Summer 7-2016

Teacher Perceptions of School Discipline: A Critical Interrogation of a Merit and Demerit System

Evelyn Licea
Loyola Marymount University

Summer 7-2016

Teacher Perceptions of School Discipline: A Critical Interrogation of a Merit and Demerit System

Evelyn Licea
Loyola Marymount University, liceae@gmail.com

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Teacher Perceptions of School Discipline:

A Critical Interrogation of a Merit and Demerit Discipline System

by

Evelyn Licea

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2016

Teacher Perceptions of School Discipline:

A Critical Interrogation of a Merit and Demerit Discipline System

by

Evelyn Licea

Loyola Marymount University
School of Education
Los Angeles, CA 90045

This dissertation written by Evelyn Licea, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

7-18-2016
Date

Dissertation Committee

[redacted]
Dr. Antonia Darder, Committee Member

[redacted]
Dr. Derrick Chau, Committee Member

[redacted]
Dr. Emilio Pack, Committee Member

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Teacher Perceptions of School Discipline:

A Critical Interrogation of a Merit and Demerit Discipline System

by

Evelyn Licea

Schools are seeking to understand how to build positive school environments that help students learn and become good citizens in the school community. One practice used in charter schools is merit and demerit systems. The literature indicates that positive and negative reinforcements acts as punitive discipline that only works when adults are around students to enforce policies, rules, and expectations. One particular charter high school that used a merit and demerit system to discipline students was studied to understand the implications of such systems for students of color living in a low-income community. Using the principles of critical pedagogy, the study connected and drew inferences between teacher perceptions of discipline and how the merit and demerit system impacted student referral and punishment. A total of 12 teachers (ninth and 10th grade) participated in this qualitative study. Through classroom observations and focus groups, trends were triangulated and presented in this study. A major finding of this study involves the teacher understanding that the concept of a merit and demerit system is beneficial, but ultimately leads to a loss of student agency. The discussion focuses on explaining an authoritarian

perspective and the perceptions and reality of the implementing a merit and demerit system at the high school level. Implications for educators to understand and improve school discipline policies that support students and rethink punitive and authoritarian practices are discussed. Recommendations for future research in the study are presented and summarized.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Creating equitable schools requires challenging and disrupting the social norms that hold inequality in place" (Oaks, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006, p. 158).

As an educator in the charter school reform movement, I have seen great schools, where school practices are implemented that build strong school cultures. In these schools, students are valued and taught how to navigate the relationships among respect, power, and authority. As a first-year teacher entering the charter school reform movement, I saw the promise of small, safe, and academically thriving schools push the teams I worked with to implement discipline practices that supported students in the process of reflecting, restoring, and ultimately learning from mistakes. As a teacher, when a student misbehaved in my class, I wanted to see my student reprimanded in ways he or she could learn from the consequences. My transition from classroom teacher to administrator proved challenging. The discipline process I used in my classroom had been very similar to the punitive discipline my parents implemented at home. As a first-year administrator, this perception of discipline began to shift as I began to connect punitive discipline to low-academic performance.

I began to advocate for discipline practices requiring teachers and administration to provide support, intervention, and a human connection for students who struggled with behavioral issues in the classroom. The teachers I was leading at the time considered compliance in the classroom the end all, be all of "good" behavior. As a team, we did the best we could. We kept students "in-line" and sent out students who were disrupting classroom learning. Repeatedly the same data emerged; misbehavior in the classroom was connected to poor academic

performance. Hence, I advocated for humanizing disciplinary practices that began to reframe the practice of discipline in the school. From counseling, mandatory tutoring, to behavior contracts, students needed to be supported in their personal growth process. Regardless of the intervention, some students still struggled with misbehavior in the classroom. Hence, I worked to support teachers in discipline decisions because I felt it would show students that all adults on campus were on the same page and part of a larger team that would teach them the value of respecting authority.

After seven years of supporting a small charter school campus in East Los Angeles, I had the opportunity to open my own charter school. Along with the excitement of founding a school that would prepare students for college, I also worked meticulously to find teachers who shared this humanizing perception of school discipline. I wanted teachers who believed behaviors of students could change if the right supports were in place. At the same time, I wanted to create a school space promoting the value of leadership rooted in social justice.

The first team of six teachers took this task to heart. Determined and dedicated to our mission, we created a merit and demerit system that would address minor misbehaviors quickly and swiftly to maximize classroom instructional time. The merit and demerit system was an integral part of this approach, outlining positive and negative behaviors whereby a student received a merit for going above and beyond the expectations of the teacher or a demerit to (re)address minor misbehaviors in the classroom.

The merit and demerit system seemed successful, but as my knowledge of critical pedagogy continued to evolve, I began to question how the dynamics of power, respect, and authority students were learning in my school would help them evolve in their own

understanding of the world around them. In year three, with these concerns in mind, the school began to implement fully restorative justice practices meant to humanize the schooling experience of students. Teachers, however, generally perceive discipline in terms of rewards, punishments, and reflection. Therefore, even with a highly functioning behavior system and a team of teachers that considers discipline in the classroom as a means of support and redirection, we still found ourselves at a loss for supporting students who struggled with misbehavior in the classroom.

As I continued to support my school community in developing discipline practices that could foster greater respect and understanding, I questioned the extent to which a merit and demerit system could directly impact issues of equity related to the practices of referral and punishment for students at College Preparatory Charter High School (CPCHS). I entered this work with ambivalence, but with a deep desire to understand better the dynamics of how teacher perceptions of school discipline could impact the education of students of color.

Statement of the Problem

School discipline practices are often considered a defining factor in whether a student graduates from high school. Historically, harsh discipline practices contribute to the high dropout rate of students attending public schools. Punitive discipline practices exclude and alienate students from a school community by criminalizing their misbehaviors and making them not feel part of the school community. This in turn affects the schooling experience and educational outcomes of students affected by punitive discipline practices. From 1990 to 2000, the gap in high school graduation for students with misbehavior problems showed a 20% difference than peers who did not display misbehavior. The data show a steady decline in the percentage of

graduation rates for students with issues of misbehavior leading to suspensions and expulsions (Shollenberger, 2015). Any discipline practice affecting the academic attainment of students ultimately affects their opportunity to graduate from high school.

In the last few years, there has been a growing consciousness about the effects of punitive discipline approaches and their connection to out-of-school suspensions and poor academic performance. Throughout the United States, schools are working to improve school climate through the implementation of positive behavior supports such as the Character Counts Program and restorative justice programs. Such programs have sparked conversations about improving discipline practices in schools. However, even with positive behavior supports and restorative justice practices, the suspension and expulsion rates for students of color continues to be higher than those of White students (Fabelo et al., 2011). The suspension data from 2012 public schools in California shows African American students make up 6.5% of total enrollment in schools in California, but 19% of suspensions, in comparison to Hispanic students, who make up 52% of enrollment, but 54% of all suspensions. The data also show a gap in suspension rates as compared to White students, who make up 26% of total enrollment but represent 20% of suspensions (Chavez & Freedberg, 2012).

Hence, concerns over charter school exclusionary disciplinary practices of students of color persist. Denice, Gross, and Rausch (2015), drawing on research in the field, noted in *Understanding Student Discipline in Charter Schools* that disciplinary practices in charter schools have raised concerns among educators, policy makers, and the media. They signal two important issues:

> Critics of charter schools charge that these schools—especially those with a "no excuses" approach rely greatly on exclusionary discipline, thereby returning the most challenging students to district schools…[In addition,] Charter schools and charter management organizations (CMO) may not have the same kind of obligation to serve expelled students as districts and district-run schools. If a student is expelled from a charter school, there is no requirement that the student be accepted into any other charter school or into another school in the same CMO or network. (p. 2)

On a national level, a comprehensive review of charter schools, civil rights, and school discipline conducted by Losen, Keith, Hodson, and Martinez (2016) also illustrated disproportionate ethnic/race comparisons for average suspension rates of students attending charter elementary and high schools across. The data here similarly showed that students of color, particularly Black students and those with disabilities, were disproportionately suspended in comparison to their white counterparts. The phenomenon has been so well documented that it is now referred to as the *discipline gap*, a term coined by Daniel Losen and acknowledged as such by the U.S. education and justice departments (Berwick, 2015).

A critical approach to analyzing the underlying factors contributing to the negative schooling experience for students of color, then, is necessary for understanding the true impact of discipline practices in schools. Ultimately, research shows effective discipline practices create a shift from a climate in which many students are suspended, expelled, over policed, or punished regularly to a culture promoting healthy relationships and academic success across classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014). Restorative justice interventions seek to resolve and educate, rather than deport or discipline. Underlying factors that may contribute to

the negative schooling experience of students of color include teacher perceptions of punitive school discipline and established discipline structures relating to rules and consequences in a school and classroom setting. Pitzer (2015) has argued that the use of authoritarian approaches, particularly with working class students of color, reflects a racialized deficit discourse, which is a predominant framework found in urban schools—often taken up by urban teachers—which constructs poor urban youth and youth of color as deficient and as objects in need of control and correction. Educators have the ability to disrupt deficit views of students of color in relation to school discipline, but a lack of evaluation of these policies prevents the improvement and change of punitive discipline practices in public schools.

In an effort to create schools that are culturally democratic regarding school discipline, Darder (2012) has advocated for a dialectical approach that engages with the manner in which political economy, ideology, and cultural politics directly influence how teachers implement school discipline policies. In addition, research has shown that disparities arise when students from racialized communities are treated unequally and disciplined more heavily for behaviors in comparison to students from the dominant culture who may not be disciplined, disciplined less harshly, or receive nonpunitive responses for identical behaviors (Gregory et al., 2014). These disparities arise from the difference in approaches educators employ when disciplining students. Gregory et al. asserted that by understanding students' lived experiences, educators' "cultural competence" can systematically help them reflect on how their own actions create student reactions regarding discipline challenges in the classroom. Teacher perceptions toward discipline play a significant role in how inequities are produced when implementing school discipline practices (Losen, 2011). However, as noted earlier, school discipline practices have been shown

to create a discipline gap in the classroom, which occurs in systematic ways. This phenomenon is also augmented by federally mandated academic standards and fear of losing control in the classroom, which leads to the belief that certain students are trouble makers and dangerous, thus contributing to the discipline gap and the school-to-prison pipeline (, Rocco, Miller, & Salmon, 2014). In response to a fear of teachers losing control in the classroom, approximately 94% of U.S. public schools have adopted *zero tolerance* policies as a best practice in an effort to supposedly reduce school violence (Skiba, 2006). Nevertheless, inequities in educational policies, procedures, and practices resulting from student racial profiling indicate disparities in discipline referrals. Related ethnographic research suggests that a teacher's fear of losing control in the classroom—heightened by recent zero-tolerance policies and asymmetrical power relations in the classroom—contribute greatly to increased suspensions (Pane, Rocco, Miller, & Sander, 2014), particularly for poor and working class students of color.

Disciplinary practices in schools directly affect the teaching and learning experience for teacher and students. Teacher-student relationships are shaped by asymmetrical relations of power, often manifested as a consequence of deficit perceptions that teachers hold toward their students (Darder, 2012) and as the process of subtractive schooling that results from such perceptions (Valenzuela, 1999). Teacher education programs in the United States, unfortunately, fail to provide consistent avenues for reflection and dialogue by which educators can come to understand how hegemonic values of schooling have a direct influence on how disciplinary practices are implemented in the classroom. For example, Vavrus and Cole (2002) explored the sociocultural factors influencing a teacher's decision to remove a student from the classroom in an urban school. The results of their study suggested disciplinary moments, or patterns of

classroom interaction often preceding suspension, are negotiated as a social practice among teachers and students in moment-to-moment interactions characterized by a perceived loss of control rather than actual violent behavior (Pane et al., 2014).

In contrast, culturally responsive approaches to discipline assist educators in responding to questions of classroom discipline in respectful and skillful ways—ways that connect directly to students' lived experiences, as opposed to disciplinary practices driven by perceptions of deficit and loss of control. As such, culturally responsive approaches to discipline, similar to culturally responsive pedagogy, facilitate and support the achievement of all students, based on their cultural strengths and knowledge (Gay, 2000). In theory and practice, culturally responsive discipline practices then can potentially result in a more humanizing approach to school discipline efforts within schools, particularly urban schools that must serve the needs of a culturally diverse population.

Research Questions

This study focused on understanding teacher perceptions of school discipline at a charter high school in the Los Angeles area. The research questions were:

1. What are the perceptions about school discipline held by ninth and tenth grade teachers at a charter high school (College Preparatory Charter High School) in the greater Los Angeles area?
2. Are teacher perceptions of school discipline accurately reflected in the school's merit and demerit system currently used to inform student discipline practices?

3. To what extent does the merit and demerit system impact school discipline perceptions and practices with respect to inequalities in student referral and punishment?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of ninth- and 10th-grade teachers of school discipline at a charter high school in Los Angeles, with a student population that was predominantly working class and of color. This study focused on critically analyzing the relationship between teachers' perceptions of school discipline and how this affected the way teachers employed the merit and demerit system to discipline students. In addition, the study explored the strength and limitations of the merit and demerit system in an effort to understand if this discipline system influenced teacher perceptions and practices in ways that reproduced inequalities in student discipline practices.

Significance of the Study

Within California, the Los Angeles Unified School District has followed the national moratorium on suspensions and is currently trying to push for implementation of *restorative justice* in school discipline systems (Banks, 2015; Watanabe, 2013). Schools in California are seeking to find ways to incorporate discipline practices that allow building and fostering positive school culture and creating a more just climate within schools. With this in mind, this study is potentially significant in that it explored the perceptions, impressions, philosophes, and attitudes of teachers relating to school discipline. The findings of this study can be useful to school leaders who seek to understand the direct link between teacher attitudes and perceptions and the discipline practices they enact within a school setting. The social justice link here directly ties to

the interrogation of inequalities related to a school discipline system through exploring the experience of teachers and their perceptions of discipline in a classroom and school setting.

Theoretical Framework

The study is theoretically grounded in a critical pedagogical framework of social justice addressing teacher perceptions of school discipline and how those perceptions affect the implementation of discipline systems in the school setting. The educational schooling experience of students should be fair and democratic—free of harsh disciplinary practices that contribute to low academic achievement and the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon. Critical pedagogy was embedded in this study to analyze the problem.

According to Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2009), the guiding principles of a critical pedagogical analysis incorporate a lens that seeks to understand educational practices based on social forces related to key principles, from which to engage the dialectical relationship of students to the world and how power relations impact their education. More specifically, these principles speak to issues of culture politics, political economy, hegemony and counter hegemony, ideology, praxis, dialogue, and conscientization. In combination, these guiding principles of critical pedagogy forge a critique of social practices in student discipline to understand more clearly how these practices are contextualized and linked to social justice concerns and the larger social and political climate.

Critical pedagogy, therefore, is employed as a dialogically humanizing practice for both teachers and students in the classroom (Darder et al., 2009). Paulo Freire (1970, 2011) has asserted that critical pedagogy cannot only engage questions of achievement and opportunity gaps, but also support revolutionary educational practices that guide students in learning to read

and appropriating the codes of power within educational institutions for the purpose of transforming their world. The critical foundation of this study focuses on analyzing how humanizing disciplinary practices might become part of an emancipatory educational practice, in concert with the kind of discipline Freire considered necessary to supporting a process of empowerment, particularly among working class student of color.

Gay (2000) has asserted culturally relevant teaching "is culturally validating and affirming" (p. 29). Culturally relevant teaching and, in this case culturally relevant discipline, places the onus of responsibility upon the educator to understand the whole student and adapt classroom teaching and methods to the specific cultural needs of students of color. This study engaged discipline practices from a critical pedagogical perspective that is culturally affirming and relevant to the context and lived experiences of working class students of color (Darder, 2012; Gay 2000). Teachers and students must be part of classroom environments where mutual respect and an understanding of difference are brought together in ways that humanize all teaching practices, including student discipline.

Unfortunately, the political nature of education, as an authoritarian endeavor, including student discipline, does not engage student frustrations, fears, or desires as meaningful expressions in advancing the construction and reconstruction of deficit views students have of themselves and the world around them (Freire, 1998). For this reason, Freire believed a student's moral construction and deconstruction of character develops through *praxis*, action, and reflection—where students' lived experiences must be at the center of the discourse.

This study assumed that the best starting point for students to engage in *praxis* to understand the development their own moral character was through the implementation of

restorative justice practices allowing them to engage the unfinishedness of their human condition and engage in critical dialogue about their lives (Freire, 1998). Students' capacity to be critical about their own lived histories directly connects to the evolution of social consciousness and how they understand the world around them (Darder, 2015). Teachers are implicated in the formation of student consciousness, particularly with respect to the moral and behavioral expectations perpetuated within schools. These expectations can be most apparent in the ways in which teachers perceive the practice of school discipline and their role in that process (Darder, 2002).

Teachers' capacity to explore their personal biases can help them develop classroom relationships promoting generosity and humility as teachers are able to understand better the social contexts in which their students live. By doing so, they begin to understand the influence of classroom discipline practices and how students see themselves and the world around them. The climate of respect born of just, serious, humble, and generous relationships, in which the authority of the teacher and the freedom of students are ethically grounded, converts the pedagogical space into an authentic educational experience (Freire, 1998). As further explained by Darder (2002):

> Educational and discipline policies that govern the meritocratic classroom environment- testing, assessment and promotion- ultimately determine which students are going to receive the privilege to be teachers, doctors, lawyers, artist, etc. and, hence, affording them the opportunities tied to these professions. (p. 76)

In schools, the politics of meritocracy determine which students receive benefits, opportunities, and resources. Similarly, discipline practices become defining factors contributing in significant

ways to the life trajectory of students. In this way, particular values, beliefs, and relationships about student discipline perpetuate inequality in schools and society.

Public schools today generally enact paternalistic and authoritarian approaches to student discipline (Darder, 2002; Whitman, 2008). Whitman wrote that paternalistic schools tell students exactly how they are expected to behave and their behavior is closely monitored and surveilled, with extrinsic rewards for compliance and penalties for noncompliance. Teachers play a large role in how students will develop autonomy and how they will accept or problematize issues of disciplinary practices in schools. Discipline practices that do not engage the psychological, emotional, and social needs of students socialize them to become passive and trump students' abilities to engage in an emancipatory pedagogy that respects their freedom and autonomy (Freire, 1998). Tough (2012) explained that the lack of engagement with a pedagogy of student autonomy connects to compliance-based system models promoting an atmosphere of punitive dependence, which ultimately negates student decision-making, self-determination, and empowerment. As a result, students often demonstrate a shallow code of conduct that prevails as long as teachers are supervising behaviors in the classroom and school setting.

A lack of critical consciousness and understanding of the purpose of teaching and learning affects the ways teachers will follow and implement discipline practices promoting compliance and limiting cultural democracy in the classroom (Darder, 2012; Freire, 1998). As teachers struggle to challenge conflicts and contradictions in the dimension of discipline practices in schools, they are able to build environments that support an emancipatory view of authority, encouraging students to critically rethink their values, ideas, and actions relating to the consequences these might create in relation to self and others (Darder, 2012). Patricia Bissell

(1991) has further explained that educators who seek to enact liberatory goals in discipline practices must not fall prey to the oppressive sins of the public school system and work toward resisting and transforming public education:

> Another way to describe this impasse would be to say that we want to serve the common good with the power we possess by virtue of our position as teachers, and yet we are deeply suspicious of any exercise of power in the classroom. This profound suspicion results from a totalized notion of power as a unitary force with uniform effects. Rather we should differentiate uses of power under the rubrics of coercion, persuasion, and authority to recognize the positive uses of power-as-authority-in resolving our dilemma. (p. 848)

A critical understanding of authority and power regarding discipline practices can create a dialectical view of authority that can challenge attitudes, beliefs, and actions, perpetuating the dependency of punitive approaches in public schools (Bissell, 1991; Darder, 2012). Before teachers are able to challenge authoritarian discipline practices, they must have an understanding of how their own perceptions of what is right and wrong affects the reality they create in their classrooms and schools.

In a recent editorial in *Education Newsweek* on the topic of teacher perceptions and the importance of crafting and an environment for learning, Chronister (2014) argued:

> A school's social and disciplinary environment is guided by teachers and administrators and will impact a students' ability to learn. National initiatives to improve schools tend to focus heavily on curriculum, testing, and personnel. But a growing consensus also recognizes that elements that make up school climate - including peer relationships, students' sense of safety and security, and the discipline policies and practices they

> confront each day - play a crucial part in laying the framework for academic success. The way in which teachers and administrators create and implement discipline practices make a difference in the rise and fall of punitive practices, often discriminatory "zero-tolerance" practices, along with the emergence of promising alternative discipline models that seek to reduce conflict without resorting to expulsion or out-of-school suspension. (p. 3)

When educators fail to critique and challenge discriminatory discipline practices, the perpetuation of compliance and punitive measures persist in schools (Perry, 2014).

Chronister (2014) has further highlighted the importance of critical perspectives in student discipline by portraying the important influence that positive school climates have on student academic success. Furthermore, he emphasized the power and authority of teachers and administrators in doing away with punitive discipline and moving toward creating promising alternative school discipline models. Through establishing a humanizing culture of critical discipline, educators can create culturally democratic school environments where students enter into a praxis of empowerment that supports them as democratic cultural citizens in navigating their world (Darder, 2015).

Research Design and Methodology

This study was grounded in a qualitative approach, documenting the impressions, insights, and philosophical connection of teachers to a school discipline system, particularly regarding their perceptions of discipline practices in an urban high school. A convenience sample of 12 ninth- and 10th-grade teachers participated in two focus groups that centered on their perceptions of school discipline and shared their own stories of how they have used the merit and

demerit system to address student behavior in the classroom. More specifically, the study analyzed school and teacher values of school discipline and how those values impacted inequality in student referral and punishment decisions. The focus group recordings were transcribed and the data coded according to repetitive, significant, and prevailing themes. Furthermore, the data were analyzed to determine individual and collective perceptions and philosophies of school discipline and how those were either in sync or distinct from the merit and demerit system at CPCHS.

In addition to teacher focus groups, classroom observations were conducted in which field notes of behavioral incidents provided additional data. Each teacher was observed over an eight-week period for a total of two hours. The field notes collected from classroom observations provided additional data on (a) teacher response to student misbehavior, and (b) student response to teacher discipline. The behavioral criteria utilized for the observations included: (a) verbal/body language, (b) outcome/consequence, and (c) follow-up after discipline interaction.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

One of the limitations of this study was the sample size. As a founding charter school, CPCHS served two grade levels and was in its second year of operation. The sample size of 12 teachers forming part of the study might not be generalizable to other school populations. In addition, issues of reliability regarding self-reporting may also have played a role in the analysis and conclusions derived in the study. Researcher bias might also have contributed to the results and explanation of the data presented.

Lastly, my position and role within the school may also have caused some bias in the responses of the participants. As a founding school principal, I realize that biases of teachers may

also have been at work in their sharing their perceptions during focus groups about the merit and demerit system. Although I have a professional relationship with my teachers, I still realize that some self-censorship may have occurred during their sharing of practices and perceptions. This will required me to be cautious and diligent so that I remained open and receptive to their perceptions without clouding their responses with my own views on school discipline. One other delimitation was the exclusion of substantive discussion of mainstream literature on school discipline and practices. Instead, the literature for this study is grounded in the critical pedagogical literature related to classroom authority and subsequent practices.

Definition of Terms

Critical Pedagogy: A philosophy of education and educational practices founded on critical social theory and focused on a humanizing classroom approach supporting the empowerment of culturally, politically, and economically oppressed student populations (Darder, 2012; Darder et al., 2009).

Culturally Relevant Discipline: A school discipline approach that builds on the principles of a culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2000).

Merit and Demerit System: A school-wide system that helps to monitor the behavior of students throughout a school (see Appendix I).

Misbehavior: Inappropriate behavior that disrupts classroom time or the school day.

Negative Behavior: Actions displayed during the school day that interrupt school and classroom activities.

Positive Behavior: Actions displayed during the school day by students that do not interrupt school and classroom activities. *Positive Behavior Support:* A systems approach for

establishing the social culture and individualized behavioral supports for schools to be effective learning environments for all students.*Restorative Justice:* Refers to a school discipline approach that focuses on mediation and agreement rather than punishment (Dalporto, 2016). As such, it is an approach that promotes values and principles that use inclusive, collaborative approaches for being in community (Stutzman & Mullet, 2005).

