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# Leadership and Communication as Opportunities for Growth: Refining Discipline with Cross Cultural Relationships beyond the Classroom

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University of San Francisco

**Leadership and Communication as Opportunities for Growth:  
Refining Discipline with Cross Cultural Relationships beyond the  
Classroom**

A Field Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education  
With an Emphasis in Human Rights Education

by  
Sabrina Sanchez  
May 2015

# **Leadership and Communication as Opportunities for Growth: Refining Discipline with Cross-Cultural Relationships Beyond the Classroom**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by  
Sabrina Sanchez  
May 2015

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field projects has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

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## ABSTRACT

Overt disciplinary tactics disproportionately affect scholars of color. This field project aims to shed light on discipline policies across a variety of learning environments and provides scholars of color with the opportunity to self-advocate. I utilize a culturally relevant pedagogy in my framework component to stress the need for reciprocal relationships based on dignity and mutual respect. I provide effective alternative strategies, framed by culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and Gregory and Mosely's theory of culturally relevant discipline (CRD), for addressing misconduct that emphasize stronger communication and greater leadership opportunities. My project consists of three parts: a modified communications policy in alignment with discipline guidelines at my work site, a core values rubric and a leadership council application packet that can be utilized across different learning environments that work to promote positive youth engagement. It is vital that schools offer a fair and supportive system of discipline that does not intentionally or unintentionally undermine the cultural, emotional, and mental well being of scholars of color by engaging in overly punitive discipline measures.

*Keywords:* disproportionate discipline, reciprocal relationships, scholars of color, hegemony, and consistent communication;

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

Carter G. Woodson's thought-provoking and powerful 1933 book *The Mis-Education of the Negro* delivers an exceptionally accurate portrait of the overt discipline strategies in the U.S. educational system of his time. Woodson offers the following treatise on the treatment of Blacks in the Jim Crow era:

It is an injustice to mis-discipline them and suffer their manners to be corrupted from infancy to old age and then blame them for making the mistakes, which such guidance necessitates. People who have been restricted and held down naturally condescend to the lower levels of delinquency. When education has been entirely neglected or improperly managed we see the worst passions ruling with uncontrolled and incessant sway. (p. 125)

Although written over a century ago, this book is still noteworthy today because much of what Woodson wrote about continues to happen to scholars of color (the term I will use to refer to young students of color) in the classroom. Delpit and White-Bradley (2003) poise a disturbing, but relevant, question considering decades long efforts to reform education: "Do we want to educate our students' spirits or incarcerate them" (p. 288). Quite frankly, this question haunts me. It is even more bothersome because I witnessed first-hand the impact of soul crushing practices driven by punitive disciplinary tactics disproportionately applied to scholars of color. I firmly believe that the school to prison pipeline contributes to the mass incarceration of young African American males, which runs parallel to the punitive discipline policies enacted in many schools.

According to the Thomas Rudd (2013) of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, African American students, especially African American boys, are disciplined more



often and receive more out-of-school suspensions and expulsions than their White counterparts. In 2010, over 70% of the students involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement were Black or Latino. A 2009-2010 survey of 72,000 schools, including kindergarten through high school, revealed while African American students comprised only 18% of students enrolled in the sampled schools, they accounted for 35% of those suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once, and 39% of all expulsions. Overall, African American students were more than three times as likely as their White peers to be suspended or expelled (Rudd, 2013). The magnitude of problem is also evident in examples of three public school systems in different parts of the country (Rudd, 2013). First of all, African American students in Portland public schools are almost five times more likely to be expelled or suspended than White students. Second of all, in Oakland, almost 20% of African American male students were suspended at least once in 2011—six times the rate of White students. Finally, African American students in Chicago public schools comprised 45% of the student body in the 2009-2010 academic year but accounted for 76% of the suspensions. The Advancement Project (2015) offers the following critical analysis of these current realities:

The combination of overly harsh school policies and an increased role of law enforcement in schools has created a ‘school-to-prison pipeline,’ in which punitive measures such as suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests are increasingly used to deal with student misbehavior, and huge numbers of youth are pushed out of school and into prisons and jails. In many communities, this transforms schools from places of learning to dangerous gateways into juvenile court. This is more than an education crisis; it is a racial justice crisis, because the students pushed out through harsh discipline are disproportionately students of color. (para. 2)

Where is the investment for humanity? It is not that “the conversation in education has been reduced to a conversation about one another;” the conversations are non-existent (Delpit &

White-Bradley, 2003, p. 283). When there is a lack of communication between teachers, paraprofessionals and scholars, the opportunities to connect in a spiritual and meaningful way prevents authentic relationship building. Cultures are dismissed and the complex identities of scholars of color are not fully recognized, resulting in an unsupportive and dismissive learning environment that is damaging to their development. Masterfully exploring the concept of hope, Duncan-Andrade (2009) describes the pain that results from disproportionate discipline:

We may think that if we send out the ‘disobedient’ child, we have removed the pain from our system. It simply does not work that way. Rather, when we exclude a child, we introduce yet another social stressor into the micro-ecosystem. We rationalize the exclusion by telling ourselves that we have pulled a weed from the garden, allowing a healthier environment for the other children to grow. (p. 9)

Authentic relationships based on the fundamentals of character building recognize the variety of lived experiences and backgrounds that comprise learning communities. Consequently, I am urging for a careful analysis of how teacher-paraprofessional-scholar relationships are differently influenced by discipline practices in/out of the classroom and “the culture of the street or features of their home backgrounds and communities most certainly play a role in shaping their behaviors” (Payne, 1984, p. 45). Additionally, when *those* disciplining are not engaging in constructive dialogue, management strategies become inconsistent in between the multivariate system of partnerships reaffirming hegemonic discourse in the marginalization of *others*. The ability to maintain relationships becomes challenging when balancing the power structures between various groups scholars of color belong to.

Some individuals may consider their status higher than others depending on their position or title at school, their responsibilities, years of experience etc. Todd (2007) asserts, “the crisis in education points to the power granted” (p. 599). In addition to this, I argue the intersection

between culture, race, and communities when observing discipline policies, needs to be considered in order to better understand how the misallocation of power and preservation of privilege disproportionately affects scholars of color and the consequences of unfair punishment that make it difficult to maintain positive relationships in different learning sites (i.e. classroom, home, and community).

Adults must play an active role in student lives before, during, and after school (Noam & Bernstein-Yamashiro, 2013). Factors such as socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic differences, discrimination, lack of financial resources, community organization, and social and cultural disparities are prevalent, yet difficult to discern independently when studying exclusionary school discipline policies (Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). Research has suggested that bias is the contributing factor to the disproportionate discipline toward scholars of color (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2003). Are officials acting in a biased fashion when enforcing rules? Who are considered the officials? Due to increased national attention and resource allocation to out-of-school programs, there are new job opportunities for non-classroom teachers, for example, tutors, mentor, after school activity leaders, volunteers, assistants etc. There are increased possibilities for new interactions and developing relationships between school day teachers and after-school educators. In out-of-classroom settings (lunch, recess, advisory, after school programs), scholars are continually being supervised across different sets of beliefs and values that often hold them to different standards than credentialed teachers. These differences present an array of challenges “because teachers differ in age, maturity, experience and mindset, they tend to have their own comfort levels in relationships with students;” therefore, students relate and experience

relationships in varying ways (Noam & Bernstein-Yamashiro, 2013, p. 29). Behaviors change according to needs and environment. Students look for different things from different adults and vice versa. Hence, it is imperative to engage in consistent communication about students' conduct and behavior management strategies to better develop and enforce positive and effective discipline practices that are congruent across various learning sites. For scholars of color who are labeled as *troubled* students, cooperation between them and out-of-classroom teachers is invaluable. The foundation of their relationship is built on reciprocity, commitment, and caring. The once *troubled* scholar is almost guaranteed to display compliance and obedience towards their favorite teachers. Payne (1984) states, "the students may be a pretty rebellious bundle in general, but they are not equally rebellious with all teachers" (p. 45). This cooperation, he proclaims, is what alters the character of the institution.

Approaching discipline with a cultural understanding and sense of neutrality, not only enables scholars to self-regulate, but it ensures cohesiveness and leadership between the two parties. Communication becomes even more challenging and difficult to maintain when working with more people, and in terms of discipline, it takes greater effort and adult responsibility to maintain effective, equitable treatment of scholars when addressing behaviors and codes of conduct. Social or professional barriers (entitlement, status, power) lead to disagreements between the in and out of classroom teachers and students (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2003; Rocque, 2010). Rocque (2010) notes, "the way groups differ in communication styles may lead to differential treatment" (p. 559). In consideration of the scholars of color, we must take action to

prevent this kind of negligence from producing an even more detrimental disciplinary system for our youth.

