



The Challenge and Success of Whole-School Implementation of Restorative Practices

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Introduction

Exclusionary discipline is a means of punishment utilized as a response to student misbehavior. Through exclusionary practices, students are pushed out of the mainstream environment and come to understand that they are not wanted in school. Furthermore, exclusionary discipline practices continue to marginalize racial groups, namely African American and Latino youth who are already overrepresented when it comes to racial disparities in school discipline data (Anyon et al., 2016; Wilson, 2013).

Restorative practices in the educational setting is an alternative approach to dealing with student discipline in ways that exclude youth from school. Such an implementation requires that old practices are challenged, as well as the beliefs and assumptions educators hold regarding discipline. The restorative practices approach offers a way to examine student misbehavior in the context of relationships, and repairing relationships through forgiveness and restoration (Blood, 2005).

As school buildings continue to consider restorative practices as a way to address student behavior and refashion school culture, this research has implications for practice in the educational setting. Cultures that are highly resistant to change are difficult to shift, which creates more of an impetus for strategic planning (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005). The way in which the restorative practices approach is presented to staff and subsequently implemented will impact the level of staff buy-in exhibited, and ultimately its success.

Methods

The purpose of this narrative qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of school staff in the implementation of restorative practices in a grades 3-5 building, in an urban district in northeastern Ohio.

Research Questions - What are grades three to five school administrators' and teachers' stories of implementing restorative practices in their school?

- How do participants first become aware of restorative practices?
- What successes or challenges in implementation did participants experience?
- How are participants impacted personally and professionally by restorative practices?

Context – About 3 years ago, a grades 3-5 elementary building made a decision to not suspend students from school. After the first year, the staff did a book study about restorative practices. After the second year, a team of five attended four days of training through the IIRP.

Participants

- 1-Administrator
- 1-Teacher
- Attended IIRP training

Data Collection

- 30-minute semi-structured interviews (Galletta, 2013)
- Interview protocol (Creswell, 2013)

Data Analysis

- First & Second Cycle Coding (Saldaña, 2016)
- Thematic Analysis (Riessman, 2008)

Figure 1: Research Methods

Findings

The interview transcript data was critically examined for emerging codes, which were grouped into "categories of belonging and an order of some kind" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 107). The table below illustrates the organization of the categories by theme, supported by excerpts of data in the form of participants' own words.

