with the high control and low support box, this type of authority figure relies on force and coercion as the primary mode of establishing social discipline and behavioral compliance. Control under such authority figures is typically experienced as authoritarian. Rules are stated, little support or nurturing is offered, and punishment or fear of punishment is the primary mechanism by which the behavior of subordinates is managed. This authority model is primarily oriented around the goal of behavioral compliance as opposed to understanding or the internalization of rules and norms developed through active engagement. Power is wielded in a way that limits the ability of stakeholders in the community to engage one another directly, develop shared goals and expectations collectively, and participate fully in communal activity (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997). Highly punitive cultures might succeed in establishing a modicum of order and performance through coercion and intensive monitoring of behavior, but in the end they tend to generate resentment, resistance, and negative subcultures (Braithwaite, 1989). This

reflects Glasser's (1998) assertion that "managing people depends for its ultimate success on the cooperation of the people being managed" (p. 17).

On a deeper level, the punitive, authoritarian model (hereafter, *authoritarian model* for brevity) does not typically allow community members to share power collectively or discuss issues of power openly (Foucault, 1979). In fact, open conversations about power and authority are usually discouraged, as such conversations are necessarily seen as a challenge to institutional order (Foucault, 1980). It is common that authority figures in such environments justify control and coercion through the insistence that subordinates are too inherently unruly, lazy, or incompetent to be meaningfully engaged (Finn, 1999). This creates an environment in which potentially participatory discussions around power and authority are reduced to zero-sum authority games in which only authorities wield power and learners either submit or resist. Indeed the whole idea of power in a punitive environment carries a negative connotation (Foucault, 1980). Instead of power being the ability to creatively interact and effect change in one's community, power becomes defined as the ability to control. Power becomes "what says no" (p. 139).

In the classroom this approach is typified by tightly controlled, educator-centered learning. The presumption is that the educator is the primary content expert whose task is to fill the mind of the student. Freire (1971) termed this approach the "banking model" (p. 71) of education, in which the educator dispenses knowledge and the student receives it. The student's role under this model of education is largely passive. The task of the student revolves around the absorption of course material and the ability to regurgitate information on demand. William Glasser (1998) described this type of classroom as one in which students are seen as things to be managed. Glasser (1998) noted that much of pedagogy and education institutions in general treat



students as if they are static, inanimate, and passive. Teachers in such classrooms expect no resistance and react harshly when it is encountered. The lack of engagement and one-way flow of communication from authority to subordinate (doing things *to* people) creates a dynamic in which it is difficult or impossible to have meaningful personal engagement in learning. The authoritarian model is the most common mode of operation for existing educational institutions both in their pedagogy and management of behavior (Brookfield, 1995; Freire, 1971; Morrison, 2003; Silber, 1972).

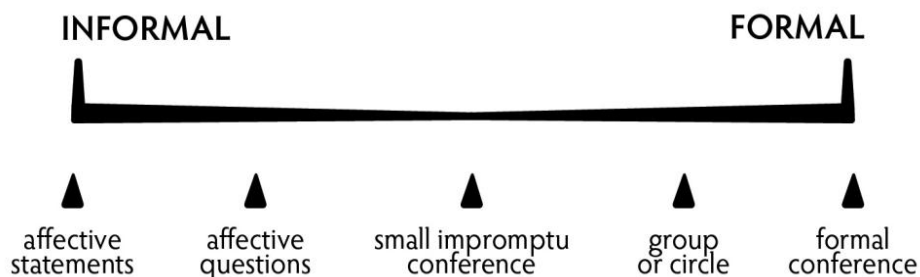
In contrast, the restorative classroom seeks to actively engage learners by providing participatory learning processes that balance the need for limits, boundaries, and structure with engagement, support, and nurturing. One foundation to this approach is a commitment to “fair process” as outlined by Kim and Mauborgne (1997, p. 69). In their research into decision-making processes of private companies, they found that organizations with the highest levels of worker satisfaction and productivity and the fewest amount of labor disputes all used a very similar process for collaborative decision making. This process allowed for both a vertical hierarchy (authority figures who take responsibility for making final decisions) and horizontal participation (inclusion of the input and voices of the people who those decisions are likely to affect). Though many organizations seemed to arrive at this form of decision making intuitively, Kim and Mauborgne (1997) noted three common steps taken by these leaders when important decisions needed to be made. They first “engaged” (p. 69) those whom the decision was likely to affect by asking for their ideas, input, and feedback. They then “explained” (p. 69) why the decision was made and rationale behind it. Finally, they provided clear “expectations” (p. 69) for behavior implied by the decision. The key insight was that workers were more concerned with how they were treated than achieving specific outcomes (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997). They also

noted that organizations utilizing fair process exhibited higher levels of creativity, collaboration, and willingness to go beyond minimum performance expectations (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997).

This approach is also reflective of the general concept of collaborative learning. Barkley (2010) asserted that for student engagement to become a regular and consistent feature of higher education, institutions must employ an explicit framework for that engagement (p. 6). In short, it is not enough for institutions to say that collaborative learning is a “good thing.” Institutions must have theory and practice in which faculty can be trained (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005). If the authoritarian model of education seeks to *force* people to learn (Shor, 1998) then the restorative model of education should make students *want* to learn.

These ideas heavily influenced restorative theorists (Costello et al., 2009) in asserting that a highly restorative classroom should evidence this participatory form of decision-making whenever possible. Wachtel (2004) argued that this can be reliably accomplished by providing a range of informal and formal engagement practices that are designed to encourage authority figures to share power and for students to take personal responsibility for their own learning, share ideas, offer opinions and collectively negotiate behavior expectations. Wachtel (2004) described simple continuum of practices arranged from informal to formal that can be employed by educational institutions seeking to create a highly restorative culture.

Practices such as affective statements and questions encourage direct and emotionally rich communication between community members as essential in the regulation of the emotional component of classroom relationships (Nathanson, 1997). Even in professional and collegial interactions between students and educators, affect and emotion play a powerful role in determining the quality and experience of that relationship (Goleman, 2006). Also, practice and



*Figure 2.* Restorative practices continuum. From “From Restorative Justice to Restorative Practices: Expanding the Paradigm,” by T. Wachtel, 2004, Paper presented at the 5th International IIRP Conference, Vancouver, Canada, p. 2. Retrieved from [http://www.iirp.edu/iirpWebsites/web/uploads/article\\_pdfs/bc04\\_wachtel.pdf](http://www.iirp.edu/iirpWebsites/web/uploads/article_pdfs/bc04_wachtel.pdf). Copyright 2004 by the International Institute for Restorative Practices. Reprinted with permission.

proficiency in the use of emotional language among social groups increases social bonding and the ability of groups to cope with and repair relationships in the wake of harm or conflict (Goleman, 2007; Zehr, 2002). The authoritarian model of education views the classroom as a collection of multiple one-on-one relationships between student and educator—if a relationship is acknowledged at all. The restorative model lens views the classroom as community of interconnected relationships with each member sharing a relationship with every other member (Costello et al., 2010). If the restorative classroom is then an interconnected community of relationships, including authority figures, then regulation of the emotional component of those relationships becomes integral to maintaining a healthy learning environment (Corey & Corey, 2001).

Practices such as small impromptu conferences provide a framework for students and/or educators to meet informally and engage each other directly to resolve problems and conflicts or repair harm (Wachtel, 2004). These meetings can be initiated by instructors or students and often include the use of the following “restorative questions” (Costello et al., 2009) as a guide for repairing any harm done to relationships:

*To respond to challenging behavior:*

What happened?

What were you thinking about at the time?

What have you thought about since?

Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?

What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

*To help those harmed by others actions:*

What did you think when you realized what happened?

What impact has this had on you and others?

What has been the hardest thing for you?

What do you think needs to happen to make things right? (p. 16)

In the authoritarian classroom it is typically the educator who alone regulates behavior and meets out consequences for misbehavior or lack of performance. In the restorative classroom, behavior regulation becomes a collective task in which educator and student share responsibility for maintaining healthy relationships, resolving conflicts and, when necessary, repairing harm (Costello et al., 2009). Instead of hoarding tasks related to behavior regulation the restorative educator seeks to build self-regulatory skills and initiative taking among the classroom community.

The restorative classroom also typically includes a commitment to the regular use of semi-formal practices such as circles. Circles provide regular forums where the classroom community can practice fair process in decision-making (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997) and respond to conflict through creative uses of restorative questions (Costello et al., 2009). Various similar forms of circles have existed since premodern times and have their roots in the practices of

indigenous and tribal cultures from around the world (Braithwaite, 2002). The practice of circles typically involves the use specific “go-round” questions or prompts that all participants take turns answering in sequence around until all have had an opportunity to be heard (Costello et al., 2010). Circles prompts might be used to simply help students get to know one another through questions such as, “What is one reason why you do the work that you do?” or “What are you hoping to learn in this class?” They might be used to help students and educators establish goals such as, “What are your learning goals for the coming month?” Circles can be used to discuss course content using prompts such as. “What is one way you personally connect with the story that we read?” They can also be used to discuss conflict or the emotional climate of the classroom. An example would be, “What do you think are the main issues in this classroom and what do you think needs to happen to make things better?” Since authority figures are expected to participate equally in such processes, circles become the regular and explicit opportunity to practice fair process, regulate affect, and provide a forum daily collaborative participation in both learning and community formation (Costello et al., 2010). In this area, restorative practices theory often draws on collaborative learning scholarship such as the use of professional learning groups (Rodger, 2001) and group reflective processes (Schon, 1983). The scope of issues that can be discussed or negotiated in circles will vary the setting and participants. However, it is important that restorative practitioners discuss and negotiate these limits and boundaries explicitly with the class or group. Restorative practices do not negate all forms of authority, leadership or hierarchy. Rather, restorative practices seek to limit authoritarianism through highly participatory processes, such as circles and fair process, that encourage power sharing (Costello et al., 2010).

The use of formal practices such as restorative conferences (Wachtel, O'Connell, & Wachtel, 2010) allow for structured opportunities to repair harm in the wake of serious behavioral incidents or conflict. Conferences allow those affected and those responsible for harm to address instances of wrongdoing—often without recourse to formal punitive sanctions. In the case of the IIRP, formal conferencing and less formal impromptu conferences utilizing restorative questions are integrated into the institutions formal student grievance process. All faculty and administration are responsible for utilizing these practices to resolve conflicts between students. Restorative conferences utilize a more formal and scripted set of restorative questions designed to ensure responsibility taking for harmful behavior, exploration of how that behavior has harmed others and how the harm can be repaired (Harris, Walgrave, & Braithwaite, 2004). Restorative conferences are built upon the understanding that when relationships are harmed people tend to react by lashing out at others, blaming themselves, withdrawing or avoiding the source of conflict (Nathanson, 1992). All of these reactions, though normal and predictable, can be harmful to relationships and community formation unless the community has processes that encourage the sharing of emotion and direct communication among those most affected (Nathanson, 1997). Restorative practices provide regular opportunities for the effective regulation of affect in groups by encouraging these practices (Wachtel, 2004).

The concept of the restorative classroom, as practiced by the IIRP graduate school, is to train all faculty, staff and administration in the practices outlined above and to employ them explicitly and systematically in all relations and learning activities with students and each other. The main theorists of this new field do not claim that the practices themselves are completely unique. In fact, most openly and readily acknowledge that most of the individual practices have existed in other forms in other settings (Wachtel, 2004). The unique contribution that this field

stands to offer, of which the IIRP graduate program is representative, is the unification of these practices under one explicit authority model and the intentional and strategic implementation of that model at the institutional level.

As discussed above, restorative practices theory has its roots in a diverse array of fields and theoretical traditions. If the above has answered the question “*what* is restorative practices?” the next section addresses the question “*why* restorative practices?” To answer that question, I first examined the historical and cultural origins of the modern authoritarian model of education. This is the prevailing model for the vast majority of youth and adult education settings in the United States—to which restorative practices is a response. I will then discuss the potential for formal education institutions to play a transformative role in society as this is inherent in the restorative philosophy and central the IIRP’s mission and rationale for its graduate programs. Finally, I will discuss restorative practices through the lens of adult learning theory in order to situate the application of restorative practices in graduate programming within the larger adult learning theory context.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter discusses the origins of the modern authoritarian model of education. I argue that this model of education, still the prevailing model in the United States, is rooted in class-based needs, struggles, and ideologies from the 20th century. Also, the field of restorative practices is explicitly transformational in its aims. This chapter discusses the potential of higher education institutions to play a role in transforming this model to one that is more participatory and restorative. Next, I discuss multidisciplinary influences common to both adult learning theory and restorative practices, namely group development theory and narrative theory, both of which relate directly to issues of power and authority. This section concludes with a discussion of the potential of restorative practices to play a transformative role in the practice of adult education and learning.

### **The Origins of the Modern Authoritarian Model of Education**

The early part of the 20th century saw the widespread growth of industrialization, the advent of mass communication, and advances in transportation (Zinn, 2003). Highly industrial societies such as the United States were becoming increasingly complex. This led American philosopher and educator John Dewey (1997) to assert that mass schooling was necessary in a highly complex society to prepare children to “share effectively in adult activities” (p. 9). Although the sentiment sounds sensible enough at first read, one must consider exactly what adult activities Dewey and others thought that individuals must be prepared to undertake. Prior to this century, most Americans lived a largely rural and agricultural existence. Most people lived or worked on farms (Zinn, 2003). Others lived in small towns that supported largely agricultural enterprises. New industrial enterprises such as coal, textiles, and large-scale manufacturing would reshape American life and the very future of Americans (Zinn, 2003). The new



industrialization required that new industrial workers and their families be increasingly concentrated in urban areas and where, according to Zinn (2003), their lives would be “filled with cause for rebellion” (p. 43). As a necessary counterweight to socialist labor agitation in these areas, “schools . . . taught that to be rich was a sign of superiority, to be poor a sign of personal failure” (p. 43). The system of public education born during this time would serve a dual function of preparing individuals for the complexity of work in a modern industrialized society while also inculcating acceptance of and belief in the necessity of a highly class-stratified and hierarchical society. The practice of power and authority in the vast majority of modern adult learning institutions has its roots in this ideological commitment. The concern of educational philosophers such as Dewey (1997) was not only with the education of the young but with the formation of the minds and habits of future workers and managers who would be trained by institutions of higher learning. Dewey (1997), as a progressive thinker, did hope to see the advent of a more student-centered practice of education. However, his educational scheme was ultimately underpinned by the belief that capitalism, and its obvious social inequities, could be reformed by better preparing individuals to operate within it and by helping its institutions to be more charitable and collaborative (Ryan, 1995). Dewey’s vision, though progressive, did not challenge the underlying class-biased ideologies of the 20th century. In fact, historians such as Zinn (2003) would assert that much of 20th-century liberal reform was in fact an explicit attempt to stave off revolutionary movements that sought to shift social control to working-class centers of social-power such as unions, workplace councils, and new revolutionary political parties. These roots have been underexamined in the adult learning literature of the United States because U.S. culture is particularly resistant to discussions of class conflict (Brookfield, 2002; Shor, 1996).

This regimented form of education would be necessary to reorient the more independent and generally libertarian agrarian mind to the complexity of urban industrial life and the need for more specialized work (Zinn, 2003). For some this belief was almost religious in its utopian fervor (Taylor-Gatto, 2000). This new, class-biased system placed the need for management of industrial development and the expansion of capitalist enterprise first and concerns for the dignity and liberty of workers, and by extension learners, second (Taylor-Gatto, 2000). As a fundamental social paradigm shift, this new society would require more than simply preparing adults to operate within it—it would require individuals to believe in it. This would require a widespread system of mass education from primary through higher education unified by specific values and ideologies molded by class interests. Dewey (1997) was an ardent evangelist for the new ideological mission of mass education. He asserted that, “by various agencies, unintentional and designed, a society transforms uninitiated and seemingly alien beings into robust trustees of its own resources and ideals. Education is thus a fostering, nurturing and cultivating process” (p. 12).

This criticism of Dewey is not to suggest that education should not prepare the young to participate in adult society. However, it does highlight the fact that any mass system of education will reflect the needs, ideologies, and desires of the dominant class in that society (Zinn, 2003). In the case of Dewey, that society was, and still is, a capitalist one that depends on social hierarchy and inequities in power and control to maintain itself (Freire, 1971). Dewey’s social analysis, like that of most liberal and progressive theorists (Ryan, 1995), sought to treat the symptoms of capitalism instead of the root sickness. On the farm, independence, innovation, and ingenuity were a necessary and natural fruit of rural life. However, in the factory dependence on owners, acceptance of monotony and obedience would be prized in workers—and would need to

be reinforced by managers deeply committed to this new pattern of relationships. The factory experience and aspects of modern schooling and higher education began to take on many similarities. Public schooling for the young would now prepare young people for industrial life by providing the minimal knowledge to perform new and more scientifically complex and compartmentalized work tasks. Higher education would now slowly move away from enlightenment-era ideas of liberal education that viewed learning as primarily concerning the cultivation of virtue (Taylor-Gatto, 2000). Higher education began to shift its emphasis to the preparation of future managers to effectively support and propagate the new industrial-capitalist order (Zinn, 2003). Adult learning began to take on a more functional and utilitarian quality as the need for an industrial bureaucracy grew (Freire, 1971; Taylor-Gatto, 2000). The largely independent and self-directed learning and apprenticeship models of rural learning would need to be replaced by highly coordinated and standardized models of learning that were more hierarchical, dogmatic, and authoritarian than any that had preceded them in American life.

Freire (1971) asserted that the effect of this shift was a fundamental dehumanization because adults became increasingly harnessed to goals that undermined their own self-interest as members of the working-class majority and as human beings (p. 44). Regarding physical labor, Marx and Engels (1998) asserted that one of the primary harmful effects of highly industrialized capitalist societies was to alienate workers from the product of their labor through regimentation, specialization, and lack of ownership of the final product. This effect was mirrored in higher education. The traditional liberal arts educational orientation had, for centuries, focused on the personal development of virtue and the intrinsic value of knowledge. But by the mid-20th century, the focus had shifted toward meeting the external need for training technical managers of the new capitalist economy (Brookfield, 2002).

