

FREQUENTLY DISCIPLINED STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EXCLUSIONARY  
DISCIPLINE AND CARING TEACHER BEHAVIORS

By

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To my husband, Stephen, and my children, Carly, Lydia, and Palmer and to my parents,  
Denny and Becky, with my gratitude for their support, tolerance and inspiration  
throughout my study

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Abstract of the Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
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The purpose of this dissertation research was to analyze frequently disciplined students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and caring teacher behaviors. The research focused on educators' disproportionate discipline practices that result in Black students experiencing exclusionary discipline at a higher rate than their White peers.

Practitioner research was utilized to address the disproportionate discipline practices at the school where I teach. Data collection included interviews with six of my frequently disciplined students, written discipline reflection forms, and my participant journal. Data analysis resulted in the following six themes: (1) Exclusionary discipline was ineffective in changing student behavior; (2) exclusionary discipline was harmful to students' educations and futures; (3) participants supported the school's use of exclusionary discipline; (4) certain teacher behaviors escalated disciplinary interactions; (5) calm discussions between educators and students were essential during disciplinary interactions; and (6) students' and teachers' perceptions of respect and disrespect were important in disciplinary interactions.

By understanding the perceptions of students, educators gain knowledge of students' needs and how we can best meet those needs. Attention should be paid to implementing alternatives to exclusionary discipline practices, such as restorative practices and positive behavioral interventions and supports. As indicated by this study, practitioner research provides a systematic approach for examining problems of practice. Future research on the impact practitioner research may have on reducing the discipline gap would be of value to combating the disproportionate disciplinary practices that negatively impact the educational experiences of Black students.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW, AND METHODOLOGY

Schools should be equalizers of opportunity for students from diverse sociodemographic groups, but educational outcomes of different groups tell a different story in districts across our nation. Disparities in test scores and other academic outcomes between White students and their marginalized peers continuously show that students have different educational experiences based on race and social class (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). In addition to the frequently discussed gap in achievement between Black students and their White peers, there is also a gap in the disciplinary experiences of Black and White students. Black students are punished more frequently and more harshly at school than White students, even when exhibiting the same types of behaviors (Milner, 2013; Skiba, Nardo & Peterson, 2002).

The disproportionate representation of Black students in school discipline, specifically in the areas of suspensions and expulsions, is a phenomenon often referred to as the *suspension gap* (Gregory, Cornell, & Fann, 2011). The suspension gap between Black students and White students widened from 2.9% in 1973 to 8.17% in 2010 (Wald & Losen, 2010). The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) biennial report, released in June 2016 from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights that analyzes school- and district-level suspension data from the Elementary and Secondary Education Civil Rights Compliance Survey, showed that during the 2013-2014 school year Black students were 3.8 times more likely to receive a discipline referral, out-of-school suspension, or expulsion than White students. Black male students are especially at risk for receiving a school suspension. Using the 2006 CRDC report, Losen and Skiba (2010) analyzed suspension rates of more than 9,000 middle schools

and found that 28.3% of Black males were suspended at least once during a school year compared to only 10% of White males (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

School discipline often includes measures that exclude students from the learning environment, such as suspensions and expulsions, which result in students missing classroom instruction (Brown, 2007). The 2016 CRDC report included new data regarding student suspensions at the preschool level. According to the report, Black children were less likely to be enrolled in public preschool programs, but Black children that were enrolled in these preschool programs were 3.6 times more likely to be suspended than their White peers. The use of school suspensions as a primary disciplinary response could be a contributing factor to the well-documented gaps in academic achievement (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). The 2016 CRDC report also indicated that the number of US students suspended for misbehavior almost tripled from 1.7 million in 1974 to more than 5 million in 2011.

Factors identified as possible contributors to the racial discipline gap include: cultural bias in school and teacher practices (Gregory et al., 2010; Gregory & Thompson, 2010), cultural differences between students and teachers (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan & Leaf, 2010) and poor relationships between Black students and the adults they encounter in the school setting (Carter, Fine & Russell, 2014; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). There has been little research done on these potential student and classroom level factors that may contribute to the racial disparities in school discipline outcomes (Bradshaw et. al, 2010).

My own classroom and school context reflect these national trends regarding racial disparities in exclusionary discipline. For this study, I utilized practitioner research

as a method of examining my students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and caring teacher behaviors. Practitioner research is a reflective and systematic approach to studying problems of practice. This embedded approach to studying a problem of practice empowers the researcher to generate new knowledge that is relevant to her context, which ultimately leads to improved teaching and student learning. Practitioner research allowed me to serve as both practitioner and researcher as I examined the discipline gap, an educational inequity that highly impacts the students I teach. During the study, I critically examined my own thinking and practices and made changes to ensure I was not contributing to the problem of disproportionate disciplining of the Black students at my school.

At the time of this study I was teaching 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade special education classes. I taught 24 different students a day, including two White students and 22 Black students. Of these 22 Black students, 16 had received at least one day of suspension within the first three months of school. Many of these suspensions resulted from teachers sending students to their administrator with office discipline referrals. My research is intended to help teachers at my school, and potentially educators in other schools, gain an understanding of how their interactions with students can potentially play a role in the inequitable suspension rates of our Black students.

### **Background and Significance of the Problem**

The Children's Defense Fund (1975) first reported data regarding racial disparities in school discipline practices over four decades ago. In recent years, the federal government has issued their guidance to schools on decreasing disproportionalities in school discipline. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has collected and disaggregated discipline data and reported on disproportionalities, and some

schools have started adopting evidence-based interventions such as restorative justice and social-emotional learning curricula in response to disproportionate discipline rates (Gonzalez, 2012; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). However, despite all that has been done, and is being done, the discipline gap still exists. Regardless of whether teachers are knowingly addressing student behavior using a lens that is more critical of the behavior of Black students, inequitable actions by teachers have proven to have a negative impact on the futures of students subjected to exclusionary discipline.

The negative impact of school suspensions is not confined within the walls of the school. Studies have shown that students' histories of disciplinary referrals are a predictor of future involvement in the prison system. Commonly referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline (Wald & Losen, 2010), this is a phenomenon where many Black students who experience repeated disciplinary interactions at school also experience an increased risk of being incarcerated (Aud et al., 2010). A student who is expelled or suspended is two times more likely to be arrested within the same month than a child who has not been expelled or suspended (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold & Cauffman, 2014).

Chronic absenteeism, including school days missed due to suspensions, can greatly impact a student's educational outcomes. By 6<sup>th</sup> grade, chronic absenteeism is the leading predictor that a student will later drop out of high school (Balfanz, 2016). In their analysis of the interrelationships between suspensions, attendance, and course performance being key indicators of high school dropout, Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox (2012) stated:

Here there is clear evidence that for students who are otherwise regularly attending school and passing their courses in the 9th grade, being

suspended can lead to more suspensions, lowered attendance and course failure in later years, and as such act as the trigger mechanism which puts them on the path to ultimately dropping out. (p. 11)

Research has shown that each additional suspension after a student's first suspension decreases the student's odds of graduating from high school by 20% (Balfanz et al., 2012; Gregory et al., 2015). Black students are more likely to receive multiple out-of-school suspensions compared to their White peers. During the 2011-2012 school year, Black students made up 16% of school enrollments nationwide, yet they made up 42% of those who received multiple out-of-school suspensions. White students made up 51% of school enrollment and 31% of students who received multiple suspensions (Office of Civil Rights Data Collection, 2014). The inequitable treatment of Black students produces negative consequences that have proven to impact students' lives for far longer than the school age years (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Not only is there a discrepancy between educators' uses of school disciplinary actions with Black and White students, there is also a discrepancy in the type of misbehavior assigned disciplinary consequences by teachers at the classroom level (Skiba et al., 2002). Misbehavior that is subjective consists of offenses that require teacher interpretation of what constitutes a violation. Objective misbehavior is easy to identify and requires little interpretation to determine if a violation has occurred. Black students are more often given negative disciplinary referrals for subjectively defined misbehavior, such as disrespect and defiance. White students are most often given disciplinary referrals for objectively defined misbehavior such as using profanity, fighting, or skipping class (Monroe, 2009; Skiba et al., 2002; Staats, 2016).

Evidence shows that racial disparities exist in the types of infractions that result in disciplinary consequences across our nation, but in Arkansas, where I teach, these

disparities are larger than the national average. A statewide report on school discipline practices and outcomes stated that on average, 76 minor non-violent infractions are reported for every 100 Black students, while only 23 infractions are reported for every 100 Hispanic or White students (Office for Educational Policy, 2017). These data show that Black students in the state are three times more likely to be cited for subjective infractions than their non-Black peers (Office for Educational Policy, 2017).

These disparities also exist across the district and at the school where this study took place. A report released during the school board meeting on November 17, 2016 provided a breakdown of the district's disciplinary actions based on grade, race, and gender for the period of October 1, 2016 to October 31, 2016. According to this report, Black students made up 60% of our school enrollment and White students made up 30%. During the 21 school days included in the report, there were 75 students assigned to in-school suspension (ISS) and 25 students assigned to out-of-school suspension (OSS). Ninety-one percent of the 75 students assigned to ISS were Black and 9% were White. Of the 25 students assigned to OSS, 92% were Black and 8% were White. These numbers showed that Black students in my district had been assigned school suspensions at a much higher rate than their White peers.

In the spring of the 2015-2016 school year I gave the students in my English class a writing prompt asking them to write down anything they wished they could tell their teachers. Students' responses included comments such as "Please don't yell at me anymore" and "Stop picking on me when other people in class are doing the same thing." Based on these responses, daily teacher-student interactions that I witnessed, and information my students shared with me during informal conversations, I believed

that my school was lacking widespread caring teacher-student relationships and that the lack of these relationships could be contributing to punitive exclusionary discipline practices.

It is important to note that the discipline gap has been found in all grades K-12, but it becomes more prevalent in the middle school grades where students are subject to more exclusionary discipline than they were in elementary school (Arcia, 2007; Kennedy-Lewis, 2013). Research suggests that suspension during the middle years may have significant long-term repercussions (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Listening to the perspectives of middle school-aged students provided me a chance to examine the views of the students most affected by the disparities in discipline practices.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

I addressed this pressing problem that was occurring within my context by using practitioner research. The purpose of my study was to provide an in-depth account of my students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and caring teacher behaviors. I decided to listen to the perceptions of frequently disciplined students because of their multiple experiences with exclusionary discipline. At the time of the study, 85% of my students experienced exclusionary discipline in the form of either ISS or OSS. For this study, I defined frequently disciplined students as those that had received three or more suspensions since the start of the school year when data were collected.

Exclusionary discipline disproportionately harms Black students. Not only is it important that we recognize the discipline gap between Black and White students, but it is essential that we work to identify and eliminate possible contributing factors. Much of the past research focuses on teachers' and administrators' perspectives about the root

causes of the discipline gap without adequately considering the perspectives of the students that are frequently suspended.

The national trend of disproportionality in discipline rates between Black and White students was also occurring in the urban middle school where I was a special education teacher. Overall, the school was composed of 60% Black students, yet my classes were composed of 92% Black students, of which a majority were male. Many of my students experienced punitive exclusionary discipline, and it was impacting the quality of education for a large population of the student body. I was concerned about the long-term effects exclusionary discipline would have on my students and wanted to adjust my practice so that I would not be contributing to these effects.

For this study, I recruited my students who were experiencing exclusionary discipline at the school. By providing my fellow educators and myself an opportunity to look at discipline from students' points-of-view, this study raised consciousness within my school about the impact disciplinary actions had on our students. In addition, we gained a better understanding of our students' perceptions of caring teacher-student relationships. As a faculty, we were able to begin the work needed to address discipline in more appropriate and equitable ways.

The insights gained from this research improved my own practice and were shared with the staff at my school as a means to address our school's pressing problem of disproportionate disciplinary practices. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are my frequently disciplined students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline practices?
2. How do my frequently disciplined students perceive the influence of teacher behaviors on student behaviors?

3. What teacher behaviors do my frequently disciplined students identify as caring?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was guided by two theories: ethic of care, and culturally relevant critical teacher care (CRCTC). Ethic of care was used as a part of the conceptual framework for this study to highlight the importance of care in the relationship between students and their teachers. Noddings (2001) described care in the educational setting as a basic need grounded in relationships, including relationships between teachers and students. Care occurs within relationships and involves reciprocity between the giver and receiver of care (Noddings, 1992). Caring relationships between teacher and student only exist if the student believes the teacher cares for them. Many perspectives of care fail to acknowledge that the perception of care is not universal and varies among cultural groups (Garza, 2009; Noddings, 1992, 2001). Race should not be overlooked as an important aspect of understanding individuals' perceptions of care (Tosolt, 2010).