Organization of the Dissertation

The study is presented through a five-chapter format. The first chapter has provided the foundation for critical analysis of discipline practices and an introduction to the study itself. The second chapter will present past and current literature on the topic of school discipline and will highlight principles that aim to create a humanizing approach to the discipline process for students of color. The third chapter provides an explanation of the methodology of the study by presenting the research questions guiding the data collection and analysis of this study. Chapter 4 will present the data of the study and Chapter 5 will offer an analysis of the data collected. Chapter 5 will also include recommendations for future research and a conclusion from the research presented in this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

"'Spare the Rod and spoil the child:' said to mean that if you do not punish a child when it does something wrong, it will not learn what is right" (Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary & Thesaurus, 2008).

Arum (2003) has noted in his work that when Americans are asked about what is wrong with contemporary public schooling, survey responses suggest they are often struck by the failure of public schools to provide institutional encouragement for the proper socialization of youth. Accordingly, Hickman (2008) has argued that there is a need for teachers to move away from punitive perceptions of discipline toward a restorative justice approach, which supports an emancipatory perspective of discipline practices guiding students to consider more critically the impact of their actions upon self and the school community. This study looks more critically at where we are in the field to understand better the issues of theory and practice that must be engaged if we are to develop more humanizing practices of student discipline in schools today. The literature presented in this chapter seeks to move the discussion about school discipline toward this more critical engagement.

History of School Discipline Practices

A humanizing education that aims at liberating and emancipating students takes into account those cultural and political forces directly informing student discipline practices in schools and the inequalities that often result in both student referrals and punishments. Throughout history, a lack of critical reflection and dialogue about school discipline has led teachers to replicate the status quo by exercising social constraints and control rather than

encouraging students to engage more freely with the world around them. Since, the 18th century, corporal punishment has been commonplace in schools. Teachers have used corporal punishment to ensure compliance and silence students considered unruly in the classroom. Behavioral expectations have defined classroom management, grounded on expectations that students, particularly poor or working class students, be compliant and unheard in the classroom setting.

During the middle of the 19th century, in an effort to improve the schooling practices for students in public schools, U.S. educators studied European models for ideas on discipline and teaching practices. Philipp Emanuel von Fellenberg, a Swiss educator, advocated for ending corporal punishment in the classroom; his work was further studied and brought to schools in the United States. Fellenberg urged that corporal punishment not be used for academic errors and suggested that learning occurred best through the encouragement and kindness of teachers. These pedagogical developments created learning environments that met the needs of students, examined connections between education and discipline, and considered teachers' roles in creating environments conducive to learning (Butchart & McEwan, 1998).

A major shift in school discipline occurred in 1910, when attendance for all students—regardless of race and class—became mandatory. The transition to mandatory attendance for all students allowed the supervision of children to be transferred from parents to teachers during school hours. This transfer of child supervision extended teachers' roles to that of parental disciplinarians, with the expectation that teachers function *in loco parentis*, a term meaning "in place of parents." Stepping further into parental roles justified and explained the evolution of school discipline history in the United States (Arum, 2003). From corporal punishment as a consequence for misbehavior, the school context underwent numerous paradigm shifts in school

practices related to discipline. Similarly, during the first decades of the 1900s, state legal systems were beginning to develop ways to handle juvenile offenders, which was intended to distinguish between school infractions and legal infractions (Wilf, 2012). One value attached to the examination of misbehavior in schools was that children should be redirected and taught how to behave, thus formalizing the separation between legal juvenile misconduct and school disciplinary practices.

The period ushering in the greatest contestation of student rights was 1969–1975. *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969) was the first major school discipline court case to reach the Supreme Court (McCarthy, Cambron-McCabe, & Eckes, 2014). In December 1965, three students wore black armbands to school to publicize their objections to the hostilities in Vietnam. Their fathers filed a complaint in the federal district court to block the school district from disciplining these students. The district court upheld the constitutionality of the action taken by school authorities, finding their actions reasonable as they prevented disturbance of the existing school discipline culture. However, when the case reached the Supreme Court, the court supported student rights, by ruling:

> [A student] may express his opinion, even on controversial subjects like the conflict in Vietnam, if he does so without "materially and substantially interfering with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school" and without colliding with the rights of others…materially disrupts class work or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of other is, of course, not immunized by the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech. (qtd. in Arum, 2003, p. 61)

This case had widespread implications for the expansion of student rights, extending rights to students in public schools that were previously thought to belong only to adult citizens. Future judges would use this landmark case to support student expression in schools while at the same time halting school discipline practices impeding student expression on campuses across the United States.

Glasser's (1990) work on *control theory* explored constructivism and community in education during the 1990s. Glasser viewed constructivism in schools as a way for students to make meaning in the process of meeting their basic human needs (Butchart & McEwan, 1998). Glasser's ideas on cooperative learning, team approaches, and the school as community were a welcomed approach for many American educators. Moreover, Glasser upheld the notion that the way that we struggle for power is constant in our daily lives. Of this, he stated that students fulfill their need for power when they are able to make choices in the classroom. If students do not feel they have the power in their academic classes, they will not work in school (Glasser, 1990, p. 60).

Glasser's (1990) efforts for collaborative practices in the classroom were meant to push students to produce quality work through a greater sense of choice. Through offering students choice, he theorized that students would be more self-motivated and learn to the best of their abilities if they were given the liberty to choose in the learning process. This approach pushed educators to think through how to offer students choices regarding classroom assessments. Unfortunately, Glasser's control theory, later changed to *choice theory*, fell short in addressing the conflict and injustices prevailing in American schools in that it failed to take into account the inequalities linked to culture and class, as well as other differing contexts of schooling.

The 1990s continued to define good discipline by compliance. Good students sat quietly while they learned (or received) the information teachers taught (or dispensed)—consistent with Freire's (1970/2011) notion of *banking education*. The conventional wisdom of the 20th century saw education as a process of controlling student behavior, while the aim of education was the one-sided, hierarchical transfer of information from teacher to student. This points to the manner in which the epistemic formation of teachers, along with the influences of their personal epistemologies impact instructional practices in the classroom (Bendixen & Feucht, 2010). It is, in this context, the traditional epistemology of schooling that results in a banking model, which continues to shape hegemonic practices of teaching and learning today; ignoring, in particular, deficit views and punitive practices of racialized containment that disable the academic formation of students of color (Darder, 2012, 2015; Darder & Torres, 2004).

In the second half of the 20th century, educators and healthcare professionals published studies about the development of young adults. These researchers began to transform school discipline history by integrating concepts of restorative justice into the approach to school discipline. Healthcare professionals became more informed about how student misbehavior might be connected to physiological or psychological difficulties like attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity, or emotional disturbance (Arum, 2003). With this connection, initiatives in schools pushed educators to consider ways to address the physiological and psychological issues affecting student behavior during the school day. Even today, lack of understanding exists about how these issues affect the development of young adults, particularly those from economically disenfranchised communities of color. The consequence is the perpetuation of school discipline

practices that fail to meet the needs of vulnerable student populations and perpetuate social inequalities as well as exclusions within the school environment.

However, along with the historical contribution from healthcare professionals in the area of school discipline, there were challenges. The issue of physical violence in schools, for example, presented an additional challenge requiring greater understanding about how to better support students who required psychological services. Furthermore, the issue of violence and poverty became a topic of study connected to academic achievement, often linked to the racialization of poor and working class communities of color. Educators were taught that the "cycle of poverty" was responsible for breeding violence in communities of color, which was then transferred to the school setting. This racializing notion was coupled with already-existing teacher perceptions of deficit toward students of color, exacerbating inequalities through unjust practices of school discipline (Darder, 2012).

The last two decades, unfortunately, have been characterized by increasing violence and crimes committed by students on school property. As a consequence, schools have reacted by advocating a return to more stringent controls and punishments for student misbehavior and violence on school grounds. The outcome was the institution of draconian zero-tolerance policies (Biehl, 2012). Under the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, all states enacted legislation requiring at least a one-year expulsion for students who bring firearms to school. In expanding the scope of the law, states have added to the list of prohibitions by including weapons such as knives, explosive devices, hand chains, and other offensive weapons, as well as drugs and violent acts (McCarthy et al., 2014).

Zero tolerance policies have focused directly on harsh forms of punishment and, as a consequence, breed distrust in students toward adults. By subjecting students to automatic punishments that do not take into account extenuating and mitigating circumstances, zero-tolerance policies cloud the formation of positive attitudes of justice and fairness for all students. As a result of zero-tolerance policies, students are subjected to criminal or delinquency charges that foment the school-to-prison pipeline. The ultimate result for zero-tolerance polices is to create a downward spiral, particularly in the lives of working class students of color, which ultimately leads to long-term incarceration (Civil Rights Project, 2000).

From harsh zero-tolerance policies, to the increase in suspensions and expulsions, unjust practices of school discipline have contributed significantly to the phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline (Wilf, 2012). Such student discipline systems have created outcomes permitting schools to give up on students who were considered not to care or are "not ready to learn." More importantly, school discipline practices that do not engage with the actual needs or issues impacting the lives of students, within the classroom and their community, serve to thwart their learning outcomes (Perry, 2014).

To a large extent, the literature on classroom management of the 1990s to 2000s created a culture of exclusion in schools. This literature focused heavily on creating checklists of classroom strategies, defined by compliance and reinforcement of rules created by the teacher (Crimmins, Farrell, Smith, & Bailey, 2007; Morgan & Ellis, 2011; Storey & Post, 2012). From narrating behaviors to creating extrinsic incentives, the literature highlighted quick-fix strategies, which would allow teachers to address behaviors in the classroom in a manner that bypassed opportunities for dialogue between students and teacher. Moreover, the literature did not address

the need for teachers to understand the historical and contemporary causes for misbehavior in the classroom.

Furthermore, studies have associated school dropout—often a consequence of suspension and expulsions—with poverty (Harding, 2003; Rumberger, 1987; Walker & Sprague, 1999). Other researchers have linked student discipline issues to illiteracy or reading problems (Adams 1988; Grande, 1988). Adams (1988) found that children of upper- and middle-income families came to school with an average of 1,000 hours of exposure to print material, whereas students from low-income backgrounds came to school with an average of 25 hours of exposure to print material. Through no fault of their own, these students are perceived academically behind their age peers from the time they first enter school.

Scott, Anderson, and Alter (2012) noted a clear link between academic struggles and behavior problems in schools. Students who struggled to learn foundational skills such as reading were significantly more likely to exhibit behavior problems in schools, often as a form of resistance and frustration (Darder, 2002, 2012). Teaching students basic literacy skills is the foundation of an education aiming to help students communicate with their surrounding world. The lack of critical literacy development in schools is evident in the academic performance of students living in impoverished communities. The consequence of problems related to the literacy development of students of color has been the perpetuation of a racialized academic divide, which stubbornly persists in low-income communities when compared to more affluent communities.

Racialized disparities in school suspensions increased noticeably as schools first became desegregated, especially in high socioeconomic schools. Larkin (1979) has speculated that the

increase was a byproduct of mounting racialized conflict within newly integrated schools. These conflicts were the result of racism and ethnic or cultural differences that heightened misperception in teacher-student and student-to-student relations (Thornton & Trent, 1988). Overrepresentation among African American students in school suspensions and expulsions has also been found; they more frequently have been subjected to harsh disciplinary measures, such as corporal punishment, even when less obtrusive alternatives are available (Gregory, 1995; McFadden & Marsh, 1992; Office for Civil Rights, 1993; Shaw & Braden, 1990).

Most recently, McCarthy et al. (2014) have noted that suspensions are frequently used to punish students for violating school rules and standards of behavior. Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, and Belway (2015) have revealed that nearly 3.5 million public school students were suspended from school at least once in 2011–2012. That figure represents more than one student suspended for every public school teacher in America. Recent estimates indicated that one in three students will be suspended at some point between kindergarten and 12th grade (Shollenberger, 2015). Of the 3.5 million students who were suspended in 2011–2012, 1.55 million were suspended at least twice. Given that the average suspension is conservatively put at 3.5 days, the average estimated hours of instruction that U.S. public school children lost nearly amounted to 18 million days in just one school year because of exclusionary discipline (Losen et al., 2015).

Loss of classroom instruction time has a negative impact on student performance. Losen et al. (2015) further have shared that in a 2014 study (Attendance Works), they found that if a student missed three days of school in the month before taking the National Assessment of Educational Progress, it translated into fourth graders scoring a full grade level lower in the area

of reading. Newer research also showed that higher suspension rates closely correlate with higher dropout and delinquency rates and have tremendous economic costs for suspended students (Marchbanks et al., 2015), as well as for society as a whole (Losen, 2015). Therefore, the significant racialized disparities in suspensions directly affect the life trajectory of students of color from impoverished communities.

Delpit (1995) examined the dynamics of testing and assessment in public schools. She has observed that urban school districts adopt "teacher-proof" curricula to address low-test scores and, in the process, mandate behavior management strategies that ignore the natural rhythm of teaching and learning. The disruption of teaching and learning directly affects the process by which teachers and students develop meaningful relationships that help navigate conflict in the classroom. Even more disconcerting, Deplit (1995) highlighted the bias and ignorance of educators who see "other people's children" as damaged and dangerous caricatures. Further, she insisted that schools are not to be blamed alone for the fostering of these negative stereotypes; society shares the blame for perpetuating negative perceptions of people of color. About this, Carter, Skiba, Arredeondo, and Pollock (2014) have stated:

> Regrettably, our history also left us with pervasive and false ideas about "races" that have shaped our perceptions of who is valued and who is not, who is capable and who is not, and who is "safe" and who is "dangerous." (p. 2)

Such negative stereotypes taint the perceptions teachers bring into the classroom about the discipline "needs" of students of color. This view affects the implementation of discipline practices in the name of supporting students who are seen as lacking morals, values, and needing to be taught how to be good citizens. (Delpit, 1995)

Restorative Justice: Toward a New View of Discipline

For teachers, punitive measures often become the preferred disciplinary approach in the classroom because they offer immediate resolution (Sheets, 1996). Kohn (2006), a critic of rewards and punishment, has detailed a "working with" solution that takes a different approach to discipline. Kohn's "working with" approach is often rejected because the traditional teacher perception of discipline is not one of a process, but rather a one-time act for an offense (Sheets, 1996). In contrast, has offered the following 10 principles for "working with" students through disciplinary offenses:

1. Build relationships with students before you try to solve a problem with them.
2. The teacher must have a certain set of skills for deescalating a disciplinary situation in the classroom.
3. The adult's role in dealing with an unpleasant situation begins with the need to diagnose what happened and why.
4. Adults must be willing to look beyond the situation at hand and ask questions about their own practices.
5. Maximize student involvement in resolving a disciplinary situation.
6. Having students reflect on their own motives, disagree, and, in general, help construct an authentic solution.
7. When a student does something cruel, the first priority is to help the student understand what they did is wrong. Second, the student needs to be assisted in making restitution or reparations for the harm they have caused.

8. Adults must be willing to check back later to ensure the plan created with the student has had the ability to work.
9. Problem solving requires flexibility about the logistics as well as about substance.
10. Minimize the punitive impact by remaining warm and confident the two can eventually solve the problem together.

These principles align with restorative justice practices in that they provide adults a variety of places from which to reflect critically on how to approach the discipline process with students. Butchart and McEwan (1998) have argued that most mainstream literature on classroom discipline considers neither the impact of the classroom environment nor activities (as long as students are on-task, moving toward some hierarchy of pre-established ends, or fulfilling certain needs), the culture of the school, the lived histories, or personal difficulties of students when assessing how to create and maintain order in the classroom. For teachers, this translates into infusing discipline practices with their own preconceived deficit notions about students or unexamined authoritarian beliefs of classroom discipline.

It is not surprising then that school districts and teachers have been highly criticized for implementing discipline practices that create an atmosphere of disorder and hostility. Such an atmosphere disrupts the educational process of working class students, in particular, in urban educational settings where racism and poverty result in alarming school discipline disparities (Arum, 2003). What is in question here is the soundness of discipline practices that do not account for racism, cultural differences, or class inequalities within mainstream schools and communities of color. Restorative justice approaches to school discipline, in direct contrast, aim to begin precisely from the lived histories of students and their communities. As such, this

critical approach adheres to Freire's (1970, 2011) insistence that humanizing educational practices must begin at the center of students' lived experiences.

Defining Restorative Justice

At the core of restorative justice lies the critical belief in repairing and making amends to affect positively oppressed communities. In the case of schools, this means restorative justice practices work to transform the relationships of inequality that schools often enact upon disenfranchised communities when dealing with issues of student discipline. Stutzman and Mullet (2005) have explained:

> A restorative justice program promotes values and principles that use inclusive, collaborative approaches for being in community. There approaches validate the experiences and everyone within the community, particularly those who have been marginalized, oppressed, or harmed. These approaches allow us to act and respond in ways that are healing rather than alienating or coercive. (p. 15)

Through this critical framework, all participants within the school setting have the opportunity to discern together the effects of an offense in relation to the impact it has on the community at large. Through this process, all students, teachers, parents, and administrators have the opportunity to consider the impact of their direct and indirect actions and how these contribute to the offense in question, as well as the most effective response to such an offense, given the context and the realities of students' lives.

Restorative justice practices in schools work to create the conditions for teachers to develop a creative and compassionate framework for approaching conflict resolution with their students. There are a variety of classroom practices associated with restorative justice, which

aim to move away from punishment toward restoration of the community relationship. One common practice is the use of what are called *restorative circles*. In concert with restorative justice principles, restorative circles are organized within the classroom to help build community and for responding to challenging behavior in ways that will allow, through authentic dialogue, for teachers and students to come to understand a particular situation of harm and to make things right together (Clifford, 2013). Restorative justice practices such as this encourages schools to move away from standardized or prescribed punishments in response to an act of aggression or other offense (Pane et al., 2014).

However, in direct contrast to the aims of restorative justice, Stutzman and Mullet (2005) have rightly noted:

> The lack of creativity led to discipline that was more about our need for control or quick resolution rather than about our children's lifelong learning. When dealing with conflict we often do not view it as an opportunity to or teachable moment, but rather as something to get through. (p. 18)

When schools follow punitive policies, the school community at large is affected, as punitive discipline approaches do not allow students to see the impact of their offenses on the larger school community, nor for the school to consider possible misreadings of student behaviors based on the realities of their lives within and outside of the classroom. A criticism of restorative justice practices, however, is the amount of time it takes for the entire school community to see the positive impact that comes from students' development and learning from their mistakes, and ultimately, making those mistakes teachable moments (Sheets, 1996).

In response to such critiques, Stutzman and Mullet (2005) have posited that, through the use of teachable moments, school communities have the opportunity to develop and undergo the restorative justice process effectively by moving through four important stages:

- Encounter: Create opportunities for people affected, offenders, and community members who want to do so to meet to discuss the conflict and its aftermath.
- Amends: Expect offenders to take steps to repair the conflict they have created.
- Reintegration: Seek to restore people affected and offenders to whole, contributing members of society.
- Inclusion: Provide opportunities for parties with a stake in a specific conflict to participate in its resolution.

However, even when undergoing these four stages, restorative justice does not advocate for the absence of consequences for offenders, but rather seeks a more thoughtful and humanizing approach to arriving at sound consequences *with* student participation. Stutzman and Mullet (2005) conceptualized this process along a discipline continuum ranging from punishment to restoration (see Figure 1). The process focuses on assisting students as well as teachers, administrators, fellow students, and parents to understand the real harm caused by the misbehavior. It facilitates a move toward commitments to restoration and future change.

Figure 1. Discipline continuum (Stutzman & Mullet, 2005).

Hickman (2008) noted this solution-based approach seeks to identify accurately the function and purpose of a conflict, and from there develop a plan to replace the conflict with a consequence that truly meets the needs of the student and advances the student toward critical reflection and learning. In this way, the student will have an opportunity to learn how a conflict created through his or her actions can affect the wider school community and understand through dialogue the principles of respectful communal engagement within the school environment. Restoration is achieved through supporting students and others to repair the disagreements and move beyond them in ways that honor all involved. Within the context of restorative justice, teachers have the authority and responsibility for selecting a plan or consequence *with* the input of the student (Stutzman & Mullet, 2005).

Restorative justice can offer a powerful context for student voice in the discipline process through implementing practices making discipline a participatory and liberating process of critical thought and reflection. Some of the practices and outcomes typically identified within restorative justice include conflict mediation, conferencing, restitution, and community service (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005). All of these practices aim to establish a more humane and creative way to handle discipline in the school setting and work to mend both individual and institutional harms that can transpire within a school community.

Educational Movements and Restorative Justice

Three movements in education have influenced the restorative justice movement (see Table 1). These include conflict resolution (CR), character education (CE), and emotional literacy (EL). Each of these movements addresses reflective and collaborative pedagogical practices with students to guide them beyond mainstream notions of punishment and punitive

consequence. Conflict resolution allows students to learn from each other and grow with each other in an effort to reach higher levels of moral and ethical consciousness (Kohn, 2006). Character education, on the other hand, defines a set of core values a community is able to use in their interactions with one another. Along with CR, CE uses these values as a baseline for relationship building within a school setting.

The EL movement, also known as emotional intelligence, has given school communities the opportunity to think of ways to teach students about cognitive and social development and how this affects their approach to behavior and situations that can lead to misbehavior (Goleman, 2006). Goleman has stated that by teaching students about self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills, we also teach them how to navigate complex interactions of difference with people around them. Moreover, at the core of EL lies an understanding of how the internal self affects the world and situations surrounding an individual and community.

Table 1

Restorative Justice Movements in Education

Movement	Description
Conflict Resolution Education	• Peer mediation program. • Includes the opportunity to create curriculum that integrates conflict resolution into school life. • Teaches conflict resolution skills to all students, mediators and nonmediators.
Character Education	• Relationship building of adults and students. • Designed to teach and encourage positive values and behavior. • Core values of CE programs include responsibility, respect, trustworthiness, and friendship.
Emotional Literacy	• Addresses the affective and cognitive components of learning through teaching students about self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Note: Adapted from Goleman (2006).

These three movements have all influenced the direction and implementation of restorative practices in the last decade. Along with the values and principles informing the three movements, Stutzman and Mullet (2005) have noted the philosophies of constructivism, critical reflection, and psycho-education have shaped restorative justice discipline practices extensively through supporting processes of student self-determination and empowerment.

> Constructivism holds the individuals gain meaning and motivation when they are given power to make their own decisions and engage in the problem solving process through collaboration. Critical reflection describes a problem solving process that honors multiple perspectives and emphasizes creative problem solving along with analysis of the system and solutions. Lastly, a psycho-education approach values an understanding of the internal feelings, needs and conflicts that motivate behavior. (p. 20)

These philosophies of restorative justice allow teachers and students to use empathy as a way of approaching conflicts in their everyday classroom interactions. In addition, through the practice of constructivism, critical reflection, and psycho-education, teachers are encouraged to develop empathy and confidence within themselves to move away from dependency on punitive school rules and more toward reliance on the relationship they share with their students as well as their self-awareness and capacity to know how to deal with conflict ethically and humanely, creating more just school communities (Freire, 1970, 2011; Losen, 2011). In essence, school discipline practices grounded in a restorative justice approach support teachers to transformation their practice from one that uses fear and compliance as a management strategy to one that brings compassion and empathy when engaging student's classroom behavior (Martin, 2015).

Gregory et al. (2014) have adopted this philosophical foundation to advocate for the implementation of a restorative justice practice of school discipline, anchored in the following critical principles of justice:

- Justice requires that we work to restore those who have been affected by a conflict.
- Those most directly involved and affected by conflict should have the opportunity to participate fully in the response, if they wish.
- The community is key to building and maintaining a just peace.

During the current moratorium on school discipline, a new trend to move toward restorative justice practices in schools has emerged in an effort to humanize the discipline process and better understand how to overcome historical inequalities in school discipline. The overarching purpose of this approach is to develop teacher practices of student discipline that make school communities a place where students from the most vulnerable communities can genuinely and consistently develop and grow as critically conscious individuals and social beings (Darder, 2012). However, a major concern underlying this emancipatory purpose is the perception of classroom teachers—teachers who are responsible for the intellectual and social formation of working class students of color.