The discussion above is not an attempt to argue for a socialist ideology. Rather, it is intended to examine the alienation that modern capitalism has produced and its effect on education as seen through the lens of those theorists who have critically reflected on the negative aspects of capitalism and industrialization in the 20th century. This critique is not only applicable to the Western capitalist countries but also to the supposed socialist regime that once existed in Russia, modern-day China, and other countries laboring under various authoritarian governments and power structures. The Russian and Chinese governments have actually utilized a form of state-centered capitalism that merged authoritarian rule and central planning with market capitalism. They also exhibit class divisions similar to republican and parliamentary capitalist societies (Albert, 2003).

In his essay, "Overcoming Alienation as the Practice of Adult Education," Stephen Brookfield (2002) discussed how Erich Fromm's work on the concept of alienation was rooted in Marx's understanding of class struggle. Marx saw the alienation of worker from self as being produced by a disconnection from the product of one's labor. Fromm held that this was analogous to the alienation of student from self (as cited in Brookfield, 2002). This alienation in students is produced by the experience of authoritarian education in which their productive activity is harnessed to support goals and structures outside their immediate control or even opposite to their own self-interest. Fromm noted that goal of learning in adulthood should be to "penetrate ideological obfuscation, and thereby eliminating the alienation produced" (as cited in Brookfield, 2002, p. 98) and envisioned a socialism defined not only by economic relationships but also by the quality of interpersonal relationships. Simply put, the goal of adult education should be the liberation of individuals from this state of alienation, much like Marxism seeks to end alienation in work. This alienation described by Brookfield and Fromm has been a structural

element of most modern higher education settings since the advent of modern capitalism. In his essay “Competency and the Pedagogy of Labour,” John Field asked whether a critical pedagogy that seeks to create empowered and self-directed learners has a place in this schema. To what extent do existing andragogical practices reinforce this oppression? Can adult learning be liberated from a disempowering model of education designed to undermine the larger self-interests of learners?

The internalization of traditional power and authority structures was also observed by Lacey Wooton-Don (2000). In a semester observing student attitudes toward classroom authority over 24 college class sessions, she found that even though the instructors were frequently described in affirming terms such as “easy-going” or “laid-back,” most students also assumed that the instructor was “judging, watching and evaluating” them (Lacey Wooton-Don, 2000, p. 2). Most students described much of their work as irrelevant or “pointless,” while ironically equating the act of questioning assignments or directions as “misbehavior” and “immaturity” (Lacey Wooton-Don, 2000, p. 2). Students expressed implicit trust in the instructor and cited that the authority they ascribed to educators was primarily derived from their respect for the instructor’s institutional position instead of more personal characteristics or the relevance of their educational experience. Most noted that they were “trained” in their previous schooling how to behave “properly” in the classroom (Lacey Wooton-Don, 2000, p. 2). As noted in this study, adult educators who seek to establish new authority patterns and discourses in the classroom face great difficulty. Student conditioning around authority can sometimes run very deep. One of the central the questions for those interested in promoting a more empowering practice of education is whether formal educational institutions, often a source of indoctrination and oppression, can play an active role in transforming the experience of adult learners.

**The transformative potential of educational institutions.** For learning to be an empowering experience, students need to be able to construct their own meaning in the classroom. Students must connect learning activity to their own hopes, dreams, problems, and interests instead of the class-biased needs of elites (Shor, 1998). Shor (1998) argued that for nonalienating learning to be possible, classrooms must be participatory, critically reflective, desocializing, democratic, interdisciplinary, and activist oriented. Shor (1998) asserted that these factors assist the student in moving from a disempowered passive role into a full consideration of what they already know and then toward their own potential for making new meaning and self-management—not only in the classroom, but also in the workplace. This is perhaps one of the most critical factors for educators to grasp when attempting to build new, more empowering institutions of adult learning (Mezirow, 1998). Shor (1998) and Mezirow (1998) pointed to the necessity of putting the student in power over their learning. They asserted that this is the most reliable means of retaining a truly critical and transformative education that ripples beyond the classroom.

Educational institutions organized with these liberating goals in mind might actually assist learners in moving to more empowered developmental stages with regard to authority. William Perry asserted that a developmental scheme exists in which learners evolved toward more conscious and meaningful relationships with authority figures (as cited in Love & Guthrie, 1999). In his experience observing college students, Perry noted that students tend move from an initial position of basic dualism in which there is only right and wrong and the professor is the sole possessor of truth through various stages toward a position of “commitment in relativism” (as cited in Love & Guthrie, 1999, p. 13). In this stage, students acknowledge that multiple perspectives on the truth exist—including their own. Yet despite the knowledge of “multiple

truths,” students still develop the ability to commit to specific ideals, which is necessary for full formation as an individual (as cited in Love & Guthrie, 1999, p. 13). According to Love and Guthrie (1999), “If a decline in self-motivation among college students in general is a valid assumption, then creating environments that induce maturation or growth becomes that much more important” (p. 15). The explicit integration of this developmental scheme into the design of learning systems could potentially clarify the role of educators as facilitators rather than possessors of knowledge.

Although Perry’s work has been foundational in understanding adult development, it has been critiqued as not fully capturing the experience of female development (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997). For instance, Perry’s early developmental mapping experiments included few women, a later female-oriented study showed that women exhibited the same developmental stages exhibited by men (Belenky et al., 1997). However, this congruence cannot account for what elements of women’s experience might not have been included in Perry’s scheme. Belenky et al. (1997) noted that Perry’s scheme culminates in one’s inclusion in the community of scholars—having certified oneself as a complex and meaningful thinker with one’s own ideas and conceptualizations of the world. They asserted that this might reflect the typical course of male development, which is based on earning inclusion into hierarchical institutions, but does not reflect women’s needs for communal inclusion as a prerequisite rather than a consequence of development (p. 194). Whereas in the male experience knowledge becomes power over the unproven and uninitiated student, Belenky et al. argued for an approach she called “connected teaching” (p. 190), which seeks to nurture students’ potential through the development of relationships. Belenky et al.’s focus on nurturing teacher–student relationships

and communal inclusion is important, not only for understanding female development, but also for crafting a more restorative and relational classroom for all students.

Adam Renner (2009) asserted that education and learning institutions have the potential to play an important role in reinvigorating and building the type of community under assault by the alienating and community-destroying aspects of neoliberal capitalism. Whereas capitalistic structures of control encourage compartmentalization among the governed, educational institutions and new learning technologies have the potential to promote global and holistic thinking. Precisely because they provide the freedom to think and explore issues on a deeper level institutions of learning can be strategically poised to offer critical analysis of the current system. To do so, Renner (2006) argued they should have an orientation toward community, praxis, and courage, which he defined as follows:

*Community* - Teachers, students and parents should work together. Teachers should model amongst each other the community they wish to create in their students and communities—especially if their goals are more radical.

*Praxis* – They must be socially engaged and see “through humanizing pedagogical practices which pose problems for their students, making the world a series of issues to be researched, resolved, and improved, rather than one that is given, static, and unchanging.

*Courage* – They must be willing to challenge and engage institutions and the wider society. (p. 72)

In such institutions, learning should be designed to counteract students’ resistance to playing an active role, which can stem from learned passivity, a desire for the teacher to do the work, or passive resistance (Taylor et al., 2000). Classroom practices should work against



authoritarianism as an unethical expansion of authority that hoards empowering tasks into the control of authority figures (Taylor et al., 2000). It would be important for classrooms attempting to use this empowering approach to discuss what it means to be a good student and what assumptions teachers and administrators have about that idea. From a developmental perspective, restorative educators should expect that many students will need time and practice to grow into more empowered learners (Love & Guthrie, 1999). This is only likely to happen when students are confronted with consistently collaborative and nonhierarchical classroom practices (Renner, 2006). Shor (1996) noted that, when he designed his classroom activities to put students more in control over their learning, they often resisted the opportunity. He speculated that this resistance is often due to fear of authority figures, lack of trust based on past experience, and many years of habituated passivity in the classroom. One might challenge this idea by asserting that students who prefer more passive learning or an authoritarian classroom should have a right to such an experience. It is true that such students do indeed have a right to that type of classroom; in today's society their options are myriad. However, all educators bring an ideological framework to their practice, whether they are conscious of it or not. As such, they have a responsibility to discuss the beliefs and rationale for their educational practice openly with students and be open to challenges themselves. However, it would be an exercise in relativistic futility to not attempt to create more collaborative and restorative classrooms and institutions because a student might prefer the contrary. Institutions, educators, and students must all make ideological choices.

### **Adult Learning Theory and Restorative Practices**

Restorative practices theory has developed independently of adult learning scholarship. However, both perspectives share common concerns and influences that relate directly to the question examined in this study. This study examined the experience of adult learners in a highly

participatory group-learning environment. The study also examined the aspects of each participant's life story as a learner. Both restorative practices and adult learning scholarship have been shaped by a concern for the group-development process in highly collaborative and participatory classroom settings. Also, both perspectives have been influenced by narrative theory. Narrative theory provides a framework for the desire to empower learners by helping them develop their own unique voice and a method of integrating one's life experience into the learning process. I briefly discuss these two areas of common influence. I then conclude by discussing the potential contributions of restorative practices to adult learning theory and practice.

**Group development and narrative theory.** In adult learning environments, “facilitation” is more useful than “instruction” (McElhinney, 1994, p. 2). Unlike the educator-centered learning that many adults have encountered in their youth, adult educators have found that interactive group processes are more appropriate and effective in engaging the adult learner because such processes allow adults to utilize their existing knowledge and expertise in creating new meaning (McElhinney, 1994). Small and interactive group processes in the classroom are more appropriate to adult learning experiences where there are likely to be multiple right answers to a given problem or challenge. This idea complements Mezirow's (1997) theories of transformative learning in that groups ideally should allow for affect, critically reflect, limit the influence of disruptive members, and provide equal opportunity to challenge and generalize learning (McElhinney, 1994).

Through this type of interactive learning, adult learners not only engage in a more personal way with material but also experience unique therapeutic factors that emerge from group process and positively impact learning (Yalom, 1995). In his foundational work on group

development, Irving Yalom (1995) described these factors as instillation of hope, universality, altruism, corrective recapitulation of the primary family group, development of socializing techniques, imitative behavior, development of interpersonal relationships, corrective emotional experiences, the group as social microcosm, group cohesiveness, and existential experience. This mirrored the thinking of Carl Rogers (1997), who argued that optimal learning environments should focus on building authentic interpersonal relationships in the classroom. Thorpe, Edwards, and Hanson (1997) found that many of the concepts central to therapeutic groups are equally present in participatory and transformative learning environments: expressing realness and empathy, prizing students, trusting them, viewing students' potential instead of their limitations, and being comfortable with the uncertainty of discovery. From this perspective the teaching modality of adult educators is transformed from one primarily defined by didactic instruction to one marked more by facilitation of group learning through interactive engagement. This idea was put forth succinctly by Freire (1998) in his recommendation that educators should work toward doing things *with* students rather than *to* them and that authenticity in interpersonal dealings in the classroom is the most important factor in group formation.

On the macro level of psychological theory, interactive group learning can lead to the development of social connectedness (Wachtel, 2004). As a goal of adult learning programs, this type of learning also holds promise for civil society development (Townsend, 2006). Collaborative adult-education settings have the potential to offer corrective experiences, where students can examine their passivity and alienation to prepare themselves for a more participatory society (Brookfield, 2002). Group learning and development challenges the notion of individualistic education that centers learning only within the mind of the isolated learner. Restorative practices challenge this notion by asserting, like Brookfield (2002), that learning

must also be an interactive and interpersonal process that encourages participation in a learning community.

In an effort to make adult learning more group and student centered rather than educator centered, adult learning theory and restorative practices have been heavily influenced by the field of narrative therapy. The narrative perspective encourages individuals and groups to explore dominant themes and stories surrounding their lives. In the context of adult learning, these concepts and techniques have helped to provide a framework for examining learning in a way that accounts for students' personal biographies, thoughts, and feelings about the material. The hope is that the process of examination will lead to a richer discussion of one's personal story and the arc of a group's experience together. This examination can lead to deeper insight into the meaning of the learning process and how it connects learning with lived experiences (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Although narrative practices in education have been informed greatly by the narrative therapy, it is imperative that educators understand the difference between therapy and teaching. Although some of the practices are similar, they bring different assumptions about intended outcomes (Thorpe et al., 1997). Whereas therapy presumes that the client is there to make personal changes or address a life challenge, the student does not enter the classroom with such an intensive personal focus. Although personal growth and change might result from classroom processes, they should not become the aim. The goal of applying narrative theory to education is to deepen learning by situating otherwise lifeless material within the lived experiences of individuals and groups (Thorpe et al., 1997).

Semmler (2000) asserted that educators must encourage "storying" and "re-storying" (p. 51) if learning is to be transformative. According to White (1992), one's narrative "provides the primary frame for . . . interpretation, the activity of meaning making" (p. 1989). Our lives are

literally immersed in narrative. From our family histories to myths to the news, one's narrative is constantly forming and weaving. Group, cultural, and familial narratives are often some of the most powerful at the individual level. For instance, in "Teaching to Transgress," hooks (1994) spoke warmly of her powerful experience at Booker T. Washington public school, where she was surrounded by Black female educators. She experienced a strong and clear sense of their shared narrative. She said that they "learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization" (p. 2). This observation by hooks (1994) also highlights that one's personal narrative is always intimately intertwined with the narratives of others and that one's narrative can feel more powerful when it relates to a shared group narrative. Personal stories and group narratives are powerful because they stimulate an empathic response (Rossiter, 2003).

Stories allow people to connect emotionally as well as cognitively with subjects, people, and groups by engaging not only the intellect but also one's whole humanity or person. It is this total involvement in the narrative that demands that students take an active role in forming meaning (Rossiter, 2003). Polkinghorne (1988) asserted that meaning is not a substance, but an activity. Narrative, he explained, is one of the operations of the realm of meaning (Polkinghorne, 1988). It is the narrative impulse in humanity that seeks to understand the relationship between the elements of experience: the self and other, this experience and that, my group and the rest of the world. Polkinghorne (1988) stated that understanding a narrative is less about details and facts and more about the meaning behind what is observed and experienced. Rossiter and Clark (2007) further developed the discussion of this process of meaning making by stating that narrative is a metaphor for human life. When an individual or group experiences something unique, important, or surprising, the experience is usually named through the use of story and

metaphor (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). The same process is at work when one attempts to delve deeper into a complex subject. Over time and with repetition, the metaphoric meaning becomes the reality (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). If the narrative impulse is innate to human meaning making (Polkinghorne, 1988), then learning processes that seek to give learners a more empowered role should integrate narrative techniques. The narrative tendency to give individuals and groups a better sense of the meaning of their story is crucial to the process of development as an empowered learner or community and to gaining control or authorship of one's story—rather than that narrative being dictated by others (Rossiter & Clark, 2007).

The narrative approach to learning also aids in the formation of relationships and has the potential to facilitate empowerment and validation of the value and life experience of students from marginalized populations. In *Relational-Cultural Therapy*, Jordan (2010) discussed negative relational images around issues such as class, race, and gender that can disrupt relationships and cause disconnection from others. She posited that adults long for connection and relationship, but internal and cultural factors often obstruct the meeting of this need (Jordan, 2010). On an internal level, adults often feel that there is something wrong or defective about themselves that they must hide from others. They thus hold back aspects of themselves from relationships with others. The result is often dissatisfaction and continued feelings of separateness (Jordan, 2010). Jordan argued that this is particularly true for women and racial and cultural minorities who, already marginalized by oppressive social institutions, experience a magnified form of separateness. She argued for a narrative and dialogical approach that accounts for these chronic sources of disconnection and encourages storytelling as a method of building connections and understanding with others (Jordan, 2010).

Narrative techniques account for difference in identity and experience and promote the formation of relationships by encouraging the development of an authentic voice. This makes it possible for students and authority figures to understand one's real identity instead of enforcing a false dogma of sameness that attempts to negate the reality of class, race, and gender (Robb, 2006). Similar to Jordan (2010), Jean Baker Miller and Irene Pierce Stiver (1997) defined disconnection as "the pain of not being understood and of not understanding the other person" (p. 11). Miller and Stiver (1997) argued that power inequities based on class, race, gender, and other identities serve to exacerbate personal disconnection by enforcing social separateness. They depart from much of the psychotherapeutic literature by asserting that power and the social context of relationships must be taken into account when building authentic relationships. They further assert that modern American society as whole reflects this power-over dynamic that works against social connectedness (Miller & Stiver, 1997). As with Jordan (2010), Miller and Stiver (1997) argued for group processes that develop authentic voice through interpersonal dialogue, build an understanding of the stories of others, and discuss issues of power openly.

This relational movement in psychology has exposed how narrative and interactive processes acknowledge the reality that people grow through taking action in relationship with others (Walker, 2004). In the learning context, narrative techniques such as storytelling, autobiography, and reflective exercises allow the learner to examine their narratives with a more explicit and conscious focus (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The use of restorative practices such as circles encourage the regular sharing and examination of one's personal narrative and the narrative of the classroom as a community (Costello et al., 2010). In many ways narrative can be said to be the very first means of both learning and instruction. Because an oft-stated goal of adult learning is to aid in one's development as a learner (Love & Guthrie,

1999), narrative techniques help the individual and the classroom community gain perspective on their story (Randall, 1997). The student or teacher who does not connect the subject matter at hand to real problems, issues, or themes in their own life story will often experience a strong sense of alienation from learning (Jordan, 2010). Learning with no clear sense of one's narrative can lead to alienation and frustration for both learner and educator. However, interactive group processes that account for one's personal narrative can provide a means to engage this personal disconnection and challenge social power relations (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Randall, 1997). It is crucial that the critically reflective adult learning environment maximize these opportunities. The restorative classroom, informed by the participatory and transformative principles of adult learning theory, has the potential to provide the practical means to accomplish these aims.

