REDUCING EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE FROM THE CLASSROOM: A DESCRIPTIVE QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

A thesis presented

by

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Abstract

This case study was conducted at a traditional 9-12 comprehensive high school 10 miles outside of New York City in Bergen County, New Jersey.

The focus of this study was to examine how teacher practices and behaviors can reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom, and explore how teachers can genuinely and authentically connect and foster positive relationships with their students to create a positive school climate and culture.

Keywords: exclusionary discipline, teacher-student relationships
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Finally, to all my colleagues who shared in my struggles over late night conversations and early morning pep talks to keep that flame burning—thank you for always believing in me. This is just the beginning of a powerful legacy to come.
Dedication Page

This work is dedicated to the one person who has never given up on me no matter my faults, mistakes, or shortcomings. To my life partner, my bundle of joy, my everything and reason for breathing. To my son, Zamari Alik Watson, this work was done to protect you and so many others like you. Your hugs and kisses on those late nights mommy was “working late,” I thank you. Always know that education is access and knowledge is power. Know that you gave mommy the strength all those late nights—Never, Never, Never Give Up! You can…and you will!

Always Mi Corazon!
Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

The following research examines the inconsistent exclusionary discipline practices issued to African American students at a 9-12 culturally diverse high school in northern New Jersey. The current discipline policy and student code of conduct referral process exposes current discipline practices that contribute to exclusionary and inconsistent referrals that support negative student outcomes and discipline recidivism, especially at the classroom level.

The overall goal of this case study is to reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom that removes students, particularly African American students, which creates discipline recidivism and poor educational outcomes. Specific purposes of this study are to explore relationship building to further reduce exclusionary discipline practices and improve classroom management skills to ultimately increase student academic success and improve overall school climate and culture. It will also examine teacher-student relationships in an effort to reduce the inconsistent exclusionary discipline practices that remove many of its African American students from the instructional environment.

Statement of the Problem

There are too many inconsistent disciplinary referrals being made by classroom teachers that close out African American students from academic instruction which causes discipline recidivism. This is a major problem in many school districts across the country.

Discipline Referrals are usually made based on a violation or infraction of student code of conduct policies, which oftentimes originates from a referring teacher (usually in the classroom). In order to maintain a safe, nurturing, and learning environment, school administrators, personnel, and disciplinarians are held responsible for upholding the school policy on codes of conduct to ensure that the learning environment is interrupted as few times as possible. To assist
in reducing discipline referrals from the classrooms, creating environments where students distinctly understand school expectations within the climate must be continuously articulated to the entire school community. Articulations trickle directly back into the classroom where the interaction with students and referrals are more intimate.

**Significance of the Research Question**

In developing and promoting a sound understanding of the cultural tenants of classroom discipline that reduces referrals, there must be an expansion on several factors that contribute to inconsistent discipline. The ongoing factors that must be explored can be reduced to the following areas for this study: teacher education literature, classroom management skills, and the relationships between cultural context and the perceptions of student misconduct.

The rationale for this study and the researcher’s interest is in expanding and sharing research-based data on improving teacher-student relationships through a culturally relevant lens to address inconsistent exclusionary discipline practices from the classroom-level at the research site. The significance of the problem is most beneficial to the local level of education, in particularly the site for this study, because the rate of disciplinary referrals from the classroom directly impacts the culture and climate of the building, and directly impacts student achievement.

The American Academy of Pediatrics’ (2013) and Shabazian (2015) both agree that recommendations for school disciplinary policies posit it to be pedagogically unsound and ineffective practice to exclude students for school violations, more so because increased time where students spend engaging in school and student activities effectively improves students’ academic outcome. The removal from the academic process perpetuates a vicious cycle of academic failure, which is a result of the student falling further behind in course work and
receiving fewer opportunities to gain and improve the academic skills necessary to achieve academic success. The levels of increased frustration oftentimes produce behavioral issues that incur more exclusionary discipline and more distance from academic interactions with teachers. Teacher education literature and its many foci on reducing student misconduct and discipline has been among the top of practitioner concerns (Reed, 1989; Glickman & Tamashiro, 1980).

Classroom management has also been a constant concern that teachers express less preparation (Calhoun, 1986; Leyser, 1988), which is oftentimes one of the reasons for exiting the teaching profession (Canter, 1989; Haberman & Rickards, 1990). The relationships between cultural context and student misconduct must be explored further to guide practitioners on how to conduct a more positive environment to produce more lucrative educational outcomes. This perspective could potentially enhance professional efficacy in designing effective classroom management practices. Of great importance are the voices and shared experiences of those teachers who are recognized as effective in culturally diverse environments. This is central to the improvement of school discipline practices since schools are becoming more and more culturally diverse (US Department of Education, 1996-97). Effective teaching and learning cannot take place in a classroom where there’s an absence of effective classroom management (Crone & Teddlie, 1995; Noguera, 2003) and cultural relevance.

There are many resources that consistently show connections between school discipline and dropout rates (Bowditch, 1993; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Rumberger, 1995; Wenlage & Rutter, 1986), and delinquency (Skiba et al., 1997), and high rates of recidivism (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). There are also connections to the current Student-To-Prison Pipeline (STPP) epidemic that links school discipline to the criminal
justice system (Majors & Billisen, 1992; Noguera, 2003; Wacquant, 2000). One way of confronting classroom teacher exclusionary discipline referrals is through relationship building.

**Research Problem and Research Question**

There is more than 4 decades of documented research that supports and consistently demonstrates the need to address the overrepresentation of African American students in excessive exclusionary discipline practices. It has been well documented that inconsistent exclusionary discipline of African American students, especially males, is a crisis that needs immediate attention to save and transform the education system. The use of disproportionate exclusionary discipline has also been termed as the “discipline gap” (Brown, 2014) in some circles of the discourse. Townsend-Walker (2012) with support from the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (2006) defines the overall school-to-prison pipeline context, the artery from which exclusionary discipline deviates, as “the negative school experiences that persistently route African American males away from school…” (p. 320). The common themes that seem to consistently emerge in various definitions of this “gap” are the exclusionary practices of discipline distributed to African American students for non-violent, subjectively viewed infractions, and non-aggressive offenses. If the same students are not being removed from the building, they are receiving harsher disciplinary actions at a disproportionate rate over their peers for similar or far less infractions. The paramount commonality in all of the literature that cannot be disputed is the disproportionality rate at which African American students are being removed from the classroom.

African American students are inconsistently excluded from classroom instruction which increases discipline recidivism; purposefully examining the ability to manage student behavior through relationship building to reduce exclusionary discipline practices remains the objective.
This research seeks to answer questions addressing inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom. The research question that will guide this study is: *What teacher behaviors or practices contribute to exclusionary discipline from the classrooms?*

**Definition of Key Terminology**

**Discipline**

[mass noun] The practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience. The controlled behavior resulting from such training.

**Exclusionary Discipline**

[adjective]. Relating to or characterized by the exclusion of something, especially from a contract or group. Ex: The practice of excluding groups by using punishment (suspension, expulsion, removal from instruction, in school suspension) to correct perceived disobedience.

**Referral**

[noun]. An act of referring someone or something for consultation, review, or further action. Ex: Usually made in verbal or written form to an authority figure such as an administrator.

**Discipline Referral**

[noun]. A written, verbal, or physical document submitted to a school administrator usually resulting in a follow up consequence.

**Culturally Competency**

Cultural competence is having an awareness of one’s own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. It is the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each student unique, while celebrating the between-group variations that make our country a tapestry. This understanding informs and expands teaching practices in the culturally competent educator’s classroom.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Responsive(ness)</td>
<td>is the ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of your own culture as well as those from other cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Cultural Theory</td>
<td>is built on the premise that, throughout the lifespan, human beings grow through and toward connection, and that we need connections to flourish, even to stay alive. This theory views isolation as a major source of suffering for people, at both a personal and cultural level. The theory behind this approach centers around positive interpersonal factors such as growth-fostering relationships and mutual empathy as well as cultural factors that facilitate validation and empowerment for marginalized populations. The approach seeks to reduce sources of individual isolation and social injustice, such as racism, classism, and homophobia, which contribute to chronic disconnection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>the way the school community perceives itself regarding those behaviors that are acceptable, as well as by which the community holds itself accountable and responsible for those behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STPP (Student –to-Prison Pipeline)</td>
<td>the exclusionary practices of discipline distributed to African American students for non-violent, subjectively viewed infractions, non-aggressive offenses, and if those students are not being removed from the building, they are receiving harsher disciplinary actions at a disproportionate rate over their peers for similar or far less infractions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privilege</td>
<td>an interpersonal construct that involves unearned benefits afforded to powerful social groups within systems of oppression. The state of having a status or identity that is preferred or favored in society (Kendall, 2006). Results when a set of conditions systematically empowers select groups based on specific variables while systematically disempowering others (MsIntosh, 1992).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>“the way in which members of a school community perceive different aspects of their school, including safety, emotional and socioeconomic well-being, and how these factors affect student learning” (Nava Delgado, 2014; Skiba et al., 2014, p. 552).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive Behavior</td>
<td>any behaviors that hampers the ability of instructors to teach or students to learn (Clayton State University, date unknown); when a child is uncooperative and prevents themselves and other children in class from working, or when the teacher’s attention is divided between the disruption and attention to the other students’ in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequence</td>
<td>the effect, result, or outcome of something occurring earlier; a result of a particular action or situation often one that is bad or not convenient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disproportionate</td>
<td>too large or too small in comparison to something else, or not deserving its importance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Justice System</td>
<td>is the primary system used to handle youth who are convicted of criminal offenses. It intervenes in delinquent behavior through the police, court, and correctional involvement, with the goal of rehabilitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Achievement</td>
<td>the measurement of academic content a student learns in a determined amount of time, based on the learning goals or instructional standards that educators are required to teach at the respective grade level(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-Term Outcomes</td>
<td>goals reached in the near future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term Outcomes</td>
<td>goals reached in the distance or over an extended period of time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following section of this chapter will include a description and discussion of Relational-Cultural Theory which will serve as the theoretical lens for this study.
Zero-Tolerance Policies

the presumption that removing students who engage in disruptive behavior will deter others from disruption and create an improved climate for those students who remain (APA, 2008, p. 852). Zero tolerance can be defined as a highly structured disciplinary policy that permits little flexibility in outcome by imposing severe sanctions (often long-term suspension or expulsion) for even minor violations of a school rule. A hallmark of zero tolerance is that it permits little or no consideration of the student’s intentions or the circumstances of his or her misbehavior (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Tebo, 2000).

The following section of this chapter will include a description and overview of Relational-Cultural Theory which will serve as the theoretical lens for this study.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) is a life continuum theoretical model that posits its founding principles on the context of human growth through their relationships with others, but is mostly practiced in therapeutic counseling (Hammer, Crethar, & Cannon, 2016). It was not always the case. RCT first reached notoriety with Jean Baker Miller’s work, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (1976), with her examination of human growth and development regarding women in relationships from a nontraditional perspective. Her perspective eventually became the conduit by which counselors viewed relationships and then evolved into a theory of counseling through collaborative works of other (women) RCT scholars (Janet Surrey, Irene Stiver, Alexandria Kaplan, and Judith Jordan). RCT, focuses on “growth within relationships and toward mutuality and relational competence” (Miler, 1976; Hammer et al, 2016, p. 126). It has been described by other scholars as a way to understand women in relationships, their roles as caretakers, and the interactions between these entities (Haskins & Appling, 2017). It has also
been described as the theory that probes into the complexities of human relationships, using notions of connecting and disconnecting, to identify and question the social implications in psychological theory (McCauley, 2013).

In its infancy during the 1970s, RCT was referred to as “self-in-relation theory” and posited that other theorists like Erikson and Freud overlooked considering the emotional and mental wellness improvements women made when their relationships grew stronger. The U.S. larger social context, was a highly patriarchal and systematically institutionalized entity that marginalized many of its minority groups and people of color, including both men and women. At the peak time where there were increased pressures for women’s equality, social conflict and the fight for civil rights, several female psychologists at the Stone Center housed at Wellesley College wanted to study how these factors in society affected women in the workplace, positions of influence, and other non-traditional arenas. The original work in “Self-Relation Theory” was done with women, but as the theory evolved, it began to look at other marginalized groups in society and how those groups made improvements in their lives through counseling while building and connecting with other groups in society. RCT has since evolved into a theory that attempts to “simplify the complex nature of relationships and relational competence for all people” (p. 128). The theory has been applied to developmental relational counseling for men, made applicable for issues of bullying (in group counseling; addressing concerns of intimidation and harassment), and for couples. Regardless of the context, Hammer et al (2016) states the following:

RCT is centered on following basic tenants: (a) people grow through and toward relationships throughout the lifespan; (b) movement toward mutuality characterizes mature functioning; (c) relational differentiation and elaboration characterize growth and relational competence; (d) mutual empathy and empowerment are at the core of growth fostering relationships; (e) authenticity is necessary for real engagement and full participation in growth-fostering
relationships; and (f) all people in growth fostering relationships contribute to one another’s growth and development. (p. 128)

RCT’s emphasis on relationships and their construction within the social context provides the backdrop for exploring the intersectionalities of an individual person’s many identities; It is vital to understand that the individual brings with them numerous and overlapping identities and characteristics and one’s individual identity reflects these convergences.

Growth happens in the context of society with a particular focus on issues of power and privilege. The goal of development in relational cultural theory is not to form separate, independent selves, but to develop the ability to actively participate in relationships that encourage and cultivate the well-being of each individual and all those involved. In Relational-Cultural Theory, isolation is looked upon as the fundamental source of an individual’s suffering and progression toward mutuality made with connections to others is the apex of relational development, (Miller & Stiver, 1997). To capitalize on these benefits, both parties must have an “openness to influence, emotional availability, mutual respect and responsiveness” (p. 1) which is characterized by growing and the growth-enhancing relationships that develops as a result. The affirmation of personal experiences and one’s sense of self then becomes another experience as part of the larger more communal relationship unit(s). The RCT model is all about the growth of mutual relatedness and mutual connectedness. The emphasis on mutual connections to the lives of all those people involved is essential to the success of this theory and central to its implementation. The full implementation and communal benefit of RCT is the building of communities which value people and the support of one another through resilience and resistance to the alternatives and becoming the agents of change, which is the full realization of growth as people connect and make connections.
Focusing only on the *Relational* part of the theory, it presumes that to be human, individuals instinctively seek to engage in relationships, and this is what drives humans to interact. This portion of the theory searches for understanding the formation of relationships. Jean Baker Miller’s “growth-fostering relationships” represents relationships where the parties involved take a personal and intimately active role in creating uninhibited mutuality. To reach this pinnacle status (in the theory as well as in relationships), each party must individually attain the “Five Good Things” and be able to also demonstrate them within the relationship. Those good things are: (1) Sense of Zest or Energy; (2) Increased Sense of Worth; (3) Clarity: Increased knowledge of oneself and the other person in the relationship; (4) Productivity: Ability and motivation to take action both in the relationship and outside of it; and (5) Desire for More Connection: In reaction to satisfaction or relational experience. In these good things and the development of the relationship, there is a reality of diversity and power differentials that require mutual participation in the process towards a healthy coexistence that yields mutual empowerment.

Because the development of empathy is most important later in life, RCT holds that mutual empathy is required for the existence of “growth fostering relationships” to flourish successfully. The theory suggests human nature draws individuals to “grow through and toward connection” (p. 2). An additional requirement in fostering the “Five Good Things” are the pieces that make up mutuality.

In order to experience this, RCT as a whole and one of its major tenants is that people grow towards the capacity of having and sharing respect in one’s self and with others. This requires all parties to be open to being changed by the others in the relationship (McCauley, 2013). The mutuality within a relationship involves (1) the individual actively participating in the process of developing a relationship versus trying to be the same or equal in the relationship, and (2) there
is some acknowledgement of trueness in diversity and power differentials, which further allows the relationship to move towards (a) a healthy coexistence and ultimately (b) mutual empowerment in the relationship. According to RCT, mutuality itself is self-fulfilling. It is the absence of such that drives relationships into developmental psychological problems, which could potentially become violent. The assertion that when relationships become fragmented they contribute to human suffering and isolation. Conversely, when experiences in relationships were positive, they resulted in more positive relationship building and highly mutual (pro-social behavior) toward healthy coexistence. Finally, mutuality can transform conflict towards a healthy reconnection with the relationship. For creating pro-social coexistences that are healthy, RCT supports using 4 components of Mutual Empathy. These elements are:

(a) Capacity for emotional response

(b) Mental capacity to take perspective of others

(c) Ability to regulate emotions

(d) Levels of awareness of self and others (McCauley, 2016, p. 3).

Mutual Empathy is described as “an openness to being affected by and affecting another person” (p. 3). In it contains one’s ability to become emotionally and rationally involved in the relational process to develop an ongoing and stronger relationship. Its implementation requires an understanding that disconnections within relationships occur and are inevitable. It must be understood that emotional and empathetic failures are a natural part of relationships and their behaviors. It also understands that disconnections can be transformative if there is a re-connection made and rebuilding of trust awareness is genuine. This means one has to understand their own experiences as well as other’s experiences, and those experiences are seen as fluid, dynamic, and collective versus being single, isolated, and individualized. The overall goal of
empathy is to create and experience a more genuine, purposeful, and effective coexistence in healthy relationships in both individual and the larger societal context. The creation of non-social and unhealthy coexistences is against the RCT model but can be viewed in Appendix A: Pro-Social and Non-Social Existence for comparisons. In this manner, relationships functioned, flourished, and were healthy when empathy is a focal point.

The cultural aspects of this theory posit a deliberate focus on “the influence of larger culture and power differentials on the quality and nature of relationships and the subsequent effects on healthy coexistence” (McCauley, 2013, p. 1). This lens of the theory was an addendum to the original theory, which suggested that relationships cannot be separated from the larger culture. From the onset of the theory, there were three elements that were agreed upon. The first is that because relationships cannot be removed from the larger social culture, one of the main foci is naming the oppressor and then giving a voice to the groups who are marginalized. Naming the oppressive relationships and its systems and then promoting self-advocacy for those who are marginalized in the population regardless of gender went beyond personal and intimate relationships—the goal is to determine how to contribute to a more peaceful coexistence within those relationships, became the second focal point. Thirdly, RCT presumes that all individuals, regardless of their status within their society, are socially inclined to build relationships and RCT explores the unpredictability in relationship development. It is in the understanding of how power differentials contribute to nurturing or disrupting individual relationships both locally and globally that growth towards pro-social behaviors can begin. To further understand how RCT promotes relationship building is to view the theory from the basic social constructs and how individuals identify across these categories: privilege, social status, target and agent status, convergence, and salience (Hammer et al, 2017). Although these tenants are important to the
understanding the whole of RCT, its scope and sequence requires more analysis. This overall study does not have the adequate time to devote to such an important aspect of the theory.

Relational Cultural Theory provides its participants a chance to be uninhibited in their actions as well as be unencumbered in their interactions with others, thus producing strong bonds that will allow for both parties to consider one another’s perspectives as well as their experiences before making rash or harsh decisions themselves. RCT and its tenants are highly equipped for studying the relationships between students and teachers and the various interpretations for inconsistencies in exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom. Because of the strong value on interpersonal connections and the suitable traits of being empathetically open and vulnerable to both one’s self and others, the theory provides elements necessary to build relationships in an environment where connectedness, personal connections, and the care of ethics are non-negotiable factors in educating children. Schools and members of the school community will begin to cultivate a learning climate and culture true to the essence of educating students with attaining high levels of student achievement as an added benefit.

Rationale of Theories

There were a few other theory options considered here. Examining the inconsistencies of exclusionary discipline practices to address student discipline in schools could have potentially been viewed by the following theories, however, they were not selected and explanations will be shared as to why they were not selected. The theories considered were Critical Race Theory, Authoritative School Discipline Theory, and Resilience Theory.

Resilience Theory (RT) did not align very well with the present study. RT seemed more applicable for an environment that has reached maturity in its relationships between students and teachers, and has been cultivated over an extended period of time. Resilience Theory posits that
resilience is determined and developed by exposure to both risk and protective factors (Greff, Vansteenwegen, & Ide, 2006; Zauszniewski, Bekhet, & Suresky, 2009). It is built on studying and understanding why some children grow up to be healthy productive adults in spite of their risk exposure. There is a focused attention on positive, contextual, social and individual variables that interfere with the developmental goals of the child. There is also the inclusion of other factors such as families, environments, and individuals, which provides empirical evidence and results; it also focuses on coping with mental illness in appropriate social structures, which is not applicable to this study, thus Resilience Theory is not being considered.

The next theory, Authoritative School Discipline Theory (ADT), was closer in its alignment with developing strong aspects of a school climate. Its main aspects are to develop two strong complimentary attributes that improve school climate—through structure (school discipline) and support (availability of caring adults). ADT suggests both structures are non-negotiables for maintaining safe and orderly school climates and would be most conducive to learning. It suggests that similar to parenting, schools must also discipline students “with an appropriate blend of structure and support” and “adolescents need sufficient structure to feel safe but not so much structure that they cannot exert their growing desire to independence and self-direction” (Gregory & Cornell, 2009, p. 108; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). Students who feel supported without feeling their own sense of autonomy violated oftentimes are more accepting of the school structures they attend. The same principle also applies within the classroom with teachers who provide high structure and support in their classrooms, and are most effective in managing misbehaviors in their classrooms when they occur. Further, they are more able to obtain student cooperation, engagement, and high achievement, with less negative feedback. Gregory & Weinstein (2004) found that teachers with high levels of structure and support also
were able to increase school achievement, especially with students who experience negative outcomes based on their socioeconomic status. These studies taken together would highly suggest ADT aligns best with this study, especially since its tenants can be applied in the classrooms. However, the deciding factor that has the theory outside the selection process is that it does not account for the personal development of relationships at the source of the discipline referral. ADT could be most useful in a later extension of the current study as it supports school administrators in developing sound policies and practices (Gregory & Cornell, 2009). Since ADT theory focuses on the climate of supporting and structuring the learning environment so students feel respected and safe, it does not align with resolving the issues of inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom.

Critical Race Theory focuses on several elements and maintains that racism is a normal part of the US American fabric and is engrained in American society. It maintains that power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color. CRT is committed to social justices and is highly active in eliminating oppression as a broad global focus. Given these few elements, CRT would be ideal in examining inconsistent exclusionary teacher referrals since research shares that African American students are three times likely to be referred for non-violent and discretionary discipline. Most importantly, CRT does not, particularly for this study, allot enough time to reveal and examine data suggesting that all referrals made against African American students at the study site are specifically based on race exclusively. Further, this critical presumption would initially bias the research, significantly tampering and making all data collected inconclusive within the study. So, it was decided to delete CRT as a possible framework; rather allow the data
collected during the study to reveal if race is in fact the prominent factor creating the inconsistencies in referrals or just a de facto conclusion.

Relational Cultural Theory was selected to examine this study to address issues of relationships within the classroom learning environment. RCT’s basic tenants provide the foundation necessary to critically examine “why” and “how” inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals are being initiated. It particularly provides an aerial perspective on growing mutually respectful relationships and shared empowerment in the learning environment for mutually beneficial ends—student success. Additionally, RCT provides the teacher and the student equal access to contributing each other’s growth and development in the learning environment respectively. The acknowledgement of relationship boundaries and expectations of respect for the individual person, through empathetic relationship building makes issues of power and privilege conversational. Both parties understand their own position as well as the position of others, and are encouraged to make decisions based on those respectful relationship boundaries. These types of relationships promote an ethics of care that generate more ionic results for the climate and culture of the school community.

From a cultural lens, the “culture” of the classroom can be extremely transformative once relationships have been forged. Being able to respond to adversity in times of emotional turmoil can place a great strain on relationships, but RCT provides a conduit for addressing such issues. In these matters, people who have developed mutually respectful relationships with one another are more prone to making decisions in a matter that projects their levels of respect for the other party. This promotes a healthy coexistence. It is this reason RCT became the deciding theory of use. The development of humanitarian behaviors develops, which is a benefit to all members of
the local school level community, but is a transferrable skill for life for all members of the global community.

RCT and its relationship to conducting this study will be done using a descriptive qualitative methodology containing a series of interviews, a questionnaire, and local school discipline data.

The capacity for Relational Cultural Theory to reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom can be addressed through many avenues, however, the author will analyze with this study, how this issue could be addressed by focusing on building healthy relationships directly in the classroom, providing students with high levels of expectations that promote respect and academic excellence in the learning environment, and the ongoing nurturing of the classroom climate that fosters mutual respect and shared leadership between the teacher and the students.

**Applying Theory to the study**

Relational Cultural Theory will be used to study inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom by examining relationships between students and teachers and determine how to best improve those relationships to reduce discipline recidivism.

The elements that make RCT the best fit for studying this problem of practice is based in the mutual relationship building between teachers and students at the research site. RCT shapes this case study by developing the reciprocity to respect one’s self and be respectful of themselves and respectful of other members in the learning community. Studying the case in this way allows the researcher to examine the relationship building process within the learning environment and possibly determine if relationships are forged prior to discipline referrals. In other words, the researcher will examine if there are efforts on behalf of the teacher to design a mutually constructed classroom climate with students on specific expectations on behavior(s) and examine
how those expectations are managed when they are not followed. A look at how power and
decision-making are shared or determined in the classroom as relationships are formed.
Additionally, it could be examined if there have been fluid and ongoing conversations between
teachers and students that establishes relationships in advance that will be able to address
consequences when expectations are not met. If there is a mutual respect developed between the
teacher and student regarding teacher expectations and proactively addressing these concerns is
vital in determining whether students will be disruptive in class. It also may determine if a
teacher would forward a discipline referral if the misconduct is interpreted as being so intrusive
to the learning environment to be removed from the classroom. The ability for both parties to
recognize their own behaviors and reactions as well as the other party’s behavior and reactions
on issues of misconduct in the classroom can be the difference between being removed from the
classroom and remaining in the classroom, more so because there is level of cultural competency
that has been developed to account for such a situation. The use of RCT theory to examine
current relationships will be a founding principle for developing stronger relationships in the
future and to create a climate of learning and a culture of respect. Understanding relationships
and also understanding cultural differences are the key to cultivating a climate that is mutually
respectful and bridges the gaps between misunderstandings. The tenants of this theory are the
very reasons it was selected as the frameworks for this study.

Conclusion

Exclusionary discipline that disproportionately removes African American students from the
classroom has been documented over the last 40 years beginning in 1975 by the Children’s
Defense Fund with their empirical study on school discipline. Since the 1970’s the rate at which
exclusionary discipline has been issued to public school children has been supported by several
federal mandates (Zero Tolerance, The Guns Free Schools Act of 1994, NCLB, etc) with both language and implementation policies. As a result, African American students have been disproportionately affected by these policies at three times their rate in the population forcing the US government to combine resources and examine how these policies are affecting schools across the land. The US Department of Education’s Civil Rights and the US Department of Justice have collaborated on The Joint Dear Colleague Letter to address issues of removing exclusionary discipline practices from schools and mandating that proactive measures be implemented to address these education violation practices.

Research has also shown that exclusionary discipline practices create other negative outcomes for both disciplined and non-discipline students alike. In addition to these negative outcomes, inconsistencies of discipline referrals also create poor relationships between teachers and students resulting in a poor climate and culture for the school learning community.

Relational Cultural Theory is a framework that posits building relationships through openness, mutual respect, and shared empathy to understand one’s life perspectives as well as the perspectives of all others in the learning environment. RCT will be the frameworks that will guide this study. The following chapters will share in greater detail how Relational Cultural Theory will assist in examining inconsistencies in exclusionary discipline referrals for African American students at the case study research site.

The overview to this study will lead into Chapter 2 and the literature review which will look at three overarching themes and discuss the policies that allowed exclusionary discipline to be practiced, the ways in which those practices have removed African American students from the educative process and creating recidivism in misbehavior, and then how exclusionary discipline also harms those students not being disciplined. Chapter 3 will discuss the qualitative
methodological approach that will be demonstrated in this research. To conduct the process, surveys and two rounds of interviews will be implemented to gather the necessary data. Chapter 4 will share the study’s raw data collection and its analysis. Finally, Chapter 5 will detail the findings and discuss the implications for future progress on this education epidemic.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

“The system broken, the schools closed, the prisons open” (Kanye West, POWER, Roc-A-Fella Records, 2010) seems fitting when discussing the student-to-prison pipeline’s exclusionary and inconsistent discipline practices and what actions gave birth to this phenomenon. This chapter will discuss the available data that supports a re-examination of school discipline practices that disproportionately excludes students from the classroom. African American students are inconsistently excluded from classroom instruction which increases discipline recidivism. An important tenent of this study is to examine teacher ability to manage student behavior through relationship building to reduce exclusionary discipline practices. By examining inconsistent discipline referrals through the lens of relationship building, reducing discipline recidivism as well as providing strategies and solutions to improve the climate and culture of the school community are revealed.

The removal of students from the academic process perpetuates a vicious cycle of academic failure, which is a result of the student falling further behind in course work and receiving fewer opportunities to gain and improve on the vital skills necessary to achieve academic success. The level of increased frustration oftentimes produces behavioral issues that incur more exclusionary discipline and more distance from academic interactions with teachers. Still, there are too many inconsistent disciplinary referrals being made by classroom teachers that remove African American students from academic instruction which causes discipline recidivism.

This literature review consists of three sections. Section one will share the history generated over the last 40 years that gave birth to the overarching topic of the Student-to-Prison Pipeline (STPP) in its policies and federal mandates. It will then move into the outcomes associated with the implementation of these policies and mandates and its effects on students, school discipline,
and the overall school culture and climate. The chapter will then be capped with how these policies and mandates specifically affect African American students in US public schools.

The Student-To-Prison Pipeline History

It is paramount that the historical lineage from which exclusionary discipline developed be properly placed—The Student-to-Prison Pipeline is the arching namesake from which the study of inconsistent exclusionary discipline is born. The Student-to-Prison Pipeline (STPP) is described as the harsh disproportionate disciplinary actions distributed to students, as a result of zero-tolerance policies, that forces them out of traditional educational institutions and shuttles them into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. Although this definition, extremely broad in both scope and sequence, is not the focal point of this study, it does, however, provides the reader with some of the historical issues contributing to the STPP which puts the smaller vein of exclusionary discipline in complete alignment within the span of the STPP issue. Primarily, the circumstances that created the STPP have its roots in the language and implementation of Zero-Tolerance Policies in schools. It is these policies that trickle down to the exclusionary discipline issues that occur in the classroom with teacher discipline referrals.