Teacher Perceptions of Classroom Discipline

According to van Wormer and Walker (2012), it is difficult to implement restorative justice practices in schools because it challenges teacher perceptions about the best way to engage children and the teachers' authoritarian assumptions about how to discipline them. Van Wormer and Walker have noted for generations it has been accepted that adults have complete

power, authority, and control over children. In this sense, traditional views of raising children are both challenged and contested by restorative justice practices that redistribute power, authority, and control away from just the adult or teacher to include the child or student.

With a traditional perspective, an absence of punitive punishment when conflict arises means the child has not been held accountable. This authoritarian form of thinking dismisses and discredits the dialogical process of encounter, amends, reintegration, and inclusion, given that restorative justice practices of discipline challenge traditional notions of power, authority, and control, as well as punishment. Instead, those who hold authoritarian perspectives about student discipline tend to interpret the practices of restorative justice as "saving" or "rescuing" or "protecting" the child from consequences of wrongdoing, and thus the parent or teacher is considered to be "permissive" (Kohn, 2006).

A challenge of implementing restorative practices and trainings in schools is resistance to a dialogical or more horizontal approach to student discipline (Freire, 1970/2011). In most schools, educators are deeply entrenched in the authoritarian and retributive paradigm of discipline (Kohn, 2006). Moreover, the implementation of restorative practices in schools requires adults to shift away from this hegemonic paradigm to a humanizing and participatory approach to student discipline. This shift in consciousness requires teachers not to be dismissive of students' thoughts or feelings (Sheets, 1996). This, again, counters traditional views of student discipline where teachers as disciplinarians rely solely on their own authority of child rearing, without concern for the view of the student (van Wormer & Walker, 2012). For many, this entails disciplining students according to the manner in which they were disciplined as children. Teachers often respond in ways that express an underlying fear of giving up authority, power, or

control of a situation when contending with school discipline issues, which consequently prevents them from using such experiences as teachable moments (Sheets, 1996).

Every teacher has particular beliefs about what is right for their students. Kohn (2006) argued "every educator is operating under a set of assumptions about human nature. The assumptions color everything that happens in the classroom, from the texts that are assigned to the texture of the casual interactions with students" (p. 1). In other words, teachers operate under their own class and cultural assumptions about what they perceive to be right for students, and these assumptions impact the way students are treated and educated within the classroom or other school settings. Kohn (2006) has questioned typical assumptions justifying authoritarian practices of discipline in the classroom. Some of these include:

- If the teacher is not in control of the classroom, the mostly likely result is chaos.
- Children need to be told exactly what the adult expects of them, as well as what will happen if they do not do what they are told.
- You need to give positive reinforcement to a child who does something nice if you want him to keep acting that way.
- At the heart of moral education is the need to help people control their impulses.

Arum (2003) further argued that educator disagreements, which have pitted punitive discipline practices against restorative justice approaches, have served to fuel false perceptions of unfairness and injustice. Hurn, on the other hand, argued that "perceptions of what is fair and just in schools is directly connected to a variety of social factors, including changes in cultural norms" (as cited in Arum, 2003, p. 167).

Sociologists have also examined more generally how normative commitments to authority influence obedience. Although it has not been applied to schools in relation to disciplinary practices, this particular line of research can offer critical insights into the dynamics of authority and responses to authority that manifest between teachers and students when issues of authority are triggered. According to Arum (2003), a normative perspective explains that people obey the law because of personal morality or the legitimacy of the regulatory agency. When people base compliance on personal morality, they obey the law because they reason within themselves that the law is just. In contrast, when people base compliance on external legitimacy and control, they obey the law because the enforcing authority has the responsibility and right to regulate behavior in such a manner. Perceptions of fairness thus play a role in both questions of compliance and legitimacy.

Teacher perceptions of discipline and how they exercise authority have a direct impact on how students are disciplined in schools (Kohn, 2006). Durkheim related the concept of authority specifically to morality and developed the concept of moral authority in considering the context of formal schooling. According to Durkheim, "the most important task for a school is the socialization of students" (as cited in Arum, 2003, p. 168). Schools, therefore, should not only teach socially appropriate behaviors, but should also inculcate general respect toward social rules. Teacher discipline can only exhibit moral value if the moral value and authority of the teacher is respected and accepted by students. When this obligatory student respect is absent, teachers tend to perceive the problem as residing in the immorality of student. Perception, then, is a powerful catalyst in relationships between teachers and their students.

In *Culture and Power in the Classroom*, Darder (2012) has articulated an important critical perspective related to teacher expectations, pointing to questions of ideology and mainstream societal beliefs:

> Teacher expectations involve a number of essential factors. It includes the social context, which incorporates the prevailing social attitudes associated with race, class structure, and the social, political, and economic ideology. Teacher expectations are influenced by specific pedagogical theories and conceptual frameworks as well as educational structures and practices instilled by teacher education programs. (p. 17)

Teacher expectations and the assumptions made about students directly connect to both their individual beliefs of classroom discipline and the dominant cultural beliefs upon which they rely on to define the worth and morality of students. For example, studies have shown teacher perceptions of student discipline are driven by underlying beliefs, such as (a) children will act generously only when reinforced for doing so, (b) the individual is motivated exclusively by self-interest, or (c) students need to be kept under control (Gregory et al., 2014). Perceptions such as these, stemming from a commonsensical authoritarian ideology, directly impact how a teacher sets disciplinary expectations in the classroom and the particular consequences meted out and to which students. Similarly, perceptions about classroom control are also influenced by the pedagogical philosophies and theories fuelling their practice.

The dynamics of power relations in the classroom can be associated with how students are labeled and perceived by teachers (Allen, 2014). This is particularly so with respect to the racialized or deficit notions distorting how teachers perceive the abilities or character of poverty-stricken and working class students of color (Darder, 2012). For the most part, the dynamics of

power in the classroom related to discipline directly link to what adults expect students to be or do to show compliance to classroom rules and teacher expectations. As Kohn (2006) has noted, countless classroom discipline books teach educators management techniques to ensure that students behave "appropriately" in alignment with adult beliefs and behavioral expectations. This begs the question: Is a silent classroom more conducive to learning? The perception of a quiet classroom often highlights teacher biases in the discipline of students by stifling, punishing, or eliminating classroom behavior considered inappropriately noisy, overly active, or self-determining. This privileging of the quiet classroom is also reinforced by school administrators, who often frown upon noisy classrooms (Darder, 2002).

The behavior of students is deeply connected to their particular cultural and class predispositions (Darder, 2012). Kohn (2006), however, contended that if students are "treated as if they need to be controlled, [teachers] undermine their natural predispositions to develop self-controls and internalized commitments to upholding cultural values and norms" (p. 42). When dealing with discipline issues in the classroom, teachers need to analyze the classroom environment and the larger institutional factors that directly have an impact on the severity and repetition of certain types of student behaviors. Further, according to Center, Dietz, and Kaufman (1982), when behavior problems arise in the classroom, one of the first factors that should be examined is instructional procedures and appropriateness of classroom materials. As Darder (2012) has pointed out:

> What constitutes the content is, for the most part, directly related to what form of knowledge and content is recognized as legitimate and necessary by those who dictate curricular decisions…Hence, the underlying principles related to both curriculum content

> and teaching methodology are derived from what is considered to be the function of American society: namely, the perpetuation of values and social relations that produce and legitimate the dominant worldview at the expense of a vast number of its citizens. (p. 19)

Culturally relevant practices in the classroom are therefore important to ensuring that the educational and behavioral needs of students are met, particularly with respect to practices of student discipline. Losen (2011) has argued that curricular decisions have serious implications for behavior, given their relationship to student (dis)engagement in the classroom. If students do not feel engaged with the content presented by the teacher, they have a higher probability of engaging in what are perceived as inappropriate behaviors such as sleeping, not paying attention, or distracting others. These behaviors may be entirely consistent with what the students is actually experiencing—boredom, tiredness, frustration, and so forth. When students display unwanted behaviors, Kohn (2006) has recommended that teachers seek to make a connection between the task and the unwanted behaviors: "When students are 'off task,' our first response should be to ask, 'what's the task'?" (p. 19). This type of critical reflection in turn allows the educator to step outside of his or her perceptions and expectations of students and analyze how the environment of the classroom and unmet needs of students might be influencing disruptive behavior.

PunishmentThe traditional notion of punishment fuels the use of punitive discipline, which fails to promote restorative justice practices. Kohn (2006) explained:

> Two features have to be present for an intervention to qualify as punishment: it must be deliberately chosen to be unpleasant, such by forcing the student to do something they

would not like to do, or preventing the student from doing something they want to do; and it must be intended to change the students' future behavior. (p. 24)

Furthermore, practices of punishment are also directly informed by the values and beliefs teachers hold about child cognitive development (Volkman, 1999). In other words, the punishments chosen by teachers in the classroom speak to how they perceive children to learn from their mistakes. Punishments are used to ensure compliance within the classroom (Volkman, 1999). Furthermore, Kohn noted, "Punishment can be quite effective, but only to get one thing: temporary compliance" (p. 25). Punishment generally works only as long as the punishing authority is around.

Consequently, educators need to think through the price of compliance and the reasons why teachers punish students in the classroom in the name of compliance. Kohn posited a few common reasons why teachers punish students:

- It is quick and easy.
- It works to get temporary compliance.
- Most teachers are raised and taught in environments that were to some degree punitive.
- Various constituents expect it: administrators, parents, and students themselves.
- It satisfies a desire for a primitive sort of justice.
- The fear that if students are not punished, they will think they "got away with it."
- Punishment continues as a result of a false dichotomy: if we have not punished a wrongdoer, we have not taken action.

These justifications of punishment directly impact the way an educator takes action when students are involved in "off task" or "inappropriate" behavior in the classroom. Along with teacher perceptions of punishments, their perceptions and use of rewards in the classroom also contribute to the way an educator handles disciplinary actions.

Rewards Punishments and rewards require surveillance by adults to ensure compliance of behaviors in the classroom (Gregory et al., 2014). The ability of students to develop their own sense of independence in making choices is brought into question, particularly when they know the only way they will follow rules and expectations is if an adult is around to enforce them. Even then, rewards in the classroom point to what adults perceive to be an adequate reward for a student to remain academically motivated or to behave appropriately in the classroom. Pink (2009) has stated: "Rewards can deliver a short term boost, but the effects wear off, and worse can reduce a person's long-term motivation to continue a project" (p. 8).

Studies have shown that when people are promised a reward for doing a reasonably challenging task or doing it well, they tend to do inferior work compared to people who are given the same task without the promise of a reward. For educators, the challenge is to not rely on a rewards system, but rather to support students to engage in "on task" behaviors by creating a stimulating classroom environment where their needs and interests are central to the pedagogy and curriculum. Kohn (2006) has noted some educators genuinely care about helping students become caring people, but a rewards system does not help students become "good citizens" or "responsible." Instead, rewards systems condition students to follow blindly someone's extrinsic rules, thwarting the intrinsic development of their own voices, social agency, and self-determination (Darder, 2012).

Community Building Debilitating notions of competition are fueled by a rewards and punishment system within the classroom, interfering with the development of solidarity and communal sensibilities (Pink, 2009). The negative effects of competition in the classroom result in a breakdown of community and work among students. Kohn (2006) has pointed to the meaning and importance of community building:

> Community building in the classroom means having the opportunity to create a place of trust and care without the restrictions of threats, where unity and pride replace winning and losing, and where each person is asked, helped, and inspired to live up to such ideals and values kindness, fairness and responsibility. (p. 102)

The teacher has a major influence on how a sense of community is cultivated in the classroom. This is the reason why it is necessary for teachers to be reflective and self-vigilant about their personal biases and assumptions, seeking to understand better what community building requires and what it can offer students.

To this end, Kohn (2006) summarized four key components to the process of building community:

- Strengthening the adult's relationship with each student.
- Building students' connections with each other.
- Providing for numerous class-wide and school-wide activities in which students work together toward a common end.
- Weaving the goal of community through academic instruction.

Through these four levels, classroom community building offers students consistent opportunities to build critical moral reasoning, which can support restorative and ethical ways of

contending with discipline issues (Sheets, 1996). In building community, students can build a sense of belonging and acceptance together, which can support the development of morally just approaches to self, others, and the world. Through community building and moral development, students explore opportunities for independence derived from a critical understanding of their own place within the community. Most importantly, community building within the classroom is fundamentally rooted in teacher perceptions of student abilities and capacities to participate in the making of democratic life (Darder 2012).

Toward a Study of Teacher Perceptions

The literature on school discipline and restorative justice approaches, in conjunction with community building strategies of classroom life, speaks to the possibilities of enacting a more just and democratic approach to school discipline practices in the classroom. The literature also clearly indicates that teacher perceptions with respect to classroom discipline constitute an important subject for study, particularly given the manner in which perceptions can either nurture or undermine a humanizing approach to student discipline practice. Unfortunately, often there are few opportunities for teachers to talk about their perceptions about school discipline and persisting disparities. Carter et al. (2014) have insisted, "If we are to undo the racial inequities that continue to plague us, we must find constructive ways to talk about them and intervene constructively to end them" (p. 2). This qualitative study of teacher perceptions of student discipline constitutes an effort to constructively engage this difficult issue in ways that can further our critical understanding of this phenomenon through both theory and practice.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

School disciplinary practices supporting the social development and intellectual formation of working class students of color are fundamental to social justice. Social justice in education is generally grounded in a commitment to support students in reaching their full potential. That notion becomes strengthened as it is directly linked to critical pedagogical practices supporting dialogue, reflection, action, and culturally democratic classroom life. An underlying assumption of this study is that by creating school disciplinary systems allowing students to feel respected and included in decisions related to their (mis)behavior, classroom environments have the potential to become places where such critical praxis can lead to the transformation of educational inequalities.

To this end, school leaders must ensure critical engagement with mainstream disciplinary practices that negatively impact students' lives and the culture of the school. Another important assumption of this study is that teacher perceptions, as discussed in Chapter 2, drive the implementation of school disciplinary practices; teachers' views ultimately create environments of learning for students. Often, this phenomenon is linked to both the perceptions teachers hold about the practice of school discipline and the biases they bring to their teaching practice (Darder, 2012). With these assumptions in mind, this qualitative study set out to better understand how teacher's perceptions of school discipline influenced issues of equality in the practices of 12 teachers at a school-site level.

Research Questions

This study of teacher perceptions of school discipline was driven by three key research questions:

1. What are the perceptions about school discipline held by ninth and tenth grade teachers at a charter high school (CPCHS) in the greater Los Angeles area?
2. Are teacher perceptions of school discipline accurately reflected in the school's merit and demerit system currently used to inform student discipline practices?
3. To what extent does the merit and demerit system impact school discipline perceptions and practices with respect to inequalities in student referral and punishment?

Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

This study employs a qualitative approach in an effort to obtain greater understanding about teacher perceptions and how these connect with the exercise of equality (or inequality) relative to the use of the merit and demerit system at CPCHS. Consequently, a qualitative approach is considered here as the best means to answer the study's research questions. Even more importantly for this particular study are the stories shared through the interviews of participants, which serve to expand our knowledge of teacher perceptions about school discipline by incorporating events and adding evaluative elements that reveal participant viewpoints regarding their school discipline practices. The data from interviews and observations were transcribed, coded, and written in ways that highlight the significant themes and issues teachers considered most important to the educational practice of school discipline and those critical perceptions illuminating a more just student discipline system .

Methodology

To answer the research questions, I conducted two-hour focus groups of ninth-and 10th-grade teachers at a charter high school in the greater Los Angeles area. In addition, each teacher was observed over an eight-week period for a total of two hours. The field notes taken during the two hours of observations for each teacher provided data on (a) teacher response to student misbehavior, and (b) student response to teacher discipline. The criteria used for the observations included (a) verbal/body language, (b) outcome/consequence, and (c) follow-up after discipline interaction.

Research Design

The following provides details about the research design, including brief discussions about the participants, setting, data collection protocol, and process of data analysis.

Participants

The 12 participants, chosen through a convenience sampling, are all teaching at CPCHS. The teachers who participated in this study are ninth- and 10th-grade teachers. Years of teaching for the 12 participants ranged from one to five years; and their years at CPCHS ranged from one to three years. Table 2, below, provides specific information about the years of teaching and length of tenure at CPCHS of each participant. To recruit teachers from both grade levels, I offered a professional development session and presented data on student discipline. During the professional development session, I described the purpose of this study and how it would be connected to improving current teacher disciplinary efforts at the school. Teachers completed a feedback form for the professional development session, which included a question about whether they might be interested in participating in this study. Once the study was approved, I

met individually with participants who expressed interest in the study to obtain their signature on the informed consent form, per IRB protocol. met individually with participants who expressed interest in the study to obtain their signature on the informed consent form, per IRB protocol.

Table 2

Years of Teaching of Study Participants

Participant/ Grade Level	Years Teaching Public Schools	Years Working at CPCHS	Teacher Preparation Program	Ethnicity/Gender
Patty/ 9th	4	3	Nontraditional	White/Female
Ana/ 9th	5	1	Traditional	Latina/ Female
Rebecca/ 9th	4	1	Traditional	White/ Female
Lucy/ 9th	1	1	Nontraditional	Latina/Female
Monica/ 9th	2	1	Nontraditional	White/Female
Maria/ 9th	5	1	Traditional	Latina/Female
Paul/ 10th	7	1	Traditional	White/Male
Roberto/ 10th	2	2	Traditional	Latino/ Male
Brittney/ 10th	3	2	Nontraditional	Black/ Female
Tania/ 10th	1	1	Traditional	White/ Female
Christopher/ 10th	2	2	Traditional	White/ Male
Lorena/ 10th	2	1	Nontraditional	Latina/ Female

The Setting

College Preparatory Charter High School (CPCHS), the high school that served as the research setting for this study, was located in the greater Los Angeles area. The school was launched and established in 2013 as an extension to College Preparatory Middle School (CPMS). The school was situated within the boundaries of LAUSD's Local District 2. This is a mixed neighborhood with pockets of deep poverty. At the time of this study, there were 16,346

households in the community with household income of less than $40,000 a year, which is low in comparison to county and city averages.

The goal of CPCHS was to provide a clear path to college for College Preparatory Middle School students who chose to matriculate to the high school, as well as to provide a college-ready environment for every student in the community who chose to enroll. In partnership with parents and the community, the school prepared students for success in college and life beyond. To achieve this goal, the school provided a rigorous academic program along with a comprehensive behavioral disiciplinary program called a merit and demerit system.

College Preparatory Charter High School was a charter school serving a population of 211 students from the greater Los Angeles area. The school was in its third year of operation and would continue expanding one grade level at a time, reaching a total population of 480 students once it operated at all four grade levels. At the time of this study, the school was colocated with a traditional public high school. As a third year charter school, CPCHS was able to secure funding from Proposition 39, which allows charter schools to share space with the Los Angeles Unified School District schools. College Preparatory Charter High School occupied 14 classrooms in the building of the traditional public high school. Almost 70% of the student population was made up of poor, working class Latino students, although this number was probably much larger, in that 26% did not declare ethnicity/nationality on the school form, despite the observation that the community and the school district was mostly of Mexican descent (see Table 3).

Table 3

CPCHS Student Ethnicity/Nationality

Ethnicity/Nationality	Count	% of Student Body
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0
Asian	3	1.42
African American, not of Hispanic Origin	1	0.47
Hispanic/Latino	147	69.67
Pacific Islander	0	0.00
White, Not of Hispanic Origin	4	1.90
Undeclared	56	26.54
Total	211	100.00

College Preparatory Charter High School was established with the mission of ensuring college-readiness for all students. The core values of leadership, excellence, integrity, justice, and community drove the behavior system the school used to hold students accountable for behavior. Using the five core values of the school, the six founding teachers, along with the dean and principal of the school, created the merit and demerit system (see Appendix 1) used to respond to student discipline issues. Through the collective use of the merit and demerit system, teachers collaborated and agreed on how to define appropriate and inappropriate student behaviors in the classroom. Consonant with traditional rewards and punishment system, if a student was seen carrying out a behavior that was positive, then teachers gave a student a merit. If students were carrying out behaviors in the classroom considered to negatively impact the classroom culture, then they were given a demerit. Praises and checks were calculated when teachers entered merits and demerits into an Ipad program. At the end of the week, students received a behavior report tallying their total merits and demerits. Each student started the week with 100 points, each merit earned students two points, and each demerit took away two points.

All teachers at CPCHS were expected to use the merit and demerit system to uphold students to high expectations of behavior in the classroom and school setting. The merit and

demerit system at CPCHS included behaviors such as “first to be ready in the classroom,” “making a higher order thinking comment,” “helping a classmate with a questions,” “not doing work,” “distracting others,” “making an inappropriate comment,” and using “curse words” in the classroom setting. At the beginning of the year, teachers were trained on how to use the merit and demerit system to ensure teachers communicate appropriately behavioral expectations. In addition, teachers practiced using the merit and demerit system during summer professional development by giving lessons to a group of teachers that had been given student behaviors to display during the lesson. The teacher giving the lesson practiced redirecting behavior through a merit or demerit. At the end of the lesson, teachers provided feedback to the teacher facilitating the lesson to assist and coach one another on how to implement the merit and demerit system.

Context of School Discipline Policies

As a school, CPCHS had to respond to state and local district discipline policies. Five policy documents were used to inform discipline practices. These documents discussed: (a) alternatives to suspension, (b) implications of suspensions for students with special needs, (c) a matrix of suspension and expulsion recommendations, (d) the expulsion process for charter schools, and (e) how suspension rates are calculated by the district for charter schools in Los Angeles.

Alternatives to suspension-document. The first document outlines alternatives to suspension and gives descriptions with examples of each of the alternatives recommended for schools. The recommendations for alternatives to suspensions range from appropriate in-school alternatives to restorative practices. This document is meant to serve as a tool that helps prevent out-of-school suspensions (see Appendix 2).

Suspension/expulsion summary of things to know-document. The second document provides schools with information about suspensions for students with special needs. The document is a summary of school law pertaining to suspensions in the State of California. It outlines the legal rights of students who are suspended and what the process looks like when students receive instruction while on suspension (see Appendix 3).

Matrix for student suspension and expulsion recommendation. This document describes state law for student suspension and expulsions. The document defines offenses in behavior for which students can be suspended and expelled from school. They are broken down into three categories: (a) student offenses with "no" principal discretion, which means that a principal is obligated to suspend or expel a student based on the offense; (b) Category 2 offenses, which have "limited principal discretion." This category states that a "principal must recommend expulsion when the following occur at school or at a school activity off campus unless the principal determines that the expulsion is inappropriate." (c) The third category outlines the behaviors where principals have "broad" discretion to recommend suspension or expulsion. These offenses are defined using education law in the State of California (see Appendix 4).

Expulsion process for charter schools-document. This document outlines the expulsion process for charter schools in Los Angeles. The education law codes are added to the top of the document and define the behaviors or actions for which students can be expelled from charter schools. The document outlines step by step the process for convening a committee to hear the student's case and make the recommendation for expulsion. The document highlights additional steps that must be followed if a student has an individual education plan (IEP). The document is

meant to act as a guide and checklist of the actions that must be followed when starting the expulsion process for a student (see Appendix 5).

Suspension rate calculation-document. This document from the district explains how suspension rates for the district will be calculated. The suspension rate equals the total number of suspensions events divided by norm enrollment count. Other measures taken into account are the suspension rate of students with special needs (see Appendix 6). Last, under the guidance of the district, the school has a mandate not to suspend more than 5% of the student population in a school year. The district created this goal in an effort to ensure that the moratorium on suspensions was followed and implemented at all school sites. For the 2013–2014 and 2015–2016 school years, CPCHS submitted a letter to the district with an explanation of how the school would continue to work on decreasing the percentage of suspensions to 5%. The district kept these letters; what they were used for is currently unknown (see Appendix 7).

Data Collection

The data collected for this study is qualitative and was collected from focus groups, recorded with the use of a digital recording device. The focus groups helped participants discuss the strengths and limitations of the CPCHS discipline system. This study documents teacher perceptions, impressions, and philosophical views related to their understanding and use of the merit and demerit school discipline system. Particular attention was placed on noting teacher biases with respect to discipline practices at CPCHS. Teachers were afforded the opportunity to share their own stories of school discipline based on their particular personal and professional dispositions. More specifically, the study included an analysis of school and teacher values of

school discipline and how these related to issues of equality and inequality in school disciplinary practices among the participants of this study.