**The potential of restorative practices.** The goal of developing a restorative culture is to create an environment that recognizes that social power is diffused throughout social networks and challenges the false idea that power has its locus only within formal authority figures. If all social actors have the ability to engage in direct and interactive discourse, then power relations can be laid bare, problematic relational patterns can be brought to the fore, and real alternative stories about what learning actually is can be explored. When restorative processes are used explicitly toward this end, coercion and authoritarianism can be replaced by purposeful discourse that empowers actors to change their conditioned roles and reorient educational activity toward the needs of learners rather than the dictates of the institution as representative of the dominant culture (White, 1989). This transformative orientation has helped the IIRP to operationalize specific andragogical practices at an organizational level and in the classroom that seek to engage and empower learners while de-emphasizing the authoritarian, teacher-centered model.



These practices have the potential to offer a participatory mechanism to engage conditioned passivity in adult learners.

In *Pedagogy of Freedom* Paulo Freire (1998) discussed the need to balance freedom and limits in the student–educator relationship. Although authoritarian education involves dynamics that distort the use of power and authority, Freire explained that this does not mean a radical rejection of all forms of authority is in order. He submitted that we should work toward doing things with students rather than to them. Like Wachtel (2004) after him, Freire (1998) asserted that authority is necessary but that authoritarianism is not. Heifetz (1994) distinguished authority from dominance, arguing that authority plays a healthy role in community, is given willingly by others, and can be removed by others. Authority helps to provide direction and clarify roles. Authority figures uphold and transmit the organization’s values, ideologies, and beliefs. The very nature of the educator–student relationship is laden with differences in power and the exercise of authority. Educators who make no decisions, offer no guidance, and presume no knowledge of value to their students would not be educators. Some form of the exercise of authority is not only necessary, it is inherent and unavoidable in the classroom. Dominance, however, is based on coercion and habitual deference (Heifetz, 1994).

The restorative classroom requires an educator who “engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and follower” (Northouse, 2010, p. 172). This type of transformative educator recognizes that the teacher’s role is not to personally direct all activity but to inspire others to take responsibility for their learning (Northouse, 2010). Similarly, Ira Shor (1998) asserted that adults learn best in classrooms that are collaborative, democratic, and critically reflective. These factors assist the student in moving from a disempowered and passive role into a full consideration what they already know and their

own potential for making new meaning and self-management (Shor, 1998). Though developed independently, the influence of scholars such as Freire and Shor is clearly evident in restorative practices theory—as this is precisely how this new field explains the balanced and optimal use of authority in relation to adult learners (Wachtel, 2004).

This is similar to Mezirow's (1997) concept that learning should be a transformative experience. He argued that transformative learning must involve a shift in one's frame of reference. Frames of reference are that body of experience that defines how we look upon the world and are composed of habits of mind and points of view. They include not only conscious elements such as memories, concepts, and values but also unconscious conditioned responses and feelings that shape our experience. Some aspects of these frames of reference are more open to change, whereas other aspects are more durable and can take a very long time to shift (Mezirow, 1997). Because conditioned passivity in learning is so deeply ingrained, it cannot simply be unraveled as a prerequisite to adult learning. It must be examined through critically reflective methods that are intertwined with learning itself (Mezirow, 1998). Students and educators must be able to experience a new conversation about authority and a new practice of collaborative power (Foucault, 1980).

Habits of mind kind can be likened to a subroutine that undergirds all of our interactions. These are deeply conditioned ways of being that involve important blind spots, that is, what we don't know that we know *or* what we don't know that we don't know (Mezirow, 1997). For example, a first-generation college student might bring knowledge and assumptions about society and social class that go unrecognized as such until they are given the opportunity to thoroughly reflect on these and related issues. This might include insights about deeply ingrained beliefs in the relative value of intellectual versus physical labor or feelings of class betrayal by

attempting to move up in the social hierarchy. When a learner has a limited frame of reference, it is very difficult to examine ideological influence upon his or her worldview. This often leads to a deep imprinting of norms and values that are accepted with little testing or resistance.

Points of view, however, are more malleable and open to change. When we experience cognitive dissonance, when the world does not act as we expect or our skills seem insufficient to meet new challenges, our points of view are often what change first to cope with new conditions (Mezirow, 1997). Points of view are useful as a starting point for transformative learning.

However, such shifts for adult learners require an immersion in an adult learning milieu that challenges past conditioning and offers opportunities to develop new skills that transform power and authority in student–educator relationships. Restorative practices such as fair process (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997) and circles (Costello et al., 2010) provide regular opportunities to discuss students’ frame of reference, worldview, and issues of power openly in the classroom.

Restorative practices can also provide practical mechanisms for transformative learning.

Mezirow’s work has focused on developing constructs to describe the cognitive process of transformational learning. However, John Dirkx (2000) has approached the topic of transformative learning from a mytho-poetic perspective influenced by Carl Jung and Robert Boyd that emphasizes integrating emotional and spiritual aspects of learning more consciously into daily life. Dirkx and Boyd share Mezirow’s concern for personal development and transformation but define this process using a Jungian lens (Dirkx, 1998). Like Mezirow, Boyd argued that part of the aim of transformative learning is to surface the unconscious, but like Jung he held that images and symbols are more powerful than language in this regard (Dirkx, 1998). Also like Jung, Dirkx (2000) described this process as “individuation,” explaining that the aim is to “deepen a sense of wholeness by, para-doxically, differentiating, naming, and elaborating all

the different selves that make up who we are as persons” (p. 2). This is similar to Mezirow’s (1997) idea of perspective transformation, but is more dependent on subjective and creative faculties than reason and logic. Where Mezirow reflects on the mind, Dirkx and Boyd reflect on the soul and its language of symbol and imagination.

Dirkx (2000) described this “imaginal method” as generally having four stages. First, learners must describe the hidden image as fully as possible. Then, they must associate the image with other aspects of their life. Next, the image must be amplified through the use of stories, poetry, and myths that present a similar image. Finally, learners must animate the image by allowing it to interact with the self through further imaging work (Dirkx, 2000). Similar to Boyd, Dirkx (2000) held that small-group processes that focus on narrative activities are perhaps the most powerful method to act out this transformation because both story and myth are inherently communal acts of creation. Also, like Freire (1998), Jordan (2010), and Miller, and Stiver (1997), Dirkx (2000) posited that transformative potential is constrained at the individual and group levels by coercive sociocultural forces that impede relationship, connectedness, and group formation. However, transformational learning group processes can also counteract these social forces (Dirkx, 2000).

In summary, restorative practices provide an explicit framework for understanding power and authority that closely mirrors the transformational social critique of Freire (1998). Like Freire (1998), restorative practices theory (Wachtel, 2004) recognizes the need for authority in learning but rejects authoritarianism as antithetical to the transformative learning process. Also, restorative practices such as affective statements and questions (Costello et al., 2009), fair process (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997), and circles (Costello et al., 2010) aid the cognitive and emotional processes of surfacing deeply held and hidden beliefs (Mezirow, 1997) that impact the

learning process and can lead to transformative learning and individuation (Dirkx, 2000). Finally, restorative practices have the potential to assault alienation and oppression by creating opportunities for individuals and groups to develop an authentic voice (White, 1992), reject marginalization by developing meaningful relationships (Jordan, 2010), and build group connectedness that counteracts social oppression (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

This study did not aim to demonstrate the effectiveness of restorative practices. At this stage of investigation into the application of restorative practices in higher education, it is not clear what measure of effectiveness would even be appropriate. Most official measures of effectiveness come laden with the very biases that have driven modern authoritarian education—be it grades, later career success, or other outcomes based heavily on quantifiable measures. At any rate, given my clear bias, perhaps that type of study would be best conducted by another researcher. What this study did seek to explore is the narrative. That is, I focused on the stories of what adult learners have experienced in one graduate program that has attempted to use restorative practices as its explicit model for the use of power and authority in the classroom. In short, in the spirit of Freire (1971), Shor (1998), Brookfield (2002), and Wachtel (2004), the goal was to let these adult learners speak for themselves.

## **Chapter 3: Method**

### **The Qualitative and Narrative Approach**

This study sought to investigate the question, what are the experiences of adult learners in a restorative practices–based graduate program with regard to aspects of power and authority in relationships with instructors? A qualitative approach was chosen for this investigation because the purpose of this study was to explore the critical aspects of adults’ experiences as learners and as IIRP graduate students—as opposed to measuring outcomes or comparing the effectiveness of various practices or treatments (Creswell, 2007). As a field of study restorative practices theory is built upon a relational hypothesis, and its practices are intended to transform social life in the classroom and beyond (Wachtel, 2004). As such, any investigation into restorative practices is inherently a form of social inquiry. The qualitative approach is uniquely suited to the investigation of the complexities of social life that often elude more rationalist forms of inquiry developed in the natural sciences (Reissman, 1993).

Adult learners entering the graduate classroom bring a lifetime of experience, relational history and biography with them (Merriam et al., 2007). In short, they bring their life story as a learner (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Reissman, 1993). As discussed above, only one other study has investigated the experience of adult learners in a restorative practices–based graduate program (Adamson, 2012). As a first step toward understanding this unique environment, it is critical to understand how each individual’s experience is situated within a lifelong context of relationships with teachers, mentors, and professors (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Any investigation of the discrete experience of adult learners within the IIRP graduate program would be incomplete and limited if it did not include an understanding of the individual’s long history of experience with authority figures in educational settings.

The narrative perspective encourages individuals to explore dominant themes and stories surrounding their lives (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001). These techniques, drawn from literary and therapeutic fields, have helped to provide a framework for examining the world in a way that accounts for personal biography, thoughts, and feelings around life experience (White, 1989). The hope is that this process will lead to a rich discussion of participants' personal stories, which in turn can lead to deeper insight into their perceptions and experience (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

The recounting of stories also has a "reflexive relationship" with the teller's lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71). The past is always expressed through the lens of the present, and the present is contextualized within experiences from the past (White, 1989). How one chooses to tell a story, how its themes are framed, how the action is recounted, and how feelings are expressed all signify something not only about one's present reality but also about the reality one would prefer in the future. For these reasons this study sought to understand participants' experiences as learners across their lifespan as a necessary component to contextualizing their experiences at the IIRP graduate school.

### **Listening Guide Voice-Centered Method**

The data for this research were collected using a semistructured, narrative interviewing process and were analyzed using the listening guide voice-centered method developed by Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch (2003). As discussed in detail in the next section, I am immersed in the environment I am attempting to study as IIRP's director of continuing education. I am partial to the restorative practices ethos and approach and biased concerning its value and potential to make positive contributions to higher education and other areas of society. Thus, it was important that I include measures to account for my own biases and ensure that I am

accurately capturing the voice of the participant as distinct from my own. This method's layered four-step analysis was designed to capture the voice of participants through successive and purposeful readings of their interview text. Also, this method is rooted in a worldview that is highly similar to the restorative practices perspective, namely that "human development occurs in relationship with others and, as such, our sense of self is inextricable from our relationship with others" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 157). Gilligan et al.'s method utilizes a series of sequential listenings to the text. First is listening for plot, which is comprised of listening for the participants' own narrative plot line and clearly documenting my own reactions and emotional responses to the story. Next is the isolation of I-poems. These are formed by isolating all first-person I statements designed to focus on the unique voice of the participant and delve into how that person speaks about him or herself. Third is listening for contrapuntal voices. During this stage the text is read two or more times while focusing on specific aspects or voices within the participants experience related to my research question. These voices do not necessarily need to contradict each other. Instead, they are often different yet complimentary aspects of a participant's voice that weave and combine with each other as in a composition of contrapuntal choral music. Finally, a cumulative analysis is composed using the data from the readings above (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 158). I used this process of successive readings to identify major themes in each narrative and then across all of the participants' stories.

Gilligan et al.'s (2003) method is also appropriate for this study because aspects of the student experience are similar to the feminist experience, from which the voice-centered method arose. Gilligan et al. argued that narrative techniques assist women in reclaiming their authentic personal voice. Similarly, such techniques assist students in reclaiming their own voice and resisting conditioned passivity in the classroom (Belenky et al., 1997; Shor, 1996). In the



traditional classroom the process by which educators arrive at conclusions is often hidden from students (Belenky et al., 1997). Knowledge is presented not only via the voice of authority, but as the voice of authority (Freire, 1998). For women as well as adult learners, the reclaiming of authentic voice it is not only a matter of being heard but is, in a deeper sense, a demystification of the process of making meaning (Belenky et al., 1997). This idea has roots in the critical pedagogy of Freire (1971) and reflects the authority model and collaborative power-sharing practices of restorative practices (Wachtel, 2004).

### **Insider Research Concerns**

I am an alumnus of the IIRP graduate program and an administrator at the organization. In this respect, I am an insider with biases and opinions concerning restorative practices, many of which are known to me and some of which are unknown. I believe that the restorative approach has the potential to greatly benefit not only graduate institutions but also many other areas of society, such as K–12 education, counseling, organizational management, and social work. I manage and participate in the implementation of restorative practices projects. I believe deeply in the values that underpin this new field and its potential to transform many social institutions into ones that are more empowering, democratic, and collaborative. I am a public figure in the field and known as such by the participants in this study. Because this was a study that aimed to investigate power and authority in a restorative practices–based graduate program, I played a role in the relational and social matrix I was investigating. Whether known or unknown, conscious or unconscious, my positioning affected my data collection, analysis, and relationship with the participants.

Insider administrator research presents several challenges. Foremost is that I am asking questions that are specifically oriented toward exploring core ideas and beliefs about the IIRP's

institutional practices. As opposed to more technical concerns, my questions were designed to explore and potentially challenge organizational beliefs and practices. Although I do not supervise faculty, I attempted to minimize potential harm to them, such as student criticism, by removing any direct references to individuals by name in this report.

Anderson and Jones (2000) argued that this type of research requires that the researcher consider the level of organizational risk they are willing to accept. They noted that some researchers in this position used methods to protect the anonymity of participants. The engagement of alumni versus current students and the guarantee of anonymity were additional methods of protecting participants and mitigating risks to them personally. With regard to IIRP graduate students, I am also somewhat on the outside in that I only teach introductory-level courses and do not supervise faculty. To avoid asking participants to reflect on my own practice or placing them in an uncomfortable position I selected only participants whom I did not teach.

Regarding my ability to take risks and report findings that might be challenging to organizational practice, I can only say that I believe I was open to this in my research. The IIRP is an organization built upon norms (both formally written into policy and developed culturally) of open and direct feedback. This type of activity is encouraged and is quite common in my organization and has been normalized as part of our recent Middle States Commission on Higher Education accreditation process. Self-assessment has been institutionalized and mandated as an integral part of this process. Further, I did not intend this study to be evaluative; rather I merely sought to better understand the experience of the participants in this unique adult learning environment.

The listening guide voice-centered method itself (Gilligan et al., 2003) was designed as a method that is particularly strong in capturing the voice of participants and self-checking through

multiple iterative readings, each intended to capture the participant's voice in its own unique way. This method helped to control for my own biases by providing multiple lenses through which to view and critically reexamine earlier analyses. As described above, the engagement of alumni was designed to encourage participants to respond openly and truthfully and to minimize fear of reprisal for any criticism of the institution or other concerns.

### Participants

This study engaged 10 IIRP alumni who had successfully completed their master's degree requirements in one of the IIRP's two master's degree programs: Restorative Practices in Education and Restorative Practices in Youth Counseling. Participants were invited to participate via e-mail (see Appendix D). With the exception of those whom I had taught in introductory courses, all eligible alumni were invited to participate. One additional exception was those few alumni who now live outside of the Mid-Atlantic States where the IIRP is located. This was a convenience measure due to the desire for face-to-face interviews and a lack of travel budget for this research.

Table 1

#### *Participant Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Age	Race / ethnicity
Megan	F	43	Caucasian
Francine	F	47	Caucasian
Patrick	M	60	Caucasian
Susie	F	59	Caucasian
Mara	F	42	Caucasian
Ben	M	45	Caucasian
Deanna	F	66	Caucasian
Marcy	F	34	Caucasian
Pam	F	42	Caucasian
Betsy	F	56	Caucasian
	<i>F</i> = 80%	<i>M</i> = 49.4	
	<i>M</i> = 20%		

All 10 invitees agreed to participate. At the time of this study, the IIRP had graduated 83 alumni. The mean participant age of participants was 49, slightly older than the mean age of all alumni (approximately 45 years old). Eighty-percent of all alumni were female, and 37% of all alumni identified themselves as a racial minority. The gender composition of the participants in this study was reflective of IIRP alumni as a whole. Two of the participants were male, and eight were female. However, all participants in this study identified themselves as Caucasian. In the 2008–2009 academic year a sizable cohort of African American students entered the IIRP program and, at the time of this writing, comprise the vast majority of the school's minority alumni. During that year I taught several introductory course sections attended by many students from this cohort. As discussed above, I did not invite any of the students I had taught as an additional measure to minimize the effect of my inside researcher status. The remaining five minority alumni eligible to participate (along with many White alumni) did not respond to my invitation to participate. I was hesitant to accept an all-White sample, but in the end I decided that a lack of minority representativeness would be less of a threat to the validity of this study than concerns about the risks of insider research. The lack of diversity is a clear limitation of this study and a much-needed area of exploration for future research. A similar study was conducted by Adamson (2012) at about the same time as this study. Adamson's study included both current students and alumni in its sample population, which consisted of 27% minority participants (all African American). This was below the 37% minority student population at the time of his study (Adamson, 2010). What this slightly lower participation rate implies, if anything, is unclear.