Several other definitions have been used to describe the STPP. Fowler (2011) shares that it’s how schools’ use their discretion to determine which exclusionary discipline line item it could choose to discipline a student’s misconduct or misperceived behaviors. Archer, (2009/10) contends that it’s the “collection of education and public safety policies and practices” (p. 868), that are highly contributive to the negative outcomes of students, particularly African American students, who are issued more exclusionary discipline referrals than all student groups. It is called “death by education” by Fasching-Varner’s et al (2014), and takes a different perspective making use of the economic lens and a free-market capitalistic approach. This perspective would
provide opportunities for other disciplines such as business, economics, and global capital (as a racially identified group) to analyze how the STPP exists within its own context. This perspective is outside the scope of this study, however does require an equal amount of scrutiny. Skiba et al (2014) uses a very inclusively strong approach in their definition stated here:

a construct used to describe policies and practices, especially with respect to school discipline, in the public schools and juvenile justice system that decrease the probability of school success for children and youth, and increase the probability of negative life outcomes, particularly through involvement in the juvenile justice system (p. 546).

A broad definition but specific and detailed in the actions it creates for students caught in this vicious cycle of discipline recidivism.

There appears to be a common theme emerging from the preponderance of literature, both quantitatively and qualitatively, that suggests exclusionary discipline practices in schools are counter-productive to sound pedagogical theory and practice for children, and further has lasting negative outcomes (Verdugo, 2002; Townsend, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Siba & Peterson, 2002; Christie & Jolivette, 2004; Mallett, 2016; Teasley, 2014; Nishioka, 2013; Archer, 2009/10; Togut, 2011; McNulty Eitle & Eitle, 2004; U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division & U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014; Gonsoulin, Zablock, & Leone, 2012; Tillman, 2008; Skiba & Williams, 2014; Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015). More interesting, it is still puzzling to conceive that school districts who continue to use exclusionary discipline practices for “typical teenage behavior” and minor infractions of an adolescent student actually do a significant amount of harm to non-disciplined students and the overall culture and climate of the learning environment respectively. Disappointingly enough, these minor infractions as compared to more violent offenses (which the discipline’s language was written to address) continue to systematically remove students
from the educative process and streamline them into the pipeline of exclusionary discipline (Gonzalez, 2010; Butts & Mears, 2011). Gonzalez (2012) shares that although schools are the safest places for youth, schools have also unequivocally taken on the same language and punitive practices of both the criminal and juvenile justice systems and implemented them into their school discipline policies and practices. Something of interest is the data shared by the Advancement Project, when they reported, that public school students are the most policed and monitored groups in the country after accounting for prisoners and jail inmates in the U.S. (Advancement Project, 2005; Gonzalez, 2012). These are common practices associated with the Student-to-Prison Pipeline and they are supported by various cases across the country.

One study conducted in Connecticut reported that students of color committing the most common disciplinary infraction were more likely to receive harsher punishments such as arrest while white students were committing the same offense and receiving ‘different’ consequences (American Civil Liberties Union, 2008; Curtis, 2014). Additionally, African American and Latino students caught with drugs, alcohol, or tobacco products were ‘ten times more likely” to be suspended and arrested while white students committing the same crimes were not (American Civil Liberties Union, 2008; Curtis, 2014). Both of these examples are direct demonstrations of both the federal and state mandated Zero Tolerance Policies and The Guns Free School Act of 1994 being implemented in schools.

Another study shows that African American male students in a Midwestern school district were given higher and harsher punishments than their white male counterparts for similar behavioral infractions (Lewis et al, 2010; Curtis, 2014). And a third study, conducted by the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2012) show African American students (ages four and five) account for almost half of all out-of-school suspensions (exclusionary discipline)
in preschool (Smith, 2014). Bafflingly enough, Black students represent 16% of the overall “student population”, but adversely make up 32-42% of student issued out-of-school suspensions, 27% of student referred to law enforcement, and 31% of students who are subjected to school-related arrests (Smith, 2014; DOEOCR, 2012). Frighteningly, 20% of black boys and 12% of black girls face out-of-school suspension demonstrating that Black students are inconsistently and disproportionately suspended and/or expelled at 3 times the rate than White students (Smith, 2014).

Racial disparities in suspension referrals to the principal’s office have also been attributed to prior referrals for African American males, which imply that teachers have a very significant role in determining which students and which infractions are forwarded to administration for discipline follow up (Skiba et al, 2002). Although research surmises it was difficult to determine which offenses were more serious, it was noted that the reasons for referrals for Black students required a bit “more subjective judgment on the part of the referring agent” (Skiba et al, 2002; Curtis, 2014). There is an extremely clear indication that these ‘surmised difficulties’ identify the need for examining school discipline that focuses on reducing exclusionary referrals. However, when misbehavior does disrupt the learning environment and discipline must be issued, the manner in which it is done could potentially contribute positively to the overall climate and culture of the school.

In addition to the empirical study by the Children’s Defense Fund (1975), the last four decades of research has demonstrated the inconsistent exclusionary discipline practices of African American student removal from the classroom (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Skiba et al. 2002, 2011, 2014; Wilson, 2013; Mallett, 2015; Mallett, 2016; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Teasley, 2014; U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division & U. S. Department of Education,

The advancement of the STPP and its web of subsidiaries was casted out of the federal mandate to wage a social attack on drugs in the 1980s during the Reagan Administration. It is true that the war on drugs was announced by the federal government in response to the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s, however, it was announced in 1982, well before the crack cocaine epidemic became an issue in mainstream media and in minority communities (Alexander, 2012). In fact, there are theories and scholars who firmly believe that the timing of and mass media overhaul on the issues of crack cocaine and the war on drugs was cloaked in such race-neutral language, that there was a concerted effort on part of the government to commit genocide against people of color in this country (Alexander, 2012; Marable, 1991; Page, 1990; Welsing, 1991; James, 1954, 1992; Johnson, 2013; Burrell, 2010). Interestingly enough, the war on drugs was waged at a time when issues of illegal drugs were on the decline, nonetheless, war was declared on social control causing an increase in arrests and incarceration and then war was declared on school disciplinary policies. These declarations disproportionately affected people of color directly and immediately, both in the adult world of legal jurisprudence.
and educationally with school aged children in schools. These are the beginning foundations of the STPP.

Sociologists have adamantly shared that in the social context of managing control over its citizens, governments will design and implement tenants of social controls in the laws. Oftentimes, the extent or the severity of the punishment is either unrelated to the actual crime or in excess of the crime. This same pattern can be said for school discipline policies as it deals with student disruption, misconduct, and/or misperceived or perceived, misinterpretations or interpretations of misbehavior in school environments. When magnified, the classroom is where these discipline referrals stem, thus it would make sense to scrutinize why there are large gaps of discrepancies.

A very different perspective on the Student-to-Prison Pipeline that focuses on the incarceration of America’s youth is the Prison Industry Complex (PIC). The PIC is the nomenclature used to describe the systemized and institutionalized structures in place that details the ever expanding “economic and political context” that uses detention and correction industries in the U. S. (Meiner & Winn, 2010). The definition of the PIC presents a transparent description that is clearly made by both Stephen (2008) and Meiner & Winn’s (2010) passage here:

The term PIC aims to capture the range of material and ideological forces that shape the growth of detention: the political and lobbying power of the corrections officers’ unions, the framing of prisons and jails as a growth industry in the context of deindustrialization, the production and sales of technology and security required to maintain and expand the state of incarceration, the naturalization of isolation as a logical response to harm, and more. The PIC is an expanding economy: between 2000 and 2005, a new prison was built in the United States every 12 days.
The PIC definition is also shared by Skiba et al., (2002) and other scholars who all collectively agree that the U. S. student youth are experiencing under-education and over-punitive distribution of exclusionary school discipline that also allows a ‘two-for-one’ catch net into the student to prison pipeline and removal from the education process line, with disciplinary actions beginning with youth at 4 and 5 year olds (Duncan, 2000; Gilliam, 2005; Ayers, Dorn, & Ayers, 2001; Polakow, 2000). In the overarching scheme of the PIC, it is the particular relationships the United States heavily invests, that feeds various resources which contribute to the long-lasting and multilayered relationships necessary to maintain a carceral industry. In other words, with discipline referrals continuing to rise, students will be removed from the classroom and placed in non-traditional learning environments where recidivism is highly likely to occur. It further accepts that many students will also be likely to enter the juvenile court systems because of federal and state policies that support reassignment to any of the many PIC facilities across the country. The likeliness of recidivism is high enough where students may be placed in the cycle of PIC facilities well into their adulthood and then placed in adult faculties; most times based on subjective misinterpretations of misperceptions that lacked a relational or cultural understanding of adolescent behavior.

**Zero Tolerance Policy**

Despite all of the evidence that clearly states school violence and school crime has been on the decline, the use of exclusionary and punitive school discipline practices has increased (NAACP, Legal Defense and Education Fund, 2006; Togut, 2011; Archer, 2009-10). Zero-Tolerance (ZT) policies, developed in the 1980’s was an approach to school discipline that mandated pre-determined consequences or punishments for offenses against school codes of conduct (Curtis, 2014). The Zero Tolerance policies for all intents and purposes developed out of
the drug enforcement policies that were established at the federal and state level during the time (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Children’s Defense Fund, 1975). It became a term used to suggest that all offenses were swiftly and severely handled. From this ideology, ZT began to find its roots in schools across the country to manage student discipline when suspension or expulsion was necessary to remove a student from the building. Further, it identified which offenses would warrant such exclusion. Student behaviors that included possession/use of tobacco products, drug possession, possession of weapon(s), and participation in gang activity were all exclusionary actions. As the concept of ZT matured, other infractions such as school disruptions and tobacco paraphernalia emerged to manage student misconduct, student behaviors, and school climate. Although the rates at which school aged children were known to be violent was on a path of steady decline, the years between 1992 and 2005 proved to be the lowest rates of serious and violent crimes when students K-12 were in school than they were away for it (Gonzalez, 2012; Advancement Project, 2005; Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007). And although this was the case, the stereotypes of youth of color viewed as violent and disruptive were increasingly becoming acceptable in mainstream media, promoted, and supported the “ideological origins of punitive policies” (Castillo, 2014) like zero tolerance.

Schools are the highest contributing facilities by which students enter the STPP through excessive exclusionary school discipline practices. This occurs when schools impose consequences to student misconduct, as mandated via Zero Tolerance policies. Unfortunately, across the nation there is an exuberant number of students, and a highly disproportionate number of students of color, (who are) removed from various educational environments for non-violent offenses to school policy such as tardiness, defiance, and verbal confrontations, which many would perceive to be typical childhood behavior (Archer, 2009/10).
ZT continued its growth in schools when the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act 2001 was enacted, and gave teachers discretionary power to remove students from the classroom who are disruptive. Although removal for disruptions were reserved for extreme behaviors such as “violent or persistently disruptive students”, this policy was a compromising attempt to mandate all school districts’ accountable and responsible for the safety of their facilities (NASP, 2007; Byrd, 2001; Allman & Slate, 2011). These policies further contributed to unforeseen outcomes at the expense of the country’s most vulnerable people—children.

The causes of zero tolerance policies has been multilayered and multifaceted, and fortunately, these outcomes can no longer be ignored. According to the American Bar Association (2001), zero tolerance policies fail to distinguish between serious and non-serious behaviors, thus it cannot accurately determine which students are most dangerous against those who are not. This is extremely problematic because one the major causes of zero tolerance is that students can now be removed from schools, at the discretion of the school authorities, and receive immediate punitive referrals resulting in suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to the juvenile justice systems for other varying infractions. These infractions can range from a misperceived or misconception of disrespect towards a teacher to an actual violation of school policies by possessing a weapon. Either way, the discipline being imposed is the same. Students are being removed from education facilities at disturbing rates, and African American students are being removed disproportionately to their adolescent peers.

Zero Tolerance policies are also known to be associated with other outcomes as well. The increase of SROs (School Resources Officers who oftentimes happen to be current/retired police officers), implementation of metal detectors at the school entrances, security cameras to further monitor student behaviors during the course of the school day, and most intrusive are the body
and locker searches (Castillo, 2014; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Mallett, 2015) are all elements resulting from zero tolerance policies. The increase of students sent to the juvenile courts and its subsidiaries, according to the U.S. Justice Department (2001) and Kim (2010), are creating legal nightmares for some school districts. In 2010, there were 2.2 million juvenile arrests, 1.7 million were cases referred to juvenile courts, an estimated 400,000 children pass through juvenile detention centers, and another 100,000 youth could be found in juvenile jails, prisons, boot camps, and various residential institutions across this country. The most repugnant notion about this quantitative data is that the number of student being referred from their schools continue to increase under exclusionary discipline policies.

Another negative outcome for exclusionary discipline policies is that it fails to make schools safer and have been linked to disturbing academic failure and underperformance for many K-12 students (Townsend, 2000; Shabazian, 2015; Skiba et al, 2011; Dancy, 2014; Welch & Payne, 2010; Kinsler, 2011; DeMatthews, 2016; Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015). Moreover, in 2006, The American Psychological Association released a longitudinal study spanning ten years with findings that state the use of exclusionary discipline and zero tolerance policies do not improve school safety. Research also shows that instead of reducing student misconduct, it promotes a likelihood of disruption, increased school suspension, and higher rates of future misbehavior and suspension among students, including those who were previously suspended. The end result is recidivism is highly likely.

Suspension also is a high predictor of dropout rates and failure to graduate within the expected 4-year high school span (Sallo, 2011). The American Academy of Pediatrics found that most forms of exclusionary discipline practices not only jeopardize children’s health and safety issues, they also go on to say that these practices may also contribute rather aggressively to
academic failure (Creger & Hewitt, 2011). It is clear to state that the single, if not the most
dangerous, predictor for students’ future involvement in the web of the juvenile justice system is
a history of disciplinary referrals coming from their schools. This was also supported by a study
completed by the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University (2005).

The traces of zero tolerance policies heightened greatly when mass media coverage and
exaggeration of youth gangs as “superpredators” (Castillo, 2014) created a frenzy amongst many
Americans. The increased use of negative stereotypes of minority students, particularly African
American and Latino students, alongside the over exaggerations of language naming students
overwhelmingly violent, and highlighted notions of the news media’s coverage of school
shootings, lack of safety, and the need for more safety in schools provided the additional support
necessary to demand for substantial and immediate interventions to student discipline policies.
This led to the path of The Guns Free School Act of 1994. This particular policy aligned itself
with the language of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1973, to include
student with special education issues and special needs. This is yet another pipeline streaming
African American students into exclusionary discipline in the U.S. public schools, only this time
it specifically includes students with disabilities.

The Guns Free School Act of 1994

The Guns Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA) was established to address school misconduct
that was deemed violent and unacceptable where student removal from the educational
environment was mandatory and immediate. The U. S. Congress passed into law, in 1994, GFSA
in response to school shootings. This act mandated that every state “enact a law requiring
districts to expel students for at least one year for bringing a firearm to school” (Kim et al, 2010;
GFSA, 1994). This only laid additional foundations for increased exclusionary practices. More
importantly and less publicized is its connection to the special education student and ways to include them in exclusionary discipline as well.

One of the most interesting cases used in advocacy for students with special education needs is the legal case of *Morgan v. Chris L*. This case was the lens used by Rivkin (2009/10) to bring an understanding to the current trends of over criminalization of exclusionary and school-based discipline practices. Its perspectives are based on solutions of protection rather than inclusions of discipline. His advocacy is of promoting school discipline in a manner that is ethical and more humane, and supports more positive options on how to redirect student misconduct versus forcing them into the juvenile court systems.

The implementation of GFSA of 1994 also brought with it the increased use of SROs. In 2004, a national survey shared that armed police officers (Public Agenda, 2014) manned 54% of all public schools. Ironically, the use of police officers was most prevalent in schools housed by predominantly African American and Latino students. The belief that having an armed officer in the school environment will promote a safer school is nothing more than an educated misinterpretation of implementation. Adversely, the presence of police in the school environment does quite the opposite. For those students with disabilities, and especially those with emotional disorders, it places them at greater risks of interactions with officers’ due to the officers’ potential lack of educational background on how to deal with this population of student(s). Given their tendencies to be most defiant and oppositional towards authority figures, it may be challenging for non-educators to determine which student behaviors would be considered “outside the student code of conduct”. Furthermore, along with SROs comes the use of surveillance through cameras and metal detectors, which further perpetuates a negative school environment and hostilities for students with disabilities.
In 2006 & 2009, U. S. schools reported using security cameras and metal detectors, which contributed to mixed reviews on school safety (Hankin, Hertz, & Simon, 2011; Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2011; Wilson, 2013); students felt less safe (Hankin et al., 2011). Because the GFSA of 1994 is an extension of Zero Tolerance policies that uses optimum discretion and a more inclusive student population, it provides no sanctuary for any students who “misbehaved” in schools. Its span of discipline practices is vast and policies cover all elements of discipline in the school context. To address removing ZT practices or reducing them to a degree where they are not harmful to students, will require many areas needing repetitive scrutiny.

Special Education students and students with varying disabilities are protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (IDEA), with the purposeful mission of ensuring these students obtain equal access to public education and its services (IDEA, 2004). It is concerning that many schools continue to impose exclusionary discipline and removing students with disabilities from the education process. This has also lead to legal scholars positing exclusionary disciplinary practices as a violation of students’ right to an education (Pauken & Daniel, 2000). Because this practice is an extension of state and federal mandates on school discipline policies, it is imperative all perspectives be considered to examine if these practices are discriminatory. Nationally, there is an estimate of 7% of student suspensions (Losen & Gillespie, 2012), but the estimates for students identified as students with disabilities is above 15%, and even higher at 44% for students identified with emotional disorders (ED) (Achilles, McLaughlin, & Croninger, 2007; Sullivan, Van Norman, & Klingbeil, 2014). The use of exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities is still rising and continues to increase for students who are identified as ED, upwards to nearly 50% since the 1980s, (Wagner, Newman, & Cameto, 2004; Sullivan et al., 2014) when these policies were first introduced. Most pressing and given these findings,
exclusionary discipline is still used in most schools to manage student discipline, already knowing that it does not appropriately address misbehavior in schools (Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, & Catalano, 2006), and leads to discipline recidivism.

There is no available evidence that suggests the high rate of exclusionary discipline practices against African American students is a direct result of poverty status or a differential rate of disruptive behaviors (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). In fact, the consistent evidence demonstrating students with disabilities and students who are receiving services under IDEA are “more than twice as likely to receive out-of-school suspension” than peers without disabilities (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; U. S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights Civil Rights Data Collection, CRDC, 2014). Data also suggests other student populations are also experiencing disproportionate discipline referrals in schools, such as non-heterosexual youth and females of color (Wallace et al., 2008; Skiba et al., 2014; Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011). This lens will be discussed at greater length in the next section of this review.

**Implications**

The School-to-Prison Pipeline (STPP) takes on many forms and addresses various characteristics depending on the perspective in which the pipeline is viewed. When viewed at the level from which the STPP enters the classroom, the federal mandates that allows exclusionary discipline practices in our nation’s elementary and secondary public schools is nothing short of educational negligence. The U.S. public schools accounts for approximately 16% of African American students. It is overwhelmingly alarming when 34-43% of these students are suspended from school, 25% are engaged in some form of law enforcement interaction, and 31% are arrested on school related ‘charges’. Even the language in which students’ behaviors are referred
is disturbing—a charge is language reserved for legal jurisprudence, but it has found its way into the educational school system.

The federal and state mandates of Zero Tolerance Policies (ZT) in the 1980s and The Guns Free School Act of 1994 (GFSA) are the very conduits from which exclusionary discipline arrives to the school house. ZT’s regulations allows very little discretion and imposes mandatory consequences to students who violate codes of conduct. The GFSA allows an overabundance of discretion, and since it aligns itself with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and allows for disciplinary action to extend to student with disabilities, the extensions of increased usage of exclusionary discipline practices inflated beyond its common popularity. Exclusionary discipline practices increased especially for African American students and spread into other minority student populations as well (LGBTQ, religious affiliations, social sub-cultures, American Indians, etc.)(Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011; Brown, 2014; Healy, 2013). The sections ahead will share the intimate details on how students’ and school environments are adversely affected, even for those students who do not experience exclusionary discipline.

Zero Tolerance policies implemented in school discipline policies are harmful to students and provides the foundation for exclusionary discipline practices for managing student misconduct in the school environments. These policies are also associated with other negative outcomes such as student discipline recidivism, poor school climate, and students feeling unsafe in school that contribute to decreases in student academic success and student achievement. School districts must begin and continue to scrutinize current school discipline practices that contribute to negative student outcomes if their goals are to improve student achievement and provide learning environments that make students feel safe and secure.
The Guns Free School Act of 1994 was enacted to manage school discipline and student misconduct that required immediate and mandatory removal of students who possessed firearms in schools. However, this policy and its language aligns itself with including students with special education needs, which allows it to remove more students from the education process. The various legal scholars who contend this law continues to exclude students from their right to an education make a very strong point when they share the need for school discipline to find ways that address the roots of the student misconduct in schools versus removing them based on the outcome that led to the misconduct initially. A common theme that continues to emerge in the realm of student exclusionary discipline is the need to find ways to connect with students to improve behavior than drafting more mandates to remove them.

**Outcomes Associated with Implementation of Exclusionary Discipline**

**Policies Contributing to School Climate**

There are many conditions that are created for students and student behaviors as a direct effect of exclusionary discipline practices. Two of the most commonly practiced behaviors these conditions create for students and student behaviors that echo the conditions of a school climate are implicit bias and microaggressions.

Implicit bias, in the school discipline context does not necessarily lead to explicit bias, but does provide and sometimes promote the undercurrent of stereotypes and discriminatory practices that are unstated and unexamined (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2014). This creates differential treatment between student races and sometimes between sub-cultures of the same race (light skinned versus dark skinned). It further accepts the harsher treatments of students, more punitive consequences, and increases in police officers on school staff, at the ‘office’ level (Casteel, 1998; Nicholas-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009; Welch & Payne,
Microaggressions are everyday exchanges, most of the time are very brief, but deliver the same demeaning messages about racial stereotypes (Sue, 2010; Carter et al., 2014). Oftentimes microaggressions are ignored or negated in the everyday course of life, however, in school discipline, these same microaggressions and implicit bias behaviors and practices can take the form of overreactions by youth of color, and then there is a wonder as to why their behavior is perceived as threatening.

Teacher discipline referrals oftentimes fall under two categories: discretionary and mandatory. Discretionary referrals tend to be highly subjective based on the referring agent’s interpretation of the discipline infraction. The most common types of discretionary discipline referrals made are classroom referrals for disruptive behaviors, disrespect, disobedience, insubordination, loitering, truancy and absenteeism, violations of school dress codes or any other types and forms of behavior that is considered “non-traditional” classroom behavior determined by the referring agent. These behaviors are usually non-threatening, non-violent, and often considered minor violations. Discretionary referrals are effective routes to extending exclusionary discipline practices to students, thus removing them from the school environment and creating a negative effect on their academic achievement. At the other end of the discipline continuum, mandatory referrals are those behaviors considered to be more serious infractions and sometimes may include local law enforcement support. Nonetheless school officials have the legal requirement and obligation to report the offense. These referrals are associated with behaviors that created the zero tolerance laws initially, such as weapons in schools, bombs and explosive materials in schools, drugs in schools, violence and criminal behavior, and any illegal activities that affect the climate of the school and its inhabitants.
Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette (2004) share similar convictions that students who experience recidivism with exclusionary discipline are more prone to dropping out of school and most likely become involved in the juvenile justice system. Despite many arguments that school violence is on the rise, much of the data suggest that violence in schools has been on the decline in recent years (Curtis, 2014). And although this is the case, schools continue to use exclusionary discipline practices to control student behaviors to enforce compliance. In spite of all the research that demonstrates negative outcomes and consequences, school usage of exclusionary discipline has nearly tripled since the 1970s (Brown, 2014; Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2012). School offenses that were once handled by school administrators are now being ‘handed’ to police officers, and students remain in police custody and charged with law violations for school offense (Perry & Morris, 2014).

Exclusionary discipline practices have also been linked to poorer grades, low academic performance, and poor performance on cognitive subjects such as science, math, and history (Perry & Morris, 2014; Davis & Jordan, 1994). One study over time followed students who were suspended and those who were not, and after two years found the students who were suspended performed at five grade levels below those who were not suspended. This is suggestive of the linear correlation between academic growth and the effects of suspension on student academic achievement (Arcia, 2006). Arguably true, Arum (2003) states that a school’s discipline policy should be moderately strict, it should be consistent, and should be perceived as fair by the students if it is to be most effective. A discipline policy that is overly punitive to its learning environment decays the school’s moral authority, which produces high levels of resistance, defiance, and alienation, where the consequences become the end and not a means of reducing and correcting inappropriate social behaviors.
Students who are not suspended are also affected by exclusionary discipline practices in schools. A school climate that practices control through exclusionary discipline jeopardizes student success (Perry & Morris, 2014; Rausch & Skiba, 2004). In addition, it was found that schools who have high levels of out-of-school suspension over an extended period of time, also have declining academic achievement among their students who are among the non-suspended; signal to well-behaved students that controlling student behavior in the school environment is a must (Perry & Morrie, 2014). It also suggests that punitive environments may produce social psychological outcomes that fester long after the punishment has been inflicted, and overly punitive environments increase the status quo of excessive discipline and creates additional problems.

There are quite a few elements that contribute to school conditions that perpetuate exclusionary discipline practices. One study done by Bikel (1978) in Kentucky share that the following items that contribute to those conditions were ambiguity of rules, lack of teacher expected behaviors, staff unwillingness to accept their roles in the contribution of these conditions, expectations of teachers, judgements of teachers, inappropriate response by adults and the discipline strategies used within the classrooms, and resistance to changes in school discipline practices. In excess of this, the following characteristics were associated with schools who practiced conditions that contributed to exclusionary discipline were school policies and procedures that dealt with discipline, the administrators’ philosophies and attitudes about student discipline in schools, and the staff’s beliefs and behaviors about student discipline (Christle, Nelson, and Jovlivette, 2004). What is most important to realize, is the exclusion from educational instruction, due to zero tolerance policies, is in opposition of the mission of education. Moreover, exclusionary discipline sends an unintended message (depending on the
lens from which it is viewed) that dropping out of school is an acceptable outcome if you are unable to conform to the school policy (Civil Rights Project, 2000).

**Conditions created for student and student behaviors**

The contributions of exclusionary discipline practices are many, and disciplinary strategies that exclude students from the classroom and school altogether for normal adolescent behaviors increase the risk of those students statistically contributing to academic failure and drop out, increased truancy, and discipline recidivism (Forsyth et al, 2015; Skiba et al, 2011). More surprisingly, excessive use of exclusionary discipline also contributes negatively to non-disciplined students (Perry and Morris, 2014).

Exclusionary discipline, particularly on an individual level compounds feelings of anger, apathy, and disengagement, and these psychosocial consequences usually result in the likelihood of recidivism. In their analysis, Perry & Morris (2014) reveals that students who attend schools whose out-of-school suspension rates are high exhibit lower achievement, even if they are not personally suspended. The aforementioned literature continues to reveal how exclusionary discipline practices are highly ineffective in meeting the needs for improving student success in school, and only compounds the very problem it was designed to reduce.

Irby (2014) shares the notion of a critical point in literature that suggests the highest degree of determination finds African American and Latino students are more likely over their white peers to be issued discipline referrals because of subjective infractions that fall into the categories of disobedience and insubordination or disruptive behavior based on cultural and ethnic indifferences/mix matches. “Because racial and cultural collisions are regarded as the roots of racial disparities in discipline, the ability to help students get out and stay out of trouble rests largely on teachers’ moral authority, which can be undermined by color-blind ideologies or
lack of sufficient resources in the school environment” (p.518). The overall goal is to manage the behavior, remove the biases on the characteristics of the student committing the infraction away from the discipline practice, ensuring the discipline aligned with the infraction, is equitable, ethical, and nothing more. This could potentially be done with relevant cultural relationship building with educators and their students as part of their school discipline and climate focus.

There are both short-term and long-term effects and outcomes stemming from the use of exclusionary discipline in schools. Research has consistently documented that exclusionary discipline is the most widely use form of control demonstrated to enforce compliance to student codes of conduct in schools. Although school discipline is designed to reduce and deter student misbehavior, research supports that climates relying heavily on exclusionary discipline are inclined to produce negative school climates and are associated with negative school and academic engagement, ultimately impacting student achievement. Gregory, Cornell, and Fann (2011) and Skiba et al (2014) found that the schools where students rated as having the lowest levels of support and academic expectations were linearly associated with the highest rates of exclusionary discipline (suspensions) as well as the largest black-white suspension gaps.

There are gaps with other student populations as well. Student alienation has become a problematic factor that is as consistent with cultural alienation, school disengagement, and low attendance rates that compound academic failure and dropout rates for Indigenous Indian (American Indian) students (Larimore, 2000; Brown, 2014; Skiba et al., 2014: Healey, 2013). In fact, Healey (2013) reports that American Indian students in Montana and the history of public education towards the American Indian student has led to mistrust and high skepticism. The ongoing neglect of tribal culture and traditions as a primitive and inferior lifestyle promotes negative outcomes for these students. Teachers view American Indian students and other
students in a negative fashion, positing some elements of the “Stereotype Threat Theory”, which says that consistent negative stereotypes presented to groups’ members eventually become internalized by that group and leads to the perceptions of those stereotypical behaviors (Healey, 2013; Smith, 2009). Moreover, many courts have reasoned that those teachers making use of false assumptions about students’ and students’ abilities based on low test scores or underperformance in academic abilities, treat those students who are disadvantaged in such a way that the students begin to act out the expectations—self-fulfilling prophecy—which makes those negative assumptions appear accurate, and the students’ actual intellect goes unforeseen.

Burris (2012) states that the STPP is defined by race and class and disproportionately targets those students in high minority and high poverty areas, and when students who wish not to drop out of school are forced out by zealous administrators who wish to make vast improvements on their standardized test score, it sends negative messages to those students. Burris (2012) also shares that in Mississippi, the graduation rate in 2007-2008 were among the lowest in the nation at sixty-two percent (Mississippi Youth Justice Project, 2008), and leads the country in discretionary state spending on prisons, which places it third behind Louisiana and Texas in rates of incarceration (USJD & Grassroots Leadership, 2001; Mauer & Welch, 2007). It could be considered that such an alarming rate of students not completing their high school education also sends a disturbing message about the climates of their schools and how it engages its students.

Educational opportunities and engagement are two of the strongest indicators that lead to academic achievement; disengagement is one of the strongest indicators of truancy for African American male students (Toldson, 2011). Skiba et al. (2014) consistently posit that there are long-term negative effects associated with these factors based on the Muscott, Mann and LeBrun
(2008) report. It reported the average office discipline referral (ODR) resulted in 15-45 minutes of lost time for its stakeholders, which included students, teachers, and school administrators. This seems very insignificant at face value; however, the students who are receiving exclusionary discipline and experiencing recidivism are in a turbine of cyclical mis-education and disconnection from those educative processes and learning opportunities with their teachers.