Each teacher was observed over an eight-week period for two hours. The notes taken during the observation served the purpose of gathering data on (a) teacher response to student misbehavior, and (b) student response to teacher discipline. The criteria that will be used for the observations connected to behavior are (a) verbal/body language, (b) outcome/consequence, and (c) follow-up after discipline interaction. The recorded focus groups and data were transcribed. The data were coded according to the repetition, significance, and prevailing themes surfacing during the interviews. Furthermore, the data was analyzed to identify individual and collective perceptions, impressions, and philosophies of school discipline and how those were or were not in sync with the merit and demerit system at CPCHS.

Focus groups. Two grade-level teacher focus groups were held as part of this study. The first focus group engaged questions about perceptions of discipline, and the second focus group focused on questions about implementation and practice of the merit and demerit system. Each focus group participant was asked to state the grade he or she taught, subject, years of teaching experience, and years of teaching experience at CPCHS. After initial introductions, the researcher posed questions (see Appendix 7) to prompt group discussion. The two focus groups were recorded with a recording device and then transcribed. As participants answered the questions, the researcher also took field notes of participant responses.

Classroom observations. Each teacher was observed over an eight-week period for two hours. The observation protocol (see Appendix 8) focused on the following: (a) verbal/body language, (b) outcome/consequences, and (c) teacher/student follow-up. The notes taken during

the observation served the purpose of additional gathering of data on (a) teacher response to student misbehavior, and (b) student response to teacher discipline. During the study, 24 hours of observations were recorded for all 12 participants. Each participant was observed and field notes were recorded for a period of two hours, in which the implementation of the merit and demerit system was observed and recorded. During the observations, participants were observed through the use of four major areas of focus, as noted above. The areas of focus were created to more easily collect data related to the impact of the merit and demerit system in addressing misbehaviors in the classroom.

Data Storage and Confidentiality

After the data were collected from the focus groups, the recordings were secured in a locked cabinet to ensure the security and anonymity of participants. The notes taken during the focus groups were also locked with the audio recordings. After a year, the audio recordings and observation notes were to be destroyed to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of all participants. The data were transcribed and coded, using pseudonyms for each participant.

Coding of Data

All the transcribed data were coded for major patterns of repetition as well as for prevalent themes and issues that surfaced in the responses of participants. Of most concern were those that related directly to teacher perceptions of school discipline, philosophy and practices of school discipline, and to the extent to which CPCHS's merit and demerit system for student discipline was in sync with teacher perceptions and perspectives. I analyzed the data based on the major themes and issues surfacing across the data to understand better the significance of teacher responses to the development of an emancipatory student discipline approach. The analysis of

the data was conducted according to its significance with respect to the research questions that informed the study.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was the sample size. As a founding charter school, CPCHS served only two grade levels and was in its third year of operation. Consequently, the study does not have a larger number of teachers to take part in the study. The sample size of 12 teacher participants may not be necessarily generalizable to other school populations. In addition, the nature of self-reporting may have played a role in the way the results of the study were analyzed. As such, researcher bias may have contributed to the results and explanation of the findings in the study.

As part of the study, the researcher gathered information pertinent to the analysis of the data collected, but my position within the school might also have caused some biases in the responses of the participants. As a founding school principal, I realized the possibility of teacher bias in sharing their perceptions about the merit and demerit system. Although I had an effective professional relationship with my teachers, I still realized that some censorship could have occurred during their sharing of practices and perceptions. With this in mind, I made an effort to remain open to and nonjudgmental of the responses offered by participants.

Delimitations

In terms of delimitations, quantitative research was not collected as part of this study because it would not provide data adequate to understanding the specificities and nuances of teacher perceptions about school discipline or answers to the study's research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOWARD A CRITICAL APPROACH TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Presentation of Finding

The focus group data and observation notes of interviews and classroom observations are presented to highlight the relationship between teachers' perceptions of school discipline and how this affects the way that the teachers participating in this study employed the merit and demerit system to discipline students in their classrooms. In addition, I used the focus group data here to analyze if teachers' perceptions of school discipline were accurately reflected in the school's merit and demerit system to inform discipline practices. In addition, I explored the strength and limitations of the merit and demerit system in an effort to understand if this discipline system impacted teacher perceptions and practices in ways that produced inequalities in student discipline practices. The following presentation of findings is divided into four areas of focus: (a) teacher perceptions of student discipline at CPCHS, (b) teacher perceptions of a merit and demerit system, (c) teacher response to misbehavior, and (d) the impact of a merit and demerit system in discipline practices regarding inequities in student referral and punishment.

Teacher Perceptions of Student Discipline

Findings from the group interviews revealed that participants all shared common values, beliefs, and mindsets about student success and achievement in relation to classroom behavior and expectations. Participants seemed to believe that clear behavior expectations and consistency in holding students accountable for those expectations was needed to ensure the success of students in all classes. Teachers shared the belief that, to implement the merit and demerit system at the school well, they needed to have the ability to build relationships with students to support

the academic and personal development of students in this school community. Participants also expressed the importance of following up with conflict in the classroom with restorative practices allowing the reflection of the students and adults on campus.

Participants also mentioned the importance of having support from the administration team in following up with behavior concerns and incidents. All participants agreed that the merit and demerit system at the school was allowing teachers to have common behavior expectations of the classroom and the creation of a school identity and culture focusing on the preparation of students for college and life beyond.

Perceptions vs. Reality

Personal background and experiences with discipline incidents affected the study participants' perception of school discipline. Some participants shared how their own personal experiences informed the discipline they expected to see in their classrooms. As shared by Brittney:

> "For me personally my experience actually hindered my classroom management for my first year … because very much I had this image, like I would go to the front of the room and start talking and of course everyone would be listening to me, because that is what I did in high schools like before I started teaching it never occurred to me … even though I know there were students in class who would talk and not do the right thing … it just seemed like the obvious thing to me in my head … of course the students would listen, of course they would do all their homework, of course … because they want to learn and we are here to work together. And, of course the students actually do care and want to learn and work together, but there is different factors going on in students lives that like were

> and weren't going on for me ... like some things I understand coming from students and something's I don't … I think just the way I process issues in my life is different than the way a lot of my students process issues so, it manifest in different ways … so it's actually something that I had to get over to be able to become better at managing my classroom." (Brittney, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

For Brittney, her schooling experience reflected the privilege she had had as a student of color in honors courses. For this teacher, students were expected to have her same perspective about schooling. Other participants agreed that they were able to connect with students based on how they saw themselves as students when they were younger. As Monica further echoed,

> "You see yourself in some kids so when they push back and resist, you understand and relate to them more." (Monica, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

All participants agreed that the ability to relate to students helped with understanding and approaching conflict in the classroom with empathy and respect for the student. During classroom observations, teachers approached discipline situations in direct ways for students. In addition, in teacher-student interactions related to discipline, students were observed consistently apologizing for behaviors each time a teacher addressed them with a demerit.

Moreover, participants in this study often expressed that their personal schooling experiences with discipline, teacher preparation programs, and the summer professional development were all linked to developing their perceptions of discipline in the classroom. Furthermore, participants noted that these collective experiences allowed teachers at CPCHS to approach the implementation of the merit and demerit system with what they considered to be consistency in all of their classes. Participants also noted that the perception of discipline at

CPCHS was supported through what some termed “restorative practices” that humanize students in the discipline process and allow adults to separate misbehaviors from students.

Teacher perceptions of student discipline at CPCHS directly connected to comments made about their desire to support and help students succeed academically. Participants repeatedly shared their belief in teacher responsibility to maintain healthy classroom environments. Therefore, a major finding in the interview process was the importance of teachers being reflective about their own practice, as illustrated by Maria in the following quotation:

> “I do think though that it is the teacher’s responsibility to run their classroom in a way that sets their kids up for success. That’s not to say students are not responsible for their individual actions. But if your class isn’t going well because of many student behaviors, then it is important to reflect on what you are doing as a teacher. As a teacher at our school, that means that you can use the merit and demerit system or other means of correction. If your class isn’t going well, that’s on you. You are the adult in the room, so, I do think that the responsibility does fall on teachers to set students up for success. If students from that point on make bad decisions, then that’s on them.” (Maria, Second Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

Maria’s words well describe the mindset of the teachers in this study and how they worked to understand incidents of misbehavior in the classroom. Even more, Maria noted that reflecting on teaching practice allowed the teacher to have the opportunity to think about the types of supports necessary to build trust and relationships with students. As put concisely by Patty:

"The responsibility of managing the class falls on the teacher." (Patty, Second Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

All participants agreed that behavior systems were used in schools as a way to make sure students were receiving quality education, where "students feel positive about the interactions that they have day to day with a teacher" (Patty, Second Ninth-Grade Focus Group).

This was a major finding in that seemed to indicate that teacher perceptions of discipline were directly influenced by values, beliefs, and mindsets about teacher practice and responsibility in the discipline process. During classroom observations, it was evident that teachers set up classrooms that helped and supported students in the academic process, but also facilitated the classroom discipline process. This was apparent by the organization and procedures that teachers put in place to assert their classroom management approach. However, the extent to which these practices were culturally relevant in relation to the lived experiences of students at this school was not apparent from either the focus groups or observations.

When describing the teacher values, beliefs, and mindset necessary to working with students attending CPCHS, Christopher shared that:

> "I try to think about it as if it's their responsibility because like you can only control what you can control, and we can't control everything, but especially with an environment and this type of job … if you want to … like if you have the attitude that you do not have a lot of agency then you won't … and I think if you do have the attitude that you have a lot of agency then you will … and you can go and see the same student with the same parents behaving very differently in one class versus another class … the independent variable being the teacher … and we know there is a lot of research that shows that effective

> teachers make a big difference … and so …I think the scary, but also the part of the job that is … I think when they are in your classroom they are your responsibility … they are growing up, but they are still kids." (Christopher, Second Tenth-Grade Focus Group)

Christopher's perspective served as an excellent example of teacher attitudes in this study—attitudes that seem to directly affect the ways they approached conflict with students in the classroom. During observations, for example, it was evident that Christopher followed-up with his students when discipline situations occurred. Christopher's perceptions of how his approach to discipline impacted students was also evident by his misunderstanding of how that process impacted student development of agency and voice. During follow-up conversations observed, Christopher made sure that his students understood the reasons why classroom behaviors were not permitted. On two occasions, however, even after students shared their concerns about the disciplinary decisions, Christopher did not engage student concerns, but rather kept the demerits that students were given and, again, reiterated the adult perspective in the situation.

Consistency

Many participants expressed that clear and consistent school wide behavior expectations allowed teachers to understand school expectations as to what their classrooms should look like. As stated by Lorena, a merit and demerit system "helps everyone manage the classroom. It helps the students stay on task, and it allows the parents to know how the students are behaving in the classroom" (Lorena, Second 10th-Grade Focus Group). Along with consistency in behavior expectations and consequences, participants expressed their belief in student discipline being multifaceted and affected by distinct layers of responsibility. Brittney went on to share:

> "As far as ensuring who is responsible for the child's behavior, personally speaking, I feel like each party has a different role. I think ultimately it is up to the child to ensure their behavior is correct, because when you are younger, you have adults telling you what to do. And you have a choice of how to behave, but especially as you become a teenager, less of the responsibility should be on the adults to ensure you are behaving. Because if a child decides in their mind that they don't want to behave, nothing you are going to do is going to make that child behave. I feel like it is a teacher's responsibility to ensure they have an environment where it is easy for a child to behave and to ensure that expectations are clear about how they should behave. I think it is the parents job to support their child behaving, but I think, ultimately, who is responsible for a child behaving is the child. I think the other adults are just there to support them, but you can't make a child behave." (Brittney, Second Tenth-Grade Focus Group)

In the context of this school, participants shared that discipline was described and explained to teachers as being a source of support, in order to allow students to understand how to learn to become young scholars who are successful both academically and behaviorally.

Building Relationships and Understanding Community

All participants also expressed an understanding of the social factors affecting the schooling experience of students of color attending public schools. For example, Paul stated the following:

> "Without context of the school and surrounding community, you might perceive a student not completing work in the classroom as being resistant to authority. On the other hand, if

you understand the context of the community then you will understand that Johnny has stopped his work because he is hungry." (Paul, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Participants further expressed understanding that the schooling process acted as a form of socialization for youth in the community. Patty mentioned that her previous experience working at a charter school on the East Coast made her realize,

> "Certain expectations were really important, and teaching students to engage in cultural norms that were essentially, middle class, White cultural norms, is important. I don't think anyone disagrees that kids being fluent in those norms is potentially harmful." (Patty, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

Patty goes on to state that teaching students middle-class norms should be done in a way that does not devalue students' own cultural norms.

Although most of the participants made some note about cultural norms, an understanding of cultural norms with respect to their practice with students at CPCHS was not highly evident in classroom observations. Teachers, for the most part, approached student discipline with a conditioned sense of consistency, regardless of what they might know or not know about a student. I observed a variety of teacher and student follow-up discussions about behavioral incidents. On very few occasions, teachers did change consequences for misbehavior in the classroom; but for the most part, even after conversations with students, most of the teachers in this study, as with Christopher above, upheld demerits that had been given.

All the focus group participants seemed to agree that, along with empathy and respect for students in the classroom, teachers must approach conflict through the use of restorative practices. A common practice mentioned by participants in their classroom and observed during

classroom observations was the use of restorative circles (as discussed in Chapter 2), in order to help resolve conflict with a student in class. Tania explained the use of restorative circles, in the following way:

> "I think it always helps because it makes it not personal, especially because it is recognizing that you see them not just as the sum of their decision, but as a human that makes mistakes and who we want to succeed. Students might come back to your classroom realizing that 'oh, she just wasn't trying to get me.' They are thinking like 'oh, this person really does care for me.' And they might not show that to you, but deep down they know it. So from my experience, I've never had an issue with any ongoing battle with a student because if there ever has been a very egregious behavior incident, I have always been able to use restorative circles to talk to a student and repair our relationship. Or at least just find out what is going on that caused conflict with the student. I think that goes a long way." (Tania, Second 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Participants shared that the practice of restorative circles was introduced and practiced by teachers during their summer professional development at CPCHS. The administration and charter management team provided professional development for teachers, which included modeling restorative circles as well as practicing running circles with adults, prior to the school year beginning. As shared by Maria, summer professional development helped the teachers in this study develop the understanding that

> the responsibility of a teacher is to obviously provide a safe environment where 90% of misbehaviors for students will be addressed with a strong lesson plan, and for the 10% of students who might misbehave, teachers need to use restorative practices to teach

students how to make appropriate behavior choices. (Maria, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

Participants further discussed the importance of summer professional development as a catalyst for how they were prepared to build a collective understanding of the merit and demerit system and how to address misbehaviors in their classrooms through the use the merit and demerit behavior system.

Teacher Perceptions of a Merit and Demerit System

During the focus groups, participants shared the importance of having a school discipline system that can be reinforced school wide. Paul's comment exemplified the perception of the teachers in this study:

> "For me, it's been about separating the behavior from the individual. And once you can focus on that, you can clear away a lot of the other stuff that is involved with emotions. There is a behavior, and there is a record of it. And there is a consequence for the behavior. So one way or another, the behavior is being reinforced and it's being reinforced school wide. I've been in schools where students like the one teacher who is the 'cool' teacher. The adult that lets students chew gum. I feel like that is not what happens here." (Paul, Second 10th-Grade Focus Group)

The participants also shared an understanding of having been exposed to professional development in the summer, which allowed them to separate the behavior from the student. They spoke about the importance of understanding the merit and demerit system, and how this encouraged teachers to focus on behaviors, rather than personal issues that they might have with particular students. About this Maria stated,

> "There is a function behind misbehavior and it is our responsibility to go above and beyond and support the student in learning how to correct that misbehavior." (Maria, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

In addition, the participants consistently expressed their view of the merit and demerit system as "a tool," which they used to inform students, parents, and fellow teachers about student behavior.

Last, as repeatedly noted by participants in this study, the teachers firmly believed that the merit and demerit system at this school provided clarification and guidance for how to train students on what proper behavior looks like in the classroom setting. Teachers, as mentioned earlier, talked about practicing how to implement the behavior system in summer professional development. Through this practice, teachers discussed how participants provided feedback to one another about how to use strategies to correct student behavior in the classroom as set forth in *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Technique that Put Students on the Path to College* (Lemov, 2010)—a book that was distributed to teachers attending the summer professional development. Classroom observations revealed that teachers used similar practices across the two grade levels represented in this study. Participants addressed classroom behaviors with the same spoken and body language and had similar posters on the walls, outlining classroom procedures, rules, and expectations.

All participants agreed that the exposure to behavioral practices during summer professional development allowed the teachers at their school to develop a collective mindset for how they approached issues of conflict in the classroom. They expressed the experience as very helpful in supporting this approach to school discipline. As described by Lucy:

> "In terms of preparation, from the school … I am just so thankful that I got in depth prep, like learning about the behavior systems. The *Teach Like a Champion* sessions during summer sessions staff training helped because in my teacher preparation program, I felt like what we learned was so basic and here it's … it's … really helping me realize that I have to make sure that I am firm, and consistent. I am just so happy that I learned that here and it has been very helpful so far." (Lucy, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

Participants further shared that they felt the school provided a clear outline for how to approach conflict with students in a way in which students were supported academically and personally. As noted earlier, all participants in the first ninth-grade interview mentioned their experience in working with the *Teach Like a Champion* book. Patty shared:

> "*Teach Like a Champion* has helped me become a stronger classroom manager." (Patty, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

Overall, the staff shared that working with this book provided quick classroom strategies for how to address the behaviors that teachers want to discourage in the classroom.

Even though each of the participants essentially used the same merit and demerit system to address behaviors in the classroom, their ability to address misbehaviors based on the four areas of observation revealed the complexity of using a uniformed merit and demerit system for the school. For the most part, each of the participants expressed his or her ability to use a demerit every time he or she corrected behaviors in the classroom. For these teachers, verbal responses to correcting behaviors in the classroom were equivalent to a demerit.

The verbal responses of teachers, as observed in this study, always included a direction to the student about what behavior to correct. Additionally, the body language teachers used to

address behaviors ranged from hand signals to moving into proximity of the student. As participants discussed in the focus groups, a "follow-up" for teachers translated into a private discussion with the misbehaving student. Last, a "lack of responsiveness" by students, as noted during the observations, meant students where "off task," or not following directions of the teacher. Being off task constituted reason enough, for participants, to issue a demerit to the nonresponsive student.

Teacher Responses to Misbehavior

The following discussion of teacher responses to misbehavior focuses on four important areas for assessing the use the merit and demerit system: (a) verbal language, (b) body language, (c) follow-up, and (d) lack of responsiveness.

Verbal Language

During focus groups, the major theme of consistency in the classroom was repeatedly connected to the verbal messages teachers used to address behaviors in the classroom. When issuing merits and demerits, teachers were observed using similar language to communicate students' merits and demerits. Some of the language included statements like "great job, that's a merit for volunteering" (Ana, Observation 1); "That's a merit for your higher order thinking (HOT) comment" (Rebecca, Observation 1); "That's a demerit for being unprepared, take out your handout" (Rebecca, Observation 2); and "That's a demerit, pay attention" (Lucy, Observation 2).

These verbal cues were clearly observed to function as an important method of communication between students and teachers. Students, for the most part, also seemed already trained in the merit and demerit system. When they received merits, students thanked their

teachers; when they received demerits, they apologized and addressed behaviors. Students' demeanor also seemed to change, especially when issued demerits. If a student was slouching in class, when issued a demerit, students would sit up and proceed with "re-engaging" in the classroom. When students received merits, the reaction observed usually was that of a thank you or a smile for their teachers.

The narration of behaviors in the classroom was also a strategy used by teachers in both grade levels. As noted by Lucy to her class during one of the observations:

> "I see some of you ready and prepared. Thank you for not talking. Group 1 is dismissed. Thank you for exiting quietly, your group gets a merit." (Lucy, Observation 3)

As participants shared in focus groups, narrating behaviors helped teachers set expectations for all students in the classroom. All teachers strongly believed that narrating positive behaviors out loud helped to motivate students to behave well. As Lorena explained in one of the focus group discussions:

> "I think narrating behaviors helps everyone. It helps the teachers manage the classroom and it helps the students stay on task." (Lorena, Second 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Christopher also shared the following:

> "Being comfortable with the language in the merit and demerit system helps teachers address behaviors using the same language. This helps students not personalize behavior situations when teachers address misbehaviors. It allows for students to not feel singled out when behaviors are all dealt with in the same way." (Christopher, Second 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Body Language

As evidenced in observations, teachers used body language to redirect behavior in the classroom. This method helped teachers continue class time and allowed them to address behaviors they felt needed to be pointed out. The first body language strategy used by all the teachers in this study was moving into proximity of the student(s) misbehaving. On different occasions, when teachers wanted the attention of a student, or a group of students, they used proximity to students to get the attention of all students in the class. During an observation, Tania walked over to a student who was falling asleep and tapped on the student's desk. As a result, the student sat up and began to follow along with the reading. During another observation, Roberto walked over to a student who was kicking a ball underneath his desk. Roberto pointed to the ball and then pointed to the back of the classroom. The student quietly stood up and put the soccer ball in the back of the classroom. The student then sat in his seat and continued participating in the discussion.

During observations, it was also evident that students had been trained and taught body language signals to communicate with the teacher. If a student had a question, he or she put up two fingers for the teacher. If students needed to use the restroom, they crossed their fingers and raised their hand. Lastly, if the students wanted to add a comment in class, they simply raised their hand. These are examples of how teachers used body signals to maximize instructional time, in ways that would minimize disruptiveness in the classroom.

Furthermore, teachers shared their awareness as to how body language supported their classroom management. Lucy stated:

> "Even picking up your iPad helps keep students quiet and re-engaged. They know that's how we keep track of merits and demerits, and when you pick up the iPad, it's almost a reminder to refocus even before issuing merits or demerits." (Lucy, Second Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

All participants also recognized that "squaring-up" helped address students and redirect behavior. Participants explained that as a body language strategy, this strategy helped teachers deliver instructions to students in a way perceived as confident. The teachers' belief of being a "warm-strict" teacher and its connection confidence in the classroom was also expressed. Several teachers explained that being "warm" translated to being empathetic, while being "strict" referred to a teacher's ability to assert his or her authority in the classroom.

Follow-Up

For participants in this study, being able to follow-up with students about incidents of misbehavior provided an opportunity for students and teachers to have a conversation that allowed students to share their perspective about the situation. During observations, it was evident that both teachers and students initiated follow-up conversations after class or during class. At times, conversations took place in the hallway, in an effort to have a more private discussion between a student and the teacher.

During an observation, I witnessed Patty giving a student a demerit during class. At the end of class, Patty asked the student to stay behind. After the class left, the student and the teacher had a conversation about why the teacher gave the student a demerit. During the conversation, the student told the teacher he understood why the teacher gave him a demerit. The

teacher also asked the student if he was feeling ill. When the student responded with a yes, the teacher stated:

> "I expect more from you every class, you know that if you are lost, you can always ask me for help." (Patty, Observation 1)

The student thanked the teacher for speaking to him and apologized one last time. For participants, this type of follow-up worked to build student-teacher relationships, as students were able to better understand the perspective of the teacher and why the teacher had to discipline the student and redirect behavior.

During another observation, Rebecca gave a student a demerit for drawing on their notes. She stated:

> "That's a demerit for drawing and being off task." (Rebecca, Observation 2)

The student proceeded to erase the drawing and continued watching the video being shown in class. After class, the student stayed and asked the teacher if she could speak to her. The student "respectfully disagreed" with the teacher and shared with the teacher that the drawing she had on her paper was from the material being covered in class. The teacher picked-up her iPad and checked the student's demerits for the day. Rebecca told the student this would be her third demerit for the day, and she disagreed with the student because she had not given directions to draw out content being covered during class. The student was visibly upset, and the teacher asked her to return afterschool. The student thanked the teacher for taking the time to speak to her and left the classroom.

During an observation of one of Roberto's classes, he gave a student a private demerit for talking to his partner. The student shrugged his shoulders and stated to the teacher that his friend

was also talking. Roberto responded with "That's an inappropriate response" (Roberto, Observation 1) and handed the student an automatic detention slip. The student was visibly upset but sat up and tried to follow the in-class discussion. The student stayed after class, and his teacher spoke to him about the student's inappropriate responses. He apologized to Roberto and shared with the teacher that he was frustrated that the teacher signaled him out in front of the class. The teacher informed the student that, in the future, if he were to be given a demerit, he should not talk back to the teacher and disrespect the teacher in front of class. Roberto recommended the student wait until the end of class and respectfully disagree with the teacher. The teacher shared with the student that he appreciated the student's initiative and ability to "turn it around." After the follow-up, the teacher removed the automatic detention, but kept the demerit for the student "talking out of turn."