Participation rates by racial and other minorities in research is a controversial topic. Most of the studies in this area relate to healthcare research. A recent study has challenged the long-held belief that racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to participate in research due to lack of

trust and issues of power and social inequity (Wendler et al., 2006). Wendler et al.'s (2006) study found that there was very little difference in the willingness of racial-minority and non-Hispanic White participants to participate in health research and that the small difference had more to do with barriers to participation such as travel to the study, childcare, and time off of work (Wendler et al., 2006). However, it is unclear to what extent these insights might apply to the sample population of this study. The obvious question here is whether there were any factors at work within IIRP as an institution, the researcher, or the relationships between the mostly Caucasian faculty (except one Palestinian faculty member) and African American students that led African American alumni to not want to participate in this study. The five African American alumni who chose not to participate could easily have had the same reasons as the many other alumni who chose not to respond, but unfortunately their voices have not been heard on this question. Clearly, a recommendation for future studies of this population should include an in-depth examination of the experience of minority adults in this program.

The age of these participants is another significant factor. The mean age of participants was nearly 49.5. As the baby boomer generation matures, increasing numbers of older adults are returning to an array of higher education settings (Kasworm, 2003; Kazies et al., 2007; Pusser et al., 2007). In 1971 adults older than 24 constituted approximately a quarter of undergraduate enrollment, but are now estimated to comprise nearly half of the total number (Kasworm, 2003; Kazis et al., 2007). Other adults are returning to graduate studies in response to career changes, desire to remain competitive in their field, and other reasons related to economic disruption and restructuring (Pusser et al., 2007). Institutions that serve this population must consider the meaning of education to these students, their needs, and the modes of instruction most likely to meet those needs. These adult students are likely to have learning needs that are appropriate to a

more advanced developmental framework. These students are likely to seek an educational environment that is more multiplistic and allows them to share their own experience, expertise, and life narratives (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

### **Data-Collection Procedures**

All participants were asked to complete and sign an informed consent agreement to participate in this study (see Appendix A). A gender-specific pseudonym was assigned to each participant to provide a reasonable amount of anonymity. Also, the names of faculty referenced in interviews were removed from all quoted passages below. To address the research question, a semistructured interview protocol (Appendix B) was used during a 1-hour face-to-face interview. Five main interview prompts and 12 secondary prompts were used to draw out participant experiences related to the subject of this research.

I tested the interview in a pilot study and found it to be very useful in exploring the issues with which this study is concerned. Because the participants and I shared a common theoretical language (and presumably a philosophical commitment regarding restorative practices), I sought to keep the interview protocol as broad and open-ended as possible while encouraging reflection along the lines of this study's inquiry.

I also conducted a document review following each interview. All IIRP students submit a cumulative capstone reflection paper as part of their final seminar course. The purpose of this paper is to reflect upon the whole of their course of study and focuses on both personal and professional growth. This typically includes a reflection on the classroom learning experience. After analyzing each interview transcript using the voice-centered method as a guide, the analysis was compared with and informed by a review of each participant's capstone reflection paper. This document review provided a secondary source of data that provided further insight

into participants' experiences at the IIRP. The themes that emerged from each participant's interview were used as a lens through which their papers could be read. This allowed me to note any congruence, dissonance, or added dimensions between the two sources. When these comparisons were completed, a final, cumulative analysis was conducted across all 10 interviews and document analyses.

### **Data-Analysis Process**

All interviews were audio recorded. In addition to repeated audio review throughout each stage of the analysis process, all interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber to aid in the textual analysis process. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix C). These transcripts were then printed, read, and reread several times. Each transcript was then reviewed by an outside auditor. The auditor is a licensed professional counselor familiar with narrative techniques and does not work for the IIRP. In this first review, the auditor was asked to examine the primary questions and follow-up questions asked of each participant for issues of bias concerning my insider status. I then made corresponding notes reflecting on this feedback prior to continuing with the analytic process. Then, I reviewed each transcript again using the voice-centered method of analysis (Gilligan et al., 2003). I used different colored highlighters for the first two readings—one for plot and one for “I-poems” (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 157). For the third review of each transcript, reading for contrapuntal voices (Gilligan et al., 2003), I made notations of my thoughts and impressions on each printed transcript. For the fourth review, reading for cumulative analysis (Gilligan et al., 2003), I wrote a four- to five-page analysis that heavily quoted the participant's own words and followed the same chronological format as the interview protocol. See Appendix E for an example of two cumulative analyses. These full written analyses were then reviewed several times and revised as necessary to clarify main

themes and the overall narrative of each story. These written cumulative analyses were then synthesized into the findings and matrices contained in chapter 5.

### **Limitations**

This study only explored the experiences of adult learners in the clearly bounded system of the IIRP graduate program. Conclusions cannot be drawn beyond this program or the demographics of the sample. The design of this study did not seek to make explicit cross-comparisons among cases by gender, race, age, or other factors. Also, as discussed above, comparisons by race were not possible due to a lack of minority representation among the participants. Despite these limitations, it is hoped that this study can serve as a starting point and broadly inform the direction of future research into the experience of adults in higher education programs utilizing the restorative practices approach.



## Chapter 4: Introduction of Participants

This study engaged 10 alumni of the IIRP graduate school. As noted above, I am an insider regarding this research because of my position at the IIRP. Also, the IIRP is a relatively small institution. I knew or had met most of the participants prior to conducting this research. In some cases we had worked on collaborative projects in the past. In other cases I met them when providing professional development and consulting for their organization. In some instances, the participants related stories about classroom events or interactions with IIRP faculty about which I had prior knowledge as an administrator. As an insider researcher this posed an interesting challenge. What would I do with this information? If I happened to know more about a particular story that was being shared by a participant, perhaps because I had previously been at a meeting where the event was discussed—should I share that information? How would that knowledge impact my analysis? In the end, I choose to be as open as possible about other knowledge about events or relationships with participants and reflect on how those factors affected my analysis. However, my insider status and depth of knowledge about the IIRP learning environment, the events described by participants, and my prior relationships with some of the participants also added a depth and richness to my ability to understand the environments in which their stories were situated (Anderson & Jones, 2000). The following is a brief introduction to each participant, the major contributions made by his or her interview, and my reflections on some of the issues described above. Each participant is introduced with a gender-specific pseudonym, a subtitle denoting the major theme of his or her personal story, and a brief personal description.

### **Megan: Healing Personal Trauma**

Megan is a 43-year-old educator, author, and healthcare-reform advocate. Her interest in this particular application of restorative practices was rooted in an experience of personal trauma.

Megan saw restorative practices as a method of creating healthcare processes that are more just, participatory, and inclusive of the voices and needs of patients. This particular application of restorative practices, though innovative and intriguing, had no explicit curriculum track within the IIRP graduate program. Because the only degree tracks available at the time were a master of restorative practices in education (focusing on K–12 education) and master of restorative practices in youth counseling, Megan pieced together courses and coursework as best she could to develop her interest in applying restorative practices to healthcare services.

In her reflection on her IIRP experience, Megan discussed a desire to be understood and to heal from past wounds and trauma. Reflecting on her relationships with IIRP faculty, she related recurring confusion about boundaries in these relationships. She challenged the practice of some faculty by saying that she felt that she was strongly urged or even pushed to disclose personal trauma as part of the classroom learning. Yet she asserted that, after these disclosures, she did not feel heard (in her words, she didn't feel "safe" or "valued").

Outside this study I have experienced Megan as a passionate and articulate woman who does not shrink from conflict and is not afraid to be the voice of dissent. In her advocacy work, she is a voice for a population that often suffers in silence. Megan brought that same courage to her studies at IIRP and in her interview. Her experience at the IIRP graduate school highlighted important aspects of power and authority in the student–instructor relationship.

### **Francine: Creating Strong Communities**

Francine is a 47-year-old educator who has held a variety of education and community-development settings focused on youth development. I know Francine as the director of a youth group in my community that uses restorative practices in its activities. She said that these experiences are designed to strengthen her local community by building strong and healthy

bonds among local children and families. Francine's story revolves around her reflection that, throughout her life, her most meaningful educational experiences were with educators who explicitly sought to develop a personal relationship with her as a student. She fondly described educators who retained their authority role in the classroom but tempered this with a willingness to be personally and emotionally available to students.

**Patrick: Making School Better**

Patrick is a 60-year-old elementary school counselor. I knew very little about Patrick prior to his interview. He had briefly served as a student representative on one of IIRP's accreditation committees that I chaired. However, his participation and our interaction were limited to a few brief phone calls and e-mails prior to the interview. Patrick struck me as a quiet, caring, and soft-spoken man. He described himself as shy and reserved. Patrick said he sought out the IIRP graduate program because he was dissatisfied with the quality of emotional and social support offered to children at his school. For him, the IIRP became an outlet to commune with other adults who shared his ideas concerning the needs of young children and a refuge from his school environment (of which he is quite critical). Patrick framed his experience as a learner by describing how he grew up as a White, working-class boy in the Deep South. He discussed a tension between his desire to fit in, his attempts to be invisible to authority figures, and his deep and somewhat silent desire to personally connect with teachers and professors.

**Susie: Questioning Discipline**

Susie is a 59-year-old suburban elementary school teacher. I had no relationship with her prior to her interview and knew nothing about her as a student at the IIRP. I found Susie "bubbly" and, as she related in her interview, very talkative. This relates to a major theme in her story, namely a desire to be heard by authority figures and a desire for approval. These two

needs, however, sometimes caused tension in her experience as a student. Susie sought out the IIRP program because she was dissatisfied with the punitive disciplinary system at her school, which she saw as harmful to children and not meeting the emotional needs of children or adults. She also felt very isolated, alone, and unheard in her critiques. She reported having a philosophical “coming-home” experience when she began attending classes at the IIRP, and she repeatedly referred to this experience using religious metaphors.

### **Mara: Changing Leadership and Management Practices**

Mara is a 42-year-old independent management consultant. Prior to this interview Mara served as a student representative on an accreditation committee that I chaired. Her particular interest in restorative practices is its application in leadership and organizational management, although she has also worked as a public school teacher. My impression of Mara has been that of a deeply thoughtful woman who processes her thoughts and feelings quite openly.

Mara grew up in a relatively affluent family. She said she was conscious of this at an early age. Echoing some of the literature on social class discussed above, Mara said that later in life she became conscious that she thought teachers were more likely to trust and regard her and other students positively. Despite these apparent advantages, Mara described her home life as often chaotic and unsatisfying. Throughout her life this led her to seek structure and nurturing relationships in school. This theme formed a common thread throughout her interview.

### **Ben: Making Classrooms Participatory**

Ben is a 45-year-old administrator at a large, suburban, Catholic high school. I have an ongoing relationship with Ben as a consultant. In this capacity I assist his high school with the implementation of restorative practices. Ben’s school is situated in a midsize city and serves a largely working-class student population. He reported that, throughout his life, he struggled in

school environments in which he had little personal connection to educators or authority figures. He said he was drawn to the IIRP program because of its focus on participatory classroom processes—unlike many of his past education experiences.

As an administrator of a large organization, Ben brings a unique perspective to these conflicts. From my experience with him and his school outside this study, I know that these questions are directly related to his own efforts to create a more restorative organization. As to my own bias, I felt very empathetic to Ben and these concerns. As an administrator, I constantly wrestle with these questions. Ben and I have had several conversations outside this study about restorative leadership and how to balance a leadership hierarchy and unequal, formal power with the participatory ethos of restorative practices.

#### **Deanna: Helping Adults From Welfare to Work**

Deanna is 66-year-old adult educator for a welfare-to-work program. I have known Deanna as an advocate for restorative practices for several years prior to her becoming a graduate student at the IIRP. She grew up in a small family in a rural community. She said this meant she was surrounded by more adults than children. The effect of this was that she grew up behaving for adults as a way of being seen as a “good kid.” Performance, grading, and judgments by adults dominated her childhood education experience. This led to anxiety over schooling. She became interested in restorative practices as a way to make education more creative and student centered rather than grade centered.

She works with poor and working-class adults seeking employment and job training. Deanna said that, in her experience, most of her students are adverse to “school” and tend to approach “teachers” such as herself with apprehension. She wants her adult students to learn valuable skills that will help them find employment and reconnect with the process of learning.

For them, she wants this experience to be personally meaningful, creative, and engaging. This aspect of Deanna's personal story clearly connects with my own, so it was natural to feel a sense of solidarity with her motivation to use restorative practices as a way to empower working-class learners.

### **Marcy: Working-Class Connections**

Marcy is a 34-year-old teacher in an urban middle school. I am very familiar with Marcy's work setting because I have provided training and consulting services to her school on the implementation of restorative practices. Marcy's school community reminds me very much of the one in which I grew up. It was once a tight, working-class string of neighborhoods now fallen on hard times and economic decline. Her generation experienced this decline firsthand, along with increased poverty and crime, just as I did in my own childhood. Marcy thought that she understood these students because she was a once a rebellious, working-class youth often at odds with teachers and authority figures. She moved frequently as a child and rarely sustained long-term relationships with friends or adults. Marcy's interest in restorative practices stemmed from her desire for connections to and relationships with others. She also believes that she is learning methods to connect with the poor and working-class youth she serves, many of whom are experiencing childhoods similar to her own.

### **Pam: Developing Voice**

Pam is a 42-year old teacher who works with Marcy at the same urban middle school. Unlike Marcy, Pam grew up in the community in which her school is situated. Like Marcy, her interest in restorative practices stemmed from her belief that the approach can help to restore the once strong community she remembers from her youth. Pam grew up with a very positive, working-class identity during the most prosperous generations of her town.

Pam also discussed her identity as a woman and her desire to have a voice in and an impact on the world around her—roles not always encouraged in the culture of her youth. As such, restorative practices also connected with this desire for herself and for her poor and working-class students. She is acutely aware of issues of social justice and is concerned about the welfare of recent waves of immigrants that have moved into her community. Pam explicitly hopes that restorative practices will help to transform the use of power and authority in school as well as to confront “discriminatory beliefs and unfair practices that only serve to further alienate” members of her community.

### **Betsy: Change Through Life Coaching**

Betsy is 56-year-old professional life coach who owns her own consulting business. I have known Betsy for several years as a local restorative practices advocate and trainer. Betsy became interested in restorative practices as an alternative to the rote and passive classrooms she experienced in Catholic school as a child and in her college experience. Like several other participants, she said she yearned for a more creative and participatory learning environment. Later she would recognize that she was looking for a relationship-centered and “hands-on” classroom experience. Betsy is passionate about the application of restorative practices in helping professionals develop their personal strengths and leadership abilities.

## Chapter 5: Findings

As discussed in chapter 1, a growing body of research has been documenting the effects of the restorative practices approach in educational settings for youth. However, little is known about how adult learners at the graduate level experience this approach and how it affects their learning experience. This study yielded three main findings.

1. Participants used highly consistent language when describing the teachers and professors who were the most meaningful to them throughout their lifespan. They used words such as “connection,” “relationship,” and “personal” when describing these educators.

2. Participants had meaningful personal experiences, which they frequently described using therapeutic or psychological language.

3. Relationships with the classroom group as a whole were more important than relationships with professors alone.

This study also exposed one subtheme in the participants’ stories. This theme was not as obvious as the three mentioned above but was still significantly related to the questions posed by this study. Six of the participants clearly discussed that they were drawn to study restorative practices at the IIRP graduate program to fix some problem they perceived in their organization, their field, or society as a whole. For most participants, this drive revolved around their personal biography, conflicts from their childhood, and past trauma with others. Though it was not the direct intent of this study, this subtheme is instructive as to the self-selection bias concerning the adults who seek out this educational program.

### **Finding 1: Consistency of Language Regarding Educators Across the Lifespan**

The interview protocol asked participants to reflect upon the whole of their educational experience in the hopes that this would give a better sense of how the IIRP graduate school



experience is situated within their life experience as a student and the larger arc of their relationships with teachers and professors. This decision led to an important finding. Participants used highly consistent language when describing those teachers and professors who were most meaningful to them—regardless of whether they were reflecting on authority figures from childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, or adulthood. They used words such as “connection,” “relationship,” and “personal” when describing these educators. They spoke of authority figures who took a personal interest in them and were emotionally and academically nurturing. The participants reported that they had personal relationships with these teachers and professors. The following table provides a sample language comparison organized by participant and life stage.

The similarities of participants’ experiences suggest that these elements of the student–teacher experience are common across the developmental spectrum. They described their most memorable and positive relationships with educators in the same way, whether they knew this authority figure as a child, adolescent, or adult. As seen above, participants repeatedly used words such as “connection,” “relationship,” and “personal” when describing these educators. They described their most memorable experiences with professors at the IIRP graduate school as reflected in their experiences with other teachers and professors throughout their life, and their descriptions used remarkably similar terms. The restorative practices philosophy does not claim to have created a new model for using power and authority. Instead, the model claims to make explicit what uses of power and authority have always worked best in educating others to behave this way more deliberately and consistently (Costello et al., 2009; Wachtel, 2004). A relationship with an authority figure in which the student feels a nurturing and personal connection was central to their best memories from their education and to their best learning experiences in general. This is one of the basic presumptions of the restorative practices philosophy—that the

Table 2

*Consistency of Language Regarding Educators Across the Life span*

Name	Early childhood / adolescence	College / early adulthood	IIRP graduate program
Megan	“I felt a different level of respect and the ability to engage.”	“She actually found out more about the personal things going on in my life . . . there was a little bit more personal relationship there . . . She made me feel very valued.”	NA
Francine	“She just knew what I needed. . . . She knew how to help me feel comfortable.”	“I usually developed a fairly close relationship with my teachers. . . . And then usually could make a connection because then I can understand why they love this so much. And I think that’s how the relationships start.”	“Each of those were extremely open and extremely willing to share.”
Patrick	“He had information that was sort of outside of the textbook kind of stuff and would talk about current stuff that was going on, made it very interesting and helped me feel connected to him.”	“He would talk about real life situations . . . we got each other . . .”	“She clearly cared about the students, she had real sensitivity to pick up on what was going on with them . . . did a good job at creating a safe environment for learning”
Susie	“I really got very friendly with my chemistry teacher . . . We used to talk about stuff. We would talk about philosophy and we would talk about all kinds of things.”	“He was interesting, he was funny. . . . He thought outside the box.”	“I enjoyed their personalities.”
Mara	“I think when you’re connected to a teacher the content sometimes carries weight—or I give it more weight . . .”	“So when there was a connection it seems like it allowed more opportunity to talk about the pollination of ideas . . . your personal stuff a lot.”	“The connections to the teachers was almost as significant as connection with their students . . . a personal connection, a desire for you to grow.”

