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Kevin J. Banks

May 2018

SENSEMAKING AS A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING HOW MIDDLE
SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS AS SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERS
ADJUDICATE DISCIPLINE REFERRALS TO DISRUPT THE RACIAL DISCIPLINE
GAP

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of K-12 Professional Leadership

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Acknowledgements

I first want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for providing me the strength and endurance to complete this journey. I am nothing without You and can do all things through You. I want to acknowledge and thank my wife Brandie for selflessly supporting me throughout this expedition. There were countless days that I had to leave you alone with the children as I conducted research and wrote over the course of these past three and a half years. I sincerely love and appreciate you. Thank you for your sacrifice.

I want to recognize my children Kennedy, Karleigh, and Kingston for enduring numerous weeknights and weekends without my presence at home. This time away truly hurt me more than you will ever know. Thank you for your patience and continued love throughout this process. I hope my efforts inspire you to achieve greatness. I am grateful for my mother and father who provided prayer, encouragement, and childcare while completing this mission. Your support has been invaluable.

I want to acknowledge the unnamed assistant principals who participated in this study. Thank you for your time, energy, insight, and honesty. I am grateful for my committee chairperson, Dr. Bradley Carpenter. I am appreciative of your vision, guidance, and support. You have inspired me to press beyond what I thought was possible. I would also like to thank my committee: Dr. Ruth Lopez, Dr. Keith Butcher, and Dr. Lachanda Landry. Your experience, feedback and acumen have proved valuable to my study and my development as a practitioner.

I would like to thank Principal Walker for her tutelage and investment in me. I am grateful for your support and understanding throughout this process. Finally, I would

like to thank the many family members, friends, co-workers, and cohort members for their prayers, words of encourage, and assistance on this journey.

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Abstract

Background: Black students are disproportionately suspended, expelled, or placed in alternative school settings during their preschool through 12th grade years (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Black students, specifically black males receive office discipline referrals more often and for infractions that are more subjective in nature than their white counterparts. The “space” between when teachers submit office discipline referrals and when students are subsequently excluded from the learning environment lacks exploration. APs, the authoritative campus figures responsible for receiving, analyzing, investigating and making disciplinary decisions are literary mysteries (Marshall, 1992). **Purpose:** The importance of this study was predicated on the need to reduce the well-documented number of black males disproportionately excluded from the learning environment and to combat the negative cumulative effects of these unbalanced practices. By examining and discussing the sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995), utilized by APs when making disciplinary decisions, a gap in literature has been addressed providing a reference point for future researchers, as well as tools to improve the professional practice of school practitioners and social justice advocates. **Methods:** This study observed an exploratory, qualitative approach delivered through a multi-case study design (Yin, 2014), which examined the phenomenon of AP sensemaking when adjudicating office discipline referrals. The participants within the study were secondary APs who shared similar experiences as urban secondary school administrators, yet their experiential backgrounds differed. The primary focus was to develop understanding of the cognitive processes employed by APs when making decisions on office discipline referrals for the purposes

of reducing the racial discipline gap and informing the practice of school leaders. In addition to an in-depth interview, participants used an on-line journal to detail their most memorable disciplinary experience each week for a total of four weeks. To conclude, a focus group was held with participants. **Results:** The key findings of the study indicated the social justice orientation of the AP drove their discipline approach, APs contended with the challenge of coaching culturally incompetent teachers, and there were multiple variables that informed the decision making of APs. Additionally, APs with social justice dispositions sought a high level of discernment regarding office discipline referral facts and desired to make judgements that were in the best interest of students. Lastly, key findings revealed APs contended with the emotional adversity that accompanied making exclusionary discipline decisions and combated criticism received from both teachers and parents. **Conclusion:** This research produced findings to support how social justice APs made sense of and disrupted the racial discipline gap, made sense of office discipline referrals, and navigated the emotional aspects related to making disciplinary decisions. The results point towards a need for social justice leaders that actively shape their environment through action, informed decision-making, refined investigative methods, maintaining an emotional balance and combating criticism with a focus on student growth.

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Chapter I

Introduction to the Study

Exclusionary discipline practices directed towards Black males continues to be a prevailing issue in public education. Since publication of the seminal Children's Defense Fund (1975) report titled, *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?*, which underscored the existence of racial disparities in education between Black and White students, exclusionary discipline has been a national concern (Edelman, Rochelle, & Smith, 1975). While empirical research illustrates the existence of a racial discipline gap, there is a lack of research on the school personnel most responsible for adjudicating student discipline, which traditionally is the Assistant Principal (AP). Not only is there scarcity of research regarding the AP position, absent in the research is an examination of the sensemaking APs undergo when analyzing and processing the office discipline referrals that often lead to exclusionary discipline for students. Sensemaking can be described as the cognitive process used by an individual that helps her or him progress from opacity to understanding.

Beyond immediate exclusion from the learning environment, unbalanced exclusionary discipline practices towards Black males are attributable to a number of long-term negative effects such as low academic achievement (Skiba & Sprague, 2008; Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014), disengagement from the educational community (Curtis, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011), increased student dropout rates (Evenson, Justinger, Pelischek, & Schulz, 2009; Skiba & Sprague, 2008), and funneling towards the school to prison pipeline (Heitzeg, 2009; Townsend Walker, 2012). Although research indicates the frequent assignment of punitive discipline to be counterproductive to youth development,

exclusionary discipline practices remain unfairly applied across the nation (Gregory et al., 2010).

Reducing the disproportionate number of Black males subjected to exclusionary discipline practices is the catalyst for examining the sensemaking process of APs, as many times these school administrators act alone as the judge and jury. The positive implications of using a sensemaking theoretical framework to examine APs adjudicating office discipline referrals is significant, as findings may provide guidance to the preparation of aspiring APs, inform the professional practice of those currently serving in the role of AP, and ultimately decrease current racial disparities within the racial discipline gap. The sensemaking theory is the theoretical framework employed within this study and is defined by Weick (1995) as including the “placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning” (p. 6). Aptly named to delineate the intellectual process of developing understanding about a given subject, the sensemaking theory’s seven properties made it an ideal theoretical framework to guide this study. I used the sensemaking theory to examine the dynamic process in which APs construct meaning of situations that require disciplinary decisions while contending with complex internal and external factors.

Background

Beginning in preschool and continuing throughout secondary grade levels, statistics have proven that Blacks, specifically Black males, tend to receive office discipline referrals more often and for infractions that are more subjective in nature than their White counterparts. Although other ethnic groups such as Latino, Native American,

and Asian/Pacific Islanders are subjected to exclusionary discipline practices, the largest divide as detailed through empirical literature is between Black and White students and will serve as the ethnic groups of comparison for this study. According to the 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) (2016) from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR), while 6% of all K-12 students received one or more out-of-school suspensions, the percentage is 18% for Black boys, 10% for Black girls, 5% for White boys, and 2% for White girls. Black preschool and K-12 students are over 3.5% as likely to receive one or more days of out-of-school suspensions as White students. The aforementioned exclusionary discipline data is consistent with both historical and contemporary trends illuminating the racial disparity of exclusionary discipline practices across the nation.

The “space” between when teachers submit student office discipline referrals and when students are subsequently excluded from the learning environment lacks exploration. APs, the authoritative campus figures responsible for receiving, analyzing, investigating and making disciplinary decisions are literary mysteries. The literature is dense concerning the teacher and principal roles; however, APs, those most frequently dispensing student discipline verdicts, are, empirically speaking, clandestine operators in the field of educational leadership. Kwan and Walker (2008) observe, “a review of the literature reveals a dearth of serious studies on the complexities of being a vice-principal. Most studies tend to provide little more than a normative description of the roles and duties of vice-principals...” (p. 74). Additionally, what’s more perplexing about the lack of research on APs adjudicating office discipline referrals is that available research about the position overwhelmingly agrees a chief responsibility of the AP is student discipline

(Bukoski, Lewis, Carpenter, Berry, & Sanders, 2015; Glanz, 1994; Kwan, 2009). Harvey (1994) notes “in nearly all schools the deputy principals had major responsibility for maintaining the standard of student behaviour. For many practitioners, student welfare and discipline were their major responsibility” (p. 16). With evidence indicating APs bear the disciplinary brunt of the campus, it would be prudent to examine in detail the cognitive processes employed by individuals presiding in these roles when concluding on discipline.

The importance of this study is predicated on the need to reduce the well-documented number of Black males disproportionately excluded from the learning environment and to combat the negative cumulative effects of these unbalanced practices. By examining and discussing the sensemaking processes utilized by APs when making disciplinary decisions, a gap in literature will be addressed, providing a reference point for future researchers, as well as tools to improve the professional practice of school practitioners and social justice advocates.

Problem

Blacks are at increased risk of being suspended, expelled, or placed in alternative school settings during their preschool through twelfth grade years (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Gregory et al., 2010; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). During the middle school years which is the focus of this study, out-of-school suspension may have significant long-term consequences (Losen & Skiba, 2010). In a study conducted by Balfanz, Spiridakis, Neild, and Legters (2003), researchers documented the educational pathways of over 400 ninth graders incarcerated in a major northeastern city and found the majority of these ninth graders were Black males with a history of out-of-school suspension, poor

attendance and low academic performance dating back to middle school. In another study conducted by Hilberth and Slate (2014), researchers studied all Black and White Texas middle school students (6-8 grades) for the 2008-2009 school year. Results of the study concluded there were statistically significant differences between the discipline Black students received compared to White students. Black students in this study received in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and were referred to Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP) more than White students. Research repeatedly illustrates the disconcerting reality that this sub-population of student is disproportionality subjected to the most severe consequences provided by schools (Fowler, 2011; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Heitzeg (2009) explains this lack of disciplinary equity from a national perspective by asserting that Black students are being suspended in numbers greater than would be expected from their proportion of the student population. In some states, Black students are expelled at between 6 and 10 times the rate of Whites. The penalties encumbered upon Black males extend beyond alienation from the classroom and extends into the criminal justice system (Wald & Losen, 2003). Recognizing the school-to-prison pipeline originates in the formative years of preschool with the most vulnerable members of society, serves as impetus to add unique research to the dearth of information available on this topic. While abundant information is available on the general topic of exclusionary discipline, scarce literature exists concentrating specifically on APs who adjudicate discipline.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine the sensemaking process of APs as they adjudicate office discipline referrals. APs, the school personnel primarily responsible for determining student disciplinary consequences, are integral and understudied members of the educational community. Increasingly, school leaders are being called upon to confront and disrupt social injustices in an effort to alter systemic inequities of marginalized populations (DeMatthews, 2016; DeMatthews, Mungal, & Carrola, 2015; Diem & Carpenter, 2012). According to Albritton, Anhalt, and Terry (2016) “disparities between racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups related to educational outcomes...represent prominent examples of social injustices that persist in educational settings” (p. 238). Social justice leadership as defined by Theoharis (2007) asserts that school leaders “make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (p. 223). This study aims to empower APs as social justice leaders to embrace the realities of sensitive topics, boldly implement educational practices that enhance decision making, promote equity and impartiality, and deconstruct barriers to achievement.

Research Question(s)

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do secondary APs identified as social justice leaders make sense of and disrupt the racial discipline gap?
2. How do secondary APs enact sensemaking when adjudicating student discipline?

3. How do secondary APs navigate the personal and emotional aspects related to the act of disciplining students?

Brief Overview of Methodology

This qualitative study is delivered through an exploratory approach utilizing a multi-case study design (Yin, 2014), which examines the phenomenon of AP sensemaking when making disciplinary decisions on office discipline referrals. The participants within the study are secondary APs who share similar experiences as urban secondary school administrators, yet their experiential backgrounds differ. According to Merriam (2002), qualitative researchers concentrate on understanding individual interpretations of reality at particular points in time and contexts. Learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world and its meaning is the essence for this approach. The primary focus is to develop understanding of the cognitive processes employed by APs when making decisions on office discipline referrals for the purposes of reducing the racial discipline gap and informing the practice of school leaders.

Participants. The participants consist of three secondary APs identified through convenience sampling. The secondary APs are employed at the site district, which is located in an urban local in Southeast Texas. The secondary APs are current, full-time administrators at the site location, which is a middle school within the site district. Participants must have been employed as an AP of the middle school campus for the entire 2016-2017 school year. Additionally, participants of the study must be identified as possessing social justice leadership characteristics by their campus principal and hold

the responsibility of making disciplinary decisions on students, including Black students in one or more grade levels.

Data sources. Prior to contacting potential participants for inclusion in the study, I obtained approval from the University of Houston's Institutional Research Board (IRB). The methods of data collection for this study consisted of face-to-face interviews, online journals, and a focus group. I conducted one face-to-face in-depth interview with each participant using an interview protocol to guide the process. In addition to the in-depth interview, participants used a structured on-line journal to detail their most memorable disciplinary experience(s) each week for a total of four weeks. To conclude, a focus group was held with all three participants using an interview protocol to guide the process.

Theoretical Framework

After office discipline referrals are submitted by teachers, an understudied intellectual process occurs which leads to an outcome for referred students. The primary member of this process, the AP, progresses through a cognitive continuum to arrive at a disciplinary decision for the referred student. The cognitive continuum is comprised of several intellectual actions synthesized by the AP concluding with a judgement about a student's conduct. With the discipline gap skewed negatively toward Black males, examining the thought processes of the school personnel most responsible for disciplinary decisions is critical. The sensemaking theory was the theoretical lens employed to obtain insight into the mental processes of APs adjudicating office discipline referrals.

Sensemaking theory. Most associated with Weick, professor Emeritus of Organizational Behavior and Psychology at the University of Michigan, “the concept of sensemaking is well named because, literally, it means the making of sense” (Weick, 1995, p. 4). Weick (1995) proposes the following seven unique principles that differentiate sensemaking from other explanatory processes:

1. Grounded in identity construction
2. Retrospective
3. Enactive of sensible environments
4. Social
5. Ongoing
6. Focused on and by extracted cues
7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy

“These seven characteristics serve as a rough guideline for inquiry into sensemaking in the sense that they suggest what sensemaking is, how it works, and where it can fail” (p. 18). Sensemaking, because it involves individuals, is a social concept complimentary to the qualitative approach of this study. Postulating on the nature of qualitative research, Merriam (2002) proposes the key to understanding qualitative research is held with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by the interaction of individuals with their world. The world, or reality, is not static, solitary, or agreed upon; instead, various understandings of reality exist which are in flux and continuously transforming over time. In-depth analysis of the sensemaking concept and its principles are discussed in greater detail in Chapter II of this study.

Definition of Terms

Assistant Principal: an assistant principal is defined as the person who serves directly under the principal. The terms assistant principal, vice principal, and deputy principal are used interchangeability (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012, p. 93).

Office discipline referral: An office discipline referral represents an event in which (a) a student engaged in a behavior that violated a rule or social norm in the school, (b) the problem behavior was observed or identified by a member of the school staff, and (c) the event resulted in a consequence delivered by administrative staff who produced a permanent (written) product (defining the whole event (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000, para. 10).

Exclusionary Discipline: disciplinary consequences imposed on students which require their removal from the educational environment. Out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, and expulsion are the primary forms of exclusionary discipline (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010, p. 27)

Zero Tolerance: philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 852).

Cultural Mismatch: denotes misinterpretation and the conflict that arises as a result of the misinterpretation when differences between one's own culture clashes with the differences of another's culture (Skiba et al., 2011, p. 87).

Discipline Gap: “among students who experience exclusionary discipline, students of color, particularly African American youths are significantly overrepresented” (McElderry & Cheng, 2014, p. 241). This inequity is referred to as the discipline gap.

School-to-Prison Pipeline: punitive and overzealous disciplinary practices that remove students from mainstream educational environments and funnel them onto a one-way path toward prison (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2005, p. 1).

Limitations

I will focus exclusively on secondary APs from one site district in an urban school district in Southeast Texas; therefore, the results may not be represented across the nation. The participants of the study will be from urban school districts, thus excluding potential findings in suburban and rural districts. Participants of this study will be limited to secondary APs, excluding elementary APs. Three secondary APs will be participants of the study, a small sample size challenging the generalizability of the findings.

Delimitations

The delimitations for this study were established upon my research goals, which are to (a) better understand how APs cognitively process office discipline referrals, and (b) employ the findings of this study to assist with reducing the number of Black males disproportionately excluded from the learning environment. The participants of the study must possess a social justice leadership orientation and be full-time secondary APs with a minimum of one-year administrative experience at the site location. The participants’ primary work duties must consist of making decisions on office discipline referrals of students, including Black males.

Assumptions

There are four assumptions fundamental to the study. I assume that collecting sensemaking data from APs who assign disciplinary consequences will provide clarity about the cognitive processes used when adjudicating office discipline referrals. I assume the APs interviewed for the research study answered all interview questions truthfully. I assume the APs interviewed are ethical school administrators in good standing with the state of Texas and in their respective school districts. Lastly, I assume the research questions were appropriately fashioned.

Significance

As previously mentioned, studies about the AP role in general are scarce. Being that one of the primary duties of an AP is discipline and acknowledging the existence of the racial discipline gap, more information is needed on the thought processes employed by APs when making disciplinary decisions. Implications obtained from this research can advance knowledge in the educational field by providing researchers and practitioners cognitive framework to make improved decisions on office discipline referrals. An additional implication of this research is the advancement of professional practice by training, novice, and veteran secondary APs.

Through increased understanding of the sensemaking process employed by APs adjudicating discipline in the field, practicing administrators can address student disciplinary concerns from an informed perspective thereby increasing the probability of positive outcomes for students, specifically Black males. The positive social change implications of this study are noteworthy and include aiding Black males through decreased utilization of exclusionary discipline, promoting academic engagement,

economic advancement, and decline within the school-to-prison pipeline. Furthermore, this study has the potential to assist school leaders with strengthening student and community relationships as well as improve the structure of how schools discipline their students and provide professional learning.

Positionality

My biological, employment, and family status provide multiple layers of connection with exclusionary discipline policies, molding within me a unique internal perspective. As a Black male and graduate from United States (U.S.) public schools, I have navigated the “landmines” currently awaiting other young Black males. As a middle school student, I was once suspended from school due to betting another student five dollars that my team would win our intramural basketball game. My actions were classified as “gambling” and constituted a violation of the school’s zero tolerance policy, which mandated my removal from the learning environment. The fact that I had no previous disciplinary infractions was not considered when issuing consequences.