Aside from following up with students for behavior situations, teachers were observed following up with students to provide positive feedback to students. During several observations, both Maria and Monica asked students to stay after class and thanked students for their participation and engagement in class. This again illustrated participants' beliefs about building relationships with students through positive experiences in the classroom. About this practice, Roberto noted:

> "I feel like following up with a student is a good buffer. Following up with a student is open to communication and restorative. It is like repairing the harm. Not too long ago I had a student come back and apologize and was being sincere, and his behavior has been different lately. Following up with students after class is a tool of support." (Roberto, Second 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Lack of Responsiveness

During classroom observations and according to the guidelines of the merit and demerit system at CPCHS, few teachers did not address behavior incidents in the classrooms. During an observation in Lucy's classroom, four student behaviors that needed to be addressed, according to the merit and demerit system, were left unattended. In the observation, Lucy did not address (a) a student getting up from seat without permission, (b) a student cursing during class time, (c) a student talking out of turn, and (d) a student not completing classwork during class time. Furthermore, during an observation of Monica's classroom, she did not address a student with a backpack on the table. In addition, four students did not complete the beginning assignment for the period, and Monica did not address them, although there seem to be a need to redirect their behavior in the classroom. It was also noted that smaller class sizes allowed teachers such as Lucy to issue more merits and demerits than in larger sized classrooms such as Monica's.

Student Referral and Punishment

Because teachers used the merit and demerit system to address behaviors in class, there was a direct link to the outcome of student referral and punishment at CPCHS. Table 4 shows the demerits, merits, detentions, and referrals that had occurred at CPCHS in the previous three years. The data are also desegregated by school year and grade level.

Table 4

Demerits, Merits, Detentions, and Referrals at CPCHS in the Previous Three Years

School Year/Grade	Demerits	Merits	Detention	Referrals
Year 1 (2013–2014)				
Grade 9	32,876	24,786	365	62
Year 2 (2014–2015)				
Grades 9, 10	17,044	36,085	243	75
Year 3 (2015–2016)				
Grades 9,10,11	14,300	17,348	178	38

Year 1 (2013–2014)				
Grade	**Demerits**	**Merits**	**Detention**	**Referrals**
Grade 9	32, 876	24,786	365	62

Year 2 (2014–2015)				
Grade	**Demerits**	**Merits**	**Detention**	**Referrals**
Grade 9	11,678	16,543	168	58
Grade 10	5,366	19,542	75	17

Year 3 (2015–2016)				
Grade	**Demerits**	**Merits**	**Detention**	**Referrals**
Grade 9	6,234	8,926	112	29
Grade 10	4,867	6,398	46	9
Grade 11	3,199	2,024	20	0

The data here show the progression and impact of the implementation of a merit and demerit system school-wide for teachers and students. The dynamics and growth of a founding school seem to have impacted the ability of teachers to implement a school-wide system. As shared by participants, as the school continued growing, the leadership team was trying to focus on having teams of grade levels teachers work together, so that they could reflect upon the implementation of the merit and demerit system throughout the year. As observed in the data in Table 4, the number of merits and demerits were much higher for the first year of the school. It is important to highlight that the first year in which the school was opened, only high school freshmen attended the school. As mentioned by the ninth-grade interview, this trend indicates the

dependence of teachers on the merit and demerit system during that first year of implementation, along with their mindset of equating authoritarian practices to being a good teacher. Moreover, participants shared that they believed that the decrease in the use of merit and demerits was attributed to student conditioning and understanding of how merits and demerits worked at the school. The following discussion highlights the connection between the data from the study and how they connected and helped explain how student referral and punishment was carried out at CPCHS.

Demerits

Through the use of the merit and demerit system, teachers had the ability to assign demerits to students who did not follow the school values and principles, as outlined by the graph of behaviors making up the merit and demerit system at CPCHS. Demerits were used as a means of reminding students to refocus their behavior and complying with teacher directions in the classroom. As stated by Patty:

> "Demerits help students understand that certain behaviors cannot disrupt the learning of the classroom." (Patty, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

All participants in this study agreed that, for students to see demerits as a valuable discipline practice, every grade level team teacher needed to be on the same page and consistent with the types of demerits issued. Ana stated:

> "Consistency in implementing demerits is important because it allows for students to see that all teachers hold the same expectations for their behaviors in class." (Ana, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

All participants shared that being consistent with the type of referrals given for inappropriate behaviors allowed students to see that teachers at the school shared the same expectations—rather than leading students to believe that some teachers were "laid back" or "cool." As stated by Brittney, it was important that students see that "every adult in the building is going to hold them to the same expectations, and it's not a personal thing, or a matter of whether a teacher likes you or not" (Brittney, First 10th-Grade Focus Group). Hence, for the teachers in this study, their use of demerits at CPCHS was considered an important aspect of maintaining an orderly and high achieving classroom environment. As shared by teachers in this study, new teachers may tend to comply more closely with demerits, as they may be more insecure or lack confidence in their role as classroom teachers. Hence, a logical response for new teachers was to assert a greater sense of control over students with the use of the merit and demerit system, in order to establish themselves as having control of their classrooms, which they often associated with being a good teacher.

In addition, participants agreed on the importance of students being cared for when issuing demerits. As stated by one of the participants, it is important for students to not see demerits as teachers "picking" on students, but instead see the use of demerits as part of "looking for the best in me, and if I mess up, they are not angry about it. My teachers will remind me of the behavior that I need to correct to continue learning throughout the day" (Brittney, Second 10th-Grade Focus Group). Based on the insights provided by participants, the mindset related to demerits at CPCHS equated demerits to a "reminder" or an effort to redirect the behavior of students.

Merits

Part of the merit and demerit system at CPCHS focused on incentivizing good behavior with the ability to provide merits for students. Just like demerits, the school had outlined and defined behaviors considered to be worthy of merits (see Appendix 1). Across the board, teachers shared their frustrations with not being more proactive about giving students merits throughout the day. As stated by Christopher:

> "I think it's easy to be very consistent on pointing out negative behaviors. I think it's harder on the positive behaviors to be as consistent … I don't feel like there is a directive to be positive. I think in fact, it's kind of the opposite. Like it's more of your discretion to give students merits. I don't know if that is a problem, and it might be better that way, but it's something we have considered as a team." (Christopher, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Some participants shared that during summer professional development, the practice of using the merit and demerit system focused more on providing students with demerits, rather than merits. They further shared that their discussions of how to implement merits was limited to focusing on the behaviors they wanted to see in their classrooms, which led to concentrating on correcting misbehavior, rather than praising students for their positive behaviors. All participants shared that each grade level tried to balance the amount of merits and demerits given each week, but they noticed that they were seldom able to meet that balance. As such, participants admitted readily that the imbalance of merits and demerits was a personal struggle for them, where they questioned their ability to be more positive in the classroom.

Along with reflecting on their ability to provide more merits for students, participants shared their thoughts about the effectiveness of merits in increasing positive student behavior. Tania shared, for example:

> "Merits place a huge extrinsic motivator on students … they tend to internalize the good behaviors because they want to receive merits from teachers." (Tania, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

All participants shared that merits were a good strategy for praising students and recognizing students throughout the school day. They shared that merits allowed students to feel empowered and "feel more positive about the interactions that they had on a daily basis with teachers" (Patty, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group). Apparently, participants did feel that merits allowed positive interactions between students and teachers, although they experienced a challenged in using them more often.

Detention

Along with merits and demerits, teachers were able to issue detentions to students who received three demerits and automatic detentions for behaviors deemed as more egregious by the behavior chart of the school's merit and demerit system. Detentions were mostly given for cursing in the classroom and for inappropriate responses (talking back) to a teacher. As stated by Paul:

> "Detentions are an additional reminder to students about the importance of upholding our school values. Detention is not like a demerit that is given and then you don't have to deal with anymore." (Paul, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

All participants shared the belief that detentions were meant to allow students time to reflect about the way they approached a situation or did not meet a behavioral expectation.

Roberto shared that detentions allowed teachers to correct inappropriate behaviors in the classroom because

> "Kids don't know how to behave and we all make mistakes. Our job as teachers is to guide students through how to fix mistakes, while in a structured setting, because in the real world, they are going to learn the hard way." (Roberto, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

All participants shared that they appreciated the opportunity to give students detentions for misbehavior in the classroom. They shared that as teachers they felt empowered to not have to rely on the administration team to take on the task of issuing detentions to students for more egregious behavior. Participants also shared that they felt that students respected teachers more because they knew that teachers had the ability to give detentions, as opposed to only the administration team at the school.

Referrals

Along with merits, demerits, and detentions, the behavior chart for the merit and demerit system at CPCHS outlined student behaviors that called for a referral out of the classroom. Along with outlining those behaviors for teachers, the administration team provided a document outlining the steps teachers should take before a student would be sent out of class. As shared by participants, the teacher needed to address the student and provide directions for what behaviors needed to be corrected. If the teacher issued three demerits with behavior corrections to students, then the teacher needed to have a conversation with the student about the in-class behavior.

During this conversation, the teacher must assess whether the student may be redirected with the help of the dean of students or the student's counselor. If the teacher felt it appropriate to ask the dean of students or counselor to speak to the student, the adult was called to speak to the student. When the student returned to class—if the student continued with misbehavior after the conversation with the teacher, dean of students, or counselor, then the student was sent to the dean of students with a formal referral. This referral merited a conversation with the dean of students, a written reflection from the student, a meeting with a parent, and a meeting with the teacher before the student returned to class.

Teachers in this study considered referrals an extreme measure that should only be taken to ensure that the learning of other students was not affected negatively. All participants shared the importance of making sure the misbehavior of one student did not hinder learning from continuing during a class period. About this, Brittney stated:

> "I feel that the merit and demerit system supports referrals as a system. I think it can be very helpful in making sure you are not giving referrals everyday because there are certain things that students are held accountable for. For example, a student can't get a referral for talking, that's a demerit. I feel that is really good for new and beginning teachers because I feel that sometimes it can be hard to separate emotion from your job. There are teachers who will kick kids out just because the kid is being annoying and I actually think that having to justify why the student is receiving a referral is just good for our school because it means that kids are in the classroom unless they have done something egregious. Our students are sent out of class only if they are being openly defiant after four checks, or, if they did something to someone that is inappropriate. I just

feel like it makes a referral so much more serious and it send the message that referrals are not a subjective thing. It also means we are thinking of you (student) as a person. It also helps the teacher reflect. For example, did I (teacher) go through all the steps before sending the student out of class?" (Brittney, Second 10th-Grade Focus Group)

All participants shared that when a student was sent out of the classroom with a referral, it compromised the authority the teacher had in class. Participants shared that referrals made students feel excluded from the classroom and also diminished the authority a teacher had with a student. Ana explained it in the following way:

"Students are yours until June. I think that especially at a small school like this, students don't have the ability to take the same class with another teacher because there is one teacher that teaches the subject and grade level. This forces the teacher to know that you need to repair relationships with students, and that, as soon as you send them out of your class that kind of lowers your authority. I think there is a line and there are things where they need to go to administration, or they (students) need to leave the classroom right away. If a teacher gives a student a referral then it is important to have a conversation with them before they return to the classroom so it's not that the student doesn't ever want to go to your class again." (Ana, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

All participants highlighted the importance of repairing the relationship with the student before the student returned to class. For these teachers, taking the opportunity to have a conversation with the dean of students and the students themselves allowed for a discussion that helped the student reflect on his or her behaviors in class. In addition, participants shared that having the dean of students present allowed teachers to send a united message about school-wide

behavior expectations for students. Teachers also shared that sitting down and having a conversation with a student allowed the student to understand that a referral is not the focus of what teachers want from students, but instead, focused the student toward understanding the behavior. This, they unanimously surmised, allowed the student to learn and not be excluded from the classroom setting.

Summary of Findings

Based on the data collected from interviews and classroom observations, the following trends emerged in the study. First, participants expressed their belief in the importance of caring for students to make any discipline system work for a school community. All participants shared that teacher mindsets, values, and beliefs about student success directly affected the way teachers carried out discipline in the classroom.

Another trend that emerged among the participants was the belief that restorative justice practices in schools helped build relationships between teachers and students. As shared by participants, restorative justice practices at CPCHS had helped to build relationships between teachers and students. All participants shared that restorative justice, along with a merit and demerit system, could only work if supported by a school's administration team.

Another trend that emerged repeatedly was the belief in the need for consistency and following through when employing the merit and demerit system. All participants firmly concluded that being consistent with a merit and demerit system allowed students to learn what behaviors are appropriate and expected in the classroom. Moreover all participants shared their belief that teacher expectations involved a number of essential factors. They mentioned that

teacher expectations of classroom management were influenced by specific learning theories as well as educational structures and practices instilled by teacher education programs.

Throughout the focus groups, participants discussed that their work in grade-level teams were guided by a belief in student success and defining life success as college graduation. At the same time, all participants shared their concern for having students depend on a school-wide discipline system that extrinsically motivated them. Participants, however, did express a concern that after students left a structured school, they would not be able to adjust to a college environment that did not offer as much structure.

Although stated earlier, it is worth repeating that all participants expressed that teachers at CPCHS held a belief in student success and achievement, which drove their implementation of the merit and demerit system. The underlying goal for these participants was to help prepare their students for the demands of the college setting. Participants shared the importance of implementing restorative practices that would foster positive classroom environments. Ultimately, these teachers perceived that the merit and demerit system offered educators the opportunity to implement behavioral expectations and consequences that allowed students to reflect upon what behaviors were appropriate in the classroom setting and, through this process, more readily correct their behavior in positive ways.

Chapter 5 offers an analysis and discussion of all these finding, along with implications and recommendation related to emancipatory discipline practices that are in sync with critical pedagogical approaches in the education of working class students of color.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"Research suggests that tougher discipline without increases in student perceptions of fairness could stifle educational development and proper socialization" (Richard Arum, 2003).

School discipline practices in public schools create school and classroom environments that have been shown to impact the educational experience of students of color in schools (Arum, 2003; Losen et al., 2016). In recent years, restorative justice practices in schools have been implemented with the goal of creating school communities that develop the personal character of students in schools (Stutzman & Mullet, 2005). Charter schools have been on the cutting edge of creating school discipline practices meant to teach discipline, develop character, and ultimately help students prepare for a college path. Parents are sold a promise of a great education in smaller school communities that are more "strict" and help a student to prepare for the demands of the college setting. Yet, more recently, some charter school sectors are moving toward rethinking discipline (Disare, 2016). This study is an example of such an effort.

As discussed in Chapter 2, research has shown that the relationship a teacher builds with a student is of upmost importance in creating a supportive academic environment for learning (Kohn, 2006). Teachers become agents of fairness in classrooms, as they work with students to understand issues of fairness related to school discipline as a community concern**.** Fairness is an important element of compliance; therefore fairness is a function of legitimacy and moral authority (Arum, 2003). If students perceive discipline practices as unfair, they are most likely to disregard the set rules a school has developed.

The development and implementation of school and classroom discipline is also directly affected by teacher perceptions of school discipline. How a teacher perceives punishment and rules determines the ability of a teacher to implement classroom practices that move students beyond simply compliance (Kohn, 2006). Research has also shown that school communities help create discipline practices that can actually be followed through, when behavioral expectations are communicated in consistent ways among teachers, students, parents, and administrators. Teachers and administrators must then work together to ensure that punishments and referrals are enforced not only in the name of compliance, but also fairness and community well being. Of particular importance in this study was the examination of teacher perceptions related to follow-through of behavioral expectations, their use of a merit and demerit system, and the affects they felt this had on the socialization of youth of color in their charter school environment.

With this in mind, the following sections discuss findings from the study related to the three research questions that drove the collection of data about the teacher perceptions of school discipline and their implementation of a merit and demerit system at CPCHS. The discussion includes a critical analysis of teacher perceptions of discipline, along with a discussion of the tensions between perceptions of discipline and the implementation of a merit and demerit system in ninth- and 10th-Grade classrooms. The discussion and analysis also includes a summary and explanation of how teacher perceptions seemed to impact or inform student referral and punishment.

Teacher Perceptions of School Discipline

The participants shared a belief in upholding high expectations and implementing consistent behavior consequences in the classroom. The perception of having consistency and

high expectations directly connected to the participants' own view of their notions of authority and power in the classroom. This finding related, in particular, to the first research question related to perceptions about school discipline held by ninth- and 10th-Grade teachers at a charter high school (CPCHS) in the greater Los Angeles area. The participants' belief in the achievement of all students as necessary to maintaining a classroom environment conducive to learning was a topic explored in research and backed by evidence of the teacher being a defining factor in establishing classroom environments conducive to learning (Butchart & McEwan, 1998). In addition, participants expressed a belief in having a school-wide system that allowed all grade levels to focus on behaviors in the classroom in the same way. This approach, they mentioned, helped students see consistency in classrooms and did not single them out by one particular teacher.

Perceptions and Reality of Discipline

Throughout the focus groups, participants shared their awareness of the differences they saw working in a low-income community like CPCHS. Several participants noted that some students entered ninth-grade at CPCHS reading at a second-grade level. Participants shared feeling a sense of urgency in making sure they were maximizing classroom time for all students in the classroom. As Patty shared:

> "The responsibility does fall on the teacher to set students up for success." (Patty, Second Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

Participants all agreed that the responsibility of teachers to care for their students was nonnegotiable when working with students from a low-income community (Civil Rights Project, 2000).

Furthermore, participants shared their belief in seeing school discipline as an act of caring for all students. As shared by Christopher, when referring to school discipline at CPCHS:

> "I would just add the personal element. I think the reason why it works is because we all care about the kids a lot and we are warm strict. We are strict, but we really love the kids." (Christopher, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

The teachers in this study believed that correcting what they thought to be misbehavior better prepared the student for life after high school. To some extent, this view is connected to Goleman's (2006) theory of character education, as adults at CPCHS were using the merit and demerit system to teach core values for students attending the school.

Discussions about caring for students and enforcing school discipline through the use of the merit and demerit system took a turn to also discussing some of the difficulties and complexities of a uniform system and the impact on how students felt cared for. Both grade level participants discussed how much easier it was in the classroom to give a demerit over a merit and how, much of the time, outside circumstances affected students in the school setting. This particular view is also highlighted in research that outlines the use of punitive over positive discipline approaches in the classroom (Kohn, 2006; Tough, 2012). Several participants went on to share that they felt that a large majority of the student population was unhappy with the amount of attention given to discipline practices at CPCHS. In addition to that, several participants alluded to observing that students did not know how to behave and needed to be taught how to behave in the classroom. This points to issues of deficit thinking and the resultant process of schooling that negates the knowledge students bring to the classroom (Darder, 2012;

Valenzuela, 1999), as well as the tendency to overlook how students understand expectations to behave in the school setting.

Critical pedagogy asserts that the dominant culture of power in the classroom is rooted in authoritarian practices directly impacting discipline practices in the classroom (Darder, 2012, Darder et al., 2008). Despite agreements shared by the participants in this study related to traditional views of school discipline, critical research perspectives suggest that school-wide expectations for behavior implemented by all teachers with a view to having compliant classrooms becomes authoritarian polices that students must blindly follow (Berwick, 2015; Disare, 2016). Bissell (1991) further explained that educators who seek to enact liberatory goals in discipline practices must not fall prey to the tyrannies of the public school system and work toward resisting and transforming public education. Hence, even educators who care about students can fall prey to disciplinary practices that oppress students of color. This is where an understanding of the impact of personal epistemological influences on school discipline practices is of upmost importance for all educators (Bendixen & Feucht, 2010).

As the participants confirmed, CPCHS socialized youth and helped them understand how to navigate the world with academic and personal skills outlined by a merit and demerit system, which sought to teach each student how to navigate the school context. However, the concern, that this practice raised among the participants was associated with the uncertainty of what would happen to students once the context changed. This issue was raised during the focus group discussions with both grade levels. Teachers at CPCHS were, therefore, keenly aware that they were involved in the formation of student consciousness with respect to moral expectations of school and society. What was at question then is how students would learn to navigate a new

context. Participants realized that the tight structure provided by the merit and demerit system would not be replicated outside of the school. All participants shared their worries about their students' ability to understand fully the factors of behavior conditioning that the merit and demerit system imparted on student character development. As stated by Tough (2012) in his study of charter schools, structure in charter schools sets up students for immediate success and the repercussions of a lack of structure for students are yet to be analyzed and studied.

Educators at CPCHS conceptualized empathy through the framework of their personal experiences with school discipline. The range of experience with school discipline ranged from participants feeling that students "got away" with a lot, to their schools being strict and "vigilant" with discipline practices. Participants mentioned that they must force themselves to look at misbehaviors from the perspective of a student in light of their personal experiences. As shared by Christopher:

> "I was the kid who was not paying attention most of the time (laughter). I would just sit with my head on my desk, reading a book, but not the book for class. It was something that I was interested in … I think for me the biggest thing is that I remember being really upset like my ninth and tenth grade years. I was sad. So a lot of times when I look at our kids, I think about how they are doing. That is something that I go to … here is this kid upset about something. Are they depressed? Are they unhappy?" (Christopher, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Participants also mentioned having open conversations with fellow teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents when they were having difficulties trying to support students in the classroom. According to participants in this study, using a community framework of school

discipline supported teachers at CPCHS to be more empathetic toward their students, a result aligned with restorative justice approaches that seek to enhance the ability of teachers to refrain from using fear and, instead, move toward expressing compassion and empathy when contending with student behavioral issues (Martin, 2015).

The practice of empathy in the implementation of a merit and demerit system is grounded in participants' belief in the mission of college readiness for all students. Through classroom observations, it was evident there is a culture of respect—whether compliance based or not—permeating the classrooms. As stated by Freire (1998), the climate of respect that is born of just, serious, humble, and generous relationships, in which the authority of the teacher and the freedom of students is ethically grounded, converts the pedagogical space into an authentic educational experience. Ethically speaking (and ideally), all adults engage in the teaching profession with the belief that every child can succeed. Christopher linked this to the responsibility of teachers to attend to their relationship with students:

> "I feel like recognizing that if you have an issue with a student and you know that the relationship is not in a good place, then you need to address it. It is important to work with the admin team and reflect on how to do better as a teacher. I mean, not every teacher and student will have a great relationship, but you have to have respect for the discipline process and students have to know that you care about them." (Christopher, Second 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Teachers believed it was their responsibility to work on engaging and developing meaningful relationships with students and helping students understand the purpose behind the merit and demerit system at CPCHS. Participants shared the importance or repairing relationships with

students to ensure that students felt respected and begin to understand the perspective of adults at CPCHS. Part of the process for having students understand an adult perspective connected to the notion of having students see the discipline system as a system of behavior support whereby the school outlined acceptable behaviors in the classroom. Students were expected to see teachers as enforcers of the college-ready expectations set by the merit and demerit.

Dominant cultural beliefs about compliance and student discipline were perceived as acts of empathy for participants in this study. Participants embraced the college-ready mission for CPCHS because they defined their own success with college completion—again, an example of where personal epistemology drives teacher perceptions (Bendixen & Feucht, 2010). Moreover, the view that compliance of the merit and demerit system equated with the success of students seemed to inadvertently negate concern for those students who would not meet the behavioral expectations of the merit and demerit system at CPCHS. Moreover, society's behavioral expectations of students in schools mirrored those of compliance and submission to the rules set forth by districts, schools, or teams of educators (Bissell, 1991; Darder, 2012; Kohn, 2006).

Students who are unable to meet set expectations are sometimes blamed negatively for their lack of ability to assimilate and "fit into" the school cultures through intense discipline practices (Darder, 2002, 2012). This seemed to true in this study, despite the fact that participants mentioned that students who needed more help with adjusting to the merit and demerit system received additional intensive supports provided by counselors and the dean. This approach acted as a problematizing concept for the merit and demerit system, as teachers agreed that it was not a one-size-fits-all approach to addressing learning gaps of behavior for students who struggled to adjust to the merit and demerit culture at CPCHS.