Roberts' (2010) concept of CRCTC added to Noddings' (2001) discussion of care by extending beyond the traditional notion of care and considering the roles of students' cultures and social conditions in their perceptions of care. CRCTC brings together the main ideas of CRT and the ethic of care by positioning teacher care as a tool for disrupting systemic racism. Teacher care for Black students should include preparing students to address the realities of racism in their lives and dispel the dominant colorblind ideology (Roberts, 2010). This approach to care advocates the consideration of the effects of cultural and socioeconomic conditions in showing care to all learners, especially historically marginalized students (Hambacher & Bondy, 2016). Teachers who enact CRCTC demonstrate political clarity, critical hope, and asset-based thinking

(Hambacher & Bondy, 2016). Teachers demonstrate political clarity when they recognize societal injustice, acknowledge that societal injustice is reproduced in schools, and aim to prepare students to confront societal injustice. Critical hope is aimed at creating a more just and equitable society when one possesses an unrelenting belief that she can produce positive change to improve the well-being of humanity. Teachers that exhibit asset-based thinking have respect for knowledge and resources students bring with them, rather than viewing students as being deficient. Bondy and Hambacher (2016) conducted research where they interviewed and observed two elementary teachers to investigate the enactment of CRCTC. Their findings showed that CRCTC enacted by the teachers provided them with knowledge that allowed them to care for students in a way that would “prepare them with the dispositions, knowledge, and skills to achieve flourishing lives” (p.27).

Ending the racial disparities found in the disciplinary practices at the school where I was teaching was an overarching goal of this study. The concepts of ethic of care informed this study by providing a lens to explore characteristics of teacher care, as perceived by frequently disciplined students. The inclusion of CRCTC as part of the conceptual framework for this study helped to highlight the role culture plays in the perception of teacher care and in the development of caring teacher-student relationships. The development of caring relationships with students is one way teachers can work towards reducing racial disparities found in school disciplinary practices.

### **Relevant Literature**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of frequently disciplined students regarding their experiences with classroom behavior, the influence

of teacher behaviors on students' behaviors, and students' perceptions of teacher care. This section will begin with a synthesis of research regarding the roles of school and district policies in the racial discipline gap, which will be followed by a review of literature on teacher beliefs and practices that are contributors to the gap. The chapter will then explore teacher beliefs and practices that have been identified as being able to help diminish the discipline gap.

### **School and District Policies That Perpetuate the Discipline Gap**

School-wide and district-level policies play a role in perpetuating the discipline gap (Skiba et al., 2002). Zero-tolerance policies include the use of punitive disciplinary measures, such as out-of-school suspensions and mandatory expulsions. As mandated by federal law, many schools across the United States use zero-tolerance policies requiring mandatory student expulsion for students that sell, furnish or possess a firearm. Schools have extended their zero-tolerance policies to include other student misbehavior, including possession of other weapons, selling of narcotics or over-the-counter drugs, and other prohibited behaviors (Gregory & Cornell, 2009). Zero-tolerance policies, which could be thought of as a way to rid the influence of bias by providing predetermined consequences to all perpetrators regardless of circumstances or backgrounds, have been shown to differentially affect students of color (Curran, 2016; Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Hoffman, 2012). Hoffman (2012) conducted a study designed to estimate the effect of expanded zero tolerance policies on racial disparities in an urban school district. After analyzing the district's recommended expulsion data and data obtained from the State Department of Education, the researchers found that the expansion of the district's zero tolerance policy created a substantial increase in the percentage of Black students being recommended for expulsion. Although less than

25% of the district's student population was Black, Black students comprised about 75% of the increase in recommendation for expulsion under the expanded zero tolerance policy. Zero-tolerance policies have not improved the discipline gap, but rather resulted in harsher penalties being placed on the more frequently disciplined Black students.

Disparities in discipline resulting from district or school level policies may contribute to racial disparities in discipline at the classroom level (Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). School disciplinary policies put in place to make schools safe for students are consequently resulting in inequitable discipline practices and the exclusion of Black students from the learning environment (Skiba et al., 2002). In addition to district and school level policies driving racial disparities in discipline, individual student-teacher interactions at the classroom level have also been identified as contributors to the discipline gap (Noguera & Akom, 2000; Skiba et al., 2002).

### **Teacher Beliefs and Practices that Contribute to the Discipline Gap**

As schools attempt to address the issue of disproportionate rates in disciplinary actions between Black and White students, educators should acknowledge the role of teacher beliefs and practices. Any effort that fails to address teachers' beliefs and practices will likely be unsuccessful in producing change (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). Teachers have the power to determine which students are punished and how discipline problems are addressed. For example, by responding with exclusionary discipline, unsympathetic teachers consistently alienate students who present tough fronts (Toshalis, 2016). Teachers' approaches to handling discipline are fundamental to closing the racial discipline gap. Gregory and Mosely (2004) studied teachers' beliefs regarding the reasons for discipline problems as they relate to race and culture at a large urban high school. After thematic analyses of transcribed interviews with 19

teachers, teacher beliefs and practices were identified as playing a role in teachers' descriptions about why students have discipline problems.

Teachers' identity factors, such as race and culture, as well as their values, beliefs, and perceptions inform their teaching practices, which in turn impact student achievement (Cross, 2003). Teachers' knowledge and beliefs about race have implications for their teaching practice and the expectations they hold for the students they teach. A teacher's own racial and cultural identity can shape how they approach discipline. Many choices teachers make in the classroom are shaped by their cultural backgrounds and individual beliefs. Cultural disparities between students and teachers (Gregory et al., 2010; Monroe, 2006), educators' implicit biases (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Gregory et al., 2010; Staats, 2016), and negative teacher-student relationships (Anyan, Zhang & Hazel, 2016; Toshalis, 2015) have all been identified as contributors to the disproportionate disciplinary actions taken by educators against Black students.

**Cultural differences between students and teachers.** Although our nation's student population is becoming more diverse, educators are still predominately White (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Many Black students are being taught by White female teachers. According to a 2016 report conducted by the US Department of Education, during the 2011-2012 school year 82% of public school teachers were White compared to 51% of public school students (USDOE, 2016). Teaching materials, policies and behavioral expectations often align with the norms of the White middle-class population (Monroe, 2005). The cultural norms of a teacher may be at odds with the cultural norms of their students resulting in the misinterpretation of student actions. For example, White teachers may misinterpret culturally normal forms of play between Black males as

being aggressive behavior (Monroe, 2005). In their article arguing for the need of schools to utilize culturally relevant classroom management as a way to address classroom management issues, Weinstein et al. (2004) discussed how culture and race influence teachers' responses to student behavior. They reported problems encountered by a White teacher who misinterpreted the behavior of two Black students as being aggressive when in actuality the two students were engaged in a culturally based linguistic exchange.

Tensions can arise between Black students and their White teachers due to differences in communication styles (Gregory et al., 2010). White teachers may be unfamiliar and even uncomfortable with the more active and physical style of communications common among Black adolescent students (Monroe, 2005). The common communication style of White teachers, which typically discourages emotion (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003), clashes with the communication style of Black students, which includes considerable body language, eye movement and positioning (Gay, 2002; Schlesinger, 1991). Teachers may consider Black students' communication styles as being rude, disrespectful, or disruptive. In a study of seven Black middle school girls' perceptions of their compliant and noncompliant behaviors and how their interactions with educators shaped their perceptions, Murphy, Acosta and Kennedy-Lewis (2013) found that miscommunications with educators alienated young Black girls from the learning process.

**Implicit biases.** Black students are also suspended more frequently than their White peers when committing the same offenses (Milner, 2013; Skiba, et al., 2002). Although well intentioned, educators may experience discrepancies between their

conscious ideals and unconscious associations (Staats, 2016). Implicit biases are attitudes or stereotypes that result in prejudiced judgments in a subconscious manner that can lead to actions that are not aligned with one's explicit intentions (Staats, 2016). The prevalence of implicit biases, including racial biases against Blacks, is well supported in psychological research (Kang & Lane, 2010). Such biases may affect disciplinary decisions made by individual teachers or administrators. Okonofua and Eberhard (2015) conducted a study to examine the influence of students' races on teachers' responses to minor infractions. Participants in their study were given school discipline infraction records for a group of students who misbehaved twice. Stereotypical White and Black names were used as the names on the student records. After reading the first infraction record for each student, the participants were asked questions related to their view of the severity of the infraction and how they felt the student should be disciplined. The results of their study showed that for Black students the first infraction influenced how teachers regarded the second infraction. Teachers were more likely to view multiple infractions as a connected pattern when the perpetrators were given stereotypical Black names as opposed to stereotypical White names. Educators' individual discipline decisions cumulatively add up to create the large racial disparities found in school discipline. Students may experience discrepancies between educators' conscious ideals and subconscious associations.

The discrimination against Black students in schools is an extension of inequities found in our broader society (Weinstein, Tomlinson & Curran, 2004). The criminalization of Black males by the media has been identified as a contributor to the negative stereotypes formed by teachers about Black male students (Gregory &

Thompson, 2010; Kunesch & Noltemeyer, 2015). The media often portray Black culture as commonly including illicit drug sales and use, violence, and anti-authoritarianism (Monroe, 2005). Many teachers may be unaware of how their negative, stereotypical perceptions of Black males are impacting teachers' disciplinary actions (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Monroe, 2005). Teachers may approach classes with a majority of low-income and Black students with an emphasis on controlling student behavior (Haberman, 1991; Howard, 2013). Teachers may also react to perceived misbehavior more harshly than necessary when the student misbehaving is a Black male due to the stereotype that Black students are troublemakers in school contexts (Monroe, 2005; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Staats, 2016). It is important that teachers stay consciously aware of how their disciplinary mindsets and implicit associations may be contributing to their daily decisions about student behavior.

### **Teacher Beliefs and Practices that Reduce the Discipline Gap**

Teachers may be unaware of the role they play in perpetuating the discipline gap. By evaluating and adjusting their current practice, teachers have the power to reduce the discipline gap (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). The use of culturally relevant teaching practices and development of positive teacher-student relationships can both aid in reducing the gap (Monroe, 2009).

**Culturally relevant practices.** Educators that use culturally relevant teaching practices develop disciplinary styles that mimic the styles found in students' home environments (Monroe, 2005). Ladson-Billings (1995) defines culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy of opposition committed to collective empowerment which rests on three criteria: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must

develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current social order.

Culturally relevant practices stem from a teacher mindset that honors and respects the variety of cultures and experiences that students bring to the classroom and includes students' cultural ways of knowing and being in classroom curriculum and teachers' instructional practices (Nieto, 2013). Teacher education in culturally responsive classroom management has been identified as a pressing need to combat racial disparities in school discipline (Bryan, 2017; Griner & Stewart, 2012; Skiba et al., 2002). Monroe (2009) described how culturally relevant practices can help close the discipline gap when she stated:

Gathering deliberate and measured information about the lived and evolving journeys of the young people in their charge strengthens practitioners' grasp of students' motives and actions in the classroom. Teachers may especially glean insight into displays that may be misinterpreted as inappropriate conduct and unnecessarily penalized. (p. 325)

Teacher knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds is one of the pillars of culturally relevant teaching. Teachers who lack experience with the cultures of their students will particularly profit from making a concerted effort to learn more about students' cultures (Monroe, 2009).

Teacher education programs fail to adequately prepare their students to work with children from varying backgrounds (Bryan, 2017; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014; Sleeter, 2001). This failure to prepare teachers is seen by some scholars as an act of supporting and continuing the systematic privileging of Whiteness (Gillborn, 2005). It pays to be a member of the dominant racial group because institutions within our society provide White people with undue privileges (Bell, Funk, Joshi, & Valdivia, 2016;

McIntosh, 1989, 2015). Preparing White pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to see and think about their Whiteness, in a way that benefits marginalized students, may prepare them to teach for social justice (Hill-Jackson, 2007).

Teachers may not see the value of culturally relevant practices due to their claims of colorblindness, or failure to see and recognize racial differences in their classrooms (Gay, 2000). Race most often impacts social perception when information is ambiguous, which may lead to teachers' use of stereotypes to fill in the gaps and guide inferences. This use of stereotypes could help explain the high rate of Black students being disciplined for offenses that rely on subjective interpretation (Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016).