Name	Early childhood / adolescence	College / early adulthood	IIRP graduate program
Ben	“I can say in high school it started already where if I didn’t really connect with the teacher, it didn’t matter what the subject matter was, I would check out.”	“It was the ones... where it was a smaller class, where . . . there was a personal connection.”	“A different kind of teaching . . . participatory teaching and learning from each other, so right from the get go you knew it was something different. . . . That personal side was attractive.”
Deanna	“He got people.”	“I think the ones that stood out where we could have relationships with teachers.”	“I think what happened was that each professor brings something very unique, and because of their experience, and because you just knew they cared.”
Marcy	“In his class, always A’s. Just did what I needed to do, on time, prepared, focused, all that good stuff. I had a relationship with him.”	NA	“They were personable and they were real, and they were wanting to bond.”
Pam	“I respected what they said and respected the school values because we had strong relationships.”	“Very nurturing and loving. . . . Definitely high expectations but at the same time very loving, nurturing, understanding. It was a great combination, high expectations.”	“She’s just an amazing person. Just so good at what she does. I felt a really deep connection with her.
Betsy	“Always, they’re the first ones that come to my mind. Because the relationship was deeper than any other teacher.”	“That was when I felt with those professors I always felt that the relationship deepened. I got more out of it.”	“I had a wonderful relationship with all my professors. . . . I am the relationship building person, so as long as that piece is built in to my learning, my learning is just exponentially out there.”

most effective educators will do things *with* students in a relational and emotionally connected manner (Wachtel, 2004). This was confirmed in the reflections of these participants.

For many participants, having personal relationships with authority figures was central to connecting with the learning material as well as the educator. When asked to reflect on relationships with teachers during her childhood, it is interesting that Mara chose to share a story about helping one of her art teachers clean brushes:

It felt like she was paying attention to you, which was nice. . . . I remember one time for example, I was having a hard day . . . and she asked me to help out by cleaning the brushes so it was a nice place. . . . She said let's clean the brushes and she showed me how . . . it felt like a big responsibility so it felt like the relationship with her. . . . It felt nice.

Mara explained that this affected her learning: "I think when you're connected to a teacher the content sometimes carries more weight. Or I give it more weight." For Mara, the personal connection and connecting with content must go hand in hand: "It's interesting, so there's the personal connection and there's also a content connection sometimes. So a content connection makes it easy. . . . I think in retrospect, I think the content connection is personal. . . . I can't disassociate those two things."

The following I-poem highlights the importance of relationships to Mara.

I think it's a connection with the person

I think that the connection allows exponential growth

I think what also stands out

I remember

I think

I feel

This is also reflected in her thoughts about her IIRP experience. Mara said that what stood out to her most at IIRP was the intentional structuring of classroom activities designed explicitly to build relationships through participatory interactions around the material:

There was more of the professor creating structure for the students and both providing space for learning and engagement. So then I think that they created space, supported student engagement with one another, sort of a combination of space and support, and structure for people to be where they were and to grow.

Several participants also discussed times of their life when they did not have personal relationships with teachers or professors. Ben discussed large, impersonal classes at a large state school: “So I sat with a 1,000 kids . . . for Intro to Bio. Forget it. I went and bought the notes. Went to class five times and took the test. That was it. I had no connection.” Marcy explained that during her college years she was busy working several jobs and she felt like she had little time to bond with professors: “I did what I had to do obviously, but I don’t know if I would say if there was any sort of complete bonding with them. Not like with Mr. D . . . in high school. It wasn’t like that.” The result was that college took on very functional quality. Marcy continued,

I went there, I did what I had to do and I got out of there. I was working three jobs. I didn’t care. I had my friends and stuff like that so it didn’t hurt me. I don’t think I really thought about it. . . . I don’t think I would call any of them a mentor. I don’t keep in touch with any of them, or would even want to.

This is contrasted with Marcy’s very different experience at the IIRP, where she had close relationships with professors. This experience is illustrated in the following I-poem.

I did bond with them

I think that

I just wanted

I wanted to do my best

I wanted to show her how well

I wanted to be a great student

Participants used consistent language when describing the teachers and professors who were the most meaningful to them throughout their lifespan. They most frequently used language that described a meaningful, personal relationship and strong levels of connectedness. These relationships helped participants to better engage with learning material. When these relationships were absent, learning also seemed to be less immersive and interesting.

### **Finding 2: The Meaningful Personal Experience**

Participants had meaningful personal experiences in the IIRP program. They frequently described these experiences using therapeutic or psychological language. In the stories of these 10 participants, this element stands out as unique from the descriptive language they used to describe their prior educational experiences. Participants explained in different ways, that their experience at the IIRP helped them to experience personal growth, heal from past wounds, resolve internal conflicts, and experience a safe classroom community. Table 3 summarizes the frequency of these therapeutic experiences by type.

Table 3

*Meaningful Personal Experience by Type*

Type of meaningful personal experience	Number of participants	Sample quotes
Personal growth	8	<p>“It ended up being a lot more sort of personal growth.”</p> <p>“It was a huge growth experience.”</p> <p>“I think one of the things that I think is unique about IIRP is that there is space for . . . it’s not purely content . . . there’s the recognition that the personal growth has to happen . . . and the way things are structured sort of creates it . . . creates the opportunity for the support, for students to help support each other, and the professors.”</p> <p>“At the end I had said that you change because of what you’re learning, because of the teachers, because of the classroom. It’s really a lifestyle change. It’s not just something you learn and hopefully apply—it’s really life changing.”</p> <p>“Even doing a counseling degree somewhere else, you’re not getting that in depth focus of self.”</p> <p>“I know it sounds corny, but it really just changed my life because it changes the outlook of how you perceive things.”</p> <p>“I mean it was personally transforming, it just transformed my life.”</p>
Healing from wounds / internal conflicts	6	<p>“For me it was personal healing that was still happening over injuries, loss of a child, and broken relationships, that I didn’t know how to fix.”</p> <p>“I really felt like while I was going through the program it was a kind of lifeline for me. Trying to help me cope with what I saw as really negative environment [at work].”</p> <p>“For me, it was okay to make mistakes. Truly, up until that point, it wasn’t necessarily okay to make a mistake... That goes way back and I won’t go way</p>

Type of meaningful personal experience	Number of participants	Sample quotes
Feeling part of a safe community	4	<p>back to my childhood, but that’s what I did recognize.”</p> <p>“It just dawned on me a lot of personal things about myself and maybe how I have an issue with perfection, what that was all about, just through that conversation in that class. It just was like life changing . . . I had never had that experience in an educational setting before. Talk about making it relevant—you totally get it when you experience it yourself.”</p> <p>“She clearly cared about the students, she had real sensitivity to pick up on what was going on with them . . . did a good job at creating a safe environment for learning”</p> <p>“The circle created equality and held respect for individuals to share their thoughts and perceptions freely without the risk of judgment.”</p> <p>“This is a place where it’s okay to be honest about what my experience is.”</p>



Francine said that IIRP professors sought to help students make connections between their personal lives and the material. Describing one such experience, she said that the classroom practices

made all of us look at ourselves and really use the process of restorative practice. . . .

Even doing a counseling degree somewhere else, you're not getting that in depth focus of self. . . . In this particular situation you are really looking at who you are as a practitioner.

Two contrapuntal voices became clear in Francine's story: One described a drive to achieve academic and personal success, and the other was keenly aware of opportunities for personal growth. As related in her reflections about high school,

I don't remember what I learned. Truthfully. I know I did, because you took the tests, and you took the SATs, and you did all of those things and they said you were doing well. . . .

And I didn't really see the subjects as much as a vehicle for growth, as it was a passport.

This is what I needed to do to get done.

She related that in college she developed relationships with professors by bonding with them around her studies. Whereas Francine discussed feeling personally alienated from her learning in high school experience, she had a different experience at college:

I usually developed a fairly close relationship with my professors, mainly because I really want to know how they see it [the material]. . . . And usually I can find their love in that.

And then usually could make a connection because then I can understand why they love this so much. And I think that's how the relationships start.

Similarly, Mara suggested that restorative practices is not just a field of study or set of practices, but a "way of life." She explained,

One of the biggest lessons and something I did not expect was how IIRP created a level of reflection and introspection that I would not have imagined. If you had asked me—and likely my friends and family at any point of my life, it would have seemed I did not put a huge premium on relating to people, connecting to people and developing relationships and community; however, my capacity to contextualize and support relationships and community has fundamentally changed. This, I think, has made a tremendous impact on me and my family.

Susie, in particular, repeatedly called restorative practices a “way of life” and even went so far as to compare restorative practices to a religion in a way that echoes the therapeutic language used by others:

I truly believe that the whole thing it's truly, it's very close to religion. It's really a philosophy. It's a way of life. It's not just something that you learn and implement in the classroom. It's not a teaching technique. It's a philosophy. And I guess you could do it as a teaching technique, but it's certainly more genuine if it's your philosophy. . . . This is what I'm talking. . . . I'm sure it's the way a lot of religious people feel when they read the bible.

For some, the IIRP learning environment helped them to feel “safe” in the classroom. For instance, Patrick discussed growing up as a fairly shy boy in the Deep South during the early 1960s in a culture where “sameness was important. . . . You weren't supposed to stand out in any way unless you were especially good at academics or sports.” In Patrick's interview, two contrapuntal voices emerged around this finding. One speaks of being reserved and feeling isolated. This voice speaks of school as a place where he has to be invisible. The other speaks of wanting to feel safe in the classroom and connected to others. Describing himself as shy and

reserved, Patrick said that he saw obedience to authority figures as a way of fitting in—a way of not standing out or drawing attention. Regarding his elementary school principal, he said, “Because she would fasten those eyes on you and you’d feel like, oh my God, I’m in trouble now!” When asked how he felt around the principal, he said that he felt “pretty intimidated. Pretty strained, cautious, silent, very much don’t do anything to draw attention to yourself. It was a big part of the experience.”

This continued throughout Patrick’s life, and although he had a few important and caring relationships with teachers or professors, he described most of his educational experiences as attempts to be invisible out of fear of authority figures. Even during his interview, I sensed in Patrick a certain cautious hesitancy. He seemed to choose his words in a careful and considered manner. I couldn’t help but imagine him as a shy and cautious young man in need of caring relationships with teachers, but locked in an authoritarian and nonparticipatory classroom that rewarded silence and passivity. Reflecting on his relationships with IIRP professors, he said that, as with earlier educators from his life, he felt most connected to those who were passionate about their field (yet understood how to personally connect with students). About one IIRP professor in particular, he said, “She clearly cared about the students, she had real sensitivity to pick up on what was going on with them . . . did a good job at creating a safe environment for learning.” He further reflected that this feeling of personal safety

made it easier for me to come to subsequent classes feeling like this is a place where it’s okay to be honest about what my experience is, and I think the structure of the program does that too, circles do that as you know, because the circle model allows people to not . . . you can go beyond just being intellectual about your experience, which is such a big part of so many traditional classrooms with the instructor in the front and the students

facing the instructors. That model automatically creates a divide and a different status and I think the circle model changes that.

Whereas for most participants using therapeutic language was a positive experience, some also related that this aspect of the IIRP experience led to conflict or confusion for themselves or others—especially regarding boundaries with faculty. For example, Megan said,

It was a huge growth experience. I think the underlying element at that time of IIRP was personal . . . the whole restorative process . . . so it kind of forced out things that you wouldn't normally you would be bringing into your learning experience. Well, for me it was personal healing that was still happening over injuries, loss of a child, and broken relationships, that I didn't know how to fix.

However, he added,

I don't know if the faculty . . . understood or knew what bringing these things out in people during class time how that could impact what the student may expect of the faculty and what they think the relationship is, but it's not. I think that was an element for me. Because I ended up feeling conflicts with faculty during the course of my grad program, which was part of the roller coaster ride.

Two contrapuntal voices developed at this point in Megan's interview that were evident in her reflection on her IIRP experience. One voice appreciated the freedom to process personal experiences as part of the learning. The other voice related that this caused a confusion of boundaries with faculty that led to misunderstandings and conflict throughout her experience. She reflected further about whether there was anything about the IIRP environment in particular that contributed to this: "You were asked to reflect personally, you know, give personal

experiences, and in addition, you were being given, and watching, and studying about personal traumatic experience of others that on levels I very much could relate to.”

The effect of this was that

it brought up some frustration and anger in me towards a couple, specific faculty. I didn't necessarily feel safe anymore. . . . And being the person I am and having had the traumatic experience I have had . . . I really had a hard time dealing with that.

I know a good deal about Megan's personal story and trauma, as well as her difficulties and conflicts with IIRP faculty. My reaction to Megan's story was as mixed and rich as her own experience. I have worked with highly traumatized populations for most of my career as a counselor and later as a consultant to high-risk urban schools. I know that it can be common for those who have experienced significant and recurring trauma to develop a heightened sensitivity to danger and conflict, whether physical, emotional, or relational. Rightly or wrongly, I couldn't help but reflect on how this might have influenced Megan's experience at IIRP, her frequent conflict with faculty, and her disappointment with aspects of the institution's response to these conflicts. Was she simply recreating her traumatizing experiences from the past? Was she predisposed toward dissatisfaction and conflict? For me as the researcher and insider, were these thoughts a form of defensiveness and desire to defend the IIRP program? Was this a way to make her the problem and not the IIRP? Megan is a passionate and articulate woman who does not shrink from conflict and is not afraid to be the voice of dissent. Megan's experience at the IIRP graduate school highlights important aspects of power and authority in the student–instructor relationship. Her concerns made her story one of the richest in this study. Regarding power and authority in these relationships, it is clear that although all of the participants valued

having strong personal relationships with authority figures, it is precisely that personal relationship that can cause confusion.

Other students reported on similar experiences in other classes, thereby confirming Megan's experience, but they had different perspectives on the issue of personal relationships. Patrick said that in his opinion a restorative classroom requires a professor who can encourage students to share personal experiences and connect those experiences with their learning and "at the same time not let it devolve into group therapy when it's not supposed to be that." He remembers students who "clearly brought some personal issues into the environment that could have been a tremendous distraction." He recalled that the professor in that instance "managed to keep the class appropriate without being disrespectful."

Ben recalled another instance:

We had a student I think in my first set of classes—at least the rumor was that they were asked to leave because everything that came up . . . would engage in self-disclosure on all kinds of things that it wasn't the place for self-disclosure. . . . This is not therapy.

And although Mara ultimately remembers this part of her time at IIRP as a positive experience, her language did convey an element of personal risk and faculty pressure to take such risks as integral to the learning experience. Mara explained that when she is more personally "comfortable" with a teacher she is more likely to "expose" herself and share personal information related to her learning. Regarding one IIRP professor, Mara stated, "if I had not been comfortable with her my learning would have been stunted." She described how this sharing helped her to regain her voice—something she thought that she lost as a child:

I grew up in a very strict home with an authoritarian father who valued obedience from his children more than anything. He was an alcoholic and when he drank he was abusive.

. . . There were no discussions over the dinner table about your day, current events, or how you felt about something. I had a zest for life but in my father's presence, my voice was often silenced. As I was raising my children, I would frequently wonder how a child's sense of identity could adequately develop if they have no voice.

She also explained that the participatory nature of her counseling courses led her to reflect on the impact of her family environment as a child:

I began to realize that the client is the expert in their own story. I had closed myself off to my family for survival and I feared walking through that door would open painful wounds. I was not sure if I had the strength to face these wounds yet once again. But secretly as with most children, you want to feel a sense of belonging with your family of origin.

Finally, she concluded by reflecting on this aspect of her experience: "I have always been curious and it has served me well, so I gave myself permission to open this space and seek the answers I needed to reauthor the next chapters of my life."

As evidenced above, therapeutic language was common to the participants' reflections of meaningful personal experiences at the IIRP. For some, this was experienced as something that enhanced their learning or brought an added personal dimension. For others it clearly led to a confusion of boundaries and roles for which they felt unprepared. Clearly, IIRP professors need to be explicitly prepared to discuss and define the boundaries between group process and group therapy. They should also be prepared to assist students in navigating this interpersonal terrain and its emotional benefits and risks.

### **Finding 3: The Role of the Classroom Community**

Some of the distinguishing features of a highly restorative classroom should be high levels of participatory engagement, group process, and interactivity between students (Costello et al., 2009; Costello et al., 2010). For students in this research, relationships with the classroom group as a whole were more important than relationships with professors alone. The highly participatory group experience in IIRP's restorative practices-based, graduate school classrooms was described by many of the participants as being a unique life experiences. Unlike their reflections about earlier education experiences, participants were more likely to mention the "group," "community," and other students when reflecting on their learning at the IIRP. This was an unexpected finding. It exposed and challenged an assumption I made in framing this study that the relationship with IIRP professors would be the most important factor in participants' experiences of power and authority in the classroom. No questions were asked that sought to draw this out. The finding emerged of its own accord in many of the interviews (to differing degrees). Table 4 illustrates participants' reflections on the role of the classroom community in their IIRP experience.