Participants noted that teachers at the school received additional support from the administrative team and parents when working with students that the merit and demerit system process was unable to support. From parent meetings, student meetings, restorative circles, and counseling for students, these practices were meant to assist the student to understand the impact of their misbehavior in the classroom and how it affected their educational attainment at CPCHS. Teachers mentioned that they empathized with these students because, when entering CPCHS,

> "… students had to undo years of bad education and a lack of behavior expectations from middle schools that students attended." (Brittney, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

This, unfortunately, was yet another example of deficit notions that impacted student discipline in this school setting.

Authoritarian Discipline

From the perspective of participants, discipline practices help students learn from their mistakes by allowing them to reflect. During the focus groups, participants shared that approaching every conflict with empathy helped the educator to understand the root of conflicts in the classroom. Participants shared stories of how follow-up conversations with students allowed them to hear and understand a student's perspective. This type of reflection was evident in the focus groups and in the in-class classroom observations. Even though some of the demerits given during class were punitive and nonreflective, several conversations and discussions occurred with teachers and students about demerits and conflict arising in class. As stated by Patty:

> "Meeting with a student about a discipline incident helps and develops trust and understanding so you can work with the student ... It gives you a chance to clarify that

tomorrow, the next time I see you, it's a fresh start." (Patty, Second Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

In the focus groups with teachers, it became evident that they believed the discipline practices used through the merit and demerit system at CPCHS were what Gay (2000) called culturally relevant discipline practices. Unfortunately, despite their impressions, upon closer analysis, the merit and demerit system is actually quite authoritarian in nature. The perception of teachers was that they were addressing discipline with an approach to student reflection but, as observed in observations, students were not given the opportunity to reflect on their behavior redirections. Instead, students were being conditioned to learn through an adult-led discipline process at CPCHS. This antidialogical approach is consistent with banking education and concerns that Bissell (1991) has raised about repressive (albeit well-meaning) power relations between teachers and their students.

Freire (1998) believed that a student's moral construction and deconstruction of character evolves through a critical praxis whereby students' lived experiences must be at the center of the discourse. At CPCHS, teachers had begun the process of engaging students in critical praxis, however it remained yet at a surface level. This process was limited by the participants' traditional belief of discipline as measured by student compliance and the standardization of behaviors for a merit and demerit system, which predominantly defined student academic success as college preparedness. During focus group discussions and classroom observations, reflection and engagement of school discipline was limited to talking about behaviors defined by the merit and demerit system as misbehavior. During follow-up conversations, teachers and students reflected on the actions students needed to change in order to meet teacher expectations

and comply with an authoritarian school-wide discipline system. Through classroom observations, it became evident (despite best intentions) that school discipline efforts lacked connection to students' lived experiences, and, ultimately, ignored the great potential that might be found in the unfinishedness of the student's human condition (Freire, 1998).

Most of the discipline addressed through demerits observed during classroom was quick, swift, and focused on redirecting behavior in a matter of seconds. Tough (2012) argued that this paternalistic discipline lacks engagement with a pedagogy of autonomy for students and, thus, supported the compliance-based system models and promoted an atmosphere of punitive dependence that ultimately negated student decision making. It is important to note here that this was a concern shared by all participants during focus group discussions. About this concern, Whitman (2008) posited that paternalistic schools tell students exactly how they are expected to behave and their behavior is closely monitored—with extrinsic rewards for compliance and penalties for noncompliance. These qualities of the system described by Whitman (2008) were mirrored by the merit and demerit system at CPCHS. It is worth noting here that, although unexpected, neither classroom observations nor teacher interviews reflected gender differences with respect to teacher views and practices of school discipline.

Hence, what this study clearly echoes was that teachers played a significant role in how students developed their autonomy, their social agency, and how they would, in turn, accept or problematize issues of disciplinary practices in school and similar conflicts that might ensue out in the world. Part of the reflection that was beginning to happen through the use of restorative practices at CPCHS was connected to greater teacher reflection about how a more emancipatory understanding of compliance with the merit and demerit system could better support students in

their educational journey at CPCHS. As Freire (1998) well understood, discipline practices that do not support the psychological, emotional, and social needs of students condition them to become passive agents and interfere with students' critical abilities to contend with issues of freedom and autonomy in more democratic ways. This was a concern that teachers in this study expressed, particularly with respect to the extrinsic nature of the merit and demerit system. For example, Tania stated:

> "Having this system places this huge extrinsic motivator on them and by the time they are this age, you want them to have intrinsic motivation. We wonder what's going to happen when suddenly there is no big motivator in place. Are the kids at that point going to internalize everything? Or is it going to fail? It's hard to tell." (Tania, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Even though conversations about what true freedom and autonomy looked like for students had been initiated, participants shared that there were outside factors such as charter management expectations, expectations of the administration team, and state testing that limited teacher abilities to implement truly democratizing practices that could genuinely engage students in reflection about discipline practices and the socialization of students, based on those practices. From the focus groups and classroom observations, it was evident that, as a team, the school had begun the process of problematizing the impact of the merit and demerit system on a student's long-term character development, particularly for students of color.

Reflection of Teacher Perceptions by the Merit and Demerit System

As a charter school, CPCHS was working to build the character of their students with the use of a merit and demerit system that upheld values the teachers felt were necessary in order to

be successful in college. According to the participants in this study, the rewards and consequences of the merit and demerit system translated to discipline practices that become defining factors, which would contribute in significant ways to the life trajectory of students of color. The reality was that students were being socialized in traditional middle class norms that this particular group of educators saw as necessary to life success in this society.

The merit and demerit system is, thus, conditioning students to navigate arenas of education that thrive on having students learn to follow the rules and not question the status quo. In this way, particular values, beliefs, and relationships about student discipline connected to the hidden curriculum of college readiness perpetuate inequality in schools and society (Darder, 2002). It was with this in mind that my second research question focused on assessing whether the current perceptions of school discipline were accurately reflected in the school's merit and demerit system.

According to participants, they were free to provide input to the development and update of the merit and demerit system at CPCHS. They mentioned that, as a school, they also felt that they had opportunities to engage in open and honest conservations about things that were working with discipline practices in relation to student progress. The mindset of teachers was that a united front supported students best. Ultimately, the most difficult process these educators faced was the conversation about what authority and power means in the classroom and how it is implicated within the context of discipline practices.

For Kohn (2006), the beginning of discipline should include the thoughts and perspective of students. This can only happen when teachers are able to see students as part of the discipline process. As Roberto mentioned:

> "I like the fact that demerits are opened to communication with the grade level teams and the dean. If as a team we feel that students are being affected negatively by a demerit, or if we need to add or remove a demerit or merit to the system to ensure that students behave a certain way, we have the ability to do just that." (Roberto, Second 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Teachers perceived their ability to add and change the merit and demerit system as a method of equality and support for students. What they did not critique were the authoritarian, adult-led, merit and demerit system implemented at the school, about which students have little to no say.

Participants all acknowledged that the merit and demerit system perpetuated middle class values, but they considered these important to student social mobility, particularly after they graduate from CPCHS. Unfortunately, the American Dream myth, which historically has linked education to social mobility, is not borne out by recent national research that concludes, "upward social mobility is limited in the United States" (Greenstone, Looney, Patashnik, & Yu, 2013). Nevertheless, a big part of what drove the development and implementation of the merit and demerit system at CPCHS was the belief that it would promote greater access to college for all students attending the school. It was not surprising, then, to find that teachers and administrators at the school were committed to helping students prepare for the academic and social demands of college through the use of a merit and demerit system, which they considered to be fostering the values and beliefs to be found in a college environment. Hence, despite a few concerns mentioned during focus groups, teacher perceptions, over all, seemed in sync with the school discipline system. Triangulation regarding the inclusion of teacher perceptions of school

discipline in the merit and demerit system is also apparent in both the school and the teachers' social messaging of behavior expectations, as well as educational goals and outcomes.

Student Conditioning, Agency, and Voice

College Preparatory Charter High School took a full day during the summer, prior to students entering ninth grade, to teach them the behavior expectations of the merit and demerit system. Through a day-long training led by the dean of students, a teacher, and a group of tenth- and 11th-grade students, incoming freshmen received an introduction to the merit and demerit system, as it pertained to expectations, positive praises, and consequences for misbehavior. Emphasis was placed on a student's ability to show college readiness by demonstrating college-like traits in their behavior in the classroom. As stated by Paul:

> "The college ready incentive has been a big thing for kids … there is a certain swagger about kids that are excited about the college ready incentive." (Paul, Second 10th-Grade Focus Group.

All participants agreed that CPCHS focused on providing the message to students that the merit and demerit system be understood as an important aspect of college preparation. The power dynamics of having students see college readiness as the only way to define success highlighted a deeper social challenge for CPCHS, which was rooted in the dominant ideal of college graduation and adoption of a merit and demerit discipline system, as important to life success. The college-ready culture then becomes a one-way dimensional definition of success that impacts self-perception for students that might not have aspirations to continue to college right after high school (Stephan, Davis, Lindsay, & Miller, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, participants shared their concerns for students who were not able to adapt to the behavior expectations of the merit and demerit system. Even tough teachers optimistically mentioned that higher-needs students received additional supports from the school, but they still worried about such students' ability to adapt to social settings outside of the school. Teachers mentioned the desire of the school to work with students to change their behavioral patterns when behaviors were affecting students negatively in terms of their educational attainment.

On many occasions, participants mentioned the importance of building relationships with students to foster ways of solving problems with them, as opposed to solving problems for them. This perception of discipline is presented in Kohn's (2006) work through his development of the 10 principles of "working with" students through disciplinary incidents. Teachers believed that students were receiving the social message that even through discipline challenges, adults on campus were willing to support students to reflect on discipline incidents in order to help students learn from their mistakes. Participants agreed that CPCHS focused on helping students see the supports available through the merit and demerit system as a tool for redirecting behavior. As Brittney shared:

> "The role of addressing misbehavior with the use of the merit and demerit system is largely trying to make an environment where misbehavior is not the norm. An environment where students know that teachers are looking for positive behavior, but also creating an environment where the teacher is not solely relying on the merit and demerit system to do all the work for them. The merit and demerit system is a tool in a

box of many other strategies to support student learning." (Brittney, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Overall, teachers discussed the importance of not relying on the merit and demerit system as a sole support for developing relationships with students. They perceived the follow-up and restorative circle discussions as adding to the element of "working with" students through discipline situations. Yet, in classroom observations and during follow-up sessions, students seemed to be shut down when trying to explain their own perspectives on teachers' disciplinary actions. The process of "working with" students was being implemented at a more surface level, whereby follow-up sessions were actually another opportunity for the adult to get their perspective across and get the students to understand what behaviors they needed to change, in order to avoid demerits.

Limitations of Merit and Demerit System

Although teachers expressed, for the most part, positive sentiments related to their perceptions of the merit and demerit school discipline system, limitation existed. Darder (2002) has argued that, in schools:

> educational and discipline policies that govern the meritocratic classroom environment- testing, assessment and promotion- ultimately determine which students are going to receive the privilege to be teachers, doctors, lawyers, artist, etc. and, hence, affording them the opportunities tied to these professions. (p. 76)

The politics of meritocracy then determines which students receive benefits, opportunities, and resources. Similarly, in schools like CPCHS, discipline practices become defining factors that contribute to the life trajectory of students. In the case of CPCHS, the social messaging about

behavior expectations inextricably connected a student's ability to become college ready with the adoption of and compliance to behavior policies as outlined by a merit and demerit system. The definition of life-success for students at CPCHS was equated to eventually being able to graduate from college. Consequently, in concert with Darder's work, the politics of college-readiness at CPCHS contributed to the life trajectory of students, whereby their future potential was directly tied to vocations or professions that require a college degree.

During the focus groups, participants shared concerns about the social messaging of college graduation being the only key to defining life-success. Some participants shared that the mission of the school focused on access to college for students, but, ultimately, students should have the choice of whether they wanted to pursue other pathways after high school. Lucy lamented:

> "It is difficult to see when students put themselves down when sharing aspirations of other professions that do not require a college degree." (Lucy, Second Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

As shared by some participants, this belief can hinder students from exploring life experiences outside of college graduation, which begs the question as to how these students valued this mandatory merit and demerit system.

Some participants did openly talk about that limitations of the merit and demerit system, which included discipline practices that covertly promoted and perpetuated authoritarian discipline practices at CPCHS. As much as teachers valued the system, they did question the nature of a merit and demerit system that might not be meeting the cultural norms of the

community they were serving. Several teachers also mentioned the complexities of working with discipline practices that did not include student voice.

Kohn (2006) argues if students are "treated as if they need to be controlled, we undermine their natural predispositions to develop self-controls and internalized commitments to upholding cultural values and norms" (p. 42). Teachers recognized the inability to include full student voice when providing feedback on the merit and demerit system. They talked about feeling conflicted about how the merit and demerit system was either setting up or not setting up students for success. Teachers contradicted themselves, and recognized the contradiction, as they touched upon what they felt was the importance of upholding a merit and demerit system perpetuating middle class values, but at the same time recognizing the views students had about their own cultural values and norms. Patty shared a personal experience of working with a charter management organization outside of California, with similar college-ready and discipline values as CPCHS:

> "I think that, my experience at a charter school outside of California was not so positive. Everything was super structured, super organized, and everyone was on the same page. But I really didn't feel like it was human, to the point of, dehumanizing and racism. I think that administration had in their mind that teaching students to engage in certain expectations was really important and teaching students to engage in certain cultural norms that were essentially middle class, White cultural norms, was important. I don't think anyone disagrees that kids being fluent in those norms is potentially helpful, but, it was done while devaluing their cultural norms. That was super problematic on a lot of levels. I think seeing the structure done here in a way that is still positive and doesn't

preach a certain way of being beyond what is just effective learning has been a really important shift for me to see." (Patty, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

Patty further shared her belief that CPCHS focused on the perpetuation of school values, based on the belief of good learning.

Ultimately, even the definition of good learning was subject to the perceptions of the groups of adults working with the school's student population. The social validation of discipline practices in schools that serve students of color promotes an ideological perpetuation of the message of acculturating and understanding of social norms and cues of a dominant group. As Darder (2012) has contended, the underlying principles related to both curriculum content and teaching methodology are derived from what is considered to be the function of American mainstream society: the perpetuation of values and social relations that produce and legitimate the dominant worldview at the expense of a vast number of its citizens.

In the case of CPCHS, teachers all supported a merit and demerit system because they felt it was connected to social mobility for students in this country. However, the perpetuation of discipline practices that fostered values of social relations and a dominant worldview could hinder the ability of students to contextualize their own cultural norms in relation to their own lived histories. The propagation of mainstream ideals of education begins to define a new world view for students, which disrupts their ability to understand the oppression that results from being forced to assimilate cultural norms that are not their own.

Student Referral and Punishment

Lack of creativity in developing discipline polices that are meant to act as behavioral interventions for students can lead to discipline for control or quick resolution, rather than a

student's lifelong learning. When dealing with conflict, schools often do not view situations as an opportunity for teachable moments, but rather as something to simply move through (Stutzman & Mullet, 2005). With this in mind, the third research question focused on the extent to which the merit and demerit system impacted school discipline perceptions and practices, with respect to inequalities in student referral and punishment. General findings about perceptions of student discipline at CPCHS included teachers' genuine belief in the importance and value of the merit and demerit system. All participants shared their belief in having a uniform system of expectations for students in the classroom. Major findings from triangulation of responses in focus groups and data from observations revealed the following factors about inequities related to student referral and punishment at CPCHS: one-size-fits-all, the fear of student failure outside a structured setting, and a decline in student voice and social agency.

Consistency and Follow-Up

Participants agreed on the importance of using the merit and demerit system consistently across grade levels. During observations, it was evident that teachers were willing and able to address behaviors that their grade-level team had agreed to address in class. Teachers mentioned that having uniformed systems allowed students to perceive the system as fair. Regardless of this belief, teachers still shared concerns about their ability to navigate the use of the merit and demerit system and, therefore, sometimes found themselves using alternative responses when addressing behaviors in class. Moreover, participants did express concerns about having one system with uniform rules, which at times did not apply to all students. About this, Maria stated:

> "I think part of my concern is having a one-size-fits-all system that even special education students are held accountable to. Especially with students with special needs,

> for those that are really hyper active the question becomes; where do we draw the line between being fidgety and looking through your backpack, and being off task? As a special education teacher, I understand how to best support students and I worry that some of their behaviors will lead to demerits from other teachers." (Maria, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

Participants in both grade levels agreed that having a one-size-fits-all approach to addressing discipline could have a negative effect on outcomes for students, especially those who might need accommodations. This is where participants shared that adding restorative justice practices to the development of a merit and demerit system helped to support teachers in understanding how to best address behaviors with students. Some teachers mentioned that they had fallen prey to the concern Maria shared above, but they also felt they had the opportunity to sometimes rectify the mistake by following-up with students, or students themselves would follow up with their teachers. Rebecca shared an example of how she was able to use the merit and demerit system as a support, rather than as a mandatory discipline tool in her classroom:

> "I think it's also about knowing your student. I know there was a certain student today who had his backpack on during the beginning activity in class. I told him he needed to take it off and I didn't freak out or anything. I was really calm and I came back to check-in with him maybe like a minute later. He finished writing his beginning activity and then he took it off. I think another teacher would have approached the situation differently. I do think and believe 100% that we are not wearing our backpacks during class time. But knowing that this student is more defensive than others, it's ok to give him that minute to take it off himself. Allowing the student to make the choice of taking off his back pack,

and giving him space to do it, allowed for us to not have a confrontation in the classroom. Even a demerit in the situation would have probably made him upset and we would have gone back and forth. Just like with our students with special needs, I know who they are, and I know how to modify my use of the merit and demerit system to support the student and allow for classroom conflict between teacher and student to be minimal." (Rebecca, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

One reason why participants felt they had the capacity to use the merit and demerit system as a support rather than a mandate in the classroom was because of the school's implementation of restorative justice practices that encouraged teachers to deviate from the merit and demerit system in times when they felt they can support students without the use of a merit or demerit. Teachers mentioned, however, that deviating from the merit and demerit system as a tool for behavior management was difficult to do, and, because of the perceptions of fairness, they tended to stick to issuing merits and demerits as outlined by the discipline system.

In one of the focus groups, Tania shared her concern about one-size-fits-all approach to student discipline:

"I think something that can be limiting is that despite context, despite the kid's situation, a merit and demerit system can be unfair. We are kind of expected to hold every student accountable to expectations because that is what's fair. So if an expectation isn't met then you get a demerit. Most of the time, yeah, that's great, but there are definitely times where you feel like you can just give a student a quick correction and it turns it all around. As teachers, it's also difficult to know when we can deviate and do just that. We do a great job this year in communicating with the grade level, but what happens when

you have a teacher that is by the book and uses the merit and demerit system as an end all be all?" (Tania, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

Some participants shared that they felt comfortable with and knowledgeable about implementing the merit and demerit system in the classroom. Teachers also recognized the potential inequities that a merit and demerit system carried in the classroom. About this, participants did express concern about the complexities of the merit and demerit system as it referred to the issue of equity in the discipline process. They expressed feeling the need not to allow students to "get away" with behaviors that affected students negatively in the learning process.

Van Wormer and Walker (2012) have correctly noted that, from a traditional perspective, the absence of a punitive response when conflict arises means the child has not been held accountable and has been "saved" or "rescued" from the consequences of his or her wrongdoing. In such an instance, the teacher is considered permissive. This traditional perspective of discipline is what seems to keep the teachers in this study connected to the school's merit and demerit system. The need not to be permissive to students is part of the conditioning process of teachers who are taught to see discipline as based either on a reward or a consequence. This shift in mindset hopefully will be offset as teachers are more exposed to true restorative practices, which will allow teachers at the school to "work with" students in the discipline process.

Teachers at CPCHS also voiced an understanding or perceiving bad behavior as a function or manifestation of a student needing help. Maria explained:

"The responsibility of us as teachers is obviously to provide that safe environment. Provide a safe space, an organized space. I know that we talk about the right to implement 90% of the things that will decrease the amount of distractions. And when it

> comes to that 10% of students, we will need to use restorative justice practices and other means of intervention when making decisions as a team for how to best support the student." (Maria, First Ninth-Grade Focus Group)

All participants shared that the system worked as a mode of compliance for about 90% of the student population. Teachers admitted that working with students who were not able to "fall in line" required time and commitment from a team of teachers, parents, counselors, and the students themselves. Kohn (2006) has noted that educators who genuinely care about helping students assist them to become caring people, but a rewards system does not necessarily help students become "good" or "responsible" citizens. Instead, rewards systems condition students to blindly follow someone's rules, thwarting the development of their own voices, social agency, and self-determination (Darder, 2012).

Student Agency

All participants agreed that the school had implemented structures that allowed students to experience academic and personal success at CPCHS. They also agreed that students were motivated to do well in school because of the incentives the merit and demerit system offered them. However, Pink (2009) asserted, "Rewards can deliver a short term boost, but the effects wear off, and worse can reduce a person's long-term motivation to continue a project" (p. 8). The fear of a student failing outside of the CPCHS community was directly connected to the amount of structure that would be absent from the students' experience once they leave CPCHS. With a focus on college readiness, participants shared worries about students not knowing how to motivate themselves in their first year in college. Tania shared:

> "And to add to that when we talk about them being so close to college, it's like having this system places this huge extrinsic motivator on them and by the time they are juniors and seniors, you want them to have intrinsic motivation. So you wonder what's going to happen when suddenly there is no big motivator in place, where there is no big system in place. Like, are the kids at that point going to internalize everything? Or is it going to fail?" (Tania, First 10th-Grade Focus Group)

What comes into question is the ability of students to develop their own sense of independence and social agency in making choices when they know that the only way they will follow rules and expectations is if they have an adult to enforce them. Teachers question the extent to which students were building independence and agency when their behavioral expectations are defined by a merit and demerit system. Tough (2012) described this concept of independence and agency building as a shallow code of conduct students tend to follow; it prevails as long as teachers are supervising behaviors in the classroom and school setting. If teachers' perceptions of the merit and demerit system are correct, about 90% of students will have internalized what the school believes to be college-ready behaviors, while 10% will again struggle to adjust to an environment that expects the same behaviors, but without the external surveillance and intervention.

Student Voice

With merit and demerit systems limiting the ability of teachers to try restorative justice forms of intervention, the struggle becomes greater with respect to having teachers challenge conflicts and contradictions in the arena of discipline practices in schools (Darder, 2012). Even in school like CPCHS, where teachers have the flexibility to implement restorative practices

along with a merit and demerit system, teachers have difficulty building environments that support an emancipatory view of authority, encouraging students to rethink critically their values, ideas, and actions in relation to consequences they might experience, in relation to themselves, others, and the world (Darder, 2012).

From classroom observations, it was evident that students had internalized the system to the degree to which they had learned to politely agree with adults. As observed during one classroom observation:

> "A student received a detention for inappropriately responding to a demerit. The student stayed after class to apologize to the teacher for rolling her eyes. The student tells the teacher that she was not feeling well and that she was upset that she had received a demerit during class. The teacher let the student know that even though she was not feeling well, she still expects the student to behave in class. The student then agreed with the teacher that she deserved detention." (Monica, Second Observation)

It was also noted in observations such as the ones above that students understood the meaning of disagreeing with adults. Participants mentioned that they conveyed to students that all the expectations outlined by the merit and demerit system were meant to help them become college ready. The complexity of compliance for students at CPCHS regarding behavior started with (a) valuing the system, (b) knowing how to work with the system, (c) understanding that adults have a united front, and (d) the perspective of adults is the one mostly valued.

During observations, students seemed to value the system as a tool to ensure that the classroom is a space of learning. This, more than likely, was related to the teacher or school's

repetition of this value within the classroom, particularly with respect to the learning of self and others. For example, during an observation, the following was stated:

> "The teacher addressed a student for falling asleep in class. The teacher states to the student that he needed the student to 'stay awake to make sure you are retaining the concepts.' The teacher went on to further state that every time he had to address the student in class 'it affected the learning time of other students in class' because he needed to take time from class to address the student that was falling asleep." (Christopher, First Observation)

Teachers were able to redirect behaviors in the classroom with, and without, the use of the merit and demerit system. Another concept noted, but difficult to confirm with the data gathered, was the degree to which students had learned to "work" the system. Yet, in almost every follow-up conversation between teachers and students witnessed, the student ended up apologizing to the teacher for his/her behavior in class. This again calls into question the degree to which students were honestly and conscientiously engaging in restorative conversations with adults on campus. The other concept in question was the student's ability to rethink critically their values, ideas, and actions in relation to the consequences these might generate for themselves and others (Darder, 2012). Are students learning how to critically reflect and problematize their world when resolving conflict, or are they learning to become compliant and silent with respect to their social agency and advocacy?