### **Purpose of the Project**

From Young's relativist point of view, "those who define the curriculum depend simply upon political power, not on scholarly authority (as cited in Entwistle, 1978, p. 30). School disciplinary policies that disproportionately keep scholars of color out of school reduce their opportunities to learn and increase gaps in educational achievement. Research on classroom discipline has focused on individual characteristics (Gregory & Mosley, 2004), which might provide an explanation to the shift in focus from students' actions to teachers' attitudes and beliefs (Delpit, 1995; Fine, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2004). Each of these studies provide understanding of how inequalities are most pronounced among those designated *troublemakers*, even when other youth are engaged in identical behaviors. This unequal treatment and unfair punishment is what motivated me to conduct this research.

The purpose of this project is to provide alternative strategies for engaging in discipline that promotes positive youth development. This project is in the form of a workshop. The workshop provides specific ways to emphasize cultural capital in scholars. The workshop begins with an overview of culturally relevant discipline models that can be used to redirect the blame and produce a more inclusive environment where scholars of color can engage and directly contribute to policy development that is conducive to building healthy relationships. Discussions and activities address treatment mechanisms for issuing consequences of misconduct and stressing the importance that they should be aligned throughout the school. Additionally,

resources for delivering transformational education using cultural integration will be included to support scholars of color' position with discipline. Through these culturally relevant programs, scholars of color can modify institutionalized practices of disciplinary policies and reconstruct harmful practices to create a safe space for paraprofessionals, teachers and most importantly themselves. The project answers the following questions:

- What are the social, political and cultural boundary issues in these less formal, less hierarchical out-of-school settings (i.e. after school programs & restorative justice programs) and what do they suggest about educator-learner relationships?
- What are the differences between the classroom teacher role and the out-of-school teachers (i.e. after-school leaders)?
- How can we build accountability mechanisms that assist influencing [their] behavior and also provide redress for victims of discriminatory discipline by school actors?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Gramsci states, "culture consists not in erudition but in the 'organisation, discipline of one's inner self...it is not only the subjective organisation of one's own internal ego but is also objective'" (as cited by Entwistle, 1978, p. 46). To highlight Gramsci's idea of culture, I borrowed Ladson-Billings and Tate's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and Gregory and Mosely's theory of culturally relevant discipline (CRD) to frame my project. On one hand, CRP focuses attention on the ways educators should display competence in teaching in a cross-cultural setting that enables students to relate learning to his or her cultural context. On the other hand, CRD emphasizes educators understanding the cultural genesis of scholars' behavior and

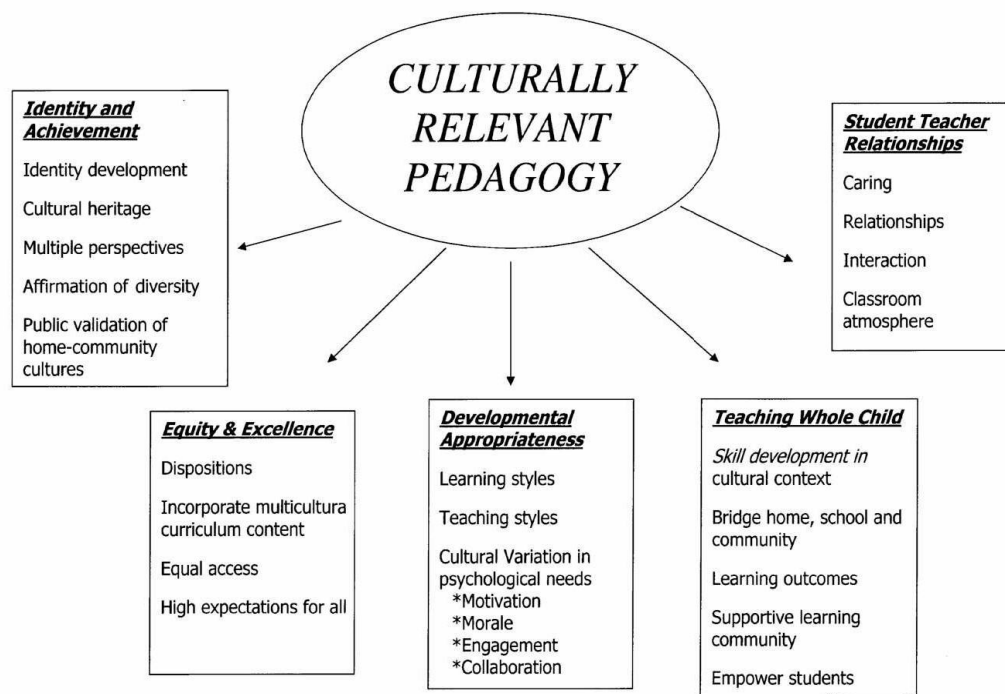
necessitates a focus on approaching discipline as a vehicle for transforming the learning environment into a space for individual and collective empowerment.

CRP emphasizes the ways educators can understand and recognize how the intersection of school and home-communities are essential for understanding how students' cultures can be used in different learning environments (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Gay states, CRP "teaches *to and through* the strengths of ethnically diverse students" (as cited in Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 67) and encourages collective action grounded in cultural understandings, experiences and ways of knowing the world (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Distinguishing the difference between culturally relevant teaching and CRP, Ladson-Billings (1995) explicitly states it "is specifically committed to collective, not merely individual empowerment" (p. 160). Demonstrating the value of the school and home-community connection, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) note, "such intentional inclusion becomes a direct demonstration of the distinction between difference and deficiency" (p. 68). Therefore, educators are challenged to view the ethnically diverse backgrounds of their students as beneficial to their teaching rather than a deficit to students' learning. The deficit model, defined as the automatic assumption that some students are more prone to academic success than others because of their cultural or ethnic background (Flores, 2005), normalizes inequitable discipline practices and disproportionately impacts scholars of color (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

CRP aims to ensure educators honor the diverse viewpoints of their student population and resist the unconscious urge to promote homogeneous perspectives as universal beliefs. Culturally responsive educators reflect on the stereotypes, biases, and fears they have about the

ways their students are different from them. Once they recognize their cultural frameworks are not inherently better than those favored by other cultures, they can begin to investigate and appreciate the traditions and values of others. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) outline five principles of CRP: identity and achievement; equity and excellence; developmental appropriateness; teaching the whole child; and student-teacher relationships (p.71). The figure below provides a more detailed explanation of the five principles:

**Figure 1**  
The Principles of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy



*Figure 1.* Adapted from “Toward a Conceptual Framework of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: An Overview of the Conceptual and Theoretical Literature,” by Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 38, p. 72).



CRP is a student-centered approach to education, which emphasizes students' unique cultural strengths as a way to promote student achievement and assist them in developing a sense of well-being about their cultural place in the world. Similarly, CRD focuses on humanizing scholars.

According to Gregory and Mosely (2004), CRD is a humanizing pedagogical tool for synchronizing culture and race that offers “a new way of conceptualizing discipline problems” and the influential role it has on behaviors (p. 23). Across discipline patterns, many racial-cultural disparities exist (Gregory & Mosley, 2004; Skiba et al., 2011). School, community, and society have a profound impact on behaviors and affects how cross-cultural relationships are established. Too little attention has been paid to the disproportionate discipline strategies implemented by classroom teachers (Skiba et al., 2011) and how their beliefs and/or views about scholars of color lead to culturally insensitive relationships that disregard their intellectual identity and individual growth.

CRD is a natural extension of CRP, which uses students' cultural backgrounds, rendering of social experiences, prior knowledge, and learning styles. The CRD model emphasizes scrutinizing the way teachers' personal views influence their use of discipline, specifically the disproportionate punitive strategies. Drawing on an ecological framework, CRD “takes into account multiple levels of influences on the disciplined student, the disciplining administrator *or* teacher, and even the student who evades being disciplined” which in turn can improve the behavior modification practices that adhere to democratizing pedagogy (Gregory & Mosely, 2004, p. 26). CRD potentially transforms classrooms and their *in between space* into a safe place to learn, teach and understand emancipatory discipline *through* the strengths of culturally diverse

scholars. Specifically, CRD is about developing positive behavior support, identifying the environmental events; circumstances and interactions that result in problem behavior, and developing culturally appropriate strategies for prevention and teaching new skills (Gregory & Mosely, 2004).

CRP and CRD address the importance of recognizing the value of culture for diverse learners. By linking learning and discipline with culture, educators are able to maintain the cultural integrity of scholars while also demonstrating cultural competence and the need for developing a broader critical consciousness (Ladson Billings, 1995). To offer a viable challenge to the dominant paradigm of discipline, both theories recognize the relevance of culture and race in their encounters with scholars; furthermore, they are aware of “the cultural mismatch between classrooms and the community” (Gregory & Mosely, 2004, p. 24). CRP and CRD are appropriate theories to frame my project because they collectively emphasize an approach to addressing the multilayered issues of discipline that focuses on empowering rather than penalizing scholars of color.