As a practicing school administrator, I engage in instructional leadership and discipline management daily. When teachers have unmanageable classroom disruptions that hinder academic instruction, they create and submit office discipline referrals, which are sent to administrators. As an administrator, I’m charged with evaluating student discipline referrals and responding appropriately to the infraction with commensurate consequences if deemed necessary. Having personally experienced being suspended from school as well as suspending students from school, I can empathize and understand the challenges that students, teachers, administrators, and parents face. During my tenure in the educational field I’ve continued to refine my professional skill-set via professional

learning and graduate studies thereby increasing my understanding of the racial discipline gap and the associated problems.

As father to three children, one of them a Black male who is a special education student in preschool, I am concerned for their (his) future. At times, when I look at my son, I contemplate the arduous journey ahead of him and long to provide guidance and protection from societal structures designed to unfairly target, ensnare, and exclude him from the learning environment linked to the penal system. Having my son or one of my daughters entangled within the grips of the school-to-prison pipeline would be heart wrenching and something that I cannot allow.

In my current role, when I look at Black male students and throughout the nation, I see these young men as extensions of my son who I won't let perish to the school-to-prison pipeline. Holding fast to this lens drives my study and motivates me to seek practical, research-based solutions to the identified problem. A minor yet noteworthy grammatical decision was made during the beginning stage of this study. I needed to decide whether to use the words African-American or Black to describe the ethnic group of focus for this study. I decided to use Black for one reason. That reason is because I don't always feel African-American, but I always feel Black. When examining the ethnic description African-American, the hyphen after the word African transitions into the word American which is supposed to denote the American ideals of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" as described in the U. S. Declaration of Independence (US 1776). Unfortunately, for various reasons, I don't always feel those ideals apply to persons of African descent, hence my decision to use Black. My position within this study is to influence the reduction of exclusionary discipline practices and decrease the racial

discipline gap throughout the U.S. by informing the professional practice of APs, the school personnel most responsible for adjudicating disciplinary referrals.

Conclusion

Black male students face a unique set of challenges requiring navigation through a gauntlet of obscure yet discernible obstacles. Beginning in preschool, Black males must forge an expedition through an educational system, which disproportionately levies exclusionary discipline towards their sub-population. The problems that arise as a result of this unfair punitive system have far-reaching consequences that adversely affect the educational outcomes and literal freedoms for Black males and their families. To better understand how Black males are excluded from the learning environment, an examination of the sensemaking process of APs, the school personnel charged with disciplining students and adjudicating office disciplinary referrals, is the basis of this study.

What follows in Chapter II is a review of seminal literature establishing a framework that provides contemporary perspective, historical context, in-depth analysis of elements critical to the study and a theoretical base of guidance for the study. Chapter III details the research methodology including research design, site and participant selection, data collection and analysis methods as well as detailing data quality and ethical procedures. A presentation of results will occur in Chapters IV and V, followed by a discussion of results, conclusions and recommendations in Chapter VI. The discussion will expound upon the theoretical and practical implications of the research, both summarizing and evaluating the data in relation to the original research questions.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study is to examine the sensemaking process of APs as they adjudicate office discipline referrals in relation to the disproportionate number of Black males excluded from the learning environment.

Chapter II is divided into eight major sections. In the opening sections, I will detail the school to prison pipeline, discuss the disproportionate representation of Black males excluded from the learning environment, and define the various forms of exclusionary discipline. In subsequent sections, I will discuss alternatives to exclusionary discipline and detail federal and state discipline policy. The concluding sections will examine social justice leadership, present empirical findings on the role of APs and elucidate the sensemaking theory by providing a historical overview and discussing the theory's core tenets.

My literature search strategy consisted of Academic Search Complete, EBSCO, Education Source, ERIC, JSTOR, and PsycARTICLES databases through the University of Houston Library. I used several key words and phrases in isolation and in conjunction with one another, including exclusionary discipline, racial discipline gap, pipeline to prison, zero tolerance, assistant principal, vice principal, discipline referrals, sensemaking theory, social justice leadership, disciplinary alternative education programs, overrepresentation of minorities, restorative discipline, and positive behavior supports. I obtained additional literature and exclusionary discipline data from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights. I also examined the references of the literature collected for my research and located those sources that were pertinent.

School to Prison Pipeline

The racial discipline gap, unbalanced use of exclusionary discipline practices, and strict enforcement of zero tolerance policies have conspired to create a punitive system that criminalizes Blacks at disproportionate rates. Fowler (2011) defines this systematic approach that schools use to make “discretionary decisions to suspend, expel, and/or criminalize student misbehavers which contribute to student push out, dropout, and ultimately to what researchers call the ‘school-to-prison pipeline’” (p. 16). The roots of this “educational pathway” originate in preschool and can be linked to the U.S. penal system. As reported by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2014a), Black children represent 18% of preschool enrollment, but 42% of the preschool children suspended once, and 48% of the preschool children suspended more than once (p. 7). These statistics suggest that patterns for educational opportunities that influence academic outcomes begin in the formative years of school. Fowler (2011) cites compelling research conducted by the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University (2005) that the single greatest predictor of future involvement in the juvenile system is a history of disciplinary referrals at school (p. 16). Influenced by their constituents, lawmakers are now acting to protect and support young children. One example of this is in state of Texas which passed House Bill (HB) 674 in 2017. HB 674 by Texas House Member Eric Johnson restricts school districts from providing students out-of-suspension that are below the third grade with the expectation of violations such as weapons, drugs, or alcohol. Data linking schools to prisons is a reality that cannot be ignored, and a fact which parents are growing keenly aware of.

Many parents do not trust district or campus administrators to mete out disciplinary consequences in a fair and equitable manner. Black parents are protective of their children due to punitive disciplinary practices and prison forecasting strategies utilized by school and prison systems. “At least a half-dozen states are today planning the number of prison cells they will need to build in the next two decades, based upon today’s third and fourth grade reading scores” (Bonstingl, 2002, p. 9). The involvement of courts with school-originated infractions, specifically low-level offenses such as truancy and disorderly conduct, create financial and future unforeseen hardships for students and their parents. Once referred to the court, discretionary decisions continue to be made for students as they proceed through juvenile court processing as intake officers determine whether a referral will be “dismissed or disposed of informally via counseling, warning, referral to another agency or informal probation” (Feld, 1991, pp. 174-175). If the decision is made for the case to be formally processed, the student will appear before a judge who, with discretionary authority, will evaluate the case and sentence judgment.

Juvenile disposition guideline systems have been created and enacted by many states to address the abuse of discretionary authority by judges; nevertheless, judges continue to possess some form of flexible authority to make critical decisions about the lives of students who enter their courts (Curtis, 2014). Even when judges provide lenient consequences to students who have committed minor violations of zero tolerance policies, the stigma of criminality now exists. Curtis (2014) contends that school referrals to the juvenile justice system have long-term harmful effects, as judges are likely to mete out tougher consequences for students appearing in court again for additional violations, such as probation violation.

A review of seminal literature (Edelman, Rochelle, & Smith, 1975) identifies the historical context of the overrepresentation of Black students subjected to exclusionary discipline practices. The racial discipline gap precipitated by unbalanced exclusionary discipline practices and the advent of zero tolerance policies have exacerbated the funneling of Black students, predominantly Black males into the school-to-prison pipeline. The realities of the research must prompt social justice leaders to boldly confront the burgeoning inequities of this marginalized group and take counteractive measures to close the racial discipline and achievement gaps.

The Racial Discipline Gap

Concerns about missed learning opportunities and the detrimental effects of suspensions are intensified by consistent research findings that indicate Blacks are suspended at disproportionate rates (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Black students, students with low socioeconomic status, and students with disabilities contend with unfavorable conditions within U.S. schools (Townsend Walker, 2014). There is a discipline gap within U.S. public schools as illustrated by data demonstrating Black students, specifically Black males, are overrepresented in the use of exclusionary discipline in relation to their overall enrollment in school (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). The disproportionality of punitive discipline is exemplified in a Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) snapshot from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2014a). The March 2014 CRDC brief utilizes data from the 2011-2012 school year to illuminate alarming details on school discipline. As reported, Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than White students. On average, 5% of White students are suspended, compared to 16% of Black students (U.S. Department of

Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014a, p. 1). When comparing the types of infractions for which Black and White middle school students in a large urban district were referred to the office, Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) found no obvious differences in severity of misbehavior, but that Black students tended to be referred to the office more often for offenses that required a higher degree of subjectivity, such as disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering (p. 334). Students referred to the office for behavioral infractions will face corrective action from a school administrator, most likely the AP. The AP has the ability to remedy the matter using a variety of methods, among those options is the use of exclusionary discipline.

Exclusionary Discipline Practices

Until the 1960s, schools utilized an assortment of disciplinary methods to curtail undesirable behaviors, including corporal punishment. “Corporal punishment was an accepted and frequently used method of discipline until the mid-1960s. The social, political, and ideological changes of the 1960s brought into question the wisdom of corporal and other inhumane punishments” (Tajalli and Garba, 2014, p. 621). While the use of corporal punishment has diminished considerably, this form of student discipline is still practiced in several states; however, parental authorization is customarily required. Since corporal punishment has been restricted as a disciplinary option, school districts and campuses sought other approaches to address misbehaving students, mainly suspension (in-school and out-of-school), expulsion, and assignment to Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP).

In-school suspension. In-school suspension is a disciplinary action which involves student removal from the learning environment and placement in a separate area

or classroom for a designated time period. In the established location, the student must complete their academic work and is not allowed to participate in mainstream educational activities along with other students (Dahbany & Hyman, 1997; Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015). As an alternative to out-of-school suspension, schools are increasing their use of in-school suspension as it is viewed as a less severe option (Cholewa, Hull, Babcock, & Smith, 2017). Conversely, in a recent study conducted by Cholewa, Hull, Babcock, and Smith (2017) analyzing predictors and academic outcomes associated with in-school suspension, researchers conclude that students who were “Black, male, of lower socioeconomic status, or placed in special education were significantly more likely to receive in-school suspension (ISS). Further, findings suggest an association between ISS and lower grade point averages and increased likelihood of dropout” (p. 1). While the aforementioned study identifies negative correlations between Black males and in-school suspension, more research is needed on in-school suspension as a disciplinary method (Noltemeyer et al., 2015) in comparison to the body of research available for out-of-school suspensions.

Out-of-school suspension. Among the most widely used disciplinary procedures in schools today, out-of-school suspension refers to the relatively short-term removal of students from school for a disciplinary infraction (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). In general, the most common timeframe which constitutes a suspension is removal from the learning environment for 10 days or less, however this is governed by state and local policy (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Among exclusionary discipline approaches, out-of-school suspension has been extensively researched over multiple decades and proven non-effective (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

Strong correlations exist between student gender, geographic location, and student grade level. Research indicates male students who reside in urban locals at the secondary level are at the greatest risk of being suspended (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). “The likelihood a student will be suspended out of school increases from 2.4% in elementary school to 11% in middle school” (Losen & Martinez, 2013, p. 3). According to Losen (2013), three popular misconceptions used to justify the frequent use of suspensions are (a) suspensions improve the future behavior of students by stimulating parental involvement, (b) suspensions deter other students from misbehaving, and (c) suspensions promote favorable teaching and learning environments (p. 5).

Losen (2013) dispels these notions by positing that if student misbehavior is symptomatic of a lack of parental involvement, a lack of evidence exists suggesting parental involvement will increase once the student is sent home to spend more time in a dysfunctional setting. Additionally, if suspensions served as deterrents for future misbehavior, researchers would see year-over-year reductions following initial suspensions, which has been disproven by multiple longitudinal studies (Mendez, 2003; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). Losen (2013) dismisses the last misconception by highlighting research that points to both the frequent use of suspension as correlating to low academic achievement (Skiba & Rausch, 2006) and research highlighting how the instructional and classroom management skillsets of the teacher promote student success and minimize misbehavior (Kratochwill, 2014; Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). While out-of-school suspension endures as the most prevalent form of exclusionary discipline, expulsion, used less frequently but requiring a longer penalty duration is a significant form of school discipline.

Expulsion. Expulsions are a by-product of zero tolerance policies, which are expounded upon in a subsequent section of this study. Necessitated due to specific behavioral violations considered egregious in nature, expulsions are procedural removals generally involving the school district superintendent and school board in which students may be expelled for a semester, a year, or longer from school (Skiba, Eaton, & Sotoo, 2004; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Expellable offenses include such violations as possession of a knife, firearm or explosives, serious injury to another person except in self-defense, possession of alcohol or controlled substances, and robbery or extortion (Morrison et al., 2001). Expulsions, much like out-of-school suspensions, are exercised more heavily in secondary schools, urban environments, and disproportionately affect boys (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). According to the 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), Black students are 1.9 times more likely to be expelled from school as White students with Black boys representing 8% of all students, but 19% of students expelled (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Educational options are limited for students expelled from school. According to Morrison et al., (2001) the lack of federal regulation requiring states to provide alternative education for expelled students creates precarious positions for students who have lost their right to public education. States hold the discretionary authority to determine whether or to offer alternative education to expelled students.

Disciplinary alternative education programs. Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP) are schools designed to provide provisional education to students identified with problematic behavior at their home campus (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). These restrictive educational settings allow students to continue their academic

progress while serving their punishment. District or campus administrators place students in DAEPs using mandatory or discretionary authority. Mandatory placements are those considered the most severe and include such infractions as possession of drugs, alcohol, deadly weapons, or assault. Conversely, discretionary placements are extended to less serious infractions such as repeated student disruptions and rule violations.

Discretionary placements have become a pressing concern due to the subjective nature of the infractions, with research indicating Black students receive disproportionate amounts discretionary disciplinary referrals (Skiba et al., 2011). The expansion of discretionary authority for DAEP placement is directly correlated with the advancement of zero tolerance policies (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Consistent with the aforementioned forms of exclusionary discipline, Black students are disproportionately sent to DAEPs, specifically in urban environments (Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Citing DAEP statistics from the state of Texas during the 2008 and 2009 academic years, Tajalli and Garba (2014), observe Blacks comprised 13.6 % of first graders in Texas yet represented 47.3 % of first graders in DAEPs, additionally data revealed Blacks of all grades comprise 29.3 % of DAEP enrollment while only 14 % of the overall student population of Texas was Black. “For the last two decades, school disciplinary programs have mushroomed throughout the United States. Although nearly half a million students are annually sent to disciplinary alternative programs, there is scant scholarly literature on the issue” (Tajalli & Garba, 2014, pp. 620 - 621). With the rapid growth of DAEPs, its clear association with zero tolerance policies and disparity towards Black students, additional research is needed on DAEPs as most empirical literature concentrates on out-of-school suspension data.

Zero tolerance. In response to political and community pressure to eliminate school violence, lawmakers began applying zero tolerance policies to educational settings during the early 1990s with the passage of key legislation designed to prevent guns in schools. Zero tolerance, as noted by the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008), “is a philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (p. 852). Amplified during a time of intense media coverage surrounding school shootings (mainly in rural areas), zero tolerance policies were principally instituted to eliminate guns in schools. The term “zero tolerance,” first coined in 1980’s federal drug policy, rapidly expanded within the educational community with the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA) during the Clinton administration. Heitzeg (2009) describes the GFSA mandate, which required schools receiving federal funding expel students for one calendar year who bring a gun into a school or school zone and report that student to law enforcement. Successive amendments to the GFSA, state laws, and district policy expanded the original GFSA mandate to include other forms of weaponry. The threat of gun violence in schools prompted school districts to enact policies that quickly dispatched mandatory punishments for specific violations of behavioral code. According to the Indicators of School Crime Safety report Kaufman et al. (2000) commissioned by the U.S. Department of Justice, by the end of the 1990s, 94% of American public schools had zero tolerance policies for firearms, 91% for other weapons, 88% for drugs, 87% for alcohol, and 79% for tobacco and violence respectively (Kaufman et al., 2000, p. 133). Extending beyond

the minimum mandates of the GFSA, many school districts expanded their zero tolerance policies to include violations such as: drugs, alcohol, fighting, smoking, and more subjective infractions classified under school disruptions.

Fowler (2011) illustrates the problem with subjective evaluation of discretionary offenses by analyzing discipline statistics from the state of Texas. “According to the Texas Education Agency, in the 2009-10 school year, 68% of student referrals to disciplinary alternative schools were discretionary, as were 72% of all student expulsions from Texas schools” (Fowler, 2011, p. 16). The Harvard Civil Rights Project (2000) asserts the expansion of these policies extends beyond the intended purpose of the original federal decree that initially concentrated on egregious criminal conduct by students and began to “include other weapons and possession or use of drugs. School districts throughout the country quickly expanded Zero Tolerance Policies to include many more types of behavior and, significantly, to cover infractions that pose little or no safety concerns” (p. 1). While the original purposes of these policies were well intended, they have inadvertently resulted in negative outcomes for Black students. Although as previously indicated, school shootings in rural areas precipitated the passage of the GFSA intensifying zero tolerance policies, it is in mostly urban communities where Black populations reside, that these policies have the most adverse effects. According to Triplett et al. (2014), “While the adoption of zero tolerance has been a national phenomenon, research indicates that urban, high minority schools disproportionately apply zero tolerance policies and punitive discipline controls” (p. 354). Thus, while zero tolerance policies exist in rural and suburban communities, it is within urban settings that Black students are disproportionately affected most by these policies.

When students are removed from their primary academic setting, either academic instruction is eliminated, or substandard instruction occurs. Additionally, students who are excluded from school are exposed to uncontrolled environments which increase their chances for involvement with illicit activity. Mendez (2003) indicates “school suspension correlates significantly with a host of negative outcomes, including students’ poor academic achievement, grade retention, delinquency, dropping out, disaffection and alienation, and drug use” (p. 26). According to Evenson, Justinger, Pelischek, and Schulz (2009), beyond the temporary effects of the initial student punishment lies a complex set of long-term disadvantages with far-reaching consequences that “include elevated rates of school dropout, poor school climate, low academic achievement, and discriminatory school discipline practices” (p. 5). Zero tolerance policies which disproportionately affect urban schools with dense minority populations, promote inequitable disciplinary practices which are punitive in nature and have long-lasting negative consequences for students affected by them.