As noted above, this finding was surprising because participants were only asked to reflect on their relationships with IIRP professors and not the classroom group as a whole. During the interviews participants certainly spoke warmly of their relationships with various professors; however, they were frequently more animated and intense when discussing the group experience. Regarding power and authority in the IIRP classroom, it is clear that the class as a whole is in many ways more important than the instructor-student relationship and that this was novel to the participants. For example, Deanna reflected explicitly on this point:



I really liked the . . . approach, which was very different. I'd never had anything like that in any of my other experiences. It was more about you . . . and maybe the teacher, there wasn't so much, with the class working together to support each other. I had never experienced that before.

Patrick reflected on how circles and group-oriented focus actually limited the role of the instructor and increased the role of the group: "Such a big part of so many traditional classrooms . . . the instructor in the front and the students facing the instructors. That model automatically creates a divide and a different status and I think the circle model changes that." This clearly led to experiences such as Francine's. Unlike her descriptions of prior learning experiences, she also included relationships with classmates as part of her reflection. She spoke in detail about the role of the classroom group:

As I listened to the different perspectives from my classmates, I realized how the use of the circle created equality and held respect for individuals to share their thoughts and perceptions freely without the risk of judgment. . . . We also began to become aware of one other's strengths on a deeper level.

It is clear that Francine thought that environments that encourage personal vulnerability and risk-taking helped her to grow as a learner. These elements seemed to be the most memorable aspects of her learning throughout her life and in the IIRP graduate program. Unique to her recollections of her experience at IIRP was the inclusion of stories about how other students helped to create an emotionally safe environment where she could make herself vulnerable to others.

Table 4

*The Role of the Classroom Group/Community by Distinguishing Characteristic*

Distinguishing characteristic	Number of participants	Sample quotes
Group processes promote honesty and interpersonal risk taking	6	<p>“Helped individuals to share their thoughts and perceptions freely without the risk of judgment. . . . We also began to become aware of one other’s strengths on a deeper level.”</p> <p>“You can go beyond just being intellectual about your experience.”</p> <p>“This is a place where it’s okay to be honest about what my experience is, and I think the structure of the program does that too.”</p>
Circles promote group development	5	<p>“As I listened to the different perspectives from my classmates, I realized how the use of the circle created equality.”</p> <p>“The circle model allows people to . . . go beyond just being intellectual about your experience.”</p> <p>“I think that the whole way that the school was set up, the circles, the whole atmosphere was different. . . . So it kind of forced you to be more interactive, more open.”</p>
Group as support network	5	<p>“This group . . . became my community of care. They guided me, supported me. . . . At times, they counseled me.”</p> <p>“The group working together to support each other. I had never experience that before.”</p>

Similarly, Susie reflected that the other students and the classroom “community” were some of the most memorable aspects of her experience:

I was given all of the time and space I needed to do just that. This group . . . became my community of care. They guided me, supported me and helped me to understand the very different techniques. . . . At times, they counseled me, so I learned by example.

This related to two contrapuntal voices in her interview: One voice discussed a deep desire to be heard, whereas the other voice spoke of feeling criticized for being too talkative and needing to control herself continued throughout her high school years. The following I-poem characterizes her early years as a student.

I just didn’t go with that whole raising your hand

I mean

I had something to say

I wanted to say it when I wanted to say it

I thought

I always talked too much

However, at the IIRP she felt that her own experiences and voice were valued and that she had opportunities to share “the point of view of a mother, a middle aged woman and a teacher. I was immersed in a restorative environment. . . . My needs were met.” In her final reflection of her classroom experience, Susie focused not on her relationships with professors, but on the class as a whole:

Over these last two and a half years I have discovered much about our relationships to each other and much about myself as an educator, a counselor, and a member of the community of beings. At the start, the realization that there was a commonality for what I

once thought was a singular belief was eye-opening. Entering our classes was like coming home. I liken the feeling to that which many derive from going to church on Sundays. I always feel better for the experience.

These participatory restorative practices, such as the oft-referenced circle format, clearly made relationships with the classroom group as a whole more important than relationships with professors alone.

### **Subtheme: Restorative Practices as a Solution to a Life Problem or Conflict**

This study also exposed one subtheme in the participants' stories. This theme was not as strong or obvious as the three main themes mentioned above, but was still clearly related to the questions posed by this study. Six of the participants clearly disclosed that they had been drawn to study restorative practices in the IIRP graduate program to fix some problem they perceived in their organization, their field, or society as a whole. For most participants, this drive revolved around their personal biography, conflicts from their childhood, or past trauma with others. Though it was not the direct intent of this study, this subtheme is instructive as to the self-selection bias concerning the adults who seek out this program. Table 5 summarizes the external and internal problems discussed by these six participants.

For instance, Pam said that her interest in restorative practices originated from her belief that the practices could help to restore the once strong community she remembers from her youth. This highlights two contrapuntal voices in Pam's story. One is the voice that seeks rootedness in a community with a strong identity. The other is the voice that craves empowerment, freedom, and the ability to make her own choices about her identity. Pam grew up with a strong sense of a positive working-class identity during the most prosperous periods of her town's history. She discussed the importance of this sense of place:

It was a very important place for me. It was the place where I was very successful. In the community I grew up in . . . The school . . . it's a square-mile town. The school was kind of like the hub of the community. It's where you went after school. . . . It was a place that provided a lot of programs during the summer for us. It was just a really important part of my life as a child.

Table 5

*External and Internal Problems*

Name	External problem	Internal problem
Megan	Reform of healthcare system / patients' rights	Past trauma / loss of loved one
Patrick	School reform / improve emotional climate for children	Feeling unsafe at school as a child / desire to connect with teachers
Susie	School reform / help children feel respected and included	Wanting her voice to be valued as a child and adult
Ben	Conveying religious values to children	Reform of his own lifestyle as a young adult
Pam	Revitalizing her community / school reform	Develop voice as a woman / Loss of working-class community identity
Marcy	Supporting troubled youth	Recovery from adolescent rebelliousness

Pam also developed a strong need to find her voice as a woman, which at times was at odds with the culture around her: "I went to an all-girls, private Catholic college. . . . So it was extremely empowering. Strong, all about women's issues—even though it was taught by Catholic nuns. I felt very empowered there. It was a really good experience." In this college she also learned about issues of social class and how they intersected with her identity as a woman. She reflected about a particular nun,

She just talked a lot about women's issues. She was phenomenal. I learned a lot about social class and what that means in society, especially for women. She was from India. She just gave me a new perspective on just rules in society and making it relevant and meaningful and it was just very empowering. It's the only word I can . . . I could talk to . . . it's hard to remember specifically, but there were lots of examples like that, things that I hadn't been exposed to being from a small town. I guess like everybody has that experience when they go to college, but because it was an all-girls school I think that's why I felt that way.

She summarized the impact of this:

I think as a girl maybe just the experience I had growing up, things that I saw about what a woman's role should be, or the plight of women if you will, there are a lot of single mothers in this community, so it's kind of off balance. I think being in a school that focused on girls, and girls in education, and women's issues, just created an awareness for me. My life could and should be different than what I had seen growing up maybe.

Pam said that she saw the same needs reflected in her community at the time of the survey and that she was drawn to restorative practices as a means to transform her community and continue this development from her early adulthood. She said about her IIRP experience,

I mean it was personally transforming. It just transformed my life. . . . I think whatever was left over from undergrad that I still needed to deal with personally. . . . It was just unique in that while I was learning how to apply those things to other people in my field in education, it was helping transform me at the same time.

In her final reflection paper, Pam discussed the importance of her community and her concerns for the well-being of its children: "As an educator for the past 15 years in my hometown, in

which I still live, I have been an eyewitness to the growing disconnect between the youth and our community, in particular, the schools.” She added that, after the installation of a new highway and a devastating hurricane, her town, “once a lively bay-shore resort through the 1950s, which quickly became a ghost town . . . turned a thriving bungalow rental summer escape into a year round community for blue collar working-class families.” She said,

Most of us had been nurtured with the gift of resilience. Growing up with a strong sense of belonging fostered this resiliency . . . a place where everyone knew your name and people were genuinely concerned with your success and overall wellbeing.

At the time of the interview she thought that

in many ways, [her town was] caught in the vicious cycle that scores of communities find themselves in, misguided by discriminatory beliefs and unfair practices that only serve to further alienate its members. As our youngest community members act out in response to the harsh conditions in which they live, they are widely met with zero tolerance policies and exceedingly punitive outcomes.

Still, she reported that, as she had found in her own experience,

Empowerment is what these young people seek and the hope that this is possible is what they lack. Hope fosters resilience; so as a result, these young people are not resilient.

They see themselves as victims of their circumstances and fail to recognize the power of education in their lives. As a restorative practitioner in this environment, my role becomes leader, modeling the way and inspiring the heart.

The following I-poem illustrates that her experience at the IIRP has helped her serve these youth better more effectively.

I find with my students too

I'm an adult that's trying to help them

I listen more

I just think there's a better connection

I was drawn to Pam's personal story more than any other participant. Her childhood experiences closely matched my own. I too grew up in a close-knit, working-class community that, though once prosperous, began to decline precipitously during my childhood. Unlike my parent's generation, my brothers and I witnessed a rapid decline in standard of living as poverty and crime grew around our increasingly small enclave on the outskirts of Philadelphia. It is difficult for me to read her story without recalling my own. I was drawn to restorative practices as a way to empower and give voice to disenfranchised communities. However, I was also drawn to restorative practices because it has helped me feel that I was having a positive impact on social issues that I had felt powerless over as a child. Pam's story is one strong example echoed by most of the other participants in varying ways.

### **Summary**

The first insight gained from this investigation is that participants used very consistent language when describing the teachers and professors who were most meaningful to them throughout their lifespan. Participants used words such as "connection," "relationship," and "personal" when describing these educators. Second, participants had meaningful personal experiences that they frequently described using therapeutic or psychological language. Finally, relationships with the classroom group as a whole were more important to participants than relationships with professors alone. The highly participatory group experience in the restorative practices-based graduate school classroom stood out as being unique in the life experience of these learners. Indeed, it was more important than any unique relationship with IIRP professors.



This study also exposed one unexpected subtheme in the participants' stories. Six of the participants clearly discussed that they had been drawn to study restorative practices in the IIRP graduate program to fix some problem they perceived in their organization, their field, or society as a whole. For most participants, this drive revolved around their personal biography, conflicts from their childhood, and past trauma with others. Though it was not the direct intent of this study, this unexpected subtheme is instructive as to the self-selection bias concerning the adults who seeks out this program.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

The findings discussed above bring important insights into power and authority in the student–instructor relationship in a restorative practices–based graduate program. This institution is unique in that it is the first graduate school to employ a restorative practices approach systematically by mandating the restorative power and authority model in instruction, group processes, and student relations across all faculty members. Prior to this study, little was known about how restorative practices were experienced by graduate students. The following section will discuss how the findings of this study relate to existing literature on restorative practices and adult learning.

### Consistency of Language Across the Lifespan

The first finding of this study was that participants used very consistent language when describing the teachers and professors who were most meaningful to them—regardless of whether they were reflecting on authority figures from childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, or adulthood. They spoke of authority figures who took a personal interest in them and were emotionally and academically nurturing. Participants felt that they had a personal relationship with these teachers and professors. This echoes the fundamental hypothesis of restorative practices, that is, that “individuals function best when those in positions of authority do things *with* them rather than *to* them or *for* them” (all emphasis original; Wachtel, 2004, p.1).

When describing their most positive and memorable experiences with educators, participants repeatedly said that these educators established a personal relationship or connection with them. Several participants also explained that it was this personal relationship that helped them to “connect” with the academic material. It is significant that the descriptive language used by participants was remarkably similar when describing these educators from across their

lifespan (see Table 1). The use of words such as “relationship,” close “connections,” and “personal” was very common to all of the participant’s reflections. These similarities suggest that the personal and relationship elements of the student–teacher experience are common across the developmental spectrum and participants’ cultural backgrounds. Their most memorable experiences with professors at the IIRP graduate school had relational qualities similar to their experiences with other teachers and professors throughout their life. Participants described these experiences in remarkably similar terms.

These findings validate the fundamental hypothesis proposed by Wachtel (2004) that the model of authority most conducive to learning is one where the educator retains his or her authority but uses it in an engaging, personal, and relational way. This echoes similar assertions from the literature on relational-cultural therapy (Jordan, 2010), collaborative learning groups and communities (McElhinney, 1994; Rodger, 2001), and women’s groups (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Jordon (2010) argued for a client-centered therapeutic approach in which the therapist is a supportive guide who assists the client in exploring his or her own story. Rodger (2001) and McElhinney (1994) asserted that a truly participatory classroom that is centered on the needs of learners necessitates educators who are willing to act as facilitators of the learning process rather than dispensers of knowledge. Miller and Stiver (1997) argued for the creation of collaborative experiences for women in which they can share their own stories and discuss issues of power openly. All of these theorists share a view of the use of authority and power that accords with Wachtel’s (2004) concept of restorative authority, in which the people in positions of authority do things *with* people rather than *to* them or *for* them.

The restorative practices philosophy claims that its core constructs and ideas contain essential truths about human relationships that are common to all people and cultures (Costello et

al., 2009; Wachtel, 2004). Implied in the restorative literature is that the restorative practices hypothesis is true regardless of life experience or social background. This claim was supported by the results of this study and the differing backgrounds of the participants. A relationship with authority figures in which the student feels a nurturing and personal connection with the teacher or professor was central to their best memories from their education. This is one of the basic presumptions of the restorative practices philosophy (Wachtel, 2004) and it is confirmed in the reflections of these participants.

The participants' stories reveal that the educators who were most memorable to them built a strong personal relationship and helped them to personally connect with the material. Regarding their experience at the IIRP, it is clear that the learning experience was both emotional and cognitive. This finding is supported by Adamson's (2012) recent study of the IIRP student population. He found that emotional experiences of students at the IIRP were so linked with their cognitive experience that the two were often indistinguishable for students. As indicated by this finding, this restorative practices classroom dynamic ultimately requires the willingness of educators as authority figures to share power with students through engaging practices.

### **The Meaningful Personal Experience**

All participants related having a meaningful personal experience at the IIRP, and they described this experience using therapeutic language. In the stories of the 10 study participants, this element stood out as unique from the language used when describing their prior educational experiences. Participants said, in different ways, that the IIRP approach helped them to grow personally, heal from past wounds, resolve internal conflicts, and experience a "safe" classroom community (see Table 2). For some, the IIRP method was viewed as something that enhanced

their learning or brought an added personal dimension. For others, it clearly led to an experience that confused them and for which they felt unprepared.

Inherent in the restorative practices philosophy of group formation and in the training of IIRP faculty is the idea that the classroom is a type of community, however temporary and limited in its scope and temporary it might be (Costello et al., 2009; Costello et al., 2010; McElhinney, 1994). Within this community, as in other more permanent communities, the assumption is that students will bring their own personal experiences, stories, and needs to the learning process, which will often trigger or make personal insights or corrective emotional experiences likely (Nathanson, 1997; Yalom, 1995).

The community dynamic certainly seemed to have been at work in the classroom experiences of the IIRP graduate students in this study. Seven of the 10 participants recalled the classroom community as a universally positive experience. For example, Patrick described feelings of personal safety. Francine said that the experience included a depth of self-focus that she had not experienced prior to attending classes at the IIRP. Susie went so far as to recall her experience using religious metaphors and called restorative practices a “way of life.” One participant found this experience confusing and troubling. Megan related feeling confused, frustrated, and angry after sharing elements of a personal trauma she experienced. In her opinion, the IIRP faculty was unprepared to support her, and this led her to feel emotionally unsafe in the classroom. Two other participants had mixed experiences. Mara described how she felt pressure to take personal risks that she might not have otherwise taken in another learning environment. Ben had a positive personal experience but explained that he felt frustrated with other students who, in his opinion, confused the opportunity to share personal stories with an opportunity for group therapy. He recalled instances when other students engaged in what he felt were

inappropriate self-disclosures that made him feel uncomfortable and disrupted his learning. A highly participatory and restorative classroom that regularly uses practices such as circles and storytelling encourages students to connect their learning with their own life stories, conflicts, and in some cases traumas. As predicted by Yalom (1995), intensive and collaborative group processes will encourage participants to share deeply personal elements of their life experience. However, in the classroom setting, educators must be prepared for such sharing and help others navigate the boundaries between learning and therapy.

This element of the IIRP experience points to Mezirow's (1997) idea that learning should be a transformative experience. He posited that transformative learning must involve a shift in one's frame of reference, which he explained as the body of experience that defines how we look upon the world. Frames of reference include not only conscious elements such as memories, concepts, and values but also unconscious, conditioned responses and feelings that shape our experience (Mezirow, 1997). Some aspects of these frames of reference are more open to change, whereas other aspects are more durable and can take a very long time to shift. These changes are often triggered by disorienting dilemmas, which are life events that can occur suddenly or over a period of time that trigger a reexamination of one's experience, beliefs, and self-concepts (Mezirow, 1997). The findings of this study strongly suggest that the restorative classroom triggers these experiences in adult learners. Restorative practices such as fair process (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997) and circles (Costello et al., 2010) provide regular opportunities to discuss one's frame of reference, worldview, and life experiences—in short to provide the practical mechanisms for transformative learning. All participants related in various ways that the group experience caused them to unexpectedly link their learning with past experiences and frames of reference. This is evidenced in Mara's reflection on how her father's alcoholism and

her chaotic home life as a child shaped how she approached relationships. Megan explained how the group experience led to a personal reflection on past trauma and how that has influenced her learning. Patrick talked about how he felt shy, unsafe, and uncomfortable around authority figures but learned to find voice and comfort through participating in classroom circles at the IIRP.

