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Disciplinary D/discourses: Navigating and Negotiating Disciplinary Paradigms

Michael R. P. Bailey
University of South Florida

Disciplinary D/discourses: Navigating and Negotiating Disciplinary Paradigms

by

Michael R. P. Bailey

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Major Professor: Zorka Karanxha, Ed. D.
William R. Black, Ph.D.
Frederick Steier, Ph.D.
Brenda L. Walker, Ph.D., J.D.

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Dedication

To my wife, Dani. You have always been the one to balance me. You pick me up when I am at my worst and always push me to be my best. This journey has not been easy but having you as my partner and my best friend has helped me along each step of the way. My love and admiration for you cannot be expressed in a short dedication. Thank you for everything you do for me and for our family. This work would not be possible with you.

To my children, Jude and Ariya. Jude, your compassion and sense of moral justice is the type of love that can change the world. Ariya, your sharp wit and determination keep me on my toes and make me gush with pride when I look forward to what you will accomplish in life. You both challenge me every day to be a better man and I am eternally grateful for the privilege of being your dad.

To my mother Dee and my father Mike. You have taught me about unconditional love, instilled in me a tireless work ethic, and taught me that putting others first is the path towards building a better world. Thank you for being my role models, for your unwavering support, and for teaching me that love, respect, and determination make all things possible.

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Abstract

Over the past twenty-five years, in the United States, zero-tolerance policies that were initially implemented to deter gun violence and drugs in schools have expanded to include a wide range of discretionary offenses such as disrespect and defiance. As a result, many students have been denied access to educational opportunities, been excluded from their peers, and had their lives irrevocably changed due to systemic sanctioning of exclusionary practices. Educators, who are caught between competing societal demands, job expectations, and ethical beliefs about their profession are tasked with balancing the instructional and interactional components of their work in an attempt to provide support for their students. This study uses Gee's (2014) methods for discourse analysis to explore the ways in which various D/discourses related to student discipline are conceptualized and enacted in one school district. Findings include intertextual connections between broader societal Discourses related to discipline in education; issues of power and agency related to the enactment of discipline; and disconnects in the structures that are meant to support educators and students.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Would You Be Willing to Lose Your Job?

In the summer of 2015, I was sitting in a classroom at a school in Riverside School District with a group of fellow Riverside employees, a colleague from my Ph.D. cohort, and one of my professors. We had each travelled from our various offices and school buildings through flooded streets, thanks to a torrential Florida downpour, in order to meet and discuss a new initiative that two schools were volunteering to pilot. The rain and flooding could not quell our excitement as we eagerly discussed how we would transform the discipline model in Riverside. As we sat in a circle, modeling the restorative practices we hoped to implement, my professor asked the group of teachers, administrators, and academics the same question she had asked in our ethics class the year before – "what are you willing to get fired over?" I don't remember what my answer was during class, but on this day, it was clear. I would be willing to lose my job for this. I would be willing to stand firm in front of the superintendent and the board if it meant moving away from draconian disciplinary practices and focusing on building relationships, developing communities, and supporting students in becoming the best versions of themselves.

Unknowingly, that moment was also the start of this dissertation. As we worked towards implementation and studied a real-life example of systems change and equity policies, the sense of discouragement at our mounting stagnation began to feel demoralizing. I had presented to the school board and watched as board members teared up when I shared stories about the impact of our disciplinary policies on students we served. I listened to discouraged staff members who yearned for change talk about the roadblocks they continued to face. And most frustratingly, I

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saw contradictions and complications when staff members, in whom I believed, extolled the need for positive change while engaging in the same behaviors they identified as counterproductive.

I began to ask myself who we, as a district, were and wanted to be. I had given many trainings on restorative practices and sat through countless more focused on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, Trauma Informed Care, social emotional learning, and other similar paradigms. As I worked with schools throughout our district, I heard people using language from these paradigms and extoll the behavioral models at their school while simultaneously recommending out-of-school suspension for minor offenses. Although I was frustrated with the seeming contradictions, I was also curious as to the nexus of the language and behavior of adults. Were individuals using language because they thought they were supposed to say those things? Was there something preventing them from implementing practices in which they believed? Were they talking about discipline the same way with their peers as they were with others?