Alternatives to Exclusionary Discipline

Currently, there is a progressive movement calling for policy makers and school leaders to move beyond punitive discipline measures and incorporate forms of prevention and intervention in disciplinary matters (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014). Research based strategies are being successfully implemented across the U.S. which are reducing office discipline referrals, decreasing exclusionary discipline practices, increasing academic achievement and improving school climates (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Contained within this section of the study is an examination of School-wide Positive Behavior Supports, Culturally Responsive Classroom Management, and Restorative

Practices, three alternative disciplinary strategies that are being successfully implemented in schools.

School-wide positive behavior support. School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) is a multi-tiered proactive approach which concentrates on establishing campus wide behavioral expectations, reinforcing those behaviors by rewarding appropriate student performance, developing a consistent system of enforcement, and utilizing data-based decision making to evaluate the effectiveness of the designed supports (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2004; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Critical to successfully implementing a SWPBS system is clearly defining and teaching targeted behavioral expectations to students. According to McKevitt and Braaksma (2004), “the first critical feature of a school-wide PBS system is to establish clear and consistent school wide expectations” (p. 740). Once targeted behaviors are established, staff members (teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, etc.) teach students through created “lessons plans designed to help students learn, practice, and master appropriate behaviors” (McGoey, Munro, McCobin, & Miller, 2016, p. 135). To maintain preferred patterns of student behavior, school personnel apply positive reinforcements by rewarding desirable behaviors to enhance compliance with school expectations.

Credibility with both students and school staff can be compromised in the absence of constancy, therefore consistently enforcing the established system with fidelity is critical for SWPBS realization. “Schools with clear rule and reward systems and businesslike, predictable corrections and sanctions experience fewer discipline problems” (Skiba & Sprague, 2008, p. 41). The employment of data to guide decision making and monitor progress is an essential element of refining SWPBS supports. “The

integration of data management and progress monitoring helps school staff clearly understand what is and what is not working about the SWPBS program” (McGoey, Munro, McCobin, & Miller, 2016, p. 135). SWPBS is comprised of three tiers designed to provide interventions to all students at their respective level of need. Tier one (universal) is a school wide intervention which considers every student within the school. The goal of tier one is the advancement of “a safe and effective learning environment by emphasizing appropriate student behavior and simultaneously working to reduce punitive disciplinary measures. At this level, PBS entails frequent monitoring of office referrals for discipline and setting schoolwide goals for reducing these referrals” (Losen, 2013, p. 18). The small percentage of students who do not respond successfully to tier one interventions are provided additional support with tier two (targeted) and tier three (intensive) interventions, which provide more individualized support personalized to the precise behaviors of the student.

Restorative discipline. Further advancing the cause of social justice is a collaborative approach to discipline centered upon the relational nature of misbehavior, harm done to relationships, mending those relationships, and making restitution (Mullet, 2014). The antitheses of traditional discipline, which utilizes rewards to influence compliance or punishment to control behavior, restorative discipline (also known as restorative justice) is grounded on the premise that human beings are social in nature and instances of harmful behavior should be understood and remedied using a collaborative approach. The restorative approach is not punitive or focused on providing the offender “what they deserve,” rather it is an experiential process facilitated by trained observers to assist offenders with acquiring social skills, positive values, empathy, and expectancy of

consequences (Halstead, 1999). Principle elements of restorative justice are giving voice and power to those harmed, repairing damaged relationships, encouraging accountability of actions, reintegration of offenders into the community, and creating caring climates that prevent further harm (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). The most common methods for facilitating restorative justice are victim-offender mediation, restorative conferencing, peacemaking circles, and whole school models (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Victim-offender mediation is a process facilitated by a trained adult or peer within the school setting, in which parties progress through a continuum of restorative justice principles which promotes reconciliation, as stated by Zehr (2004):

1. Focus on the harms and consequent needs of the victims, as well as those of the communities and the offenders.
2. Address the obligations that result from those harms (the obligations of offenders as well as of communities and society).
3. Use inclusive, collaborative processes to the extent possible.
4. Involve those with a legitimate stake in the situation, including victims, offenders, community members, and society.
5. Seek to put right the wrongs.

Restorative conferencing, while similar to victim-offender mediation due to its progression through the continuum of restorative justice principles (Zehr, 2004), is conducted on a much larger scope. During restorative conferencing “all parties to the harm (including support people and professionals) come together (with support of a facilitator) to talk about what happened, the impact, and how to make things right” (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p. 143). With origins from North American indigenous

peoples, peacemaking circles draw on participants' core values and involve ceremony, a talking piece, consensus building, and a circular process facilitated by a "circle keeper" using restorative justice principles (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Zehr, 2004). Similar to SWPBS, the whole school model of restorative discipline utilizes a three-tiered system of practice to promote relational structures at varying intensities within the school.

According to Morrison (2007), the first tier of restorative justice provides universal structures aimed at establishing a values ethic and conflict resolution strategies for the entire school. The second tier focuses on addressing explicit behaviors that disrupt the harmony and social relations of the classroom, hallway, and other areas of the school through circles and peer mediation. The third tier, the most intensive, concentrates on addressing serious harm and involves all affected members in interpersonal restorative justice practices. The implementation of restorative discipline practices requires a paradigm shift away from managing student behavior via punitive, social control sanctions, to engaging students through communal processes that promote relational ecologies, mutual respect, social engagement, and personal accountability for the promotion of social justice (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Restorative discipline extends beyond the resolution of the disrupted event and seeks to empower students with problem solving skill-sets that prove beneficial for the remainder of their lives.

Culturally responsive classroom management. Classroom management consists of the things teachers do to organize students, space, time, and resources to promote academic achievement (Wong, Wong, Rogers, & Brooks, 2012). A comprehensive literature review conducted by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) indicated that of all 228 variables analyzed that affect student achievement, classroom

management had the largest effect. Characterizations and expectations of suitable student behavior are culturally influenced, which can generate conflict due to divergent cultural backgrounds of the student and teacher (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004). Failure of teachers to recognize the influence of power structures from the dominant group and subsequent promotion of mainstream ideologies as the “established standard” distorts the lens in which teachers view non-mainstream students. This conflict manifests in the form of teachers observing students from a deficit perspective as intellectually challenged, emotionally unstable, and non-compliant with teacher directives. The perceived non-compliance generates office discipline referrals, exclusionary discipline practices, referrals to special education, and fuels the school to prison pipeline.

According to Weinstein, Curran, and Tomlinson-Clarke (2003), by failing to recognize the cultural influence of behavior for racial and ethnic minorities, teachers are in effect practicing discrimination through devaluing, censuring, and punishing marginalized groups. To merge the growing divide, Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM) is needed as the diversity within schools continues to grow (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Originating from culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018), CRCM is a proactive approach to managing the classroom in a culturally responsive manner.

The five fundamental components of CRCM are recognition of one’s own biases and ethnocentrism, knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds, awareness of the broader social, economic, and political context, ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies, and commitment to building a caring classroom

community (Weinstein et al., 2004). The first principle of CRCM is the authentic recognition that all humans navigate the world based on a set of assumptions and biases which develops their belief system and, in essence, governs how they view the world and its inhabitants. Through critical analysis of the relationship between dominant social structures and idealized cultural norms, teachers can begin to examine their belief system and possible misinterpretations of student behavior. “By bringing our implicit, unexamined cultural biases to a conscious level, we are less likely to misinterpret the behaviors of our culturally different students and treat them inequitably” (Weinstein et al., 2004). Developing an understanding of students’ cultural backgrounds is the second principle of CRCM, and places emphasis on acquiring cultural background knowledge for the purpose of improving communications thus enhancing student relationships. The exploration of “students’ family backgrounds, their previous educational experiences, their norms for interpersonal relationships, their parents’ expectations for discipline, and the ways their cultures treat time and space,” (Weinstein et al. 2003, p. 270) can provide teachers an increased understanding of student behavior and decorum, while cautiously guarding against stereotyping.

The third principle of CRCM, an awareness of the broader social, economic, and political contexts relates heavily to the underpinnings of this study. The disproportionate number of Black males subjected to exclusionary discipline and its correlation to the school the prison pipeline are contextual realities that should be explored by educators through professional learning opportunities that improve practice. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran (2004) assert that teachers need to understand the

educational system reflects and often perpetuates discriminatory practices of the larger society.

The implementation of culturally appropriate management strategies describes the fourth CRCM principle, which suggests that teachers consider how their classroom management practices either advance or hinder equal access to education. CRCM teachers analyze their behavioral judgments, considering how their conclusions relate to race and ethnicity, which may influence the disciplinary actions of the teacher and consequences for the student (Weinstein et al., 2003). Creation of a caring and compassionate classroom is the final principle of CRCM. Students who perceive their teachers as positive, concerned about their well-being, and sincerely interested in their achievement are motivated to succeed. Weinstein et al. (2003) conclude that CRCM is a frame of mind as much as a set of strategies or practices that furthers the cause of social justice.

Discipline Policy

Legislation guiding school disciplinary practices has been enacted at both the federal and state levels. These statutes are designed to protect students and guide educators when addressing student discipline issues. School discipline policy continues to be a source of debate among advocacy groups, educational stakeholders, and politicians to address the racial discipline gap.

Federal policy against discriminatory discipline practices. The federal statutes that protect students against discriminatory discipline practices are Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title IV, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq, enforced by the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division (DOJ) "prohibits discrimination in public

elementary and secondary schools based on race, color, or national origin, among other bases” (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014b, para. 1). Title VI, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq, enforced by both the DOJ and the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) “prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin by recipients of Federal financial assistance” (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014b, para. 1). On January 8, 2014, both the DOJ and OCR issued a joint “Dear Colleague” letter as a guidance document for public schools across the nation, emphasizing the requirement for schools to adhere to federal law prohibiting discrimination based upon the aforementioned protected classes. The guidance document details two ways in which student discipline can be considered unlawful: different treatment or disparate impact.

Different treatment occurs when schools deliberately discipline students based upon their race. An obvious case of intentional discrimination would be a policy that is discriminatory on its face, meaning one that explicitly requires students of a particular race be disciplined differently from students of another race, or only disciplining a specific race of students. A more covert form of different treatment commonly observed involves the use of disciplinary policy which is neutral on its face yet administered in a discriminatory manner or discriminatorily applying discipline when vague policy exists (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014b).

Disparate impact occurs when schools evenly apply facially neutral discipline policies that while not implemented with the purpose to discriminate, have an unfair negative impact of discriminating against a particular student race. When evaluating the existence of disparate impact, the DOJ and OCR will engage in a three-part inquiry.

These federal agencies want to determine if the discipline policy negatively affected a specific race of students, if the discipline policy was necessary to meet essential educational goals, and whether alternative disciplinary practices were available which would accomplish the schools stated educational goal with less of a burden on the marginalized racial group (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014b). Whether explicit or concealed, unfair discipline practices and policies are subject to the statistical and factfinding scrutiny of the governing bodies of the U.S. Department of Education.

State education code and district discipline policy. In the state where this study was conducted, a compilation of state educational laws passed by state legislatures are called education codes. Education codes govern all educational institutions within the state accepting financial assistance. From preschools to colleges, all learning organizations receiving state funding, whether in-whole or in-part, must abide by the statutes established within the education codes. Of particular importance to this study are the education codes mandating school districts adopt a student code of conduct detailing circumstances under which students can be removed from the learning environment.

School districts are directed to display and/or make available to parents a student code of conduct which specifies the conditions which necessitate student removal from the school bus, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, and placement into a DAEP. The student code of conduct represents a comprehensive set of by-laws established by the school district to govern a safe and orderly learning environment and is a binding agreement between the district, students, and parents. Students attending state funded institutions are held accountable for their behavior in accordance with the student code of

conduct and are subject to the disciplinary consequences outlined in therein. In general, student code of conducts details behavior management practices, lists specific types of behavioral infractions, and lists the respective range of consequences for those infractions. Furthermore, these wide-ranging documents explain the placement and appeal processes for the DAEP and expulsion from school.

Social Justice Leadership

Consistent with historical literature, Black students remain members of a marginalized group of students who continue to be overrepresented in exclusionary discipline (Edelman, Rochelle, & Smith, 1975, Skiba et al., 2002). In the 1970s, Black students were twice as likely to be suspended as White students, whereas in the 2000s, Black students are over three times as likely to be suspended than Whites (Losen & Skiba, 2010). To combat these inequities, school leaders are being called upon to advocate for students as social justice leaders in an effort to redress harmful practices and close the racial discipline gap.

While scholars have defined social justice leadership using varying descriptions, commonalities of their definitions direct school leaders to focus on advocating for marginalized student populations (Theoharis, 2007), critically questioning current policies (Dantley & Tillman, 2006), and eliminating inequities (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). According to DeMatthews (2015), “the practice of social justice leadership begins with an ability to recognize inequity amongst other issues associated with school administration” (p. 145). For the AP, this means being cognizant of the racial discipline gap and its disparate impact against marginalized students as she/he

addresses disciplinary issues against the myriad number of competing factors contained within the school day.

According to Diem and Carpenter (2012), social justice leaders should “engage in, and facilitate, social justice oriented conversations with students, parents, and community stakeholders” (p. 96) to advance inclusive practices that are culturally sensitive to remedy the academic achievement gap. Social justice leadership extends beyond effective leadership and being satisfied with providing equality for all students by being concerned with achieving equity of schooling experience and opportunity throughout the lifetime of the student (DeMatthews, 2015). As school leaders boldly confront inequitable conditions and engage marginalized groups through community outreach and shared-decision making (Wasonga, 2009), they promulgate social justice dispositions within all educational stakeholders.

Assistant Principal

The authoritative figures situated between the school principal and teachers is most often the assistant principal. A dynamic role fraught with multiple demands, incessant interruptions, unpredictable events, and communication challenges, assistant principals are unique individuals. What follows is a historical and contemporary overview of the position based upon available literature.

Campus disciplinarians. An understudied process occurs before students are excluded from the learning environment. Historically, when a teacher has difficulties with a student in the classroom, she/he will attempt to remedy the behavior by applying classroom management strategies previously attained through preservice training and/or professional learning. If these methods are unsuccessful, oftentimes the teacher will

create an office discipline referral and submit it to the APs office for processing and assignment of consequence. Consequently, it is mainly the AP who makes the decision whether to remove a student from the learning environment via exclusionary discipline or provide some other form of corrective action allowing the student to remain in school.

While vital to the achievement of school campuses, APs are understudied members of the educational field. Extensive research is available for examination on the roles of teachers and principals; however, a lack of research is available on the AP role. Historically, APs are the utilitarian personnel of the school who “fill their days with the three Bs: ‘books, behinds and buses,’” with heavy emphasis on behinds (Good, as cited in Hunter, 2016, p. 12). Regarded heavily as disciplinarians, APs spend an inordinate amount of time devoted to addressing student behavioral issues. Glanz (1994), who conducted a survey of 200 New York APs from both elementary and middle schools, observes that assistant principals spend the majority of their time “handling disruptive students, dealing with parental complaints, supervising lunch duty...and other kinds of administrative paper work” (p. 284). “The role of the assistant principal is complex and demanding. Teachers, students, parents, and even other professionals show little understanding of the difficulties assistant principals face in successfully dealing with discipline issues every day” (Williams, 2012, p. 107). APs endure a metaphorical gauntlet each school day, responsible for a variety of essential operational tasks while ensuring student learning and maintaining a safe environment as the disciplinarian figureheads of the campus.

Contemporary expectations. Stressors in the current educational environment have increased for all educational stakeholders. With demands to turnaround persistently

low performing schools, the challenges associated with high stakes testing, and schools inhabited with vulnerable student populations, APs can no longer specialize as disciplinarians (Barnett et al., 2012; Bukoski et al., 2015). APs are now being compelled to become instructional leaders on their campuses.

Instructional leadership encompasses a multitude of activities designed to improve the quality of teaching and promote scholastic achievement. Instructional leadership activities involve reflective practice, data driven decisions, alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and standards, as well as recruiting, acquiring, coaching, and evaluating instructional talent. The irony of the contemporary instructional focus for APs is that empirical literature dating back to the mid-80s and early 90s, identifies the longing desire of APs to be more involved in meaningful activities on the campus. Harvey (1994) asserts “deputy principals are now seeking to broaden their range of responsibilities beyond the maintenance of organizational stability. Deputy principals are demanding greater involvement in instructional leadership and the management of school level change (Marshall, 1992; Spady, 1985)” (p. 16). Despite the contemporary rally to advance in instructional leadership, APs still bear the brunt of disciplinary responsibilities in schools.

Unless and until another position is created to fulfill the demands of addressing school discipline, APs will be forced to occupy the role. Glanz (1994) argues the complex nature of public schooling requires a redefinition of the AP to include an instructional focus. “This, of course, entails relieving the AP of lunch duty and his or her duties as chief disciplinarian” (Glanz, 1994, p. 286). Since APs will continue executing the duties of chief disciplinarian for the foreseeable future, in conjunction with the fact

that APs spend an excessive amount of time on discipline of which Black males are disproportionately affected by, it is imperative that research is done to examine how APs make sense of adjudicating office discipline referrals.

Theoretical Framework: Sensemaking Theory

Karl Weick introduced the concept of sensemaking into organizational studies. Sensemaking is the cognitive, emotional, and physical process employed by humans to construct meaning. “How they construct what they construct, why, and with what effects are central questions for people interested in sensemaking” (Weick, 1995, p. 4). Although unconsciously performed by most people, sensemaking is a complex process involving multiple variables requiring the individual to place stimuli into frames of reference, which shapes meaning, promotes understanding, and guides action (Schwandt, 2005). Sensemaking is a recursive cycle that begins with both unconscious and conscious anticipations and assumptions, which serve as predictions about future events (Louis, 1980, p. 241). This cyclical process integrates ongoing retrospective analysis to develop knowledge structures which serve as foundations for interpretation of unexpected occurrences; however, “it is not simply the interpretation of information; rather, the continuous interaction with information allows meaning to emerge” (Schwandt, 2005, p. 182). Sensemaking is a unique proposition in that sense made is a relative concept of the human condition. What makes complete sense to one person may seem utterly foolish to another.

Disruptive ambiguity is the genesis to the sensemaking process (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 413). Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015) assert “sensemaking is delimited to the episodes that take place from the moment some aspects of the ongoing

process of organizing are interrupted until they are satisfactorily restored (or in some cases) permanently interrupted” (p. S12). Disruption of the status quo stimulates action, “thus to understand sensemaking is also to understand how people cope with interruptions” (Weick, 1995, p. 5). When the course of a person’s workflow is disrupted, it naturally induces emotion, which impacts the sensemaking process. “An interruption to a flow typically induces an emotional response, which then paves the way for emotion to influence sensemaking. It is precisely because ongoing flows are subject to interruption that sensemaking is infused with feeling” (Weick, 1995, p. 45). Sensemaking is a multifaceted process consisting of seven properties or characteristics that differentiate sensemaking from other explanatory processes such as understanding, interpretation, and attribution (Weick, 1995, p. 17).