### **Significance of the Project**

Despite seemingly endless debates about the deficiency of public education, there is still a dearth of literature examining the inconsistency of discouraging discipline practices across various learning spaces. Oftentimes, these misguided discussions create even more unjustifiable arguments and divert attention from helping students learn and succeed. Rather than connecting with individual students, neglect becomes a contributing factor to the streamlining of our young African American youth into prisons (Alexander, 2012). The significance of this project rests

heavily on hegemonic influences and their role in preventing valuable relationships. I emphasize the critical function of consistent communication and how it impacts cultivating partnerships. Culturally relevant discipline models are capable of attributing behaviors to the whole scholar by “including concepts of skill development in a cultural context between home-school-community collaboration and empowerment” (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p.76). In turn, this approach has the potential to transform behavior management strategies into a culturally constructive model that validates a scholar’s background rather than ostracizing them, (Yang, 2009; Zammit & Alvarez, 2011). Reciprocal relationships can be used to redirect student misbehavior. In order to bring social justice awareness to our surrounding communities, there must be well-intentioned concern and comprehensive understanding of the discriminatory issues causing irreparable damage.

### **Definition of Terms**

- Culture- shared beliefs and behaviors that are socially transmitted in formal and informal ways (Marger, 1994 as cited by Gregory & Mosely, 2004).
- Culturally relevant models- recognize the social and cultural resources held by all students and incorporates them into creating curriculum or setting rules; are situated distinctly within social and cultural context when setting rules; “places emphasis on the needs of students from various cultures” and acknowledges “through sensitivity, how cultural nuances integrate these cultural experiences, values, and understanding into the learning environment”; advocates for collectiveness rather than individualistic empowerment (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 67)

- Critical consciousness- developed by Paulo Freire, is a social concept that focuses on understanding how our daily lives contradict with society and the significant impact our “object of being” has within the socio-political landscape; may also include taking action against oppressive measures.
- Discipline- “A necessary condition for effective action in the social world” (Freire, 1998, p.86). “Is not the source of repression but rather mechanism...a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior...thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (Foucault, 1995, p. 138).
- Ethical responsibility- “Based on dignity, is a requirement that involves one to think of oneself and one’s life as objectively and intrinsically important and the special social responsibility that one has to oneself to live well,” (Kamm, 2010, p. 691).
- Punishment- “Is as an exclusionary act by which students are removed from the opportunity to learn...it is harm inflicted by an external agent as a mechanism through which outside regulation becomes internalized subjectivity” (Yang, 2009, p. 49).
- Hegemony- “refers to situations in which one nation exercises political, cultural or economic influence over others” (Entwistle, 1978, p. 11). For this paper, I will apply this concept to relationships between individuals and groups.
- Hegemonic discourse/language- resembles a dictatorship-model where a ruler dominates the masses; “the role of force and coercion as the basis of ruling class domination” (Entwistle, 1978, p. 12).

- Counter hegemonic “fosters a just society for all” (Gramsci as cited in Entwistle, 1978, p. 40).
- Out of school time- a general term commonly used to represent any activity that occurs outside of the classroom and not during the normal school hours (i.e. before or after school) however, for the purpose of my study, I extend the term to include any occurrences experienced off site.
- Paraprofessional- indicates professionals obtaining a position within a school setting but do not hold any teaching credential and/or a specific license to self-handling teach their own classroom. For example, mentors, after school activity leaders, tutors, volunteers etc.
- Punitive/overt/disproportionate discipline- when harsher levels of punishment for same and/or less intense reasons on the basis of race and /or culture, which contributes to the racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline; discriminatory punishment and/or racial stereotyping as a contributing factor in disproportionate office referral; involve procedures like out/in-of-school suspension, expulsion and classroom removal that over represent scholars of color and increase the risk of further negative interventions; runs parallel to the “school-to-jail” link that leads to school disengagement, racial hostility and particularly disparate treatment that creates a hostile learning environment (Rocques & Paternoster, 2011; Skiba et al., 2011)
- Scholar(s) - used to describe student(s).
- Scholars of color- used to describe non-White students.

- Teacher-student relationships (TSR) - a personal and instructive engagement between a teacher and a student within a classroom setting that has major influences on student academic achievement (Roorda, Koomen, Helma, Spilt & Oort, 2011).
- Organic intellectual- “Intellectual individuals constantly interacting with society, struggling to change minds, engaged in the evolution of knowledge, raising issues in the public domain and defending decent standards of well-being, freedoms and justice” (Tickle, 2001, p. 161); It is the means by which the oppressed do for themselves, for our own good; For the wrongly disciplined, it becomes a matter of commitment and persistence to break free from institutionalized suffering (Gramsci as cited by Entwistle, 1998).

## CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

Traditional ways of addressing behavior tends to follow a Westernized view where those in positions of authority use power, in all its incarnations, to control and oppress the lower classes (Spivak as cited by Morton, 2003). Comprehensive approaches on how disciplinary patterns should be exercised, extend beyond the classroom to include the community and the broader culture (Negron-Gonzales, 2009; Noguera, 2000). The outcomes of discipline are not necessarily produced or reproduced consistently across ethnic or racial groups (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). For instance, according to Skiba et al., (2011), African American and Hispanic/Latino students are more likely than White students to receive out-of-school suspension/expulsion for all types of infractions. The severity of consequence levels depend on the outcomes, in which “outcomes at various levels interact with, reinforce and stimulate outcomes at other levels” that make it clearly evident that more culturally-centered and strength-based solutions are needed to depict the complexities of race and discipline across diverse environments (Zammit & Alvarez, 2011, p. 185). Solution-focused discipline practices emphasize in cultural understanding, foster collective growth and positive relationship building between scholars-teachers and paraprofessionals (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Some potential influences on disciplinary patterns include race, classroom culture, school organization and quality of relationships between scholars, teachers and paraprofessionals (Monroe, 2005; Skiba et al., 2011). Most approaches to discipline, however, involve a reductionist style of rigid tactics like removal, which deny participation (Skiba, 2008). These patterns reveal that an

inconsistent enforcement among scholars of color (Gregory & Mosely, 2004) Thus, scholars develop a subjectivity of always being readily and involuntarily available for punishment, and this subjectivity involves cultural mismatches, between how behaviors are assessed and the culture of certain scholars (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Yang, 2009).

Several researchers have addressed the role of racial and cultural disparities across discipline practices impact how schools and communities play in the development and maintenance of equitable education and social inequality (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Monroe, 2005; Skiba, 2008; Spivak et al., 2011; Rocque, 2010). However, minimal research has explored how discipline navigates between cross-cultural learning environments (in and out of school), which in turn influences the behaviors of scholars (particularly of color) and affects how they are treated. With this review of literature I seek to make transparent the disproportionate application of disciplinary practices against students of color. When there is a lack of engagement between educators and learners, hegemonic ideas (reactionary) become normalized and found in every day practices (Negron-Gonzales, 2009).

Acknowledging discipline as “part of a rigorous craft that demands intensive work and painstaking creativity towards a common goal” enables educators and learners to achieve cultural competence (Yang, 2009, p. 53). There is substantial research around issues related to the academic achievement gap and how its connection to discipline impinges on scholars educational attainment; however, the limited literature on the implementation of disciplinary procedures in out-of-school sites (after school programs or nonprofits organizations) and how scholars’ constantly navigate between different learning spaces (before/after school, community, etc.)



affect how they are disciplined, especially *who* is doing the disciplining. Context shapes communication; therefore, when attempting to develop effective discipline strategies we all must be aware of our different learning spaces and how positionality impacts behaviors.

When attempting to understand behaviors, scrutiny of paraprofessional to student relationships is pertinent - if not critical- to consider. This review of literature presents an integrative approach to disciplinary practices and how the dynamics of relationships shift between school hours and time spent in their community. This review encompasses issues pertaining to culture, identity, race, hegemony, achievement, and ethical responsibility. The four major themes are explored: the consequences of punishment, the value of reciprocal relationships in discipline, the benefits of cultural connectivity, and consistency management and cooperative discipline. I conclude with a brief summary of the literature.