**Teacher-student relationships.** The quality of teacher-student relationships greatly influences student behavior (Okonofua, Paunesku & Walton, 2016). Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder (2004) examined data collected from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to examine whether teacher-student relationships predicted students' academic achievement and disciplinary outcomes. Their findings indicated that stronger bonds between teachers and in schools were associated with a lower likelihood of student disciplinary problems. The ways students perceive their relationships with their teachers are important to their experiences of school, and impacts their involvement in disciplinary interactions. Gregory and Weinstein (2008) compared the classroom experiences of the same students in two different classrooms. The first classroom was with the teacher that had most recently submitted an office referral for a defiance-related offense. The second classroom was with a teacher with whom the student had identified having a good relationship. Analysis of observation

data along with student reports and school records indicated that the teachers with whom the students thought they got along best treated them with care and high expectations, and that students were more willing to comply with the authority of teachers who had earned their trust. The findings from this study indicate that positive teacher-student relationships positively impact student behavior and reduce students' involvement with exclusionary school discipline. In contrast, negative teacher-student relationships have been identified as possible contributors to racial disparities in discipline outcomes (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Okonofua et al., 2016).

Handling school discipline through restorative practices has been shown to help transform teacher-student relationships so that teachers rely less on suspensions to address student behavior (Gregory et al., 2015). Restorative practices include strategies that educators can use to prevent students' rule infractions before they occur and intervene after an infraction has occurred (Gregory et al., 2015). In the use of restorative practices there is less emphasis on punishment and more emphasis on accountability, healing, and addressing the needs of all impacted individuals. All parties affected by an infraction come together to identify how those involved were impacted and how to repair the harm after an infraction has occurred. The belief is that students are more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when school authority figures involve students in the process of handling discipline issues (Wachtel, 2005). The authoritative school climate created by the use of restorative practices elicits trusting teacher-student interactions in which students feel supported and treated fairly, and teachers are perceived as more respectful (Gregory et al., 2015). Schools that have implemented restorative practices on a school-wide scale have seen decreases in the

number of school suspensions issued to students (Owen, Wettach, & Hoffman, 2015). In a study analyzing survey data from 412 high school students from two small cities on the East Coast of the United States, Gregory et al. (2015) found that teachers who used more restorative practices issued fewer discipline referrals to marginalized students and had more positive relationships with diverse students compared to teachers who used restorative practices less frequently.

**Empathic discipline mindset.** Teachers who are ill prepared to handle disruptive classroom behavior will often adopt authoritarian disciplinary practices where they engage students in power struggles that serve only to escalate the disruption (Skiba et al., 2002). Punitive discipline mindsets are mindsets held by teachers who believe that students must be punished to learn how to behave (Okonofua et al., 2016). This type of mindset undermines the relationships of trust and respect between teacher and student that has been shown to be beneficial for student success.

Teachers with an empathic discipline mindset address student behavior with the ability to appreciate and validate the student's point of view (Okonofua et al., 2016). In a study of 39 randomized kindergarten through twelfth grade teachers, from various locations across the nation, Okonofua et al. (2016) examined whether the use of an empathic mindset intervention for teachers would change teacher practices and student responses to discipline, and ultimately lower student suspension rates. The empathic mindset intervention used for the study consisted of teacher participants reading an article promoting an empathic mindset and then participating in a discussion of how the use of an empathic mindset could lead to changes in the way teachers interact with students and, in turn, positively affect students' classroom experience and behavior.

Results showed that students whose teacher received the empathic mindset intervention were half as likely to be suspended over the course of a school year. When teachers possessed an empathic mindset, they tended to have characteristics identified as being successful when working with diverse student populations (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Teachers with empathic mindsets did not respond to student misbehavior by attempting to change the student, rather they attempted to adjust the context that contributed to the misbehavior (Okonofua et al., 2016). Addressing student misbehavior in this manner could shift the blame for the misbehavior from the student to the context. This type of response to misbehavior could nurture relationships with students and create positive student attitudes about school. An empathic mindset is of crucial importance for teachers to form authentic, caring relationships with their students (Warren, 2015).

**Students' perspectives.** Educators often operate under the false assumption that the effectiveness of schools can be shaped by adult views alone. It is often assumed that teachers and administrators can accurately understand the views of students without engaging students in dialogue, but teachers and school administrators can only begin seeing the world from students' perspective when they start listening to students and building upon students' perspectives to directly improve educational practices (Cook-Sather, 2002; Kennedy & Datnow, 2011). Carefully listening to students provides educators with new insights into what students are thinking and feeling, and these insights in turn provide educators a new lens through which to examine the education they are providing their students (Noguera, 2009; Storz, 2008). Previous examinations of students' perspectives have provided educators with vital

insights, including an understanding of the value students place on respect, trust, fairness (Cushman, 2003; Storz, 2008) and caring teacher-student relationships (Noguera, 2009). Jansen & Bartell (2013) conducted a study examining students' and teachers' perspectives of caring instructional practices in mathematics classes. Four math teachers and 22 middle school students from a district in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States participated in the study. After interviewing participants, the researchers discovered that caring teachers were described as teaching in a way that shows every student's learning matters, communicating high expectations for students, and creating a welcoming classroom community. Studies such as the one conducted by Jansen & Bartell (2013) provide students with a safe space to voice their perceptions and beliefs and can enable educators to develop, share, and build upon a more accurate understanding of students' experiences.

Students' definitions of teacher care vary according to their cultural background (Hayes et al., 1994). Nieto (2008) described how educators may unintentionally cause harm to Black students in their attempts to demonstrate care:

Caring within a structure plagued by inequality takes multiple forms, and at some moments when we think we are caring for students of color we actually are harming them because we are failing to counter a social structure that treats them unequally. . . . Teachers can participate in practices of racism—that is, practices that deny students of color equal opportunities along racial lines— even when they think they are individually being “nice.” (p. 29)

Understanding students' perspectives of teacher care can help prevent the unintentional harm described by Nieto. Tosolt (2010) surveyed 50 5-8 grade students to investigate their perceptions of caring teacher behaviors. The study results showed that Black students were more likely to value teacher behaviors that support students' academic success than were White students.

## **Conclusion of Literature Review**

The review of literature identified the role of school district policies in producing the discipline gap, different ways in which teachers can positively and negatively impact the disproportionate discipline rates of Black students, and the importance of educators validating the views of students. Synthesizing the literature enabled me to gain a stronger understanding of what the contributing factors may be for the disproportionate punitive discipline practices at my school. In the next section, I will describe the methodology of my study.

## **Methodology**

Research has shown that the use of exclusionary discipline with students has the potential to create long-term negative consequences (Gregory et al., 2010; Losen & Skiba, 2010). As a teacher, I worried about the long-term consequences of suspension for the 85% of my Black students who received these punishments in an average year. Caring teacher-student relationships, where respect, empathy, and trust are common practice, have been shown to lower school suspension rates (Okonofua et al., 2016). At my school, assistant principals reported receiving multiple disciplinary forms from teachers daily. These referrals were what led to the high suspension rate found at my school. According to the monthly discipline report for the month of October, 2016, there were 383 referrals written by teachers. Of these 383 referrals, 180 of them resulted in either ISS or OSS. These data indicated that almost half of all disciplinary referrals resulted in the student being suspended. Based on interactions that I saw between students and teachers, and conversations I overheard in the teachers' lounge, I did not believe that many of the teachers at my school had caring relationships with their students.

For me to better understand my students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline practices and how students described caring teachers that cultivated positive teacher-student relationships, I chose to engage in practitioner research. This context-based research methodology was chosen because it best suited my desire to gain a deeper understanding of how my students interpreted my actions and my fellow teachers' actions when handling student behaviors that we perceived as challenging. Practitioner research allowed me the opportunity to capture my students' experiences so that I could gain a better understanding of the impact exclusionary discipline had on my students. In addition, at the conclusion of the study, I knew what I could do to create caring relationships with my students to help prevent punitive disciplinary interactions from occurring.

As with other research methods, practitioner research aims to generate new knowledge. What makes practitioner research different than other forms of research is the scope of knowledge generated and the role of the researcher in the study. Practitioner research is the systematic, intentional study of one's own practice where the researcher is embedded in the study itself (Dana, 2016). Educators can use practitioner research to address problems of practice identified in their school environment. The focus of knowledge gained from practitioner research is to improve specific concerns of practice in a local context (Ravitch, 2014). The use of practitioner research provides the opportunity for educators to play a direct role in the improvement of their own practice and potentially the practice of other teachers at their school. As a practitioner-researcher in this study, I had prior knowledge of the context, a deep understanding of the current discipline practices at the school, established relationships

to assist in the recruitment of participants, but, most importantly, familiarity with the problem of practice and motivation to address it.

### **Research Context**

This study took place at a middle school in Arkansas that enrolled over 1500 students. The district where the study was conducted had multiple neighborhood elementary schools whose students matriculated into this one middle school. The Arkansas Department of Education's school enrollment data for 2015-2016 showed the student racial demographics to be about 60% Black, 30% White, 5% Hispanic, and 5% Asian, Native American or multiple race (Arkansas Department of Education, 2016).

### **Selection of Participants**

Due to my dual role as a teacher and a researcher, I removed myself from the participant recruitment process and instead relied on our school's Due Process Designee to recruit students for this study. The Due Process Designee obtained parental consent before discussing the study with students. Removing myself from the recruitment process helped to ensure that my students did not feel pressured or intimidated into participating in the study. I provided our Designee with a neutral third-party recruitment script to read to students (Appendix A), and I was not present during the recruitment process. Our Designee was responsible for Special Education paperwork and was someone who had an established relationship with my students. The 24 students that I had in my resource classes were all recruited to participate in this study. Our Designee visited each of my five resource classes to recruit students for the study. After reading the recruitment script, the Designee provided students with consent forms (Appendix B) and instructed them to return the forms to her, signed by a parent, if they were interested in participating in the study.

There were 14 consent forms returned to the Designee. My target number of participants was six to eight, so I looked at student disciplinary records to determine which students had experienced exclusionary discipline. Eleven of the 14 students who returned consent forms had experienced exclusionary discipline during that school year. From those 11 students, I chose the six students that I felt I had the best rapport with to participate in the study. After obtaining parent consent, I then used an assent script to obtain students' verbal assent to participate (Appendix C).

During the initial recruitment process conducted by the Designee, students were made aware of the purpose of the research and informed that participation was voluntary and the decision not to participate or to opt out of participation during the study would not impact their grade or the current teacher-student relationship. Since the participants of this study were my students at the time, this recruitment process helped address the power dynamic that existed between my students, as potential study participants, and me, as their teacher.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through student discipline reflection forms, individual student interviews, and my personal journal, which allowed me to record thoughts about my own practice during the study. These methods of data collection were chosen because they were the most effective in allowing me to clarify my own thoughts as I handled discipline issues involving my students. Data were collected over the last nine weeks of the 2016-2017 school year.

During this study, I wanted to listen to the voices of the most marginalized student population so that I could share their stories, which often go unheard by educators from racially and socioeconomically dominant societal groups. During the

initial, semi-structured individual interviews (Appendix D), participants were asked about their perceptions of their disciplinary experiences, teacher behaviors that positively and negatively influenced their disciplinary interactions and relationships with their students, and what they thought teachers could do to prevent students' challenging behaviors from occurring. A second interview was conducted with one participant when she returned from a suspension that occurred during the time of the study. This additional interview allowed me to gather information about the student's reaction to experiencing exclusionary discipline (Appendix E). All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The audio recordings and transcriptions were stored on a password protected external memory drive as well as on my personal laptop, which is also password protected.

To gather data on participants' immediate thoughts after a disciplinary action, I asked them to fill out a discipline reflection form when they were sent to their administrator's office with a disciplinary referral (Appendix F). Each assistant principal was provided with the reflection forms and a roster of all of my students so they could assist me by distributing the forms. Students returned the discipline reflection forms to their assistant principal when they finished filling it out. To address the potential risks of the assistant principals' knowledge of which students were participating in the study, I had all my students fill out the reflection forms regardless of whether or not they were study participants. Although participants were sent to their administrators often during the time of the study, I only received six forms back from the assistant principals. These six discipline reflection forms were scanned and used for analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis for this study consisted of identifying themes to answer the research questions based on a systematic look at the data collected (Dana, Thomas, & Boynton, 2011). Once the interviews were conducted, the recordings of the interviews were transcribed. The entire set of data was read through multiple times, and I made notes to gather initial insights into the similarities and differences between student responses. With my research questions and conceptual framework in mind, the notes helped me create my initial codes. A code book was created that listed the codes used and their meanings (Appendix G). I then read all data slices that were similarly coded, looking for emergent themes related to my research questions. Creswell (2013) defined themes as “broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 186). Each of the study’s findings was a direct result of an analysis of the initial codes (Appendix H). Also, while reading through the similarly coded data I made notes when the data within a code had common aspects with ideas found in the conceptual framework. For example, while examining codes related to students’ perceptions of positive teacher behaviors I noted that many of the students’ descriptions related to the ideas found in ethic of care theory. Identified themes reflected my students’ perceptions of exclusionary discipline and caring teacher behaviors, and how they thought teacher behaviors impacted student behaviors.