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which various D/discourses related to student discipline are conceptualized and enacted in one school district. Specifically, I seek to understand how the power structures through which language and action interact to create a disciplinary paradigm. In order to do so, however, it is important to first understand the context of school discipline in the United States.

The Discipline Problem in American Schools. In the United States, rates of exclusionary discipline have reached record highs. Laws that were originally intended to address guns, drugs, and school violence have become increasingly applied to non-violent, non-criminal behaviors. Although these policies are intended to create a safe learning environment there has been little evidence to confirm that such policies have a positive impact on the rates of

misbehavior in schools (Fuentes, 2011; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Regardless, policies that encourage or mandate exclusion for certain offenses continued to expand.

Rates of exclusionary discipline can be, in part attributed to the expansion of zero-tolerance policies over the past 25 years (Essex, 2004; Skiba, 2002). Zero-tolerance laws were originally part of a law enforcement framework enacted under President Regan in the 1980's as part of the War on Drugs campaign. Despite the fact that such policies were ineffective at reducing the rate of drug use among Americans (Jensen, Gerber, & Mosher, 2004) and contributed to a dramatic rise in incarceration rates, especially among poor, black males (Bobo & Thompson, 2006), these policies fit within a broader public Discourse that demanded swift action for a perceived moral crisis in the United States (Kennedy-Lewis, 2014). These policies expanded to schools via the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA) which mandated states develop discipline policies that included, at minimum, a one-year expulsion and referral to law enforcement for any student found to be in possession of a firearm on school property (Allman & Slate, 2011; Henault, 2001; Skiba, 2002). Over the next five years, zero-tolerance policies expanded drastically to include a variety of offenses such as weapons other than firearms, drugs, alcohol, fighting, profanity, insubordination, and dress-code violations (Essex, 2004; Martinez, 2009; Skiba, 2002).

Nationwide, more than 11 percent of students have received out-of-school suspension as a result of a disciplinary infraction (Losen & Martinez, 2013) with students of color (Anyon, Lechuga, Ortega, Downing, Greer, & Simmons, 2018; Carter, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2017; Monoroe, 2005), students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (Skiba, Peterson, and Williams, 1997; Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles, 1982), students who identify as LGBTQ+ (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015), and students with disabilities (Sullivan, et al., 2014) being the most

likely to face such harsh consequences. This is especially problematic since exclusion from

school is closely correlated with poor academic achievement (Perry & Morris, 2014), increased

dropout rates (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Fox, DePaoli, Ingram, & Maushard, 2014), and a higher

likelihood of social-emotional problems (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). Furthermore, the use of zero-

tolerance policies is often applied to relatively minor disciplinary issues that can become

classified as more serious criminal activities such as battery or disorderly conduct (Brown, 2006;

Hirschfield, 2008). These practices pave the way for students to enter the criminal justice system,

part of a phenomenon often referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline (Skiba et al., 2014; Wald

& Losen, 2003)

Issues of inequity and social justice are compounded by a deep philosophical divide over

the most effective way to address student discipline. There is an increasingly strong push for

discipline models predicated on preventative measures such as Positive Behavior Interventions

and Supports (PBIS) (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009; Coffey & Horner,

2012), Restorative Practices (Pavelka, 2013; Zehr, 2002), and Trauma Informed Care (Walkley

& Cox, 2013); however, there is also a vocal contingent advocating for stricter disciplinary

measures for addressing student misbehavior in the name of school safety, order, and

maintaining a productive learning environment (Ahmed-Ullah, 2014; Petrilli, 2015). These

competing paradigms are further complicated by mandates from the federal government to

reduce the use of exclusionary practices and increase the use of preventative frameworks (Sugai

& Simonsen, 2012; United States Department of Education, 2016a).