One factor that might have contributed to students being compliant and not exploring and critically thinking of their actions was the observation that students had accepted the merit and demerit system as part of the schooling experience at CPCHS. As Freire (1998) asserted, a

student's moral construction and deconstruction of character develops through *praxis*, action, and reflection where students' lived experiences must be at the center of the discourse. Thus, at CPCHS, teachers perceived discussions with students to be part of restorative justice practices aimed at engaging student experiences. Yet, if students engaged with adults with the mentality that adults were always right, then they were not engaging in transformative dialogue. Instead, it became a one-dimensional discussion in which adult perspective dictated what students should think and feel about themselves in relation to their level of compliance to the merit and demerit system.

However, this is not to suggest that coercion or manipulation was a deliberate goal or intention of adults at CPCHS. Adults genuinely felt that they engaged with students in restorative conversations to learn what affected students; but through observations of the classrooms, it was evident that students had internalized the belief that adults had absolute power in the school and were always right, or at least, were consistent with consequences for behaviors viewed as inappropriate in the classroom. This, in turn, created a new continuum of understanding of the reality of discipline practices at CPCHS. Overall, participants felt that because of their degree of care for their students, it was possible for them to work with students to make sure that they saw discipline as necessary in the learning process. Nonetheless, it must be noted here that teacher perceptions and practices tied to the merit and demerit system at CPCHS can embody the very kind but still "false generosity" that Freire (1970) argued results from disempowering classroom relations enacted supposedly for the good of the student. Underneath is usually the need to retain absolute control of students and a lack of faith in their capacity to participate in their own governance.

Implications of the Study

There are important findings and implications based on the results of this study. Major inferences point to the manner in which teacher perceptions of school discipline impact the implementation of a merit and demerit system, the impact of a merit and demerit system in stifling the development of student voice, and social agency and self-advocacy, the impact and perception of student referral and punishment, and the manner that power relations and a sense of righteousness are espoused through the practices tied to a merit and demerit system. Each of these implications are discussed in the next sections, to understand how they relate and how they might be connected to the development of school culture at CPCHS.

Teacher Perceptions of School Discipline and Implementation of a Merit and Demerit System

Teachers in this study expressed their belief in school discipline practices implemented by the school as a means to better serve students. Participants shared the importance of having teachers who cared for students and who taught students appropriate behavior in the educational setting, which they linked to being important for their future college endeavors. Ultimately, the dynamic of conversations among teachers and students focused on the adult perspective. As a result, the question about genuine dialogue arose. If teachers were invested in showing a "united front" in thought and perspective with students, how can adults and students engage in genuine conversations about growth and personal development that allow adults to learn as much from students as students learn from adults? In the current culture of the school, students were learning how to best comply with norms, rules, and expectations created by teachers and administrators at

CPCHS and very little about critically engaging teachers regarding discipline practices they might experience as unfair.

Throughout the study, it also became evident that the implementation and co-mingling of a merit and demerit system with restorative justice practices created contradictions, when even well-intentioned educators did not know how to fully navigate the epistemological differences that existed between these two approaches. This raised question about how to best prepare teachers to engage in a communal process of conscientization as a means of supporting students to construct and deconstruct their personal perspectives and classroom actions linked to student needs but that may be in conflict with school mandates of behavior. The process of critical praxis—reflection, action, and transformation—is important in supporting both students and teachers to understand their conditions, in relation to an emancipatory teaching and learning process. For teachers, it is important they see their work as a political act in which they can create the conditions for students to problematize situations, social structures, and their own education in relation to their experience in the world. It is important for students to learn how to problematize their lived conditions, in an effort to begin to break down the barriers of their own limitations and allow their consciousness to develop as historical subjects of their world (Freire, 1970). An emancipatory school discipline process must allow dialogue that can fosters a praxis of community, as students and teachers begin to problematize the set expectations related to the hegemonic ideals that undergird the perceptions and implementation of a merit and demerit system at CPCHS.

Student Voice and Social Agency

At CPCHS, the development of student voice and social agency when facing contradictions and complications in a discipline system was a major challenge. The merit and demerit system hindered students from becoming independent thinkers who could think outside of the limitations placed upon them. Participants agreed that having a "united front" when addressing misbehavior issues in the classroom helped students comply with the expectations set forth. Students saw adult authority as the "end all, be all" in the reality of discipline at CPCHS. This model affected the engagement of dialogue and critical reflection for students. Because adults had an understanding and uniform way of addressing behavior, students were limited in the critical reflection and problematizing of their own conditions as students as CPCHS. Without ill intentions, adults were stifling the ability of students to problematize discipline practices and the inequities some of these practices could create, even in a community like CPCHS that prided itself on being committed to social justice.

Discipline practices at CPCHS were teaching students about social mobility through the use of values and ideals that glorified middle class social norms as the only avenue of personal success. Students were creating a definition of success for themselves that was rooted solely in their belief that college graduation was the only way to define life success. Inadvertently, this approach limits students' aspirations for their very uncertain future in ways that can negatively impact their potential (Martinez, 2015). Discipline policies governing the meritocratic classroom environment, moreover, determine which students are going to receive the privilege to become teachers, doctors, and lawyers and, thus, offer them the social and material opportunities tied to these professions (Darder, 2002). Participants attested that, at CPCHS, the merit and demerit

system as a discipline system of values and beliefs was seen as providing students with privileges generally only available to students being educated in high-income communities. What is in question here is a critical understanding of how voice and social agency in students developed or was stifled at CPCHS, depending on the manner in which mainstream values and ideals were ascribed to or were challenged within the school discipline culture of the school.

Student Referral and Punishment

At CPCHS, teachers saw punishment and referral as a means for reflection and correction of misbehavior. According to the findings in this study, punishment through the use of the merit and demerit system was meant to act as a "reminder," supposedly to help students correct their behavior. Students who did not able respond well to demerits received detention. If that still did not work to correct their behaviors, students were issued referrals for behavior infractions. As affirmed by participants, these practices—regardless of the positive spin adults gave to their explanation and consequences—still mirror an authoritarian approach to school discipline that defies emancipatory objectives. To their credit, participants did express a surface recognition of the contradictions and a need and desire to change this aspect of discipline at CPCHS. However, greater critical understanding of how issues of culture and power impact pedagogical practices (Darder, 2012), including school discipline was needed if the school sought a more emancipatory approach for school discipline.

To some extent, teachers at CPCHS were beginning to engage issues of power in the classroom by also incorporating restorative justice practices that allowed them to understand further the impact of punishments and rewards in the classroom. Coupled with an authoritarian approach to discipline, teachers were using restorative circles and conversations to learn from

student perspectives. The positive understanding of authority and power regarding discipline practices could then be utilized to create a more dialectical view of authority in order to challenge attitudes, beliefs, and actions perpetuating the dependency of punitive approaches in public schools (Bissell, 1991; Darder, 2012). As participants begin to problematize their use of the merit and demerit system, they must also come to understand how their own perceptions and personal epistemologies about what is right and wrong impact the conditions they create in their classrooms every day.

Another important challenge for educators at CPCHS lay in the amount of work and support required for working with students who did not comply with the expectations set forth by the merit and demerit system. At the time of this study, the school supported the schooling experience of students who did not comply with the rules and expectations set forth by adults with extra counseling, dean support, and even home visits. These supports were put in place to help students understand what participants felt was the importance of learning to respect authority in the school setting. However, little was currently being done to enter consistently in a process of self-critique, with respect to the authoritarian practices that could lead to student resistance and refusal to comply.

Many participants shared their concerns for the potential life path of students who were unable to "respect" authority and learn to follow the rules. Much of this sentiment emerged from the participants' own lived experience regarding privilege, relationships with authority, and their adherence to mainstream values. This, in itself, is problematic in understanding the impact of the inculcation of these values in students who growing up in low-income racialized communities, already subjected to structural conditions of inequality in all aspects of their lives (Darder, 2012;

Valenzuela, 1991). The extent to which students' lived experiences were devalued through referral and punishment was also deeply connected to the fostering of mainstream notions of college graduation in defining success for students attending CPCHS. This speaks to the need for expanding the manner in which we define notions of personal success in schools today, particularly within disenfranchised communities of color.

Power and Authority

As discussed previously, a mainstream notion of power and authority is what drove the implementation of discipline practices at CPCHS. In addition, notions of power, teaching, and learning at CPCHS were rooted in the unexamined belief that there was only one way of being. Freire (1970) suggested that this tactic was rooted in the authoritarianism of a banking model of education, in which teachers are the masters and students the learners who are treated as if they are incapable of learning without the teacher dispensing or pouring of knowledge into students. In the case of CPCHS, the banking model extended to fostering discipline practices that adhered to the belief that students must learn from adults. Participants expressed this sentiment in a variety of ways. For example, Brittney stated emphatically: "Students do not know how to behave" (Brittney, First 10th-Grade Focus Group). This deficit mindset perpetuates authoritarian practices in the name of helping student learn mainstream behaviors, values, and ideals. The hidden implications of discipline practices at CPCHS thus devalue the life experiences of low-income students of color and preserved and protected the school's authority as propagated by teachers, counselors, and administrators.

The larger implications of school discipline practices at CPCHS were also rooted in institutional disciplinary practices that inadvertently perpetuate inequity in public schools. This

inequity is rooted in the lack of opportunity that students have to develop their own understanding of the world around them. Moreover, the politics of meritocracy determines which students receive benefits, opportunities, and resources. Similarly, discipline practices become defining factors that contribute in significant ways to the life trajectory of students. In this way, particular values, beliefs, and relationships about student discipline interfere with the development of critical social consciousness, in relation to the schooling people of color in the United States (Darder, 2002). Introducing mainstream ideals and values for social mobility can do more harm than good, if not coupled with the development of a critical praxis that supports the conscientization for students from disenfranchised communities. The propagation of mainstream ideals affects students as they are taught to devalue their own lived experiences and the cultural norms of their families and communities.

Significance

As teachers struggle to challenge conflicts and contradictions in traditional discipline practices in schools, they must also tackle authoritarian ideals of discipline that stifle the teacher's ability to build environments that support an emancipatory view of authority. The teachers at CPCHS were challenged to encourage students to think more critically about their values, ideas, and actions in relation to the consequences they might experience in relation to themselves and others (Darder, 2012). As stated before, many charter schools have been marketed as schools that focus on stringent, military-like, no-excuses discipline practices for students of color. These discipline polices have the unfortunate result of reinscribing larger structures of unfair relations of power in enacting teacher and school authority and power. Accordingly, students learn to comply with hegemonic ideals as the only survival strategy

available to them, including the mentality that college readiness is the only true measure of personal success.

The close-knit communities of charter schools are said to be creating spaces where more time can be dedicated to each student. Nonetheless, in smaller school communities the need for authoritarian practices in school discipline is mirrored from state and local district mandates. Even though there has been a focus on reducing exclusion from the school setting through suspension and expulsion, schools and districts across the nation often negate the opportunity for an emancipatory praxis in school discipline practices. Even as a reform movement, charter schools have a long road ahead in rethinking discipline practices that conserve deficit thinking and banking approaches to school discipline practices. Ultimately, all students possess life experiences that can assist them to grow in consciousness, with engagement and dialogue—as opposed to being mere empty vessels who need to be taught the ways of "behaving."

Critical pedagogical frameworks, as discussed in this study, highlight the negative impact of authoritarian forms of school discipline (Bissell, 1991). For the most part, discipline is dictated by adults, while students are supposed to comply with school rules and expectations. At CPCHS, this notion of authority and power is well apparent, even as participants and staff are beginning to critically problematize their understanding of school discipline and the implications of restorative practices, with respect to the merit and demerit system.

Although all participants defended the use of the merit and demerit system as a means of showing students they cared about their futures, there were moments of intense reflection, and conflict expressed. Consequently, this study sought to foster true dialogue among participants in the focus groups about the limitations of their own school discipline practices and how dialogue

must take student experiences into account when addressing student behaviors that impede the learning process. These discussions seemed to assist participants in recognizing the importance of fostering independence and critical thinking.

This study may help educators and policymakers recognize the incongruence of the nation's push for understanding school discipline practices in ways that can break away from authoritarian discipline practices that negate students voices, social agency, and the ability to form advocacy skills through a deeper understanding of their own lived conditions within the classroom and beyond. The study's significance is also impacted by its investigation of a controversial topic, especially at a charter school, with such high expectations for the academic and personal development of students. Trying to change a system of discipline that is deep-seated in the belief of college readiness for all, based on the actual statements of the people who continue to run the school, remains a significant challenge.

The findings in this study contribute to the limited research regarding discipline practices in charter schools, especially qualitative research about school discipline practices rooted in a merit and demerit system. By being able to investigate teacher perceptions of school discipline in relation to a merit and demerit system through the lived experiences of teachers who enacted often-controversial interventions like demerits, rewards and punishments, a greater awareness of the forces and factors surrounding discipline practices in schools emerged. It revealed larger implications regarding the socialization of youth and the development of consciousness for students from disenfranchised communities.

This research is crucial for any district or charter school employing a merit and demerit system. Merit and demerit systems require evolving conversations from staff members as the

implementation of such systems are affected by teacher perceptions of school discipline. Diverse programs and training might be needed for teachers to explore their own privilege as they embrace the understanding that there is no single path or method that will help all students enact impeccable behavior in the school setting—which, in fact, might, in unexamined ways, actually work against students' self-interest as members of oppressed communities. There is, moreover, truly no one-size-fits-all discipline model that can serve the true needs of every student. This realization is something educational leaders should use to evaluate critical discipline polices that are deeply affected by teacher perceptions of school discipline.

Social Justice and Teacher Perceptions of School Discipline

This study sought to understand the teacher perceptions of school discipline in relation to the implementation of a merit and demerit system. Through the examination of views of charter school teachers, the study aimed to create a space of dialogue and reflection for teachers about their own perceptions and the impact of discipline practices for students of color. As a result of the findings of this study, a recommendation to problematize discipline practices in school settings clearly requires time for open dialogue among teachers, parents, and administrators. This open dialogue can lead to genuine learning processes for any school community, which can ultimately work to change the educational outcomes for students of color. A dialogue concerning how teachers perceive discipline can also foster personal insight and growth as teachers, administrators, and parents engage in creating new methods of understanding authority, and the role that authority and power play in the development of voice, social agency, and critical consciousness for all students. With this in mind, five questions are offered here to assist educational leaders in reflecting on school discipline practices:

1. What is the purpose of discipline practices in the school setting?
2. How do discipline policies and school discipline practices impact educational outcomes for different students?
3. What are the perceptions and experiences of discipline for teachers in a school setting?
4. What discipline practices allow less reliance on compliance and more on critical and open dialogue between adults and students?
5. In the context of a school community, what supports do teachers need, in order to engage discipline as "working with" and not "punishing" students?

Recommendations for Future Research

The study conducted at CPCHS highlighted other important questions as they pertain to school discipline practices and teacher preparation programs. Recommendations for future research include studying the extent to which teacher preparation programs impact teacher perceptions of classroom discipline for students of color and how that translates to action in the classroom. Moreover, the results of the study highlight the need for district-wide research and the need for comparative studies that look at the issue of school discipline across the kindergarten to 12th-grade landscape. A study of such nature will also allow the opportunity to consider how childhood trauma and school discipline must be juxtaposed in considering future discipline policies for school districts across the nation.

Teachers were the main participants in this study. The involvement of students was limited by classroom observations that focused on observing teacher practice. Further research is needed from the perspective of students about discipline practices in schools. The student voice

is a major component missing in most analysis of school discipline practices. Such research can add a critical piece to the process of discipline as dialogue, as the analysis of student perceptions comes full circle with teacher perceptions of discipline as they relate to authority and power.

Future research can also focus on the impact of charter school discipline practices as it relates to postsecondary "success." A study of this nature is much more complex, but can help explain the actual implications of providing college-ready environments in conjunction with an authoritarian discipline approach and how this affects the way that students are able to perceive themselves as members of society after leaving these educational spaces. In addition, a recommendation for future research directed toward understanding ways to rethink discipline practices in a school may also shed light on what actual dialogue with students and feedback on discipline practices might look like at a school. Part of the possibility of rethinking school discipline includes an opportunity for further work on questions of aspirations and school discipline, in order to move districts and schools toward valuing student dreams. It is through critical questioning that schools can use their knowledge of student aspirations and dreams to create discipline practices that are restorative in nature. The inclusion of restorative justice practices in schools also allows for the study of change management issues with respect to moving school discipline policies from authoritarian to culturally responsive discipline practices. The figure below outlines comparisons of the values of authoritarian discipline practices to restorative discipline practices in schools in an effort to create a new discipline continuum in schools today.

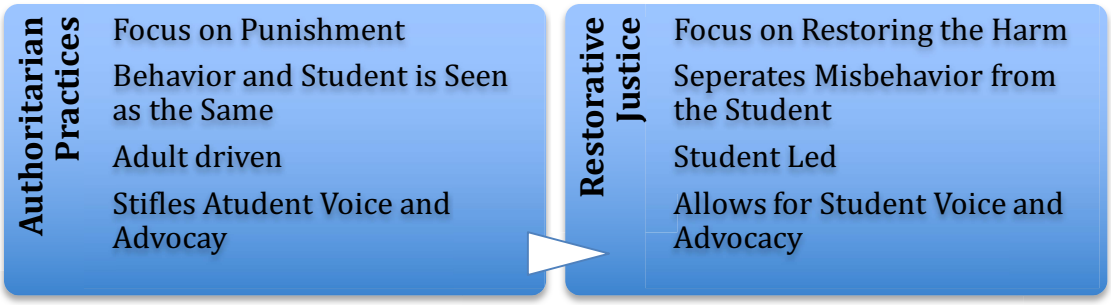


Figure 2. This figure contrasts authoritarian discipline values and restorative justice values.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand teacher perceptions of school discipline, how those were reflected in a school's merit and demerit system, and how those impacted student referral and punishment. The result of these finding suggests that even well-intentioned educators were replicating systems of oppression that affected the development of consciousness of students as it related to their educational experience and understanding of authority and power. Moreover, the findings suggest a huge push for principals to create induction programs that allow educators to create spaces of dialogue in which teachers can examine their own privilege and perceptions about working with students of color. Even then, it is critical for school leaders to foster environments that problematize the effects of harsh discipline practices for students and allow teachers to develop and grow in their own understanding of perceptions of less authoritarian school discipline. It is ultimately the responsibility of school leaders to enact social justice in relation to school discipline practices by engaging in critical conversations about diversity, respect, power, authority, hegemony, and ultimately, the development of praxis in the discipline process to ensure students benefit from a humanizing approach to the learning process.

Epilogue

During the course of this study, my understanding of discipline practices in schools has evolved along with my ability to problematize school discipline policies. As a first year principal, I believed it was important that my teachers created classrooms spaces where strict discipline was in place. I valued this because I believed that a classroom with compliance taught students the importance of understanding how to behave in an educational setting. Most importantly, I believed it was the right thing to do to help students understand how to navigate the American education school system. As the creation and the implementation of the merit and demerit system began at CPCHS, and my continued knowledge of critical pedagogy evolved, I began to notice the indirect results and impact of a merit and demerit system on students.

As a result of this study, I have begun to value and question how a school community can build an environment that truly connects to students' lived experiences and does not suppress them in the name of upward mobility. With the implementation of restorative justice practices at CPCHS, I have begun to see some of the positive effects of building strong relationships with students. I truly believe that every adult that worked at CPCHS believed and cared for students. The next steps in the growing process for this school is to also teach adults how to problematize discipline policies and understand how authoritarian practices can impact the academic and personal development of a student.

Moving forward, I want to be able to create a space where adults can question their perceptions of discipline while creating positive classroom environments in which students and teachers have healthy and positive relationships. The greatest growth for me has come in having

the courage to encourage my teachers to actually explore their own biases and perceptions of discipline. It will be extremely important to redefine what authority means for teachers at CPCHS. This, of course, will have to be a collaborative process in which adults have to ask hard questions about what compliance, authority, and punishment render in a school setting and search for ways to integrate students into processes that impact their daily classroom experiences.

One of the greatest realizations of the beauty of the ability of my team to impact students positively happened during lead camp. As I stood behind 88 students during the filming of a video, I realized how their own lived experiences could never be changed or impacted by a merit and demerit system. All 88 students wore a white t-shirt. On the back of the shirt, they had written a challenge they had faced throughout their lives. Words like abandonment, abuse, unloved, and others decorated the back of their shirts. During the activity, one student would approach another and give the other a hug. As they turned to look at the camera, the front of their shirts had a word for what they hoped the future would bring.

At that moment, I realized that what mattered the most in supporting students was not teaching them how to learn to navigate rules or systems, but instead, the importance of teaching them how to validate their past to build a present that will ultimately affect their future. The activity proved to be impactful for the seven staff members present as well. After the activity, adults commented on how they questioned their own approach to discipline practices because they felt that they did not take into account the challenges that students shared they had faced in their lives.

As I continue pushing my team in changing the dynamics of the merit and demerit system, I will keep in mind the importance of creating emancipatory discipline practices that take into account the lived experiences of students. It is through those lived experiences that adults and students begin to create authentic dialogue and learn to work with each other to support their development and conscientiousness. In return, this dialogue and reflection will create a space where teachers and students humanize each other and change their own perceptions of each other and the world around them.

Appendix A
CPCHS Merit and Demerit System

	Leadership	Excellence	Integrity	Justice	Community	
Praise/Check Specific Behavior (+/- 2pts)	**Praises** *First to be ready *Volunteering **Checks** *Unprepared (without materials) *Uniform	**Praises** *Urgency *Excellent work *HOT comment/work *Perserverance **Checks** *Complaining *Incomplete work *Unprofessional work *Posture	**Praises** *Professional academic discourse **Checks** *Off task *Making an excuse	**Praises** *N/A **Checks** *Not Following directions *Backpacks *Out of seat without permission	**Praises** *Appropriate encouragement *Working well with others *Model engagement **Checks** *Talking out of turn *Calling out *Minor disruption	
Positive/Negative Phone Call Home (-2pts)	The second check in a given class period warrants a positive/negative phone call home					
Automatic Detention Repetitive Behavior Over a Period or School Day (3 Checks) *AD can also be given for a one time action (- 10pts)	*Late to class	*Making an inappropriate response *Drawing/Tagging on paper	*Skipping office hours/detention/HWC (must serve HWC the following day)	*Electronics *Gum/Food *Cursing *Detention disruption	*Demonstrating disrespect to others	**Missing Homework** Every missed HW assignment counts -5 and the student is required to serve HWC afterschool
Above and Beyond Call Home Continued Behvior Over More Than One Day (+15pts)	Teacher discretion					
Referral Chronic Behvior Over More Than a Week (- 30pts) *Referral can also be given for a one time action See referral step ladder for further disciplinary consequences	*Truancy	*Defiance	*Stealing, Cheating, Lying (Honor Code Violation)	*Vandalism, alcohol, drugs, weapons	*Fighting, bullying or any malicious action towards others	

Appendix B
Alternatives to Suspension

Alternatives to Suspension

Alternatives:	Description/Example(s):
Appropriate In-School Alternatives	Can be during natural school breaks, during nutrition/lunch and during early release days (not in school suspension or exclusion from instruction and services needed).
Behavior Monitoring	Strategies to monitor behavior and academic progress: might include behavior log checked after each class, self-charting/monitoring of behaviors, strategies that provide feedback to the student, Check in-Check out, daily-weekly behavior reports.
Community Service and Service Learning (supervised)	Set amount of time (not during school hours), can be in the community or in the actual school community. e.g., tutoring younger students or assisting community service agencies
Coordinated Behavior Plans (for any student)	Creation of a structured, coordinated behavior plan specific to the student and based on the assessment of the quantity, severity and/or purpose of the target behavior to be reduced; should focus on increasing desirable behavior and replacing inappropriate behavior. Needs to be implemented with fidelity across settings and staff.
Detention	Before/after school, recess, lunch, weekend, short school days (once school has ended or before school starts).
Loss of Privileges (at school): Can be coordinated with parents to include at home loss of privileges.	Student 'preferred' activity/privileges should be identified prior to this becoming a choice. This can be accomplished by conducting a reinforcement survey. e.g., Eat lunch in the cafeteria instead of outside. Unable to attend club meetings or extra-curricular activities for a set amount of time. Unable to earn school activity.
Mentoring/Counseling	Adult assigned to support the student. With parental permission, student required to participate in counseling.
Mini-Courses: Check for understanding of the content at the completion of the course.	Short courses or modules on topics related to the student's behavior as a corrective teaching opportunity. Incorporate a social skills component. Staff can use behavior training software or curriculum that teaches alternatives related to the behavior. Use videos, readings, research, etc.