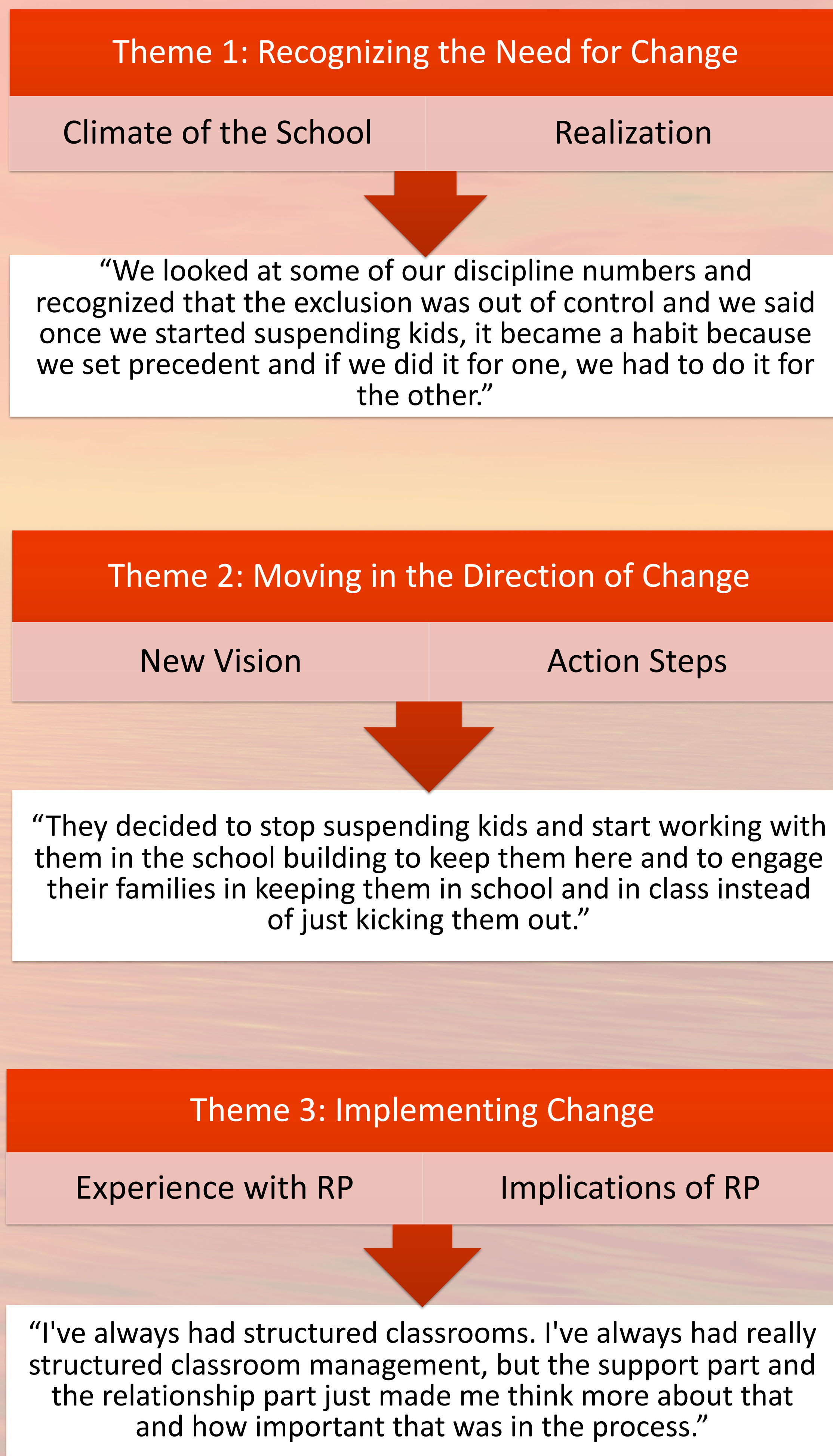


Figure 2: Themes, Categories, and Excerpts

Discussion

Implementation of restorative practices naturally causes a shift in how schools have traditionally thought about student discipline and behavior management (Blood, 2005). A necessary task of school leadership then, is to create an environment and the conditions necessary for this type of change to take place and be sustained. This narrative study intended to highlight the experiences of teachers and administrators in their implementation of restorative practices. The data collected was coded and categorized, and as a result, three overall themes were developed: a) Recognizing the Need for Change; b) Moving in the Direction of Change; and c) Implementing Change.

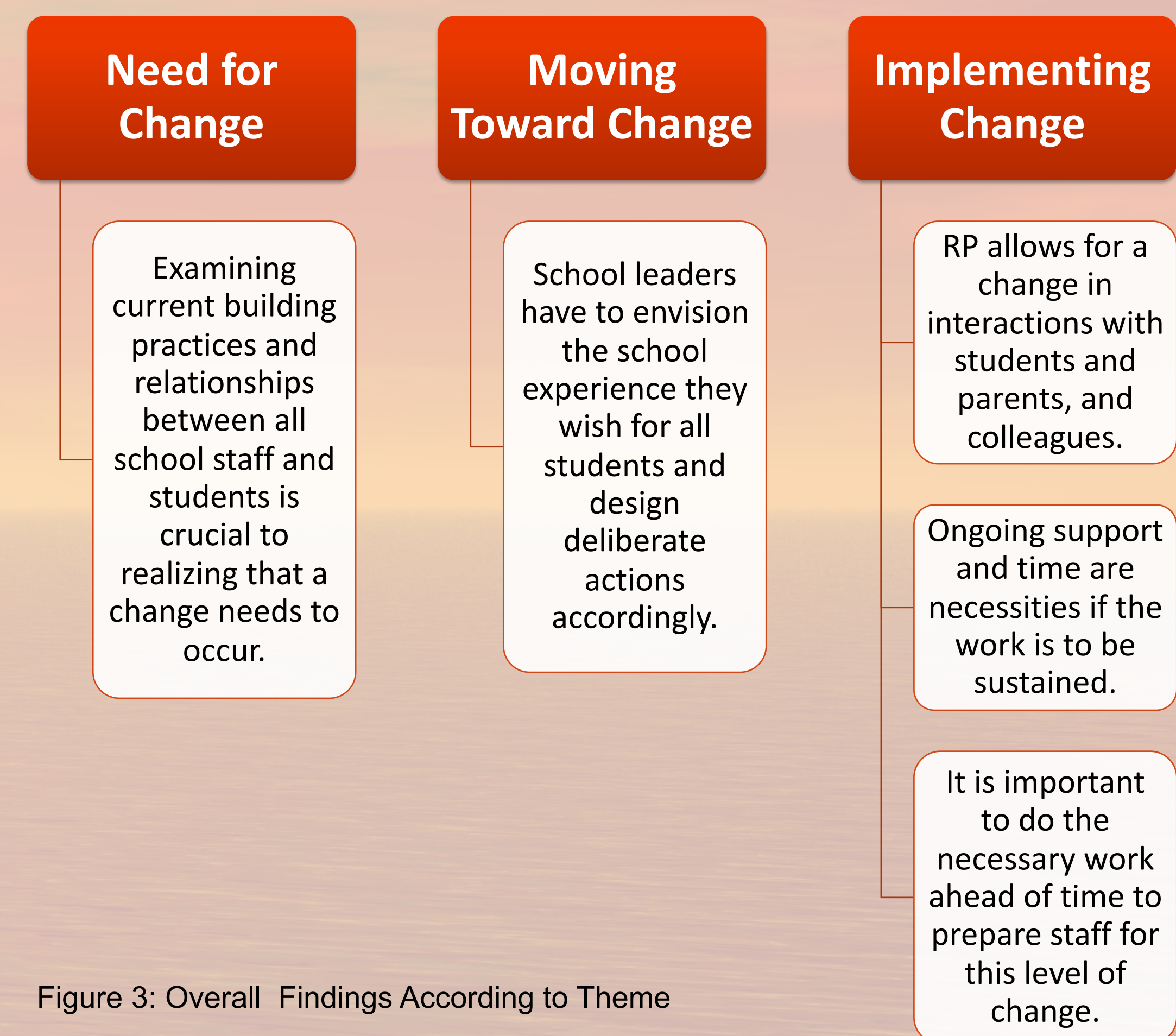


Figure 3: Overall Findings According to Theme

Conclusion

Strength - First order narratives yield stories that provide detailed description about experiences with implementation rather than general facts (Riessman, 2008)

Limitation - Number of participants isolate findings to specific setting and context

Next Steps – 1) Student voice regarding the use of restorative practices and 2) Implementation among staff who received formal training and who have not

References

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