Several pieces of literature (Skiba et al., 2014; Tajalli & Garba, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011; Peguero & Bracy, 2014; Christle & Jolivette, 2004) all share that exclusionary discipline has a negative effect on student achievement and may contribute to other/continued negative outcomes for students. Skiba et al (2014) states, “…the effects of exclusion are probably mediated by a number of short-term negative outcomes that are presumably increasing the risk of more severe outcomes, such as dropout and juvenile justice involvement” (p. 552). Skiba et al (2011) shares that exclusionary and expulsion discipline practices potentially constitute risk factors that may further produce negative outcomes inclusive of declining academic performance. There seems to be an alarming rate of disproportionate exclusionary discipline distributed to students, even when the data strongly suggests that this discipline practice has various negative effects on student academic success. In fact, the disproportionate rate at which African American students are being suspended or expelled from school has created another phenomenon called the “discipline gap”.

The “gap” has created a discourse so well documented that the U.S. Education and Justice Departments produced and distributed a joint effort called the Dear Colleague Letter on the Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline letter that directs school districts to make the necessary adjustments to their discipline policies or face certain consequences in the future. Even more alarming, the actual numbers being reported with regards to student discipline
varies so greatly across national school districts that discipline practices seem to be more a
deterioration of policy than it is student behavior. Research states that exclusionary discipline is
associated with increased negative perceptions of school climate and increased student discipline
referrals (Sprague et al., 2013; Healy, 2013; Boneshefskiet al., 2014). Educational opportunities
are also lost from students and schools that practice high rates of exclusionary discipline
practices. In other words, exclusionary discipline has the opposite effect of its intentions, and
could potentially do more harm than good. Ultimately, it does not work. Short-term effects such
as loss of educational opportunities and student engagement are direct indicators proving
exclusionary discipline increase the risks to other negative academic and behavioral outcomes,
thus impacting the overall school climate in academic achievement for all students.

The overall consensus given the resources that support discipline disproportionality in U.S.
education suggests there needs to be some focus on the relationships between teachers and
students in discipline, teacher professional concerns with disciplines, and the level of educational
quality which has encouraged the development of scholarship on this topic. Further, there must
be proactive and prescriptive measures to address these issues and how to provide insight on best
practices to effectively manage them.

**How, Why, and Which Students are Affected**

Exclusionary discipline effects the entire school climate and culture; however, it effects
some students more than others, and still some students more disproportionately than others.
Exclusionary discipline also debilitates students’ opportunities for learning. The manner in how
students are effected are vast and long-lasting. Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt (2016) and
other scholars share that students who fail to complete their secondary education will experience
very serious ramifications later in life which include poor future educational attainment
(Gottfried, 2010), high rates of unemployment over an extended period of time (Couch & Fairlie, 2010), lower earnings over a life-time compared to those who do complete secondary education (Ritter & Taylor, 2011), and even juvenile and adult court interactions. In the context of school discipline, basic research shares that people use stereotyping to fill gaps of ambiguity about race in social perception and this continues to be the greatest degree by which guide their inferences (Okonofua et al., 2016; Sager & Schofield, 1980). It may appear that this is a major reason there are so many disparities in school discipline and why most referrals are typically subjective in their interpretations.

The study done by Skiba and colleagues (2002) found that White students were more likely to be referred for more objective offenses such as smoking and vandalism, but Black students were most likely to be referred for offenses that were more subjective like perceptions of disrespect, aggression, or threats. These perceptions are typically consistent with racial stereotypes about Black people in general, with Black boys specifically being labelled as aggressive or dangerous. These negative perceptions also imply that negative relationships are being developed or have been developed between teachers and racially stigmatized students (Okonofua et al., 2016; US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2012).

Research also indicates that exclusionary school discipline is used disproportionately with students who are: (a) male; (b) come from low socioeconomic families; (c) of a minority ethnic background; as well as (d) identified as being a low academic performer or possess some sort of disability (Skiba et al., 1997; Christle et al., 2004). Even further, harsher discipline practices against ethnic minority males because of teacher interpretation, may confirm the racial misperceptions students begin to internalize as experiencing microaggressions and ill-treatment in school. Negative interpretations can further sever relationships between teachers and students
and create opportunities for disruptive behaviors and school avoidance. This is greatly studied in the social identity threat theory when discussing the consequences of negative stereotypes (Welch & Payne, 2010; Hanselman, Bruch, Gamoran & Borman, 2014; Wasserberg, 2014; Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006).

Other minority groups of students are effected by the same or similar exclusionary practices as African American students, particularly males. Skiba et al (2014) and other researchers have shared the emerging data regarding non-heterosexual students, female students of color at elementary and secondary level are beginning to experience high rates of exclusionary discipline (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2008). Non-heterosexual students, particularly girls between 7th and 12th grades, are 1.25 to 3 times more likely to receive discipline referrals than their counterparts (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011; Skiba et al., 2014).

American Indian (Indigenous Indian) students are also effected by exclusionary discipline practices in schools. Research consistently shows that American Indian students are also experiencing negative academic outcomes like cultural alienation, school disengagement, decreases in school attendance, and increases in dropout rates at school because of disproportionate disciplinary practices (Brown, 2014; Christle et al., 2005; Larimore, 2000; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010). American Indian students are exposed to exclusionary discipline, only second to African American students (17 percent), at 8 percent as compared to their White peers at 5 percent (Brown, 2014; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Further, the Civil Rights Data Collection survey for 2009-2010 shared that in 2006, the American Indian student population made up 1.7 percent of the student population nationwide. The American Indian male experienced exclusionary discipline at 15.9 percent and the female at 9.6 percent. This is data
very closely aligned with that of the African American male and female student data reported by the same institution (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010).

**Implications**

It can be adamantly stated that exclusionary discipline practices have promoted negative outcomes for students of color and several other groups of student populations as well. African American male students have the highest recorded rates of disproportionate practices distributed against them, followed very closely by the American Indian male. Emerging groups like non-heterosexual students and females across most ethnic/racial groups are closely gaining ground in higher exclusionary rates as well. The problem of exclusionary discipline practices against these groups of students strongly suggests that schools need to examine their discipline practices more diligently so as to not contribute to the academic and discipline gaps that already exist, which have been negatively impacting students for the last forty years.

**Disproportionate Impact on African American Students**

The American Psychological Association (2008) makes some very strong statements about the use of exclusionary discipline and its effects on African American students. First, its Task Force concluded that the current available data and research literature indicates that suspending students predicts more future misbehavior and that schools with higher rates of suspension and expulsion have poorer climate; secondly, it shares if the impact of zero tolerance policies on school discipline policies could develop behaviors that reduces the ‘subjectivity of decision making’ for those who make discipline referrals, it would possibly reduce some of the biases, disproportionalities, and may become more fair to African American students and other minority groups who traditionally experienced exclusionary discipline practices (APA, 2008; Hoffman, 2014); and thirdly, exclusionary discipline are highly ineffective in deterring student misconduct.
in schools with negative effects on health and academic success (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Gregory, Skiba, & Norguera, 2010). On a national level, an African American student will receive exclusionary discipline at a rate 1.8 times higher than a white student, and an African American male student will receive exclusionary discipline at a rate of 3.5 times although the behaviors or infractions creating the discipline practice is no more serious or in excess than those committed by other students (Carter, Fine, & Russell, 2014; Gibson, Wilson, Haight, Kayama, & Marshall, 2014).

The interpretation as to which student behaviors are negatively effecting the climate of the school learning environment is a challenge in and of itself, however, there is current research that shares a key link in considering how to address these issues. One of those key links is in which cultural group has the power to determine which student behaviors are in violation and how to determining which levels of discipline actions are imposed. In public schools, there is a clear differentiation between cultures, with White educators being the dominant group (Noguera, 2008). This creates a major disconnect in cultural relationships. If the dominant social group controls the power to determine which infractions will be disciplined through what consequences, then the dictation of which offenses requiring exclusion directly impacts members of any minority group of students because there is limited knowledge on how to adequately relate to cultural differences, thus creating and reinforcing stereotypes of certain behaviors of that minority group as normative, pathological, and even criminal (Gibson et al., 2014). Noting that pathological interpretations of student behaviors is the process of treating differences as a limitation of ability, deficits, or malfunction, this leads to the use of discriminatory practices and the enforcement of those behaviors through the implementation of policies (Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007). These interpretations also create situations where students respond adversely
to the expected behaviors of the dominant social group. According to Tantum (2003) and Fordham & Ogbu (1986) both share that student responses vary but is mostly identified as being oppositional which rejects normative values. When students reject these norms, the responses represent themselves as being resistant to compliance and are associated with exclusionary discipline actions, prejudices & perceptions, and unfair treatment. It is here then that students find these means of “resistance” as a means of protecting and distancing themselves from perceived white racist educators in their schools. In addition to these psychological concerns, there are several other domino effects that African American student encounter because of exclusionary discipline practices in schools, which further extends open the achievement gap.

**Educational Outcomes/Ramifications of Exclusionary Practices Affecting African American Students**

Research supports that students who are excluded from the educational environment due to exclusionary discipline practices fall behind socially and academically. The limited engagement with teachers in school and the lagging behind in comprehension of academic requirements to be successful, African American students are frequently placed in lower-level ability groups, which tends to receive sub-standard quality of resources and instruction (Townsend, 2000). This also leads to remedial programming, which further reduces academic achievement among those students who are frequently exposed to exclusionary discipline practices. This then creates the continuation of poor academic grades and academic retention. The removal of students from the social environment with their peer groups produces inadequacies of learning how to resolve social conflict and the practice of prosocial behavior is another factor. There are limited instructions on how to proactively and positively respond and develop social skills at the time most adolescents are learning how to control and manage their social responsibilities.
Exclusionary discipline removes this opportunity for students during a time when they need it most. The most damaging outcome students face is the time frame in which they could potentially be exposed to more negative behavior. Oftentimes, when students are excluded from the school environment, they are subjected to long hours of unsupervised time. During this time students who are suspended or expelled from schools are at a greater risk of intersecting with law enforcement and further widens the gap in academic achievement (Chobot & Garibaldi, 1982; Garibaldi, 1992). And at the pinnacle of negative outcomes for exclusionary discipline practices against African American students, in particularly males, is the withdrawal from school altogether. Because alienation is a direct result of exclusionary practices, students may experience feelings of their home schools rejecting them. This feeling of rejection causes students to drop out of school early, and further increases opportunities for those students to engage in activities that will have them intersect with law enforcement, promotes issues of compromising self-esteem due to the perceived interpretation of school rejection (Townsend, 2000; DeRidder, 1991). These behaviors replicate school discipline recidivism.

Academic achievement is a major concern for students who receive exclusionary discipline. State accountability examinations, reading and writing achievement, school grades, and most other informal and formal school achievement assessment tools continue to show negative correlations between exclusionary discipline and student achievement. The most common of these are school retention, school dropout, school refusal, school truancy, school discipline recidivism, high acrimonious relationships between teachers and students, poor communications due to cultural differences, and ultimately entrance into the juvenile justice system and its web of resources (Townsend, 2000; DeRidder, 1991; USDE-OCR & USDJ-CRD, 2014; Skiba et al., 2002; 2011; 2014). These hosts of issues associated with exclusionary discipline remain a major
concern for districts since the distribution of the federal *Joint Dear Colleague Letter (2014)*. There are also quite a few consequences for these exclusionary practices that effect African American students in U. S. public school education. Since the distribution of the *Joint Dear Colleague Letter (2014)*, school educators have been given the task of how to reduce such disparities in school discipline or face consequences.

In conjunction with the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division (USDJ-CRD) and the U. S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (USDE-OCR), the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) shares disturbing quantitative data demonstrating the need for the immediate implementation of school discipline that aligns and complies with “all applicable constitutional requirements and Federal laws, including civil rights statutes and regulations” (p.3) of the *Dear Colleague Letter*. Further, the OCR (2011-2012) collected data that showed African American students without disabilities are 3.5 times more likely than their White peers without disabilities to be disciplined using exclusionary discipline. And even though African American students represent 15% of students in schools that year, 35% of them were suspended once, 44% were suspended more than once, and when disaggregated 36% were expelled! This means over 50% of students who experienced exclusionary discipline, exposed to arrest at school, or even referred to law enforcements were African American or Hispanic, but definitely an ethnic minority male. It was recognized by the U.S. departments that a range of factors could contribute to such extreme disparities, nonetheless, the need to revisit how students are disciplined in school was still the focal point. As of now, not so far as to bring civil rights violations under Title IV or Title VI, the current evidence shares that there is enough data to suggest there is serious concerns to address under the current school discipline practices. In addition to these practices, the outcomes of lost instructional time become extremely transparent. The removal from the instructional
environment contributes to the lack of academic attainment—a double edged sword. Moreover, if removal was not warranted, harsher discipline treatment and the frequency of harsher discipline was distributed as well (CRDC, 2011-12; Dear Colleague Letter, 2014). The important take away from this data is that racial discrimination in school discipline is a serious problem (Dear Colleague Letter, 2014).

The Title IV and Title VI protect students from the entire discourse of actions under disciplinary process—from classroom management issues through to exclusionary practices of school removal. There is clear protection from discrimination based on race and aligns with all academic, educational, extra-curricular activities, programs sponsored by schools, and any school related activities, program, initiatives under school and district jurisdiction. Schools cannot divert from these mandates. If and when they do, they may face violations of civil rights and federal mandates and all penalties under those laws.

Implications

Consequences and ramifications are being distributed by federal departments for those school districts who continue to exercise exclusionary discipline that fall outside of mandatory and criminal removal of students from school. According to the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education, the Joint Dear Colleague Letter is the means by which schools and their districts will be held accountable for the scrutiny, re-examination, and re-implementation of appropriate consequences for student misconduct in school. The immediate implementation of these new policies and practices must be documented and measurable for the federal and state departments to be able to support programs that are working and advise those districts who continue to struggle. Nonetheless, exclusionary discipline must be justified, if it is to be used. The removal of students from the educational right of receiving an education is no
longer at the discretion of school officials. Schools must find alternative means to communicating with students who are misbehaving and disruptive in school, and make those moments an opportunity to learn more about how to assist students in becoming more responsible citizens so those skills are transferred into adulthood.

**Conclusion**

Exclusionary discipline has been used over the last four decades to remove students, particularly African American males, from their constitutional right to be in the academic instructional environment. Exclusionary discipline practices against African American students have been so dire that both the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education have joined forces to mandate that school officials re-evaluate their school discipline policies to keep students in schools and examine other measures of redirecting student misconduct in schools to remove exclusionary discipline as a means of consequence.

Researchers have demonstrated the various tenants of negative outcomes associated with exclusionary discipline practices on both students who receive these disciplines and those who do not. The climate and culture of learning environments that make use of exclusionary discipline as a normative practice also created negative outcomes for those students who do not engage in student misconduct. In addition to those students without disabilities being affected by these disturbing school discipline practices, students with disabilities are affected at a higher rate and more frequently than their peers without disabilities.

The federal mandates, Zero Tolerance Policies, Guns Free Schools Act of 1994, and No Child Left Behind, are all policies designed to ensure schools and their authorities keep students safe, as well as gives school administrators and classroom teachers the authority to remove students deemed are a danger to their learning environments. Since their inceptions, these
mandates have created many concerns about which students and which infractions are deemed removable. Although there are clear explanations as to which offenses in schools are automatically qualified for removal, the implementation of Zero Tolerance policies on an individual basis both by states and then by school districts and their respective schools, has created the current disparities that are present in school discipline. It further has allowed many school discipline practices, especially those that are highly discretionary, to remove students from schools as well as instructional environments almost at will regardless of the infractions. 

Unfortunately, these practices have affected the most marginalized student in the country, those who are of ethnic and cultural backgrounds different from the dominant social group. Moreover, with scrutiny and strong demands on how schools must revise their current school discipline practices, the time it took these laws to create the destructive and cyclical funnel of the Student-to-Prison Pipeline, it will take twice as long to reverse its effects. In short, the ultimate goal is to educate all students, with or without disabilities, minority or not, in a manner that does not violate their constitutional rights to be educated and in the most objective fashion as mandated by law. The enforcement of law regarding intellectual property must be demonstrated with students of ethnic and cultural backgrounds as they are enforced for those students who are identified as being a member of the dominant social group. The call for school discipline has been announced with the Joint Dear Colleague Letter and the rebuilding of school discipline that is more ethical will take time, and that time is now.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore relationship building to further reduce exclusionary discipline practices and improve classroom management skills to ultimately increase student academic success and improve overall school climate and culture. It will also examine teacher-student relationships in an effort to reduce the inconsistent exclusionary discipline practices that remove many of its African American students from the instructional environment.

African American students are inconsistently excluded from classroom instruction which increases discipline recidivism; purposefully examining the ability to manage student behavior through relationship building to reduce exclusionary discipline practices remains the objective. The guiding research question for this study is to examine What teacher behaviors or practices contribute to exclusionary discipline from the classrooms? This research seeks to answer questions addressing inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom.

This study plans to demonstrate the use of a single descriptive qualitative case study methodological approach to answer the research question. In order to clearly understand the perspective of this methodology, qualitative research will be explained. From here, Yin’s (2009; 2014; 2017) descriptive case study will be shared and the author’s paradigm expressed to provide a clear context of the study.

The design of a research study is to logically connect the data that will be collected to the original research question that is to be answered. This can be expressed either explicitly or implicitly, but expressed somewhere in the study nonetheless. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that four major quality aspects are carried out thoroughly. Those items are: (a) construct validity; (b) internal validity (if one is to use explanatory or casual case study); (c)
external validity; and (d) reliability (Yin, 2009). These items are very different in qualitative explanations. The qualitative explanation of what this study will address will be shared in the upcoming sections. In order to embark on the research study, it is vital that the researcher develops a road map, or research design. The design is used to move the study from asking the initial research question, through the data collection process, and then finally answering the research question and providing some possible implications/resolutions that further delve into other perspectives of the topic. However, during the transition stages of moving from one section to the next, collecting data and analysis of said data offers the researcher the opportunity to make inferences about the various elements that arise during the investigation. One key takeaway during the design process is the ability to make generalizations or investigate further to account for different perspectives.

The main goal of the research design is to ensure that the evidence collected addresses the initial research question. To avoid flaws in the research, the researcher must be able to answer questions that pertain to the data collected regarding a logical problem. As an example, if one is researching a single organization and the research question(s) are asked to involve entities outside the organization, this is a flaw in the design of the study. This can be avoided if the research questions only pertain to the single organization exclusively.

Case study as explained by Yin (2009) require five tenants in its design that are extremely important:

1. A study’s questions,
2. Its propositions, if any,
3. Its unit(s) of analysis,
4. The logic linking the data to the propositions, and
5. The criteria for interpreting the findings.

The research questions are usually inquiring or examining a real-life problem in terms of “how” and “why” prompts, and thus the researcher’s first task is to specifically present the study’s questions in this regard.

This study will address the five aforementioned components in the following paragraphs to set the context for this research. It will also explain the four major aspects, which were expressed in the previous paragraph, that will connect the research question through the data and analysis and then finally to an implication or resolution that addresses the research question. To further understand the research design for this study, an explanation of why the qualitative design was chosen needs to be shared.

**Qualitative Research Approach**

Qualitative research seeks to explore phenomenon and search for deeper understanding of the problem from the perspective of those that directly experience the problem. Each participant’s perspective on their experience is a “thick” (Denzin, 1989) and dense account that the researcher must decipher and then analyze data for understanding. Qualitative research design attempts to link the data to the original research questions of the study (Yin, 1994).

Additionally, qualitative research is informed by constructivist theory, which emphasizes the creation of meaning from the perspective(s) of individual construction.

Constructivism posits that knowledge is built through the interactions of the individual and their reality. This is created in the mind of the individual more so than an external entity (Hansen, 2004); others share that it can only be uncovered through deep reflection (Schwandt, 2000); and still others state meaning can only be discovered through the interaction between the researcher and the research subjects (or “cases”, as in a case study)(Ponterotto, 2005). There are
several reasons a qualitative research lens was used for this study and Maxwell (2005) expresses those reasons as meeting specific intellectual goals in a study. Those goals are:

1. Understanding the significance of phenomena for the study participants
2. Understanding the background and environment for the actors
3. Identifying unexpected phenomena
4. Understanding the method by which events transpire
5. Develop contributing explanations

The selection of a qualitative research method over a quantitative method was appropriate for this study because its design allows for an inductive approach with an emphasis on individuals and a focus on verbal communication. This type of research study is best suited for understanding the environment where the study is conducted, the meanings behind the participants’ participation, and the discovery of unanticipated influences.

Qualitative case study will accomplish many of the goals designed by the nature of its study. Investigating and understanding for meaning through interpersonal dialogue between both the participants and the researcher will provide some insight into the research question. It will be the researcher’s goal to uncover the deeper meanings hidden in the conversations shared by the participants. Additionally, it will also be the goal of the researcher to link the data to be collected to answering the research question. It is this reason a descriptive approach to qualitative case study for this research was chosen to address the research question.

Descriptive case study describes the phenomenon rather than attempting to explain or interpret the phenomenon. Descriptive studies are aimed at uncovering “what is,” so the use of surveys, archival analysis, and sometimes observations are strategies used to gather data; this requires no control over behavioral events and is focused on contemporary events (Yin, 2003).
Thus, a descriptive case study is focused and detailed, and the propositions and questions about
the phenomenon are meticulously scrutinized and articulated at the onset of the study (Tobin,
2012). The meticulous articulation of current knowledge on the phenomenon is what sets the
boundaries of the case and this is called the descriptive theory. The main goal of a descriptive
case study is to reveal the patterns of connections, through the theoretical construct, and move
the theory forward making use of vigorous propositions and questions. The researcher then must
take the vast amounts of evidence and make assertions about relevance and validity.

Establishing and critically defining the protocol prior to data collection, is a hallmark of
Yin’s case study design. This protocol would include: an overview of the case study project—
which includes the objectives, issues, and topics; fieldwork procedures; case study questions that
clearly link data to be collected to the research question, which will provide the guidance for
reporting the case at its conclusion (Tobin, 2012, Yin, 2003). Therefore, the combination of a
descriptive qualitative single case study methodology was specifically selected to engage the
research question. The design of the study in this manner should uncover strong implications that
will address the research question directly and provide some useful implications.

**Participants**

Participants for this study will be 12-15 full time faculty members who are either
instructional or non-instructional staff members. The instructional staff members have at least
five years of teaching experience. The non-instructional staff members have had a minimum of
five years teaching experience and have moved into quasi-administrative or administrative
positions, or serve in a non-instructional capacity as a member of the child study team, school
psychology, social worker/counselor, or guidance. Their ages range from 35 years to 60 years.
Teaching subjects for the instructional members were not a factor in this study nor a factor for
being selected to participate. The ethnicities and genders of the participants are diverse. *See Chart 1 below for details.*

**Chart 1: Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Instructional</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of participants for this study met the standard for a qualitative case study, although this topic is hotly debated. Descriptive Qualitative Case Study has a standard of 15 participants, however, many researchers find it difficult to define the factors to determine saturation prior to collecting the data. A purposeful random sampling (criterion based) method was used to generate the participants for this study. This form of sampling is common in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to gather a representative sample using sound judgement in the selection of participants, as well as saves time and money (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). This sampling technique also is a non-probability method and often occurs when there is a limited number of participants that can serve as primary data resources based on the nature of the research and its design (Dudoviskiy, 2017). Qualitative case study is driven by the data collected and aims to provide robust interview analysis. This is
because the occurrence of a piece of data or code is enough to become part of the analysis. Moreover, the work in qualitative study begins to diminish and does not necessarily lead to more information, as the study goes on (Mason, 2010).

According the Dey (1999), the concept of saturation is an inappropriate one because oftentimes the researcher may close categories in their studies too soon with partially coded material, while other researchers like Strauss and Corbin (1998; 1990) suggest the concept of saturation is subjective. Again, qualitative research is most concerned with meaning and not generalizing hypothesis (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Moreover, qualitative research can become very laborious, and analyzing large samples is extremely time consuming and may be impractical in the end.

The setting of the study will occur is a comprehensive secondary school with a diverse population of the staff, faculty, and students. The data collection strategy will be conducted through a single survey and two rounds of interviews. The survey will be distributed to generate interest from the faculty and staff members to participate in the study. Among those who volunteer to participate in the study, there will be two rounds of interviews. Since qualitative research is strongly reliant on extensive communication and consistent engagement with its participants, the interviews and the quality of meaning derived from the interviews is paramount. The strength of conducting interviews is to delve into the meanings and determine how they all connect to the research question being asked. A weakness in this strategy is that too many interviews could become too monotonous and lose the integrity of the study. Finding a fair medium between the strength and weakness of conducting interviews will be a benchmark for the researcher.
Procedures

The researcher is the primary variable in data collection and data analysis. This section of the study focuses on “how” the data is collected based on the research question being asked in this study. The research question being asked is: What teacher behaviors or practices will reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom? In order to answer such a multilayered question, one of the basic elements of a strong qualitative researcher, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), is to have a sound and clear understanding of the topic being studied and the location where the study is being conducted. The data for this study was collected through an initial survey distributed to engage volunteers to participate in the study, followed by two rounds of semi-structured interviews. The data collected will be juxtaposed with the analysis of field notes and journal notes. To account for the opportunities to test emerging themes, initial analysis and collection was done concurrently and then compared to previously collected data.

The interviews were conducted on-site, in a private and confidential location of the participants’ choice. Each initial interview was limited to a minimum of 45 minutes to an hour, then followed up by a second interview. The interviews were guided by an interview protocol (see Appendix B: Interview Protocol) used to gather responses from the participants and assist with answering the research question. Additionally, to improve data collection, modification to the interview protocol in subsequent interviews will be done (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In this study, the initial interview was audio taped, member checked, and transcribed from audio tape to text. The second interview was shorter in time and the interview protocol were traditional pen to paper responses. These techniques produce very robust and large amounts of data, which allows for discovering emerging and unforeseen themes. The field notes and journal notes taken were purely descriptive in nature with items like dates, times, participant and
researcher thoughts, environment, and details of the setting. These notes also included additional questions, thoughts, and any concerns that may have arisen during the interviews. To be critically vital to the study, the notes must be accurately organized, remain focused on the research question, and provide a transparent account of the researcher’s perspectives. The reflexive journal will be generated throughout the data collection phase to ensure biases are removed from the study and the researcher’s influence is minimized (Ortlipp, 2008).

The practice of maintaining a reflexive journal has some benefits. First, it allows transparency throughout the data collection phase; secondly, it allows the researcher’s experiences to have a slight influence on how the interviews are conducted and how those experiences may influence outcomes; and third, the practice of reflexive journaling provides opportunities for the researcher’s value to be present in the collections process instead of dismissing them altogether (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001).

Data Analysis

It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide its readers with a clear process and fluid access to the participants’ experiences via effective communications of the analysis of interviews (Patton, 1990; Newman & Benz, 1998). Quality document analysis, just like the interview protocols, surveys, and follow up protocols, must always link back to the research question being asked; it must also link to the theoretical frameworks being used to support the study (Butin, 2010). The style and fluidity of the analysis should naturally guide the reader through the study and the way it was framed. Using Yin’s (2009; 2014; 2017) editions of case study, the process of describing a “linear but iterative process” and providing some discussion on the six elements of case study research: the plan, design, preparation, data collection, analysis, and reporting is influential in producing a high-quality case study. Yin’s (2009) edition makes
great emphasis on analytical techniques with a particular focus on pattern matching to gain more insight on the phenomenon, using propositions to link back to the research question. Whereas, Yin’s (2014) edition places a great deal of emphasis on developing a strong and thoroughly sound case study as its end result. For this study, a combination of both editions will be used to gain more insight to What teacher behaviors or practices will reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom? The latest edition of case study research by Yin (2017) combines all sections nicely and it also will be a guiding reference source for this case study.

Analysis of qualitative data requires searching for themes and codes in vast amounts of data, as well as reflecting on the interviews and journal notes and describing the contexts of the data (Yin, 2009; 2014; Creswell, 2013; Ortlipp, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A professional transcribing process, through Transcriptionlive.com, will take the audio data and transcribe it to text to be compared to the original audio taped interview. Once this data is collected, the process of open coding will begin. Open coding is a process that categorizes large amounts of data through close examination and searches for similarities and differences in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The next line of analysis includes a line by line analysis to establish common categories, which was reviewed and followed by axial coding. Axial coding further links coding through inductive reasoning, and in this process possible sub categories are formed and deeper meaning about the phenomenon are developed. The final step in this section was reassembling all the data so the researcher can identify connections, relationships, and link the collection back to the research question. Member checking will be conducted to ensure the transcribed and line by line analysis is to the satisfaction of the participants. The reflexive journal notes will be reviewed juxtaposed to interview protocol analysis to ensure all relevant data is transparent and inclusive.
Criteria for Quality Qualitative Research

Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit the creditability of a research study is critical in assessing its value and worth through several tenants that define the data that links to answering the research question, but also the overall trustworthiness of the data being presented by the researcher. In the following sections, these tenants: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability will be examined, but a more focused discussion will be directed towards ethical considerations, credibility, transferability, self-reflexivity, and transparency. The final section on the limitations of this study will be discussed.

Ethical Considerations

Providing a safe, secure, and private space for data storage is vital when embarking on a study where human subjects will be participating. Securing anonymity and privacy is vital in developing and maintaining a trustworthy study. All names of participants in this study will be given an alias name and number to protect their identity (ie. “Johnny #3” and “Kim #4”). Loss of credibility is the result of any study if the researcher does not guard against anything that would compromise the study’s data and expose true identities. In order to keep with what Miles and Huberman (1994) describes as a “well organized physical place for storage and retrieval of raw field notes, tapes, edited hard copies, memos, and so on” (p. 45), the researcher will have a designated and lockable storage cabinet. The contents of this storage cabinet will only be accessed by the researcher, who has the only key. The computer files and data will be stored on the researcher’s personal computer and portable hard drive with a coded name and password only accessible to the researcher. The computer is also protected by virus protection, spam ware and add ware protection, firewall protection, and identity theft protection. A hard copy of all
materials will also be kept in the locked storage cabinet and indexed on the researcher’s personal computer.

Credibility

The credibility of a study is defined as data being tested with the members of a specific group to ensure data is being recorded and reported accurately and precisely (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This will be done both formally and informally beginning with member checking during the interview and transcribing stages of data collection. This technique is traditionally used to establish the validity of an account. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit this to be the most crucial point in establishing the credibility in a study. This technique has some controversy, nonetheless, it can be used and has some major positive aspects to it when:

1. The opportunities allow for the participants to review the data and search for any discrepancies in the reporting,
2. The participants are given the opportunity to correct any errors or misinterpretations of reported data,
3. Gives the participants’ an opportunity to provide additional information, which could be triggered by reviewing the previous data,
4. There is a recorded session and accurate account of verbal communication between the researcher and the participant,
5. Gives both the researcher and the participants’ an opportunity to collectively summarize data, and
6. Gives the participants’ the ability to confirm data that will be presented in the study as well as acknowledges consent to the usage of the data.
The second technique that will be used to establish credibility for this study is triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data to investigate and produce understanding in a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is a technique that is also used to test for validity, but qualitative researcher’s use this technique to gather a more comprehensive and well-developed account of the data being represented (Patton, 1999). In this study, a triangulation of sources by using participants in different professional capacities in their roles at the research site will provide different points of views at different times during the data collection phases. (Patton, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2013).