Conflicting views regarding the most appropriate manner for addressing behavioral issues

in schools is only one factor that complicates the classroom structure. Pressure related to high-

stakes assessment (Jacob, 2005), shifting classroom priorities associated with performance pay

(Harrison & Cohen-Vogel, 2012), and teacher shortages that lead to high numbers of alternatively certified and substitute teachers (Black, 2016) can all impact the implementation of a variety of student supports. Additionally, increased pushes for school choice and voucher programs may leave schools spread thin on essential resources while trying to support the neediest and most vulnerable students (Angus, 2015). These issues are further compounded by the fact that schools in the United States have become increasingly diverse with greater gaps between school and family cultures. Despite the increased diversity, the American teaching force is still overwhelmingly White, middle-class, and female (Villegas, Strom, & Lucas, 2012). Given the wide range of variables that impact teaching practices, it is unsurprising that teachers and administrators struggle to develop paradigms that meet the diverse needs of all learners. As a result, students may be pushed out of school via disciplinary measures or academic failure when they repeatedly encounter systems that are unprepared to provide adequate supports.

Despite the above-mentioned complications, educators have an obligation to develop support structures that promote the growth and development of all students. Although many studies investigate the impact of school culture (Barr, 2011; Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011) and implementation of positive and preventative behavior supports (Coffey & Horner, 2012; Lustick, 2016; Pavelka, 2013), there is a relatively small literature base that explores discourses related to school-discipline. Those studies that do explore disciplinary discourses tend to focus on subjects such as policy (Kennedy-Lewis, 2014) or discourses related to specific groups of students (Ringrose, 2011). The extant literature base does not explore the ways in which societal and professional discourses intersect with the educators responsible for supporting students to create disciplinary paradigms. This study aims to fill that gap.

Research Questions. This study examines how broad societal Discourses related to school discipline manifest in, and/or are absent from, the disciplinary Discourses of K-12 educators. Furthermore, I seek to understand how these Discourses demarcated membership of specific roles and how these roles shape and are shaped by the implementation of disciplinary practices. To do so, I analyze the ways in which various Discourses related to student discipline were conceptualized and enacted in one school district. Through investigating instances of intertextuality, localized Discourses, and discursive features, I explore the following questions:

(1) To what extent do the D/discourses in which Riverside School District staff members engage align with prevailing D/discourses in broader society related to student discipline?

(2) In what ways do Riverside School District staff members leverage and deviate from prevailing D/discourses related to student discipline to construct a disciplinary paradigm unique to the district?

(3) How do the D/discourses used by Riverside School District staff members reflect particular ways of saying, being, and doing that lead to the enactment of disciplinary practices within the school district?

Theoretical Framework

The issue of disciplining children in school inevitably leads to questions of power and authority. Who gets to make determinations about disciplinary consequences? What rights do students and parents have to object to those consequences? Who gets to decide which behaviors constitute misbehavior? Questions such as these highlight core tensions regarding the role of discipline and the purpose of schooling. During this study, I use a poststructural framework based on the work of Michel Foucault to explore how power, authority, agency, and other such topics influence language and, in turn, practices related to school discipline.

Central to the above concepts in the work of Foucault are the terms *pouvoir/savoir* and *puissance/connaissance*. Although both terms can roughly be taken to mean power/knowledge, each carries its own set of meanings and implications. *Pouvoir/savoir* generally refers to the ways in which knowledge is situated within contextualized relationships such as social institutions (Ennis, 2008). *Puissance/connaissance* is associated with the idea of legitimized knowledge (e.g., that which is taken as true in a particular field of study, profession, etc.). In both cases those with power have the ability to influence what knowledge is considered valid which, in turn, reinforces their power to make such decisions and solidifies their status as insiders (Foucault, 1972/2010). As it relates to school discipline, power/knowledge can be seen in two major ways. First, these constructs can be used to understand how some students, who have the access to knowledge and resources, are more easily able to demarcate themselves as "good students" and, in turn, access the success that reinforces their status as well-behaved, high achievers, etc. Secondly, at more pertinent to this study, the idea of power/knowledge can be used to explore the language and action of adults in order to better understand how discipline comes to be conceptualized and enacted in schools.

In addition to power/knowledge, the concept of *dispositifs* is important to this study. *Dispositifs* describe networks of interactions and social structures through which fields of power and knowledge are organized (Foucault, 1977/1995). Through such a process, *dispositifs* create normative structures that privilege certain ways of knowing, being, thinking, and acting. In the context of this study, *dispositifs* helped to inform the intertextual relationships between various levels of societal and local Discourses. As a result, this concept is important for situating power/knowledge within Riverside School District.