Grounded in identity construction. Identity construction is a foundational principle of the sensemaking concept as “sensemaking begins with the sensemaker” (Weick, 1995, p. 18). Who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416). Weick (1995) posits the sensemaker is an ongoing puzzle undergoing continual redefinition consequently the establishment and maintenance of identity is a core preoccupation in sensemaking.

Retrospective. Derived from Schutz’s (1967) analysis of “meaningful lived experience,” emphasis on the word “lived,” Weick (1995) proposes that retrospection describes “the reality that people can know what they are doing only after they have done it” (p. 24). In describing the retrospective nature of the human condition, Weick (1995)

concludes the formation of sense is an attentional process to that which has already happened. “Actions are known only when they have been completed, which means we are always a little behind or our actions are always a bit ahead of us” (p. 26).

Enactive of sensible environments. The sensemaking principle of enactment emphasizes that people, through action, create their own environment and their “created environments” become either “constraints or opportunities to face” (Weick, 1995, p. 31). For example, (Weick) 1995 found that “when people enact laws, they take undefined space, time, and action and draw lines, establish categories, and coin labels that create new features of the environment that did not exist before” (p. 31). In essence, “individuals enact their reality” (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p. S9), which they then must face and seek to make sense of retrospectively.

Social. Sensemaking is a social process underscored by the interdependence of humans, their social interactions, and a variety of social factors. “Those who forget that sensemaking is a social process miss a constant substrate that shapes interpretations and interpreting. Conduct is contingent on the conduct of others, whether those other are imagined or physically present” (Weick, 1995, p. 39). Researchers of sensemaking “pay a lot of attention to talk, discourse, and conversation because that is how a great deal of social contact is mediated” (Weick, 1995, p. 41)

Ongoing. Sensemaking has no origin nor does it have a conclusion, as people are always engaged in situations. Weick (1995) asserts that “sensemaking never starts. The reason it never starts is that pure duration never stops. People are always in the middle of things, which become things, only when those same people focus on the past from some point beyond it” (p. 43). “It is this unending dialogue between partly opaque action

outcomes and deliberate probing that is at the heart of sensemaking” (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p. S9).

Focused on and by extracted cues. The speed at which sensemaking occurs places humans at a disadvantage. “Sensemaking tends to be swift, which means we are more likely to see products than process. To counteract this, we need to...pay close attention to the ways people notice, extract cues, and embellish that which they extract” (Weick, 1995, p. 49). In defining cues, Weick (1995) notes that “extracted cues are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (p. 50). Extracted cues assist people with generating points of reference which guide direction and decision making. Cognitive bracketing which refers to focused attention (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992), noticing which refers to activities of filtering, classifying, and comparing (Starbuck and Milliken, 1988), and “extracting cues from our lived experience” (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p. S14) precedes interpretation.

Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. “Accuracy is nice, but not necessary” in the study of sensemaking (Weick, 1995, p. 56). Weick et al., (2005) argues that sensemaking is not about precision, “instead it is about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism” (p. 415). While accurately perceiving disruptive events can prove challenging, a plausible account assists the sensemaker with taking action and “actions enable people to assess causal beliefs that subsequently lead to new actions undertaken to test the newly asserted relationships. Over time, as supporting evidence mounts, significant changes in beliefs and actions evolve” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416).

The application of the sensemaking concept and its related properties to APs who adjudicate office discipline referrals will provide critical insight into the cognitive, social, and emotional processes employed by these understudied members of the school community. Furthermore, an examination of the decision-making of APs through the sensemaking lens in relation to the disproportionate number of Black males excluded from the learning environment is a significant pursuit with positive social justice implications. In-depth inquiry into this process will contribute towards the lack of empirical literature available for analysis, critique, and/or application.

Chapter III

Methodology

Chapter III will provide a detailed overview of the methodology used to answer the research questions that guide the study. The following components are included within this chapter: research questions, research design, site selection, participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis, provisions for trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to examine the sensemaking process of APs as they adjudicate office discipline referrals. Three research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How do secondary APs identified as social justice leaders make sense of and disrupt the racial discipline gap?
2. How do secondary APs enact sensemaking when adjudicating student discipline?
3. How do secondary APs navigate the personal and emotional aspects related to the act of disciplining students?

Research Design

This qualitative study is delivered through an exploratory approach utilizing a multi-case study design (Yin, 2014), which examines the phenomenon of AP sensemaking when making disciplinary decisions on office discipline referrals. After thoroughly evaluating potential research approaches, qualitative research was selected due to its interpretive approach and alignment with this study's sensemaking theoretical

framework. According to Merriam (2002), “Qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant’s perspective...and is characterized by the search for meaning and understanding...” (p. 6). Sensemaking is the cognitive, emotional, and physical process employed by humans to construct meaning. Employing qualitative research to explain the sensemaking process of APs when adjudicating student discipline configured precisely and was therefore selected as the approach for the study.

When evaluating research methods for this study, case study design was reasoned most appropriate. According to Creswell (2007), case study research is a qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through data collection involving multiple sources of information, and then reports a case description. Yin (2014) asserts that case study research is most appropriate when researchers are seeking to understand the “how” and “why” of a social phenomenon which is in direct alignment with the research questions for this study. The multi-case study design aligns to my aim to study three secondary APs (cases), bounded by region (Southeast Texas), locale (urban), district (one site district), grade level (middle school), and time (data collection period) which creates the context for the study making it the most relevant research method.

Site Selection

The study was positioned in one middle school within the site district located in an urban locale of Southeast Texas. The site district and middle school were selected using convenience sampling due to my employment at the site district and middle school at the time of the study. The pseudonyms assigned to the site district and middle school are Inner City Independent School District (ICISD) and Metro Middle School (MMS).

Participant Selection

I used convenience sampling to identify and select participants for this study. After obtaining consent from the University of Houston's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the site district's Research and Accountability department, I contacted the principal of CMS to communicate the purpose of the study, discuss participant selection criteria, and obtain permission to contact potential participants. Merriam (2002) asserts the nature of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the participants' perspective therefore its vital to select a sample from which the most can be learned. Patton (1990) maintains that it is critical to select "information rich" cases for in-depth study as those are the participants from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. Four criteria were used to select participants:

1. The participant is a current, full-time AP within the site district.
2. The participant was employed as an AP of the middle school for the entire 2016-2017 school year.
3. The participant has been identified by the campus principal as possessing social justice leadership characteristics.
4. The participant is responsible for making disciplinary decisions on students, including Black students in one or more grade levels.

Prospective participants were contacted via email and provided the Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study document that outlines detailed information about the study for potential participants to review. I explained in person the components of the Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study document to respective APs that self-selected to

participate in the study prior to conducting the face-to-face interview. Prior to collecting any data from face-to-face interviews, on-line journals or the focus group, signed consent was obtained from individuals who self-selected to participant in the study.

Data Collection Methods

Case study research emphasizes detailed, in-depth data collection using multiple sources of information in the form of observations, interviews, audiovisual material, documents, and reports (Creswell, 2007). This study obtained data from participants using in-depth interviews, participant on-line journals, and a focus group. I began the data collection process by conducting one face-to-face interview with each participant using a Guided Interview Protocol (Appendix A). The interview protocol was adapted with permission (Appendix D) from DeMatthews (2012). DeMatthews' (2012) qualitative study, *Principal Sensemaking of Inclusion: A Multi-Case Study of Five Urban School Principals* is a doctoral dissertation which also utilized the sensemaking theoretical framework. The three interviews occurred from December 2017 to January 2018 with a duration of approximately 60 minutes per interview. Interviews were held after work hours at the site location in a quiet area, free from distractions, and ideal for recording.

The questions contained within the guided interview protocols aligned directly to the study's three research questions and were crafted to ascertain the sensemaking and lived experiences of APs who make disciplinary decisions in middle schools. To obtain feedback and improve the guided interview questions before collecting data from participants, I conducted a pilot interview using each protocol with an administrator not employed at the site location. The data was transcribed and reviewed for the purpose of

refining the guided interview protocols used with participants. The participant interviews opened with a set of introductory questions designed to establish relationship and understand the participants' backgrounds, educational values, and leadership experiences. Following the introductory questions, the interview protocol progressed to questions that correlated directly to the study's research questions. These open-ended, guiding questions link directly to Weick's (1995) sensemaking principles and facilitate the dialog between myself and the participant.

The second method of data collection occurred in the form of participants' utilization of a guided on-line journal protocol from January 2018 to February 2018. Each participant was provided a Guided On-line Journal Protocol (Appendix B) in which they recorded their lived experiences as it related to making disciplinary decisions during their work week. The questions within the on-line journal consisted of three sections which directly align to the study's research questions and Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory. Participants completed their on-line journal one time per week for a total of four weeks. The on-line journal was a real-time document that was password protected and shared only with the respective participant and me.

The final method of data collection was a focus group with all three participants of the study in February 2018. I coordinated a date and time for all three participants to meet for a focus group once all face-to-face interviews and participant on-line journals were completed. The focus group was facilitated by a Guided Focus Group Protocol (Appendix C) and held after work hours at the site location in a quiet area free from distractions and ideal for recording and discussion.

Field notes and audio recordings of face-to-face interviews and the focus group were generated with permission from participants via the Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study document. A transcription of the field notes, face-to-face interviews, participant on-line journals and focus group were input into the qualitative research software Dedoose, which is password protected. All transcripts were de-identified and are secured in a password protected computer. Pseudonyms are used for subjects, school and school districts.

Data Analysis

To develop an accurate written report of the participants' lived experiences as APs making disciplinary decisions, I employed the data analysis spiral method (Creswell, 2007) commonly used in qualitative research. In contrast to fixed linear approaches, the data analysis spiral method is a circular approach that begins with the data management of text and progresses through an upward circular continuum that touches on several analytical procedures before concluding with a written narrative (Creswell, 2007). I managed data collection and analysis through utilization of Dedoose. Field notes, transcribed face-to-face interviews, participant on-line journal entries and the transcribed focus group were input into Dedoose for organization into files. After input into the Dedoose and organization of the data into files, I spent time reading and absorbing the full transcripts multiple times to gain a global understanding of the collected data. As I reviewed the transcripts in detail, memos were written in the margin to notate key thoughts and reflections.

As the upward circular continuum of the data analysis spiral continued, I began the process of code formation which Creswell (2007) indicates is the "heart of qualitative

data analysis” (p. 151). During this stage of data analysis, I began interpreting the qualitative data which was coded to align with the study’s research questions and sensemaking theoretical framework. After coding of the data, I began the process of classifying coded segments into themes, looking for patterns that were represented through detailed descriptions. I concluded my data analysis by developing naturalistic generalizations that enriched readers, researchers, and practitioners followed by presenting an in-depth picture of the multi-case study design through a narrative (Creswell, 2007). The multi-case study narrative will be presented in Chapter VI.

Role of the Researcher

According to Creswell (2007), researchers who engage in qualitative inquiry “bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of belief to the research project, and these inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study” (p. 15). Rather than hide from this fact, “good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and, at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry” (Creswell, 2007, p. 15). As the primary instrument of data collection, it is important for me to communicate my potential bias as it relates to the research focus as well as my connection to the site location and participants of this study. As a Black male who is currently employed as an AP, I recognize my perspective of the racial discipline gap, exclusionary discipline practices, and how APs navigate the challenges of the role inform the structure of this study. Additionally, my current employment at the site location and existing relationship with the participants have likely shaped my interpretation of the study. To counter the abovementioned frameworks, I used the provisions of trustworthiness described in the following section.

Provisions for Trustworthiness

To promote credibility, and increase the trustworthiness of the study, I employed triangulation, thick description, and member checking. Triangulation refers to “the convergence of data collected from different sources, to determine the consistency of a finding” (Yin, 2014 p. 241). I used the data collected from face-to-face interviews, participant on-line journals and the focus group to triangulate the study’s findings effectuating greater reliability. To enhance the study’s transferability, I employed thick description which is an in-depth form of writing that vividly describes the characters and their actions, contexts, emotions, feelings, and relationships (Denzin, 1989). “Thickly” describing study participants and their lived experiences as APs making disciplinary decisions in urban schools, allows readers of the study to analyze common elements and make determinations of transferability. Member checking, “involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). After classifying coded segments into themes, I emailed participants themed analysis of their respective face-to-face interview, participant on-line journal, and focus group responses. Feedback gained from member checking was utilized to improve data quality and reporting.

Chapter IV

Research Question Results

This study is an examination of the sensemaking process used by APs as they make decisions on office discipline referrals. APs are understudied, essential members of the educational community and are the school personnel most responsible for providing disciplinary consequences to students. An extensive history of documented racial disparities related to exclusionary discipline practices permeates the U.S., negatively impacting minorities, specifically Black males. By examining and discussing the sensemaking processes utilized by APs when making disciplinary decisions, a gap in literature will be addressed providing a reference point for additional research, as well as tools to improve the professional practice of school administrators and social justice leaders. The following research questions guide this study:

1. How do secondary APs identified as social justice leaders make sense of and disrupt the racial discipline gap?
2. How do secondary APs enact sensemaking when adjudicating student discipline?
3. How do secondary APs navigate the personal and emotional aspects related to the act of disciplining students?

Chapter Frameworks

Chapter IV is divided into five sections. In the first and second sections, I will discuss the data collection and data analysis methods. In the third section I will describe the research setting including participant introductions. I will address each research question in the fourth section, presenting the research results from face-to-face interviews, on-line

journal responses and the focus group. The fifth section of chapter four will conclude with a summary of the research results. A presentation of results for the seven principles of the sensemaking theoretical framework will occur in chapter five, followed by a discussion of the research results in chapter six. The discussion of results will include an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications for social change and conclusion.

Data Collection

There were three participants from whom data was collected. The forms of data collected were face-to-face interviews, on-line journals, and a focus group. Data was collected after work hours at the site location in a quiet area, free from distractions and conducive to recording. The three face-to-face interviews occurred from December 2017 to January 2018 with a duration of approximately 60 minutes per interview. Collection of data from on-line journals occurred from January 2018 to February 2018. Lastly, the focus group was held in February 2018. Data was audio recorded, transcribed, de-identified and input into the qualitative research software Dedoose.

Data Analysis

After inputting the transcribed data into Dedoose, I engrossed myself in an iterative analysis of each transcript, reading them multiple times to absorb and obtain an in-depth sense of the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007). When reviewing each transcript, I created memos in the margins to note key thoughts and reflections. As I continued to examine each transcript and progress through the data analysis spiral (Creswell, 2007), framework began to emerge with natural comparisons surfacing within the data. As I interpreted these comparisons, codes began to form, unfolding data

contained within the research results. Once code formation was complete, I classified codes into themes by examining detailed descriptions, individual experiences, and the actions of participants. The following codes and themes emerged from the data:

Table 1

Codes and Themes

Codes	Themes
Upbringing Shaped Social Justice Leadership AP Social Justice Leadership Characteristics AP Approach to Discipline	Social Justice Orientation Drives AP Discipline Approach
Teachers Unaware of Blindness/Bias Challenge of Changing Teacher Mentality/Attitudes Coaching Teachers	The Challenge of Coaching Culturally Incompetent Teachers
Teacher Credit Score Student Profile Environmental and Contextual Factors	Variables that Inform Decision-Making
Investigative Methods Aid the Level of Truth Attained by AP Determining Student Consequences Autonomy to Decide	Discernment and Assignment
AP Emotions Associated with Exclusionary Discipline Variation of Emotions Relative to Type of Exclusionary Discipline Internal Struggle/Grit	Emotional Adversity
Teacher and Parental Criticism AP Self-Efficacy Impacts Parental Conversation Focus on Student Growth Offsets Criticism	Combating Criticism

Note. This table represents the code formation and themes developed for this study. AP = Assistant Principal

The research results are presented in thematic sequence as illustrated in Table 1. After the research question is highlighted, the theme will be presented, followed by a presentation of participant results. All research results will be presented from one participant, respective to the specific theme and its correlating codes before transitioning to results from the next participant. The process will repeat until the results for all research questions have been presented.

Setting and Participant Introductions

Metro Middle School (MMS) is one of approximately 10 middle schools located in Inner City Independent School District (ICISD) which is positioned within an urban locale in Southeast Texas. MMS has approximately 1,200 students in grades six through eight and is a Title I campus with 85% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. The school's enrollment by ethnic group is approximately 35% Black, 45% Hispanic, 10% White, 5% Asian, and 5% Two or More Races. Student discipline has been a challenge at MMS in previous years, averaging approximately 1,300 office discipline referrals per year for the last five years. The majority of these office discipline referrals are for: disruption, defiance of authority, unacceptable physical contact, disrespect, fighting, and profanity. Disciplinary consequences provided to students who committed these infractions consisted mostly of out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension or after-school detention. Entering the 2017-2018 school year, ICISD instituted a district-wide restorative discipline initiative designed to reduce the number of students excluded from the learning environment. MMS leadership quickly embraced the initiative by designing a restorative discipline student support system within the school's master schedule. The creation of this support system was intended to allow the restorative discipline process to be executed during the school day and throughout school year by APs and select school personnel trained in restorative justice practices. The restorative justice focus at MMS makes it an ideal site location and MMS APs ideal participants for this study. Three APs consented to be participants of this study. Pseudonyms are used for names, and approximations are used for years of service to protect participant identities. I would like to introduce Samantha, David and Tonya.

Samantha. Samantha is a Black female educator with a total of 20 years' experience. Fifteen of those years were spent in the classroom as an English teacher at the secondary level. She has been an AP for five years at MMS. She holds a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in Educational Leadership. Samantha displays passion for education, referring to it as an "equalizer" that allows all students the opportunity to be successful regardless of life challenges. She believes serving as an AP affords her the opportunity to impact more students as a school leader than she had in the classroom as a teacher.