**Transferability**

Transferability is the ability of the results of the study to be applicable outside the boundaries of the study. This is done with thick and robust descriptions of the study phenomena and adequate amounts of contextual information for the reader to recognize and see the findings applicable to other situations. The use of block quotes from the participants and extensive descriptions are acceptable techniques for accomplishing this task. Lincoln and Guba (1985) share that the manner in which thick description can be shared achieves external validity, and sufficient descriptions can allow conclusions to be drawn and transferred to different times and settings as well as various situations and different groups of people.

Creswell (2013), Marchionini and Teague (1987), and Yin (2009) all present the task of transferability as being best presented when the researcher defines the boundaries of the case before data collections begins. In doing so, the researcher defines the participants of the study, the number of participants, the manner in which data collection and analysis is conducted, the number of interviews, time of interviews, and the setting of the study are key factors necessary for the readers to independently measure the transferability to their personal settings.
**Internal Audit**

The purpose of an internal audit is to ensure there is a paper trail of evidence reviewing the process of data collection, analysis and conclusion of the study. It also establishes and allows other investigators to validate any section(s) of the research study, if necessary. This audit was established to confirm all aspects of this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that conducting the audit evaluates whether or not the findings, the interpretations, and the conclusions of the study are equally supported by the data presented.

**Self-reflexivity & Transparency**

The examination and attitude of attending to the context in knowledge construction and the influences of the researcher in the process of conducting the study is called reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher’s background and their position on the topic of study will affect the investigation’s angle at studying the phenomenon, the methods by which to adequately judge the study, and the most appropriate framing and communications of its conclusions (Malterud, 2001). While there may be many different ways to view a specific phenomenon, qualitative researchers understand that providing a richer and more developed account of the findings can only be biased or skewed by the researcher themselves. In protecting against such an undesirable event, Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggests the researcher guard against this by using a reflexive journal.

The reflexive journal allows the researcher to make regular journal entries during the research process by recording methodological decision, the logistic for those decisions, and is a recorded account of the researcher’s own views, values, and interests. It also allows the inclusion of human subjectivity, through the lens of journal objectivity by recognizing that knowledge is partially situated and to account for this effect (Malterud, 2001). This begins when the personal
accounts, professional experiences, and preconceived ideas are shared prior to the study, but are revealed through the research process. These accounts can be viewed as declarations if they are mentioned at the beginning of the study by the researcher. The key component in using the journal is to look at the data, its interpretation, and compare it to the research for competing conclusions (Malterud, 2001).

**Potential Research Bias**

I have been a public-school educator for twenty years with more than half of those years as a classroom teacher, classroom discipline has always been the avenue by which teachers remove students from the instructional environment, for the sake of preserving the climate of the learning environment. The researcher has always maintained the role of a “student-centered” learning environment as the key to keeping education elevated as a pillar within the climate and culture of the school learning community. The researcher has since been promoted to Dean of Students with the current role and responsibilities of maintaining a positive relationship between the school and home with regards to student behavior and student culture that affects the building’s climate. This new role deals directly with discipline. Since selecting this topic to study and conducting a thorough literature review, the positionality of ensuring equity in school discipline for the most marginalized students in education has become a mission guaranteed to cause strife at every turn—because the truth is cloaked in race-neutral language and protected by both state and federal mandates.

As a member of several cultural and ethnic categories, the removal of students from the learning environment, especially African American students, who are most marginalized students in education (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975), has struck a personal cord in providing and promoting the most recent, relevant, and reliable data to keep all students in the classroom.
While keeping them in the classroom, the follow up goal is to ensure students are also being equitably educated and disciplined, if need be in a manner that is done with dignity.

The researcher made use of a reflexive journal to ensure that biases were not part of the empirical study, but still documented as part of personal interests and values that may evolve during the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was also done to reduce subjectivity and maximize objectivity. This strategy was followed as closely as possible, along with the selection of the study design and methodology that will withstand scrutiny, to further increase objectivity and guard against loss of credibility.

With regards to the interview protocol, asking open-ended and neutral questions that were not leading, all interviews were tape recorded and participants were allowed to participate in the member checking process. Questions were asked in a progressive manner from general to very specific and the researcher was very cognizant of the tone used to ask the questions so as to not lead the questions or influence the dialogue. Every effort was made to provide a truthful and neutral study with the conclusions depending on the evidence from the study and the participants’ individual accounts from their interviews.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations in this study. The use of only one school and a small number of faculty member participants provides a narrow scope in this study. These two limitations added with the limited time frame to conduct the study are reasons for further inquiry of this study. A longitudinal inquiry of this study would provide additional data to expand on other perspectives of the research question.
Conclusion

The overall goal of this case study is to reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom that removes students, particularly African American students, which creates discipline recidivism and poor educational outcomes. Specific purposes of this study are to explore relationship building to further reduce exclusionary discipline practices and improve classroom management skills to ultimately increase student academic success and improve overall school climate and culture. It will also examine teacher-student relationships in an effort to reduce the inconsistent exclusionary discipline practices that remove many of its African American students from the instructional environment. This investigation was guided by the overall research question: *What teacher behaviors or practices will reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom?*

Exclusionary discipline has been documented over the last forty years, and has also been documented as inconsistent and creating negative effects in academic performance as well as contributing negatively to the school’s climate and culture (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Skiba et al., 1999; 2000; 2002; Townsend, 2000; 2012; USDOEOCR, 2011; 2012).

The literature review on exclusionary discipline in U.S. public schools shows there are many scholars and research studies conducted that confirm that African American students are excluded from the classroom at higher rates, more frequently than other student groups, and for more subjective infractions at the discretion of school officials (Skiba et al., 2006; 2011; 2014; Brown, 2014; Burris, 2011; Carter et al., 2014).

A descriptive qualitative case study was used because of its inductive approach and its emphasis on rich, robust, and vast data collection approaches to answer the research question. The theoretical framework of a relational-cultural theory approach was selected to further inquire
about how to reduce exclusionary referrals from the classroom by strengthening relationships between students and teachers through identifying the behaviors or practices that could reduce the initial discipline referral.

The participants in this study were faculty from a single comprehensive high school with grades 9-12. The data was collected through a single survey, two sessions of interview questions, and analysis of field notes and a reflexive journal. The analysis of all data occurred concurrently and at the end of the study. The data for this study was securely stored in a locked storage cabinet and on the researcher’s personal computer. The anonymity of the participants remained secured throughout the study. Several actions took place to ensure the credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study.
Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to explore relationship building to further reduce exclusionary discipline practices and improve classroom management skills to ultimately increase student academic success and improve overall school climate and culture. It also examined teacher-student relationships in an effort to reduce the inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom that removed students and create discipline recidivism and poor educational outcomes.

There were twelve participants that engaged in two rounds of interviews. The first round was an in-person interview session for approximately 1 hour with the use of a protocol to support conversation. The second round of interviews was approximately 25 minutes in length and was used to conduct a member-checking session for reporting accuracy. The Relational Cultural Theory was significant in guiding the study to answer the overarching research question of How does examining the practices and behaviors of teachers reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom? Although each theme developed as a matter of pattern matching and are being reported individually, there was an abundance of overlap and cross-referencing among them. Therefore, the interview data was reported where it fits most logically and links back to either the theoretical frameworks, the research question, or both. For some themes, the participants’ perspectives were shared and followed by a chart that detailed which comments addressed the theoretical frameworks and which comments addressed the research questions. Where there was too much information, the data was placed in the appendix preventing reader fatigue. The table below detail the 4 themes and 8 sub-themes that emerged from the data.
Table 10: Themes and Sub-Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Theme 3</th>
<th>Theme 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td>Management Styles (Links to the Research Question)</td>
<td>Connections-“Lived Experiences” (Links to the Research Question-first &amp; Theoretical Frameworks)</td>
<td>Getting to Know Your Students (Links to the Research Question)</td>
<td>Inconsistencies (Links to the Theoretical Frameworks-first &amp; Research Question)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Theme 1</strong></td>
<td>Experiences and Trial &amp; Error</td>
<td>Forming Relationships</td>
<td>Reasons for Removal</td>
<td>Inconsistencies with communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Theme 2</strong></td>
<td>Student Connections</td>
<td>Building Connections</td>
<td>Talking with Students</td>
<td>Strategies for Not Sending students out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Yin’s (2018) case study design, a common distortion during data collection is that sources may be individual people when the unit of analysis is the organization. However, there are instances where the organization is the source and the individuals become the unit of analysis. This reversal is acceptable, and it is true for this case study. In other words, the units of analysis were the lived experiences being shared by the participants and the source was the organization. For example, various sources such as call out logs, student discipline data, local and state reporting data, and building suspension reports were all used to support the lived experiences of the participants’, which were the units of analyses. It is not advisable to base the conclusions on the organizational sources of information only. Thus, the line of questioning must be about the individual, and not the organization. The Quadrant Table 11: Visual Map/Organization of Themes & Lived Experiences is based on data collection and unit of analysis shares how this case study follows such a design.

Quadrant 1 is based on individual experiences and personal anecdotes that share quotes from the participants to address the RQ. The sub-theme that emerges follows the same pattern. Thus, its findings should conclude based on the experiences from the individual. Quadrant 2 is
based on the same patterns as well, but addresses the RQ first with its sub-theme pattern findings addressing the TF. This too is permissible because the unit of analysis dictates such a result. Quadrant 3 links the RQ and its findings as well, however there is a slight influence from the organization regarding types of disruptions and the appropriate actions(s) taken to manage them in the moment. These individual experiences are the units of analysis, and its conclusions are based on such. But the most dramatic shift takes place moving into Quadrant 4. Here, the TF is addressed followed by the RQ, however, the data sources (organization) plays a significant role in determining how effective the individual responses are implemented and managed. This quadrant speaks directly to Yin’s guiding example. The sources of data should not distort the conclusions.

Overall, each quadrant provides several stories from the participants’ lived experiences and those experiences align with the respective quadrant where the theoretical framework and/or the research question was most relevant based on the data. Each story in the next few pages, called anecdotes, are the strongest and most robust expressions of experiences that best supports both their respective themes and the sub-themes. Some sections have participants with more than one anecdote. This is done to reduce confusion for both various readers and various audiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quadrant 1: Theme 1-Management Styles (Links to the Research Question)</th>
<th>Quadrant 2: Theme 2- Connections- “Lived Experiences” (Links to the Research Question-first &amp; Theoretical Frameworks)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Theme 1:</strong> Experiences and Trial &amp; Error <strong>Sub-Theme 2:</strong> Student Connections</td>
<td><strong>Sub-Theme 1:</strong> Forming Relationships <strong>Sub-Theme 2:</strong> Building Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark: “You Can’t Treat Everyone the Same”</td>
<td>Francine: “Working From Your Humanity”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick: “Not in the Moment”</td>
<td>“’X’ is Going to Happen”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilma: “I Learned”</td>
<td>“Support When Mistakes Happen To Me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry: “Balancing It All”</td>
<td>Tiffany: “Level of Communication is Very, Very Clear”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francine: “Four Examples”</td>
<td>Wilma: “Do You Still Do This?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jabari-Thomas: “Hard with Myself”</td>
<td>“Talk To Them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindy: “Defensive Classroom Management”</td>
<td>“Getting To Know You”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry: “Consistency”</td>
<td>“I AM Monologue”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jett: “Being Honest &amp; Non-Judgmental”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Henry: “Knowing the Student”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: The stories shared during each section of the analysis, 2018.

This section presents descriptive language shared by the lived experiences of the participants. This case study incorporates some aspects of relativist perspectives in that a somewhat constructivist approach in its design attempts to reveal the perspectives of different participants; it focuses on how those differences bring forth very similar patterns and to illumine the topic for this case study. In this pipeline, the use of direct quotes and passages will bring to life the experiences of the participants.

**Section 1 Themes: Theme One—Management Styles**

The 12 participants in this study all agreed throughout the interview process that their styles were very different in how they managed their classrooms and how they managed their students. There were two guiding questions that also produced the two sub-themes for this initial section. What emerged from the data and evolved into sub-themes were participants generalizing to be consistent in managing the classroom responsibilities, including misbehaviors, as part of the territory of being in the classroom as an instructional staff member, and learning through trial
and error. Participants also generalized this as a mandatory rite of passage by the overall profession of teaching or as a non-instructional member learning within the profession.

The second sub-theme that emerged were the connections teachers made with their students through their management styles in the classrooms. These connections allowed the teacher to not only craft a style that was acceptable to them, but also connected to students so that learning and teaching can take place. The responses from 4 of the 12 participants in the sub-themes below details their experiences.

**Experiences and Trial & Error**

All twelve participants shared that learning to manage their students came through their experiences with trial & error. The four teachers in this section, all in different areas of the building and working with different student population types have all agreed that trial & error were their foundations, and it also contributed to making connections with their students. They further agreed that before you can assess any type of discipline to students, you must determine how to connect to them through your trial and error experiences to decide how you will proceed with your approach. *Table 11* details the anecdotes used to express the participant’s perspectives covering their trial and error experiences. This was done beginning with the first participant Mark, who is an instructional faculty member with 17 years of teaching experience in the district and works with both special education students and general education students. In his story, he states:

There were some workshops I had early on but mostly it’s trial an error and experience as well as what to do with certain kids with certain mannerisms and certain attitudes…and know when to use different strategies to control their behaviors. You can’t treat every student the same. People have different things
that works for them, and what works for one kid may not work for the next. You really need to evaluate your students...You cannot begin to penalize kids before you have a chance to evaluate them and try a couple of strategies to try and see if you can help the student with their behaviors and help them stay on task.

Here, Mark shares that his experiences using trial and error strategies has been instrumental in him determining when to select the best approaches to working with his students in the classroom. Through his trial and error experiences he was able to determine which strategies work best with certain kids prior to implementing any type of discipline. This is pivotal in reducing exclusionary discipline from the classroom beginning with the teacher. Getting to that point is only captured through your trial and error experiences. This was also supported by Frederick in his experiences.

Frederick is a non-instructional faculty member with 11 years of experience in his current role as a school counselor. Frederick shared his gained experiences through “allota trial and error. That’s the first thing I’ve delt with, and the one thing I’ve learned...”. Even as a non-instructional faculty member, he had to rely on his experiences through trial and error to determine which strategies and tools to implement while working with his students. He also believes that discipline practices that remove students should be not be implemented until you have had a moment to determine the behaviors of your students. “Sometimes, disciplining the kid in the moment goes left and not the way you’ve planned... You’re definitely going to address it, but not in that present moment. Sometimes it’s not the best time to address certain behaviors.” In his role, Frederick shared that dealing with the discipline, when it comes to him, was important, but not to the extent that removes the student from the classroom. He had to learn this through his trial and error experiences while working with students “in the moment” prior to imposing
any discipline suggestions from his lens. As a counselor, this will become instrumental working juxtaposed to many of his instructional colleagues, as they often reach out to him for added support when working with students they have in common. This is suggestive of the importance of understanding when to impose discipline by relying on your experiences as a professional, especially when most of those experiences are not taught through a text book. You must rely on those trial and error experiences to guide you through what successfully and unsuccessf

works in your classrooms in real life with real students and real situations.

Both Frederick’s and Mark’s experiences were in alignment with Wilma’s. She was the third participant to share her experiences in this section. Wilma is an instructional faculty member with 12 years of teaching experience. She shared “I learned through experience; I learned through trial and error. And I learned that you can always soften but you can’t get tougher. I learned that you really have to get to know your student, and the behavior may not be about you but something else, so you have to build relationships in order to make it work. Because if they don’t respect you, you’re not going to go anywhere with them—no matter what!”

Although Wilma mentioned getting to know her students as a means of making some connections to manage the classroom, there is a closer lens that needs to be shared. She learned to perform these management skills and implement these management tools through her trial and error experiences. Again, it was the connection of trial and error experiences where these three participants have all agreed they were able to foster their skills in managing their classrooms and managing their students. It was also in this same vein that Wilma begins to tie into the next sub-theme in this section.

Managing the classroom must begin with a strong grasp on expectations from your students the moment the teacher begins to engage them. Learning through trial and error is the
common denominator in all of the participants’ anecdotes. They all have stated, that determining which strategies and tools to implement came about from trying them and making a decision as to if they were successful in the ultimate goal of managing their classrooms and managing their students within the classroom. The fourth participant in this section shared a different approach to developing his management style in the classroom. Henry discusses his perspectives with support from surrounding colleagues as well as trial and error.

Henry has 11 years of teaching experience as an instructional faculty member, but teaching is a second career after working in another profession for an extended period of time. Henry shares “trial and error is how I learned. I also learned from speaking with colleagues who teach or have taught parts of the same course I teach, and that’s what everyone had to put up with. You had to learn how to manage your lesson plans, the curriculum, the tools you have to deliver the information, the students pulling you in different directions and management—you had to learn how to balance it all.” Again, making use of one’s trial and error experiences and learning to manage in the classroom goes back to each individual developing their own styles of management. Their styles of management emerged and developed through trial and error and deciphering how to determine what works and what does not work for them in their classrooms.

This last perspective takes yet another approach from an instructional faculty member. Francine is a 19-year veteran and presents her views in her anecdote.

By being prepared with your lessons—in terms of organization—students walking into a space seeing disorganization is not a good sign—it’s already going to set a tone when they walk into the classroom. The least you could do is put on the appearance of ‘I’m ready to go’. And then there is the physical space—just thinking about how things are arranged, how students enter the room, the obstacles that
might be in their way that may cause any kind of disruptions; just having something for them to do right away when they walk into the room—something productive. And greeting them as they walk in. Acknowledging their presence—welcoming them into the space—a simple acknowledgement that everybody here is important, is important. Then you can say, ok, now let’s get to work.

In this lens, Francine states that the management style she learned was at the very least be prepared so students can walk into a room where, at bare minimum, there was the perception of management. Walking into a space where ‘chaos’ sets the tone will ultimately say to students that this teacher is not ready to teach and there are no rules or boundaries of organizations. Additionally, if there are boundaries how serious can they be if the actual space in which I am to learn is not organized enough for me to learn. With 19 years of experience in the classroom, this obviously was not something developed overnight, nor was it a gift packaged scenario walking into the classroom on day one of her teaching career. Francine, as well as the other participants learned how to manage their classrooms and develop a style of management that worked for them through the experiences of trial and error and determining what worked for them in their respective spaces.

Trying different strategies, implementing different educational items across the many students crossing their paths over all the years has provided a plethora of experiences and loads of tools and markers that have worked and have not worked. It has been the defining and refining of those skills and strategies in alignment with the students they meet each school year and during each class period that has lasted. The ability to try new strategies and test new ideas over the years and then select those that work and
develop a working profile of successes in their classrooms or learning spaces has been instrumental in developing management skills that have evolved into successful experiences that have worked for them, and currently working for them, while engaging with their students.

**Conclusion.** All 12 participants agreed that their trial and error experiences allowed them to develop their respective management styles in the classroom. These perspectives also share the common theme of having to learn their trade by trial and error to get the experiences they now have, all while being successful in the classroom. The participants shared “Alotta trial and error” and “I learned by trial and error” to demonstrated the significance of learning their management craft and all the rites of passages of being a successful classroom teacher through the experiences of their individual trials and errors over the years.

**Student Connections**

Discussing management of the classroom, all participants shared various ideas about what worked for them based on their experiences and making use of trial and error scenarios over the years, however, stories across these next 4 participants shared some commonalities for keeping the space organized and everyone remaining on task to be productive; it was also very interesting to hear how viciously strict they were with themselves. What emerged from the data and what became very clear through the conversations, is that there was a very high level of respect for their individual crafts, and an even higher respect for their students. With one quarter of the participants sharing such strong and deep convictions regarding how they felt about themselves as professionals, and the expectations they set for their students, a standard of excellence was personified.
Each teacher presented in the descriptions of themselves and in their classroom management styles high levels of expectations for everyone within their learning environment. In these ways, this was how they made connections to their students. Jabari-Thomas is a 12-year veteran in the classroom and shares the struggles with which identity should be presented each day with his students. “I think the educator in me, that I fight with, within myself is worried about the end product. So, I go back and forth. I would ultimately state that my management style is loose and collaborative.” It was very clear that Jabari-Thomas holds himself in high regards as a professional in both his craft and as the facilitator of education with his students. He declares his dedication to his students as well as his dedication to the craft of teaching. It is because of this internal turmoil that Jabari-Thomas allows there to be a looser management of the classroom and a more collaborative approach to including the voices of his students. This seems to allow him the ability to find success in himself as the teacher and success in his students as the facilitator, without so much focus on one style of his own management over the other. This also provided the platform for extracting the best performances from his students and a happy medium in his management of those students. This further allowed for him to connect with his students.

When describing her experiences in the classroom with management, Mindy, an instructional faculty member in the district for 16 years presents an alternative lens to management since her classroom was located in a “non-traditional classroom setting”. The experience of Defensive Classroom Management gives another view on how teachers in different classrooms manage their students. She begins to share “I guess with Physical Education in general, we have to look at everything…we have to be aware of our surroundings because we’re constantly moving. I am always in front of it…kinda like when you’re driving…always on the
defensive. You can always see ahead of the situation, and you can always see something going on. I try to put out small fires by trying to prevent things from happening. I try to be more proactive than reactive in my approach.” In this way, Mindy’s connections with her students begins with ensuring their safety in the classroom arena, just as much as Jabari-Thomas extends his connections through giving students a little more autonomy to be a part of the decision-making process in the classroom. Mindy goes on to say “If you don’t have classroom management, nothing’s being taught, nothing’s being learned. You’re spending so much time managing students in the class, it’s very difficult to teach anything—that’s if you don’t have classroom management. If you do have classroom management, you are putting yourself in an environment for education to happen and for learning to happen.” Allowing herself to be proactive but also tactful enough in managing the classroom where instruction is still taking place, while extending freedoms in her classroom to her students shows another way of connecting with them.

In both styles and approaches, the effectiveness of promoting a style that connects to their students that rests on their experiences over the years provided a solid foundation for success in their respective arenas. Although very different in approach, each style was equally effective in managing the respective classroom.

Wanda began her teaching career in another school district and another state all together, and felt her preparations were solidified through her educational training with the use of various techniques. With 13 years of instructional experience and teaching in one of the largest departments in the building, her story shares her experience.

On the high school level, building reoire with students is something that helps you in the classroom management because if you’ve taken the time to get to know
them, and you’ve shared about yourself; sometimes that can be a positive reinforcement with the students. Students will say ‘oh, I like her’ or ‘let me do the work for her’ and this will breed positive outcomes. I share a little bit about myself, I get the students to share a little bit about themselves, and I have been pretty fortunate in the classroom.

The notion of building rapport and getting to know your student comes up multiple times in Wanda’s shared experiences throughout this chapter. The use of best practices from formal training and relationship building through communicating with students helped her management in the classroom reinforce positive interactions with students. It seems that the relationship building strategies to foster positive learning experiences with her content area helped to re-enforce her classroom management style. It also seemed that her style navigates more towards a democratic environment where everyone has a voice to share in the community of the classroom. Although very different from the last two styles in Mindy and Jabari-Thomas, Wanda’s style is just as effective in her realm. Each of the three participants, all with very different styles, were still able to manage their classrooms from those experiences they honed over the many years of trial and errors prior to their current successes in the classroom and connecting to their students in their own way.

The last lens in this section comes from Terry. Having taught at all levels of education from Pre-School through high school and currently part-time with some college level classes, her span of 20 years of experience in this one building alone, she has seen many changes move across the continuum of classroom management. In her view, Terry posits:

It’s consistency for me…my rules are very simple. They are stated on the first day. I tell my students that my rules are few, which is Respect, to be Honest and
not lie, and to take Responsibility for your actions, and pretty much…Consistency—be consistent and put in our best effort. My consistency for those rules and it’s easy for the kids to say ‘she doesn’t want that’…There are choices you make in life and there are consequences. Overall, misbehaviors and classroom management, you kinda have to handle it yourself.

It is quite hard to dismiss the plethora of lived experiences in the classroom from Terry. Having taught across all grade levels, in both an administrative role and now in the classroom, as well as in the post graduate venue, these experiences were valuable to share. Especially, when research posits that a lack of consistency is one of the many reasons for disruptions in any environment. Terry’s experiences are also very valuable for both new and veteran members of the learning community and could potentially be lucrative in supporting the needs for transforming the climate and culture of the building altogether.

The 4 participants in this section of Theme 1 have very different management styles, granted they all are in agreeance with one common element—keeping their students centered on the classroom expectations supported by their management styles. The manner in which they do this varies greatly, but it was their collective experiences over the years that grants them the advantage of being successful in their respective spaces.

They all seemed to agree that every student having a voice in the learning environment tells students that they matter in that space. Followed by developing some common rules that are consistent, democratic, and mutually respectful so they build positive connections with students was highly important. Additionally, it was clear that adolescence is a very experimental time in student life, so being proactive and progressive in managing the learning environment’s physical space is vital to keeping students in safe learning arenas. And finally, providing the added touch
of relationships has tied these teachers to their students in a way that learning can take place. Although the styles and approaches to doing this work were very different, the management of their classrooms promoted high expectations for student success and student engagement, and student exclusion seemed virtually null.

**Conclusion.** This sub-theme regarding teacher classroom management styles is vitally important to the upcoming themes. Standing alone, it presents how drastically different the management styles varied in the participant’s and the goal of producing safe environments for students to learn and the instructional staff to teach still remained a focal point. The importance of this will be shared in the upcoming themes and the interconnections necessary to reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom. However, being able to manage the environment is key to providing the necessary arena for learning to occur.

The participants shared various phrases and verbal language in managing their learning environments. Many of the items listed in Table 12 below share the different pieces of ‘choice language’ shared during the interviews. Although significant in their individual standing, collectively they mean for a very strong compilation of positive language or ideas that could be shared at this high school. This list, of course is not complete by any means, but a strong beginning in driving the conversation amongst adults to support each other in making meaningful connections or enhancing what is already working in their classrooms.

The table below summarizes the participants’ perspectives linking back to the research question or the theoretical frameworks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Links to Theoretical Frameworks: Relational Cultural Theory</th>
<th>Links to the Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can’t treat every student the same; they are individual people</td>
<td>Trial and Error (was mentioned most often)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning who your students are and knowing how to engage them</td>
<td>Being proactive</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development and education training and preparation</td>
<td>Use of a variety of strategies and techniques such as: building rapport with students; getting to know them; using positive reinforcements when students are doing well; hand claps for attention; tally marks on board; praise in public and scold in private; mutually share personal stories to build connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praise students in public and scold in private</td>
<td>Experiences over the years (mentioned by all)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-on-1 conversations with students</td>
<td>Being prepared through differentiating lessons to keep students engaged and organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to students</td>
<td>Controlling the environment and remaining focused on teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual respect in communication and balancing soft enough to listen with strong enough to lead</td>
<td>Consistent and simple rules; Respect, Honesty, and Truth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Allow students to speak through their frustrations to validate their feelings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gotta learn to balance the dynamics to set the tone in the classroom for enhancing the climate; can get softer, but you cannot get harder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of humor in the classroom to connect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparations: organization of the lesson and managing; organization of the physical space; something to do on arrival, productivity on arrival; greeting students on arrival</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Summary.** The participants’ differences in managerial style was very important in this theme. No one professional has all the key elements necessary to suggest one platform to address students. It is in the variety of collaborative efforts that bring success. These teachers’ experiences provided a great deal of information to forward for recommendations. It is in the compilation of all their strategies that promotes the greatest suggestion. The proactive and progressive management of physical space given by Mindy, paired with the consistency of expectations in the learning environment that is respectful, honest, and responsible to build trust and relationships given by Terry, fosters the rapport building and self-management in the
classroom promoted by Wanda. These factors combined with a collaborative and democratically loose style shared by Jabari-Thomas, could potentially provide the makings of an environment where discipline referrals altogether are extinguished.

All of these perspectives, all developed through their trial and error experiences over the years, have a common thread that links back to the theoretical framework of making connections to the students and genuinely communicating expectations in a manner that was respectful and mutually beneficial to each member of the learning environment. There was also a connection to the research question and the theme itself. Preventing misbehaviors and managing your classroom are pivotal points in reducing exclusionary discipline from the classroom, as shared by these participants.

Overall, these differences in management styles to make connections provided a common theme that all participants shared in their respective classrooms. Safe, secure, and nurturing classroom management was made possible by the connections they made with their students. The two sub-themes are instrumental in sharing the lived experiences of the participants which provides one piece of the puzzle to reducing exclusionary discipline from the classroom. Making connections with students is paramount and interdependent with managing the classroom to ensure teaching and learning is taking place. The next section discusses connections at great depth. Let’s now turn to Theme 2: Connections.

**Theme Two: Connections**

This second theme on connections will discuss and determine if making genuine and authentic connections with students contribute to reducing exclusionary discipline referrals made by teachers. There were two guiding questions in this theme addressing the theoretical
frameworks, and from it emerged the two sub-themes—forming relationships and building connections.

Relational Cultural Theory, or RCT has two of its six main tenants being addressed in this section. Tenant one focuses on forming relationships as a basic human need in most societies, but also mutually connecting in a respectful manner so that both parties benefit from each other. The second tenant requires some vulnerabilities or risks to be taken to empathize with the other party and their perspectives in a respectful manner. This type of reciprocity would likely begin to foster some growth or relationship building on both sides. The risk aspect provides the mutual trust development necessary to begin making connections. The two subordinate themes will be discussed further in the sections below.

**Forming Relationships**

The sharing of ‘lived experiences’ breathes life into the case study. The discussion on strategies used to connect and genuinely form relationships with students at the high school first links the research question with addressing avenues that could potentially reduce referrals from the classroom. It then links with the theoretical framework by demonstrating how these teachers form mutual bonds with their students from a humanistic perspective. This collectively and naturally also links back to the theme of connections itself. The strategies are charted in the appendix for easy referral, but the detailed conversations shared by the participants are revealed here.

In this first section of Theme 2, there are four participants sharing their lived experiences with two of them sharing multiple experiences. As stated earlier, some sections will have multiple shared experiences from a few participants. This occurred naturally throughout the data and demonstrates the importance of the anecdote to its respective themes. In other words, the
anecdotes that are shared in each theme are those stories that support both the theme and sub-theme respectively. This will take place several times in this first half of the two sub-themes.

The anecdotes shared in this section begin with Francine, a 17-year certified Master Teacher in the district. Francine provides a great example as she’s forming relationships with her students using the strategy of consistency. “I think being consistent, following through with what you say…If you say to a student or the class, ‘X’ is gonna happen, then ‘X’ needs to happen for you.” Remaining true to your words is important when connecting with students because it is demonstrative for producing high levels of trustworthiness while connections are being made. Consistency anchors the conversations being had with students because they can hear and can see what you are doing on a regular basis. Further, Francine’s comment “so, connecting to them is one thing, but building on that is by just showing you’re consistent. Like, I say what I mean” helps to solidify the point of working from a humanistic perspective.