### **The Consequences of Punishment**

In an effort to highlight critical differences and common misconceptions about discipline, I briefly introduce K. Wayne Yang's research distinguishing punishment from discipline. Yang (2009) states, "Punishment is retribution for an offense...it is an exclusionary act by which students are removed from the opportunity to learn...it is harm inflicted by an external agent as a mechanism through which outside regulation becomes internalized subjectivity," (49). The physical removal of students from the classroom through detention, suspension or office referrals, disproportionately effects young males of color (Yang, 2009). Data aggregated at the district level show that African American males are overrepresented in the ranks of disciplined students across the nation (Rudd, 2013). In addition, the 2007 Cambridge Study in Delinquent

Development revealed that inconsistent discipline toward children was characteristic of boys who become delinquent. The phenomenon of racial disparity in school's coercive response to behavior is comparable to the criminal justice system with respect to people of color, especially African Americans and Latino/Latinas (Roettger & Paternoster, 2011). In which case, responses to conflict are often driven by a culture of fear. Rocque and Paternoster (2011) conceptualize the school-to-jail link in relation to school discipline to argue that, "this phenomenon is part of what begins the process of school disengagement for minority youth, which ultimately will land them in jail in disproportionate numbers," (p. 636) an idea we find in Ferguson (2000: 636). Of additional concern is the disproportionate effect of school discipline by race and ethnicity. Young Black males experience a multitude of stigmatizations that impact identity development, mental and intellectual well-being, academic achievement, economic opportunity and cultural conflict (Monroe, 2005; Rocque, Yang, 2009). In one of the first studies conducted by the Children's Defense Fund examining the distribution of discipline revealed that African American students were two to three times more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts (Rocque, 2010). Hereafter, I will situate discipline within Gregory and Mosley's CRD model to frame my project, but first, I will provide a brief historical summary about discipline.

The "back to basics" movement in the 1970s disguised deficiency as a culturally and linguistically different problem (Flores, 2005). In a stratified society, people holding different positions also hold different ideologies regarding educational policies (Singh & Baksh, 1977). The stigmatization of *deficiencies* thus posed as insurmountable threats to students of color because authoritative figures were policing around and over diagnosing 'at-risk' students as a

misguided attempt to fix their behavior. This “blaming the victim” syndrome placed identifiable labels on scholars of color considered “problematic” and contributed to the proliferation of misconceptions attached to a the deviant student (Flores, 2005, p. 76). Such harmful labels displace scholars from full participation in and out of the classroom. Consistent racial isolation stemmed from the common misbelief that black children are handicapped, neurologically impaired and educable mentally retarded diminishes intellectual growth (Cole, 2015.) According to Flores (2005), basic assumptions, which mainly focused on negative behavior, “placed an emphasis on weakness and assumed a resultant deficiency” (p. 88). Intervention strategies yield different results.

In Obenchain and Taylor’s (2005) study of effective behavior management in middle and secondary schools, they focus on three commonly used and misused behavior intervention strategies. The first strategy outlined is the concept of planned ignoring. As a critical component, extinction is utilized to eliminate positive reinforcement entirely, even if the behavior intensifies. For the teacher, the challenge is to remain consistent. Next, escape conditioning, often known as negative reinforcement, is the temporary dismissal of an undesirable task. When students become aware that their negative behaviors are unwelcomed in the classroom, they learn how to aggravate their teachers by simply misbehaving to escape the classroom. Obenchain and Taylor (2005) state, “the principle of escape conditioning is the removal of an unpleasant stimulus” (p. 9) where scholars of color feel indifferent toward their teachers. As a result, the likelihood of scholars repeating their unpleasant behavior increases. Another name for the third misused strategy is a “method of approximations” (Obenchain & Taylor, 2005, p. 10). This concept

emphasizes shaping discipline, as a reinforcement tactic that determines what is considered desired behavior. The principles of shaping behaviors state too much praise aimed at performance can lead to students merely wanting approval, not for the intrinsic value of cooperative behavior (Obenchain & Taylor, 2005).

For this reasons, scholars of color continue to face inequitable disciplinary practices that segregate and hold scholars of color inferior to school policies. There is no doubt that this vividly demonstrates the pernicious impact of deficit thinking on disciplinary practices. Constructive discipline is about conflict not harm. It understands how (*process*) the conflict began and from where (*location*) it derived. Not assigning the blame but understanding the impact initiates communication to create effective dialogue by tackling the root of the problem. Part of my final project strives to highlight how to shift discipline policies by making transparent the disproportionate disciplinary procedures against scholars of color and building a more inclusive environment by encompassing the relationships between community and schools. I made a conscious decision to include an explanation of how critical relationships are in building a sense of community in schools. In subsequent sections, I discuss the value of positive relationships in and out of school and how they affect scholar's behavior and the construction of disciplinary policies.

### **The Value of Reciprocal Relationships in Discipline**

The missing component in the framework of our educational system today is reciprocity between scholars, teachers, and paraprofessionals. Reciprocity as an engagement tool is necessary to disrupt the hegemonic disciplinary protocols in order to bring about social justice awareness and authentic knowledge. Several authors highlight the value of teacher student relationships (TSR) (Liew, Chen & Hughes, 2010; Noam & Bernstein-Yamashiro, 2013). Studies show how cross-cultural analysis of conflict is necessary to minimize upheaval in and out of the classroom. An effective way to accomplish this is by engaging with scholars, teachers, and paraprofessionals beyond the classroom. Delpit and White-Bradley (2003) state that being “willing to develop a relationship with them [scholars] individuals and as a group” has the potential to educate their spirits (p. 288). Reciprocity as a principle of discipline emphasizes the importance of relationship building different groups of people to connect in a deep and intimate way (Delpit & White-Bradley, 2003). Furthermore, positive discipline as an essential dimension of school connectedness stimulates TSRs to grow and flourish in and out of the classroom (Strahan, Cope & Hundley, 2005). However, cohesion, as a classroom management tool, can also be applied by paraprofessionals outside the classroom setting.

Overlooked, yet central to relationships are paraprofessionals and their significance to discipline. With greater flexibility to respond to needs as they arise, paraprofessionals bring the expertise with handling challenging behaviors and guiding scholars of color to appropriate resources (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008). Inclusion of paraprofessionals challenges the mainstream education’s dependency on ‘credentialed teachers’ by offering alternative

approaches to discipline (Spratt, Shucksmith, Phillip & Watson, 2006). Morale and intimacy are fundamentals of healthy relationships because they nurture the body, mind and spirit. Spratt et al., (2006), states that paraprofessionals “are beneficial because they can emotionally connect with those too frequently labeled as behaviorally disturbed” (p. 20). Utilizing other professional groups to assist with multiple behaviors can reduce inconsistent disciplinary practices.

Literature reveals positive TSRs are consistently linked with increased academic motivation and achievement as well as positive self-concept (Delpit & White-Bradley, 2003; Liew, Chen, & Hughes, 2010; Noam & Bernstein-Yamashiro, 2013). In addition, preliminary evidence suggests that the link between positive TSRs and academic outcomes may especially be pronounced for scholars with behavioral or conduct problems (Liew et al., 2010). As soon as scholars enter formal institutions, teachers become important agents of socialization and sources of support outside of the home. Additional results supported that including paraprofessionals with TSRs can improve community building that motivates and enables scholars to engage in positive learning (Liew et al., 2010). Reliance on classroom teachers as *experts* can no longer be the norm in the realm of education (Landeros, 2011). According to recent data there are approximately 8.4 million school-age children in after school programs with 3.4 million from low-income households and 24% of African Americans aged 6-9 years from 1995-2005 (Afterschool Alliance, 2013; Haynes & Sanders, 2011). In a case study, researchers conducted a project in 11 schools monitoring the appointed role of non-teachers to the role of paraprofessionals. The outcomes revealed non-teachers served as effective benefactors because they increased access to support for scholars, collaborated meaningfully with scholars,

maintained educational management, and provided better guidance as their primary responsibility (Andrews, 2006). I note here that a limitation for this case study was the lack of research conducted in out-of-school settings. In the school system, an important long-term developmental task is to develop positive relationships between scholars and paraprofessionals outside the classroom (Henricsson & Rydell, 2006). Literature confirms that out of school time becomes a place of worship for some scholars who are not fortunate to have either both parents or are unable to form compassionate relationships due to biased disciplinary strategies. For example, Landeros (2011) states “attitudes reveal a good teacher...one who can work with children, not one with specialised knowledge about the areas” (p. 256). Hence, the need for recognition of paraprofessionals from teachers in and out of school as positive role models who have the ability to engage, reinforce and empower good behavior. Credentials do not legitimize teachers. Landeros (2011) also notes this privileged knowledge “reflects a belief that there is an ‘inner circle’” (p. 255). Reciprocity as an engagement tool dismantles abusive authoritative systems meant to control the behavior scholars of color rather than helping them develop. Spratt et al., (2006) suggest paraprofessionals understand the cultural relevance in building healthy relationships that benefit scholar, teacher and paraprofessional. This idea is an extension of Gramsci’s viewpoint, “the establishment of rapport between the educated and the masses requires a deliberate effort towards communication from intellectuals” (as cited in Entwistle, 1978, p. 120). Paraprofessionals, as credible educators, are positioned understand the barriers of learning scholars face in school, at home, and in their community. A mutual understanding is essential to creating effective and democratic disciplinary policies that foster integration of

relationships and cultivate a culture of connectedness to maintain fair and congruent discipline strategies. Overall, it enhances the quality of a scholar's well-being.