Appendix C
Suspension/Expulsion Summary of Things to Know

Suspension/Expulsion Summary of Things to Know

Suspension: The removal (exclusion) of a student from ongoing instruction for adjustment purposes. (Please note that for any suspension, all legal documentation must be filled out, filed in students discipline records and a copy should be given to parent(s)/legal guardian.)

- 3 types of suspension:
  - School suspension (student is off campus for the suspension) AKA: Out of School Suspension
  - In-school suspension - issued by administrator (student is on campus for the suspension and is receiving academic instruction and supports related to all of the classes they are missing by a credentialed staff member)
  - Class suspension – issued by classroom teacher (student is suspended from a specific class by a teacher, is on campus for the suspension and is receiving instruction for the class currently suspended from by a credentialed staff member): if sent to another class for the suspension, the class should be same grade level and should have "similar" instruction to what is being missed from sending class (e.g., student is being class suspended from a 3rd grade class during math instruction, student would go to another 3rd grade class and instruction in that class should be math based).

***Any form of suspension is NOT considered an "Alternative to Suspension/Other Means of Correction".**

Informal Suspension Conference:

- Prior to issuing a school suspension/in-school suspension, the principal shall conduct an informal conference with the student.
  - At this conference, the principal shall discuss with the student the details surrounding the charge(s).
    - Inform the student of the grounds upon which a suspension is based, if a suspension is warranted.
    - Provide the student the opportunity to respond to the charge(s) and to present a defense.
- A student may NOT be suspended in absentia. Therefore, when a student has been arrested or released to a peace officer, or has otherwise left the campus, the student cannot be suspended until and unless the student returns to school.

Length of School Suspension:

- A single suspension may not be issued for more than 5 consecutive school days.
- The total number of days for which a student, including students with a 504 Plan, may be suspended from school shall not exceed 20 school days in any school year (please note this does not apply to students with IEPs).
  - Students With Disabilities (that have an IEP)
    - shall not be suspended for more than 10 school days in any school year.
    - The school shall adhere to all requirements specified in the student's IEP when issuing any suspension.
- In the case when the student is transferred to another school or program, the total number shall not exceed 30 school days in any school year (please note that this does not apply to students with IEPs).

Created 6/3/15 JM & KS-G

Appendix D
Matrix for Student Suspension and Expulsion Recommendation

Student Discipline & Expulsion Support Unit

ATTACHMENT B

MATRIX FOR STUDENT SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION RECOMMENDATION

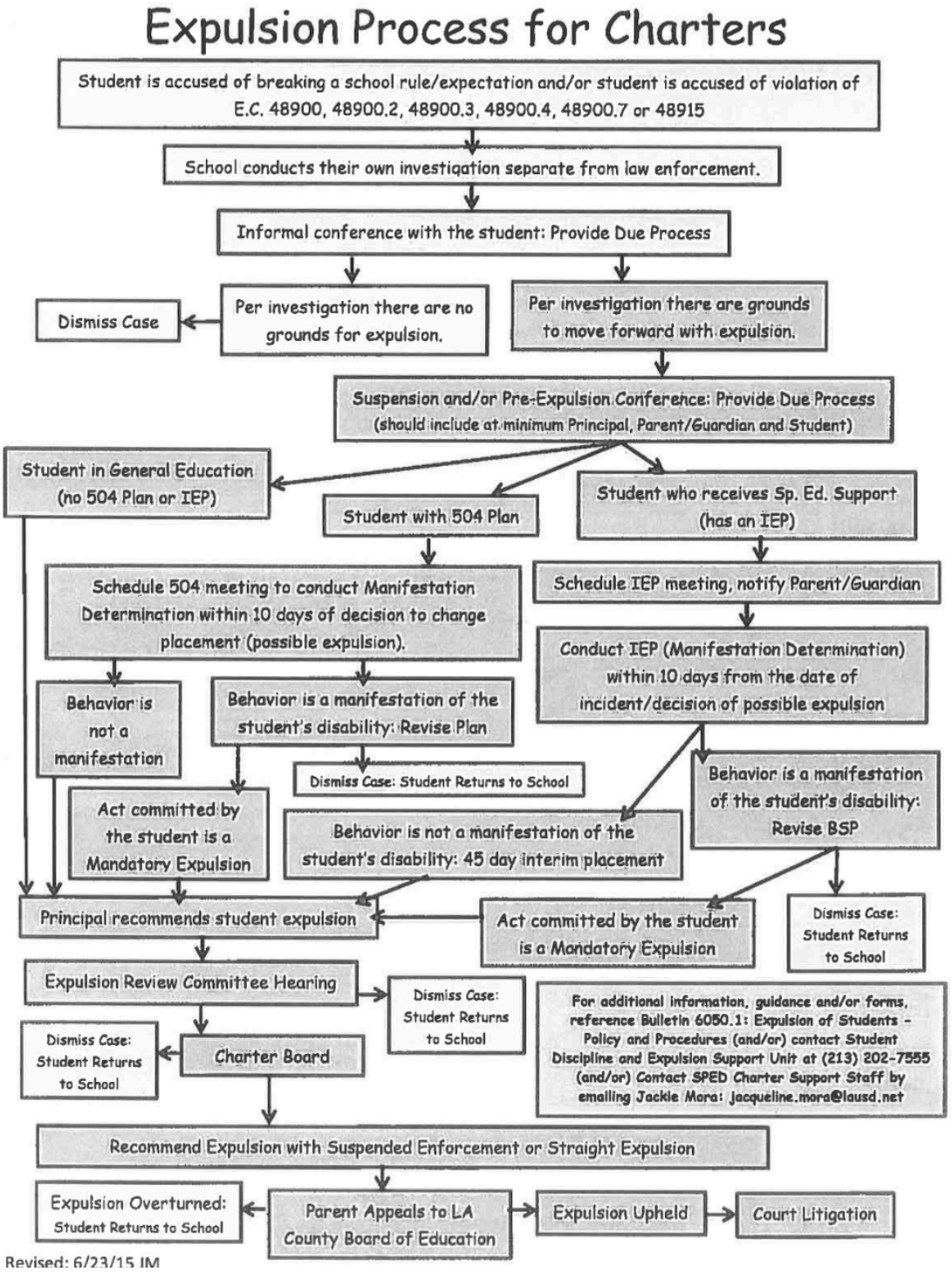
(State Law: Applicable to School Principals)

Category I Student Offenses with No Principal Discretion (except as otherwise precluded by law)	**Category II*** Student Offenses with Limited Principal Discretion	**Category III*** Student Offenses with Broad Principal Discretion
Principal **shall immediately** suspend and recommend expulsion when the following occur at school or at a school activity off campus. **(E.C. 48915[c])**	Principal must recommend expulsion when the following occur at school or at a school activity off campus **unless** the principal determines that the expulsion is inappropriate. **(E.C. 48915[a])**	Principal may recommend expulsion when the following occur at any time, including, but not limited to, while on school grounds; while going to or coming from school; during the lunch period, whether on or off the campus; or during, or while going to or coming from, a school-sponsored activity. **(E.C. 48915[b] and [e])**
1. Possessing, selling, or furnishing a firearm. E.C. 48915(c)(1); 48900(b)	1. Causing serious physical injury to another person, except in self-defense. E.C. 48915(a)(1); 48900(a)(1), maybe also 48900(a)(2)	1. Caused, attempted to cause, or threatened to cause physical injury to another person. **(Unless, in the case of "caused," the injury is serious. [See II.1])** E.C. 48900(a)(1); 48915(b) 2. First offense of possession of marijuana of not more than one ounce, or alcohol. E.C. 48900(c); 48915(b) 3. Sold, furnished, or offered a substitute substance represented as a controlled substance. E.C. 48900(d); 48915(b)
2. Brandishing a knife at another person. E.C. 48915(c)(2); 48900(a)(1) and 48900(b)	2. Possession of any knife, explosive, or other dangerous object of no reasonable use to the pupil. E.C. 48915(a)(2); 48900(b)	4. Caused or attempted to cause damage to school or private property. E.C. 48900(f); 48915(e) 5. Stole or attempted to steal school or private property. E.C. 48900(g); 48915(e) 6. Possessed or used tobacco. E.C. 48900(h); 48915(e) 7. Committed an obscene act or engaged in habitual profanity or vulgarity. E.C. 48900(i); 48915(e)
3. Unlawfully selling a controlled substance. E.C. 48915(c)(3); 48900(c)	3. Unlawful possession of any controlled substance (except for the first offense of no more than an ounce of marijuana, and over-the-counter and prescribed medication) E.C. 48915(a)(3); 48900(c)	8. Possessed, offered, arranged, or negotiated to sell any drug paraphernalia. E.C. 48900(j); 48915(e) 9. Disrupted school activities (school-wide activities; issued only by an administrator) E.C. 48900(k); 48915(e) 10. Knowingly received stolen school or private property. E.C. 48900(l); 48915(e) 11. Possessed an imitation firearm. E.C. 48900(m); 48915(e) 12. Engaged in harassment, threats, or intimidation against a pupil or group of pupils or school district personnel. E.C. 48900.4**; 48915(e)
4. Committing or attempting to commit a sexual assault or committing a sexual battery (as defined in 48900[n]). E.C. 48915(c)(4); 48900(n)	4. Robbery or extortion. E.C. 48915(a)(4); 48900(e)	13. Engaged in sexual harassment. E.C. 48900.2**; 48915(e) 14. Caused, attempted to cause, threatened to cause, or participated in an act of hate violence. E.C. 48900.3**; 48915(e) 15. Made terrorist threats against school officials or school property, or both. E.C. 48900.7; 48915(e) 16. Willfully used force or violence upon the person of another, except in self-defense. E.C. 48900(a)(2); 48915(b)
5. Possession of an explosive E.C. 48915(c)(5); 48900 (b)	5. Assault or battery upon any school employee. E.C. 48915(a)(5); 48900(a)(1) and 48900(a)(2)	17. Harassed, threatened, or intimidated a pupil who is a complaining witness or witness in a disciplinary action. E.C. 48900(o); 48915(e) 18. **Any behavior listed in Category I or II that is related to school activity or school attendance but that did not occur on campus or at a school activity off campus. E.C. 48915(b)** 19. Unlawfully offered, arranged to sell, negotiated to sell, or sold the prescription drug Soma. E.C. 48900(p); 48915(e) 20. Engaged in, or attempted to engage in, hazing, as defined in Section 32050. E.C. 48900(q); 48915(e) 21. Engaged in an act of bullying, including, but not limited to, bullying committed by means of electronic act directed specifically toward a pupil or school personnel. E.C. 48900(r); 48915(e) 22. Aided or abetted the infliction of physical injury to another person (suspension only). E.C. 48900(t); 48915(e)

* For Categories II and III, the school must provide evidence of one or both of the following ***additional findings***: (1) Other means of correction are not feasible or have repeatedly failed to bring about proper conduct, (2) Due to the nature of the act, the student's presence causes a continuing danger to the physical safety of the pupil or others.

** Grades 4 through 12 inclusive.

Appendix E
Expulsion Process for Charters



Appendix F
CPCHS Expulsion Rates Per Year

CPCHS Suspension Rates per Year	CPCHS Expulsion Rates Per Year
2013-2014- 6.8% (26 incidents)	2013-2014- 0%
2014-2015- 6.7% (32 incidents)	2014-2015- .5 % (1 incident)
2015-2016- Not Available	2015-2016- Not Available

Appendix G
Interview Questions

Interview #1 Group Questions

Grade Level: 9th and 10th

1) Describe your own school experience with school discipline.
2) What professional preparation have you received in school discipline practices?
3) What is your philosophy of discipline in schools? What is the school's philosophy of discipline at CPCHS?
4) What does discipline look like at CPCHS? What would discipline look like at the ideal school you all described earlier?
5) What do you believe are the strengths of discipline at CPCHS? What are the strengths of the merit and demerit system to help address student discipline in the classroom?
6) What do you believe are the limitations of the merit and demerit system at CPCHS? What are the areas for growth for moving forward with discipline at CPCHS?
7) Please describe a typical misbehavior in your classroom. How does the merit and demerit system help, or not help you, with redirecting this student's behavior?
8) Based on you philosophy of school discipline, what should be the consequences that a student who misbehaves should experience from the teacher and from the school?

Interview #2 Group Questions

Grade Level: 9th and 10th

1) As a grade level, what has been your biggest success in ensuring students behave in the classroom?
2) What has been the greatest surprise for the grade level this year in terms of student behavior in the classroom?
3) Who do you think the merit and demerit system supports the most? Is it teachers, students, or parents?

Appendix H

Actions, Consequences, and Follow-Up

Verbal/Body Language	Outcome/Consequence	Teacher/Student Follow-Up
Reactions of both student and teacher will be recorded during a misbehavior incident in the classroom.	After the behavior incident occurs, the teacher response (consequence) will be recorded. Along with that, student response to the consequence/outcome will be recorded.	During the individual interviews, teachers will be asked if follow-up (conversation after class, phone call home, etc.) occurred based on recorded incidents.

References

Adams, M. J. (1988). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Allen, K. C. (2014). *Breaking the "at risk" code: Deconstructing the myth and the label* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (Order No. 3641922)

Arum, R. (2003). *Judging school discipline: The crisis of moral authority*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

Banks, S. (2015, November 9). L.A. Unified restorative justice has been slow to take hold. *Los Angeles Times.* Retrieved from http://touch.latimes.com/#section/-1/article/p2p-84981715/

Bendixen, L., & F. Feucht (2010). *Personal epistemology in the classroom.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Berwick, C. (2015, March 17). Zeroing out zero tolerance. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/03/zeroing-out-zero-tolerance/388003/

Biehl, A. (2012). Zero tolerance and exclusionary school discipline harm students and continue to cradle the prison pipeline. *Children's Defense Fund*, *1*(1), 1–15. Retrieved from http://www.cdfohio.org/assets/pdf-files/issue-brief-zero-tolerance.pdf

Bissell, P. (1991). Classroom authority and critical pedagogy. *American Literature History, 3*(4), 847–863. doi:10.1093/alh/3.4.847

Butchart, R., & McEwan, B. (1998). *Classroom discipline in American schools: Problems and possibilities for democratic education.* Albany, NY: New York Press.

Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary & Thesaurus. (2008). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Carter, P., Skiba, R., Arredeondo, M., & Pollock, M. (2014). *You can't fix what you don't look at: Acknowledging race in addressing racial discipline disparities* [PDF]. Retrieved from http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Acknowledging-Race_121514.pdf

Center, B., Dietz, S., & Kaufman, M. (1982). Student ability, task difficulty, and inappropriate classroom behavior. *Behavior Modification, 6*(1), 335–374. Retrieved from http://www.davidcenter.com/documents/Publications/Student%20ability,%20task%20difficulty%20and%20inappropriate%20behavior.pdf

Chavez, L., & Freedberg, L. (2012). Understanding school discipline in California: Perceptions and practice. *Ed Source, 1*(1), 1–45. Retrieved from http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Understanding-School-Discipline-in-California-EdSource-September-2012.pdf

Chronister, G. (2014). Code of conduct. *Education Week, 32*, 1–10.

Civil Rights Project (2000). *Opportunities suspended: The devastating consequences of zero tolerance and school discipline.* Retrieved from https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/school-discipline/opportunities-suspended-the-devastating-consequences-of-zero-tolerance-and-school-discipline-policies/crp-opportunities-suspended-zero-tolerance-2000.pdf

Clifford, A. (2013). *Teaching restorative practices with classroom circles.* San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Unified School District.

Crimmins, D., Farrell, A., Smith, P., & Bailey, A. (2007). *Positive strategies: Students with behavior problems.* East Peoria, IL: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Dalporto, D. (2016). *Restorative Justice: A different approach to discipline.* Retrieved from http://www.weareteachers.com/blogs/post/2015/04/03/restorative-justice-a-Dedifferent-approach-to-discipline

Darder, A. (2002). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Darder, A. (2012). *Culture and power in the classroom: A critical foundation for bicultural education.* New York, NY: Bergin & Garvey.

Darder, A. (2015). *Freire & education.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Darder, A., & Torres, R. D. (2004). *After race: Racism after multiculturalism.* New York, NY: NYU Press.

Delpit, L. D. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: New Press.

Denice, P., Gross, B., & Rausch, K. (2015). *Understanding student discipline practices in charters schools: A research agenda*. Washington, DC: Center on Reinventing Public Education. Retrieved from http://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/crpe-paper-student-discipline-research-agenda.pdf

Disare, M. (2016). *"No excuse" no more? Charter schools rethink discipline after focus on tough consequences.* Retrieved from http://ny.chalkbeat.org/2016/03/07/no-excuses-no-more-charter-schools-rethink-discipline-after-focus-on-tough-consequences/#.Vur-bBhb8Vc

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York, NY: Herder and Herder.

Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Freire, P. (2011). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York, NY: Continuum. (Original work published 1970).

Fabelo, T., M. Thompson, M. Plotkin, D. Carmichael, M. Marchbanks III, M. P. & Booth, E. (2011). *Breaking school's rules: A statewide study of how school discipline relates to students' success and juvenile justice involvement.* New York, NY: Council of State Governments Justice Center.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Glasser, W. (1990). *The quality school: Managing students without coercion.* New York, NY: Perennial Library.

Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional intelligence: Why it matters more than IQ.* New York, NY: Bantam Publishers.

Grande, C. G. (1988). Delinquency: The learning disabled student's reaction to academic school failure. *Adolescence*, *23*(89), 209–219.

Greenstone, M. A. Looney, J. Patashnik, & Yu, M. (2013). *Thirteen facts about mobility and the role of education*. Washington, DC: The Hamilton Project. Retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2013/06/13-facts-higher-education

Gregory, A., Bell, J., & Pollock, M. (2014). *How educators can eradicate disparities in school discipline: A briefing paper on school-based interventions* [PDF]. Retrieved from http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Disparity_Interventions_Full_031214.pdf

Gregory, J. F. (1995). The crime of punishment: Racial and gender disparities in the use of corporal punishment in the U.S. Public Schools. *Journal of Negro Education*, *64*(4), 454–462.

Harding, D. J. (2003). Counterfactual models of neighborhood effects: The effect of neighborhood poverty on dropping out and teenage pregnancy. *The American Journal of Sociology, 109*(3), 676–719.

Hickman, H. (2008). Structure, power, and discourse: An analysis of discipline in an urban high school. *Urban Education Journal, 5*(2), 36–45.

Kohn, A. (2006). *Beyond discipline: From compliance to community.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Larkin, J. (1979). School desegregation and student suspension: A look at one school system. *Education and Urban Society*, *11*(4), 485–495.

Lemov, D. (2010) *Teach like a champion: 49 techniques that put students on the path to college.* Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

Losen, D. (2011). *Discipline policies, successful schools, and racial justice* [PDF]. Retrieved from http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/NEPC-SchoolDiscipline.pdf

Losen, D. J., Keith, II, M. A., Hodson, C. L., & Martinez, T. E. (2016). *Charter schools, civil rights and school discipline: A comprehensive review.* Los Angeles, CA: The Center for Civil Rights Remedies/The Civil Rights Project. Retrieved from http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/charter-schools-civil-rights-and-school-discipline-a-comprehensive-review

Losen, D. J., Keith, II, M. A., Morrison, K., & Belway, S. (2015). *Are we closing the discipline gap?* Los Angeles, CA: University of California. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2t36g571

Luiselli, J., Putnam, R., Handler, M., & Feinberg, A. (2005). Whole-school positive behavior support: Effects on student discipline problems and academic performance. *Educational Psychology, 25*(2–3), 183–198.

Marchbanks, M. P., Blake, J. J., Booth, E. A., Carmichael, D., Sierbert, A. L., & Fabelo, T. (2015). *The economic effects of exclusionary discipline on grade retention and high school dropout.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Martin, C. (2015). Empathy, equity, empowerment: Using restorative practices to build character and community while reducing suspensions. *Voices in Urban Education (VUE), 2015*(42), 14–18. Retrieved from http://vue.annenberginstitute.org/issues/42/empathy-equity-empowerment-using-restorative-practices-build-character-and-community-while

Martinez, M. R. (2015). *The absence of aspiration in the era of accountability* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (Order No. 3722836)

McCarthy, M. M., Cambron-McCabe, N., & Eckes, S. (2014). *Public school law: Teachers' and students' rights.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

McFadden, A. C., & Marsh, G. E. (1992). A study of race and gender bias in the punishment of school children. *Education & Treatment of Children*, *15*(2), 140–147.

Morgan, N., & Ellis, G. (2011). *A kit bag for promoting positive behavior in the classroom.* Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Office for Civil Rights (1993). 1990 elementary and secondary school civil rights survey: National summaries. Washington, DC: DBS Corporation.

Pane, D., Rocco, T., Miller, L., & Salmon, A. (2014). How teachers use power in the classroom to avoid or support exclusionary school discipline practices. *Urban Education, 49*(3), 291–328.

Perry, A. (2014, July 7). Zero-tolerance policies are destroying the lives of Black children. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything /wp/2014/07/07/zero-tolerance-policies-are-destroying-the-lives-of-black-children/

Pink, D. H. (2009). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us.* New York, NY*:* Canongate Books.

Pitzer, H. (2015). Urban teachers engage in critical talk: Navigating deficit discourse and neoliberal logics. *Journal of Educational Controversy, 9*(1), 1–16.

Rumberger, R. W. (1987). High school dropouts: A review of issues and evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 57*(2), 101–121.

Scott, T., Anderson, C., & Alter, P. (2012). *Managing classroom behavior using positive behavior supports.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Shaw, S. R., & Braden, J. B. (1990). Race and gender bias in the administration of corporal punishment. *School Psychology Review*, *19*, 378–383.

Sheets, R. (1996). *Student-teacher perception: Ethic integrity, solidarity, and resistance.* New York, NY: US Department of Education.

Shollenberger, T. L. (2015). *Racial disparities in school suspension and subsequent outcomes: Evidence from the national longitudinal survey of youth.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Skiba, R. (2006). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychological Association, 63*(9), 852–862.

Stephan, J. L., Davis, E., Lindsay, J., & Miller, S. (2015). *Who will succeed and who will struggle? Predicting early college success with Indiana's Student Information System* (REL 2015–078). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs.

Storey, K., & Post, M. (20 12). *Positive behavior supports in the classrooms and schools.* Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas Publisher.

Stutzman, L., & Mullet, J. (2005). *Restorative discipline for schools.* Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

Thornton, C. H., & Trent, W. (1988). School desegregation and suspension in East Baton Rouge Parish: A preliminary report. *Journal of Negro Education*, *57*(4), 482–501.

Tough, P. (2012). *How children succeed.* New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive Schooling*. New York, NY: SUNY Press.

van Wormer, K., & Walker, L. (2012). *Restorative justice today: Practical applications.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Vavrus, F., & Cole, K. M. (2002). "I didn't do nothin'": The discursive construction of school suspension. *Urban Review*, *34*(2), 87–111.

Volkman, B. (1999). Future teachers' perception of discipline. *Educational Research Association, 143*, 1–15.

Walker, H. M., & Sprague, J. R. (1999). The path to school failure, delinquency, and violence: Casual factors and some potential solutions. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 35*(2), 67–73.

Watanabe, T. (2013, May 15). L.A. schools will no longer suspend a student for being defiant. *Los Angeles Times.* Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/2013/may/15/local/la-me-ln-lausd-suspensions-20130515

Whitman, D. (2008). *Sweating the small stuff.* Washington, DC: Thomas B Fordham Institute.

Wilf, R. (2012). Disparities in school discipline move students of color toward prison. *Center for American Progress, 1*, 1–2. Retrieved from http://www.americanprogress.org/ issues/race/news/2012/03/13/11350/disparities-in-school-discipline- move-students-of-color-toward-prison/