Follow-through coupled with giving directives/instruction to her students sets the tone for how her students will respond to her and what they should expect from her. She continues with “and listen, once that’s established, if I make a mistake, they don’t rip me up for it, you know what I mean, they cut me a bit of slack. It doesn’t become something they use to discredit me, it just becomes—it’s ok. Everybody’s good, we’re all good, it’s ok.” Francine exposes the two tenants of the theoretical framework in the second half of this quote. Since she has established some form of connections with her students, when she makes a mistake, her students feel comfortable enough to point out errors for corrections, without feeling intimidated by her role as the teacher. This mutual level of understanding that both the teacher and the student are humans who make mistakes all the time, permits and accepts the idea of receiving assistance from her students as a means of acknowledging responsibility for her own shortcomings as well. Having
this level of transparency allows both parties to understand they are working from the perspective of not being malicious. In fact, it is within the scope and sequence of the educative process and is mutually acceptable. She continues expressing this by sharing:

they console me too when there’s mishaps and it’s something small. It could be something as simple as me making a mistake in writing something on the board. They will correct it or say you forgot something. And I will say, ‘ooh, thank you for helping me’. And we’re all good again. Whereas, that for other people may come off as the student trying to challenge me as the teacher, and that’s not what it is at all. I feel like when you have a good relationship, even if they point that out—‘Thank you soo much for pointing that out to me. Ooh what was I thinking’… and we can just keep it moving. So, there’s support from both ends, working as human people in the same space.

There has been the continued establishment for grooming a trusting relationship in the learning process. First, students are engaged thoroughly enough to notice an error, giving credit to the structure of instruction. There usually are very little disruptions in classrooms when there is sufficient engagement in learning. Second, this part of the quote captures the essence of how to reduce referrals. In many instances where there are no connections made, a student or students pointing out such an error may be perceived as a means of embarrassing the teacher or being disrespectful to the teacher, or even disrupting instruction/learning environment. This would or could potentially be a referral for discipline. But if you have made connections with your students, and know your students well enough, this very simple correction would not be an entry point into the discipline cycle.
Wilma and her tale supports how the connections she makes with her students form into relationships across the years.

I am very tough, and I am consistent, and I follow through with everything I tell them, and I have been consistent throughout the years. The greatest thing for me is when students come back from years past, and they will come in and say ‘do you still do this?’ and the class will say ‘Yes! She does this! Did she do this for you?’ And the students will say ‘yees, she still does that!’ So, it’s just across the board, all the time, So I’m…I enjoy that, so I’ve been able to figure out a system that works for me and just continue it. And sometimes refine it, over time, if need be as the years go on.

Here, the consistency is so strong in her teaching approach that all students—past and present—can connect to her style. The expectation of what she desires from students has been established and has maintained a culture of success over the years, and all her students identify with that success. It was also very evident from her years of experiences and refining of trial and error strategies that she has a set of defined strategies and tools that have worked. In fact, they have worked so well, and success has been so evident that students can share in their successes collectively.

The passions demonstrated in other anecdotes for connecting with students also made meaningful teacher-student relationships. In talking to them, she mentions getting to know students by implementing strategies and activities. Wilma was asked “What strategies do you use to make connections with your students?” and her response was:

Humor (laughter)...it helps because everyone likes to laugh. So, uhh, sometimes it’s also my personality. I have a slightly sarcastic nature, but they like it. But they
also like that I am an equal opportunist. I don’t favor people, so it could be anyone’s day for anything. Uhm, and they also say that I’m tough and that it’s out of care for them. It’s tough love. If I didn’t say anything, that means I don’t care, so I always tell them, if I stop hounding you for something, that means that I’m not sure that it’s worth the effort and you never want that to happen. And so, you always pull them aside and talk to them about that.

As a strategy, making students feel comfortable was centered on humor. Students understanding that it’s not a personal attack against them or a means to devalue them as people. Instead, it denotes that everyone was equally susceptible to some level of public scrutiny during participation activities in the classroom, and this provided equity that was being vocalized. In this way, the levels of communication are ongoing and highly defined between the teacher and the student. These anecdotes talk about forming relationships with the students after some forms of connections are made with them.

When trying to form relationships with my students…you have to talk to them. You have to find out about them, and at the beginning of the year, I have them fill out ‘Getting To Know Yous’. I go more into just what’s your favorite color, what’s your favorite food, I ask them questions about ‘How do you feel about school?’ ‘What have you been successful?’ ‘When have you felt like you were failing?’ ‘When have you been proud about yourself?’ So, I can go back and I can look at that and ask them how they learn best. And so maybe a teaching strategy that I have or I normally don’t do, I can fit in so that at least they feel like they were listened to or heard, and they can feel like they’ll be successful in something that we do. And you just build from there.
These smaller stories allowed the students to really get to understand who their teacher is while she’s also learning about who they are. The simple practice of talking with students to gauge where they are to find the right space to make a connection is important. Wanting ALL her students to be successful in her class is golden, but finding and tailoring lessons and strategies to accomplish student growth is the essence of good teaching. Once you’ve made a connection with them as people, you can definitely design a lesson to teach them.

Tiffany is an 18-year non-instructional faculty member and concurs with her instructional counterpart, in that “the level of communication has to be very, very clear” and “sometimes the truth can be blatant and brutal, nonetheless, it has to be shared. I am going to do what is in the best interest of the student, even if it’s not always easy. There has to be some faith on both sides—that’s how you connect.” Communication is paramount and must be constant when working with students. When the levels of communications are constant it reduces the chances of miscommunications between students and teachers. Genuinely sharing information can be difficult, but nonetheless, it is vital to improving relationships and making connections that are authentic. Students will appreciate it in the long run and teachers will be able to reduce disruptions in the classroom that send students out of the learning environment.

Jabari-Thomas does an activity with his students to make connections with them called “The Learning Agreement.” “Anything that comes up, you have to establish trust. In social personal issues, there has to be a matter of trust. And honestly, I think for and with that trust, that kinda helps to manage the class. You know, we’re kinda entering this non-verbal agreement. When I first got here, I used to write it out. I used to have a Learning Agreement. In this, I literally wrote out and I would leave the last three spaces for students to write in.” In this shorter version of this particular anecdote, it is clearly evident that communications and
connections with students is essential to reducing inconsistencies and misunderstandings. Providing a platform for students to share what is important to them in the classroom allows them to take ownership in the design and making of the classroom dynamics. This will prove to be beneficial in Jabari-Thomas’s extended version of this same exercise later in this section.

So far, there has been a high level of congruency amongst the participants regarding communication and consistency being an intricate part in connecting to students. It would seem that without these initial connections with students, referrals will occur more rapidly, more often, and in higher volume. It would also seem that both instructional and non-instructional members of the staff believed that relationship building begins with connecting to students, and needs to happen well in advance before consequences can be rendered for misconduct, and even more so before formal content instruction begins, and this was also shared in Francine’s response.

Non-Instructional faculty member Jett described himself as an academic advocate for his students and works in the Guidance Department of the school. In his 11 years, his approach, as he describes it, is rather simple. He describes the manner in which he connects and make relationships with his counselees.

One thing I’ve always pride myself on in my life, even before being a professional, is being honest and non-judgmental. I know that sounds cliché, but students need to know you’re really about them. And, you know, that means showing up every day, and that doesn’t mean you’ll always do it right, but they need to feel your presence, know that they can trust you, and my main strategy is love…And I just want to be present. I wanna be…I wanna show them that if I’m
gonna say something, I’m gonna do it. And if you don’t meet me half way, I’m still gonna fight for you. So, I think they feel that I’m present.

In his story, Jett simply shares that making a difference every day is also about just showing up, being present and making an impact. If your students know you showed up for them and you’re working with them, on their behalf, and for their benefit, they know you care and hopefully you’re able to make a connection with some kids in that fashion. The student knows that someone is always advocating on their behalf, even when they themselves have taken the day off. The students can connect to your level of care because you have demonstrated it for them and to them on multiple accounts. In other words, demonstrative behaviors when working alongside students can be an instrumental part of connections in a non-instructional capacity.

**Conclusion.** This theme was centered on the genuine and authentic connections both instructional and non-instructional faculty made with their students to help them be productive in the high school. All of the participants in this section of the analysis posit that genuinely communicating with their students sets the foundation for making their connections. Talking with students, asking about how they learn best, giving them the forum to be comfortable in the presence of their peers through various activities provides a strong conduit in the promotion of inclusivity in the classrooms.

The lived experiences presented by the participants in this section also expressed how important it was for students to be able to connect to their teachers as humans, as people first. Understanding students’ perspectives has the potential of removing discipline referrals from the classroom since there was an authentic connection and relationship that has been previously established. This was most important not only because students remained in the classroom, but
there was a fostering of positive relationship building that contributed to the positive connotations of a healthy school climate.

Data consistently reveals that students who feel safe and secure in their school environment are more likely to produce strong academic outcomes while feeling some connectedness to their school and their teachers. This further promotes a positive student culture and pride in keeping the school’s spirit healthy. The second half of Theme 2 discusses the implementation of strategies used to connect with students and the detailed descriptions of those strategies.

**Strategies for Building Connections**

The discussion of activities was a very important sub-theme that emerged from the data. These collected experiences provided robust details on how authentic and genuine the participants felt about fostering relationships with their students. These activities are attached to the purpose of the theoretical framework building on mutual investments from and for both students and teachers.

The implementation of these strategies further promotes the fostering of relationship building via RCT. The risk-taking necessarily demonstrated by the participants was instrumental in providing the outcomes needed for students to commit to making those connections. This begins with Jabari-Thomas and the first insights to the activities in this lens.

The “I Am Monologue” speaks directly to mutual risk-taking by the class and the teacher as a collaborative group, but more importantly it provided the safe space to take the necessary risks to make the activity successful. There is a mutual respect for all parties in the classroom, but there is also a greater respect for the differences that are presented as a result of this activity. The passage below shares the essence of relationship building and a prominent aspect of RCT.
The connecting for me is the verbal, asking those personal questions. It’s that physical...that touching and making contact. I am blessed that I am in my workspace. This needs to happen and trust needs to be established right away before we move forward. I tell the students all the time, that we have to get kinda touchy feely here. And to let me know immediately if you are not ok with being touched. Most times they never say they’re not ok, but they are never going to say that in a room full of people anyway. So, it’s uhmmm, my yellow light comes on then. Cause we do it and then immediately I know who’s comfortable and who’s not. Immediately, the minute we start to exercise. I think I try to connect them by, again, sharing some of myself.

As a means of promoting trust in the classroom, Jabari-Thomas has also been able to gauge, through his years of experience linking back to trial and error, when and how to engage students in this exercise. Although the outcome yields positive and trusting relationships, he has to partake in the activity to ensure that students are able to trust him as well. The mutual level of engagement that was demonstrated on both ends of the educational relationship between teacher and student provided the support and foundation necessary to make the activity move forward. This level of vulnerability was transparent and both parties were equally and simultaneously subjected to it. It is in this mutuality that sparks the connections where relationship building begins.

When presented with the question of “how do you form relationships...” Jabari-Thomas elaborates with this:

There’s an activity that we call the “I AM Monologue” and I asks the students to write about anything. And backstage we have a huge mural that says “What
Happens in Theater, Stays in Theater” so they have a safe space to express themselves. And I mean over the years, you name it, they have written about it…and in the “I AM Monologue” we can NEVER ask “Is it true? I can’t ask that and they can’t ask that. They have written everything from first love, first kiss, being abused, thoughts of suicide. And I get to know them, yes. And I open up too and share with them people I have lost in my life from HIV and AIDS. So, once we share that, someone in the class will say, in a non-verbal communication—with their eyes like—me too. And that is how we connect. It’s not the I AM, it’s the WE ARE. I call it the I am to show them that we do have connections and we definitely have more similarities than differences. And this is how I begin to foster those relationships.

In this lens, Jabari-Thomas demonstrates with the students, the purpose for building trust—to build relationships, and equally important in building relationships—trust is essential. He further details that this activity was an 85-minute period activity and was anchored in seriousness and purpose. The ultimate goal is to build trust and connections with the students so they both are equally committed to the production of quality work in the classroom.

Henry’s stories encompass three anecdotes into one lens. Here, he shares those details.

I think the most important part of what I do is to get to know the students. And to think about who they are and what they, what’s going on with them. What their interests are, because if I can feed what I’m trying to teach them and connect it, rather, if I can try and connect that with what they are interested in, then it’s an easier sell, and I can move on to more of the people who find it more of a struggle. So, knowing the student is the most important thing. How do I do it? Uh,
I talk to students. And I listen to them. And I listen to them talk to one another, and try and join in the conversations, whenever I can. I also have a survey in the very beginning of the year. That seems to be about where are you going with your life, but really is about giving me an opportunity to hear about them. I stay in touch with guidance, and as I said, I talk to other teachers of the same students I have. And ask how they are doing. And I try to, if I’m having difficulty, I try to ask what successes have you had with this student? Or what do you know about what’s going on with this student? And this also extends to coaches.

The strategies or plans of action that Henry and Jabari-Thomas demonstrated showed great lengths teachers go through to support their students. The strategies that were selected seemed to only be selected during class time by the teacher because there was a need to ensure communication occurred immediately with their students. Developing an environment that ultimately makes communication a reality was respectively autonomous—but the goal was always the same. Getting to know their students and making them feel safe and comfortable was instrumental in this entire process.

The table below are strategies by the participants’ linking back to the research question first, then to the theoretical frameworks. Each strategy is identified by “RQ” or “TF” to indicate which lens was represented.

Table 13: Theme 2 – Quadrant 2 Chart: Strategies that link Theme 2 and the Research Question, then the Theoretical Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies Used to Connect to Students and Form Mutual Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ: Being involved with what they do, both in and out of the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ: Proximity in the classroom to your students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ: Proactive assessment of physical space and environment for those not in a traditional classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ: Change in tone of the environment; ex: making jokes, using humor, having conversations on current events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TF: Talking with them 1-on-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Conclusions

Having strategies to assist in connecting and forming relationships with students was very important to teachers. The amount of time taken to develop those relationships with students made it possible for the participants to engage in productive conversations when miscommunications and disagreements presented themselves. It also allowed for mutual conversations or discussion to take place when both parties were ready to engage the other respectfully. It further promoted the idea of collaboration and working through the conflict. This concept allowed concerns to be discussed and resolved without the use of discipline, referrals, or outside assistance.

This was consistent with non-instructional staff as well. Making a meaningful relationship so that genuine advocacy can take place was an important factor that emerged with
non-instructional faculty, but not enough to pattern into its own sub-theme due to the limited number of non-instructional staff members who participated in the study. Nonetheless, it was a key component across all participants that connecting with their students provided them greater access to reaching them academically and socially.

**Summary.** The sub-themes of making connections and the strategies used to make those connections were instrumental in reducing inconsistent exclusionary discipline from the classroom. Students who make genuine and authentic connections with their teachers also have increased academic success and feel more connected to their schools, thus promoting a more positive school culture and improving the school climate overall.

Being able to connect to students is essential to improving academic success and enhancing student achievement. The ability to have conversations with students and engage them in the educative process is important and vital to their success as they prepare for college and life outside of high school. These experiences have allowed teachers to make connections to students that could potentially drive instruction and foster new teaching strategies in the classroom to support their learning. Connections with students could potentially resolve miscommunications, whenever they occur, and allow both teachers and students to talk through misunderstandings fostering stronger relational bonds. This mutual respect for one another as people decreases the likelihood of discipline referrals being made from the classroom or being made at all. It further encourages shared decision-making and collaborative efforts to resolve those issues without the use of referring to an administrator, who may not have as strong of a relationship with the student simply because their daily interactions are limited.

Teachers who make genuine and authentic connections with their students know their students best. The strategies and connections they make alongside their students helps to
promote positive classroom cultures that foster long-lasting relationships and mutual bonds of respect. Both parties have a vested interest in the relationships they have developed with one another, and oftentimes wish to resolve any miscommunications amongst themselves due to the levels of respect that have been fostered. It is in this mutuality that the connections are strongest and discipline referrals are less likely to occur.

In the next theme, a discussion will be held on what happens when disruptions occur unexpectedly or escalate beyond expectations, and the strategies teachers put in place to manage them when they do.

**Theme Three: Getting to Know Your Students**

The third theme of Getting to Know Your Students moved right into the classroom setting directly challenging the RQ. There was one guiding question for this theme and from this emerged two sub-themes: No Removals and Talking with Students. The participant’s responses composed the bulk of what has been successfully strategic for these teachers.

**Reasons for Removals**

There were very specific reasons for referring students out of class as reported by both instructional and non-instructional faculty members, however a major piece of evidence was revealed, and was consistent over all 9 instructional staff members—they could not remember a time when there was a disruption in their class or incident where the student needed to be referred. The common response was “I can’t remember the last disruptions” or “I don’t have many disruptions in my space.” Either one of these phrases was reported consistently across the participants. The first phrase was reported at least twice between Mindy, Wanda, Mark, Francine, and Terry. Specifically, Mindy, Wanda, Mark, Francine, and Terry stated the first phrase 12 times and the second phrase 18 times respectively. This was discovered during the
pattern matching analysis phase of the data, and should be mentioned prior to sharing what were behaviors that did remove students. Ironically, these teachers actually removed students from the classroom based on both the state and federal mandates requiring students to be mandatorily removed from their instructional period.

A mandatory referral for removal requires school officials to remove any student who presents a danger to him/herself and/or others based on having a weapon, firearm, bomb, or any act requiring the notification of local law enforcement officers. These are the exact types of referrals for which the law was originally written. Table 14 details some of those examples.

Table 14: Chart for Mandatory Referrals for Removal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extreme and Excessive Profanity</th>
<th>Fighting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Severely cursing someone out or cursing out the teacher</td>
<td>Threats of violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm to self or others</td>
<td>Severe disrespect with intended malice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrupting the learning of other students</td>
<td>Changes in consistency of student behaviors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resource: Personal Interview with Participants, 2018; NCLB; Guns Free School Act.

It could be conceivably stated based on this law of mandatory removal, that students are NOT to be removed from class unless those elements in Table 14 are present.

Student misconduct is a normal part of adolescent development. And school official’s response is extremely important. Removing students from instruction has proven detrimental to both disciplined and non-disciplined students like. Further, the American Psychological Association and other professional organizations adamantly share that it is pedagogically unsound practice to exclude students from instruction since the short-term outcomes like truancy, discipline recidivism, and increase in school dropout rates are immediately damaging.

This sub-theme suggests that students should not be removed from the instructional classroom. The current data on student removals presents dismal outcomes that hurt student
achievement and student performance and are counterproductive to the goals of reducing exclusionary discipline of any kind.

**Conclusion.** There are very many ways of removing students from the instructional period, however, exclusionary discipline has proven to support negative outcomes for both disciplined and non-disciplined students alike. There are many professional organizations who all concur that the practice of student removal for discretionary reason is pedagogically unsound and does more harm to students in the short-term, but also has lasting effects long after the consequence has been served.

The federal government has issued various mandates in hopes of keeping public schools safe, however, the implementation of those mandates have lost their meanings regarding student removals, creating a shift in discipline practice. The laws were designed to structure the learning environment to prevent student mischievous behaviors that endangered school culture and climate. This included misconduct around drugs, guns, and possessions of those items, and the removal of students engaged in this behavior would deter other students from misbehaving. This did not occur; in fact, it made matters worse.

Over the years, keeping students’ safe by removing those who would require a mandatory removal erupted into no tolerance mandates that removed students at the discretion of school officials when necessary. This practice further emerged into the overuse and abuse of discretionary power. It is clear that removing students from the instructional period was not the intent of these laws, but it is also very clear that the practice of exclusionary discipline does not work.

The next sub-theme to be discussed are those strategies used by the participants that supported their efforts in reducing disruptions in their respective classrooms.
Talking with Students

Several of the participants shared those strategies necessary to assist them in keeping students in the classroom. In this section of the study, one of the rival propositions presents itself. A rival proposition or plausible rival is a potential oppositional perspective used to view the research question from the extreme end of a continuum. In other words, it is an idea or way of defining your most threatening example against your original proposition. In this case, the connotations of strategies used to ‘reduce exclusions’ from the classroom based on teacher referrals has a pessimistic viewpoint. Thus, the rival in this case study is centered on the language in which the RQ is presented. This will be addressed later in the chapter, and involves an alternative to the description/interpretation of the RQ. It will be discussed to some degree here for the reader to become familiar with the term and how it is situated in the findings.

Half of the participants share similar points with different stories discussing reasons why they would have a student removed from the classroom. Jett shares how a change in the consistency of the student’s behavior is a red flag that something is wrong. Henry tries to mediate disruptions when they occur with the help of a third party when communications break down. It is in this scenario he signals the call button for administrative assistance. In this way, the third party can possibly bring a certain level of neutrality to the conversation. Francine talks about having a student removed from the classroom, when their disposition or behavior takes away from the other students in the classroom. Jabari-Thomas speaks to students being removed only when they have become so belligerent and communication options have been exhausted.

These examples simply share that there are very many ways and reason for removing students from the instructional period, however, the rival proposition emerges in the notion of reversing this inconsistency. Neither of these options for removal are mandatory, but
nevertheless, student disruptive behavior must be addressed to preserve the culture and climate of the learning environment for everyone. Here, the rival proposition is the exact opposite perspective of what’s presented. In other words, the opposite proposition would be keeping students in the classroom even when disruptions are unexpected or overly excessive. In presenting a more inclusive and positive tone to support the benefits for ‘keeping students in the classroom,’ the overall language used to present the RQ must also be positive. The actual rephrasing of the RQ must be read to address strategies that keep students in the classroom verses ways to reduce removing overall.

This optimism would promote the goal of keeping students in the classroom and working through the difficult times of managing the dynamics of student behaviors than reducing ways to have them removed. In its original framing, the RQ still seems to grant the option of student removal to be warranted based on discretionary connotations from the referring teacher. Changing the perspective to options of keeping students in the classroom focuses on resolutions in the moment and bypasses the removal of students altogether. The first of these experiences to be shared is from William.

Sometimes, when I’m in the middle of instruction, I can, if I see something that they’re not supposed to be doing, i.e. a student on their cellphone, you know hiding a cell phone, during the course of my instruction, if I’m speaking to the class, I’ll say…‘You know, when we’re driving and sometimes you’ll see certain distractions like maybe a student sitting at their desk with their cell phone out, when they should be paying attention to the teacher…’ You’ll see other faces look around the room to see who I’m referring to. And that student, I won’t directly look at them, I’ll look around the class or look at another student when I say that.
So, I’m not really calling them out. But they kinda get the message. Sometimes they will hear it and you can hear them fumbling around to put the device away, and other times it may be in one ear and out the other, but the other students hear it. And this signals in the back of their mind that he’s picking people out, so I’m not going to try that…and it helps that way.

William is sharing the idea of instructing pass the student. In his strategy to re-direct the student without bringing much attention to their actions, he makes mention of the matter, but provides the student with the verbal direction of self-correction and opportunity. This gives students a chance to make the necessary adjustments in their own behaviors in a dignified manner without disrupting the instruction or sending them out, rather keeping them in class and correcting the behavior in the moment. In the second story, this is said:

If it’s in the classroom setting, I’ve even gone to points in time, when I have addressed the class, review what we are going to do for the day, and I’ll say to them ‘If it does not interest you at all, you could leave the classroom. I’m not going to report you to your administration, I’m not going to say anything to you about why you left my class, I’m giving you an opportunity to leave, if this is not what’s important to you. Every time I say that, not one student moves.

By the student staying on their own accord, the behavior is a non-verbal agreement to follow directions and not be disruptive. Or, at the very least remove the items or entity that is distracting them in the first place. The strategy of giving students the option of making their own decisions even after being told what the consequences could yield, students still refuse to leave the classroom. This demonstrates that students were somehow aware of their behaviors and wanted to make amends by refraining from continuing the behaviors to remain in class and
follow the directives of the teacher. This cannot be accomplished without making connections with students early on. This also speaks to other venues for making connections so students don’t inadvertently harm themselves. This level of communication with students promotes independence and shared decision-making strategies where students can determine for themselves how they wish to proceed when the options are presented in front of them.

Wanda has a list of re-directing techniques that she uses to reduce disruptions with her students. Here is her list.

Table 15: Wanda’s—List of Redirecting Techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes just stand next to the student who is being disruptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lightly touch the student on the shoulder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make whatever appropriate face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will ask the student to step outside the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I’ll ask a peer to talk to their friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the class is just bubbly and excited but moving towards unacceptability, I will do:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. a call and response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. clapping to re-focus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wanda has found that these strategies and techniques in her repertoire have been most productive, especially given the limited physical space in her classroom and the early reoire building that has already occurred during the early months of the school year. Further, having some strategies that do not always draw mass attention to the student and the situation allows the student to have dignity in their re-directions from the teacher. It removes the audience factor from the situation and does not disrupt the learning environment for the entire classroom.

Nonetheless, the issue is manageable and without any major disruptions on a mass level in the classroom; it also keeps the relationship between the student and the teacher mutually respectful under the stress factor.
Using his counseling hat, Frederick shares a strategy he uses to assist students with re-focusing and self-reflecting to help themselves while in class.

I try to get the student to reflect on what did they do? Something triggered them to respond, but it’s getting them to self-reflect on that…sometimes I have a student literally sit in the chair, and take out my watch, and say ‘Alright, you got 7 minutes.’ Literally think about it for 7 minutes. I’m going to check my emails, I want you to think about it for 7 minutes, and I want you to give me three things you probably could have done differently to avoid you being removed from class.

This strategy can be instrumental in supporting the instructional faculty who does not have the luxury of an office but the added stressor of having the audience of their other students ‘looking on’ to see what’s going to happen between the teacher and the student in the moment. This allows both parties a quick moment to redirect their attentions and not disrupt the instruction in class, but it also has the added benefit of keeping students in the classroom to manage the situation and mending the miscommunication(s) with each other. There can now be some direct communication between the parties when the opportunity is right at the site of disruption.

Another counseling strategy was shared by Tiffany. She has students talk about what to do when they recognize themselves physically becoming agitated and self-advocating to communicate with the teacher that they need a short break to walk out of the environment or situation causing the stressor. Having the student express, respectfully and proactively, to their teacher when they need to leave the classroom so they can gather themselves and re-focus when their emotions are running high. Self-advocacy is key in the counseling lens and when students can accomplish this in a manner that is respectful and without disruption, the respect factor increases and deeper connections can continue to fostered.
These final two strategies for non-instructional faculty deserves a little more attention because they could be implemented in the instructional capacity as well. Oftentimes, when students are disruptive and need “a moment” to gather their emotions, teachers can direct students to take a moment at the rear of the classroom or in a space where there is a little privacy and gather their thoughts, calm themselves, or simply relax until they are able to self-advocate. This allows instruction to continue in the heat of the moment, mutual respect for the individual’s personal space, and enough time to rationally think through the conflict before discipline is warranted. The key point in this arena is maintaining the respect factor between both parties, and an allowance for both parties to remove themselves from the situation and de-escalate. But the ultimate goal is to keep the student in the classroom and within the instructional environment. An allowance for separation as well as recollection before self-advocacy is an important step for both the teacher and the student because there is mutual respect for the situation that is occurring and an opportunity to rationalize the circumstance to yield a positive outcome.

**Conclusions.** All of these strategies provided guidance and support in the development of an ongoing relationships; there was a level of mutual respect for one another’s perspective in the moment. This is the growth factor in developing a mutual relationship. It promotes some vulnerability on both sides of the situation. There are positive outcomes and growth between the parties. Most importantly, the potential reduction in discipline and student referrals is pivotal in the academic success of the student and the instructional continuation for the teacher.

The ability to view the rival proposition in this theme allowed for a more productive and more positive version of communication about excluding students from the instructional period. In promoting change and fostering a climate and culture for positive connotations, it is absolutely imperative that proactive, preventive, and the void of negative promotions be
managed properly. To begin with a negative connotation to support a positive outcome is an oxymoron in the design of the campaign and may lead to more skepticism than optimism. However, beginning with a positive perspective that is likely to promote some positive feedback based on the phrasing of the RQ must be strategically calculated. It is easier to use honey to catch bees than to use sugar water. A more optimistic approach is necessary for success.

**Summary.** All participants in this theme agreed that keeping students in the classroom was a necessity. The manner and reasons for which students were being removed from the classrooms did not align with the laws written to address mandatory exclusionary discipline, but it was clearly articulated that there are some reasons for removing students when their behaviors escalated beyond expectations. Most importantly, it seemed that all participants only removed students from their respective classrooms when students did demonstrate behaviors listed in Table 14. Unfortunately, this is not the overall norm based on the school data, discipline data, and the district data reported during the duration of the field study. This is suggestive of a more intensive look at a potential longitudinal study at this site.

The consideration of a plausible rival proposition to the RQ was also instrumental in this theme. It allowed for the re-phrasing of the RQ to a more inclusive and more positive outlook for generating school wide support in addressing concerns, behaviors, and practices that disrupt learning and teaching in the building. It also suggests that viewing comprehensive strategies that keep students in the classroom as opposed to reducing ways to remove them, denotes a more optimistic perspective for supporting student academic success. It also supports the need to connect to students more genuinely and authentically while developing these strategies to encourage mutual levels of respect. Mutual levels of respect could be instrumental in the overall reduction of discipline referrals based on fostering relationships initially.
Theme Four: Inconsistencies with Communications

The current practices and behaviors used by teachers to address student discipline issues are pivotal in determining the levels and types of consistent dialogue that needs to be shared across the building. There was one guiding question for this theme, and the emerging themes were inconsistencies with communications and strategies for not sending students out.

Examining those practices and behaviors is key in addressing the climate and culture of the building to reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom and improve student academic success overall. This section’s sub-themes had two specific concerns that were mentioned several times across all twelve participants and highlights both behaviors and practices that could be examined closer. One sub-theme that directly links to the research question and the other directly to the theoretical framework respectively. Sub-theme number one—Consistency Among the Staff—was considered the ultimate issue behind many of the issues at this site. Sub-theme number two—Not Sending Students Out—became necessary to address because unsupervised students began to create other issues across the research site rather quickly. Let us discuss it next.

Inconsistencies with Communication

When asked “What do you think are behaviors or practices that will reduce student removal from the instructional period?” the most common response was consistency. There were 12 total participants in this study, of which 7 answered that consistency among the staff is the #1 issue. Henry, Tiffany, Francine, Wilma, Frederick, Wanda, and Terry all specifically stated “consistency among staff is the number one issue.” By this, reference was made to teachers picking and choosing the battles they engage with issues and circumstances that occur in the building daily.
Some teachers choose not to make a big deal about students bringing lunch into the classroom. They would say, listen, if lunch comes late, get your lunch and eat your lunch in my class because I don’t want you to miss my class. And I understand you don’t want them to miss your class. But then when students come to my class with food, and want to eat in my class, I—the rule in my class is there is no food in my class, you cannot eat in my class. And it makes me look unreasonable because their other teachers allow it.