Methods

Through the lens of Foucault's theories, especially those concepts referenced above, one can begin to question how knowledge/power is made tangible in the disciplinary process. When considering knowledge both in terms of *savoir* (contextualized) and *connaissance* (sanctioned), the links between broad discursive formations, language-in-use, and the social institutions in which knowledge/power are manifest can make visible structures that perpetuate the extant disciplinary practices. As Gee (2014) noted, "language has meaning only in and through social practices, practices which often leave us morally complicit with harm and injustice unless we attempt to transform them" (p. 12). Through this study, I endeavor to gain a better understanding of the meaning-making components of the language used in Riverside School District and, ultimately, play a role in providing insights that may help the district transform practices that perpetuate social injustices.

During this study, I use discourse analysis through a case study design to address my research questions. Case studies provide a useful framework for investigating "a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence" (Noor, 2008, p. 1602). In this study, Riverside School District serves as a single case wherein people, policies, D/discourses, beliefs, and many other factors came together to create a disciplinary paradigm upon which people act and are enacted upon. In order to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, I examine my data using discourse analysis methods. Discourse analysis is a research paradigm that, in the broadest sense, can be used to explore "the relationship between language and context [and] the ways in which contexts help determine the full extent of what we mean or can be taken to have meant" (Gee, 2014, p. 20). Similarly, Johnstone (2008) described discourse analysis as a study that goes beyond what is simply said and accounts for structural

relationships, intent, expression, and a variety of similar factors that provide context and meaning for language. This method is useful for helping to understand how language both shapes and is shaped by the practices it describes.

Discourse analyses can examine language on a variety of levels including micro interactions in speech such as stutters, false starts, and pauses (Mautner, 2009), rhetorical devices such as face threat acts and tautologies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and contextualized approaches that examine relationships between language and social practices. For the purposes of this study, I use Gee's (2014) framework for discourse analysis. Gee's approach looks both at what he terms discourses with a little "d" (i.e., language-in-use) and Discourses with a capital "D" (i.e., language with the context, assumptions, identities, situated meanings, etc. that give it meaning). The ability to look both at contextual and interactional components of language make this framework particularly useful for my analysis since I am able to examine my data both in terms of its connection with broader societal Discourses as well as in terms of the day-to-day usage of language that is intertwined with Riverside School District's disciplinary practices. As Gee noted, discourse analysis is a

> method that can do two things beyond description: a) illuminate and provide us with evidence for our theory of the domain, a theory that helps to explain how and why language works the way it does when it is put into action; and b) contribute, in terms of understanding and intervention, to important issues and problems in some area that interests and motivates us as global citizens. (p. 12)

Role of the Researcher

It is prudent, at this juncture, to attempt to provide a degree of transparency regarding my role as a researcher in this study. I have worked in the field of education more than a decade first

as a teacher and later as district administrator before transitioning to a postsecondary institution. In my administrative positions, I been responsible for a variety of areas including developing programs for students with disabilities and English language learners; facilitating dispute resolution between parents, students, and schools; and conducting manifestation determination reviews for students with disabilities who have experienced a significant number of days and/or incidents of exclusionary discipline. It is during manifestation determination reviews for students with disabilities that I often found myself torn between the nomothetic responsibilities of my official position and the idiographic components of the ontological and epistemological views I was refining as an emerging scholar. This tension led to a great deal of professional and philosophical discomfort as I tried to navigate and reconcile the discord I was experiencing that ultimately laid the foundation for my interest in this particular line of research.

Although my professional practices were instrumental in the development of this study, there are certain issues I must acknowledge. My experiences working with schools, families, and children around the issue of discipline has left me predisposed to critically analyzing the disciplinary process. As an administrator, this served two purposes. First and foremost, I felt an obligation to both ensure students were provided the supports necessary to allow them access to a wide variety of rich educational experiences and to support schools in establishing the systems necessary to do so. Secondly, there is a pragmatic aspect to ensuring students are provided a wide range of supports and interventions due to the litigious nature of special education (Kotler, 2014). Pragmatism was often an uncomfortable bedfellow in my administrative positions as budgets, human resources, and operational concerns were part of my daily considerations, even when they were not what I would have preferred to focus my professional energy accomplishing.