### **The Influence of Hegemony**

No matter from which group they come, those in power describe their own station in life as resulting directly from goal-oriented behavior, a competitive urge...in short, they place the reasons or causes of their 'success' somewhere within themselves...the reasons or causes of 'inferior' status [are placed] somewhere within the minds, within the personalities, or within the culture of those who are economically, politically, or educationally out of power, (Romano, 1967, p. 8). Using appropriate literature, I have discussed transformative methods involved with engagement and inclusiveness that fosters influential interactions rooted within students, teachers/paraprofessionals and community. In this section, I refer to literature that analyzes how hegemonic discipline - the role of force and coercion as the basis of ruling class domination - interferes with thought processes when determining what the consequences will be for the behavior. Two recurring themes that became apparent throughout my research were power and dominance. I borrow the concept of hegemony from Antonio Gramsci to understand the complexities of control and management of scholars of color in disciplinary practices. Stereotypes in hegemony translate to common sense knowledge where people subconsciously begin to abide and believe that the domineering rules are necessary to control scholars of color (Koirala-Azad, 2013). A powerful common sense status is difficult to resist. As a collective group of scholars, Yang (2009) claims, "regardless of who is being punished, everyone is impacted" (52). Several authors illustrate their personal experiences about the challenges they



encountered with disciplining their scholars of color to express how improving student outcomes, both inside and outside school walls, is a shared institutional concern. Relating to the criminalization of youth and how easily their identity translated to classify them as delinquent

Monroe (2005) states:

Beside Kevin's name were the expected words. Status: Suspended. Location: Juvenile detention provided in a crisp and matter-of-fact conclusion to the story. Yet, my own experiences with Kevin, coupled with observations by students and colleagues, raised complicated questions about the situation... There is a particular need to understand how and why teachers' views of these students, particularly males, mediate their disciplinary actions in the classroom. (p. 45)

In Kevin's case, he was a victim of the hegemonic belief that young adults of color are a threat and barbaric invaders to society, consequently, hindering his full potential to grow and succeed.

Another example portrays how hegemony not only affects the culture in and out of the classroom but also subtly invades teachers' moral reasoning behind punishing rather than disciplining.

Yang (2009) tells his experience after writing his first referral:

It seemed reasonable that the school administration might have something useful to say to the student, so I filled it out [referral]... I quickly learned that this was the poorest advice you can give to a new teacher struggling with classroom culture and her/his own authority within it...institutionalized, depersonalized forms of retribution assert the conviction that they [scholars] were wrongfully punished. (p. 49)

Overall, the literature showed how disciplinary policies are inadvertently influenced by false assumptions around the ideas of hegemony while simultaneously, perpetuates youths of colors as deviant. Monroe (2005) asks, "How do images of African American men and boys in society at large relate to teachers' notions about effective disciplinary strategies based on student race and gender? Moreover, how do prevailing norms and practices in society at large influence the shape of disciplinary problems in schools?" (p.45). The control of naming and being named produces

subjectivities based on limited measurements that inaccurately assign identities and stigmatizes students based on their conduct (Foucault, 1995; Yang, 2009).

### **Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline in Practice**

Some literature has revealed classroom disruptions shift attention away from teaching and learning time. This has direct implications for student performance. Freiberg, Huzinec, and Templeton (2009) state, “positive school climate and student achievement are casualties of classroom disruptions” (p. 64). Additionally, Freiberg et al. (2009) report “zero-tolerance policies during the last decade have accelerated the number of suspensions and expulsions, resulting in students falling farther behind academically while being left unsupervised at home or in the community” (p. 64). Student behavior can frame the degree of latitude of how teachers are willing to teach. In a case study of 14 inner-city elementary schools, Freiberg et al., (2009) studied how diverse learning environments in classrooms experience ongoing changes that influence and are influenced by relationships and behaviors by implementing the Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline (CMCD):

An instructional and classroom management program that provides teachers, administrators, students, and school staff with the tools needed to build community and organizational capacity within their schools. It [CMCD] that emphasizes on preventing discipline problems before they begin, improving school and classroom climate as well as student behavior, and effectively managing instructional time, resulting in greater student achievement. (p. 64)

Opuni (2006) affirmed that using more comprehensive strategies for learning enhanced cooperativeness between all participants. Findings from Lapointe and Legault (2004) case study of an 8th grade history class indicated:

On the basis of group perception teachers became more helpful and understanding and less dissatisfied and punitive...interactions are bidirectional...it is important to intervene

in a way that scholars and teachers realize that their own behavior can have detrimental results on others and on themselves...when they realize this, and then understand their capacity to resolve problems, a basis for long-lasting changing exists. (pp. 9-10)

Sharing responsibility for learning in and out of school settings cultivates democratic and participatory practices that are fair, inclusive, and caring, between teachers, paraprofessionals. Teachers and paraprofessionals along with scholars have the potential to become self-disciplined and empowered, by experiencing greater responsibility. Both elements of CMCD create a sense of "belonging" for both scholars and staff and are derived from five central themes: prevention, caring, organization, cooperation, and community (Freiberg et al., 2009). The CMCD model also inspires self-worth, self-dignity, self-sufficiency and self-love. Freiberg et al., (2009) state, "This whole-school focus creates a sense of cohesion and consistency among personnel, students, and staff" and are all equally vital in successfully adapting a cooperative discipline approach that "creates shared leadership and responsibility" (pp.64, 66). It is through consistency and transformative, constructive strategies adopted across the entire school and team that promote communication between teachers, scholars, paraprofessionals and parents through meaningful connections. Supporting my CRP model, the CMCP alongside collaborative discipline would inspire us to teach *to* and *through* the strengths and differences of students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Real performance improvement comes from the intensity of shared goals and the level of investment in the partnership. Furthermore, it is the desire to go beyond the classroom space and experience community that leads to successful alliances between schools, leadership and communities' in/out of classrooms.

## Summary

In summary, the above literature exposed three noteworthy themes: the value of reciprocal relationships in discipline, positive behavior interfered by hegemonic discipline, and consistency management, and cooperative discipline in practice. Disciplinary strategies such as active, collaborative, and problem-based learning can be utilized to reinforce social justice and equitable education in and out of classroom settings. While schools may be considered the central location for academic achievement, this literature review reveals that the role of paraprofessionals engaged in out-of-school settings can be influential communal spaces of healing and human growth for everyone.

Several authors cited in this review challenged hegemonic discourse by using a collaborative approach to discipline. They thoughtfully recognized the importance and necessity of reciprocity between adults and scholars. It is impossible to try to *fix* a scholars' race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. However, it is possible to understand the root cause of behaviors so educators can successfully engage in transformative discipline. To omit the oppressive disciplinary strategies enforced by institutions, a conversation between paraprofessionals and teachers must happen. Discipline as a transformative possibility emphasizes acknowledging and teaching about, not punishing, inappropriate behavior. It also integrates both educator and learner's mind, body, and soul to maximize full potential, minimize punitive and degrading practices against scholars of color to effectively dismantle the behavioral barriers preventing a democratic form of discipline.

## CHAPTER III THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

### **Description of the Project**

This project provides alternative strategies for engaging discipline that promotes positive youth development in an engaging way for both paraprofessionals and youth to exercise their full potential outside the classroom setting. These alternative approaches to managing behavior focus more on discipline as an opportunity to communicate rather than punishment. I've developed my strategies in a manner that is conducive specifically for organizations and programs that work with youth of color outside of the institution. The project itself may be adapted in the classroom; however, my expertise and experience lies in the non-profit setting.

I have organized my project into three parts. Firstly, one of the effective strategies I created was a modified communications policy that was aligned with the student attendance requirements at my workplace. Secondly, I developed a rubric that assessed our students based on our three values: integrity, commitment and perseverance. Lastly, in addition to enhancing our program's culture, I proposed and created an application for beginning the first Teen Ambassador Council at our site. Establishing a culture of respect and cross-generational understanding is critical to one's identity and ownership. Please note, that each of these alternative strategies may be used to compliment your program's behavior management and/or discipline policy.