This level of inconsistency directly contradicts what is practiced and what is being said about what is practiced. This is known by two specific theories in practice—an espoused theory of action and a theory in use (Argyris & Schon, 1974). An espoused theory of action is what the professional or the professional environment believe they are demonstrating, like being consistent in its communications with the “no eating in the classroom” when addressing student behaviors and discipline. The theory in use is what is actually happening with regards to the communications of the rule. That is, Henry is saying “No, you may not eat in my classroom” and other teachers are saying “it’s ok if you eat in my classroom”. This level of disconnect and inconsistency sends the wrong messages to both students and faculty, but ultimately it says we are not consistent with what we are saying and what we are doing.

Underscoring this reference on inconsistencies with the school rules is shared clearly in this statement by Wilma: “We’re told to do ‘X’ and then ‘Y’ is expected. Or, some people do ‘X’ and then some people do whatever they want, and then the student will say Teacher A told me that I can do that and it’s ok. That frustrates me because it seems like we’re not all on the same page—and we should be.”
There seemed to be great frustration amongst the staff regarding the expectations of behaviors for students but more so how to create a climate of compliance when there is so much non-compliance both being communicated and demonstrated across all of the adults. High levels of frustration began to make its way into the classrooms in the form of miscommunications about classroom rules, varying expectations about classroom rules, and most importantly which infractions to refer for discipline have all become consistently inconsistent. Shared next is exactly how these inconsistencies interfere with student achievement.

Tiffany speaks to overall classroom management as being inconsistent with the enforcement of rules in the building. “Understanding the student’s perspective, the rules and regulations, and know there is a certain decorum that is expected in the classroom. When students don’t meet those unspoken expectations, we then have inconsistencies followed by consequences. There are inconsistencies and it isn’t always equitable. But in all fairness, it requires people being aware.” And Frederick captures the essence of consistency with the use of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich as a metaphor.

Well, the one thing you have to do is to be very consistent in what you do. You can’t waiver. I always give this example. If you have a Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwich, right. And the peanut butter is on the top every single day. It’s the top, when you give that kid a peanut butter and jelly sandwich the next time, you can’t flip it over to the jelly side. It always has to be peanut butter on the top. That’s what worked, that’s how it’s always worked, and you gotta stay consistent. You must remain consistent.

These examples of teacher practices expose how the reduction of student removal from the instructional period could potentially be addressed. Providing some insight into how teacher
behaviors could reduce student removal revealed a pattern that participants agreed on—sending students out doesn’t work. However, consistency does work.

Consistency in the communication of expectations to both students and teachers must first be exercised before the climate and culture in this high school can begin to address student achievement on any level. This can also have a tremendous effect on student academic performance if more seat time in the classroom under the direct supervision of instruction occurs with less exclusions from the classroom. Theoretically speaking, if there is meaningful engagement in classroom instruction and students are NOT removed from the learning environment, then the student could benefit greatly from the academic instruction being supplied—with less interruptions—that will improve academic success for those students. In other words, keeping students in the classroom should improve academic achievement for students, if the instruction is effectively engaging.

**Conclusion.** In this first theme, the level of inconsistencies about what is expected and what is demonstrated in the climate of the building is directly effecting the culture of the building. These inconsistencies are also creating disruptions that are inconsistent at the classroom level and sending mixed communications across and between students, teachers, and administrators. The disconnect between the culture and climate of the building regarding its espoused practices and its theory in use practices is contributing to much of the discipline issues from the classroom. This disconnect is also contributing negatively to the potential academic success students can have in the learning environment. Reducing these miscommunications and disconnects could reverse many of the issues creating inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom.

**Strategies for Not Sending Students Out**
Removing students from the instructional period was unanimously and unequivocally the wrong thing to do based on the feedback from every single participant in this study. In addition to this point, it was made clear that one major factor that could reduce removals from the classroom is strictly logistics with the class periods being 85 minutes long for both adults and students, and Tiffany echoes this perspective. She further shares that there must be a Line Drawn in the Sand. We need to do a better job of having the adults in the classroom have a clearer understanding of behavior. And in all fairness to the teachers, I am not sure if they are given the supports to have an understanding of different stressors and be able to recognize certain behavior and then be able to de-escalate situations. And the way I understand it, [sending students out] it’s a weakening of their position and they’re giving up authority, when in fact it doesn’t have to be that way. And that’s the perception of what have we done? Not sending a student out will actually improve their relationships. You have to find a way to work together. It’s very easy to draw that line in the sand—on both sides, student and teacher. You’re not solving the problem.

Sending students out of the classroom does not make the issue(s) creating or that created the problem go away. Further, it can be shared that Tiffany believes that perhaps teachers are not even given the opportunity to understand what they don’t understand since there is little to no supports given to them to assist in addressing some of those concerns. The ability to resolve issues presumes that there is some understanding of what the issue is in the beginning. It is unclear whether or not this is the case, and oftentimes many issues are misunderstood or referred erroneously. This is highly problematic.
Mark and Terry agree almost verbatim based in their responses. According to Mark not removing a student “makes you very powerful because they [the student] know they can’t leave the classroom because they know they have to deal with you.” In the same vein, Terry states: “the student is pissed off, but now has to deal with me.” Mark continues to share that “when they act up and you send them out, they feel like they have more power than you and you can’t control them. But if they misbehave and you make them stay, they know they have to deal with it, so they have to buy in or it’s going to be a miserable year for them.” Terry also feels the same by sharing this lens: “No, you don’t get to curse me out and go somewhere. You’re going to deal with me, and look at me, you were man or woman enough to yell at me, now you’re gonna have to deal with the results, and think about it. You’re going to have to come talk to me—I’ve tried talking to you.” Frederick posits that not removing the students improves the relationship between the teacher and students. He believes sending them out is the easy way—you’re removing the student, and by removing the student they are ok with it and don’t have to deal with the teacher. “A better option would be stepping outside the classroom and into the hallway and have a conversation.”

The removal of students from the instructional period was the one thing consistently agreed upon by the staff as the one element that should not be happening in the building. This practice did not resolve the conflict that created the initial discipline referral, nor did it make clearer the expectations of the classroom or building regarding the very same issue as well.

Teachers did, however, share that keeping students in the classroom does work for several reasons. First, it forces students and teachers to deal with the issue of the consequences for student misconduct. And second, it ensures that students and teachers can resolve the issue
and move pass the conflict. The final point is to ensure that students remain on task academically by remaining in the classroom.

William and Wanda also agreed that removing the student was something they did not practice, but chose to manage the misconduct in other ways. William uses a strategy, instructing past the student, as a means of minimizing the disruption(s). “I have a really tough group, and sometimes I’ll instruct past them. Because it’s small pockets, and they may be sharing conversations with each other, and if the remaining members of the classroom are engaging me and not really focused on the side conversation, I’ll continue, and then I will address those students at the end of the lesson or before the next class period.” This supports Frederick’s comment of addressing the behavior but perhaps not in the moment.

Wanda relies on her activities from the beginning of the school year when she met with the students, such as repoire building, sit silently & collect your thoughts, and high levels of positive re-enforcements to build self-esteem and confidence after miscommunications, and finally a conversation outside the classroom to resolve the issue before calling for assistance.

**Conclusions.** All of these strategies allowed for both parties to participate in the decision-making process collaboratively. The idea of empowerment was equally distributed for fostering a positive outcome. Although the adult, ultimately and legitimately has more power between the parties, it is the idea of mutual respect as people and empathy that provides the foundation for problem-solving together. There is a need to resolve the matter more democratically with all voices being heard than to simply exercise power. Having a conversation about the miscommunication to get a better understanding reduces conflict. In other words, the connections and relationships developed early on with the student provides the pedestal for determining if referrals are necessary and/or warranted. The simple act of contemplation begins
to prevail—thinking about and determining if a referral is warranted takes precedence because the referral is then more likely to be determined by behavior and severity of behavior alone—not the emotional high in the heat of the moment or the student standing in front of the referring agent.

**Summary of Themes.** This theme presented quite a bit of information that needs to be shared with the decision makers in the building. Since communication seems to be one of the building’s major impediments for sharing information, there needs to be various venues to share information that shares the same message necessary to get the points across about building expectations. Consistency and reducing the practices and behaviors that remove students from the classroom is a multi-layered problem at this building. These are the fundamental pillars in conducting sounding communications across the building, and in its current form, is it severely damaged. These venues are so damaged that a complete disruption of the theories being practiced need to be abandoned. However, the conversations still need to be had in order to promote inclusivity and shared decision-making. Addressing this theme will be difficult and ongoing, but there needs to be some input across the entire building about how to effectively communicate the expectations to begin addressing the major issues effecting the climate and culture of the building. This needs to be addressed in a strategic manner that focuses on building relationships as well, so that all members of the school community have a vested interest in making the changes necessary for successful implementation.

In all themes, each of them provided a great deal of clarity on how the teachers’ experiences provide answers to reducing exclusionary discipline at the high school, so student remain in the classroom.
The hearty lived experiences of the participants provided a substantial number of tools and strategies which provided the underpinning in theme 1. Experiences and Trial & Error juxtaposed to Student Connections expressed a great many examples of making connections with students as people. Instructional faculty experiences at an average of 18 years between all 12 participants shares a major component that contributes to keeping students in the classroom. Strategies like simply talking with to inquire some understanding about ideas teachers can use to support them in their learning in the classroom are key factors that make students feel like the teacher genuinely cares about them. Providing an open forum for students to verbally communicate about the learning environment is just as equally as important as the teacher setting the rules in the classroom. When students can buy into how the climate of the classroom will be established, they take ownership of the environment and the learning that occurs within it. If and when there is an environment, students can remind themselves or one another about the original conversations that created their environment. Giving students an opportunity to self-correct and advocate in a manner that is responsible and respectful can only occur if there are previous conversations about what that looks like and how it will be handled if it arises. Allowing students to take a moment and gather themselves by stepping into a space that is away from the conflict or outside the classroom to cool off will only be as effective as both the teacher and the student agree it will be. Having prescribed activities early with students and reviewing them periodically will allow students to build stronger relationships that will foster some mutual respect with and for their teachers.

Students who have developed strong relationships with their teachers also have great respect for them and the environment they both occupy. Students who strongly feel their teachers care about them as people and respect them as students, tend not to disrupt that environment or
implement one of the strategies presented to them to remove themselves well before being disrespectful becomes an option. Teachers play an important role in cultivating positive culture when they take time to connect to their students. In this way, teachers and students who have developed a mutually respectful relationship that is genuine and authentic oftentimes are able to resolve their miscommunications without discipline referrals ever being considered.

This first theme extends teachers the opportunity to keep students in the classroom, thereby reducing exclusionary discipline, by making meaningful connections to their students through conversations that can be facilitated through preventative activities in the classroom during the first few weeks of meeting them. Doing this also has an added benefit of improving academic achievement as students who connect with their teachers also tend to be more engaged in classroom activities, reducing discipline referral even further.

In theme 2, making connections with students by forming relationships and building those connections through various strategies shared between both instructional and non-instructional faculty was the essence of keeping students in the classroom. Engaging in activities that promote both the adult and student taking part in the development of the outcome of the activity shows students that there was a willingness to engage in some vulnerabilities to make the activity productive. Students begin to see their teachers are “regular” people versus just an educator in the school building. Engaging in extra-curricular activities and seeing students outside the classroom arena, such as in the lunch room, outside the building, or even at a school sponsored event, students begin to understand who their teachers are as people and see them in a more relaxed or less stressful environment. This allow both teachers and students to connect to one another in a different perspective. Other interests become the focal point of conversations and a genuine connection over other topics or activities emerge.
Keeping students in class through making genuine and authentic connections reduces discipline referrals also. Teachers and students begin to connect with each other through different means outside the academic arena and authentically develop a relational bond stronger than one that would only be supported by the academic subject where they initially met. Teacher also learn other avenues in differentiating their instruction to cover broader topics to drive student led conversations/activities. Both theme 1 and theme 2 collectively re-inforce ways to keep students in the classroom, even when disruptions occur. Teachers and student who make genuine and authentic connections through a variety of both academic and non-academic activities tend to have stronger educational bonds as well as stronger relationships, thus teachers and students are both willing to work through any misunderstandings in a respectful and non-punitive manner. Students are less like to be disruptive and teachers are less like to refer students when there was mutual respect for one another as people, when they each have had an opportunity to bond with the other. The ability to form relationships and build genuine connections both inside and outside the classroom reduces student discipline referrals. Neither party would harm the other by creating a situation where disruptions would need to have a referral made. Neither party would want to place the other in such a compromising position.

Theme 3 and the discussions of talking with students to get to know your students was the common thread that link all three themes so far. Reasons for removing students from the classroom begins with a breakdown in communication. When communication was void, referrals occur more often than they would if there were fluid conversations. Referrals occur even less when connections, conversations with students, and talking with students occur more frequently and in respectful manners, which are established within the first few weeks of initially meeting your students. Both instructional and non-instructional faculty agree that talking with students
allowed for the beginnings of a connection to getting to know their students. Instructional faculty shared that this was the main factor in learning about their students—talking with them to get to know them. Teachers who know their students, know more than just academic strengths and shortcomings. They also know when their students are undergoing other stressors that come with being an adolescent in high school. There was a tendency to talk with students just to get a feel for how their day is progressing, or if the student is an athlete, how was their game or athletic participation the night before. Teachers become involved in the lives of their students outside of the classroom. In this vein, teachers are able to determine when students are outside their normal characters and can sense when their students need moments to regulate their emotions or academic breaks in the classroom to de-escalate minor crisis or education fatigue. Students also understand the same perspectives when their teachers are out of sorts as well. This level of reciprocity can only occur when relationships built on genuine and authentic connections that are respectful and mutual. Both teachers and students can help to support one another to reduce both disruptions and referrals at the classroom level. This further supports how students can remain in the classroom. Talking with students was the best way to understand and know who they are and teachers must continue to communicate with students in this manner.

In conclusion, the four themes and their respective sub-themes address keeping students in the classroom by genuinely and authentically making meaningful connections with students through conversations and activities within the first few weeks of meeting their students. These connections begin to foster stronger relationships between teacher and student when either party participates in activities or events outside the classroom, which oftentimes builds an added layer of mutual respect. With all of these components combined, discipline referrals from the
classroom become less frequent because both parties respect each other enough to converse and work through any difficulties or miscommunications to resolve their own issues when they arise.

The strategies shared by both instructional and non-instructional faculty can be very instrumental in even more reduction of discipline referrals at the classroom level through stronger communications on strategies that allow students to self-advocate when situations escalate beyond expectations, or even about larger inconsistencies in the building. Establishing lines of communications to prevent miscommunications will also help reduce referrals and keep students in the classroom.

Section 2: Similarities and Differences Between Instructional and Non-Instructional Faculty

In section 2, there was comparison and contrast made between the instructional faculty and non-instructional faculty. This was not a theme related to the data analysis, but an additional lens to discuss what each type of participant shared in their communications during the field study. This was done to examine how the perspectives from each arena could influence connections with students and support each other in those endeavors. In other words, although the roles and responsibilities in the building varies in their relationships with the students, the goals of connecting and forming relationships with students to reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom can be connected, and collaborative efforts may provide the necessary bridges to further reduce classroom removals.

Non-Instructional Faculty Perspectives

The Non-instructional faculty members made use of strategies more consistently because they were not constrained to time restrictions and curriculum. Additionally, there was no audience with other people watching interactions between adult and student when there were
miscommunications. There is the added advantage of being able to contact parents and guardians or other support resources in the moment without disruption to the learning environment, or when a crisis suddenly erupts for a student. This can be done at will and with immediacy. With less focus on instruction and curriculum and classroom dynamics, there is more focus on the student specifically and giving them strategies to cope, self-advocate, re-direct their frustrations, self-reflections, and an open-door policy emphasizing a safe space for the student as necessary.

One major connection between this group is the agreement on inequities that interfere with effective and consistent management of students and student expectations. This is evident due to the lack of effective communications between and among the building expectations as they trickle back to the classrooms with the teachers. This becomes a double edge sword that effects the non-instructional staff because often times the non-faculty member is requested in supporting the student during a crisis alongside the instructional faculty member. Moreover, there are strategies that are beneficial to share with the instructional staff member to assist their common students.

And finally, the best condition of all, according to the participants was the availability and convenience of having an office to pursue those strategies. This allows the non-instructional faculty member to de-escalate situations very easily because there was the added support of having the privacy to address many issues. Behind closed doors for students to be advised and coached through their most sensitive issues makes having the addition of an office most efficient in crisis management. This gives the student an opportunity to re-focus their energy to rationalize through their situation and come to a more productive solution. This is a win-win scenario for both the student and the faculty member.
Instructional Faculty Perspectives

The instructional faculty were more concerned about engaging students and managing their behaviors in the classroom across various dynamics such as instruction, the curriculum, the student audience itself, and behavior. Their major concerns were the inconsistencies that interfered with their ability to be effective in the classroom, such as inconsistencies with building rules and expectations, inconsistencies with classroom policies across the teaching staff, and overall communications. They were all consistent with the strategies they respectively used when making connections and forming relationships with their students inside the classroom before and while delivering the curriculum. Additionally, the teachers had strategies in place when student behaviors escalated beyond their expectations and credited the success with both the strategy and the student resolutions to their “pre-developed” relationships with those students early on. With regards to engaging students and developing and fostering strong relationships with them, what emerged was that teachers who were actively involved in school activities, extra-curricular activities, or advisors of student groups contributed their participation in those activities as being a direct benefit to getting to know their students and their students getting to know them. A result, faculty who have connected with students outside the classroom have fostered strong relational bonds. A chart in the Appendix provides a bird’s eye overview of this section. See Appendix J: Similarities & Differences.

Section 3: Themes and Coding linking back to the Research Question and Theoretical Framework

In this section, the data collected must link back to both the research question and the theoretical framework for there to be some consistency and fluidity with representing the case study, its themes, and its sub-themes. Again, this is additional information for analyzing the data
that emerged during the study, and designed to show how the themes and coding link back to the RQ and TF. This is discussed below.

**The Research Question**

The search question asks “How does examining the practices and behaviors of teachers reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom?” There were a few elements that potentially covered this question. The data began to suggest specific practices that lead to “how to keep students in the classroom” versus “reducing ways to have them removed. This data gave credence to a rival proposition with regards to the language on how the research question was phrased. The original phrasing of the research question seemed to have a more pessimistic approach to trying to address as many ways as possible to reduce the frequency of removing students, although the discretionary option of removing them was still high on the priority list if the student does not comply with teacher directives. Instead, as the communications with the participants continued, the phrasing of the question evolved into a more optimistic language of “keeping students in the classroom.” This also presented the following three items supporting a re-phrasing of the connotation of the questions to a more optimistic perspective:

1. Changing the language perception to be more optimistic was key in engaging the participants during the interview sessions;

2. Lots of data lead to re-phrasing the prompt to read “how to keep students inside the classroom” versus “ways to reduce excluding them” such as strategies and tools that could be used in the classroom as often as necessary and fostered a more collaborative relationship between students and teachers;
3. The use of a more positive angle to support new staff, resistant staff, and great for sharing new information, thus providing an easier lens for evoking collective support. Being more positive led to more positive interactions around the RQ and promoted more excitement about ways to keep students in the classroom and improve relationships.

These collective elements provide solid evidence that posits a shift in the re-phrasing of the research question overall. The research question should read: How does examining inconsistent exclusionary teacher discipline practices and behaviors keep students in the classroom? Framing in this lens invites more conversational input from various stakeholders and creates a high level of buy-in to improve climate and culture at the high school. This also fosters communication about how inconsistencies can be addressed to improve expectations at the classroom level as well as the building level.

**The Theoretical Framework**

This portion of the data collection discusses links capturing the essence of making genuine and authentic connections with students to foster mutual respectful relationships that will likely reduce discipline referrals and discipline recidivism, and ultimately improve student academic success and achievement.

The participants shared that engaging students from a personal or humanistic perspective provided more opportunities to “get to know them” because it required risks by both the teacher and the student. This was captured by participants Francine and Jabari-Thomas respectively. It was also shared that the ability to empathize with students, as shared by Mark, provided additional insights to foster mutual respect in times of miscommunication. The overall consensus
from both instructional and non-instructional faculty alike defaulted to one central element—connecting to students regardless if they are culturally different from themselves.

It seemed like an odd question to the participants when it was asked because of the cultural make-up of the building’s overall population being so highly diverse; This includes both staff members and students. In this vein, the cultural difference did not have as much of an effect on the connections, however, the racial difference seems to have more of an impact with various dynamic and social stressors. Unfortunately, this lens was far outside the scope and sequence of this study, thus possibly prompting an additional study focused on racial connections between student and faculty to reduce discipline recidivism. See Appendix K: Section 3 Links to RQ & TF.

Section 4: Summary of Chapter 4

The summary of Chapter 4 was centered on four results—two from each the research question and the theoretical framework. The two results from the data collection on the research question yields:

1. There are inconsistencies in the enforcement of rules that contribute to some of the discipline issues that occur in the classroom.
2. The implementation of strategies, classroom behavioral expectations, and consistency in positive expectations reduces exclusionary discipline from the classroom

These two results are important in this analysis because it presents the transparencies of what needs to be the focus moving forward if true change is expected to occur at the high school. It further discusses these two issues as a starting point for shared decision-making and an open conversation to bridge some of the gaps impeding academic achievement in the classroom.
Instruction in the classroom can no longer take place if we continue to remove students from the classroom—there will be more students to instruct.

The two results from the data collection on the theoretical framework yields:

1. Referrals from the classroom hurt student relationships with their teachers.

2. Authentic and genuine connections foster relationship building between students and teachers that is mutual and respectful.

It must be noted that relationships that are made genuinely and authentically are key to the development of student success and a positive school climate and culture. Relationships build on anything less than these entities is a recipe for disaster. When relationships are formed with the foundations of being honest and trusting, the need for disciplines and removals can be viewed with a true lens focusing on behaviors that led to the decision to remove the student. Here, the focus becomes the behavior, which is where the focus should be anyway. Currently, that is not where the focus is and those behaviors and practices that remove students from the instructional period need to be addressed. The element of respect must be paramount in fostering the conversations to address relationships between students and faculty. Without respect, much of everything else will not get done, and left alone relationships will not be productive.

Conclusions. The research question asks “How does examining the practices and behaviors of teachers reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom?” To begin to answer this question, some focus should be made on four major findings in this case study.

First, discipline exclusion is not just extended to students of color because 76% of the student population are students of color (Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino), and the remaining 23% (White, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian, and American Indian/Alaskan Native) were categorized as a mixture of students considered to be non-students-of-color. This finding is
significant because it rules out students being targeted for being African American or non-White Hispanics and Latinos during the discipline process. It furthers implicates that color or ethnicity may not be the sole reason for discipline referrals.

Second, discipline exclusion seemed to be the result of poor teacher-student relations. This was shared over and over again with statements from the participants indicating that “getting to know your students” and “taking a little bit more time in the beginning of the year to get to know your students” provided them additional benefits when miscommunications erupted during the school year with their students. When the teacher-student relationships are poor, and the connections and relationships between the parties have not been established, then levels of mutual respect are unclear and inconsistent. When those same miscommunications are moved to the forefront that may/may not warrant a discipline referral, then questions arise that challenge whether or not the referral is appropriately accessed. This would include discipline referrals across classrooms and which referrals are being referred for discipline. For example, if one teacher refers students for eating in class and another teacher does not, then there is something fundamentally inconsistent with the enforcement of the rule, the communications of the rule, or a high combination of both.

Third, inconsistencies with rules and regulations in the building contribute to inconsistent discipline exclusionary referrals. It is in this vein that levels of communication begin to falter as well. Poor communications about inconsistent behaviors cultivates a climate of discretionary decision-making that may create more problems than it resolves. Reducing those inconsistencies and improving communications about classroom and building expectations seems to be the main issues where teachers are voicing the greatest concerns. It would be very interesting to see if
these same inconsistencies surrounding school rules and regulations about discipline referrals would resonate as an issue if students were surveyed.

The participants all have conferred that the level of expectations across the building are not conducive to promoting an atmosphere of support, especially in the classroom. The aforementioned example about food gives light to this issue. This inconsistent practice fosters a climate of inconsistency and paints one teacher as being more unreasonable than the other. It further allows students and even teachers to determine at their own discretion which rules to follow and which rules to not follow. With regards to discipline referrals, if one teacher allows cell phones and music to be used in their classroom, outside the instructional context of the class period, and another teacher does not, the inconsistency again fosters a level of ambiguity and disconnect when discipline is implemented for one offense and one teacher and not the other. This could also contribute to poor teacher-student relationships due to high levels of inconsistencies.

Finally, expectations are not communicated well and potentially not communicated at all. Expectations seem to be very unclear, and therefore inconsistencies in expectations contribute to inconsistent referrals. In other words, because there is no fluid level of communications about what is expected within the climate (environment) and culture (behavior) of the building, there are inconsistencies in discipline referrals between classrooms, between teachers, and even between administrators. These levels of inconsistencies allow students to determine for themselves which infractions can be challenged, and teachers can determine which infractions they refer for discipline or prefer to discipline themselves. This also extends to the classroom, where certain infractions are immediate referrals while others are not. It is in the lack of communication about expectations in the building that inconsistent discipline referrals contribute
to poor teacher-student relationships, which also contribute to inconsistent exclusionary discipline overall.

**Summary.** There has been a clear picture painted about the poor levels of communication, lack of consistencies, and inconsistent discipline referrals that remove students from the classroom or create ineffective teacher behaviors and practices at the classroom level. In order to understand why students are being removed from the classroom on an inconsistent basis requires an indepth analysis of what behaviors the faculty believe they are doing as opposed to what they actually are doing. Argyris and Schon (1974) refers to this as the professional’s ability to exercise their “espoused” theories and their “theories in use”.

Theories in use are those practices and behaviors that are actually be demonstrated, like communicating the expectations surrounding, in this case, a single rule—no eating in the classroom. If the expectation or espouse theory is to ensure that no students eat in the classroom, then ALL teachers must implement and practice this rule without exceptions. The continued practice of not allowing students to eat in the classroom forms into what is called the theory in use. It is the actual practice of what the faculty at the school believes they are doing and are actually doing.

There is a disconnect and a disservice to communicating the expectations when a few teachers make an “exception” to the rule. When this is done, then the espoused theory now is what they think or should be doing, when in reality, what is actually happening is the promotion of inconsistent behaviors or practices when it comes to the rule of no eating in class. This further creates the added tension of students beginning to challenge the rule across various teachers to determine if they can “change” the rule in that class for that teacher. A recipe for inconsistent discipline referrals is directly related to allowing an exception to the rule. This also interferes
with establishing a strong climate and culture of respect for codes of conduct that are in place to keep everyone safe and secure. Eventually, what could potentially happen is the breakdown of compliance with codes of conduct that will ultimately create discipline referrals. Inconsistencies must be addressed to prevent discipline referrals on a larger scale.

Examining teacher behaviors and practices to reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom, or better yet, keep students in the classroom was the predominant lens in conducting this case study. Answering the research question “How does examining inconsistent exclusionary teacher discipline practices and behaviors keep students in the classroom?” and using both the case study method and RCT framework provided rich data from those teachers who work directly with students at the high school. Having the opportunity to listen to their experiences about the many concerns that arise while working with students in the high school, and how they manage those situations ‘in the heat of the moment’ allow their professional experiences gained over the many years of trial and error to lay the foundation about how this school can transform the climate and culture of the building into a more proactive and more nurturing learning community.

One of the first examples of how this study answered the research question are those transferrable strategies between instructional and non-instructional faculty members that support student self-advocacy during times of high emotional stress or situations, high levels of frustrations, and high levels of miscommunications between students and teachers. Understanding that both instructional and non-instructional faculty members can implement strategies such as: (a) taking a walk to de-escalate; (b) respectfully ask or being directed to take a moment to themselves to sit and reflect in a different space in the classroom or step outside the classroom; and (c) step outside the classroom with the teacher to discuss the issue and come to a
resolution in the moment, supports student self-advocacy. These examples can be implemented in the classroom without much disruption to classroom instruction. This also allows the student to remain in the classroom and resolve the issue(s) with the teacher in a way that is both productive and respectful, and fosters a stronger educational and relational bond with that teacher. Keeping students in the classroom by examining current practices and behaviors reveals how teachers can also improve classroom management overall. Teachers engage the opportunity to implement individualized strategies specific to their respective students as well as how to better deliver their instructional content in a way that reaches all of their students. Understanding how to gauge when students are becoming frustrated also gives the teacher an opportunity to address issues before they escalate into disciplinary matters. Knowing their students well enough to address potential concerns, gives students an opportunity to communicate concerns that best support them in the school.

Another example of addressing the research question is centered on positive and preventative strategies. Strategies that are positive and preventative in making connections with students grow relationships. Research data strongly supports the idea of teachers making stronger relational bonds with their students to reduce disciplinary issues. By reducing disciplinary issues, teachers are able to retain students in the classroom and ultimately improve academic performances.

Strategies that are both positive and preventative keeps students in the classroom and promotes building a positive school climate. This allows teachers, administrators, and students to explore opportunities that create caring classrooms and a stronger school connectedness. Practices and behaviors that include students in the educational process are in the best interest of students, but also in the best interest of the school climate and culture. The strategies presented in
this study in being preventative in growing relationships with student answers the research question as well. Stronger relationships between teachers and students, that are genuine and authentic are felt by both parties and are equally respected by both parties. These types of relationships more often result in a conversation to resolve and work through misunderstanding(s) as opposed to a discipline referral from the classroom.

All the participants in this study provided clear insights on other logistically concerns that create and contribute to many of the larger issues that occur in the classroom. Inconsistencies surrounding rules in the building about issues such as eating in the classroom also promotes inconsistencies across classroom teachers in the manner of enforcement of the rules. The lack of communication about how this rule is to be addressed or enforced creates another layer that becomes problematic at the classroom level and leads to exclusionary discipline. Determining which rules and regulations to enforce at the building level and which rules and regulation are permissible at the classroom level will reduce inconsistencies. Clear communications about which rules are not negotiable keeps students within the instructional atmosphere. Students will be aware of which rules are taboo and non-negotiable throughout the building. This also allow teachers to develop their own classroom management climates in alignment with the larger building rules, and again communications are clear from administration to the classroom and further to the student and cultivates an overall positive culture for the building.

In matters where students and teachers are at odds on how to manage behavioral issues that escalate and disrupt classroom instruction, especially for students who fall under the Individuals with Disabilities Act or IDEA, professional development must be considered. Teachers are not always sure of how to handle discipline issues for students who have special
education needs. At the high school level, providing teachers with tools to understand what and how student experience various situations can keep students in the classroom.

Understanding the scope of needs for the student population in the building’s learning environment gives teachers and administrators an opportunity to converse about the best way to meet the needs of specific student populations through ongoing professional development opportunities throughout the school year. For example, teachers who are aware of how to handle students who are classified as ED (emotionally disturbed) should have some basic strategies on how identify certain triggers in order to support the student(s) in their classrooms. This would also keep students in their classrooms understanding that a student’s specific behavior could be a manifestation of their disability and can re-direct them in a manner that does not disrupt the class instruction, allow the student to de-escalate, and further strengthen the teacher-student relationship.