These issues are not detrimental to the study; however, they do highlight the need to be conscientious of the experiential lens I bring to the data gathering and data analysis processes.

It is also important to discuss my role and relationship with Riverside School District. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I was part of a group that worked to shift the disciplinary paradigm within the district in an attempt to rely less on exclusionary practices and address issues of disproportionality within the district. During this timeframe, I was optimistic about the ability to effect meaningful change if we were able to establish a working model. As I experienced the difficulties of such a change firsthand and as my promotions within the district allowed me deeper insight into the operations, politics, and priorities of Riverside, I became increasingly discouraged about the district's ability to make meaningful change in this area without a significant paradigm shift. Such positionality is important to understand when considering the findings of this study. My analysis was undoubtedly impacted by my experiences, both positive and negative, within Riverside. Specifically, I took a critical stance on issues that impeded change and was especially conscience of the ways in which certain structures perpetuated or marginalized the power of various groups within the district.

Definition of Terms

Although many of the following terms have been addressed and/or will be described in greater detail later in this dissertation, the following definitions help to clarify certain ambiguous terms:

- Discourse (with a capital "D"): Language mediated by other factors that give it meaning such as context, assumptions, identities, situated meanings, etc.

- discourse (with a little "D"): Language-in-use such as in a conversation between two individuals.

- *Dispositifs*: This term is derived from the work of Foucault (1977/1995) and references the networks of local and historical relationships that establish fields of power and knowledge.

- Exclusionary Discipline: This term references any punitive measure that is primarily directed at removing a child from his or her assigned learning environment. This includes, but is not limited to, expulsion, out-of-school suspension, and in-school suspension.

- Identity: This term has a broad and nebulous meaning that varies significantly across and within disciplines. For the purposes of this study, I will use Gee's (2014) definition of identity due to its relationship with my analytical framework. Gee described identity as "different ways of being in the world at different times and places for different purposes" (p. 3) as opposed to its more common meanings which relate to one's core sense of being. For example, in interviewing a K-12 educator who is also a scholar, I may have to ask which of those roles that person is trying to be recognized as in that particular moment.

- *Pouvoir/savoir*: This is one of Foucault's terms for power/knowledge. Specifically, this references the ways in which power is socially situated. The power/knowledge relationship in this case is a cyclical process through which knowledge, as a discursive practice, and power continuously shape one another. This is in comparison to *Puissance/connaissance* (below).

- Power: Drawing from both Foucault (*1970/2002;* 1977/1995) and Butler (1990/2007), I will consider power to be a productive and relational force that organizes the behavior and interactions of groups and individuals in specific contexts.

- *Puissance/connaissance*: This is another Foucault term for power/knowledge. In this case, knowledge is viewed as a discipline and represents the formal knowledge that is taken as fact in any given situation or time period. This is in comparison to *pouvoir/savoir* (above).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations. One limitation of note in this study is that, at the time interviews were conducted, I was both an administrator in the district where my participants worked as well as the researcher. This is an important piece of information to disclose since my position of authority in the school district may have impacted the ways participants responded to questions and their willingness to share openly. Another limitation worth noting is that the time between conducting interviews and completing the analysis was long enough that several participants changed positions. For example, one of the teachers in this study became a school-based administrator and one of the school-based administrators became a district-based administrator. This limited the usefulness of follow-up questions since the identity of the participants (i.e., who they were attempting to be recognized as in that given moment) may have varied significantly between the interview and any potential follow-up, thus impacting the data. Finally, during this study, I was only able to engage in interviews with my participants and was not able to observe actual enactments of disciplinary practices. Since this study focuses on how D/discourses become part of the power structures that authorize certain disciplinary practices, it would have been beneficial to see those practices in action. However, due to the nature of the study and my role within the district, such observations were not feasible.