A critical component of practitioner research is the sharing of research findings with others (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). My principal approved my request for sharing my findings with my fellow teachers during one of our regularly scheduled staff meetings. I hoped that by my sharing the study results teachers would adjust their practice in a way that resulted in fewer punitive disciplinary interactions with students.

## **Researcher Positionality**

As I aimed to gain a better understanding of how frequently disciplined students perceived disciplinary interactions, it was imperative that I considered my own biases, limitations and views and how they impacted the research process. My experiences shaped how I viewed myself in relationship to others, how I viewed education, and my interest in this particular research topic. As the researcher, I was the primary instrument used for data collection and interpretation. During grades 4-12, I attended school in the same district where the study was conducted. Throughout my schooling, many of my classes were composed of middle-class White students. The elementary and middle schools that I attended were neighborhood schools located in neighborhoods where most residents were White. Although all of the students in the city attended the same high school, I was in courses tracked primarily with White middle-class students. It is important to note that I experienced virtually no punitive disciplinary interactions as a student. I am a White female educator who studied a phenomenon that primarily impacted Black male students. When conducting research, matters of race and culture are important considerations in the process (Milner, 2007). My experiences with education, and life in general, differed from those of my students. For this study, I was attempting to accurately interpret and validate the experiences of my student participants. I worked to remain aware of my own experiences and cultural assumptions and how they may have differed from the students participating in the study.

Through my graduate studies I had developed a deep desire to work toward a socially just society, and I strive to view the world through a social justice lens. This perspective has impacted every aspect of my teaching, including my view on exclusionary discipline practices. During this study I strove to understand the

perspectives of others although I had not lived the same experiences as the participants. I recognize that these differences between my participants and me had implications for the ways in which I analyzed and interpreted data. My lived experiences formed the filter through which the data were examined. I had no personal experiences with exclusionary discipline and had not lived as a member of a racially marginalized group, therefore I know that I was unable to completely understand my students' perspectives.

### **Trustworthiness**

To enhance trustworthiness, I enlisted the help of my doctoral advisor to serve as a peer debriefer during the data analysis process (Creswell, 2013). My doctoral advisor provided a sounding board for me to test developing ideas and interpretations. Through our discussions, I widened and deepened my view of the data, which helped enhance credibility. While developing codes and themes, I was able to use data collected from student interviews, the researcher journal, and discipline reflection forms. This use of data triangulation also enhanced trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013).

### **Summary and Overview**

Listening to my students to understand how they perceived exclusionary discipline and what they believed had the potential to serve as a catalyst for a much needed school-wide discussion on this topic. One of the key elements of practitioner research, and a main reason for choosing practitioner research as the methodology for this study, was my ability to utilize the findings of the study to improve my current practice and potentially the practice of my fellow teachers. The data show that Black students are disciplined at a disproportionate rate (Skiba et al., 2002). It is my hope that the findings of this study have allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of what

can be done to put the educators at my school on a path toward enacting more equitable disciplinary practices.

## CHAPTER 2 FINDINGS

The purpose of my study was to allow me the opportunity to improve my current practice by listening to my frequently disciplined students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline practices and caring teacher behaviors. Student participants were interviewed, and interview data were analyzed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are my frequently disciplined students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline practices?
2. How do my frequently disciplined students perceive the influence of teacher behaviors on student behaviors?
3. What teacher behaviors do my frequently disciplined students identify as caring?

The racially disproportionate punitive discipline practices at my school, the frequent suspensions of my students, and my desire to better understand how my students perceive caring teacher behaviors prompted me to conduct this study.

A review of the data collected from participant interviews, discipline reflection forms, and my personal journal revealed six emergent themes. These themes were: (1) Exclusionary discipline was ineffective in changing student behavior; (2) exclusionary discipline was harmful to students' educations and futures; (3) participants supported the school's use of exclusionary discipline; (4) certain teacher behaviors escalated disciplinary interactions; (5) calm discussions were essential during disciplinary interactions; and (6) students' and teachers' perceptions of respect and disrespect were important in disciplinary interactions.

## **Exclusionary Discipline Was Ineffective in Changing Student Behavior**

This first theme describes how participants perceived the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline in preventing future suspensions from occurring. All six of the participants indicated that they felt suspensions were not effective because there were no changes in student behavior after returning from a suspension. For example, I had the following exchange with Bree:

Interviewer: How do you think that being suspended might impact how people act? Is there a change in behavior when people come back from being suspended?

Bree: No, they act the same.

Interviewer: Do you ever think that sometimes it's the same students that always get suspended, or is it kind of a variety of students?

Bree: The same students over and over again get suspended.

Bree indicated that exclusionary discipline was ineffective because if it were effective then the same students would not be the ones continuously suspended. Participants viewed the purpose of school suspensions as either a time for students to reflect on their behavior or to provide students with an experience that was undesirable so that students would not want to experience it again. Regardless of its purpose, all participants felt that suspensions were unsuccessful in solving discipline problems. Participants not only viewed exclusionary discipline as ineffective, but they also felt that it could potentially worsen discipline problems by aggravating students and causing them to develop an apathetic attitude. Ramona's response illustrated this point:

Interviewer: Why do you think schools use suspensions as punishment?

Ramona: I think they use punishment so we can go home to think about what we done and how we can make ourself better. But some kids don't

really do that, because they get all mad and like, “I don’t care. I’m just going to do the same thing.”

Interviewer: So when they come back are they any different?

Ramona: I don’t think so. I think they need to do something a little bit more than sending us home, because if they’re just sending home, we’re not going to be able to do our work.

Participants’ responses on the discipline reflection forms reinforced what Ramona was saying. One portion of the discipline reflection form asked students to indicate how they felt when their teacher sent them to their assistant principal. On all six forms participants chose “I don’t care” as their answer. In addition to these responses, four of the participants also marked that they felt “angry.” When I asked Makale how he thought being suspended affected students’ behavior when they returned to the classroom he gave the following response:

Sometimes students come back and they focus better, but sometimes they come back and they think, “Oh I don’t care. I don’t care if I get suspended again. I’m this and whatever.” So how it influenced them, I think that it just sometimes they think that because they get suspended, they’re badder.

Although Makale stated that students may have come back after a suspension and focused better, he, like other participants felt that students could have potentially returned from a suspension with an apathetic attitude that resulted in behavior that was worse than before.

### **Exclusionary Discipline Negatively Impacted Participants’ Educations and Futures**

All six participants viewed exclusionary discipline negatively, and four of the participants emphasized the negative impact exclusionary discipline had on students’ educations and futures. Students noted that when they were removed from class due to

a suspension, they were missing teacher instruction and not receiving work to complete for their classes. In the following interaction I had with Andre, who had been suspended 31 days since enrolling in the school in late November, he spoke about his experience with school suspensions:

Interviewer: Pretend you are a teacher and there are students acting up in your class. Would you send them to the ISS room?

Andre: No.

Interviewer: Why?

Andre: Because they not learning.

Interviewer: That's very true. They're not learning. What do you do in there?

Andre: Not doing nothing.

Interviewer: Just sitting there?

Andre: Sitting there not doing their work.

Interviewer: How does it make you feel?

Andre: I don't know. I feel a certain type of way.

Interviewer: What way?

Andre: Mad.

Interviewer: Mad?

Andre: Yeah, I just call my momma and tell her to come get me.

Andre responded that he would not use suspension as a punishment if he were a teacher. He recognized that when students were not in class due to a suspension, they were missing out on the opportunity to learn. Not only did he speak about the loss of instructional time, Andre also expressed how he would get mad as he sat in the school's ISS room doing work that he felt was of no importance. The school's ISS room was not

staffed with a certified teacher and a common practice for the ISS supervisor was to supply students with work that kept them busy but may not have been relevant to their learning. Bree had her own experiences with being suspended from school, but on one occasion it was a different type of suspension that resulted in her not attending her classes. Bree was suspended from the bus for fighting. Receiving this type of suspension meant that she could still attend school, but she was not allowed to ride the bus for a certain amount of time. I asked her how she got to school when this event happened and she stated, "I didn't go to school really, basically because my mom didn't have a car." Although Bree's punishment did not dictate that she could not go to school, she still missed her classes because she had no transportation to school.

Ramona, who had spent the previous school year attending the Academy, the district's alternative school, spoke about how attending the Academy could impact a student's education and future:

Interviewer: Let me ask you this, do you think had you stayed at the Academy, it would've affected your future?

Ramona: Yes, I do. I do.

Interviewer: In what ways?

Ramona: Because Academy, it's like – I don't know how to explain it. It's like, if you go to Academy, you're going to get writ up a lot, and that's not good for your future because the work there is very hard. They give you – how do you say it? Okay, if you're in the sixth grade, they'll give you ninth grade work over there.

Interviewer: Because it goes up through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, right?

Ramona: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So, do you think that now that you're out of the Academy and in this school, you think that your future looks better?

Ramona: Yes, I do.

To better understand Ramona's response, it is important to note that the district's alternative school served students from grades 6-12. Ramona attended the Academy during her sixth-grade year. Her description indicated that she felt that she was not receiving the same instruction that sixth-grade students in the traditional school setting were receiving.

In addition to Ramona's view that exclusionary discipline had an immediate, negative impact on students' educations, she, like other participants, also emphasized the negative impact exclusionary discipline could have on students' futures beyond high school. For example, Makale stated the reason he felt suspensions could influence a student's future was "because once you go to college, they look at that stuff and they look at what you did. And some colleges will be like, 'Oh no, we can't enroll...we don't want you to be here.'" Like Makale, Maya spoke about how one's future could be negatively impacted due to exclusionary discipline:

Interviewer: So, when your administrator says, "I'm going to suspend you," what are your thoughts right then?

Maya: I'm going to just do my days in there.

Interviewer: Do you think, "I've learned my lesson?"

Maya: But I don't like it. I don't like it in there.

Interviewer: Why?

Maya: Because we got to sit in one class all day. And I'm not in my class I'm supposed to be in.

Interviewer: Do you think when people get suspended it can impact their future in any way?

Maya: If they keep getting in trouble over and over, they probably not going to be nothing [in life].

Maya believed that students who were repeatedly suspended would eventually drop out of school and not succeed with their lives. Like Maya, Bree also felt that being suspended could negatively impact students' educations and their futures. When asked about how suspension could influence a student's future, Bree explained: "If you get to high school and you do bad stuff that can get on your record, and I'm telling this because my cousin—my cousin was doing bad stuff [and got suspended] and it got on his record and he got held back." Overall, the students' negative experiences with school suspensions led them to believe that school suspensions were both ineffective and harmful to their educations and futures.

### **Participants Supported the School's Use of Exclusionary Discipline**

Although students viewed exclusionary discipline as being ineffective and detrimental to their academic success and futures, all participants expressed the view that when students misbehaved they were deserving of being suspended. Participants viewed exclusionary discipline as a necessity because they felt something had to happen when students got into trouble and that removing students from the classroom setting was the only viable option.

Throughout our interview, Andre made multiple statements explaining the school's use of suspensions as necessary. When asked why he thought schools sent students to ISS or OSS for punishment, his response was, "They don't got time to put up with this stuff." He later justified teachers removing students from class as punishment by saying, "They don't have time for foolishness." As we discussed whether he felt teachers and administrators at our school treated all students fairly, Andre responded by stating, "Yes. I believe they do. It's just so many chances that

they give us. They're tired of it." Andre felt that schools had no choice but to suspend students.