Overall, ongoing communications and conversations with participants in this case study allowed very rich and dense expressions of their lived experiences to reveal how both instructional and non-instructional faculty manage their respective students in both academic and non-academic arenas. Their abilities to develop early relationships with their students provided them with strategies that could be implemented immediately if their students demonstrated behavioral issues later on in the school year. These early connections also promoted positive classroom climates for instructional staff members and stronger communications in strategy implementation for non-instructional staff members. Early connections with students also allowed teachers to keep students in the classroom and resolve many discretionary discipline referrals—those referrals that are based on the subjective perspective of the adult making the referral. The early connections with students gave teachers the opportunity to create stronger
relational bonds with their students and provided more insight on how to carefully plan instruction in the classroom to engage students in the educative process. This engagement led to less classroom management issues relating to discipline.

Strategically, non-instructional faculty were able to assist students in tools that allow them to self-advocate and de-escalate matters without disrupting classroom instruction or damaging their relationships with their teachers. Students were able to resolve many of their own issues directly with their teachers and teachers were able to implement those tools as necessary to help support those students whenever the need would arise.

Keeping students in the classroom require consistent communication that is genuine and authentic with and between all members of the building. Developing and nurturing strong relationships begin with making connections with students, and these connections also must be genuine and authentic. When all members of the building’s learning community realize that genuine and authentic relationship building will ultimately foster a mutuality of respect that is equally beneficial to both adults and students, academic achievement will be the residual outcome. This case study was the best conduit for bridging the experiences of the participants with the needs of addressing some of the major concerns impeding the cultivation of a stronger climate and culture at the high school.

*Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications for Practice* will lead the reader to an understanding on how the researcher came to the findings conclusions. There will also be some discussion on how this study aligns with the current discourse on exclusionary discipline in the education profession, and what the researcher plans to do with this data at the research site. Future suggestions regarding this case study will also be discussed.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to explore relationship building to further reduce exclusionary discipline practices and improve classroom management skills to ultimately increase student academic success and improve overall school climate and culture. It also examined teacher-student relationships in an effort to reduce the inconsistent exclusionary discipline practices that remove many of its African American students from the instructional environment. The findings in this study revealed that student removal was not specifically effecting African American students because more than 75% of the student population is African American or of African American decent. In this way, if discipline requires a student to be removed from class, it simply cannot be equated to the student being African American or of African American decent, if more than half the population falls under this category. To do so would flaw the study. The findings did reveal that student removal was negatively affecting all students across all demographic categories. The overall goal of this case study was to examine how to eliminate inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom that removes students from instruction, decrease discipline recidivism, and minimize poor educational outcomes.

As a way of examining the research question, the researcher used one framework to guide this study. Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), a life continuum theoretical model that posits its founding principles on the context of human growth through their relationships with others, is mostly practiced in therapeutic counseling (Hammer, Crethar, & Cannon, 2016). RCT’s emphasis on relationships and how they are constructed within the social context provides the backdrop for exploring the intersectionalities of an individual person’s many identities; It is vital
to understanding that individuals bring with them numerous and overlapping identities and characteristics and one’s individual identity reflects these convergences.

There were four themes and eight sub-themes that emerged from the data collections process. Those themes were:

*Table 15: Recap of Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: Management Styles</th>
<th>Sub-Theme 1: Experiences and Trial &amp; Error</th>
<th>Sub-Theme 2: Student Connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Connections</td>
<td>Sub-Theme 1: Forming Relationships</td>
<td>Sub-Theme 2: Building Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Getting to Know Your Students</td>
<td>Sub-Theme 1: Reasons for Removal</td>
<td>Sub-Theme 2: Talking with Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Inconsistencies</td>
<td>Sub-Theme 1: Inconsistencies with communications</td>
<td>Sub-Theme 2: Strategies for Not Sending Students Out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the RCT framework to determine if genuine and authentic relationships are being formed between teachers and students to reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom was implemented through consistent and ongoing communications in several interview processes over an extended period of time with the participants.

Each section of this chapter was compiled based on the findings from the fieldwork and how they link back to the research question, the theoretical framework, and/or both; the findings shared how they are situated within the current literature on exclusionary discipline, as well as with much of the current data available stating that exclusionary discipline does not work. A discussion on the findings from the data analysis will be shared followed by the implications and recommendations for future practices. These findings will be shared in greater detail during the discussions over the next sections.
There are four findings being presented. Two significant findings emerged from the participants’ interviews that link to both the research question and the theoretical frameworks. These findings are the combinations of the overall findings from all themes presented in each section that link back to the RQ or the TF. The two findings connected to the research question were:

3. There are inconsistencies in the enforcement of rules that contribute to some of the discipline issues that occur in the classroom.
4. The implementation of strategies, classroom behavioral expectations, and consistency in positive expectations reduces exclusionary discipline from the classroom.

The two findings connected the theoretical framework were:

3. Referrals from the classroom hurt student relationships with their teachers.
4. Authentic and genuine connections foster relationship building between students and teachers that is mutual and respectful.

These four findings take on the personifications of a microscope lens. The discussions on each of the findings begins with a larger perspective focusing on the building as a whole item—a macroscopic context suggesting that enforcements of larger procedures could support the reduction of those same issues in the classroom on a microscopic level. For example, the first sections of the findings focus on the results from the research question beginning with the issues at the building level, then narrowing in scope analyzing the classroom concerns. From this, there is a shift to the theoretical frameworks and a much closer look at the classroom issues presented. Within the classroom, we begin to delve deeper into the climate and culture at the classroom level, specifically addressing the intimacies of relationship building. It is here that if left unchecked, exclusionary discipline erupts at the micro-level and ultimately effecting the macro-
level of the climate and culture in the school building. In this way, the use of a microscope lens metaphorically fits for engaging this discussion. Data suggests that discipline is introduced in the classroom where the interactions between teachers and students begins (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004). Once escalated back up to the building level to be managed by a school official who addresses discipline outside the classroom, the cyclical process of discipline recidivism takes form. Let’s begin this discussion now.

**F1: There are inconsistencies in the enforcement of rules that contribute to some of the discipline issues that occur in the classroom.**

This first finding in the case study emerged as one of the major concerns contributing to classroom disruptions according to all of the participants. Inconsistencies of any kind, and more so those surrounding discipline practices and behaviors are catalytic in setting the foundation for the climate and culture of the school environment. As the participants were most concerned with inconsistencies between teachers with regards to rules such as food in the classroom, use of cell phones and ear buds unrelated to instruction, attendance issues at the classroom level, and the overall levels of inconsistencies systematically at the building level were considered some of the most troubling issues. This begins the larger macroscopic lens that takes a look at the building as a whole. When students and teachers see discrepancies in the way school rules are being enforced, it creates undercurrents of disruptions that begin in the classroom with minor infractions such as tardiness and escalates to more serious infractions such as fighting and other forms of physical harm.

School factors like: (a) the school discipline policy; (b) classroom exchanges based on the teacher’s perceptions of the student’s behaviors (which could also be based on the teacher’s perceptions of maintaining control and exercising authority in the classroom); (c) the teacher’s
ability to enact or enforce discipline in the classroom to maintain order in the learning environment; (d) and professional development that do not adequately address complex issues of developing, cultivating, and promoting a nurturing school climate and culture that makes use of prevention and early intervention can ultimately destroy school climates altogether (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Okonofua, Walston, and Eberhardt, 2016; Gonsoulin, Zablocki, and Leone, 2012).

Participants Wilma and Frederick equally share that being consistent should be the foundation for cultivating a strong climate and culture of expectations. Wilma stated “We’re told to do ‘X’ and then ‘Y’ is expected. Or, some people do ‘X’ and then some people do whatever they want, and then the student will say ‘Teacher A told me that I can do that and it’s ok.’ That frustrates me because it seems like we’re not all on the same page—and we should be.” Frederick simply stated “Well, the one thing you have to do is to be very consistent in what you do. You can’t waiver.” This is highly supportive of the discourse surrounding school discipline in the way that consistency and communication of expectations must be clearly articulated and equally practiced (Dewey, 1927; 1938; Perry, 1908; Cohen, McCabe, & Michelli, 2009).

Poor classroom management and inconsistencies in discipline policies also has a damaging effect on climate and culture. McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002) posit that teacher practices and behaviors that remove students from the instructional period compiled with poor or negative classroom management practices promote and perpetuates climates where students feel disconnected, and unsafe. More importantly, climates such as these are viewed as uncaring and non-supportive in relationships with their students, which are critical factors that negatively contribute to the academic success of the building. The educator’s effectiveness largely rests on their ability to convince students (and most times other educators in the building) that there is consistent morality their authority to make legitimate decisions. If the relationships
between teachers and students are severely undermined or damaged, then the relationships and the accomplishment of any educational goals will also be compromised. Because both actions and interactions between teachers and students are embedded within the climate of the building, within the organization as a whole, and within the consistency of discipline practices and behaviors, the communications of these expectations must (at all costs) have a solid foundation in genuine authenticity. This reinforces the value of moral decision making; this became the number one complaint and concern reported from all participants in this study. Inconsistent and ineffective communication emerged as both the catalyst and the root for much of the disciplinary concerns around rules and regulations in the building.

Consistency in school policies and the implementation of those policies, especially school discipline policies, is crucial in establishing a strong climate and culture that will support student academic success. However, it can also be concluded that if inconsistencies are present disruptions in the educative process are soon to follow. In the most recent School Discipline Consensus Report (2014) it shared more than 60 recommendations that schools can implement to re-evaluate and re-structure their approaches to school discipline, and one of the major tenants of those recommendations was establishing appropriate, collaborative school-discipline practices (Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, and Cohen, 2014; Barton & Nishioka, 2014). For this to occur, it was also recommended that teachers and students must be allowed to participate in comprehensive efforts that provide a positive school community environment that is safe, secure and nurturing, and most importantly welcoming. The US Department of Education shared in 2014 that schools who had high achieving academic success where those who also shared the common strand of creating safe and supportive climates for their schools. This was done by “schools taking deliberate steps to create positive climates and prevent student misbehavior;
ensure that clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences are in place to prevent and address misbehavior; and cultivate an expectation of continuous improvement driven by data analysis to ensure fairness and equity for all students” (p. 1). This cannot begin to take shape without the clear articulation of school vision goals that complement academic goals from shared decision making across the school community at large.

Developing a clear way in which both the school expectations on the enforcement of rules and regulations specific to climate and adherence to those expectations must be demonstrated by consistency. In the overall lens, the larger building lens, communication is pinnacle and warranted for successful implementation and positive climate growth—especially in the classroom.

F2: The implementation of strategies, classroom behavioral expectations, and consistency in positive expectations reduces exclusionary discipline from the classroom.

The second finding linking back to the results from participants answering the research question is highly situated in the current data, and is a strong founding element in promoting positive classroom environments. Gonsoulin, Zablocki, and Leone (2012) adamantly shares that providing staff development is an essential component in crafting a foundation that shapes the policy and practice in school settings. This would also include establishing fluid and open communications across all stakeholders that would foster the use of professional learning communities to reduce disruptions in the learning environment. This warrants the need for intensive professional development that is highly focused on positive behavioral expectations for the students and equitable discipline practices by the teachers. Available data shows that effective professional development can have a positive influence on student academic
achievement (Gonsoulin et al., 2012; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). The findings with respect to the research question is clearly defined by the need to promote more communication as a whole, but more of an inclusive and whole collaborative effort in the climate transformation is also cloaked in current literature (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Watson, 2001; Schein, 2010).

Another example of implementing positive school engagement to reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom would be the ongoing reviews of the discipline policy data to determine which infractions result in student removals from the classroom. This allocates more scrutiny on objective issues that are violations of the discipline policy requiring removal based on harmful intentions, versus subjective referrals that may be suggestive of professional support for the teacher in classroom management tools and strategies. An overall proactive approach to discipline and its policy for all students should promote more cultural competence particularly on issues of classroom management and teacher-student intersections. It is clear that exclusionary discipline, which are the most common responses for student misconduct, are the least effective measure to meeting the needs of students or effectively resolving the problem that gave rise to the referral in the first place. In fact, exclusionary discipline only exasperates the very problem it was intended to resolve, resulting in discipline recidivism. One further notion that should be taken when addressing discipline is the documentation of the discipline. The input of discipline referrals must also be scrutinized to ensure consistencies and accuracy for state reporting is transparent. It is very important to consider factors that leverage how data is disclosed. All of this can be monitored and streamlined through a culturally responsive and systematic approach connecting positive behaviors in school with a student rewards program.
Implementation of a positive behavioral school plan that has analyzed and purposefully scrutinized the student discipline data, promoting culturally responsive and competent tools and practices to address and then meet the needs of the student population, would potentially address the classroom issues on discipline (Cohen et al., 2009; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011; Townsend, 2000). Systematically reviewing school discipline data regularly would reduce disproportionalities as well as inconsistencies that are caused by multiple complex factors in the school environment. However, regardless of the nature of data, regular reviews could determine and evaluate of the building initiatives and transformation efforts.

The conclusions based on the findings in this section is that there needs to be clearer and fluid communications of expectations at this high school. The argument could be made that due to the poor levels of communication in the building regarding discipline referrals and student accountability at the classroom level, contributes to the inconsistent classroom discipline referrals from teachers. Henry makes it very clear when he shares this from his interview: “consistency among staff is the number one issue.” And Tiffany makes it clear bringing in both perspectives—the student and the teacher: “Understanding the student’s perspective, the rules and regulations, and know there is a certain decorum that is expected in the classroom. When students don’t meet those unspoken expectations, we then have inconsistencies followed by consequences. There are inconsistencies and it isn’t always equitable. But in all fairness, it requires people being aware.” She further supports the finding with “We need to do a better job of having the adults in the classroom have a clearer understanding of behavior. And in all fairness to the teachers, I am not sure if they are given the supports to have an understanding of different stressors and be able to recognize certain behavior and then be able to de-escalate situations.” It is in this lens that intensive professional development and PLCs (professional
learning communities) provide the conduit for improving communications, which would drive academic instruction as well as student academic achievement.

Public education is charged with the dual purpose of providing strong and effective academic instruction and developing socially competent young people. Addressing both of these interconnected and interrelated goals requires committed and well-prepared professionals in the school and directly in the classrooms. Diversity and novelty in addressing these issues must be considered on a regular basis due to ongoing society changes that effect school communities, including the transition from reactionary practice to proactive and preventative practices and behaviors.

Preventative practices promote high levels of transparencies for both students and faculty. This will require a critical evaluation on various models, however, a tiered model will work best in this high school. The school environment is one that can be heralded by the school members respectively. Tiered instruction and tiered responses to both academic and behavioral infractions have been shared through programs such as Response To Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support Programs (PBIS). They both address student academic and social outcomes using a proactive and preventative model requiring explicit training and expectations from all members in the school climate.

Expectations for both academic and behavioral practices are clearly defined and utilized in developing social tools and life skills for students. Mentoring and small group instructions are vital to their success. Professional Learning Communities are instrumental in the facilitation of these models because they allow for professional collaboration that is interdisciplinary in both style and practice (Wei et al., 2009). These teacher models provide strong leadership examples and are vanguards to effective climate policy design and restructuring. Collaborations like these
provide teachers the opportunity to share and determine what is effective and what fosters connectedness and cohesion in the building.

The findings become more refined in the next sections directly addressing the theoretical frameworks of the study. Very briefly, Relational Cultural Theory focuses on fostering genuine and authentic relationships between parties to ensure that mutual respect of one another’s perspectives can be reached. With this being said, the third and fourth findings will be discussed next.

**F3: Referrals from the classroom hurt student relationships with their teachers**

Referrals from the classroom impede teacher-student relationships. It is well documented that exclusionary discipline from the classroom does not work (USDOE & USDOJ, *Dear Colleague Letter*, 2011). Further, inconsistent referrals are damaging to the relationships between students and teachers. Teachers play a critical role in the development of school climate and culture and specifically the learning climate at the classroom level (Brown, 2014). This was demonstrated at the research site as the participants began to share their experiences about how they fostered relationships with their students. Although each participant demonstrated various styles and techniques used to connect with their students, they all yielded the same results—relationships with their students were genuinely and authentically positive, even in times of conflict. These relationships were also beneficial when students were or became disruptive in their classrooms. Because of those relationships and the energy put forth early in the school year, teachers were able to keep students in the classroom using various strategies (ie: redirection, sit & collect your thoughts, or worst-case scenario step into the hallway to quickly come to a resolution) and reduce disruptions at inception. Teachers found it most helpful to step outside into the hallway and quickly resolve the misunderstanding. This led to students remaining in the
classroom, fostering a stronger teacher-student relationship, and ultimately resolving the conflict. Further, those students improved academically.

Teachers also shared that sending students out of the classroom did not allow closure to the issue. In fact, removing students from the classroom only hurt them academically and interfered with the growth of their relationships. Consequently, the student’s behavior did not improve but worsened whenever conflicts did arise, conflicts were not resolved, or until the original matter was addressed and solved. This supports the current literature on student removals from classroom instruction (Crosnoe et al., 2004; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Delpit, 1995).

It can be concluded here that exclusionary discipline not only hurt students academically and behaviorally, but it disrupts teacher-student relationships and could potentially impact the other students in the classroom and disrupt the climate and culture of that particular learning environment.

In Coggshall, Osher, and Colombi (2013), their findings shared that school officials and its school-based personnel all play a pivotal role in reducing exclusionary discipline and discipline recidivism. Positive teacher-student relationships in schools are paramount to fostering positive academic improvement and positive social outcomes for students. This directly impacts the climate (environment) and culture (behavior) of the learning environment immensely. Positive teacher-student relationships also promote reductions in discipline recidivisms that contribute to other student issues such as school dropout, truancy, and other high-risk behaviors that could intersect with law enforcement. Additionally, teachers complain of more stress and quicker burnout (because they are doing less instructing and more disciplining in their classrooms) that leads to negative effects on students that also contributes to poor student outcomes, as well as an increase in teacher attrition, decreases in teacher morale, and very poor
teacher attendance rates. Unfortunately, exclusionary discipline practices also effect non-disciplined students as well. In other words, there is a disruption in the overall social structure of the building because it disrupts the system of social networking amongst the students and communicates various negative social messages. This disruption promotes psychological outcomes that remain well after the discipline has passed, and trickles into the classroom where the discipline and teacher-student relationship is most intimate. It would appear these same factors are occurring at the current site of this case study.

In Skiba, Arredondo, and Williams (2014), the use of exclusionary discipline increases recidivisms that could have long-term negative effects on students, but the short-term effects of exclusionary discipline have the potential of producing more immediate outcomes. Schools run the risk of negatively impacting the academic growth of its student population because students become unengaged in the social setting at the school, which impacts overall levels of student achievement. Moreover, the use of exclusionary discipline is connected to more negative student perceptions about school climate as well as school engagement. There is further data suggesting that negative school discipline may also contribute to standardized academic achievement and accountability testing (Rausch & Skiba, 2005). Overall, inconsistencies regardless of what they are, in an educational institution could have negative outcomes on climate, culture, and academic achievement of the entire building if genuine and authentic connections are not made to support student growth and success.

Another piece of literature that supports the findings for this study comes from Christie, Nelson, and Jolivette (2004) when they share that “school characteristics related to suspension rates are (a) school policies and procedures, particularly concerning discipline; (b) administrator philosophies, attitudes and behaviors; and (c) staff beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. 511).
There were many anecdotes shared by the participants based on their experiences at the research site that are directly situated within the discourse of exclusionary discipline. The findings from this study help to clarify and support what has already been shared about relationships with students and how it impacts educational outcomes and the climate and culture of schools. In this way, the findings and data collected link directly to either the research question, the theoretical frameworks, and/or both. Thus, it can clearly be stated that exclusionary discipline from the classroom not only promotes a disservice to students from an educational perspective, it also damages the relationships with their teachers producing short and long term negative outcomes.

Finally, when teachers build trusting relationships with their students in the classroom, students are more likely to be engaged in the classroom instruction there by reducing referrals from the classroom.

**F4: Authentic and genuine connections foster relationship building between students and teachers that is mutual and respectful.**

The last finding in this case study based on the participants feedback unconditionally links to the theoretical frameworks. It also is situated within the current literature that supports teacher-student relationships. The case study revealed that when teachers took additional time in the beginning of the school year and prior to introducing academic instruction, to get to know their students through establishing expectations within the learning environment, they were less likely to experience student misbehaviors that were disruptive enough to impose exclusionary discipline. In other words, student misconduct was inevitable, however, the connections made with students early on were instrumental in conflict resolution strategies with their students. Even more, teachers reported that their relationships with their students grew stronger because students felt those teachers genuinely cared about them as people. In line with this thinking,
teachers who were involved in student activities or even attended activities as spectators reported that students saw them as “regular people” and felt more comfortable in the school setting to take risks in developing connections and relationships. This is the essence of mutuality and growth fostering relationship in the RCT frameworks.

The findings also support that one of the most important experiences you will gain as a novice classroom educator will come directly from your experiences in trying new ideas, implementing new ideas and ultimately learning through trial and error—in the ‘on the job’ experiences. Because these experiences are not presented in educational texts while learning the craft in teacher preparation programs, it matters greatly that learning through trial and error is how the novice eventually becomes the experienced professional.

Activities and strategies used in the classroom setting for these teachers to make connections with their students were also very supportive of the current literature. Educators who make connections with students tend to have students who are willing to support teachers when their peers are misbehaving or causing disruptions in the classroom. This type of classroom support becomes pivotal when behaviors fall outside the guidelines of the classroom’s expectations. Students are then able to advocate alongside their peers and guide them into making decisions that are in their best interest to resolve the conflict, and still remain within the instructional environment.

Teachers learning how to use their experiences and selecting the necessary strategies to implement for certain students can only be productive and should be exercised after you have made connections with your students. More importantly, you should not implement discipline until you have tried a few strategies and tested those strategies to see if there is some gained success with it in re-directing the student misbehavior. Addressing the behavior will occur, but
determining which strategy or tool to use to address behavior cannot occur prior to the selection of that strategy simply because there is no one strategy that works for all students. Management of one’s classroom and being able to control your own learning environment is a key element in promoting a safe culture with your students. On a grander scale, when each classroom is managed appropriately, the climate of the building shifts to more learning and teaching and less discipline.

Student and teacher relationships can shape a student’s behavior in the school culture of the building, but even more in the classroom. Research consistently reveals that students who report strong and healthy relationships with their teachers demonstrate improved academic achievement, improved social and emotional growth, increased self-esteem and cognitive development (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Davis & Dupper, 2004). It is just as true in the negative sense, if student perceive a negative relationship with their teachers, they will also demonstrate poor behavioral and academic responses. Collectively, relationships between students and teachers that are positive can influence the climate and culture of the school learning environment in a positive manner. Teachers play an important role in this development because they are the closest in proximity to students on a daily basis. The fostering of mutually respectful relationships that are genuine and authentic is instrumental in cultivating a school environment focused on academic excellence and cultural competency for improving student behaviors. One of the most crucial perceptions of school rules, especially in the classroom, are that they are fair. This is critical in shaping the school climate as well.

Finally, teachers found that the levels of respect and mutual empathy for members of the classroom, even under extreme emotional conflict, remained valuable to students because of the relationships they developed along the way. Students were able to voice their concerns with
teachers respectfully and without consequence, embrace responsibility in conflict resolutions
with adults, and build stronger relationships with their teachers overall.

Exclusionary discipline from the instructional environment has proven to be detrimental
to both teachers and students alike. Teachers lose connections with students making it more
difficult to provide effective instruction for the student to achieve academic success. The student
loses valuable academic instruction and serve consequences that remove them for extended
periods of time. Either way, there are serious liabilities for both parties.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2013), The Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University (2005), and the American Psychological Association (2006) and others
(Creger & Hewitt, 2011; Sallo, 2011) adamantly posit that it is pedagogically unsound practice to
remove students from the educative process for discipline and expect students to remain on task
when they return from serving consequences. In fact, it is more acceptable to foster proactive and
preventative practices that are fostered and implemented by all means to ensure students are
being supported and guided away from exercising poor decision-making. Part of this process is
making connections with students that are respectful, trusting, and equitable so students can take
ownership in their own behaviors versus having discipline imposed on them for trying to manage
through the transition stages of adolescence.

Conclusion

The overarching question to be answered in this study is *How does examining teacher
behaviors and practices reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom?* Throughout the data
collection and analysis process, the re-phrasing of the question evolved into *How does examining
inconsistent exclusionary teacher discipline practices and behaviors keep students in the
classroom?* This wording promoted a highly positive connotation and allowed for more fluid
communication and the strategic development of keeping students in the classroom versus reducing the number of ways to keep them out or have them removed, which suggests students can be removed for almost anything so let’s work on the limited number of ways of removal. Framing the question in this manner allowed the research question to be answered directly. The focus now becomes looking at all the ways to keep students in the classroom and strategize on solutions to make “keeping them in” happen.

Answering this question using a case study allowed the researcher to speak directly with professionals who deal intimately with students and their behavioral issues daily in the classroom across all instructional and non-instructional spectrums in the building. What emerged most were the strategies used by those teachers with many years of experience that connected with students and proved to be successful in keeping students in the classroom to resolve conflicts together or “in house” versus using an administrator or “out house”. For the non-instructional faculty member, it was their ability to connect to students to assist them in making use of productive strategies that would also roster reduction in exclusionary discipline from the classroom.

The development of relationships and creating a learning environment in the classroom that was accepting and collaborative for all its members developed positive relationships between teachers and students. The strategies and tools used to make those connections with the students were seen as a means of meeting students where they were in the scope and sequence of the academic content area as well as a means to genuinely and authentically foster an environment of mutual respect between all parties. Current literature shares that students who believe their teachers have their best interest at heart tend to demonstrate higher academic success (Coggshall, Osher, & Colombi, 2013; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). Furthermore, students who perceive their teachers as caring and genuine in their relationships
with them also demonstrate academic success. In other words, students who believe that their teachers believed they were and could be academically successful, were successful.

Connections made between teachers and students that were positive and mutually respectful also played a major role in decision-making when behavioral expectations escalated. Teachers shared that they were more than willing to remove themselves from the situation before making a rash decision based on emotions because they had developed a relationship with the student(s). This supports the data on the theoretical frameworks of Relational Cultural Theory that posits mutual respect between parties based on relationships that took time to cultivate and develop. If genuine and authentic relationships are built on trust and mutual respect as human beings, when there is a disruption of this synergy, conversations can take place to peacefully and respectfully discuss and bring resolution to those issues creating the strife. There is careful consideration on behalf of the teacher to remove themselves from the infraction and develop a strategy to work on keeping the student in class versus having them removed, knowing well in advance this practice would in no way resolve the issue.

Overall, teachers can keep students in the classroom during times of miscommunication when they have taken time out to get to know their students. Just as assessment must be done prior to addressing the academic needs of the students in the classroom, the same can be said for addressing behavioral issues in the classroom as well. It is pedagogically unsound to discipline a student, let alone remove them from the instructional process, when expectations and assessments have not been taken into account, let alone discussed. Exercising some additional time to meet with students, address their concerns, discuss expectations of both their academic and behavioral output, and developing a genuine and authentic connection with them early on in the school year promotes mutual respect for them as a student but also as a person who matters to
their teacher. This allows the student to make connections to the teacher and learn what is expected by the teacher in the learning environment, as well as what happens when those expectations are not met. Thus, it is not a total surprise when the student is reprimanded for not meeting expectations, even under duress.

Enough available data stresses the importance of setting high expectations for students to ensure they are successful (Coggshall et al., 2013; Gonsoulin et al., 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Peguero & Bracy, 2014). Oftentimes student far exceed those expectations and true academic growth can be measurably attained. The next section will share how the conclusions can provide some insight and possible recommendations to the research site administrators for consideration.

**Implications for Practice**

Edgar Schein, one of the leading gurus on organizations culture, shares that all societies must develop some form of systematic way of fostering both individual and group loyalty, but vary in the ways in which they define what basic units are most important (2010). In this way, both the individual and group decisions must make sense in order for the organizational goal to be reached. Where cultures differ mostly is in the degrees by which their belief systems and behaviors about those beliefs contradict or do not align with the actual behaviors of what they actually believe. Those gaps in this high school needs to be closed. The goal of this case study was to eliminate inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom that removes students from instruction, decrease discipline recidivism, and minimize poor educational outcomes. The ability for teachers and students to genuinely make connections that are authentic depends greatly on the how teachers begin to form and foster relationships with their students.

Participants in this study reported that inconsistencies with building expectations has contributed to inconsistent referrals being made from the classroom. Communications about
building expectations and what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior by students fosters an environment where discretion in disciplining student misbehavior(s) will vary depending on the referring agent. Building documentation in this study reflected a lack of communication regarding student discipline referrals with regards to referral types. There were also some high-level inconsistencies when reporting referrals in general. The connection between student misbehavior, the student code of conduct violation, the discipline referral, and the imposing consequence for the infraction produced many layers of disconnect with regards to the implementation of expectation and the expected outcome. This practice of disconnect also could have been the genesis of the miscommunications that has evolved within the climate of the building. The high school’s inconsistent practices and behaviors in trying to enforce the student codes of conduct has produced discretionary implementation of those policies.

The administrative team and decision-making committees may want to consider articulating the vision and approaches necessary to reduce inconsistent teacher practices and behaviors to create a more equitable and culturally responsive behavioral support program that addresses student misconduct across the entire learning community. The researcher would gather a committee to assist in facilitating this venture would provide for the implementation of a PLC in action to demonstrate how PLCs work in the field. This would also provide some cohesion between procedures that are currently working and those which will be implemented. It would also give potential committee groups a chance to practice meeting in smaller unofficial PLCs to practice the concept and further improve connections between faculty and evoke more communicative opportunities. A more collaborative approach in re-evaluating current practices and behaviors would provide for relationship development, fostering positive connections between teachers and students, and an understanding of building expectations and the school
community’s role in promoting and providing a safe, secure, and nurturing educational environment for the high school overall. The researcher’s compilation of data from the PLCs and the administrative team’s compilation of data collectively would identify many of the issues that are of immediate concern to the functionality of the building. The researcher’s role in sharing the procedures of implementing an effective PLC would begin with the collaborations of both groups at the stage of data sharing. This would be most beneficial to the administrative team and ease many concerns about how to transfer the skills to the staff. The researcher will take the lead in both arenas.

The faculty would benefit from having clear expectations of their responsibilities and an understanding of their accountability in promoting an educationally sound teaching and learning environment for students. The researcher could take the lead on this part of the project, which would segue into an additional role the research plays in the building—providing professional development on classroom management strategies and tools to reduce in-class disruptions. This would provide additional supports for smaller PLCs that will develop interdepartmentally.