Delimitations. The most significant delimitation of this study is that the population was picked based on our relationships and history. This implies that, at least to an extent, there were

philosophical junctures that aligned our practices to a degree where we had, for the most part, advanced beyond casual acquaintances. Choosing participants in this study was difficult. Although it would have been beneficial to have participants who represented a broader cross-section of dispositions as educators, the benefit of having relationships that opened the line of communications, despite my official role, outweighed the benefit of searching out a wider range of participants who may have been less open to speaking with a senior administrator with whom they had little relationship.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Rise of Retributive Justice

Punitive disciplinary practices, such as those enacted and expanded under zero tolerance policies, have created school cultures wherein the teaching of relationship skills, self-management, and social competencies have increasingly been replaced by harsh, reactionary responses to student misbehavior. This problem has become especially pronounced over the past two decades as policies originally intended to address issues related to school violence became indiscriminately applied to a variety of non-violent infractions ranging from tardiness to disrespectful behavior (Lospennato, 2009; Skiba & Losen, 2016). Although the intent of these policies is purportedly to preserve a safe and orderly learning environment by removing those who are considered dangerous or disruptive, such practices have not been shown to have a positive impact on the rates of misbehavior in schools (Fuentes, 2011; Gregory, et. al, 2010). Instead, children, especially those of color, those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and those with disabilities, are disproportionately excluded and criminalized, ultimately "treated as utterly redundant and disposable—waste products of a society that no longer considers them of any value" (Giroux, 2012, p. 5). According to a report by the United States Department of Education (USDOE), Black and Latino students, in particular, were disproportionately at risk for being identified for special education services, being removed from the general education environment into segregated settings, and being suspended from school (USDOE, 2016b). These factors, all of which are associated with adverse outcomes for students, contribute to a broader

system in which marginalized groups of students continue to be denied equitable access to the educational opportunities afforded to them under state and federal laws.

The trend towards harsh and rigid disciplinary policies has given rise to, and/or provided increased awareness of, alternatives that focus more heavily on teaching and preventative strategies. Frameworks like Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009; Coffey & Horner, 2012), Restorative Practices (Pavelka, 2013; Zehr, 2002), and culturally responsive discipline (Lustick, 2016) offer paradigms from which one can think about student behavior and discipline from less punitive perspectives. Frameworks such as these have gained traction, in no small part, due to the mounting evidence that punitive disciplinary policies strongly correlate with a variety of negative student outcomes including lower academic achievement, increased risk of negative behavior, higher dropout rates, and higher a higher likelihood of incarceration for students who became entangled in disciplinary cycles predicated on retributive philosophies (Skiba & Losen, 2016). In response to these concerns, some schools and districts have shifted focus away from punishment as a primary vehicle for student discipline and concentrated more strongly on preventative measures that build the social emotional and citizenship competencies of students (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Gregory, Skiba, & Mediratta, 2017). The goal of these practices is to provide an environment where students can learn to work through the issues that may otherwise lead to punitive measures and ultimately, to create more responsible, socially competent young people.

This chapter explores the extant literature base in regard to prevalent trends in school disciplinary practices. First, I address the social and legal factors that have spurred the rise of zero tolerance disciplinary policies. Next, I address the consequences of the exclusionary

discipline policies that arise from zero tolerance frameworks and explore how the disproportionate impact of these policies on certain groups contributes to detrimental outcomes for students from traditionally marginalized communities. Finally, I make connections between the poststructural framework that guides my data analysis in order to establish how the power structures inherent in school discipline both draw from and contribute to broader disciplinary narratives in contemporary education systems.

Legal Underpinnings of Exclusionary Discipline

Over the past quarter of a century, there has been an increasing demand for improvements in school safety, especially in the wake of tragic events ranging from the 1999 Columbine shooting to more recent attacks such as those at Sandy Hook Elementary School and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Although there is little disagreement concerning the need to ensure the safety of all students, there has been considerable debate regarding how best to achieve this goal. In the interest of protecting children, many schools have adopted a zero-tolerance approach to student discipline.

Modern zero-tolerance policies originated under President Reagan during the War on Drugs, a period marked by severe criminal prosecutions against individuals charged with even minor drug crimes (Bagley, 1988). As a result of zero-tolerance drug policies, the mid-1980's saw a dramatic rise in incarceration rates, especially among poor, black males (Bobo & Thompson, 2006). Despite the severe consequences associated with drug crimes as well as high levels of government spending on the enforcement of drug laws and the incarceration of those who violated them, zero-tolerance policies proved to have no discernable impact on the rates of drug use among Americans (Jensen, et al., 2004). Unfortunately, the clear shortcomings of these policies were masked, at least in part, by a variety of Discourses that positioned swift public

action as a necessity due to the assumption that drug abuse had become both a social and moral crisis in America (Kennedy-Lewis, 2014). As a result, zero-tolerance policies were incorporated into broader Discourses wherein the public perception of a need for political response served as a justification for the expansion of such laws.