Communication was the vehicle of my project. I found leadership to serve as an appropriate behavior modification tool because the responsibility and demands of what embodies a leader, helps hold students and adult allies accountable. Across various learning environments

that “include concepts of skill development in a cultural context, home-school-community collaboration and empowerment,” scholars of color are more likely to adapt their behaviors that make them more prone to excel in (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 76). When a safe space is provided for students to express themselves, meaningful conversations and robust relationships are established. In turn, this approach has the potential to transform behavior management strategies into a culturally constructive model that validates scholar’s backgrounds rather than ostracizing them. “Criticism is not a matter of arbitrarily *condemning* an institution or belief, but of understanding it,” (Bernstein cited in Gramsci, 1971, pp. 51-52). Ultimately, the purpose of my project was not to simply understand the stringent discipline practices disproportionately scholars of color but to have them know and critically reflect from their personal experiences by giving them the opportunity to listen and share their realities. Additionally, to provide youth based program with tangible, effective strategies on how to incorporate constructive discipline using communication and leadership.

### **Development of the Project**

Prior to writing this project, my goal was to incorporate this project into my current workplace and share the knowledge I learned with my students and colleagues. In the past year, I have moved from California to Colorado, working tirelessly as the Denver representative for Futures Without Violence’s national RESPECT! Campaign and started a new job with a different organization. Even though I lived up to my expectations of aligning my project with my job, I have come to realize that regardless of where I work and with whom I work with, this project

will be applicable in my everyday life. So rather than keep my project primarily within the College Track environment, I decided to extend its development into my new workplace.

In September of 2013, I began working at College Track (CT) in San Francisco's Bayview neighborhood. CT is a nonprofit organization that empowers students from underserved communities to reach their dreams of obtaining a college degree. There, I was introduced to the GRIT model. Coined by psychology professor Angela Duckworth at the University of Pennsylvania, the term "grit" represents perseverance and sustained interest in long-term goals. At CT, "grit" is utilized as an acronym that stands for guts, resiliency, integrity and tenacity. The GRIT model recognizes and honors high-achieving students both academic and non-academically. Not to be confused with an incentive-based approach that merely uses rewards to temporarily cure the behavior, but it is a model that supports growth mind-set and teaches students about responsibility, identity development and social leadership skills. Duckworth states, "I don't think people can become truly gritty and great at things they don't love... when we try to develop grit in kids, we also need to find and help them cultivate their passions... that's as much a part of the equation here as the hard work and the persistence" (retrieved from an interview with NPR on March 17, 2014). However, I became more observant of the model's implementation in "grittier than gritty" environments. Take for example, "The Point" AKA Bayview Hunter's Point AKA home to these scholars of color who've willingly and bravely participated in this project. Everything CT was implementing - leadership opportunities, homework help, comprehensive and individualized tutoring practices, Study Squad Groups, innovative enrichment programming - was for the growth and success of the organization itself.

But what was CT *really* doing to create a culture where their student's felt significant, suitable and ultimately humane. There was only one way for me to get to the root of the GRIT model itself, and that was when I decided to share my project with the scholars of color.

The standards of the CT student GRIT rubric is one that focuses on academic achievement and leadership based on the performance levels "exceeds expectations," "meets expectations" and "approaching expectations." It is a rubric that values the culture of CT's environment; however, inadequately meets the expectations of the student's culture. By culture, I mean how/if CT is promoting a challenging environment for self-sufficiency and critical growth success that energizes our youth's voice. Does CT validate the way our scholars of color are feeling when they are unfairly punished at school? What role does discipline play in this rubric and how does exposure to the GRIT model influence life-changing experiences in those overtly disciplined? Do our students become advocates for themselves when all is said and done? One can argue that storytelling lacks credibility and therefore is not considered a fundamental tool in academe. However, when approached from the youth's perspective, storytelling is their survival tactic. A voice of reason for the open wound caused by irreparable damage. The objective of my research was not only to emphasize the importance of student-paraprofessional relationships, but also to explore how disciplinary measures contrast between different learning patterns and what patterns or trends support the CRP framework (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In a culture where time is limited, nothing can substitute for face-to-face interaction between my students and colleagues. Driven by the value of reciprocal relationships in the context of discipline, I decided to utilize a collection of informal focus groups, staff meetings,



professional development conferences and local workshops. My intention for utilizing informal focus groups was to strategically gather testimonies from a panel of experts (scholars of color) in an organic manner by engaging in dialogue. Focus groups help build mutual relationships based on personal and social interests through the process of exchange (Madriz, 1998). It gives the chance for the researcher to reciprocate in kind. Thus, as a collective interviewing strategy, the act of conversation raises public awareness and enhances the process of both knowing and learning (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Mora (2003) notes, “To learn to listen implies incorporating new perspectives and concepts and it implies learning to speak again in a different form” (p. 21). Being heavily involved with the students, teachers, and parents as an employee within both of my research sites was a major vantage point. Navigating between the role of researcher and educator during the development of my project was challenging; however, I was aware that having greater access with my participants helped build rapport and I am grateful to have been in that position. From these dialogues, a new learning discourse emerged that “emphasizes moral-ethical claims and a focus on transforming power relationships” (Mora, 2003, p. 20). In hindsight, discipline is a common yet complex way of seeking validation for our behaviors in a way that makes us feel legitimate and correct. When we become accustomed to rigid forms of punishment we’re doing ourselves a disservice, especially to our scholars of color, because in the end their unlearned lessons translate to lifelong prosecutions, which in turn bury their untapped potential. Ultimately, it is the courageous youth who shared their experiences that breathed life into my project and fueled my project with purity and innocence.

## **The Project**

I wanted to be mindful of work and school demands, so I decided to develop resources that were instructive and easy to follow in a way that best exercised positive alternatives to non-discriminatory discipline practices. Given the sensitivity of my experts' stories, I thought it was necessary to include their feedback in the recommendations section. Based on their suggestions, I expanded the culturally relevant discipline model to include leadership as liberation and consistent, constructive communication. Therefore, I organized my project into three sections:

1. A modified communications policy that emphasizes the values of cultivating reciprocal relationships between students, and one that parallels with the discipline guidelines;
2. A core values assessment rubric; and
3. The beginning application process for a Teen Ambassador Council.

## Communications Principles

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Clearly defined and consistent communication is vital to our program's mission of creating viable pathways to college. Excellent external and internal communication will assist in our effort to establish healthy, strong and positive relationships with our students. Effective communication strategies are important for all staff, volunteers, parents, students and stakeholders to understand and stay informed about the organizations policies. It is essential to maintain transparency and hold accountability for all members of our program. The implementation of a communications policy will ensure, enable and create impactful conversations.

## Purposes

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- Provide clear directions for staff to communicate with students when they are present and/or absent
- Utilize fair and ethical communication practices in accordance with our discipline guidelines
- Help improve our overall attendance
- Define departmental staff roles and responsibilities by assigning grade-specific spokesperson(s)
- Better manage workflow and establish clear programming schedules
- To regularly gather feedback to ensure we are maintaining program standards
- To provide the best standards of support and understanding between students, staff, volunteers and stakeholders involved within our program.
- Provide youth with a safe space to share their experiences about being disciplined by engaging in authentic dialogue.
- Accountability of stakeholders, institutional hierarchy and discipline tactics
- Opportunities to analyzing stories and making connections
  - Community engagement and critiquing relationships
- Understanding societal and cultural factors that impact their behaviors
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## General Practices

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### **Internal**

Internal communication is guided by weekly scheduled and attended staff meetings, regularly e-mailed program updates (i.e. Weeks Ahead), and weekly reports on grade updates. We use our personal cell phones on a regular basis to communicate with our students, parents, mentor and volunteers. This line of communication welcomes alternative perspectives and helps build and maintain camaraderie. All staff members are required to listen carefully, and respond respectfully to the views of internal staff and/or constituents.

### **External**

The purpose of our Teen Advisory Council at is to increase meaningful involvement, provide

more leadership opportunities for students, advocate for more justifiable discipline practices and to relay specific information related to all programming needs. All internal constituents are aware of who the designated spokesperson(s) is/are authorized to make public statements. All staff and should reply promptly and respectfully respond to grievances or complaints from students and/or parents.

### **Key Communication Tools**

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The advancement of technology has created new channels for delivering messages and drastically transformed how we communicate. Transferring information across different social media platforms can be efficient yet challenging. Sophisticated tools can have little impact in the success of the organization if a guideline isn't set in place. How do we create effective communication practices that can help drive participation and increase attendance? The establishment of a communications plan should also support the guidelines of appropriate use of different tools. The two specific technologies that MHS students and staff deal with are cell phones and computers. All participants are expected to use technology in a constructive manner while on-site.

### **Conversations with Youth**

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It is through personal relationships that youth programs are able to have such an impact on its students. These strong relationships help students feel comfortable speaking with staff about sensitive subjects. It is crucial for students to trust the staff in such a way that it is okay to share sensitive information. However, it is in the program's best interest to ensure a safe environment for any conversation.