Students would also benefit from having clearing expectations and their responsibilities of adhering to the policies and their role in making positive decisions that enhances their connectedness to the school and culture of the building. Thus, if communicating specific expectations about not eating in classes, and the expectation is to hold students accountable by not allowing food in your classrooms, then eating will not occur in any classrooms because students now understand that eating is not allowed in classrooms, with any teachers. This level of consistency will reduce, if not remove the percentage of dean calls to classrooms based on various subjective referrals (food items and cell phones being two of the most common referrals). This can also extend to other classroom concerns such as game play and video viewing
on cell phones in the classroom, earbuds, attendance, and a variety of other classroom level matters.

One recommendation that could be made to address the aforementioned concern is to look at the logistics of having a hybrid schedule that incorporates technological use on selected days of the week or selected instructional time frames within the instructional period. This may eliminate the classroom usage, but expose other issues such as using personal devices during school related educational activities. It may further reveal opportunities in accessing resources to both hardware and software teaching supports for the building. This could be an opportunity for the high school to engage in more innovative and creative means of accessing external funding opportunities in projects such as grant writing and free or reduced consulting services to bridge technological gaps in the classroom. All of these issues will have the necessary data it needs to support the vision warranting the need move forward to improve the climate and culture of the building.

Various studies show that analyzing school discipline data can allow schools to determine how to cultivate respectful school environments (Peguero & Bracy, 2014; Ghaith, 2003; Barton & Nishioka, 2014; Englehart, 2014; USDOE & USDOJ, 2014; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; 2000). This can also assist teachers with more objective decision-making about discipline referrals with more time to reflect on the nature of the interaction between themselves and the student(s). This requires an ongoing awareness of how connections with their students are made to proactively address student misconduct that keeps students in their classrooms. Additionally, school safety or school climate teams can begin implementing more preventive and proactive strategies that address the layers of concerns in context with setting expectations for the building.
A second recommendation that could be made under this finding would be to analyze the school discipline data and collectively begin to prioritize the main issues where communications must be expressively clear. The data will support the need in advocating for more preventative and proactive strategies to support teachers during the implementation stages. A third recommendation for this finding would also suggest having a similar level of communication with the student population to hear suggestions and ideas from them to help in developing some inclusivity by inviting the students to be a part of the conversation. Open forum conversations with students has been successful in this building, and could be a bridge to implementing new procedures with student buy in if their voices are included in the decision making. The researcher can begin facilitating this process immediately with a student climate survey and data analysis once the survey is complete. Sharing the results of the survey at the open forum would provide students with immediate information to discuss. It is also the third lens in the triage of communication that is necessary for successful implementation of PLCs, expectations, and vision needed to transform the climate and culture at the high school.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

It is recommended for future research on this issue and at this research site to begin with clearer ways of consistent communication. The lack of communication has impeded major factors of success at this high school. Communication has to take place on various platforms to reach various learners in the building, which includes faculty and students alike. In this way, reaching majority of the learning environment through various avenues says that communication efforts are being considered and taken on a large scale.

The implementation of a climate survey for both students and staff asking for input about potential initiatives being planned to improve the building and its culture is a nice segue into
creating inclusivity. This should be done annually to determine if there are discrepancies in the current school year and how to proceed the following year. Looking at how relationships and connections are made across racial, ethnic, and generational boundaries could provide additional information about how and what to consider for improving the climate and culture of the building for everyone. This could provide a plethora of insight on how people in the building are feeling about what is happening in the building. It would be most advisable to also insist the survey is mandatory. It has been unproductive in the past at this high school that given an option to participate translates into no participation. A ‘forced compliance’ to complete the survey will provide both pros and cons about what is being done in the high school. Ultimately, the results will yield that you get participation and comments regardless.

Additionally, the creation of a vision plan to be presented to the school community provides the foundational platform that will give credence to the follow up actions the administrative team would implement to facilitate transforming the climate and culture at the high school. A recommended reading to support the administrative in this transformation would be Michael Fullan’s (2011) *Change Leader: Learning to do what matters most*. This book will not have all the answers to the high school’s concerns, but it does provide a descriptive blueprint that gives educational leaders a caveat lens into how to articulate their vision for change to improve and/or enhance communicative ways in fostering support for the respective vision plan, which will ultimately be implemented to address student achievement.

A possible research question for future considerations and extending the research of this study would be *Does race play a vital role in academic expectation of students at this high school?* Looking at race would link this study’s findings to resolutions that may be able to explain why excessive exclusionary discipline is occurring overall while controlling the race
factor. This could also shed light on how to reduce disparities controlling for ethnicity and types of discipline referrals. It should include a larger participant group that also includes students. Hearing from students is vital to shifting the culture simply because it requires shifting student behaviors as well. Cooperation from the student population is a focal point in shifting any culture and creating support. Founded on communication so all voices are heard, it is the platform that is necessary for any attempts at any successful school projects requiring any level of change.

The need for articulating a vision that includes all members and stakeholders of the school provides an overall benefit to the school’s learning environment. It would be viewed as democratic in its overall implementation that promotes and fosters shared decision-making characteristics. This is powerful in establishing the foundations for mutual relationship building. It is quite necessary for fostering genuine and authentic relationships with all those who have a vested interest in the productive advancement of the building’s overall mission. For this site, leading by example would provide a live demonstration for others to follow. The researcher will also take the lead in this area as well since she is closest to ¼ of the student population in her role as a dean. Further, in her role as the building’s anti-bullying specialist, lead investigator, and chairperson of the school safety team, communicating climate and culture expectations and data results would be ideal while working as a liaison between the faculty and staff, the administration, the students, and the Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO). Effective communication is paramount at this high school to cultivate a culture of support from all relevant stakeholders.

To begin addressing the behaviors of the students in the building, the implementation of a PBIS or RTI program should be given high consideration. Considering these types of programs or other programs similar in context for the high school demonstrates a willingness to address
many of the concerns presented by the participants, while beginning the cultivating and reconstruction of the climate and culture in the building. This could be spearheaded by one of the smaller PLCs based on the data collected from the surveys and open forums and shared between all decision makers.

Answering the research question can easily be addressed regularly through consistent analysis of school data captured in the work that monitors the climate and culture of the building. This is directly in line with the researcher’s role as the chairperson for the school safety team and as a dean. Preventative and proactive procedures juxtaposed a student rewards program can easily accomplish the needs of mining discipline data as well as areas of improvement that addresses student discipline overall. Resolving the issues associated with inconsistent exclusionary discipline in a fluid manner that is equitable and non-punitive to students will develop stronger bonds in the building, and especially in the classroom. This is necessary for keeping students in the classroom throughout the development of genuine and authentic teacher student relationships.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher practices and behaviors that would not only reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline referrals from the classroom, but will ultimately keep students in the classroom even during times when miscommunication became disruptive. In this study, the participant voices and the building’s documentation were instrumental in sharing the lived experiences both teachers and students were exposed to at the high school. The researcher found that the data addressing student discipline and the behaviors and practices used to make a determination about discipline referrals were inconsistent with the individual practices and behaviors of teachers respectively. The researcher also found that building expectations were
very inconsistent with classroom expectations respectively. It is due to the inconsistencies in
expectations, practices, and behaviors that contributed to excessive teacher discipline referrals
from the classroom.

The Relational Cultural Theory was instrumental in providing a foundation for beginning
to address some of the relational impediments that reduce connections between teachers and
students. Professional Learning Communities and intensive professional development on cultural
responsiveness and strategies needs to be promoted in this school. Best practices that foster
genuine and authentic relationships that result in mutually respectful bonding are some of the
basic tenants of this theory and are vital to addressing discipline at this school. It is dire that all
these components be made a high priority in the cultivation of a new climate and culture at this
school. The implementation of a positive school behavioral plan or student rewards program that
incorporates tenants of RCT should be the first consideration for promoting a positive building
climate and student culture, and only after establishing a platform to more fluid communication.

A significant contribution to the literature is the examination of exclusionary discipline
using a relational counseling perspective. An exploration of teacher student relationships using a
relational counseling lens would provide strategies and tools on how teachers and students can
collaborate on making unique connections that would resolve school discipline issues in an
educational setting.

Addressing many of the issues that are impeding the success of the climate and culture of
this school setting overall, must begin with how to communicate. There needs to be clearer forms
of communicating building expectations from the administration to the teachers and ultimately to
the students in a manner that is culturally sensitive, equitable, and positive to create the support
necessary to implement potential programs to monitor the climate and culture in the long-term.

Any actions that undermines this effort will be for not.
Appendix A: Pro-Social vs. Non-Social Existence

Note: This chart represents the comparisons between Pro-Social and Non-Social elements that contribute to healthy and unhealthy coexistences in the larger social context.

**Sense of Self vs. Sense of Mutuality**

*(Separate Self) vs. (Mutuality)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western Civilization Ideology</th>
<th>Relational-Cultural Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualized; cultivation of Self</td>
<td>Whole; relational building between people, groups, humans in various entities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Preservation</td>
<td>Move from independence to interdependence between human entities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfishness of Human Behavior</td>
<td>Uses Self-Development as a means to bring and contribute to mutuality and contributing to the relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete independence and over-emphasis on self-development and hyper behavior for success</td>
<td>“Simultaneous need for self and others”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(McCauley, 2016, p. 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disconnection in relationships leads to more disconnection and sometimes escalates to violence</td>
<td>Disconnections are opportunities to reconnect stronger promoting increase in more positive relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and Structure inequities are status quo</td>
<td>Gives voice to marginalized groups within power structures and societal injustices to remove status quo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appenlix B: Interview Protocol

Topic: Reducing Exclusionary Discipline from the Classroom

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer: Lottie M. Watson
Interviewee #:
Ask permission to begin recording. (Turn on recorder)

Introduction
As you know, I am in my final phase of my doctoral program and your help today will aid me in completing this journey, so I want to thank you for your time. This research project focuses on what teacher behaviors or practices that will reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom. The hope is that this research can be used to help future teachers with classroom management, limit exclusions from the instructional process, and improve teacher-student relationships to reduce discipline recidivism.

First, I want to emphasize that all of my participants will remain anonymous, and that your participation is completely voluntary. If you don’t mind, I would like to review the consent form with you before we begin.

[Review and sign NEU Consent Forms]

Thank you. I have a few more administrative items to discuss before we begin. Since your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audiotape our conversation today so I can replay it after to analyze. Is that okay? Also, I will have a professional transcriptionist to transcribe the interviews. The transcriptionist will receive the audio labeled by a pseudonym, meaning they will never know your name to maintain confidentiality. Once the audio recording is transcribed, I will email you a copy for your review. Is that okay? Finally, I will forward you a copy of my overall findings soliciting your comments or corrections. How does that work for you?

I have planned for this interview to last no longer than 60-90 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. Therefore, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete the line of questioning. Additionally, there may be times where I may prompt you to go deeper in your explanations. Do you have any questions before we start?

Awesome. Let’s begin.
I am now going to ask you questions focused on the topic of the study, exploring your perspectives on teacher discipline practices and behaviors that remove students from the classroom.

I  Can you tell me a little bit about your educational background and teaching experience?
   a. How many years have you been teaching?
   b. What grade levels have you taught?
   c. What was your major in your undergraduate and graduate programs?
   d. What is the best aspect of teaching?
   e. What is the most stressful aspect of teaching?

II  Can you tell me about your classroom management experience?
    a. How did you learn how to prevent misbehaviors?
    b. What are your views on your own classroom management?

III  Can you talk to me about your connection to your students?
    a. What strategies do you use to make connections with your students?
    b. How do you form relationships with your students?
    c. What behaviors do you refer students for removal from your classes?
    d. What do you do to authentically connect with your students?
    e. How do you connect with students to engage them to participate in your classes?

IV  What happens in your classroom when students are disruptive?
    a. What strategies do you or have you implemented to reduce disruptions in your classroom?
    b. What strategies do you implement when disruptions escalate beyond your expectations within your classroom?
    c. Can you share strategies you use to connect to students that involve them in managing their own disruptions to reduce removal from your classroom?

V  Talk to me about students being removed from your classroom/instructional period?
    a. What do you think are behaviors or practices that will reduce student removal from the instructional period?
    b. How does not sending students out impact your relationship with them?
    c. What strategies do you use that allow you to connect to your students and allow you to reduce referrals in your classroom?

VI  Can you describe a time when you have made referrals for student removal from your classroom period?
   a. Can you tell me about your relationship with that student?
   b. Can you describe the relationship with you and that student before the referral, and then after the referral?
c. Can you describe the relationship between you and that student now and how it impacts your instructional time with them?

IX. Can you describe for me what type of referrals you most often make from your classroom?

   a. Can you describe for me some interactions between you and your students that will reduce the number of referrals from your classroom?
   b. Can you describe for me a strategy you can implement that will reduce the number of referrals you make from your classroom?
   c. Can you describe the interaction between you and your students as a result of the referral? Or as a result of your interaction with them?

X. Would you say that you provide clear, fluid communication about the behavioral expectations in your classroom prior to academic instruction for the class?

   a. would you say you provide this instruction for behavioral expectations each class period?
   b. would you say you provide this instruction for behavioral expectations each day?
   c. how do you make connections with your students when behavioral expectations are not met?
   d. How do your students make connections with you when expectations are not met?
   e. How do you both agree to connect when expectations are not being met on either side?

XI. Talk to me about how you relate to students?

   a. How do you authentically connect with your students?
   b. How do you begin developing relationships with your students?
   c. How do you connect to students who are from different cultural backgrounds from yourself?
   d. Can you describe how you would connect to a student, knowing the student is from a different culture than your own?
   e. What advice would you share or strategy you would suggest to best handle a student misbehavior issue, where the student has a different cultural background from your own?
   f. How does not sending a student out of your classroom for a discipline referral support your relationship with that student?
   g. How does keep that student in the classroom support your relationship with that student?

Thank you for your cooperation and participation in this interview. Just a reminder, your responses will be tied to a pseudonym and therefore your identity will be confidential.

If I come across a need to ask any follow-up questions, which would most likely only be the case if I felt clarification were needed in regard to one of your responses, would it be all right for me to contact you? Would you prefer I contact you via email or telephone?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for your participation in this study!
Appendix C: Informed Consent Forms

Name of Investigator: Lottie M. Watson
Title of Project: Reducing Exclusionary Discipline from the Classroom

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
I am inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the research will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to decide, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
I am asking you to take part in this study because you have direct communications with students and your insight could provide relevant information that could provide recommendations to share at the end of this study.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to explore relationship building to further reduce exclusionary discipline practices and behaviors to improve the climate and culture of the learning environment. It will also examine teacher-student relationships in an effort to reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline practices that remove African American students from the instructional environment.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in 2 interviews. The first interview will be 45-60 minutes at a convenient time for you. The second interview will be a traditional pen-to-paper response for at least 15 minutes. Once the first interview is completed, it will be transcribed and you will be asked to review the information to confirm that is accurately represents your responses. You will be given an opportunity to approve or to make corrections or clarify any confusion that you notice. The second interview will also be shared to clarify accuracy of the information being shared.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
Risks to participating in this study are minimal and unlikely. Participants may feel uncomfortable sharing personal stories related to their experiences and you are not obligated to share if you do not wish.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the information learned from this study may help create a stronger climate and culture in the learning environment.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researcher on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being part of this study. You will be asked to select a pseudonym, which will be used throughout the study as opposed to your real name. Audio files and transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer and locked in a file cabinet. The researcher is the only one with the key and can access this information. After the data is analyzed, these data will be deleted permanently.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question(s). Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a participant.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Kimberly Nolan (k.noln@neu.edu) or Dr. Karne Reiss Medwed (k.reissmedwed@neu.edu).

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about our rights in this study, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel:617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?
No payment will be provided for participation.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
It will not cost you anything for participating.

Is there anything else I need to know?
You must be 18 years or older to give consent to participate. Only adults will be asked to participate in this study.

___________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part

______________________________
Date
Printed name of person above

______________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the Participant above and obtained consent

Date

______________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix D: Future Consent Form

Consent Form for Future Considerations of Data

Do you give permission for the researcher to contact you regarding this study and future and/or follow-up research pertaining to this study?

Yes _________  No __________

If you answered “yes” to the above prompt, you are providing consent to contact you in the future regarding this study and any follow-up studies, up to 3 years after the conclusion of this study. Please give your consent by signing this agreement below.

Signature of person giving consent _____________________

Name of person giving consent _____________________

Date: __________
Appendix E: Recruitment Letter with Survey Link

Topic: Reducing Exclusionary Discipline for the Classroom

As part of a dissertation study, the research (Lottie M. Watson) is conducting a case study at Teaneck High School to explore teacher behaviors and practices that will reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom.

Your participation in this initial survey will be used to recruit voluntary participation for the faculty and staff members at the high school. If you so choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete two (2) interview sessions throughout the entire study project timeline. Your identity will remain anonymous throughout the entire study and all data collected during this study will remain confidential. Participants who choose to participate in the study will not be aware of other participants engaging in the study. It is also mandatory that participants not reveal their participation in the study to ensure the confidentiality and security of all materials.

Please click on the link below to answer a few quick questions in a short survey.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Lottie M. Watson

Survey Link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YJWS983
Appendix F: Survey Link Prompts

Please answer the following questions below.

1. Are you a full-time faculty or staff member employed in the Teaneck Public Schools?
   Yes_____ No_____

2. Please select the capacity in which you serve the Teaneck Public Schools.
   a. Teacher____
   b. Guidance Counselor____
   c. Administration____
      1. Dean____
      2. Assistant Principal____
      3. Principal____
   4. Child Study Team Member
      a. School Psychologist____
      b. LCD-T____
      c. Case Manager____
      d. Specialist____
      e. Other____

3. If you are a teacher, how many years of instructional experience do you have?
   1. 0-4 years____
   2. 5-11 years____
   3. 12-15 years____
   4. 15+ years____
5. If you are a non-instructional employee, how many years of experience do you have interacting with students?

1. 0-5 years _____
2. 6-14 years _____
3. 15-25 years _____
4. 26+ years _____

6. What is your opinion on exclusionary discipline from the classroom?

7. Would you be interested in participating in this study?
   Yes ____          No ____

8. May the researcher contact you if you answered “yes” to the above questions?
   Yes ____          No ____

   Please provide your contact information (email or phone number)

   __________________________

Thank you for participating.
Appendix G: Overview of Case Study

Section A: Overview of the Case Study

The goal of this descriptive case study is to examine teacher behaviors and practices that will reduce exclusionary discipline from the classroom. A closer look at how teachers develop authentic relationships with their students to reduce exclusionary discipline referrals in general. An additional component looks at two sets of rival concerns surrounding the study’s goal. One rival perspective views the practices and behaviors that contribute to exclusionary discipline with the second rival examining whether or not relationship building contributes to exclusionary discipline practices and behaviors. There were three readings relevant to the case study. Those readings are:


Two of the readings focused on the disciplinary aspects and the third provided clarity on the Relational Cultural Theory, which provided the frameworks guiding this study.

The research question proposed in this study is “How can examining teacher behaviors and practices reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline from the classroom? As a major
proposition to this study, a strong focus on teacher-student relationship building and how or why it may or may not contribute to reducing exclusionary discipline will also be previewed.

The role of the protocol guiding the case study is provocative in describing the “lived experiences” of the participants willing to share their stories. Additionally, the protocol provides a segue for the professionals to freely express their concerns as well as provide suggestions or recommendations to support the overall climate and culture of the work site for improvement.

The participants in this study were both the instructional and non-instructional faculty members of the research site. The research setting is a 9-12 comprehensive high school.

Section B: Data Collection Procedures

The author of this study is the contact person doing the fieldwork as well. The contact person is Ms. Lottie M. Watson, who is a doctoral student at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts.

The data collection process in this descriptive case study was multi-faceted. There was an initial survey used to engage participants. Those selected voluntarily participated signed the Implied Consent Forms, and participated in two interviews. The first interview used an open-ended protocol for participants to share as much of their experiences as possible. It was approximately 60 minutes in length. The second interview lasted only 20 minutes and completed the member-checking phase of communication with the participants prior to finalizing the overall data collection process. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, each participant was assigned a case name and case number. It must be duly noted that following IRB approval a two-week gap followed awaiting approval from the school district’s board of education before beginning the study. This allowed the researcher to plan a very
detailed and fine-tuned schedule of interviews that really allowed for a quick turnaround in data analysis and preparation of findings and implications. Once the interview was completed and the survey data was collected, analysis began collectively. Pre-analysis on a daily basis as the interviews were professionally and self-transcribed also allowed re-writing and editing to be a constant flow of new ideas and re-directions based on the data being presented. Several editing sessions occurred regularly on a weekly basis and provided the ability for the researcher to finalize ideas, provide more polished drafts, and precise reporting.

The data that was expected to be collected was mainly about relationship building between teachers and students. How teachers authentically develop relationships with their students is a main staple in the expectations of the study. Additional insights gave way to suggestions and strategies to share during the implications and recommendations in the summary of the study.

Overall, the role of the participants was to provide the conduit for sharing suggestions to the administrative staff about what the instructional staff is experiencing. This also promoted a higher level of communication and inclusivity on many of the decision-making opportunities made available. Much of the documentation reviewed in the field were archival, state reported data on student suspensions, building data on attendance and employee statistics, student data on ethnic and racial breakdowns of student population, and discipline data documented over the last few years to current 2018 school year. Preparation prior to the fieldwork is centered on planning. Pre-planning of the interviews, paperwork, and areas of privacy for the participants was key. The preparation of documents and themes from the “actual interview session” was fine-tuned after a few weeks of practicing with family members, plush toys, and colleagues for verbal fluidness. Refining the communication efforts that compounded with each practice interview allowed the actual interview process to be so much smoother and relatively quick.
Due to the two-week gap waiting for board approval, the ability to move quickly through the interviews and data analysis was effortless. Finally, re-reading relevant data, methodology, and the Yin (2018) text on case study methods and approaches provided a clearer “mental map” about how to move once approval had been granted.

Protecting the human subjects was vitally important to this study. Following the NIH (National Institutes of Health) Office of Extramural Research, providing informed consent forms and all disclosures about the study allow the participants to make informed decisions about their voluntary participation. Providing aliases and case numbers to each participant allowed another layer of protection and confidentiality for the human subjects. As per the university’s IRB protocol, requirements for these steps and procedures was also documented in the completion of an online course entitled “Protecting Human Research Participants” by accessing the following URL: http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php

In the consent process, a copy of the consent form used for the study needed to be submitted. There were pre-designed templates that were acceptable for use. An example of the consent form used for this study can be viewed in the Appendix C: Informed Consent Form.

**Section C: Protocol Questions**

The data collected here was to hear about how teachers genuinely make connections with their students, and if they do this authentically to get to know who their students are as people.

The first set of questions were designed to understand how teachers prevented misbehaviors in their classrooms, their own views on their management styles, and how they made connections with their students and what strategies, if applicable, did they use.

- How did you learn how to prevent misbehaviors?
- What are your views on your own classroom management?
• What strategies do you use to make connections with students with your students?
• How do you form relationships with your students?
• How do you authentically connect with your students?

The next set of questions were designed to address implementing those strategies when students become disruptive in class and how is it managed.

• What strategies do you implement and have implemented when disruptions escalate beyond your expectations within your classroom?

These last sets of questions discuss the type of referrals that are likely to remove a student from the instructional environment.

• Can you describe for me what type or types of referrals you most often make from your classroom?
• Can you describe for me a strategy you can implement that will reduce the number of referrals you make from your classroom?
• What do you think are behaviors or practices that will reduce student removal from the instructional period?

Each set of questions in each of the sections have evidence stemming from the anecdotes, short stories, and answers to the protocol from the participants. It is important to understand the answers from the participants and transcribe their stories appropriately so that the strategies and tools that have been successful for the participants can be shared in the recommendations to the building site administrations. Additionally, it could be an element that could be cross-referenced with the comments from the survey and any relevant research that supports those recommendations.
The goal to keep in mind here is to ensure that the experiences from the participants are shared with the administration to support a change in teacher practices and behaviors to improve student achievement. In other words, the overall practice for “keeping students in the classroom” should be normatively standardized and any removals from class should be clearly expressed as mandatory and have exhausted and/or violated all strategies that have been identified by the building’s policy as “successful practices” at keeping students in the classroom.

**Section D: Tentative Outline for Case Study**

This section of the report details how the case was tentatively outlined. The audience for this case study is the academic community, in particularly the university dissertation committee and then potentially the administrative stakeholders of the research site and its board of education members. The style of communication used for this report is through academic reporting, which is the normative reporting for the dissertation committee. This outline will follow the same methodology used for presenting to the dissertation committee and will take critical care with presenting its research and how it was conducted. There will be the use of vignettes to describe and tell the ‘lived experiences’ of the participants. Additional documents such as the initial survey, interviews, research site data, state documents, and district data will be used to link the research question and research data and forward recommendations back to the administrative teams at the building and their school district.
Appendix H: Theme 1-Q1C2

Theme 1 - Quadrant 1 - Chart 2: List of Non-Instructional versus Instructional Perspectives on Student Concerns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Instructional:</th>
<th>Instructional:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priorities/Strategies in mind when students arrive to them</td>
<td>Initial Activities that established connections and foster mutual relationship building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing safe spaces</td>
<td>“I Am” Monologue presented by Jabari-Thomas#10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being proactive</td>
<td>“The Rules” presented by Wilma#13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The Survey” presented by Henry #14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening-active listening techniques</td>
<td>“Ice Breakers” shared by Wanda #5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>“The Learning Agreement” presented by Jabari-Thomas#10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Phone Bag” presented by William#4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing trusting relationships</td>
<td>“Getting to Know You” presented by Mindy#2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This is just a small compilation and each strategy from the Non-Instructional Faculty was balanced with an activity from the Instructional Faculty.
Appendix I: Quadrant Visual Map

**Visual Map: Organization of the Themes and Its Lived Experience**

### Quadrant 1: Theme 1 - Management Styles (Links to the Research Question)

**GQ1:** How did you learn how to prevent misbehaviors?
- **Mark#1:** “You Can’t Treat Everyone the Same”
- **Frederick#7:** “Not in the Moment”
- **Wilma#13:** “I Learned”
- **Henry#14:** “Balancing It All”
- **Francine#8:** “Four Examples”

**GQ2:** What are your views on your own classroom management?
- **Jabari-Thomas#10:** “Hard with Myself”
- **Mindy#2:** “Defensive Classroom Management”
- **Wanda#5:** “Being Fortunate”
- **Terry #3:** “Consistency”

### Quadrant 2: Theme 2 - Connections - “Lived Experiences” (Links to the Research Question - first & Theoretical Frameworks)

**GQ1:** What strategies do you use to make and authentically connect with your students?
- **Francine#8:** “Working From Your Humanity”
- **‘X’ is Going to Happen”**
- **“Support When Mistakes Happen To Me”**
- **Tiffany#12:** “Level of Communication is Very, Very Clear”

**GQ2:** How do you form relationships with your students?
- **Wilma#13:** “Do You Still Do This?”
- **“Talk To Them”**
- **“Getting To Know You”**
- **Jabari-Thomas#10:** “The Learning Agreement”
- **Jett#15:** “Being Honest & Non-Judgmental”
- **Jabari-Thomas#10:** “I AM Monologue”
- **Henry#14:** “Knowing the Student”
- **“How Do I do It?”**
- **“The Survey at the Beginning”**

### Quadrant 3: Theme 3 - Disruptions & Strategies (Links to the Research Question)

**GQ1:** What strategies do you or have you implemented to reduce disruptions in your classroom?
- **William#4:** “Hiding A Cell Phone During Instruction”
- **“Option to Leave”**
- **Frederick#7:** “7 Minutes & 3 Things”
- **Tiffany#12:** “When Feeling Agitated”
- **Wanda#5 List of Strategies for Class**
- **Jett#15:** “Change in Consistency of Behaviors”
- **Henry#14:** “Third Person”
- **Francine#8:** “Takes Away from Others”
- **Jabari-Thomas#10:** “Being Belligerent”

### Quadrant 4: Theme 4 - Removal based on Student Behaviors & Teacher Practices (Links to the Theoretical Frameworks - first & Research Question)

**GQ1:** What do you think are behaviors or practices that will reduce student removal from the instructional period?
- **Henry#14:** Consistency among Staff
- **Wilma#13:** Consistency across the building
- **Frederick#7:** “Peanut Butter & Jelly”
- **Tiffany#12:** “Line in the Sand”
- **Mark#1:** “Deal with You”
- **Terry#3:** “You Gotta Deal with Me”
- **Frederick#7:** Improves Relationships
- **William#4:** “Instructing Past the Student”
- **Wanda#5:** Ice Break Activities
## Appendix J: Similarities & Differences

_Bird’s Eye Overview of Similarities & Differences of Participants Connections to Students_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences</th>
<th>Similarities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different strategies based on role with students. Examples would be (1) No classroom audience; (2) Time constraints are limited; (3) Office Availability</td>
<td>Provide strategies to cope when communications break down. Examples would be: (1) Go for walks to decompress; (2) Go to Guidance Counselor for support; (3) Come in and vent; (4) Step into the hallways for 1-on-1 conversations; (5) Positive Reinforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for students differently because focus is not entirely on curriculum and instruction</td>
<td>Try to engage in own education to get to know the student. Examples would be: (1) “I Am Monologue” (2) Advisors of Clubs and Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support system availabilities are varied depending on needs, stressors. Examples would be (1) McKinney Vento students; (2) Medical needs; (3) Court Mandates and Legal Obligations</td>
<td>Student-Centered environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different types of connections based on the need of the student</td>
<td>Engaging them in random conversations and speaking with them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See different perspectives in supporting student. Examples would be: (1) IEP needs being enforced; (2) Amendments to academic programming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K: Section 3 Links to the RQ & TF

Flow Chart of the relationships between the RQ, TF, and the data collections.

Research Question: Original RQ: How does examining teacher behavior and practices reduce inconsistent exclusionary discipline from the classroom? The re-phased RQ: How does examining inconsistent exclusionary teacher discipline practices and behaviors keep students in the classroom?

Theoretical Framework: Relational Cultural Theory; (1) mutual empathy and empowerment are at the core of growth fostering relationships; (2) authenticity is necessary for real engagement and full participation in growth-fostering relationships can contribute to developing mutual respect.

Results: $themes emerged: (1) Management Styles; (2) Connections; (3) Disruptions & Strategies; (4) Removals Based on Student Behaviors and Teacher Practices. Two sub-Themes also emerged for each respective theme.

Themes emerged from the Open Coding in the first phased of analysis, and Axial Coding presented the details, similarities, and differences, and cultural ideologies that linked back to the RQ & TF respectively.
Appendix L: Rival Propositions

Potential Rival Propositions for Reducing Inconsistent Exclusionary Discipline at the Research Site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes in the language to address the research question.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not really a cultural but racial disconnect for disciplinary exclusion—Note that this needs to be explored separately because it is outside the scope and sequence of this study. A Potential future implication of study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two perspectives from both types of participants are being explored collectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual reason for removals from class is detailed in Table 13 on page 100 of this study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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