Bree also referred to exclusionary discipline as something that was necessary at school. She expressed her view of school suspensions when I asked her why she thought schools suspend students and she responded, "Because we had a lot of bad children. We have a lot of backwards groups, so we have to – if they get in trouble, then we have to have a place to send them." Makale and Ramona defended the school's use of exclusionary discipline by stating that the school was trying to teach students a lesson. Makale, Ramona, and Maya all felt that exclusionary discipline was not effective, but they justified the suspension of students by stating that the school was trying to teach students a lesson. The students' justification of suspensions contradicts their responses indicating that they felt exclusionary discipline was ineffective in changing student behavior. Chris justified the school's use of exclusionary discipline because students continued to get into trouble and educators did not know what else to do with them so they just suspended them or sent them home. The participants had the overall attitude that since students misbehaved, the school had no other option but to utilize exclusionary discipline measures.

### **Caring Teacher Behaviors Included Pedagogical Care and Nurturing Care**

Teachers that showed their students that they wanted them to be academically successful, and teachers that provided the appropriate support for students to be successful in the classroom, were viewed by participants as caring. Participants stated that they wanted to be viewed as capable learners that could handle challenging work. While discussing her experience at the Academy, I asked Ramona if she felt that the teachers cared about their students. She associated a challenging academic

atmosphere with caring teacher behavior when she stated, “I think they really did because they were really trying to make us work to our potential. They weren’t trying to make us slack off.”

Not only did the participants want to be viewed as capable learners, they also felt that when teachers provided academic support to help them be successful they were showing that they cared about them. Makale described how teachers’ support and encouragement in the classroom made him feel that they cared about him during the following exchange:

Interviewer: Now, let’s think about teachers that have shown that they care for their students. When I say care, I mean they want them to succeed, they are considered nice, I guess. So how do teachers at our school show that they care about you, or other students?

Makale: They give us time. They don’t rush us.

Interviewer: Through your work or through the hallway?

Makale: Through our work.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Makale: They don’t rush us. They don’t rush us to, “Come on, keep up the pace.” They let you go at your own pace. They want you to comprehend so you can be successful in all...courses. So, they work with you...when they work with you, they want you to think about it like, “You can do it. I know you can make it.” They try new things with you. They try other methods and stuff with you.

Here Makale was describing how teachers’ academic support, which included academic encouragement and individualized instruction, showed him that they cared about him.

Like Makale, Bree believed that teachers’ classroom practices played a role in showing that they cared for their students. She associated teachers who cared with behaviors that provided a safe learning environment where all students were valued as individual

learners. Teachers were also viewed as caring when they were sensitive to students' academic challenges. Bree expressed this view in the following statement:

They don't judge people by their reading level and stuff like that. Some teachers gossip, and I don't like gossip really. If you don't want to read in class, they don't just say, "Read," like if you're reading in class and people make fun of you because of how to talk and stuff like that. Because I get bullied for how I talk.

Bree thought that caring teachers were nonjudgmental and protected students from being embarrassed due to their academic deficiencies. Ramona compared the behaviors of uncaring and caring teachers in the following description:

I think teachers that don't care--let me describe them. The teachers that don't care, they don't care if you're doing work or you're not doing your work. Teachers that don't care, they don't care if you're playing with someone else. They don't care if you're like--okay, like if they said--I'm going to walk because they get mad because a kid was bothering them and they didn't pay attention. "I'm walking out of the classroom," and they're like, "Go ahead, that's you. If you want to get writ up, go ahead." A teacher that did care, they would say, "Get your butt back in here and get to work [laughter]."

Ramona, and the other participants, had an overarching belief that teachers who cared about them wanted them to be successful in the classroom. Participants also believed that teachers who always sent students out for discipline reasons did not care about their students.

In addition to caring for students' academic needs, participants also viewed teachers that helped with their personal needs as caring teachers. Makale described a time when one of his teachers intervened and took care of his needs when his mother was unable to:

Because she gave us a...year that I will never forget, literally. She was very caring even when my mother wasn't stable. She's very caring. She actually helped us with our life problems, even when I was getting bullied, even when I wasn't at home because Mom's doing stuff, and she really did

care. I can tell you one time, she literally like...and this one made me love her for the rest of my life. I will respect her and love her for my life. My mom was going through a process where she found out that she had a disorder with her blood, and I wasn't prepared for school. I didn't have shoes. I didn't have underwear and stuff. And she literally stopped in the middle of her class and told somebody to watch her class. She went to Wal-Mart and bought me shirts, school pants, school clothes. She bought me shoes, socks, and she bought me soap and stuff like that and then she told me to go in the bathroom and wash up, get cleaned up, stuff like that.

Whether or not the teacher actually left school during the middle of class to go to Wal-Mart, it is important to recognize that Makale felt this way. He remembered this teacher as someone who dropped everything to ensure that he was being cared for. Nurturing students' emotional needs was also viewed by participants as caring teacher behavior. Maya explained how she knew her favorite elementary school teacher cared about her: "I knew she cared. Like if we got in trouble or something, she wouldn't even write us up, she'd just help us out or something, or calm us down." Several of the participants discussed how they viewed teachers that supported them during discipline interactions as caring. Andre stated that he knew teachers cared about him when they tried to help him and keep him out of trouble.

Participants described uncaring teachers as those that did not support their academic and personal needs. Makale described uncaring teachers as those that gave up on their students. He described a teacher he felt did not care about him:

I had a teacher named Mrs. X. She was a teacher that was very strict. She's very strict. And she used to give up on students like that. Like the first two days, if you weren't comprehending what was going on in her class, you're out. You're either moved to a new class, or either she's not going to help you for the rest of the year, whatever, stuff like that. So she was very strict to the point where her strictness start making her give up on students.

Makale viewed this teacher's unwillingness to help students as a way of showing she had given up on them. He went on to discuss how he felt that teachers did not care

about their students when they would confuse students' inabilities to complete assignments as their unwillingness to complete the assignment. A lack of academic support was viewed as uncaring. Participants also described teachers that were always sending students out as uncaring teachers. Teachers that wished to show their students that they cared about them needed to do everything they could to support their students' academic needs, intervene when students' physical needs were not being met, and avoid sending students out of class because of behavioral issues.

### **Certain Teacher Behaviors Escalated Disciplinary Interactions**

Participants also discussed teacher behaviors that made them mad when they were being disciplined. All participants voiced a strong dislike for teachers yelling at them when disciplining them. Makale stated his preference of teachers talking calmly to students, stating:

I think that we should actually, instead of there being a lot of mouth and yelling at each other, I think that we should go our separate ways. Come back, we sit down as people, and we talk about it. But if you want to get loud, and I'm sitting here and I'm like, "Okay, I'm talking to you. I'm talking to you now," and you're yelling then why is the point of me talking to you?

Participants were adamant about their dislike of teachers yelling at them. Makale described a situation where he was trying to talk calmly to a teacher and the teacher continued to yell at him. He felt that students should not have to remain calm if teachers continuously yelled at them. Maya stated her dislike for teachers yelling at her:

Interviewer: What do teachers do to make you angry?

Maya: I really don't like when teachers yell.

Interviewer: No yelling, yeah?

Maya: At all.

Interviewer: I don't either.

Maya: We be right there in the same room. Why do they yell?

Bree expressed her dislike for teachers yelling at her as she discussed what teacher behaviors made her angry when she is being disciplined:

Bree: Don't yell at me. Don't spit in my face. Just because some teachers, I'm not trying to be rude or anything, but some teachers' breath be stinky. They just need a peppermint.

Interviewer: So do they get close to you?

Bree: Close to my face. It's like, "Whew Jesus [laughter]." I'll be like, "You need a peppermint."

Interviewer: So does that make you angrier when they're yelling and right in your face?

Bree: Yes. Yelling, and then they spit in my face. The spit on my lips.

Interviewer: When they're talking?

Bree: Yeah.

As shown in the above response by Bree, an invasion of personal space was also viewed as having the potential to escalate disciplinary interactions. Andre reported that he would get upset during discipline interactions when he felt teachers were intentionally trying to aggravate him:

Interviewer: What do teachers do that could make you angrier as they are getting on to you?

Andre: Just keep talking about it. Ignoring the person when they say something.

Interviewer: Right. Just kind of trying to –

Andre: Egg you on.

Andre perceived that teachers encouraged students to misbehave when they engaged students in power struggles, refused to stop discussing the discipline issue, insisted on

having the last word, or when they would not listen to the students who were being disciplined. Two weeks before my interview with Andre, an incident occurred between a teacher and him while he was with my class attending a school-wide assembly. This incident resulted in Andre being suspended for ten days. I spoke to Andre about this during his interview:

Interviewer: What happened between you and Miss Y, you fell out of your seat, right?

Andre: Yeah, I was trying to tie my shoe.

Interviewer: And then what happened?

Andre: She's telling me to get up. I just got angry.

Interviewer: Now, do you think that could have been handled differently?

Andre: Yeah.

Interviewer: If you were Miss Y, what would you have done differently?

Andre: I would have never said nothing to me. Let the teacher handle it. They was in the classroom. She always got to do stuff, so.

During this incident, the other teacher and I had asked Andre several times to take his hood off and sit up in his seat. He would comply and then revert back to putting his hood on and slouching in his seat. I decided to not push the issue with Andre, but the other teacher had Andre get up and stand by her. She removed his hood when he walked up to her. Andre leaned on a door while standing next to her and the door opened. At this point Andre and the teacher began arguing. I witnessed the teacher and Andre speaking loudly toward each other and Andre eventually telling the teacher to shut up. Andre felt that since he was not in the teacher's class at the time of the assembly, she did not have the right to discipline him. He felt that she was picking on him. Based on their responses, participants felt that teacher behaviors played a role in

escalating disciplinary actions. Those behaviors included yelling at the students, not allowing the students to talk or ignoring them, invading their personal space, and engaging in power struggles with students.

### **Calm Discussions Were Essential During Disciplinary Interactions**

When asked, study participants indicated that they preferred for discipline to be handled through calm discussions where all participants worked together to solve discipline issues when they arose. When asked how teachers could help calm students down during disciplinary interactions, Makale stated that he preferred that students and teachers take time to calm down during discipline interactions and then come together to work jointly toward a solution. Makale's previous experiences with discipline included teachers getting upset with him, yelling at him and not allowing him to share his thoughts on the situation. Andre agreed that it was important for teachers to allow students time to calm down during discipline interactions. He felt that students would not react as negatively to getting into trouble if teachers allowed students a "five-minute break by themselves." Ramona shared her thoughts about how she thought student discipline should be handled in the following exchange:

Interviewer: I want you to put on your hat as if you were a teacher, and the students in class were misbehaving. Talk to me about what you would do. What's the process you would go through?

Ramona: Well, if it was at this school and I knew these students, I would probably... just tell them to go outside and calm down, and if they're not calmed down, I would probably...talk to them. Or if they're still going wild and kind of roaming the halls, I would probably beep the front office.

Interviewer: Yeah. So when you beep the office, you have somebody come and get them?

Ramona: Mm-hmm

Interviewer: And then would you write them up, or would you call the parents?

Ramona: I would tell one of the administrators to talk to them, because they need someone that they know, and that they talk to, to talk to them. So that's why I would beep the front office.

Ramona believed it was important to provide students with time to calm down before any further action occurred. If students were not able to calm down, then she believed they should be taken to their administrator's office or to someone else that the student already had a relationship with. She emphasized the need for students to be able to talk to someone they knew. Maya also described her favorite teacher as someone that calmed students down when they got into trouble instead of writing them up using disciplinary referrals. When discussing one of her favorite teachers, Ramona elaborated on how that teacher handled student behavior. She stated:

She was the most sweetest teacher I've ever met...whenever someone got mad, she would--because there would be two teachers in there so whenever a teacher was mad or something, she would bring them out in the hallway and talk to them about their issue about the other student. And then when she got done, that student got done telling their story, she would get the other student and see what the other student said happened. See if they were both telling the truth, and then she would try to fix it for the both of them so they wouldn't be arguing. She was the best teacher.

Ramona appreciated that when two students were arguing her teacher would talk to both parties and work toward fixing the problem with the students. Participants felt that discipline could be handled effectively using calm discussions between teachers and students.