1. A team conversation – consisting of at least two staff members (one male and one female) – is preferable in all instances.
2. When a team conversation is not possible, let another adult or staff member know that a private conversation is about to occur.
  - a. Notify the other adult of the location and the name of the student involved.
3. All conversations should occur in a place that affords the best of both worlds, public and private. Look for a space that allows others to see what is transpiring but not hear the conversation.
  - a. The end of the hallway near the accounting offices is typically a good place.
  - b. Do not put yourself in a position where you are in a closed room.
4. If the topic of the conversation is gender specific, match a female staff member to a female student and a male staff member to a male student.

### **Note to Youth**

- Nothing you say is wrong. I want to hear all of your opinions/experiences--even if they conflict with somebody else's. I encourage you all to use your voice.
- You are experts in your own experiences. Therefore, I want to find out about your feelings, intentions, motivations and attitudes.

- I will not analyze YOU personally! You all are not guinea pigs or lab rats, rather young scholars who I want to learn, hear and engage more with about how you are treated and to provide a safe, comfortable and welcoming space to self-express about the stories/experiences that you are unable to talk about elsewhere.
- I will analyze all of the opinions I collect as a whole from a series of focus groups. This is a collective project.
- Feel free to go into detail and explain why you feel something. Be open, true and real with yourselves.
- I am genuinely interested in what *you* think and what *you* have to say!
- Be patient with fellow group members. Be an active listener and participant.

## Discipline Policy Guidelines

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### **Core Values**

Collectively, our core values define how we interact with each other; they allow each of us to hold himself/herself accountable to a standard that is beyond reproach. As such, these core values are the keystone to any discipline policy, a policy that is in place to help each of us improve. The discipline policy is not in place to punish students through suspension or expulsion<sup>1</sup>; it is in place to guide and to teach/learn.

When these core values are pierced or unevenly upheld, the ability to achieve its mission is compromised. The mission is to mobilize and organize the resources necessary for historically underserved students to achieve their full potential. There are daily opportunities to be guided, to teach, and to learn. Most of these opportunities do not stick out as anything other than part of an average day. Through the course of informal and formal conversations, guidance is given, teaching/learning occur and their leadership roles are more defined.

Those informal and formal conversations represent the first step in a discipline policy that has a trajectory of intrusiveness. The conversations are not intrusive. In fact, they are an integral part of everyday life. However, being pulled out of an activity, because one is not showing concern for others and is in fact endangering his peers, is more intrusive. It requires a “break in the action” and is an intervention of sorts. The trajectory that begins with informal and common-place conversations ends with the very formal and unfortunate act of choosing to depart from the program.

The discipline trajectory is applied on a case-by-case basis and does not necessarily have to move in the same sequence each time. For example, a student who instigates a fight during practice might find himself in the unfortunate position of being suspended from a portion of

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<sup>1</sup> It is possible for a student to make choices that result in a suspension and even an eventual expulsion. These choices come into play as consequences of dangerous or severely disruptive behavior, behavior that is having a negative impact on the MHS community.

practice. The formal conversation would also occur, but it would occur in conjunction with the suspension.

**The trajectory has five points of interaction:**

1. Verbal warning: the informal conversation and suggesting of how to improve, learn, etc. It is give-and-take.
2. You are dropped from the activity, immediately. The MHS staff member writes up the incident and the student signs it. The student, the staff member involved, and the Executive Director sign the incident report. This occurs before the next practice.
3. Parents are called and brought up to speed. A meeting is set between the parents, the student, the involved staff member, and the Executive Director. A performance improvement plan (PIP)/contract of behavior is created to guide forward progress. If that contract, which has a start and end date, is broken, a suspension is put into effect.
4. A suspension. It is difficult to see how a suspension alone will guide or teach. The suspension must be paired with an activity that supports learning.
5. Expulsion is a last result and it alone is a process involving guardians, the board of directors, and the Executive Director. Expulsion is never taken lightly because it ends a student's chance of creating a pathway to college in this supportive environment. Expulsion is about safety, safety for the group and safety for the individual.
  - a) Expulsion is not always preceded by suspension, each case is different.

We live our lives along the first two points and hope that we don't end up touching points 3, 4 & 5.

## **YOUTH AMBASSADOR COUNCIL**

The Youth Ambassador Council provides youth with leadership opportunities to grow, engage and represent Denver. Members of the Youth Ambassador Council are comprised of students in grades 6 through 12. After a rigorous application process, the council members are required to stay involved in academic and enrichment activities within their schools and respective communities. The Youth Ambassador Council meets monthly.

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Youth Ambassador Council is to supply our students with leadership opportunities where they can experience the responsibilities of a commitment to service and action. Their active participation will allow them to build allies through cross-collaboration, which will increase awareness and appreciation of diversity by promoting mutual respect and consideration for others.

The goals of the Youth Ambassador Advisory Council are to:

- Be a positive role model by motivating, caring and encouraging all students.
- Contribute to establishing an inclusive environment; keeping in mind the MHS core values.
- Identify student needs versus wants and ensure representation of the student voice on and off site.
- Promote and organize biannual events.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Provide thoughtful and constructive feedback to students, staff and adults by consistently communicating clearly and conducting surveys when necessary.
- Participate in the development and review of certain policies and procedures that affect Mile High Squash.
- As a youth ambassador, you are responsible for organizing and implementing a project to showcase at the biannual event. (e.g. talent show, food drive)
- Help staff coordinate fundraising events, trips, parent socials within MHS and the larger Denver community.
- Attend a leadership conference once a year and one community service project per month.

### **QUALIFICATIONS**

Member of the MHS program in grade 6-12

Minimum GPA of 2.0

Attendance rate of 88%

## YOUTH AMBASSADOR COUNCIL APPLICATION

To be considered for an interview, youth must submit all the following before the deadline:

- Youth Ambassador Council Application
- 2 letters of recommendation (see below)
- Completed response questions

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

**Personal Information:**

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Name	Phone Number	Relationship
Name of Your School: _____	Grade: _____	GPA: _____

Year of H.S. Graduation: \_\_\_\_\_

**Personal Responses** (feel free to attach additional sheets of paper with your responses):

**School Activities, Hobbies, and Skills:**

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**What are your academic and personal goals?**

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**Why do you want to be on the Youth Ambassador Council?**

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**I will be an effective member of this leadership team because:**

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**YOUTH AMBASSADOR COUNCIL APPLICATION**

**Is there anything else you would like to share with us to support your application?**

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**Please provide two letters of recommendation from individuals (one from a peer and one from a teacher, coach, mentor, or employer) who know you well enough to accurately assess your qualities, character and commitment with others.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name Phone Number Relationship

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name Phone Number Relationship

### **Selection Process**

The MHS staff will carefully review all submitted applications to ensure candidates are eligible and meet all criteria. The [enter #] selected students will proceed to the interview process where each candidate will be interviewed by staff.

### **Signatures are required for a complete application**

Signature of Applicant \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE RETURN COMPLETED APPLICATION TO SABRINA**

## **FOCUS GROUP SKILL SETS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

In the course of my informal focus group for my final master's project, scholars will have an opportunity to develop social, academic, and arts-based skills in the following areas (which can vary given the scope of the individual projects):

### **LANGUAGE/LITERACY AND COMMUNICATION**

- Empathic listening
- Creative collaboration
- Vocabulary building
- Shaping, editing and analyzing personal narratives

### **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

- Choosing to participate
- Understanding ascribed and personal identity
- Understanding the creation of “the other” and the power of labels
- Building community partnerships
- Immersion and collective participation
- Team building
- Ethical reflection

### **MEDIA/TECHNOLOGY**

- Media literacy in sharing stories/projects
- Website creation
- Video production

## **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF FOCUS GROUP**

**Framework:** Using a “culturally relevant pedagogy” (CRP) approach to discipline addresses a more broad, diverse understanding of race, culture and class so that disciplinary actions may be used to empower those wrongly punished by acknowledging and recognizing their presence. CRP urges collective action grounded in cultural understanding, experiences and ways of knowing the world. Culturally relevant discipline teaches to and through the strengths of ethnically diverse students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1992).

**Objective:** By using dialogue as a transformative praxis to enable scholars to explore identity and culture through the personalizing of their experiences of being (wrongly) disciplined or ‘punished,’ scholars will be challenged to think critically about how they play a crucial role in discipline policies and what affect it has on their relationships with teachers/paraprofessionals both in and out of the classroom setting.

By the end of the session students should be able to:

1. Have a broad understanding of the meaning of “discipline” in their schools.
2. Be able to identify social and cultural based traditions/norms, which are prevalent in their communities.
3. Be able to identify good and bad practices including punishment and human right violations (I will distribute a pocket version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to each student)
4. Have constructive ideas and critical suggestions of how to improve unjust and discriminatory disciplinary practices but also simply being more aware of and valuing their lived experiences as marginalized groups in society.