Adamson's (2012) findings support the presence of transformative learning as defined by Mezirow (1997). He found that students at the IIRP regularly experienced disorienting dilemmas and pressure to critically reflect on their own ideas and practices. Regarding power and authority, this requires an educator who is more of a "facilitator" than an "instructor" (McElhinney, 1994). Group processes are more appropriate and effective in engaging the adult learner because such processes allow adults to utilize their existing knowledge and expertise in creating new meaning (McElhinney, 1994). This is reflected in one of Mara's statements: "One of the biggest lessons and something I did not expect was how IIRP created a level of reflection and introspection that I would not have imagined." A similar example is Francine's assertion that circles and other group processes "made all of us look at ourselves and really use the process of restorative practice." It is this depth of self-focus and engaging group practices that helped to create opportunities to connect what the participants' were learning about restorative practices with their own life stories and produce meaningful personal experiences.

However, the findings of this study raise two potential concerns for programs utilizing restorative practices. The first issue is the need to guard against dogmatism. Some of the participants went so far as to suggest that restorative practices is not just a field of study or set of practices, but a "way of life." Susie made repeated analogies between restorative practices and religion. The obvious concern here for institutions of higher learning is the need to consistently

encourage critical reflection, especially of the restorative practices philosophy itself, as a guard against dogmatism. This is of special concern for institutions such as the IIRP, where the approach is mandated as part of its mission. Is it imperative that restorative educators take Freire's (1998) advice and not behave as if they are the sole possessors of wisdom and allow students to fully participate in the process of creating meaning. Teachers can do this by allowing them to think critically about restorative theory itself.

The second concern is that while for most participants the therapeutic element was a positive experience, some also related that this element of the IIRP experience led to conflict or confusion for themselves or others. Megan's story is a clear example of this, as are Ben's and Patrick's critiques of other students who they felt did not maintain appropriate boundaries with faculty and their classmates. As related by several participants, they experienced a pressure and expectation to share personal stories related to the course material. This reflects Irving Yalom's (1995) assertion that this type of interactive learning leads to the experience of unique therapeutic factors that emerge from group process. Susie clearly experienced what Yalom called existential experiences in her recollection of her religious-like experience at the IIRP. Mara reflected on how the group experience led her to understand how her adult relationships have been shaped by her childhood relationship with her father. This is indicative of the recapitulation of the primary family group, in which group members act out and reflect on relational patterns from childhood. Even Megan, though elements of her experience were very difficult for her, clearly experienced a powerful emotional experience. In fact, this experience was so strong that she and faculty seemed unprepared for its intensity. Central to Yalom's (1995) group development theory is the idea is that the group process will surface hidden conflicts and needs



and provide a forum through which these issues can be explored or resolved. This certainly manifested in the participants' experiences.

However, these ideas are rooted in the practice of group therapy, not adult education. Even the repeated use of narrative techniques and encouraging students to "tell their stories," though lauded in my literature review, carries the potential risk to drift into therapy if professors are not prepared to navigate the gray areas between education and therapy. Although the participatory restorative classroom will surely evidence some of Yalom's (1995) therapeutic factors, the stories of Megan, Ben, and Patrick highlight the need for IIRP faculty to have explicit conversations with students regarding the boundaries between group learning and group therapy.

One implication of this finding is that perhaps some of the IIRP professors have not clarified these differences themselves. To date, the factors that influence restorative practices have been primarily from the field of psychology, not education. Therapy often begins with the presumption that the client desires to make a change in his or her life. This could be a conflict, relational problem, or healing from past wounds. White (1992) discussed the power of narrative techniques lies in their efficacy at surfacing deep elements of lived experiences, problems, and conflicts. This is also true of the application of these techniques to the field of education. Rossiter (2003) stated that the application of narrative techniques to adult learning encourages total involvement of the student, both cognitively and emotionally. Polkinghorne (1988) argued that narratives are the primary way in which humans create meaning and that narrative processes help students to explore complex subjects more deeply. However, the expectations one brings to therapy versus the expectations that one brings to the classroom are quite different. Students do not typically enter graduate study expecting therapy from the professor or the classroom group—

nor should they. Education, simply put, is about learning. Narrative techniques help to better connect concepts and theory to the students' lived experiences. But education should not start from the presumption that students have come to cope better with life issues. That some students will have meaningful personal experiences or perhaps even growth in the classroom is a positive element of the restorative classroom that can be embraced. However, educators must guard against classroom processes drifting into inappropriate attempts to create a therapeutic experience—whether on the part of faculty or students. Personal growth and change should not become the goal of classroom processes. Ben recalled students attempting to do this and it frustrated him. Megan said that faculty encouraged this and it confused and angered her. In the stories of these participants, it is evident that it is not the group process itself but rather unclear boundaries and expectations that caused conflict and confusion.

### **The Role of the Classroom Group and Community**

Restorative practices and adult learning theories share a mutual concern for collaborative process, group development, and group formation. A restorative classroom should be distinguished by interpersonal engagement, group-oriented processes, and high levels of interactivity between students and authority figures (Costello et al., 2009; Costello et al., 2010). Many participants described the highly participatory group experience in the restorative practices-based graduate school classroom at the IIRP as a unique life experience. Their reflections on the group experience centered on three distinguishing characteristics: (a) the promotion of honesty and interpersonal risk-taking, (b) circles as a method of promoting group development, and (c) the classroom group as a support network (see Table 4).

Participants were more likely to mention the “group,” “community,” and other students when reflecting on their learning at the IIRP—something that did not emerge from their

reflections on earlier education experiences. Though surprising, it supports the thinking of both Mezirow (1997) and Shor (1996) that in classrooms where power is truly shared with students, reflections on the classroom experience will be centered on the group rather than the authority figure. In such a classroom, the authority figure is no longer the sole axis on which the group turns. In this study, no questions were asked that sought to draw this out. Still, this theme seemed to emerge of its own accord to differing degrees in many of the interviews. Participants were only asked to reflect on their relationships with IIRP professors and not the classroom group as a whole.

It is clear that, regarding power and authority in this program, the class as a whole is in many ways more important than the instructor–student relationship and that this was novel to the participants. Intensive and participatory group processes in the restorative practices–based graduate classroom are even more unique and transformative than any direct behavior of the faculty. This finding confirms Mezirow’s (1998) assertion that a truly transformative classroom will put the student (and more appropriately, students) in control of learning process. It also confirms Shor’s assertion (1998) that such participatory classrooms will assist students in moving from a disempowered, passive role into a full consideration of their own potential for making new meaning and self-management—not only in the classroom, but also in other areas of life. This exposed and challenged my assumption in designing this study that relationships with professors at the IIRP would be the primary determinant of the quality of the adult learners’ experience of power and authority. Although my intent was explore power and authority in the student–instructor relationship, this study revealed that, in a highly restorative classroom, the instructor is less of a factor, except perhaps in his or her willingness to be less dominant and share power with the group. This finding strongly suggests that, when used consistently,

restorative practices accomplishes a shift of power and authority away from the professor alone and toward the classroom community as a whole.

This power sharing is also reflective of the concept of collaborative learning. Barkley (2010) argued that for student engagement to become a regular and consistent feature of higher education, institutions must employ an explicit framework for that engagement. In short, it is not enough for institutions to promote collaborative learning in theory. Institutions must clearly establish their theoretical stance and provide regular training, evaluation, and feedback to help educators implement that theory into their classroom practice (Barkley et al., 2005). If the authoritarian model of education seeks to force people to learn (Shor, 1998), then collaborative models such as restorative practices should encourage students to want to learn. Barkley (2010) asserted that this is best accomplished in a classroom where there is a clear and explicit commitment to collaboration and group interactivity. Creating the environment described by Barkley (2010) has been the central experiment of the IIRP program, and the participants in this study reported that collaboration and group interactivity was a central and consistent characteristic of their experience.

### **Restorative Practices as a Solution to a Life Problem or Conflict**

Six of the participants clearly reported that they were drawn to study restorative practices and the IIRP graduate program to solve some problem that they perceived in their organization, their field, or society as a whole. For most of the participants, this drive revolved around their personal biography, conflicts from their childhood, and past trauma. Although it was not the direct intent of this study, this finding is instructive as to the self-selection bias concerning the adults who seek out the IIRP program (see Table 5) and also as to what motivates adult learners to pursue restorative practices education in general and the IIRP program in particular. These six

participants clearly described their desire to change some aspect of the external world—be it their workplace, community, or society in general. These driving factors are also clearly rooted in internal problems, stories, and conflicts from their life. In short, the IIRP program draws a high proportion of students who see the world as a place in need of change.

This drive to solve life problems or conflict reflects the influence that narrative theories have had on restorative practices. Semmler (2000) asserted that educators must encourage students to craft their own life-stories. Miller and Stiver (1997) described this process as becoming the author of one's story. This authorship requires personal awareness and practical mechanisms to put new understandings into action, such as a highly collaborative classroom (Rossiter, 2007; Rossiter & Clark, 2007). According to White (1992), one's narrative provides the primary vehicle for meaning making. For example, Pam clearly linked her interest in implementing restorative practices with her desire to see that the poor and working-class youth she serves are included in the life of her community and treated with respect by authority figures. She discussed how this was rooted in her experience of developing an authentic voice as a woman in a small, tight-knit community as a child and young adult. Patrick recalled growing up in a working-class family and feeling like school was about being quiet and avoiding the attention of authority figures. He connected his interest in restorative practices with his feeling that his school was not serving the emotional needs of its students and that young people need to be given a voice at school.

Adults often return to school in the midst of life transitions (Kasworm, 2003). This is often a moment in life when adults reflect on the course of their narrative and the arc of their life story. This finding demonstrates that narrative-informed restorative practices, such as the consistent use of storytelling and group reflection using circles, help to expose these

opportunities for growth and allow for a praxis of life experience and learning that aids students in solving life problems or conflicts. The restorative classroom, informed by the participatory and transformative principles of adult learning theory, has the potential to provide the practical means to accomplish the transformative learning experience discussed by Freire (1998), Mezirow (1997), and Dirkx (2000). Nearly all of the adults in this study saw their learning in this program as an opportunity to attempt to transform aspects of themselves and the world around them.

### **Conclusions**

This study examined power and authority in the student–instructor relationship in a restorative practices–based graduate program. The first finding was that participants used very consistent language when describing the teachers and professors who were the most meaningful to them throughout their lifespan. Common descriptors for these educators were “connection,” “relationship,” and “personal.” A relationship with authority figures in which the student feels a nurturing and personal connection with the instructor was central to the participants’ best memories from their education. A strong, balanced student–teacher relationship is one of the basic presumptions of the restorative practices philosophy (Wachtel, 2004). The second finding was that participants had meaningful personal experiences that they frequently described using therapeutic or psychological language. For seven of the 10 participants this was a universally positive experience that helped them to experience personal growth, heal from past wounds, resolve internal conflicts, and experience a “safe” classroom community. For one participant, it caused conflict and confusion regarding personal boundaries with faculty and the line between group process and group therapy. Two other participants had mixed experiences. This finding exposes one of the greatest strengths of the restorative approach, namely that the restorative

classroom effectively uses narrative techniques to encourage students to connect their learning with their lived experience and life story. However, it also raises a flag that educators must be deliberate in navigating the boundaries between group process and group therapy. The third finding was that relationships with the classroom group as a whole were more important than relationships with professors alone. Participants were very likely to mention the “group,” “community,” and other students when reflecting on their learning at the IIRP, and these characterizations were markedly different than their descriptions of earlier education experiences. This supports the assertion that the restorative practices power and authority model is effective in creating a collaborative classroom in which power is shared between instructors and students. Finally, this study discovered that many of these participants were drawn to the IIRP’s program out of a desire to make change in the world and that this desire was driven by conflicts and other elements of their personal life stories.

### **Recommendations**

In addition to the insights discussed above, these findings point to several important recommendations for the IIRP program as well as for any institution of adult learning attempting to implement a restorative practices approach. First, it is important that such institutions have explicit conversations, internally and with students, about the difference between group process and group therapy. It is clear from the participants’ stories that it was not the group process itself that caused occasional conflict and confusion, but unclear expectations as to what these processes were intended to accomplish. Next, as an institution dedicated to one specific model of power and authority, it is imperative that faculty explicitly encourage critical reflection among themselves and students, especially of the restorative practices philosophy itself, as a guard against inflexible dogmatism. One way that the IIRP is attempting to address this challenge is by

offering students and faculty regular learning opportunities led by scholars and practitioners from outside the institution through continuing-education events, such as symposia and conferences. Concerted efforts should be made to invite speakers who might disagree with restorative theory or conceptualize it differently than the IIRP faculty. The hope is that this will help to encourage debate, development of new theory, and a critical thinking among IIRP faculty and students. Finally, the IIRP experience described by these participants demonstrates that it is possible to provide a consistently collaborative and student-centered classroom environment. This is in large part due to the IIRP's commitment to an explicit power and authority model at the institutional level. Adult learning institutions sympathetic to collaborative and empowering models of education should consider the depth of their formal commitment to those ideas and how consistently those ideas are applied in the classroom.

This study did not aim to demonstrate the effectiveness of restorative practices. Rather, the intent was to explore the experience power and authority in student–instructor relationships. Future inquiry should investigate the role of power and authority in the classroom group as a whole and how educators and students navigate the boundaries between group process and group therapy. Future research into this population should also clearly address the lack of minority voices in this study. Finally, future studies should examine how students in such environments respond to criticism of the restorative modality itself, while also encouraging open and free academic inquiry among students and faculty.



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## Appendix A

### Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a study being conducted by John Bailie, PhD student at Lesley University, Cambridge, MA. In this study, I hope to learn more about your experiences in the IIRP graduate school and past experiences with regard to your relationships with teachers and professors. The learning from this study will help to inform how adults experience a restorative practices based graduate program. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an IIRP graduate school alumnus.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview that will last approximately one hour. You might be asked to participate in a follow-up interview or phone conversation as necessary for additional information or clarification. The questions asked during this interview will focus on your learning, experiences and reflections regarding your experience as a learner. This information will be recorded via audiotape and transcribed. Each participant will be kept confidential by assigning a pseudonym to you to protect your privacy. Any comments about IIRP faculty will be kept confidential by assigning a coded number to any references to specific faculty members. Written reports will be kept in locked filing cabinets or password protected files.

This study will also ask for your permission to review your Final Seminar YC 660 /ED 661 reflection paper. This document review is only intended to inform the insights from your personal interview as a secondary source of information. This document review is not a re-evaluation of your work. This document will be kept in locked filing cabinets or password protected files.

You will be asked to discuss experiences that may or may not bring up uncomfortable memories or thoughts. You may choose to not share any experiences that you do not feel comfortable disclosing.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with the IIRP in any way. Your status as a valued IIRP alumnus will not be affected in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Participants will not be compensated for their participation.

If you have any questions, please contact John Bailie by phone at (267) 246-5891 or email him at [jbailiei@lesley.edu](mailto:jbailiei@lesley.edu). John Bailie's senior advisor and doctoral committee chair is Dr. Amy Rutstein-Riley, Lesley University. She can be contacted with any questions at: [arutstei@lesley.edu](mailto:arutstei@lesley.edu).

**YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.**

Participant signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Semistructured Interview Guide

1. Earliest learning experiences:
  - As a child and young adult what did you perceive school to be “about”?
  - Tell me a K–12 school story from your childhood that illustrates your relationship with your teachers or principal.
  - How did this make you feel?
  - How did this impact your learning?
2. Prior adult learning experiences:
  - What did you perceive higher learning to be “about”?
  - Tell me a story from your prior adult education experience that illustrates your relationship with your instructors/professors.
  - How did this make you feel?
  - How did this impact your learning?
3. IIRP graduate school learning experiences:
  - What do you perceive your graduate study at the IIRP to be “about”?
  - Tell me a story from your IIRP graduate school experience that illustrates your relationship with your professors.
  - How did this make you feel?
  - How did this impact your learning?
4. Potential sub questions for categories 1 through 3 above:
  - What was/is most challenging for you in this learning environment?
  - What was/is your experience around these challenges?

- Can you recall a story that illustrates this?
5. What have you found to be most meaningful or important about this conversation?
  6. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you think would be important to know about your learning experiences?

## Appendix C

### Confidentiality Agreement

I agree to keep all data, information and documents related to research being conducted by John Bailie confidential. Once my work is complete I agree to destroy all copies of this data or return these materials to John Bailie.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D**

### **E-mail Invitation to Participate**

My name is John Bailie and I am the Director of Continuing Education at the IIRP.

I'm writing to invite you to participate in a research project I am completing as part of my PhD work at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an IIRP graduate school alumnus.

Participation is completely voluntary and your willingness to participate (or not) has no bearing on your status as a valued IIRP alumnus. While I have permission from our administration to approach our alumni your decision to participate or not will not be shared with any of the staff or faculty of the IIRP.

My area of PhD research interest is student–instructor relationships. I am interviewing select alumni of the IIRP graduate school in order to learn more about your experiences in the IIRP graduate school and past experiences with regard to your relationships with teachers and professors.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview, conducted by me, that will last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. The open-ended questions asked during this interview will focus on your learning, experiences and reflections regarding your experience as a learner.

The 1-hour interview can be scheduled at a time and location most convenient to you.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Each participant will be kept confidential by assigning a pseudonym to you to protect your identity. Any comments about IIRP faculty will also be kept anonymous by assigning a coded number to any references to specific faculty members.

This study will also ask for your permission to review your Final Seminar YC 660 /ED 661 reflection paper. This document review is only intended to inform the insights from your personal interview as a secondary source of information. This document review is not a re-evaluation of your work.

Written reports will be kept in locked filing cabinets or password protected files. All participants will sign an "informed consent" form that outlines the scope of your participation and your rights and protections as a participant. This form is attached for your review. I can collect it during our interview if you decide to participate.



My hope is that this research will help to expand our understanding of restorative practices in education.