### **Perceptions of Respect and Disrespect Were Important in Disciplinary Interactions**

The three male participants spoke the most about respect and disrespect and they emphasized the importance of showing their teachers respect. They felt that to get

respect from teachers, students first had to show respect. Andre brought this up when he was discussing a teacher that he had a good relationship with. I asked him if he thought this teacher cared for her students and Andre stated, "Some people, they don't respect her so she's not going to respect you. You have to give respect to get it." Andre believed a teacher was justified in not showing a student respect if the student had not shown respect first. Chris was the participant that spoke about respect the most. He shared Andre's belief that a teacher was justified in being disrespectful if the student was disrespectful first. When asked if he thought all students at our school were treated fairly Chris replied, "Sometimes and sometimes not. But if you give [teachers] respect too, they give respect back." Chris' response indicated that he felt that students who showed respect were treated fairly and those that did not show respect were not. Chris then went on to answer:

Interviewer: Have you ever had a teacher you felt like you were giving respect to them and they weren't give that respect back?

Chris: One time. You probably giving respect to a teacher, and then they don't give you respect back then. I mean, they're probably not giving you respect at all. But if you respect them—sometimes teachers respect other kids in like an ungrateful way or in a certain way, but I know some teachers don't threaten a student, try to write them up for no reason.

Interviewer: You know teachers that do that or don't do that?

Chris: Oh, I would say some teachers do it but not a lot of teachers. But some students who had a bad attitude, but if you're not respecting the teacher, well, they're not going to have respect for you.

Andre and Chris both stressed the importance of students showing teachers respect and that if students showed teachers respect, then they would avoid being disciplined. Chris shared his perception of the importance of showing teachers respect when he stated, "Some teachers, they just don't like attitude and talking back, so they won't give

you the respect, or a warning, or a consequence. But if you give them respect they won't give you no consequence, or write up, just a warning."

Although participants viewed respect as being important, they varied in their perspectives about what was considered to be respectful behavior. Makale believed respectful behavior toward teachers included not talking back, imitating the teacher, and refusing to do what the teacher said. Chris described respectful student behavior as not talking back, not having an attitude, not getting up out of your seat, and raising your hand. When asked about how teachers could show respect toward their students, participants' responses varied. Maya described a teacher as being respectful if she talked calmly to students and helped students out. Bree believed teachers were respectful if they treated all students the same. Makale discussed an incident he was involved in where he was falsely accused of being disrespectful toward a teacher. As part of the school's uniform policy, students were only allowed to wear jackets that had no logos and were solid red or blue in color. The policy stated that students had to remove their jackets when they were in the building, but jackets could be worn outside. Mikale explained how a campus supervisor incorrectly assumed that he was intentionally violating these policies:

I was in the hallway with a campus supervisor, and she told me--I had on this Arizona Eagles jacket and it was red and blue, and she told me to take it off. And I said at the time, I had to walk from my second period class to my gym, and it was raining outside. So I knew that it was going to rain. And she told me to take it off, and I said, "No." And she was like, "Oh, you're disrespecting me because you said no." And I'm like, "It's not a term of disrespect. I'm telling you that I can't take it off, because it's raining outside and I don't want to get wet," something like that.

As a result of this teacher's misperception that Makale was being disrespectful by not removing his jacket, when he was actually not removing his jacket because he had to

go outside to get to his next class, Makale was required to miss recess for three days. Student responses showed that the idea of respect is subjective and open to interpretation. The subjectivity of what is considered respectful or disrespectful created the opportunity for misperceptions to be developed about student behavior.

### **Conclusion**

The topic for this study developed from my desire to work toward disrupting unfair disciplinary practices by listening to, and learning from, my students' perspectives on exclusionary discipline and caring teacher behaviors. In this section, I discussed the six themes that emerged from the analysis of data. Participants in this study described their views that exclusionary discipline was ineffective at changing students' behaviors and at the same time negatively impacted students' educations and futures. Other findings indicated that students' and teachers' perceptions of respect and disrespect were important, students preferred calm discussions as a way of handling discipline issues and that certain teacher behaviors escalated disciplinary interactions. In the next chapter I will discuss they findings and the implications they have for educational practices.

## CHAPTER 3 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this practitioner research was to address the disproportionate use of punitive disciplinary practices shown to be harmful for the Black students at my school. This study provided me with insight about six frequently disciplined students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and caring teacher behavior. The knowledge gained from this study helped me in my attempt to ensure that I did not contribute to the disparities in discipline practices at my school. It also helped me as I strove to create authentic, caring relationships with my students. The research questions in the study were:

1. What are my frequently disciplined students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline practices?
2. How do my frequently disciplined students perceive the influence of teacher behaviors on student behaviors?
3. What teacher behaviors do my frequently disciplined students identify as caring?

The study's findings are not meant to represent all frequently disciplined students, but readers may transfer important concepts to their own contexts. In addition to building on the existing literature concerning exclusionary discipline and caring teacher behaviors, this study also has implications for school leaders, classroom teachers, and my own practice. In this final chapter, I discuss the study's findings as they relate to current literature as well as limitations of the study. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of specific implications for teacher practice, for my own practice, and for future research.

## **Perceptions of Teacher Care**

Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors can impact how they react when involved in a disciplinary interaction. The participants of this study thought that teachers provoked and aggravated them during disciplinary interactions when they yelled at them, invaded their personal space, did not allow them to talk or ignored them during disciplinary interactions, and engaged in power struggles with them. Skiba (2002) noted that authoritarian disciplinary practices, such as the ones described by the participants where teachers engaged students in power struggles, made disciplinary interactions worse.

The teacher behaviors noted by the participants as those that escalate disciplinary interactions are also behaviors associated with attempts to gain power. The notion of power is important when examining teacher-student interactions and disparities in school discipline. Depending on the context, different forms of power are used by teachers and students (Toshalis, 2015). Teachers and students are consistently negotiating and resisting power structures related to normalized beliefs about race, culture, and schooling. Pane et al. (2014) examined the classroom interactions and exclusionary discipline practices in four secondary classrooms in a southeastern United States disciplinary alternative school. They found that teachers who exhibited more power and domination over cultural elements of the classroom, such as failing to allow students to maintain their own identity within classroom expectations, were more likely to implement exclusionary discipline measures. The connection between teachers' uses of power and exclusionary discipline practices showed that teachers' culturally-informed ideologies and beliefs influenced the power

relations in the classroom. Teachers that unconsciously reinforced the behavioral expectations of the dominant culture, such as raising your hand to talk in class and not interrupting the teacher when she is talking, failed to show care and concern for all of their students' cultural identities.

The importance of how students perceive caring teacher behaviors has been identified in the literature (Perlman, 2015). When students view their teachers as caring they are more willing to trust and cooperate with those teachers (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Participants in this study identified caring teacher behaviors to include pedagogical care and nurturing care. Specific pedagogical care that was valued by the participants was when teachers would provide challenging learning environments where teachers valued students' academic success. This finding supports previous research that found students described academic support as a caring teacher behavior (Muller, 2001). Research conducted on successful schools for Black students indicated that educators in these schools balanced respect and care with high expectations and strict discipline (Gregory et al., 2011).

It was noted by participants that caring teachers not only supported them and challenged them academically, but they did so without judgment. This description of pedagogical care aligns with the asset-based thinking of CRCTC. Teachers that possess asset-based thinking have respect for knowledge and resources students bring with them, rather than viewing students as being deficient. Studies have shown that when teachers focus on their students' assets, rather than deficits, it results in increased student success (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Rios-Aguilar, 2010). Students whose teachers exhibit caring

behaviors are more likely to internalize the value of succeeding in school (Danielson, Wium, Whilhelmsen, & Wold, 2010).

The study's participants expressed their beliefs that teachers who care about them support their academic success. They spoke specifically of teachers' high expectations, verbal confirmations of their beliefs that students were capable of being successful, and support to help students achieve success in the classroom and life after school. Nurturing care, such as helping students with basic necessities, was also described as a characteristic of a caring teacher. These characteristics of teacher care mimic the characteristics of care that are found in warm demanding teaching styles.

Authoritarian teaching and discipline styles through which both warmth and demandingness are communicated have been identified as positively influencing students' educational experiences (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Warm demanders show care and concern while also communicating clear, high expectations and holding students accountable for their performance. The warm demanding teaching style supports a culture of achievement for Black students who are often underrepresented among high achieving students. Ware (2006) conducted a comparative case study in an inner-city school district in the southern United States. In her study she compared the teaching strategies of two Black teachers with the strategies noted in the literature on Black teachers. The study's findings indicated that the teaching styles of the participants aligned with the warm demander teaching style and, like warm demanders, they incorporated culturally relevant pedagogy in their practice. Ware (2006) proposed that the intersection of the culturally

relevant pedagogy and warm demander pedagogy, "...facilitate the creation of a culture of achievement for students of color (p. 452)." In addition to understanding students' perceptions of teacher care, it is also valuable to understand students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline.

### **Perceptions of Exclusionary Discipline**

The participants discussed how students would return from a suspension and there would be no positive change in their behavior, but at times they would see students' behaviors worsen after returning from a suspension. Previous studies support participants' perceptions that exclusionary discipline was ineffective. Skiba (2000) reported that as many as "40% of school suspensions are due to repeat offenders" (p. 16). Not only are suspensions ineffective in changing student behavior, but being suspended also leads to more frequent future suspensions (Balfanz et al., 2012).

As reported by study participants, the loss of teacher instruction caused by suspensions from school negatively impacts student learning. Participants described times when they were assigned to ISS and teachers would fail to send their work and they would sit in ISS all day doing nothing. Suspensions resulted in students experiencing a lack of instruction that caused them to fall behind on their school work, which in turn resulted in receiving lower grades (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010). The link between the achievement gap and the discipline gap has been highlighted in previous research (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Lee, 2002; Vincent, Tobin, Hawken, & Frank, 2012). A study conducted by Morris and Parry (2016) supports the students' perceptions that exclusionary discipline negatively impacted their learning. Examining data from

the Kentucky School Discipline Study and school records of 16,248 students in grades 6-8, Morris and Perry (2016) found that students who had been suspended scored significantly lower on end-of-year math and reading exams. Their study was conducted over the course of three years, allowing them the opportunity to examine test scores for students who received suspensions during one school year, but not during one of the other two years of the study. They found that students did worse on the exam during the year they received suspensions compared to the years that they did not receive a suspension.

When a student is excluded from a learning environment to address discipline and that student recognizes that schools are making the decision to take that opportunity away from them, it sends a message that their education is not valued. Although the participants in this study had multiple experiences with school suspensions, their responses indicated that they still valued their education and held a strong desire for educators to do the same.

Multiple times throughout the interviews conducted for this study, participants made statements such as “they’ve got to have somewhere to put us” and “[schools] don’t have time to put up with our stuff” showing their support for the school’s use of exclusionary discipline practices. This support is indicative of the negative views participants held of themselves and the beliefs that they were problems for schools and deserving of punitive discipline. The participants’ negative self-images were likely a product of repeated negative labeling by teachers and administrators based on students’ previous mistakes. Teachers that hold negative beliefs about a student are more likely to react more harshly to students’ behaviors that challenge them. Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy (2016)

conducted research where they examined 11 middle school students' experiences with possible labeling due to their frequent involvement with school disciplinary interactions. After analyzing participant interviews, the researchers found that although the participants did not see themselves as being bad, their descriptions of schooling indicated labeling had occurred and that students felt labeling led educators to presume students' guilt based on past punishments.

Educators that allow their beliefs about students to be shaped by prior disciplinary interactions develop deficit perspectives of those students positioning them as problematic (Collins, 2011; Kennedy & Soutullo, In Press). Toshalis (2016) argued for the need for educators to recast the blame for perceived student misbehaviors away from students and to approach disciplinary solutions as lying within teacher-student relationships. Approaching disciplinary conflicts as indicative of a problem in a teacher-student relationship could help teachers focus on the positive development of those relationships and make their classrooms and schools as dynamic and welcoming as possible.

Participants viewed exclusionary discipline as ineffective and harmful for students' learning and future outcomes, yet they still supported the school's use of exclusionary discipline because that was the only method of handling discipline they had experienced. Although exclusionary discipline practices were the most common form of handling discipline issues at my school, research indicates that these practices are ineffective and negatively impact students (Maag, 2012; Skiba, Arredondo & Rausch, 2014). Perry and Morris (2014) conducted a three-year study about the consequences of exclusionary discipline that included the examination of school records for 16,897 middle school and

high school age students. This study examined the relationship between the disciplinary context of schools and students' academic achievement in reading and math. The findings indicated that high levels of OSS in a school over time were associated with declining test scores for both suspended and non-suspended students. The researchers attributed the decline in scores for non-suspended students to the effects of the constant threat of punishment, which created a highly punitive environment that hindered the academic performance of typically well-behaved students. There is a need for schools to consider more successful, proactive methods of approaching discipline instead of relying upon exclusionary discipline practices (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010).