During the interview with Samantha, I asked her to detail how her Educational Leadership program prepared her to address student discipline. Samantha indicated, "It wasn't really a focus in the program. I used some of what I brought in with me as a teacher, talking and dealing with students, I also used other APs when I came in, but it was mostly on the job training." To assess the discipline composition of her workday, I inquired about the percentage of time she spent making disciplinary decisions and the types of disciplinary infractions she encountered most frequently. Samantha responded:

On average in the last five years, I would say probably about 75% of my day. My most common discipline referrals, I wouldn't even consider them referrals really, but they are distractions in the classroom, things that students get in trouble for and teachers write them up, like throwing paper, being out of their seat, or not being quiet while the teacher is talking, there are lots of those that come through. Unfortunately, the majority of an AP's school day may be spent addressing multiple lower level disciplinary infractions that should be addressed in the classroom through the use of effective classroom management practices. Entering the role of AP, Samantha

indicated she did not feel wholeheartedly prepared to handle the full spectrum of discipline. Fortunately, she was able to apply her teaching experiences, consult veteran APs and benefit from experiential learning to supplement her lack of pre-service discipline training.

David. David is a Hispanic male educator with a total of 10 years' experience. Eight of those years were spent in the classroom as a Math teacher at the elementary and secondary levels. This is his second year as an AP at MMS. He holds a bachelor's degree in Math, and master's and doctoral degrees in Educational Leadership. David's personal desire to increase student and parental awareness of the educational opportunities available is one of the chief reasons he entered the educational profession. He decided to become an AP to further extend his influence on youths beyond the classroom.

During the interview, he commented on his potential impact by stating "As an administrator I have a lot more authority to work with kids and influence school programs than I did when I was a teacher." As my interview with David advanced, I asked how his Educational Leadership program prepared him to address student discipline. David responded by stating "They taught very little. It was minimal. I was taught more about student discipline while obtaining my teacher certification." To assess the discipline composition of his workday, I inquired about the percentage of time he spent making disciplinary decisions and the types of disciplinary infractions he encountered most frequently. David surmised that, "Last year, I would probably say anywhere between 60% and 70% of my time was discipline, and most of the office discipline referrals I received were labeled as defiance of authority and disrespect."

Much like Samantha, David also entered the role of AP unprepared for his disciplinary responsibilities and had to rely on his previous experiences as a teacher, assistance from veteran APs and on the job training. In addition to David's lack of pre-service discipline training, his first year as an AP presented a plethora of challenges which he is candid about. Although the challenges of first year APs is beyond the scope of this study, it is worth highlighting this phenomena in implications for future research in Chapter VI.

Tonya. Tonya is a White female educator with a total of 30 years' experience. Fifteen of those years were spent in the classroom as a Special Education teacher at the elementary and secondary levels. She has been an AP for 15 years, the last three at MMS. She holds a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and a master's degree in Educational Leadership. Tonya's motivation to enter the profession of education was twofold: to help students excel scholastically and to provide students tutelage to make good life decisions.

Commenting on her educational values, Tonya stated, "I think education is the most important thing someone can do for themselves. That is something I emphasize to young people when they're in school." As my interview with Tonya continued, I asked her to detail what her Educational Leadership program did to prepare her to address student discipline. Tonya stated:

Nothing really, aside from ethics courses and things like that. I feel lots of my learning came from just living in the moment. In the situation I was thrown into, I think my previous teaching experience helped me prepare because I have experience with very aggressive kids.

Extending on the previous question, I inquired about the percentage of time she spent making disciplinary decisions and the types of disciplinary infractions she encountered most frequently. As Tonya recalled her discipline composition of the previous 15 years as an AP, she stated that she addressed “lots of discipline” three times and had experience as an alternative school administrator. It was apparent that Tonya had an extensive background addressing student disciplinary issues and that her special education background offset her lack of pre-service discipline training. In the next section, I will present results from face-to-face interviews, on-line journal responses and the focus group, addressing each research question.

Research Question One

How do secondary APs identified as social justice leaders make sense of and disrupt the racial discipline gap?

Social justice orientation drives AP approach. Two themes quickly emerged from the data to answer this research question. The first theme being social justice oriented APs disrupt the racial discipline gap through their disciplinary approach, and the second theme is APs have the challenge of coaching culturally incompetent teachers. In the following sections, I will take you through each participant’s data as it applies to these two themes. To understand an APs disciplinary approach, one must first understand their upbringing which shaped their social justice characteristics. Samantha describes her upbringing as she comments:

I grew up as a lower middle-class person so I understand and know some of the things that happen in that environment. Being black my whole life, I’ve grown up in some situations that were not exactly positive dealing with race. I have a

background of seeing me and others who are treated differently just because of race, not because of ability but because of race.

Samantha's social justice lens was cultivated by socioeconomic and racial injustices witnessed throughout her childhood. The experiential knowledge of racial inequality and disparate treatment etched within her a resolve to advocate for marginalized populations. David describes how his upbringing informed his social justice orientation by asserting:

I experienced a lot of prejudice, a lot of unfairness growing up. It wasn't until I began working in a diverse area such as my church where I had an opportunity to impact those that were disadvantaged. That's where a lot of my ideals were shaped, experiencing unfairness in my life.

After enduring personal accounts of prejudice, the catalyst for David's social justice advocacy was stimulated by volunteering for those less fortunate. By both experiencing unfairness and serving those living in unfair conditions, David began molding his social justice leadership.

Tonya reminisces on memories from high school to help describe her upbringing and how it shaped her social justice advocacy:

In high school I wished there was some adult we could go to. Yes, there were counselors. Yes, there are teachers but no one that really developed relationships with any of the kids. Out of several of my close friends, I'm the only one who survived. Some things happened like alcohol-related accidents and drug overdoses. It's just the things that kids can get into if they don't have the guidance. I always felt that if there was someone they could talk to or some group. There just wasn't anything available to kids back then.

The mentorship void identified by Tonya in her formative years has shaped her desire to be a supportive force in the lives of students. The recognition that students are susceptible to a range of vices and in need of appropriate adult relationships for guidance and encouragement structures her social justice leadership. Samantha's experiences as a Black female and observations of inequality increases her empathy towards marginalized student populations and guides her professional practice. Race and class are the social justice characteristics Samantha identifies with most and they heavily influence her discipline approach. She stated:

I see the issues, the injustices, the differences that happen between race and class which put students on different levels, so to speak. That becomes part of my whole discipline approach and what I do because I know what's happening in their lives. My aim is to be consistent and fair with students.

Samantha's insight into perpetual inequalities drives her disciplinary approach with a focus to redress harmful practices. Although he was negatively impacted by discrimination as a youth, David embraced those undesirable experiences which helped mold his advocacy. Equity towards race, culture, and religion are the social justice characteristics David identifies with most. These principles guide his discipline approach. He describes his social justice position and approach to discipline by commenting:

I need to be fair to every single person. Every kid that walks in the door regardless of what they look like, regardless of cultural or ethnic backgrounds, I must treat each student fairly. Not ignoring their cultural and religious backgrounds, I can't obviously ignore that, I need to be sensitive to any diversity

that walks in my doors. I try to guard against bias and do my best to avoid making assumptions. I try to adhere to due process like they would in the judicial system.

David has an overwhelming desire to be fair and consistent when adjudicating student discipline, irrespective of student demographics or culture. Tonya's social justice disposition as a youth advocate has influenced her approach to discipline as she seeks to help students make better life choices that will extend beyond the core classes of secondary school. Tonya maintains that "I believe in discipline with dignity. That consequences need to make sense. You need to talk the child through it, I don't think just throwing demands at them or consequences are going to fix everything." Teaching students to think critically about their choices, decisions, and consequences inspires Tonya's disciplinary approach.

The challenge of coaching culturally incompetent teachers. The second theme identified in the research question is that APs contend with the challenge of coaching culturally incompetent teachers. Based upon participant responses, some teachers lack the ability to recognize the bias committed against Black males when referring students for disciplinary consequences. Additionally, APs must work to combat the negative attitudes and deficit mindsets held by some teachers through coaching activities that disrupt the discipline gap. Samantha describes her observations of cultural incompetence by contending:

I don't think teachers are necessarily aware in general, especially newer teachers. I don't think they are aware of the fact that "I just wrote five disciplinary referrals this past week, and four of them were little black boys in my classroom." I don't

think they are aware, that's why I have a teacher with the same type of referrals coming in frequently.

The results suggest failure of disciplinary consciousness promotes discriminatory discipline practices and is perpetuated by a lack of teacher awareness. The following journal response from Samantha illustrates the challenge of coaching culturally incompetent teachers resistant to the idea they may harbor unseen bias towards students:

I had a situation that led to the identification of cultural differences which caused a specific teacher to continually refer only African American students. I had a student referred to my office for being disrespectful. When investigating the incident...I discovered what the teacher felt was disrespectful was actually misinterpreted communication of the student standing up for themselves and trying to inform the teacher of an incident. I did not provide consequences to the student for the incident, instead I provided mediation between the student and the teacher to give clarity to the situation. I also explained to the teacher where her issue occurs when dealing with African American students on a consistent basis. The teacher was offended and did not accept the critique and tried to explain it away as an isolated incident.

Engaging with culturally incompetent teachers is a necessary task that can be difficult and appear nonproductive at times. Some teachers are not ready to accept opposing observations of their conduct, however social justice leaders are driven to participate in these difficult conversations. Tonya offered her observations on cultural incompetence in-action by stating:

I've heard a teacher make the comment "there are more African-American or Hispanics in in-school suspension because they are the ones with more negative behaviors that get them placed there." It's like, can you listen to yourself, why are they having those behaviors? I believe teachers have a lack of seeing themselves.

Culturally incompetent teachers display a lack of understanding of the structural impediments and systemic obstacles that minority students must contend with. Although teachers are charged with the duty of improving the minds of youths, some of the most challenging minds to alter are teachers themselves. Samantha reflects on the challenge of opposing negative teacher mindsets by asserting:

I think its attitude that must be addressed first. At some point in time, you have to examine yourself. I know teachers deal with 120 kids every day and it's hard and you're going to have some referrals, but all of them shouldn't look the same.

The mentality of the educator is the genesis of her/his actions. Teachers must critically examine themselves and consider implicit bias which informs their belief structure.

Coaching teachers with the goal of changing underlying behaviors is a critical element of social justice leaders based upon participants' results. Samantha details her actions to coach teachers that display bias in their discipline referrals:

You have to let them see it. You have to let them see what they're doing and see what kind of kid they're referring all of the time. If you don't point it out, then they don't recognize it. As new teachers, especially with all the new teachers that come and go, I don't think they're aware that their discipline referrals are the same type of student until you put the data in front of them, line the referrals on

the table next to each other and let them see. Then it becomes an “aha” moment for them.

Physical evidence precedes enlightenment. Presenting discipline data to teachers enhances their ability to recognize patterns of discipline referral practices that are otherwise imperceptible. Through coaching and modeling, APs work to address deficit perspectives and antagonistic attitudes. Tonya describes her efforts to thwart negative mindsets:

Some teachers like to be blamers. Blame others, blame kids and blame the parents. I believe some teachers hold preconceived expectations and expect certain behaviors out of certain kids and they're going to get them, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. I feel like most of my work to improve the situation is through modeling and coaching teachers. I approach them in a non-threatening way and try to coach them into better ways to deal with either the students or parents.

The APs of this study made sense of the racial discipline gap through their upbringing which shaped their social justice orientation and leadership characteristics. In addition to making sense of the racial discipline gap, the APs practiced disrupting the racial discipline gap by challenging teacher mentalities through modeling best practices and coaching teachers to promote consciousness and improve cultural competence.

Research Question Two

How do secondary APs enact sensemaking when adjudicating student discipline?

Variables that inform decision-making. When examining the data related to this research question, code formation was classified into two themes. The first theme is

secondary APs must consider multiple variables to inform their decision-making when adjudicating student discipline. The second theme is APs use investigative strategies to obtain a high level of discernment when making disciplinary decisions that adhere to policy yet make sense for the individual student. In the subsequent sections, I will take you through each participant's data as it applies to these two themes. One of the most critical variables to consider is the teacher's credit score. In the financial industry, finance companies hold trustworthy consumers in high regard, quickly extending large lines of credit and low interest rates to their best customers who possess the highest credit scores. Similarly, results from this study indicate that APs hold teachers who have proven themselves proficient at managing their classroom, providing engaging instruction, and building good relationships with students and parents in high regard. The data I found suggests that APs quickly pay attention to office discipline referrals submitted from teachers with high teacher credit scores. Conversely, the referrals submitted from teachers with low teacher credit scores are viewed more critically and with less urgency. Additional variables APs consider when seeking to make sense of student discipline are the student's profile and environmental and contextual factors. Samantha describes her initial steps when reviewing office discipline referrals by noting:

The first thing I do is I look and see who the referring teacher is, very important. Is this a teacher who consistently writes referrals all the time, or is this a teacher who very seldom writes referrals? If it's somebody who consistently writes referrals all the time, then I'm going to deal with it differently because that teacher has a pattern of everybody gets a referral. "If it's a bad day, I'm writing referrals." If it's a teacher that doesn't write referrals very often, then I'm going

to take my time to read that, figure out what's going on...I may even read the referral, stop, call, and talk to the teacher to see what's going on, because I don't usually get a referral out of that classroom.

After identifying the referring teacher, the AP cognitively references the teacher's credit score which becomes one of the variables that informs the APs decision making.

Discipline referrals received from teachers identified as prodigal are evaluated with reserve, whereas referrals received from teachers recognized as trustworthy are addressed with enhanced attention and are viewed as being reliable. As David examines office discipline referrals, the first thing he considers is the teacher submitting the referral. He explains his analysis of a teacher's credit score by stating:

What do I know about the teacher? If I know the teacher has good instructional practices, and I've evaluated them, I've been in the classroom, I've witnessed them being fair with students, then I know that what they are sending me is probably legitimate.

The results indicate that engaging instruction enhances a teacher's credit score and authenticates office discipline referrals. Tonya admits that a teacher's credit score impacts how she interprets office discipline referrals submitted to her. She illustrates her contrasting stance on a teacher with a low credit score versus a teacher with a high credit score.

If it's teacher who has sent quite a few referrals for silly things that could have been dealt with in the classroom and I have felt that they have just had a thing against certain kids, when I get that kind of referral, I must say I am skeptical towards that adult. Whereas, if I get a referral from a teacher whom I know

develops relationships with students and I know calls parents and has really invested in their kids, it's like, "Wow, he's done an awful lot to help this student be successful," I might come down harder on this student because I know the teacher has done A, B and C before it came to me.

Trivial office discipline referrals reduce teachers' credit scores and produce cynicism from APs. Conversely, teachers who submit office discipline referrals who are known to build relationships with students and parents generate higher levels of disciplinary action from APs, as these teachers are recognized as having exhausted all options before submitting a discipline referral.

Based upon the results of the study, a student's profile consists of their life status, discipline history, cognitive level and motive/intent. Samantha explains how she considers a student's discipline history, life status, and cognitive level when making sense of student discipline.

If it's somebody who's been in my office three or four times already and it's a similar issue, then it becomes a bigger problem because it's a pattern happening. If it's a student that doesn't have a history of discipline referrals, then something is going on with that student. I need to know what's going on with that student before I get to his discipline consequence because we know it happened, but we need to know why it happened. If it's a student with a disability, then that's a whole different ballgame. I'm going to pull out his plan and make sure that all he's referred for is not part of his disability.

The data suggests APs view students referred frequently to the office for discipline referrals different from students infrequently referred. Those infrequently referred

generate more questions and investigation from the AP as they seek to uncover the antecedent of the office discipline referral. When evaluating aspects of the student's profile, David reflects upon how he considers the life status of the student and their cognitive level.

Is this a straight A kid? What do I know about the parents? I know this is a kid with a history of CPS involvement. I need to be more sensitive. I need to approach this carefully. All these different things I know about the student come into play. Regarding knowing what discipline to administer, one of the things I evaluate is cognitively, do I know that the student is going to make the connection? If cognitively they are at a lower level then I need to get creative and make sure that whatever discipline I administer, they're able to make the connection, "Oh, I'm not supposed to do that."

Holistically considering referred students and acknowledging the cognitive differences between them allows the AP to structure consequences that are extenuating to the student's life status and commensurate to their intellectual level to promote understanding and prevent repeat negative behaviors. The environmental and contextual factors are also essential elements to investigate. Disciplinary infractions do not occur in isolation, there are always antecedents to the event. David expounds upon what he considers when evaluating environmental and contextual factors.

I try to bear in mind where are they in their stage of development? These are middle school kids, these kids are hormonally-challenged...they're going through puberty. The boys have elevated levels of testosterone, the girls have elevated levels of progesterone and estrogen, so each of them is going through different

things that I need to consider. Were there other kids egging him on? At this developmental stage, they like attention, they like the limelight. They thrive on that attention because they're trying to figure out who they are. Who was around them?

Developmental consideration of the student population being educated is important. The results of this study indicate that middle school students are experiencing hormonal challenges, contend with social acceptance and are struggling to form their respective identities. Another component of the student's profile is the motive/intent of the discipline infraction. Tonya explains how this portion of the student profile along with environmental and contextual factors impact how she makes disciplinary decisions.

If a student did something on purpose to hurt somebody, if they are malicious in their intent, I'd come down harder on that child. I believe most issues happen between classes or in a class that isn't supervised as much as it should be. I think location has a lot to do with it, because if they are acting up and being disrespectful directly to the teacher in class, to me, that's worse than being disruptive in the hallway during passing period.

The results point toward student intentions, the location of violations and adult supervision which are connected to a teacher's credit score, as important variables for APs consider. The intensity of the consequence is in direct correlation to the student's level of intent. The following journal response from Tonya illustrates how she considers motive/intent as well as environmental and contextual factors when making disciplinary decisions. Additionally, this journal entry exhibits how mishandled discipline events can subtract from a teacher's credit score:

An African American male student was referred for yelling the "F" word right as the class was getting ready to go to the cafeteria. The class was not structured, students were gathering and talking as they were getting ready to leave the class. Two Hispanic female students took the male student's slime and wouldn't give it back. All the teacher heard was the male student swearing while other students laughed at him. The teacher focused on the swear word, which is inappropriate, without paying any attention to the antecedent, what the females were doing. He was counseled with and assigned some in-school suspension time along with a parent conference, but the incident could have been avoided if the classroom setting was structured in a manner where the teacher could be aware of what students were doing in his classroom. If classroom structures were in place, the student who swore would have a harsher consequence.

The results show that adult supervision and classroom structure which are directly linked to teacher credit score impact an APs decision making. In addition to a teacher's credit score, APs seek to identify the genesis of the event, other involved parties, time of day and location of events to inform administrative action.