Zero-tolerance policies first major entry into public schools occurred as a result of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA), which mandated states develop discipline policies that included, at minimum, a one-year expulsion and referral to law enforcement for any student found to be in possession of a firearm on school property (Allman & Slate, 2011; Henault, 2001; Skiba, 2002). Failure to develop legislation consistent with this mandate came at significant cost to states as moneys under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as well as other relevant federal education funding, could be withheld to compel states to comply (USDOE, 1994). Despite the fact that the GFSA allows for some discretion by the local education agency (LEA) in order to comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, numerous concerns have been raised about the implementation of this law. These concerns range from issues such as unreasonable application of the law to clearly nonviolent offenses (e.g., young children who bring a toy gun to school) to broader questions related to students' rights to due process when facing disciplinary actions (Brand, 2015; Cerrone, 1999). Furthermore, the GFSA set a precedent for criminalizing students by applying the tenants of a policy intended to target illicit drug enterprises to all offenses of a certain type committed by minors in schools (Martinez, 2009). Unfortunately, like the aforementioned drug policies, the ineffectiveness of disciplinary actions related to the GFSA did little to stop states and school districts from expanding the scope of offenses to which zero-tolerance policies could be applied.

Over the ensuing five-year span, the zero-tolerance policies enacted under the GFSA expanded drastically in scope and implementation to include a variety of offenses including, but not limited to, weapons other than firearms, drugs, alcohol, fighting, profanity, insubordination, and dress-code violations (Essex, 2004; Martinez, 2009; Skiba, 2002). Although the broadened scope of zero tolerance policies initially arose from individual schools, districts, and/or states implementing policies that were stricter than those mandated under the GFSA, 2002's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandated states "adopt a zero-tolerance policy for violent or persistently disruptive students" (p. 20). As Kennedy-Lewis (2014) pointed out, this framework for student discipline arises from a broader Discourse related to school safety that "asserts the need to keep schools 'safe' by prioritizing the needs of the group over the needs of individuals; asserts that students' behavior results from conscious, well-informed choices; and advocates for punishments severe enough to deter potential perpetrators" (p. 170). Unfortunately, this Discourse, despite appealing to a 'common-sense' notion of school safety, fails to encapsulate the complex nature of adolescent behavior, the misuse and/or misinterpretation of policy by those enacting it, and unintended side effects of hardline policies. Most notable among the unintended consequences is the drastic rise in the use of exclusionary discipline in American schools over the past quarter-century.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

The rate of exclusionary discipline in American public schools has become epidemic in nature. Estimates put out-of-school suspension rates as high as one in every nine students with a dramatic increase from 2.4 percent of students in elementary school experiencing at least one incident of out-of-school suspension to 11 percent of students in secondary school (Losen & Martinez, 2013). This is exceptionally concerning as students who are suspended from school are

considerably more at-risk for negative educational and life outcomes. Research has consistently found a relationship between the amount of time students spend actively engaged in learning and overall achievement (Brophy, 1988; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002; Gregory, et al., 2010; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). Unsurprisingly, students who experience out-of-school suspension are not only less engaged in terms of time spent in class but also in regard to the relationships they develop with adults and peers (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012). Although the stated goals of NCLB's (2002) mandate for the use of zero tolerance policies is to empower teachers and establish accountability for school safety, studies have shown schools that utilize exclusionary discipline more frequently have poorer overall school climate (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013), implement fewer preventative measures (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004), have poorer overall academic achievement (Perry & Morris, 2014), and show no overall improvement in school safety (Skiba & Peterson, 1999) when compared to schools that rely on other means of student discipline. Furthermore, the negative impact of exclusionary discipline does not only apply to students who are suspended from school repeatedly. Studies have shown a single incident of out-of-school suspension may double the likelihood of a high school student dropping out of school (Balfanz, et al., 2014) and the use of exclusionary discipline practices as early as preschool can serve as a predictor of future academic and social-emotional difficulties (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006).