Examples of proactive approaches to discipline include restorative practices (McCluskey et al., 2008), School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports (SWPBS) (Eber, Upreti & Rose, 2010; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Vincent et al., 2012), and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Taylor, Durlak, Oberle, & Weissberg 2017; Zins, 2001).

### **Alternatives to Exclusionary Discipline**

Restorative practices provide an approach to handling discipline that offers students models of care and constructive conflict resolution. Restorative practices developed from restorative justice, which is a way of addressing crime by focusing on repairing harm between offenders and victims rather than just punishing the offenders. In the school setting, restorative practices serve as methods to address student behavior using a supportive process where students take responsibility for their behavior and the harm it may have caused to others. All parties involved in the incident work together to discuss what occurred and

what should be done to repair any harm that was created. Restorative practices place less emphasis on punishment and more emphasis on accountability, healing, and meeting the needs of all impacted parties (Gregory et al., 2015). Rather than constantly approaching discipline in a manner where students view themselves as the problem, educators using restorative practices give students the opportunity to be involved in a positive solution to discipline. Restorative approaches to discipline can work to dismantle the discipline gap found within schools (Gregory, 2013). Educators' uses of restorative practices are supported by the belief that students are more likely to make positive change when they work alongside educators to handle discipline issues (Wachtel, 2005). Several of this study's participants voiced their desire for teachers to talk to them calmly when discipline interactions occurred in the classroom so that they could work with the teacher to solve the problem, rather than the teacher immediately sending them out of the room and to their administrator. The participants wanted a chance to participate in finding solutions to problems and the use of restorative practices would allow for this participation to occur.

The use of SWPBS has also been noted as an effective alternative to exclusionary discipline practices. SWPBS is the application of a school-wide behavior management system that includes proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate school behaviors. The key features for SWPBS include: effective administrative leadership; team-based implementation; the explicit defining and teaching of behavioral expectations; the acknowledgement of, and rewards for, appropriate behavior; the monitoring and correction of behavioral errors; and family and community collaboration (Lewis,

Mitchell, Trussell & Newcomber, 2014). Students such as the participants in this study may be most positively affected by the aspect of SWPBS that acknowledges and rewards positive behaviors.

SEL practices vary greatly, but SEL in general seeks to build students' skills to recognize and manage their emotions, establish positive goals, make responsible decisions, appreciate perspectives of others, and handle interpersonal situations effectively (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015; Zins, 2001). In addition to improving student behaviors without the overuse of suspensions, SEL programs have also been shown to improve students' academic performance on achievement tests and grades. Findings from a meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal SEL programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students indicated that, compared to a control group, students participating in a SEL program demonstrated an 11% gain in achievement scores (Durlak et al., 2011).

When implemented with high fidelity, SWPBS, restorative practices, and SEL reduce overall behavioral issues in schools as well as educators' uses of exclusionary discipline practices (Solomon et al., 2012). These alternatives mainly focus on altering student behaviors, but the effective implementation of these practices also requires teachers to alter their beliefs and behaviors. Once teachers alter their beliefs about how they view and address student behavior, they are capable of creating a shift in their perceptions of, and responses to, students. Educators may also release their dependence upon exclusionary discipline strategies and experiment with these more positive, inclusive techniques. Teacher beliefs play a key role in the way they perceive and respond

to student behavior. Research shows that the disproportionate rates of discipline with Black students is a result of educators' subjective judgments of student behaviors (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba et al., 2002).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although this study served the purpose it was intended to serve, there were limitations. First, the decision to narrow the selection of study participants based on students with whom I had a good rapport might have precluded the collection of data from a more diverse group of students. Had a different method for narrowing the participant group been used, participants might have given different responses that might have led to different findings and conclusions.

Second, the low return rate of discipline reflection forms was a limitation of the study. I was able to obtain discipline reflection forms from students that asked their assistant principal for a form when they were sent to the office and also when I was aware of a student being sent to their assistant principal, but overall there was a very low return rate for these forms. The low return rate led to the interviews with the participants serving as the primary technique for gathering data. There is a risk that during the interviews students responded to the interview questions with what they thought would be desirable answers. Had I been able to collect forms from students every time they were sent to their assistant principal's office, I would have been provided with data from more time points and in different circumstances (e.g. during discipline moments themselves) to triangulate with the data collected from the interviews.

An additional limitation stems from the differences in race and culture between myself and the study participants. Matters of race and culture are

important considerations in the process of conducting research. I am a White teacher studying the perceptions of my marginalized students. Since my race and culture are different from the participants', this study began with the limitation that I may have lacked the cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the experiences students shared with me during the interviews. To address this limitation, I utilized an interpretative lens that allowed me to critically examine data to expose race and racism in the broader context.

This research provided me with insights about my students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and caring teacher behaviors as well as implications for practice. There are implications for future research also. I have discovered through this research process that practitioner research is an effective tool for addressing problems in teacher practice. Future research on the impact practitioner research may have on reducing the discipline gap would be of value to combating the disproportionate disciplinary practices that negatively impact the educational experiences of Black students.

### **Implications**

Despite the limitations, this study provided me with insight into my students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and caring teacher behaviors. Decisions about school practices are continuously being made without student input, although students are the most impacted by the consequences of those decisions (Angus, 2006; Kennedy & Datnow, 2011). By conducting this study, I discovered the value of including students' perspectives in teacher practice and education research, the importance of schools utilizing approaches to addressing discipline issues that do not exclude students from learning, the significance of

teachers developing caring relationships with their students, and the role practitioner research can play in improving teacher practice.

### **Incorporating Students' Perspectives**

Listening to students' perspectives can directly improve educational practices because when educators agree to listen to and learn from students they can then begin to see the world from students' perspectives (Clark, 1995; Cook-Sather, 2002). Previous research suggests that the interpretation of disciplinary interactions between disciplined students and the teachers disciplining them vary greatly. By listening to students' perspectives, educators tap in to students' expertise and knowledge that could help create substantial change to teaching practices. When educators rely upon students as sources of information, they gain a clearer understanding of what students need and how to best meet those needs. Understanding, and basing policies and practices upon, students' perspectives could help educators eliminate practices that alienate students.

Educators should incorporate methods for understanding the perspectives of their students. Asking students their opinions about curriculum or involving students in the creation of classroom norms are ways that educators can involve their students in their education. This perspective sharing can be done through informal conversations with students or through a more formal method, such as student surveys or student interviews. To address school-wide issues, schools can create student panels that meet regularly to work together to address issues when they arise. Teachers should position students as experts to address

identified problems of teaching practice, particularly when the students are most strongly impacted by the problem.

### **Addressing School Discipline Practices**

Educators' use of exclusionary discipline as the main response to perceived student misbehavior has not proven to be effective and often results in the same group of students being repeatedly removed from the learning environment. Educators should move away from using discipline practices that exclude students from learning. The use of restorative practices and SWPBS have been proven to be effective strategies to replace educators' frequent use of exclusionary discipline.

Making the change from an exclusionary discipline approach to an approach that utilizes restorative practices requires a sustained effort from both teachers and administrators. School administrators can support the implementation of restorative practices by modeling daily reflection on school interactions, creating school-wide norms that support restorative practices, and providing teacher training related to restorative practices (McCluskey et al., 2008). Schools that utilize restorative practices respond to problems with strategies that strengthen students' relationships with school staff and other students rather than push students away from schools. When restorative practices are implemented school wide, it can result in decreased misbehavior and lowered suspension rates (Owen et al., 2015). The application of a school-wide behavior management system that includes proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors can help reduce educators' uses of exclusionary discipline practices.

Since most disciplinary issues originate in the classroom, teachers play an important role in addressing disparities in discipline practices. Teachers decide which students are considered discipline problems and how to intervene when these problems occur. Participants in this study indicated that teacher behavior such as yelling, invading students' personal space, and refusing to listen to students during disciplinary interactions frequently occurred at our school and often escalated discipline interactions. Teachers have described this type of behavior as "tough love" and may not be aware of how it is negatively impacting disciplinary interactions. Teachers and administrators should be provided with professional development, such as during staff meetings, regarding how students perceive this type of behavior and how it can potentially escalate disciplinary interactions.

### **Caring Teacher Behaviors**

Participants identified caring teacher behaviors to include supporting the academic success of all students, creating challenging learning environments, holding high expectations for student achievement, and addressing students' physical needs. Based on the participants' views of caring teacher behaviors, teachers should communicate care to their students through the use of a warm demander stance to teaching that is characterized by CRCTC. A teacher that wishes to operate as a warm demander must provide rigorous instruction with engaging lessons where all students are expected and supported to succeed. In addition, a culture of mutual respect needs to be established where students' experiences and identities are valued. Frequent conversations need to be held between teachers and students that discuss teachers' and students' expectations

and the specific supports teachers will provide students so that they can meet the teachers' expectations. Teachers who enact this type of care must be aware of, and prepared to address, the societal injustices that are reproduced in schools (Bondy et al., 2013). By acknowledging and addressing school inequities, teachers demonstrate a commitment to care for students..

### **Authentic, Caring Teacher-Student Relationships**

The development of authentic, caring teacher-student relationships could serve as a way to improve disciplinary interactions between teachers and students. One key characteristic of an effective teacher repeated throughout the literature is the ability to develop and maintain strong interpersonal relationships with students (Good & Brophy, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noddings, 1992). Improved teacher-student relationships reduce distrust and cultural misunderstandings (Gregory et al., 2011).

The development of caring relationships between teachers and students requires teachers to have a deep understanding of their students and the ability to care for students. According to the findings of this study, teachers at my school can demonstrate care for their students by holding high academic expectations for students along with strong academic support where students do not feel that they are being judged for any academic deficiencies. Teachers can also demonstrate care by recognizing times when students lack basic necessities and then working to find a way to help provide students with those things.

### **Using Practitioner Research to Improve Practice**

The findings of this study indicate there is a need for teachers to frequently reflect upon their practices. The use of critical reflection can

potentially improve teacher practice in a variety of areas. For example, the participants in this study described how certain teacher behaviors would escalate disciplinary interactions. The use of critical reflection would allow teachers the opportunity to examine their decision-making process and pedagogy used when addressing student behaviors. The use of practitioner research provides teachers with the opportunity to critically reflect upon their practice. There are a variety of supports needed for teachers to be able to conduct practitioner research as a method for improving practice. School administration will need to provide time for teachers to conduct their research along with incentives for the teachers willing to incorporate research into their practice. One way to achieve this is by counting the time teachers use for practitioner research as required yearly professional development hours. Professional learning communities can be used to as a method for teachers to work collaboratively to conduct practitioner research. Since an essential component of practitioner research is the sharing of findings, school administration should develop a method for teachers to share their findings with their peers.

The use of practitioner research as the methodology for this study helped me discover the value of being a learner and observer within my own classroom. The reflective aspect of practitioner research provided me with in-depth knowledge about my own practices. I gained a keen awareness of my own interpretations of student behavior and my actions when handling student discipline. In addition to improving my own practice, I shared the knowledge I gained about students' perspectives with other educators in my building. I

believe no other methodology would have provided me findings with such relevance to my own practice.

Practitioner research improves individual teachers' practice, informs the teaching profession, and models the importance of self-studies for future teachers (Simms, 2013). Questioning one's own practice can result in professional growth and provide a progressive approach to staff development resulting in meaningful change for children (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). When teachers engage in practitioner research they develop a sense of ownership of the changes in policy and practices, decreasing their potential resistance to change (Kershner, 1999). There is also an increased likelihood that findings will be used effectively.

The use of practitioner research for this study allowed me to gain a better understanding of my students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and caring teacher behaviors. As a result of students' responses, I immediately began to make a shift in thinking about my teaching practices. Prior to interviewing my students, I would justify the use of exclusionary discipline as being necessary so that the education of other students in the class would not be jeopardized. Although embarrassing to admit, there were times when I would breathe a sigh of relief when certain students were suspended because it meant that my job as a teacher would be made a little bit easier. All it took was for me to listen to how negatively my students viewed exclusionary discipline and I became a lot more tolerant of student behavior during my class. My view of exclusionary discipline shifted from it being necessary to it being unnecessary. I started handling all discipline issues on my own without the use of discipline referrals or

administrators' assistance. When my students were suspended I would pull them from the ISS suspension room to attend my class so that they would not miss instruction. I also worked toward making sure that they were able to make up missed work in their other classes.