Discernment and assignment. The second theme that emerged from the data which answers this research question is APs use investigative methods to seek a high level of discernment to make disciplinary decisions that follow policy yet make sense for the individual student. When seeking to gain insight about a discipline issue, APs utilize a variety of strategies intended to paint a clear picture about the past event. Samantha comments on the questioning strategies she employs to gain understanding about opaque events.

I ask questions and listen carefully to the things students say. I've learned how to ask questions in such a manner, that guilty students walk right into their lie.

Oftentimes, they don't realize they tell me things they shouldn't tell me, which influences my perspective on what's going on. The things that you hear, you go back, and you piece it all together to draw a complete picture.

The research results suggest that it's important to ask the right questions, listen carefully, and use the information obtained to help structure a portrait of the event being investigated. David acknowledges that he's had to develop an understanding that students will be deceptive when facing discipline consequences, therefore embedded within his investigative methods is the presumption that children have the propensity to lie when in trouble. He explains this perspective and a somewhat illusionary investigative strategy he uses to obtain the truth.

What I've learned with kids that are in trouble is that they are going to deny it. They're going to deny it flat out. Usually, in that case, if I've got a kid who says I didn't do it and I have a strong indication that the student committed the discipline infraction. I may inform the student, "I got you on video," "All I have to do is pull out the video," or, "I have audio." Then, boom, all of a sudden, the student is like "Yes, okay, I did it." Using those tactics helps me to get a determination. Is it an illusion? Yes, I'm creating an illusion that I have information that I actually don't, but it's a strategy. Using tactics to try to get the truth out of the student.

Since students are not always forthcoming with the truth, APs sometimes employ illusionary tactics to obtain the truth when they have key information about who most

likely is the responsible party. Tonya's investigative methods are predicated on the understanding that gathering investigative details precedes the adjudication of student discipline. She learned early in her administrative career about the importance of fact-finding before adjudicating as she explains:

Since I've been an AP, the only time I felt I made a bad disciplinary decision would be because I responded before I conducted a good investigation to get all the details. I just need to be real clear and seek information from whatever sources I need.

Although it's important to seek a balance between spending too much time obtaining investigative details and obtaining enough quality information to act, APs cannot afford to be hasty when conducting investigations. APs aspire to obtain a high degree of certainty about disciplinary events to properly determine student consequences.

Samantha describes her longing to understand by asserting:

I want an understanding of everything that occurred. I want everything to line up and make sense. There's no other way I can come up with it. All these alternate things that were given to me do not make sense, there's only one road to sense. There's no other way for me to get there.

The desire to fully grasp the details surrounding disciplinary events was strong for participants in this study. It was important for APs to exclude conflicting explanations and obtain a clear sense of what transpired. Although APs wear a variety of hats that demand varying levels of commitment, they still desire to have a high degree of understanding about disciplinary issues. David explains the challenge by concluding:

I want a one hundred percent understanding about what happened, so I can administer fair discipline and sometimes that is not always possible, and it drives me nuts. I try to get as much understanding as I can. I know I'm not going to get one hundred percent. I think given the amount of the workload that we have, it's difficult.

While discipline consumes a large portion of time for APs, it's not their sole responsibility. The research indicates that while APs seek to obtain high levels of understanding about disciplinary events, they must balance their desire to fully grasp, with obtaining as much quality information as possible to take action. When making student disciplinary decisions, APs within this study sought to follow policy yet make decisions in the best interest of the student. Tonya maintains:

For serious discipline infractions, I firmly adhere to discipline policy, however there are some referrals, I don't want to say they're little referrals, but just some things that are less severe that I refer to ethics and what's the right thing to do. I make a determination on consequences that make sense for that child because each child is different.

The APs in the study communicated that following policy is important, especially for major incidents. Extending beyond policy, APs expressed an understanding of gray areas, situations that required participants to analyze people, context, extenuating circumstances and utilize their respective moral compasses to make the best decision for students. There were multiple variables that informed the sensemaking of APs as they adjudicated discipline, primary among them was a teacher's credit score followed by a student's profile and environmental and contextual factors. Also noted was the need for

APs to have a high level of discernment of disciplinary events, in order to make the best possible disciplinary decision relative to the individual student.

Research Question Three

How do secondary APs navigate the personal and emotional aspects related to the act of disciplining students?

Emotional adversity. Analysis of code formation related to this research question produced two themes. The first theme is not only do APs exhibit emotions related to exclusionary discipline, but these emotions vary relative to the type of exclusionary discipline determined for the student. Additionally, APs engage in internal struggle about difficult disciplinary decisions they make which are only overcome through true grit—that tenacity to make a tough decision and see it through regardless of the internal battle. The second emerging theme is APs employ two methods for combating the criticism received from teachers and parents which are focusing on student growth and engaging in parental conversations strengthened by AP self-efficacy. In the subsequent sections, I will take you through each participant's data as it applies to these two themes. The following quote illustrates how Samantha manages the emotional adversity related to making the decision to send a student to DAEP.

To go through the process, to put somebody at DAEP, to me that's hard. I feel I'm really shaping their future. What if they get over there and this doesn't make the right impact? Is what I'm doing what's best for them? It's upsetting because it was something that had to be done. I almost felt like the parent that says, "I'm doing this for your own good." We have that conversation, "I don't want to have to do this, but this is the only way for you to learn. It's got to happen. I hate it for

you, but I hope that you take this, you grow, and you never have to do this again.”

It was very upsetting to have to do that.

The results indicate APs’ toil with the decision to send some students to DAEP, as they questioned the long-term student benefits of the disciplinary placement. Even though participants acknowledged the placement needed to occur, there was angst in making the decision. Internal turmoil can stall action, which can be a detriment to an AP. David comments on his inner struggles related to this task:

I’ve had to really nail myself down on, “Look, a student does this, they’re going to receive a discipline.” I cannot let my emotions feed how I discipline a student. I’m going to go wrong half the time. It’s important to really know yourself, it grips with who you are. I know who I am and I’m a mercy type, I’m very forgiving. I like to get to know kids. That can be beneficial, but I’m also learning that it can serve to go in an undesired direction with the kid.

The results point toward the importance of maintaining emotional control and understanding oneself to mitigate against emotions which may serve undermine the inherent responsibilities of the AP position. To defend against this internal struggle, David has fought to regulate his mental approach when making disciplinary decisions.

He shares his transformation by asserting:

Knowing the kind of person that I am, I’ve had to take somewhat of a cold approach, meaning that I don’t like disciplining kids, in terms of I don’t like to suspend a kid. I want to keep them here as much as possible. I’ve used in-school suspension, just so that way they’re here and they have resources available to them. There’s a boundary that you can’t cross...I had to ensure that I did not

bring myself to a level equal to them. You can still establish a relationship just like a father does with their son, or their daughter. It was difficult, I didn't feel good about it, but you grow tough skin. You become callous to some degree on certain things.

The ability to remain mentally tough and establish appropriate student-administrator boundaries was key in defending against internal struggle and promoted objective disciplinary decision making. Comparable to Samantha and David, Tonya expresses the emotional adversity she has experienced when excluding students from the learning environment, specifically DAEP:

The few times that I was the facilitator of DAEP meetings, I was like, "Oh." I was just cringing inside. I did not like that feeling at all. That you have to sign off on it and all that. Inside it just felt bad, but I would console myself. So many things have been in place for the student, it's unfortunate it hasn't helped the student. I hope that they go, learn and improve. I worry about them. You have to tell yourself it's for their best. I'll do it because I know the consequence needs to happen. Do I enjoy that? No.

APs comforted themselves by referencing the student supports previously implemented to help students be successful before reaching the point of a DAEP. APs remained hopeful that students referred to DAEP would benefit from the experience and return to campus rehabilitated after serving their disciplinary placement.

Combating criticism. The second emerging theme related to this research question is APs have two methods for combating the criticism received from teachers and parents. They do so through focusing on student growth and by engaging in parental

conversations strengthened by AP self-efficacy. Samantha candidly expresses parental criticisms and the confidence she exudes through these attacks:

I've been accused of disliking and hating their kid. I don't come to school to hate kids, so it doesn't affect me because I know that's not what's in my heart. I know I have the best interest of kids in mind. When I'm accused of something like that, it's generally just somebody lashing out because they don't know what else to do.

The results illustrate the need for APs to remain secure in their identity which helps guard against false accusations. Additionally, it's important for APs not to personalize parental criticism and understand these attacks may come from a place of parental frustration.

Besides parents, teachers express their disapproval of APs as well. David expounds on the teacher criticisms he has received:

Yes, I've been criticized by teachers for either not processing discipline quick enough or they didn't like the discipline the student received. But I think some of that comes into play because they don't know what information I unearthed, what information I've discovered. They're not privy to that information. However, some teachers, they just don't like you.

Disapproving teachers may perceive APs as slow to take action, incorrect in their assessment of the situation, weak in their assignment of consequences or harbor disdain toward the AP for no particular reason. APs should expect criticism from parents and teachers and be prepared to endure it professionally. Not personalizing the disapproval of teachers and parents is vital. Tonya discusses how she handles teacher criticisms and the confidence that she's developed over time:

Yes, people talk, and they make comments, but I've gotten pretty thick skinned. I don't take it personally, I think if someone's being negative about a choice I made then it's because they still have the attitude, "I need to get them," and that's the wrong attitude.

Participants were able to accept that criticism was inevitable and grew resilient without personalizing the disapproval of others. Informing parents their child is suspended from school can be a challenging conversation. Samantha displays a high-level of self-efficacy and is secure in her ability to hold parental conversations about the delicate matter of out-of-school suspension as she states:

When talking to the parent, I empathize with them and the process they're going through. I let them know I get it, I understand why they are upset and frustrated, but their child still has to come to school and handle themselves appropriately every day and because this happened, I have to suspend them. Generally, by the end of the conversation, the parent understands. They don't always like it, but most of time they agree.

Heading into conversations with parents, APs understood they may encounter anger and/or frustration. To counteract this emotion, APs exercised empathy, clearly explained investigative details and displayed kind firmness. David is authentic in his assessment of his self-efficacy during his first year as an AP and how it impacted his parental conversations as well as his growth:

Last year, when I first started making phone calls to parents, I would get a lot of pushback from the parent. "My son or daughter didn't do that. You are not going to give him this. You're not going to do that." They're telling me what I'm not

going to do or telling me what I'm going to do. I got to thinking, "Are all the parents like that?" But this year, after having last years' experience, I realized that not all parents are that way. That this is a school policy. This is supported. I had to build that confidence up and say, "I did the investigation. I gathered all the facts. I've evaluated the evidence. This is the consequence for this."

Parents can be averse to hearing their child is being suspended from school and may aggressively seek to prevent this action from occurring. The self-confidence to address such a situation comes from experience, adhering to policy, and a quality investigation that supports the disciplinary decision. The following journal response from David illustrates how AP self-efficacy can influence parental conversations when receiving parental criticism:

The incident involved two students who were friends and had a misunderstanding that became physical. Although physical contact tends to receive out-of-school suspension, based on the circumstances, context, motives, supervising teacher and what I knew about the two students, they both received some in-school suspension time and peer mediation. I knew the parents of both students and both parents had a tendency to threaten me with going to the superintendent of the district. I knew that I was thorough in my investigation, due process had been provided, and the consequences fit within the district's guidelines and policy. As suspected, the parents felt their respective daughters should not have been punished at all. They did threaten to go above my head if I did not take the consequence away, however, after speaking to the parents for a bit longer and

listening to their concern and not giving in to their request, the situation was concluded.

By threatening to escalate the matter to the school district's superintendent, parents attempt to alter/eliminate the discipline consequence established by the AP. The results indicate the importance of listening to parental concerns yet remaining firm in assignment of consequence.

With years of experience and being a parent herself, Tonya's approach to parental conversations speaks to her level of self-efficacy:

I'm a parent, so I try to empathize how another parent would feel being told negative things about their child. I try to word it in a way that I would want to hear it as a parent. Even though we may have different parenting styles, I do believe they really love their child and care for them and they want what's best for them.

Tonya's cognizance of parental feelings aids her ability to effectively communicate undesirable information. By operating under the assumption that parents want the very best for their children, she is able to establish connections with parents despite frustrating circumstances.

Even when having difficult conversations with parents, the focus is always on student growth. Samantha emphasizes the following point in her parental conversations:

Kids make mistakes, but I don't need their mistake and their discipline consequence to determine the rest of their year. When I'm making this discipline decision, I need to make sure that it's one that's going to benefit the student. They're going to learn and they're going to grow from the situation, they're not

just going to shut down. When I make my decisions, I make sure that I'm doing what's in the best interest of that student.

Focusing on outcomes that ultimately benefit students was fundamental for the APs in this study. The participants wanted students to mature from their assigned consequences rather than repeatedly falling prey to negative behaviors. Even when making the decision to exclude a student from the learning environment, David emphasizes restorative discipline with parents. His focus is on the next steps after the consequences are served:

Being purely punitive is not the best approach at this stage of development. It is sometimes required but it's not the only approach that needs to be taken with these kids. I provide parents with the next steps about student supports. It's not purely punitive, we are following up.

APs in this study emphasized the importance of students benefiting from the consequences received. The results indicate parents were more receptive to student discipline when APs described how students would be supported beyond the penalty being provided. Tonya describes how she focuses on student growth and restorative practice to combat negativity:

After they suffer their consequence and sometimes when they're already in in-school suspension, I go visit them a couple of times just to check, "Hey, you're doing okay?" I have to pretend it's to make sure they're on task with their work. I want them to do well so they can rejoin the world the next day or whenever. I want to touch base with them to reestablish our relationship because I don't want them to fear me. I want them to know they will have consequences, but I know

they're human and I can forgive them and after they've served the consequence we can resume a regular relationship.

Restoration, growth, maturation, and relationships underscores the progressive mentality of the APs in this study. Even when consequences are required, the focus is not on the mistake itself, but learning from the mistake to make better decisions in the future. APs experienced internal turmoil when making the decision to exclude students from the learning environment, specifically when referring students to DAEP or assigning them to out-of-school suspension. To remedy this conflict, APs exercised grit—that mental resolve to adhere to consequences even when suffering from internal struggle. Criticism from both teachers and parents is inevitable for those operating as APs. Combating the disapproval of others requires APs to develop a high level of self-efficacy illustrated through confident parental conversations and a focus on long-term student growth beyond the prescribed consequence.

Summary

In conclusion, there are two themes that emerged from each research question. The participant results for the first research question, which asks how do secondary APs identified as social justice leaders make sense of and disrupt the racial discipline gap, indicate the social justice orientation of an APs drives their disciplinary approach. Moreover, their discipline approach is directly influenced by the APs upbringing and life experiences. The results also show APs face the challenge of coaching culturally incompetent teachers that are unaware of their biases and hold deficit perspectives towards students.

Results for the second research question, which asks how do secondary APs enact sensemaking when adjudicating student discipline, reveals there are several variables that inform AP decision making, chief among them is a teacher's credit score followed by the student's profile and environmental and contextual factors. Additional results for the second research question indicate APs seek a high degree of certainty before determining a student's disciplinary consequences.

Results from the third research question, which asks how do secondary APs navigate the personal and emotional aspects related to the act of disciplining students, indicates APs contend with a myriad array of emotions when making the decision to exclude a student from the learning environment. These emotions varied according to the type of discipline a student receives; however, APs struggle internally when making these decisions and have learned to remain resilient while contending with the inner turmoil. Lastly, APs combat the criticism received from teachers and parents by focusing on making disciplinary decisions that foster student growth and by strengthening their self-efficacy to hold confident parental conversations. What follows in Chapter V is a summary of results delineated by the seven principles of the sensemaking theoretical framework guiding this study.

Chapter V

Theoretical Framework Results

The sensemaking process used by APs as they make decisions on office discipline referrals was examined through the lens of the sensemaking theory that was introduced into organizational studies by Karl Weick (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Given the documented history of the overrepresentation of Blacks, specifically Black males excluded from the learning environment (Losen & Skiba, 2010), analysis of AP sensemaking is significant, as these are the primary members of the school community who make student discipline decisions. Surprisingly, there is a lack of research on the AP role (Kwan & Walker, 2008), given they are the chief campus disciplinarians and the influence of discipline on school climate. Results from this study will support the professional practices of current and future school administrators while filling a void in literature on the AP position. The seven sensemaking principles: grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy, were embedded within the questions of the face-to-face interview protocol (Appendix A). Analysis of the results are as follows.

Grounded in Identity Construction

Weick (1995) asserts that “sensemaking begins with the sensemaker” (p. 18); therefore, critically examining and knowing oneself is the foundational principle of the sensemaking theory. Our identity shapes our actions and interpretations, which impacts how others view and treat us (Weick et. al., 2005). Formation of identity for the participants of this study began in the early years of life, while they were youths. The

variables shaping participants included time-period, geographical region, race relations, and interpersonal relationships. The APs of this study identified themselves as social justice leaders who lead by action as informed disciplinarians that coach teachers to promote change and made disciplinary decisions that support student growth. Samantha highlighted the principle of identity construction when she discussed “Being black my whole life” and growing up “as a lower middle-class person” enduring “some situations that were not exactly positive dealing with race.” Further citing this principle is David as he describes, “I experienced a lot of prejudice, a lot of unfairness growing up...that’s where a lot of my ideals were shaped, experiencing unfairness in life.” As previously mentioned, the construction of identity informed the disciplinary approach of APs, including their use of exclusionary discipline. Tonya comments on her approach to discipline and its origins by stating:

I really like the restorative approach to discipline. That kind of ties in exactly to my upbringing and is more about working with kids through the problem and moving past it, as opposed to “you’re going home”, because that doesn’t really do anything.

Tonya’s childhood experiences of being coached through mistakes instead of merely punished for them has played a significant role in the construction of her identity. The formation and preservation of identity is a core tenant of sensemaking therefore it’s the first principle listed (Weick, 1995). Weick’s sensemaking principle of identity construction informs understanding of the research results by highlighting the subjective nature of “sense made.” Sense filters through the individual or “sensemaker.” In this study, sense has been profoundly influenced by their upbringing, thereby shaping their

advocacy. Ongoing critical analysis of self, is a necessary exercise to development and maintain a clear understanding of personal identity, which is essential as a social justice advocate for marginalized student populations.