If you are interested in participating please respond via email or call me directly at (267) 246-5891. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

Best wishes,

John Bailie

## Appendix E

### Cumulative Analysis Examples

#### Megan's Story

Megan is a 43-year-old healthcare advocate. She recounted the story of her early education as being defined by the juxtaposition of her public and Catholic school experience. She attended public kindergarten, Catholic schools in Grades 1 through 9, and then public school again in Grades 10 through 12. Megan said that kindergarten “was a lot of fun. Most of my memories are of, very young ones, like kindergarten of the teacher creating things in the classroom that just made me laugh.” She recounted a story about her learning during this time that illustrates the above:

We were learning how to count and it was right around Easter, and even though this was a public school, so many years ago, it was right around Easter, and we had to collect eggs and find eggs, and she said well you need to find 100 and we hadn't found 100 so she said alright you know what maybe we're not able to see because the blinds are closed. So everybody open one blind. And there was enough for our class where we all opened one blind and as we opened them, a whole mess of eggs fell. It was hysterical. Again, I'm five and we all thought oh my God this is great. And then she said that's what 100 looks like. So it was kind of cool.

She described herself as being a very reserved child:

I don't remember having particularly close relationships with any teachers. Especially as a youngster, I was very reserved, very quiet. So, I don't know that I had a lot of conversation one-on-one with them, but I do remember them for those kinds of

memorable things that were fun or made that kind of emotional impact, I was able to tie into.

In contrast, she recalled,

The Catholic school memories weren't very good. It was very stringent. There was one nun in first grade that did something funny and she never put anybody in the closet, but a lot of the other ones did. I mean it's crazy, but they did. I remember them putting somebody in the closet, getting wacked with the pencil. Sounds crazy, but then in 9th grade in Catholic high school I was getting headaches every day.

She then reflected on her relationships with teachers once she returned to public school in 10th grade:

The ones in high school were more personal. I specifically remember one teacher who we had a kind of a sociology course, now I'm forgetting the name of the woman who taught us about with the gorillas, remember *Gorillas in the Mist*? . . . We did a lot of work on her and Margaret Meade. Our classes. He held all of our classes in a circle. Swear to God, I just realized that. We'd push all the seats and we'd be in a circle. There was a lot more free flowing discussion. Even though we had at that time what I felt were pretty intensive research and writing papers that we had to do, but I felt a different level of respect and the ability to engage rather than being patronized or being told well this is the way it is.

The main theme in her stories of relationships with educators throughout her life seemed to center around the desire to connect personally with others, yet a hesitancy and fear stemming from what she described as her reserved nature. When asked about how her relationships with those teachers that she did connect with personally affected her learning she said, "Well I think they encouraged me to continue to be a teacher. I don't know if I'd be a teacher if I stuck through

Catholic school. I may be a very frustrated adult now if I hadn't." In her reflection on her college experience Megan recalled that the most memorable professors were ones who took a personal interest in her wellbeing and tried to build a personal relationship with students. She said about one professor,

She actually found out more about the personal things going on in my life because it was my senior year in college. I had had a child, out of wedlock, and she was not yet a year old, and I had, the father and I were going through a bumpy time. I was not going to get married at that point . . . She gave me a little nugget that I've kept. And I've repeated to other people. You don't have to do anything right now. You don't have to make a decision right now. And I think a lot of times we kind of force decisions on our life and it's, you don't have to. When the time is right it'll come.

When asked about how this professor's approach manifested affected her learning, she said,

She did a lot of work in government as well. And she would include us on it. We helped her with some research and she did invite the group back to her home. So that was one where there was a little bit more personal relationship there . . . She made me feel very valued. Really valued. As an undergrad being able to be included in research that was being done at a level of the US government you know, being referring to it. I really felt like it had some worth, what I was doing. So yeah, it was a positive.

When asked to reflect on her IIRP graduate school experience, she said,

It was a huge growth experience. There are, I think the, the underlying element at that time of IIRP was personal, maybe because it was you learned first, kind of personally understanding the whole restorative process so it kind of forced out things that you wouldn't normally you would be bringing into your learning experience. Well, for me it

was personal healing that was still happening over injuries, loss of a child, and broken relationships, that I didn't know how to fix.

When asked to share a story about an experience that would illustrate this, she said,

She shared a personal story of her own that was pretty traumatic to listen to and all the while knowing in myself, change a couple of nouns, and you have the story.

When asked about how these types of personal experiences in the context of her IIRP experience made her feel, she responded,

I don't know if the faculty . . . understood or knew what bringing these things out in people during class time how that could impact what the student may expect of the faculty and what they think the relationship is, but it's not. I think that was an element for me. Because I ended up feeling conflicts with faculty during the course of my grad program, which was part of the roller coaster ride.

When asked if there was anything in particular about this environment that brought out these experiences she said,

There was a certain level that you were asked to reflect personally, you know, give personal experiences, and in addition, you were being given, and watching, and studying about personal traumatic experience of others that on levels I very much could relate to.

Until this point in her interview, educators in her life that formed personal bonds with her were recalled in a universally positive light. However, it seems that, during her IIRP experience, aspects of her personal relationships with professors were confusing for her. A contrapuntal voice developed at this point that carried through her reflection on her IIRP experience.

Although she seemed to appreciate the freedom to process personal experiences as part of her

learning, she consistently related that this caused confusion about boundaries with faculty that led to misunderstandings and conflict throughout her experience:

It definitely got stagnated because it brought up some frustration and anger in me towards a couple, specific faculty. I didn't necessarily feel safe anymore and I wasn't sure that what I was bringing into the class was being valued at the same level as somebody else who maybe had something had a happier ending was bringing into the class.

When asked about how that affected her learning, she said,

And being the person I am and having had the traumatic experience I have had, and things not being dealt fairly at that point in my life, I really had a hard time dealing with that. You know, that's part of life, I get it, I know, but that left an impact. Definitely a distaste.

She also said that she experienced disappointment over several unresolved conflicts with faculty. She related that these conflicts were particularly troubling to her since she did not think that the faculty responded "restoratively" in keeping with the practices being taught in class:

I had more expectations that if I had a conflict with anyone within that organization, including the professors, or senior leaders there, that there would be in place, and I would be indicted, or at least my invitation would be welcomed, to engage that fair process.

Megan recalled a specific incident over a grade that she did not feel that she deserved:

I followed the rubric, I hit everything, I need to understand what I missed, that why I had that low of a grade after all my other work had been at a different level. She came back with nothing. There was nothing. . . . And I told her that I wasn't satisfied with that answer.

Following this experience she said that the professor refused to engage with her in a manner that reflected the restorative principles she was learning in class: “I was disappointed that there was never an opportunity, despite that we were in a graduate program for restorative processes, that there was never a process made available to actually hammer that out, why that happened.”

Though she found many interactions with faculty to be difficult and disappointing she said that the most positive aspect of her experience came from her relationships with peers:

Well, they are what really kept me engaged. If doing an accelerated program, being away from you family, and income earning time is a huge investment, so to not be, you know feel that you’re getting the quality that you thought you were going to be getting was tough, but the other students were, they were incessant in a positive way. Yeah, we’ve done it this far, you can’t stop now kind of a thing. And that allowed me to engage when there were somebody else.

Megan’s voice concerning the contradictions, conflict and confusion she experienced in the IIRP graduate program are reflected in the following “I” poems, which constitute a first person reflection on her own experience. As discussed above, she felt that the IIRP environment encouraged her to reflect on past traumas in her life, but this caused confusion about the nature of her relationships with professors.

I didn’t know how to fix

I want to say it was a roller coaster ride

I very much could relate

I was in the arena

I felt the conflict

I think it got confusing

She also related that she experienced conflict and disappointment that, in her opinion, IIRP faculty did not fully employ the philosophy and practices they taught in class regarding restorative responses to conflict.

I didn't necessarily feel safe

I was having a hard time

I was trying to dig deeper

I have positive and negative

I was very suspect

I wasn't being given a fair shake

I almost dropped out

I had more expectations

These themes are also reflected in her final reflection paper submitted as part of the capstone course for the IIRP program. She related that she had high expectations for a restorative practices-based graduate program: "It was the first time I learned that my preferred approach of having people in conflict respectfully speak to each other, be accountable for their actions and harms, and maintain growing relationships was solidified as not naïve or crazy."

Recounting her experience as a student at the IIRP, she related in this paper: "The Education degree at the IIRP has been reflective and full. It has also been limiting and confusing." And in the following passage, she pointedly related that the conflicts she experienced in her relationships with IIRP faculty are similar to those she encounters with authority figures in her professional work: "Through reflection and awareness that the IIRP curriculum encourages I recognize that the struggles of challenging professors and institutions are similar to struggles faced in challenging the status quo in health care."



Megan's reflections on her experience as a learner and on the learning environment at the IIRP graduate school clearly highlight the importance of personal connections and relationships in her relationships with educators throughout her life. However, her story also highlights the confusion and conflict that can result when a student attempts to enter into a personal relationship with authority figures. Megan said she experienced a particularly sensitivity to how she would be treated by IIRP faculty because of IIRP claims to use restorative practices in the classroom itself and not only as a subject of study.

### **Pam's Story**

Pam is a 42-year-old middle school teacher at an urban middle school. About her earliest school experiences, she said,

It was a very important place for me. It was the place where I was very successful. In the community I grew up in. . . . The school . . . it's a square-mile town. The school was kind of like the hub of the community. It's where you went after school, It was a place that provided a lot of programs during the summer for us. It was just a really important part of my life as a child.

About her relationships with teachers at this young age, she said,

I had predominately good relationships with teachers in the community at the time. I can still remember a book, first grade, a teacher gave it to me, *The Giving Tree*, she also had a big impact on my life. I gave it to my children. I give it to students now as gifts that I had relationships with. In high school they were role models for us, for my friends and I in the community. It was really important. . . . They were more like family.

She did, however, remember one particularly negative experience:

I had a couple of bad experiences, I remember my music teacher smacked me in first grade. There's a few bad apples along the but, but for the most part I had really strong, positive relationships with the staff that was here at that time.

She described her high school experience similarly:

I had a strong connection to the school because I was more interested in what they had to say when it came to curriculum, because they were invested in other things. It's hard to explain, but I respected what they said and respected the school values because we had strong relationships.

She remembers a particular story that illustrates the close personal relationships in her school and community. She recalled,

One of my favorite teachers was a high school English teacher. Mr. Walter. He was a great English teacher. He was like a life lessons guide too though. When I first met him we didn't really get along really well. I smoked cigarettes at the time and the first day of class I kind of put them down on my desk and he flipped. So my first impression of him was like oh man, "this guy." But then, later on in the year, I remember coming back from lunch, at the time you could leave for lunch if you had a car and it wasn't a crime to do that, and when I went to the store there was this homeless guy and it just bothered me. I saw him a lot. I came back and I was talking to him and he was like, "What do you think you could possibly do about that?" I remember having this conversation, and I was like, "I have some stuff at home I mean somebody has to do something." So he was like, "Go ahead go do your thing." So I left class and I went home and put together this bag, which is probably dangerous—now when I think back about it. And I went and found the guy

near the store where I had been, and he kind of hung out in the same area. I gave him the bag. He was just like, thank you, and I could see a tear in his eyes, and it had a profound effect on my life. I thought what a cool thing for a teacher to do. He would get in a ton of trouble for that now, but it was just how the staff at the high school was at that time.

There are a lot of stories like that.

It is interesting that she remembered that her town's sense of identity was so strong that certain teachers had difficulty fitting in at school:

There were a few. . . . One thing that bothered me was there were a few teachers who had misconceived, preconceived, perceptions about me or maybe some of the people I hung out with because of what some people would do in the crowd and they labeled the whole crowd. There were a few teachers who were like that. They weren't really well like, respect, and I would say they were the teachers that had the hardest time teaching in our town.

Pam also choose a college with strong sense of community and identity. About her experience, she said, "I went to an all-girls, private Catholic college. . . . So it was extremely empowering. Strong, all about women's issues—even though it was taught by Catholic nuns. I felt very empowered there. It was a really good experience." She described her relationships with her professors as

very nurturing and loving. They were nuns, you know. Definitely high expectations but at the same time very loving, nurturing, understanding. It was a great combination, high expectations. We had this English teacher who would call us Trojan women because we made it through the snow and would not miss class and those kinds of things were promoted there.

She remembered one professor in particular:

She just talked a lot about women's issues. She was phenomenal. I learned a lot about social class and what that means in society, especially for women. She was from India. She just gave me a new perspective on just rules in society and making it relevant and meaningful and it was just very empowering. It's the only word I can . . . I could talk to . . . it's hard to remember specifically, but there were lots of examples like that, things that I hadn't been exposed to being from a small town. I guess like everybody has that experience when they go to college, but because it was an all-girls school I think that's why I felt that way.

She summarized her college experience and its impact on her:

I think as a girl maybe just the experience I had growing up, things that I saw about what a woman's role should be, or the plight of women if you will, there are a lot of single mothers in this community, so it's kind of off balance. I think being in a school that focused on girls, and girls in education, and women's issues, just created an awareness for me. My life could and should be different than what I had seen growing up maybe.

This highlights two contrapuntal voices in Pam's story. One is the voice that seeks rootedness in a community with a strong identity. The other is the voice that craves empowerment and the ability to make her own choices about her own identity. This was her last formal education experience before attending the IIRP graduate program. About her experience in general at the IIRP she said, "I mean it was personally transforming, it just transformed my life." For Pam, her experience led to personal as well as professional changes:

I think whatever was left over from undergrad that I still needed to deal with personally. It was just unique in that while I was learning how to apply those things to other people

in my field in education, it was helping transform me at the same time. Weird, but I think that all of us that have been there, kind of like they were meant to be there.

Her primary interest in the program was rooted in the hope that the practice could help her school and community:

So the things that attracted to that school were issues in this community. . . . I was just like, ‘Wow this is exactly what this community needs.’ Because for so long, if we go back and forth, on the pendulum of zero tolerance. We are going back with this new superintendent—this laissez-faire... They don’t get it yet. We had instituted restorative practices here and had a lot of support under the now gone superintendent and we’re working on the new superintendent, . . . Marcy and I and some other people who had gone to the graduate school.

About her relationships with professors, Pam said,

I had a positive experience with every single one. I think that the whole way that the school was set up, the circles, the whole atmosphere was different than undergrad. So it kind of forced you to be more interactive, more open. By having the “talking piece,” the circle in and of itself. I was older too, so it was probably more comfortable speaking in groups.

She remembered one professor in particular: “She’s just an amazing person. Just so good at what she does. I felt a really deep connection with her.” She said that with her and other professors she had a relationship: “Almost like you would with your therapist. Because it was so personal, the graduate school experience.” As an example she recalled a story from class, saying they were role-playing about helping those who have experienced trauma:

It just dawned on me a lot of personal things about myself and maybe how I have an issue with perfection, what that was all about, just through that conversation in that class. It just was like life changing. . . . I had never had that experience in an educational setting before. Talk about making it relevant—you totally get it when you experience it yourself. She said what was meaningful about this experience was that the professor: “Could have told me what was wrong, she probably knew from our first conversations, but just that thing with someone—empowering them to discover things on their own and not generalizing and making assumptions.” This, in turn, has influenced her teaching: “Even the work I do in here in time out with kids, I don’t assume anything. I think it’s best for these kids to figure out themselves exactly what’s going on with them and how they can fix that. It’s just something I learned from her.” She said that these types of personal relationships with professors affected her learning:

Almost in the same way that it did with my high school English teacher... Having that strong relationship with them just in that respect, it just helps you to...I want to hear what they have to say because if I value their opinion, I feel like I’m being empowered from them. You’re just more likely to really grasp the material. It’s just something that I find with my students too, if we have that strong connection, strong relationship, that they get that I’m an adult that’s trying to help them in their lives like should I listen more, even if it’s about the Bill of Rights, or something that they totally tune out. I just think if there’s a better connection that there’s more learning happening.

Throughout Pam’s her desire to feel rooted in community and empowered by teachers is expressed in the following “I-poem.”

I had a strong connection

I was more interested in what they had to say

I respected what they said

About college, Pam also related a strong sense of place and of relationships.

I went to an all-girls, private Catholic college.

I felt very empowered.

I learned a lot about social class.

And that:

I think as a girl

I had growing up

I saw about what a woman's role should be

I think being in a school that focused on girls . . . in education . . . created an awareness

About her experience at IIRP, she said,

I had a positive experience with every single one

I think that the whole way

I felt a really deep connection

I think

I'm like this overwhelmingly

Pam reflects that these relationships helped her to feel empowered as a student.

I want to hear what they have to say

I value their opinion

I feel

I'm being empowered from them

She also found that this led to changes in her own teaching practice.

I find with my students too

I'm an adult that's trying to help them

I listen more

I just think if there's a better connection

In her final reflection paper, Pam discussed the importance of having a sense of place and her concern for her community. "As an educator for the past 15 years in my hometown, in which I still live, I have been an eyewitness to the growing disconnect between the youth and our community, in particular, the schools." And that, after the installation of a new highway and a devastating hurricane, her town: "Once a lively bay-shore resort through the 1950s, which quickly became a ghost town . . . turned a thriving bungalow rental summer escape into a year round community for blue collar working-class families." As a child and teenager she said,

Most of us had been nurtured with the "gift" of resilience. Growing up with a strong sense of belonging fostered this resiliency . . . a place where everyone knew your name and people were genuinely concerned with your success and overall wellbeing.

Additionally, she believed that

in many ways, [her town] is now caught in the vicious cycle that scores of communities find themselves in, misguided by discriminatory beliefs and unfair practices that only serve to further alienate its members. As our youngest community members act out in response to the harsh conditions in which they live, they are widely met with zero tolerance policies and exceedingly punitive outcomes.

She reported,

Empowerment is what these young people seek and the hope that this is possible is what they lack. Hope fosters resilience; so as a result, these young people are not resilient.

They see themselves as victims of their circumstances and fail to recognize the power of



education in their lives. As a restorative practitioner in this environment, my role becomes leader, modeling the way and inspiring the heart.