**Purpose:** The purpose of utilizing an informal focus group with non-professional community members (scholars) is to gather qualitative baseline information regarding current perceptions of disciplinary policies enacted in and out of school settings by listening to the first hand experiences from high school students of color. The focus will also accomplish a secondary objective of informing participating disciplined victims regarding the project; overall transform their learning experiences by acknowledging and humanizing their cultural background.

**Goal:** The conversations will help each other better understand their opinions about current disciplinary practices; help alleviate tension, broaden contextual information, and promote engagement between scholars and (non)authoritative figures; encourage verbal expression to articulate personal and ascribed identity, cultural norms and conflicts; and build communication skills and a critical consciousness to better develop dignified teacher-paraprofessional-scholar relationships.

**Essential Questions (to use for sessions when no activity scheduled)**

- Do the terms ‘trouble maker’ or ‘deviant student’ resonate with you personally? If so, how?
- What stereotypes exist around ‘trouble makers’ and ‘students of color?’
- How do your experiences with discipline change while transitioning in/out of school?
- Can you think of the power that labels have in your own life? What are they?
- What connections can you make to this issue from school’s code of conduct policies/behavior management tactics?
- What are some of the ways in which home and family and culture are represented (or not represented) in and out of your classroom?

- How can you connect the realities of a rigid/strict discipline policy environment with your own life, community and relationship with others?
- Describe the relationships with teachers at school. Describe your relationship with adults/tutors/paraprofessionals at CT.
- How do you transform struggles into sources of strength?
- Do you think society, schools, friends, teachers, adults etc. would treat you differently if they knew you got in 'trouble' a lot? Why? And how?

## CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Conclusions**

Disproportionate discipline policies that alienate, criminalize and dehumanize our youth are prevalent. The purpose of this project was to provide alternative strategies for engaging in discipline that promotes positive youth development. This project was created in the form of a workshop. The workshop provides specific ways to emphasize cultural capital in scholars.

We are doing a disservice to Black youth when we allow behavior management strategies to be used in a discriminatory fashion. The justification for stop-and-frisk or zero-tolerance policies has continuously proven unsuccessful; however, law enforcement insists on its reliance (Alexander, 2012). On a larger scale, “these routine encounters amount to much more than humiliating, demeaning rituals for young men of color... they serve as the gateway into the criminal justice system” (p.136). The school to prison pipeline parallels the present day disciplinary practices in the classroom that forcefully displaces students of color from their basic right to learn. The criminalization of youth behavior strategically pushes students out of the classroom and into the criminal justice system (Padres y Jovenes Unidos Report Card, 2012). One response to eliminate these social injustices related to pejorative school enforcement measures, recently took place in Denver, Colorado. Initiated by non-profit organization, Padres y Jovenes Unidos, alongside constituents and allied stakeholders of Colorado, worked tirelessly to

pass Senate Bill 46 (HB 1345) otherwise known as the Smart School Discipline Law (SSDL).

The SSDL mandates school districts to implement “proportionate” discipline; prevention services such as restorative justice and peer mediation; quantitative assessments that measure substantial improvement in data collection; and more rigorous appropriate training for on school-site law enforcement<sup>2</sup>. The table below is a visual representation indicating the progress since the SSDL passage:

Variability in Colorado School Discipline Practices				
School Discipline Practices	Keeping Students in School & Learning		Punish, Exclude & Push Out	
<b>Referrals to Law Enforcement</b>	# of Districts with <b>Zero</b> Referrals to Law Enforcement	<b>95</b>	# of Districts with <b>At Least 10</b> Referrals to Law Enforcement (ranging as high as 1,014)	<b>40</b>
<b>Expulsions</b>	# of Districts with <b>Zero</b> Expulsions	<b>93</b>	# of Districts with <b>At Least 5</b> Expulsions (ranging as high as 158)	<b>42</b>
<b>Out-of-School Suspensions</b>	# of Districts with <b>Fewer than 2</b> Out-of-School Suspensions per 100 Students	<b>67</b>	# of Districts with <b>More than 6</b> Out-of-School Suspensions per 100 Students (ranging as high as 20.5)	<b>49</b>
<b>Racial Disparities</b>	# of Districts in which Students of Color <b>Were Not Over-Represented</b> in the Use of Out-of-School Suspensions, Expulsions, and Referrals to Law Enforcement	<b>89</b>	# of Districts in which Students of Color Were <b>At Least 25% More Likely</b> to be Suspended Out-of-School, Expelled, or Referred to Law Enforcement	<b>77</b>

Table 1. Adapted from Padres y Jovenes Unidos website, padresunidos.org, updated 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Data retrieved from Padres y Jovenes Unidos website.

Although their data is limited to statistics only in Colorado, their efforts are noteworthy and should encourage other agencies to adopt and implement effective discipline practices both in and out of school.

### **Recommendations**

Policymakers seeking to improve outcomes for scholars who engage in misconduct in school find that the recommendations they receive depend on whom you ask. Students' voices are dim alongside hopeless parents and frustrated advocates. At the end of the day, no single agency is solely responsible for the young adults who are repeatedly suspended or expelled. Rather, it is the fundamental duty of the society at large to fight, support and add value to the lives of our scholars of color, their families, and respective communities. Some alternative strategies for demonstrating positive youth discipline practices can be:

- Violence & early prevention programming (i.e. social workers, school psychologists, counselors, mentors)
- Relationship building opportunities (i.e. mentor-mentee experiences, peer group mediation, gender based counseling sessions)
- Positive behavioral supports and social skills training

### **Recommendations from Panel of Scholars**

As requested from my scholars of color, I have included some direct quotes from conversations that took place during our informal focus groups and weekend talks:

**A:** Discipline should be a way of communicating with that person whether they knew it was right or wrong just communication with them is key instead of reacting right then and there, just think before you discipline them...it should be like you're willing to want



to do that (meaning reciprocity) rules create the environment for you” (A. Smith, personal communication, March 19, 2014).

**D:** I don't feel like anybody learns from the lesson because they're not really trying to talk to you they're just giving you the stuff and that's it... Why not simply talk and don't judge? (D. Monroy, personal communication, March 20, 2014).

**T:** I say discipline should be like alignment, meaning, trying to keep you in line but being fair with the agreements. (T. Davis,, personal communication, March 28, 2014).

**M:** I hate it honestly I don't like discipline especially by the school, but by my mom, it's ok because she just talks to me, she simply talks. In this case, approach matters more, so for me, discipline takes good communication. (M. Parker, personal communication, March 30, 2014).

**C:** Teachers need to talk to the parent you know like not telling on the student, but just explaining to the parent what the problem was and how it was handled and how they acted in the classroom (C. Faro, personal communication, March 28, 2014).

**D:** I think he needs to just talk to them and listen. (D. Monroy, personal communication, March 28, 2014).

Based on the recommendations above, it is evident that students respond better to constructive discipline. The willingness to approach a student directly about the behavior and address the situation in a tactful, respectful way has a stronger impact on the outcome. Approaching discipline using consistent and clear communication is a common best practice that offers the student empowerment and leadership.

### **Personal Reflections**

The demographics over the last 10 years of Bayview-Hunters Points have drastically changed from a small White homogenous working class to a richly diverse, predominantly black population. This explains the cause of decline in White student enrollment to less than 10% from 1975 to 2003 (Noguera, 2000). My experts lived in low-income, under-resourced neighborhoods

known to have higher poverty rates and crime than the average norm. The negative stereotypes about communities of color that label Black and Latino scholars as ‘dangerous,’ ‘uneducated’ or ‘rebellious’ is what makes our society so narrow-minded and incapable of challenging the institutionalized racism penetrating our local spaces (Flores, 2005). It is unfair for these scholars to be misrepresented and disproportionately affected by an overtly biased and inequitable education system. Raising awareness about social injustice provides scholars of color the opportunity to constructively interfere with the processes of “emerging power” that makes them “agents of knowledge” allowing them to “speak to importance that oppression, [and] the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people” (Collins cited in Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012, p. 527). Providing participants with leadership opportunities that expose them to the ubiquitous racial and ethnic disparities in discipline challenges them to examine and reflect on the parallels between discipline and incarceration. Their engagement with the dialogue around the disproportionate discipline promotes a more culturally competent learning.

I intended this field project to contribute to the research base and hopefully advance discussions on finding a greater common ground among the many people focused on improving the response to disciplinary procedures disproportionately affecting our scholars of color. To what degree these stakeholders can work in concert, employing strategies that research says will work, will dictate in part the success of our next generation.

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