Retrospective

Retrospect was heavily practiced by the participants of this study, particularly when attempting to determine the truth from students while investigating an office discipline referral. Through questioning strategies, careful listening, and synthesis of information, APs engaged in a dual retrospective cycle to evaluate information and achieve a clearer picture of the truth. The first retrospective cycle began with fact-finding via investigative methods. Tonya's describes how she engages in the first cycle of retrospection as she discusses her fact-finding strategies: "I ask for the same information but in different ways. I ask different questions and observe body language. It's really about digging deeper to see what happened, what caused it, and what could have prevented it." The second cycle occurred concurrently with the first cycle and informed the understanding of the AP as she/he discovered new information, generating connections from previous events. Samantha illustrates both recursive cycles in action when she describes her investigative strategies by stating "I ask questions and listen carefully to the things students say... the things that you hear, you go back, and you piece it all together to draw a complete picture." Samantha further communicates the retrospective principle by noting how her realization of completed events informs her understanding:

I've had investigations that started out with me not thinking one thing, and it turned completely around with evidence. I was thinking, "I don't know, this kid

can't be responsible for that." And by the time we got to the end of it, there was truth right there in front of me.

Retrospect is an essential principle of the sensemaking theory as the human condition necessitates the processing of events only after they've occurred. Weick's (1995) retrospective sensemaking principle informs understanding of the research results by underscoring how APs are constantly in the process of obtaining information, making sense of the information that was obtained, and using the information that was made "sense of" to make sense of the larger picture. Weick (1995) asserts "actions are known only when they have been completed, which means we are always a little behind or our actions are always a bit ahead of us" (p. 26). Weick's retrospective principle applied to this study, informs APs of the inherent human vulnerabilities related to investigating disciplinary events due to their historical nature.

Enactive of Sensible Environments

The essence of the enactive principle of sensemaking is that people shape their environments through their actions. The environments which are created can serve as either limitations or opportunities (Weick, 1995). The participants of this study played an active role in shaping their environment through coaching culturally incompetent teachers which serves as an opportunity for teacher growth and reduction of the racial discipline gap. David explains how he "constructs reality through authoritative acts" (Weick, 1995, pp. 30-31) by engaging in opportunities that develop cultural competence:

Whenever I speak with teachers that have issues with discipline management, I try to ensure they are fair across the board. Do other kids in your classroom see you as being fair? I try to get them to look at it from the student's perspective and

to question how they are being received. Are you being received as someone who's fair regardless of the student involved? Do the kids think you are racist or prejudiced? Do the kids think they're being singled out unfairly? I usually try to tell the teachers, "put yourself in their shoes." Ensure that how you are communicating, and what they are receiving is absence of anything that is racial, anything that implies bias. Consider how you speak to kids. Be culturally sensitive.

By having these crucial conversations with teachers, David is demonstrating how actions create opportunities in school environments. When teachers depart from these discussions, they will have been presented with information to improve their professional practice and positively impact student outcomes. Through coaching, Tonya also shapes her environment with the purpose of promoting teacher growth and reducing the number of discipline referrals for minority students:

Part of my job is to influence teacher reflection and how to respond to child behaviors. It's more about coaching adults to make better choices and emphasizing that we are trained professionals. I influence by coaching teachers about discipline practices so we don't have so many that come in that are African-American or Hispanic.

By actively seeking to influence teacher behaviors, Tonya is creating the opportunity for the teacher to influence student behaviors thereby shaping the school environment.

Weick's (1995) enactive sensemaking principle informs understanding of the research results by illustrating how APs of this study were not passive recipients of circumstance, quite the opposite was true. They were actors, fashioning their environment through

action, which created opportunities to promulgate cultural competence, social justice practices, and disrupt the racial discipline gap.

Social

The social principle of sensemaking permeates multiple aspects of this study as administrators, teachers, students and parents engage in social interactions and ongoing communication each day. As humans interact, relationships naturally develop that can be mutually beneficial. Sensemaking researchers “pay a lot of attention to talk, discourse, and conversation because that is how a great deal of social contact is mediated” (Weick, 1995, p. 41). Samantha relates how her relationships with students informs her sensemaking when investigating a disciplinary issue:

Because of the relationships that I create with students, I’m able to have conversations with students who were around the situation or know something about what’s going on to obtain insight. This information allows me to question other students and gain critical information to get to the truth.

The establishment of a relationship precedes trust and sensitive communication. It would be difficult to obtain provocative information from someone whom there is no connection. Establishing relationships with students is important to David as well. David describes how building connections with students promotes a sense of equitable treatment:

I pride myself in having a decent relationship with many of the students and getting to know the kids. Due to my relationships with students, I’m able to call them into the office and they know that I’m going to be fair with them.

Unpretentious relationships allow for the honest dialogue and minimize defensiveness. Weick's (1995) social sensemaking principle informs understanding of the research results by outlining the interdependent nature of educational stakeholders within the school environment. Application of this principle promotes the establishment and maintenance of both internal and external school relationships. Schools are true communities that highlight the social nature of the human condition. School communities require nourishment of social connections as social interactions influence academic and discipline outcomes.

Ongoing

Time is in perpetual motion, likewise people are always in action, thus sensemaking is an ongoing process. Weick (1995) observes that "sensemaking never starts. The reason it never starts is that pure duration never stops. People are always in the middle of things, which become things, only when those same people focus on the past from some point beyond it" (p. 43). The participants of this study were always engaged in the administrative process of resolving office discipline referrals. Managing discipline as an AP can become overwhelming, because from the moment students enter the building in August until they exit for the summer in June, APs are engaged in the ongoing process of adjudicating disciplinary events. Samantha describes the ongoing nature of discipline and the strain it places on APs by stating:

Discipline is stressful because it needs to be done. You can't get behind and let it go on and on. It has to be taken care of. It needs to be immediate so that kids understand why they got in trouble in the first place. You have to stay on top of it. It's just something you have to chase every day.

Falling behind on discipline has a compounding effect. First, it delays the consequence for the student, minimizing the corrective impact and second office discipline referrals begins to pile up, increasing teacher frustrations and AP stress. David illustrates the ongoing nature of student discipline and challenges of a first year AP as he comments on the substantial amount time spent investigating office discipline referrals:

More so last year than this year, I spend a lot of time investigating situations. I'd take too long to investigate and they would just pile up, and it got to a point where I had a hard time trying to get all these done. I was trying to hurry through them, but I would still try to be fair.

The ongoing nature of discipline necessitates efficient investigations to prevent errors when making decisions. Weick's (1995) ongoing sensemaking principle informs understanding of the research results by describing the incessant discipline demands of the AP. The continuous flow of humans throughout a school campus and convergence of divergent personalities, produces conflict that APs must contend with. The nature of the AP position as campus disciplinarian requires both mental and physical stamina, as constantly engaging in decision making on office discipline referrals can be a challenging and stressful task.

Focused on and Extracted by Cues

Extracted cues are basic, familiar structures that are sources from which one cultivates a broader sense of what is happening (Weick, 1995). Extracted cues serve as guideposts by generating points of reference to assist sensemakers with developing understanding and executing decision making. As social justice leaders, the participants of this study extracted cues from their local environment which shaped their national

perspective of the racial discipline gap. Samantha observes these cues by concluding that:

The African-American males are the ones that come to me in trouble. Those are the students who receive the referrals so those are the ones given the discipline. That's why there's an imbalance. I don't like the whole assertion of "they are the only ones getting in trouble." No, they're not the only ones getting in trouble. I just see that there is a high percentage of those students who are referred to the office.

Samantha extracts cues from firsthand accounts, based upon the frequency and ethnicity of the student referrals that she receives. The sources of cues extend beyond the school environment to society as a whole. David expounds on what he believes are contributing factors to the racial discipline gap by extracting that:

My experience has shown to me that as soon as you hear the word black, you automatically think of trouble. I think that's a sad stereotype that's being perpetuated throughout society. It has been perpetuated throughout history with African-American males and females. The challenge is trying to find a common ground and removing the prejudices and biases that are entrenched within our society because we are different. How we do that? We're still learning. There's a lot of unwillingness to compromise.

David illustrates how he's extracted cues from societal observations to make sense of a broader social perspective. Tonya, who has previous experience as an alternative school administrator, extracted cues from her experiences which shaped her perspective of the racial discipline gap:

As an administrator of an alternative elementary school, I would definitely say there was a much higher disciplinary referral rate for African American kids. However, once the kids got there and they just realized someone really cared about them and listened to them, they didn't act up. I think a lot of that is how adults treat them. I would hate to see a fifth grader ready to go back to their home school, and an administrator from that school would come and hang out for the day, and say, "I can't believe he's ready," and just their attitude was expecting the worst. I think in general, there are a lot of educators, unless you're trained in restorative discipline and if you don't give the kids an opportunity to shine, they're going to make poor choices and I think that happens more with African American kids.

Tonya extracted cues from her previous experiences and observations as an alternative school administrator. The data collected informed her understanding of the racial discipline gap, deficit thinking and consequently her social justice advocacy. Weick's (1995) sensemaking principle of extraction by cues, informs understanding of the research results by outlining ways in which APs bracket information into familiar structures that increase understanding and assist with framing the larger picture (Weick, 1995). Extracted cues provide reference points which stimulate understanding and enhanced decision making. The participants of this study extracted cues from their personal experiences and professional observations as APs. These extractions directly influenced their racial discipline gap perspective thereby informing their social justice leadership.

Driven by Plausibility Rather than Accuracy

The participants of this study sought to have a high degree of accuracy when investigating office discipline referrals. They employed multiple investigative techniques in an effort to uncover indisputable truth and render a fair judgment. While being 100% accurate is always the goal, it was acknowledged by participants this was not always possible and that being plausible was more practical, although unsettling. Weick et al., (2005) maintains that sensemaking is not about accuracy, “instead it is about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism” (p. 415). David emphasized that he wanted “one hundred percent understanding” in order to “administer fair discipline,” but realized that it was “not always possible.” He lamented this lack of accuracy “drives me nuts” which led him to seek a more plausible approach of trying “to get as much understanding as I can” knowing that “I’m not going to get one hundred percent.”

Disciplinary judgements need to be explained to parents, adding to the weight and stress of making accurate decisions. Tonya describes how plausibility rather than accuracy sometimes creates discomfort:

I won't feel the most comfortable about my decision if I wasn't a one hundred percent accurate, but I would feel stronger one way than the other, and never like half and a half. I would have a brain towards what I felt stronger for. I will explain to the parent that, “I know I don't have definite proof, but after following these investigate investigative steps, this is my conclusion.”

The desire to achieve perfection is strong for APs when making disciplinary decisions; however, plausibility that follows investigate steps can be effectively explained and withstands criticism is optimal when definitive results cannot be obtained. Weick's (1995) plausibility principle informs understanding of the research results by directing attention to the difficulty of APs to obtain 100% accuracy given the investigative variables and demands of their dynamic role. Although participants sincerely desired accuracy, the challenges to discovering incontestable truth necessitated an acceptance of plausibility in some cases. Instead of seeking accuracy, the results suggest it would be prudent for APs to use their investigative strategies to continually refine their understanding of a situation, thereby developing a more complete picture to assist with executing the best possible decision.

Summary

The seven characteristics of the sensemaking theory were used as a lens to examine how APs made sense of office discipline referrals to disrupt the racial discipline gap. Results from the study concluded that identity construction was a critical and foundational factor for participants and the social justice orientation for APs was developed during their formative years and shaped by era, region, race relations, and relationships.

Retrospective thought was constantly practiced by participants, specifically when conducting investigations. The APs in this study employed various fact-finding strategies in an attempt to uncover the truth for evaluation. As APs uncovered facts, they drew connections and synthesized information using a dual retrospective cycle to achieve a clearer picture of the past event.

Participants played an active role in shaping their environment through coaching activities. By rejecting passivity, APs created settings that fostered teacher growth and built teacher capacity to reduce the racial discipline gap. The social principle of sensemaking was readily apparent being that school is a communal organization requiring frequent interactions between educational stakeholders. Relationships naturally develop within schools due to the interdependent nature of humans and their social interactions.

Managing student discipline is an ongoing process that begins in August at the beginning of the school year and concludes in June at the end of the school year. Students are always in motion and events in flux as office discipline referrals continuously arise, requiring the ongoing attention of APs. To assist with developing understanding and decision making, participants extract cues from their environment which serve as guideposts and contribute to shaping their perspectives, in this case, the racial discipline gap. The APs in this study had a strong desire to be 100% accurate; however, in some cases, they had to concede the plausible approach was more practical yet disconcerting.

Chapter VI

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the sensemaking process of secondary APs as they make decisions on office discipline referrals. Acknowledged in the literature is an overrepresentation of Blacks, specifically Black males excluded from the learning environment due to the excessive use of exclusionary discipline. Reducing the racial discipline gap and the connecting school to prison pipeline is the prevalent social justice issue underscoring the purpose of this study. APs are the campus disciplinarians most responsible for making these decisions; however, there is a lack of literature concerning this critical position. Three secondary APs identified as social justice leaders are the participants of this qualitative, multi-case study design (Yin, 2014) which is delivered using an exploratory approach.

Data was collected using in-depth interviews, on-line journals, and a focus group with all three participants. The key findings of the study indicate the social justice orientation of the AP drives their discipline approach, APs contend with the challenge of coaching culturally incompetent teachers, and there are multiple variables that inform the decision making of APs. Additionally, APs with social justice dispositions seek a high level of discernment regarding office discipline referral facts and desire to make judgements that are in the best interest of students. Lastly, key findings reveal APs must contend with the emotional adversity that accompanies making exclusionary discipline decisions and combat criticism received from both teachers and parents. In the following chapter I will provide an interpretation of my findings, describe the limitations of the

study, provide recommendations for future research, and discuss implications of this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I will interpret the results of my study in contrast to the literature review, specifying in what ways the findings substantiate, confute, or enhance knowledge within this discipline. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do secondary APs identified as social justice leaders make sense of and disrupt the racial discipline gap?
2. How do secondary APs enact sensemaking when adjudicating student discipline?
3. How do secondary APs navigate the personal and emotional aspects related to the act of disciplining students?

The results of the study revealed two emergent themes for each research question. An interpretation of the findings for each theme will be presented in chronological order. Additionally, an interpretation of the findings for the seven principles of the sensemaking theory follow the most associated themes.

Social Justice Orientation Drives AP Discipline Approach

The findings indicate APs disrupt the racial discipline gap through the manner in which they approach student discipline. Participants' disciplinary approach was heavily influenced by their upbringing which involved experiences dealing with racism, prejudice, and a lack of advocacy. Their experiences shaped their social justice orientation which in turn influenced their approach to student discipline. The foundational components of their discipline approaches were equity, fairness, consistency, cultural sensitivity, and youth advocacy. Consistent with the empirical

literature, social justice leaders recognize the inequities present in school environments and promote social justice action to advance equity and inclusive practices (DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Theoharis, 2007). The findings confirm that social justice leaders “make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223). This theme gave insight to the origin of a person’s social justice orientation, highlighting the importance of identity construction as defined by the first principle of the sensemaking theory presented in a subsequent section.

The Challenge of Coaching Culturally Incompetent Teachers

The findings demonstrate APs contend with the challenge of coaching teachers that lack the ability to recognize cultural bias. Participants observed that some teachers viewed themselves as being colorblind yet submitted a disproportionate number of office discipline referrals for black students. Only when presented data were teachers able to observe the disparity in their discipline practices. Findings also revealed APs were forced to combat negative attitudes and deficit mentalities with coaching practices in an effort to disrupt the racial discipline gap. According to the findings of Weinstein et al. (2003), by failing to recognize the cultural influence of behavior for racial and ethnic minorities, teachers are in effect practicing discrimination through devaluing, censuring, and punishing marginalized groups. Failure of teachers to recognize the impact of power structures from the dominant group and simultaneous promotion of mainstream ideologies alters the lens in which teachers view non-mainstream students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). This conflict is expressed through deficit perspectives consequently

promoting unbalanced exclusionary discipline practices. The findings substantiate the need for CRCM as detailed in the literature review which includes a recognition of one's own biases, knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds, awareness of the broader social, economic, and political context, ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies, and commitment to building a caring classroom community (Weinstein et al., 2004). This theme provided insight to the obstacles APs must confront when seeking to alter the mindset of culturally inept teachers who perceive themselves to be colorblind.

Grounded in identity construction. Identity construction was central to the participants of this study. The APs had an in-depth understanding of who they were as individuals and embraced characteristics that informed their social justice leadership orientation as informed disciplinarians. With a clear understanding of self, participants coached teachers to promote change and adjudicated discipline to promote student growth and disrupt the racial discipline gap. Who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes our actions and how we interpret (Weick et al., 2005). These findings pinpoint the need for practicing APs to have a clear understanding of oneself, what social justice characteristics one embodies, and a definitive discipline approach.

Enactive of sensible environments. The findings indicate APs play an active role in shaping their school environment by taking action, in this case by coaching culturally incompetent teachers. The participants of this study engaged in critical conversations with teachers on sensitive topics that were sometimes uncomfortable. By presenting probing questioning that promote reflection, the participants influenced

teacher practices stimulating professional growth and reduction of the racial discipline gap. The findings confirm the sensemaking principle of enactment which emphasizes that people, through action, create their own environment and their created environments become either constraints or opportunities to face (Weick, 1995, p. 31). These findings also underscore the importance of APs to reject passivity and boldly seek to impact change through action.

Focused on and extracted by cues. The findings demonstrate participants of the study extracted cues from daily experiences and subtle observations that influenced their national perspective on the racial discipline gap. By activating experiential knowledge and collecting informal data, participants were able to generate reference points which served as guideposts that shaped their racial discipline gap perspective thus informing their social justice leadership. Weick (1995) notes that “extracted cues are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (p. 50). These findings substantiate the need for practicing APs to be attuned to their school environment, observing the patterns of discipline as these interpretations inform leadership and shape action.