Recognizing that my idea of caring teacher behavior may not have been congruent with my students' perceptions of care, I utilized this study to gain knowledge of how my students described caring teacher behaviors. As I listened to my students' perceptions of teacher behavior, I found myself acutely aware of how my colleagues and I interacted with students. I saw the importance of incorporating more of the behaviors that participants described as caring into my practice. Becoming aware of my students' perceptions that caring teachers provided them with academically challenging work resulted in a substantial change in practice for me. As a special education teacher, I was aware of my students' academic deficits and I worked toward supporting my students to accommodate those deficits. After reflecting upon what students were saying in their interviews, I recognized that I was allowing students' academic challenges, and my desire to protect them from academic frustration, to dominate my pedagogical decisions. I began to incorporate more challenging work along with a unique balance of independence and support to ensure student success.

Teacher expectations play an important role in student success. A study conducted by Rubie-Davies et al. (2015) produced evidence that teachers' high expectations positively impacted students' math scores. The study consisted of 84 teachers who were randomly assigned to either a control group or an intervention group where teachers received training on the instructional

strategies and practices of high expectation teachers. The findings of their study indicated that students whose teachers received the training on practices of high expectation teachers had a higher increase in their math scores compared to the controlled group. Tyler and Boelter (2008) showed that students' perceptions of teachers' expectations are associated with students' self-efficacy, which positively influences their academic performance. This study measured 262 Black middle school aged students' perceptions of their teachers' expectations along with the students' academic efficacy, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement and found that perceived teacher expectation emerged as a significant predictor of students' academic efficacy and academic engagement.

The participants of this study linked caring teacher behavior to their academic success. The participants' desires for teachers to provide support when they were having trouble, not to judge them as academically deficient, and to hold high expectations for them showed me it was important that I created a culture of success in my classroom (Cushman, 2003). My mindset about my teaching and learning has evolved and I now provide a more rigorous learning environment where I am sure to convey to my students my beliefs and expectations for them to be successful. This new mindset along with my relentless pursuit to handle all disciplinary issues myself to prevent my contribution to the placement of students in ISS or OSS lead me to believe that I am a better teacher now than I was before conducting this study. As I continuously reflect upon the findings of this study, I expect my practices to continue to change for the better. As a practitioner scholar, I will continue to examine my discipline practices to ensure that this improvement occurs.

## Conclusion

This was a practitioner research study designed to examine my frequently disciplined, marginalized students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and caring teacher behaviors as a way to address the disproportional disciplinary practices identified at my school. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. What are my frequently disciplined students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline practices?
2. How do my frequently disciplined students perceive the influence of teacher behaviors on student behaviors?
3. What teacher behaviors do my frequently disciplined students identify as caring?

By giving voice to the students most strongly impacted by the discipline practices at my school, I have gained insight and provided direction on ways that I can work towards dismantling this problem. These new behaviors include: working to implement discipline practices that do not exclude students from learning; incorporating more of the teacher behaviors that my students identified as caring; and creating a learning environment that includes both high expectations for students as well as support from me to help students meet those expectations. Since this is a school-wide problem, I have shared the findings with my colleagues and we will continue to work together to address the changes needed to improve the learning experiences for all of our students.

## APPENDIX A RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Mrs. Phaup is looking for students who are willing to be participants in a study that she is conducting. Through her study, she will be talking to her students to gain an understanding of their thoughts about discipline at our school and what teachers can do to help reduce the amount of discipline that occurs at our school.

I have already contacted your parents/guardians and received verbal consent for you to participate in this study. If you are interested in being a participant in Mrs. Phaup's study, then please have your parent/guardian sign the consent form and return it to me. If at any time you wish to stop participating in the study, then you can come to me and I will let Mrs. Phaup know. If you do not wish to participate, then simply discard the consent form. Participation or non-participation in this study will not impact your grade in any way.

APPENDIX B  
PARENT CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the College of Education at the University of Florida, conducting research on exclusionary discipline practices under the supervision of Dr. Brianna Kennedy. The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge of my students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline practices and caring teacher-student relationships. The results of the study may help me and my fellow teachers better understand our students' thoughts about our school's disciplinary practices. In addition, we may gain insight into how to better form caring relationships with our students. These results may not directly help your child today, but may benefit future students. There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. With your permission, I would like to ask your child to volunteer for this research.

The research will take place during the 3<sup>rd</sup> nine weeks of this school year. I will be conducting an initial interview with participants after school. Participants will be provided transportation home via the activities bus that runs after school. Any additional interviews will be conducted on Wednesday during our school's CAT time. During all interviews, participants will be asked to talk freely as well as answer questions about their academic and behavioral progress in school, but they will not have to answer any question they do not wish to answer. With your permission, your child will be audio-taped during the interviews. Recordings will be heard, seen, and used only by the researcher in the research process. These recordings will be transcribed and all identifying information will be removed from

the transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms or masked information. The audio files will be deleted after they are transcribed and the transcripts will be stored on a password protected server for three years after the conclusion of the study and then destroyed.

Participants will also be asked to fill out reflection forms if they are sent to their administrator's office during the study. The administrators will be given a list of participants so that they can provide them with the reflection form. Although the participants will be asked to write their names on the reflection forms, their identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. I will replace their names with code names. At the end of the study, all data will be destroyed.

Participation or non-participation in this study will not affect the student's grades or placement in any programs. You and your child have the right to withdraw consent for your child's participation at any time without consequence.

Participants will receive no compensation for participating in this study. There are no known risks or immediate benefits to the participants. If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me. Questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB02 office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily give my consent for my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this description.

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## APPENDIX C STUDENT ASSENT SCRIPT

As you already know, I am in graduate school at the University of Florida so that I can learn how to make education and teaching better for all students. One thing that I am really curious about is students' views of school. I am particularly interested in my students' views of the discipline at our school and what teachers can do to help eliminate the amount of suspensions we use. I am hoping that you will help me answer that question. If you choose to participate, I will ask you to answer questions about your experiences with discipline during middle school and your opinions about what teachers do to show you that they care about their students. I will ask you to meet with me for an initial interview that will last around an hour. If you are suspended during any time during the study, I will want to meet with you when you return from your suspension. These meetings will take place on Wednesdays, during Cat Time. If at any time during the study you are sent to your assistant principals' office, you will be asked to fill out a form about what occurred for you to be sent there. Your assistant principal will know that you are participating in the study and will be in possession of any Discipline Reflection forms you fill out, but he will not have access to any other data that is collected. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer, and even if you agree to participate now, you can change your mind at any time. The study will begin in the next couple of weeks and will last until the end of the school year. I will also ask to audio-record our interviews. I will be the only person to listen to these recordings. The recordings will be kept safe and destroyed after the study. Your names will never be used and all data will be de-identified, meaning a process will be used to prevent your identity from being connected with any study information. Your

choice to participate will not affect your grades in any way. The study will begin in the next couple of weeks and will last until the end of the school year. Would you be willing to participate?

APPENDIX D  
INITIAL STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Describe a teacher that you have had in middle school that you liked? How did s/he deal with students' behavior in the classroom?
2. What kind of consequences are used by teachers and administrators, at our school, for students that misbehave?
3. What types of student behavior usually result in a student being sent to ISS?
4. Why do you think schools use suspensions as punishment?
5. Have you ever been assigned to In-School Suspension (ISS)? If yes, what happened that led to you being suspended.
6. How do you think your own behavior might have contributed to you being sent to ISS?
7. How does it make you feel when you are assigned to ISS?
8. Do you think being suspended will influence your future? If yes, how?
9. Have you ever been assigned to ASAC? If yes, what happened that led to you being suspended?
10. How do you think being suspended affects a student's behavior when they return to school?
11. If you were a teacher how would you respond to students that you think are misbehaving in class?
12. How do teachers at our school show that they care about you and other students?
13. How would you describe a teacher that treats students with respect?
14. Have you ever had a teacher that you felt saw things from your point of view? If yes, what did they do to make you feel this way?
15. Do you feel that all of your teachers care about you and other students in their classes? Explain.
16. Describe a teacher you didn't get along with as well. How did s/he deal with students' behavior in the classroom?

17. Have there been times when you felt that one of your teachers did not care about you or other students? If yes, explain.
18. Do you think teachers, administrators and other adults at our school treat students fairly? Explain.
19. Do you ever get mad at teachers when they discipline you? If yes, what can teachers do to help you calm down? What do teachers do that make you angrier?
20. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX E  
ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Will you describe what happened that resulted in you being suspended?
2. Can you describe how your teacher acted during the incident that led to you being suspended?
3. Do you think your teacher could have handled the situation differently? If yes, explain.
4. Do you think that you could have handled the situation differently? If yes, explain.
5. What were your thoughts when your administrator told you that you were going to be suspended?

APPENDIX F  
DISCIPLINE REFLECTION FORM

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Today I got in trouble during:  1<sup>st</sup> Period     2<sup>nd</sup> Period     3<sup>rd</sup> Period  
 4<sup>th</sup> Period     5<sup>th</sup> Period     6<sup>th</sup> Period     7<sup>th</sup> Period     Lunch

I got in trouble because my teacher (or another adult) said I was:

- Talking too much       Not doing my work.       Being disrespectful  
 Using profanity       Fighting       Other: \_\_\_\_\_

I think I  should or  should not have been sent to the assistant principal's office because:

- I didn't do what he/she said I did.       It didn't happen the way the teacher said it happened.  
 I did do what he/she said I did.       Other: \_\_\_\_\_

When I had to go to my assistant principal's office I felt:

- Angry     Sad     Betrayed     Happy     I didn't care  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

If you were treated fairly, what did the teacher/other adult do that felt fair?

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If you were treated unfairly, what did the teacher/other adult do that felt unfair?

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APPENDIX G  
CODE BOOK

CODE	MEANING
Preferred Method of Handling Discipline	Students' explicit or implicit opinions about how discipline should be handled; if these opinions also relate to fairness, the segment is also coded as "All Treated Fairly."
Impact of Exclusionary Discipline	Students' explicit opinions about the positive or negative impact of exclusionary discipline.
Respect and Disrespect	Students' explicit and implicit opinions about what is considered respectful or disrespectful teacher behavior. Students' opinions about the role respect plays in teacher-student interactions.
Behaviors that Warrant Exclusionary Discipline	Students' explicit opinions about behaviors that warrant exclusionary discipline.
Positive Teacher Behaviors	Students describe teachers positively, but are not talking about respect, discipline, or fairness.
Negative Teacher Behaviors	Students describe teachers negatively, but are not talking about unfairness or disrespect.
All Treated Fairly	Students' explicit or implicit opinions about fairness are expressed, if these opinions also relate to a preferred method of handling discipline, the segment is also coded as "Preferred Method of Handling Discipline."
Teacher Behaviors that Impact Student Behaviors	How students perceive a teacher's behavior impacts their behavior.

APPENDIX H  
THEME DEVELOPMENT SAMPLE

DATA SAMPLE	FINAL CODES	THEME
I think that we should actually, instead of there being a lot of mouth and yelling at each other, I think that we should go our separate ways. Come back, we sit down as people, and we talk about it. But if you want to get loud, and I'm sitting here and I'm like, "Okay, I'm talking to you. I'm talking to you now," and you're yelling then why is the point of me talking to you?	Preferred Method for Handling Discipline	Calm discussions were essential during disciplinary interactions
She was the most sweetest teacher I've ever met...whenever someone got mad, she would--because there would be two teachers in there so whenever a teacher was mad or something, she would bring them out in the hallway and talk to them about their issue about the other student. And then when she got done, that student got done telling their story, she would get the other student and see what the other student said happened. See if they were both telling the truth, and then she would try to fix it for the both of them so they wouldn't be arguing. She was the best teacher.	Positive Teacher Behaviors	
...because if they really did care then they would sit and talk with us instead of making us more frustrated and mad, and making us get mad so that we would get written up	Teacher Behaviors That Impact Student Behaviors	
Well, if it was at this school and I knew these students, I would probably... just tell them to go outside and calm down, and if they're not calmed down, I would probably...talk to them	Preferred Method for Handling Discipline	
I really don't like when teachers yell.	Negative Teacher Behaviors	

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Courtney Phaup completed her undergraduate degree in dietetics at the University of Central Arkansas and later returned to the University of Arkansas to earn a master's degree in special education. She began her teaching career in 2002 teaching high school Family and Consumer Science classes. In 2007, she began working on her master's in special education and began teaching special education classes the same year. In 2015 she began teaching middle school level special education and dyslexia intervention class.