Variables that Inform Decision-Making

The findings indicate APs consider multiple variables when making disciplinary decisions, chief among them is the teacher’s credit score. When participants received office discipline referrals, one of the first things they did was identify the referring teacher and reference the teacher’s credit score in contrast to the student’s profile and environmental and contextual factors. Office discipline referrals received from teachers with high credit scores were perceived to be of a higher quality by APs and yielded a

prompt, firm disciplinary response. Conversely, office discipline referrals received from teachers with low credit scores were viewed with skepticism and analyzed more critically. Other variables considered by APs that were illustrated in the findings include: a student's profile, which consisted of things occurring in the life of the student, previous disciplinary events, the cognitive level of the student and the student's motive or intent. Lastly, the findings show APs consider both environmental and contextual factors when making disciplinary decisions, such as: location of the incident, time and day the incident occurred, level of supervision, stage of adolescent development and the presence of any witnesses/instigators. As stated in the literature review, APs are understudied members of the educational field with sparse empirical literature on the position. These findings, therefore, extend the body of literature available on the AP position. As Kwan and Walker (2008) observe, "a review of the literature reveals a dearth of serious studies on the complexities of being a vice-principal. Most studies tend to provide little more than a normative description of the roles and duties of vice-principals..." (p. 74). These findings also provide a framework for pre-service and practicing APs, assisting them with understanding the complexities involved with making decisions on office discipline referrals, thus enhancing their practice as professional administrators and advocates for social justice.

Discernment and Assignment

The findings reveal APs use a variety of investigative strategies to discern the highest level of truth possible. They desire a clear understanding of events that allows for an accurate disciplinary decision to be made that is guided by policy yet makes sense for the individual student. Fact-finding through skillful questioning and listening strategies

was determined to be a critical skillset of an AP. The ability of participants to obtain key information hinged upon their capacity to ask precise questions in detailed sequences and concentrate on the subtleties of student responses. Also included in their investigative toolbox were strategies such as: critical analysis of statements from involved parties, audio and video analysis, illusionary investigative techniques and relationships with students who assist with solving past events. As a result of the lack of available research on APs, these findings extend on the body of literature and adds framework for pre-service and practicing APs. According to Harvey (1994), “the extent of research literature in educational administration is remarkable for the lack of recognition of the deputy principalship. Less than 50 studies focus on the role of the deputy principal. Many of these studies are anecdotal” (p. 16). Building an investigative tool box that includes effective questioning and listening strategies will enhance the professional skillsets of APs.

Retrospective. The essence of an investigation embodies the retrospective sensemaking principle, as APs are continuously engaged in fact-finding, reconciling new information with current understandings to develop a clearer picture of the truth. The concept of dual retrospect emerged in the findings, as APs sought to make sense of evidence gathered from a source while concurrently generating connections from previous events. This dual recursive cycle informed their understanding of both current and past events, leading to enlightenment and informed decision making. These findings confirm that formation of sense is an “attentional process” (Weick, 1995, pg. 25), to that which has already transpired. “Actions are known only when they have been completed, which means we are always a little behind or our actions are always a bit ahead of us”

(Weick, 1995, p. 26). Pre-service and experienced APs can strengthen their investigative acumen through the metacognitive recognition of the dual retrospect concept.

Ongoing. From the first day of the school year until the first day of summer, APs are continuously engaged in student discipline and adjudicating office discipline referrals. Being campus disciplinarians can be stressful to APs as they hold multiple roles beyond meting out disciplinary consequences. As detailed in the literature review, contemporary APs wear several hats including that of instructional leader in a high-stakes testing environment. APs are often strained and stretched in many directions while feeling the pressure effectively manage student discipline. These findings substantiate the assertions of Weick (1995) that “sensemaking never starts. The reason it never starts is that pure duration never stops. People are always in the middle of things, which become things, only when those same people focus on the past from some point beyond it” (p. 43). These findings will prepare pre-service APs with an understanding of the demands of the position and challenges of a rigorous school.

Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. The findings indicate APs desire a high level of accuracy when determining the truth; however, veracity is not always possible. The inability to discern 100% of the truth 100% of the time was discomforting to APs and sometimes forced them to accept plausible rather than accurate outcomes. Participants sought to administer discipline fairly and provide clear and thorough explanations to parents when prescribing disciplinary consequences. In light of their other responsibilities, APs had to take action on office discipline referrals necessitating the obtainment of as much information as possible until the “scales were tipped” in one direction or another. This plausible approach allowed for informed decision-making that

could be clearly explained and defensible to others. These results confirm findings of Weick et al., (2005) as he proposes that sensemaking is not about precision, “instead it is about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism” (p. 415). With the many roles of an AP, these findings are significant, as the plausible approach will assist the AP with taking action.

Emotional Adversity

The findings reveal APs experience a broad range of emotions when making the decision to exclude a student from the learning environment, specifically out-of-school suspension and assignment to DAEP. Participants expressed a sincere desire to keep students in school, as they believed school was the best place for academic advancement. Nevertheless, participants acknowledged there were times when making the judgement to exclude a student from the learning environment was necessary and they had to display true grit—that tenacity to make a difficult decision and hold to it despite the internal struggle. APs developed the ability to “emotionally guard” themselves in order to make objective decisions that were in the best interest of the school, however they all expressed internal conflict and assigned alternatives to exclusionary discipline when appropriate. As detailed in the literature review, there is a lack of empirical research on the AP position. According to Harvey (1994), the deputy principalship remains one of the least understood roles in the schools of contemporary education systems. Due to this lack of research, these findings extend the body of research in this field and inform the practices of novice and veteran APs as they navigate the emotional terrain associated with excluding students from the learning environment.

Combating Criticism

The findings indicate APs endure the criticisms of both parents and teachers for disciplinary decisions. Amid the false accusations from a parent of disliking their child, or a teacher's disapproval of a discipline outcome, APs remained focused on making disciplinary decisions that promoted student growth and minimized repeat offenses. APs cultivated "thick skin," remaining resolute in their belief of restorative discipline practices and held parental conversations that displayed compassion for the student and exhibited confident self-efficacy that defended against criticism. Few researchers have paid attention to the assistant principalship (Marshall, 1992). These findings extend the scope of available research on APs and provides strategy to pre-service and experienced APs to enrich professional practice.

Social. The interdependent nature of humans is glaringly apparent within the school environment. Educational stakeholders interact with one another for the express purpose of academic advancement of students. Completing this task requires conversation, collaboration, compromise, and inevitably conflict. Relationships are established and bonds are formed as the social principle of sensemaking is on full display each school day. "Those who forget that sensemaking is a social process miss a constant substrate that shapes interpretations and interpreting" (Weick, 1995, p. 39). These findings will stimulate AP consciousness of the communal nature of schools through recognition that social connections impact sensemaking.

Limitations of the Study

There were three participants included in this study representative of a small sample size which limits the generalizability of results. This study focused on

participants at the secondary level, limiting comparisons to elementary schools. One site district and one site location were selected for this study; therefore, results may not be representative on a national scale. The site district was situated in an urban locale, challenging connections to suburban and rural districts.

Recommendations

Based upon results from this study, I present the following four recommendations:

1. Empirical research and the findings from this study indicate APs spend a large portion of each school day addressing student discipline (Good, 2008; Glanz, 1994; Williams, 2012). As a result, I recommend conducting ongoing professional learning to: enhance AP sensemaking of the variables that inform decision making, improve discernment capabilities, refine how APs assign consequences and effectively manage emotional adversity and criticism.
2. Empirical research and findings from this study also indicate some teachers are culturally incompetent, unaware of their biases and deficit mentalities (Weinstein et al., 2004). I recommend establishing ongoing professional learning for teachers that embrace culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and the five fundamental components of culturally responsive classroom management (Weinstein et al., 2004).
3. The findings of this study generated data highlighting stark differences between novice and veteran APs that merits additional investigation and discussion. I recommend further research on the challenges of first year APs as they enter and navigate their new role.

4. This study contained a small sample size of three participants. As a result, I recommend conducting research on a greater sample size of APs from multiple site districts to aid in the generalizability of results. Additionally, I also recommend future research on APs in suburban and rural areas as a comparison to urban locales.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study present the potential for social change from individual and organizational levels. As individuals, APs hold the proverbial keys to exclusionary discipline. These members of the school community determine whether or not a student will remain in school or be excluded from school and the length of time of their absence. This research provides evidence to support campus disciplinarians adopting social justice leadership orientations and implementing suggestions from this study that enhance administrative practices and inform decision making to disrupt the racial discipline gap.

From the organizational level, graduate and educational leadership certifying programs are charged with the responsibility of preparing the next generation of school leaders across America. The findings indicate pre-service programs are failing to prepare the leaders of tomorrow with the necessary skill-sets to effectively adjudicate student discipline when they enter the AP role. This research provides evidence to support providing pre-service APs with training on: social justice realities, influencing their environment, adjudicating discipline, investigative strategies, and navigating the emotional challenges of student discipline.

An additional organizational level where potential exists for social change is school districts. Once APs enter the role they are in dire need of ongoing professional

learning to successfully negotiate the challenges of the position. School districts and their respective campuses should be engaged in disciplinary data and provide ongoing trainings that cultivate social justice dispositions in both novice and veteran APs to promote the reduction of unbalanced exclusionary discipline practices.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the sensemaking process of APs as social justice leaders as they adjudicate office discipline referrals to disrupt the racial discipline gap. Racial disparities associated with exclusionary discipline practices have been well documented. This study is unique as it contributes to the lack empirical literature on the school personnel most responsible for executing disciplinary judgement—APs. This research produced findings to support how social justice APs make sense of and disrupt the racial discipline gap, make sense of office discipline referrals, and navigate the emotional aspects related to making disciplinary decisions. The results point to a need for social justice leaders that actively shape their environment through action, informed decision-making, refined investigative methods, maintaining an emotional balance and combating criticism with a focus on student growth.

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Appendix A
Guided Interview Protocol

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this research is to examine the sensemaking process of APs as they adjudicate office discipline referrals.

Participants: will be acknowledged for agreeing to participate in the study and the researcher will detail the purpose of the study. The informed consent form and interview guidelines will be reviewed with participants to establish understanding about the process. The researcher will then begin with opening questions, progress to engagement questions and end with concluding questions.

Introductory Questions

1. Tell me about yourself and your educational background.
 - a. How long have you been an assistant principal?
 - b. Why did you decide to become an assistant principal?
2. Share your educational values and describe how they guide your leadership on campus.
 - a. Did you hold any positions between the time you were a teacher and assistant principal? If so, what positions?
 - b. How did that/those positions shape your leadership?
3. What did your principal certification or Educational Leadership master's degree program teach you about student discipline?
 - a. What have you learned about student discipline since being in the field?
 - b. How did you learn these things?
4. What percentage of your workday would you estimate is spent adjudicating student discipline or managing student behavior?
 - a. Describe the type and level of discipline referrals that are most common.

- b. How would you describe your overall approach to student discipline?

Guided Questions for Research Question # 1 – How do secondary APs identified as social justice leaders make sense of and disrupt the racial discipline gap?

1. How do you define being a social justice leader? **(Identity Construction)**
 - a. What characteristics of being a social justice leader do you identify with most? Why? **(Identity Construction)**
 - b. What environmental factors have shaped your advocacy for social justice issues? **(Retrospective)**
2. What is your perspective on the racial discipline gap?
 - a. What do you believe are the contributing factors to the racial discipline gap? **(Extracted by Cues)**
 - b. Is there a racial discipline gap at your campus? Why/Why not?
3. Why do you believe students of color, specifically Black males are overrepresented in the use of exclusionary discipline practices?
 - a. Do cultural differences and diversity factor into student discipline concerns on your campus? Why or why not? **(Extracted by Cues)**
 - b. As a social justice leader, how does your professional practice influence the use of exclusionary discipline on your campus? **(Identity Construction)**
4. How do teachers of your campus communicate their understanding or lack of understanding of the racial discipline gap? **(Extracted by Cues)**
 - a. How do you engage teachers in social justice oriented conversations to advance equality? **(Enactment)**

- b. What barriers do you face when attempting to advocate for social justice on your campus? How do you contend with these challenges?

(Enactment)

Guided Questions for Research Question # 2 – How do secondary APs enact sensemaking when adjudicating student discipline?

1. Walk me through your thought process when you begin evaluating an office discipline referral.
 - a. What do you consider about the referring teacher? **(Extracted by Cues)**
 - b. What do you consider about student being referred? **(Extracted by Cues)**
 - c. What do you consider about the nature of the discipline infraction? **(Extracted by Cues)**
 - d. Do you consider any environmental or contextual factors? **(Extracted by Cues)**
2. What is your goal when investigating office discipline referrals?
 - a. What measure of understanding are you seeking to gain about the discipline issue? (i.e. complete or probable) **(Plausibility)** Explain.
 - b. How does your discernment about what has occurred transform as the investigation progresses? **(Ongoing)**
3. How do you determine a student's disciplinary consequence?
 - a. How do you interpret policy when defining disciplinary consequences for students? **(Enactment)**

- b. Do you have any latitude when determining the disciplinary consequence for student infractions? If so, how do you use this autonomy? **(Enactment)**
- 4. How accurate are you at determining the truth about a student discipline issue? **(Plausibility)** How do you know you are that accurate? **(Identity Construction)**
 - a. How has your accuracy at determining the truth evolved since you became an assistant principal? **(Retrospective)**
 - b. What factors or events have shaped your ability to accurately determine the truth about discipline issues? **(Retrospective)**

Guided Questions for Research Question # 3 – How do secondary APs navigate the personal and emotional aspects related to the act of disciplining students?

- 1. Describe your feelings when you make the disciplinary decision to exclude a student from the learning environment. **(Identity Construction)**
 - a. Are the feelings different depending on the type of exclusionary discipline decision (i.e., in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, disciplinary alternative education program, expulsion)? Explain.
 - b. Are the feelings different depending on the student who is receiving the consequence? **(Social)** Explain.
- 2. When making difficult disciplinary decisions, do you consider relational factors? **(Social)** Explain.

- a. Have you ever had to make the disciplinary decision to exclude a student from the learning environment whose success you were heavily invested in? **(Social)** How did that affect you?
 - b. Have teachers ever criticized your disciplinary decisions? If so, how did that make you feel? **(Social)** How did you react?
3. Describe your emotions when talking to the parent(s)/guardian(s) of a student when you make the disciplinary decision to exclude a student from the learning environment. **(Social)**
- a. Do parent(s)/guardian(s) ever feel that you have been unfair to their child? **(Social)** If so, how did this make you feel?
 - b. Have you ever felt unjustly characterized by the parent(s)/guardian(s) of a student due to your disciplinary decision to exclude a student from the learning environment? **(Social)** If so, how did this make you feel?
4. Do you consider if/how your disciplinary decisions connect to the racial discipline gap? **(Enactment)** What have you concluded?
- a. Describe your feelings related to your level of perceived influence on the racial discipline gap? **(Identity Construction)**
 - b. Describe the level of importance that you feel is ascribed to combating the racial discipline gap in comparison to other contemporary educational issues.

Appendix B

Guided Online Journal Protocol

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this research is to examine the sensemaking process of APs as they adjudicate office discipline referrals.

Participant: Please complete the following journal entry once per week for a total of four weeks. Detail noteworthy student discipline experiences as it relates to the journal questions that follow. Be as detailed as possible while excluding names or any identifying information.

Journal Question # 1 – (Correlated to Research Question # 1 - How do secondary APs identified as social justice leaders make sense of and disrupt the racial discipline gap?)

During your interactions this week with educational stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, or community members) did you engage anyone in a social justice oriented conversation? Did your professional practice as a social justice leader influence the use of exclusionary discipline in any way?

Journal Question # 2 – (Correlated to Research Question # 2 - How do secondary APs enact sensemaking when adjudicating student discipline?)

Please describe your most challenging disciplinary issue this week. Explain what you considered about the referring teacher, the student being referred, the nature of the incident, and any environmental and/or contextual factors. What level of

clarity/understanding did you obtain on the issue? How did you determine the student's consequence and how accurate to you feel that you were in determining the truth of the matter?

Journal Question # 3 – (Correlated to Research Question # 3 - How do secondary APs navigate the personal and emotional aspects related to the act of disciplining students?)

Please describe your feelings related to the disciplinary consequence that you provided to the student from journal question number two. Did you have any emotional conflict or internal struggle? Explain. Was the student, parent, or teacher critical of the disciplinary

Appendix C

Guided Focus Group Protocol

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this research is to examine the sensemaking process of APs as they adjudicate office discipline referrals.

Participants: will be welcomed by the researcher and reintroduced to the purpose of the study. The informed consent form and focus group guidelines will be reviewed with participants to establish understanding about the process. The researcher will then begin with opening questions, progress to engagement questions and end with concluding questions.

Introductory Questions:

1. Describe your level of preparation to handle discipline issues during your first year as an assistant principal?
2. What could have been done to better prepare you to address student disciplinary issues before becoming an assistant principal?

Engagement Questions:

Correlated to Research Question # 1 - (How do secondary APs identified as social justice leaders make sense of and disrupt the racial discipline gap?)

1. In what ways have you observed the racial discipline gap in action?
2. Describe your degree of locus of control in relation to the discipline gap.

Correlated to Research Question # 2 – (How do secondary APs enact sensemaking when adjudicating student discipline?)

1. When making student discipline decisions, what are the important things to consider? On the note card provided, please list five things that are important to you when making student disciplinary decisions.

2. Now, we will list these on the chart paper. If you had to select only three of these as the most important to consider, what would they be? You may select something from your own list or something that was listed by others.

Correlated to Research Question # 3 – (How do secondary APs navigate the personal and emotional aspects related to the act of disciplining students?)

1. What is the emotional toll as a result of adjudicating student discipline over the course of the school year?
2. Tell me about any disappointments you've had with disciplining students.

Concluding Questions:

1. Suppose that you were the Secretary of Education and could make one change that would reduce the racial discipline gap. What would you do?
2. What advice about adjudicating student discipline and the racial discipline gap, would you provide an individual that was currently in an educational leadership program, training to become a school administrator?

Appendix D

Permission to Use Guided Interview Protocol

Requesting Permission to adapt and use your Interview Protocol

Inbox x



KEVIN BANKS

to David ▾



Greetings Dr. DeMatthews,

I hope all is well since we last spoke. I sincerely appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to speak with me and share your "nuggets" of wisdom.

I'm also following-up to request the ability to adapt the interview protocol contained in your dissertation "Principal Sensemaking of Inclusion: A Multi-Case Study of Five Urban School Principals" for use in my study on Assistant Principals, sensemaking, and the racial discipline gap.

Thank you for considering my request.

Regards,

Kevin J. Banks

DeMatthews, David E

to me ▾



Kevin,

Great talking to you as well. Please feel free to call me David, too. You have my permission to adapt my interview protocol. Let me know if I can be of any other assistance and good luck!

Sincerely,
David

David DeMatthews, Ph.D.