In addition to academic difficulties resulting from the use of exclusionary discipline, such punitive practices can set the stage for life-long problems including involvement with the criminal justice system. Zero tolerance policies, in particular, criminalize behaviors, even if the actions in which the young person(s) in question engage are not, in and of themselves, criminal (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, 2008; Hirschfield, 2008). Relatively minor disciplinary

issues such as a non-injurious fight between two students or disruptive classroom behavior may become classified as more serious crimes such as battery or disorderly conduct (Brown, 2006; Hirschfield, 2008) especially if the incident in question results in the involvement of a school resource officer (Theriot, 2009). Under such circumstances, teachers and administrators become dissociated from their roles in guiding and supporting students and instead act as agents of surveillance and enforcement (Raible & Irizarry, 2010). This is important because the shift in teacher roles and the associated power dynamics can have an adverse impact on teacher/student relationships (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016) which, in turn, can exacerbate issues related to school violence (Volungis & Goodman, 2017).

The ineffectiveness of zero-tolerance policies bears out in statistics related to school violence and exclusionary discipline. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.), between 1993 and 2012 the percentage of all students who had ever been suspended from school raised from 15.2 percent to 19.6 percent. During that same time frame, the number of violent deaths, homicides, and suicides on school campuses has remained stable (NCES, 2017). Due to significant differences in data collection methods, purposes, and timeframes, it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from these comparative data sets; however, it is clear that during the time frame in which zero-tolerance policies have been in effect, the stated goal of making schools safer by enacting harsher disciplinary consequences has not been realized. Additionally, the call for improved safety has resulted in reactionary responses such as the use of metal detectors, security cameras, and school resource officers that are disproportionately employed at schools with high levels of poverty and high levels of minority enrollment despite no evidence of their effectiveness in curbing violent incidences (Fuentes, 2011). The use of ineffective, harsh disciplinary consequences and policing structures combined

with unequitable implementation of said policies has created a system wherein certain groups of students are systematically denied the benefits offered to their peers.

Not All Discipline is Equal

Although the zero-tolerance policies discussed in the previous section are problematic at the institutional and societal level, concerns related to school discipline become even more pronounced if the student(s) involved in the disciplinary infraction are students of color (Anyon, Lechuga, Ortega, Downing, Greer, & Simmons, 2018; Carter, et al., 2017; Monoroe, 2005), students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (Skiba, Peterson, and Williams, 1997; Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles, 1982), students who identify as LGBTQ+ (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015), and/or students with disabilities (Sullivan, et al., 2014). Although common perception suggestions that discipline is a linear, student driven process wherein a student chooses to violate an established rule and, in turn, is subject to an immutable disciplinary procedure (Kinsler, 2013; Sheets, 1996), research indicates that the response to student misbehavior is heavily influenced by a variety of non-linear factors including teacher judgement and feelings towards certain behaviors, the context of student behavior, the student's prior history, school characteristics, and resources available for managing student behavior (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya, & Hughes, 2014; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Such factors paired with legislative mandates for harsher disciplinary policies and public outcry for safer schools has resulted in practices that inequitably excludes certain groups of students from school.

Although many subgroups experience disproportionate disciplinary outcomes, for students of color, these issues are especially troubling. Despite the noted impact socioeconomic status and disability status have on discipline rates, even when controlling for those factors, race remained a significant predictor of the likelihood a student would experience exclusionary

discipline, especially for discretionary infractions such as disrespect or defiance (Nolan, 2011; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000; Torres & Stefkovich, 2009). Although students of color are disciplined at much higher rates than their White peers, the types of referrals given do not indicate a higher rate of significant or dangerous behaviors. Black males, in particular, tend to receive harsher punishments for engaging in behaviors similar to their White peers (Archer, 2009; Kim, 2009). Furthermore, when White students do receive exclusionary discipline, it tends to be for objective offenses such as fighting, vandalism, or smoking on campus while Black students receive similar punishment for more discretionary offenses such as disrespect or threatening behaviors (McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Shaw & Braden, 1990). These practices perpetuate the perception that students of color are untrustworthy and dangerous, a circumstance that can lead to alienation and disengagement with the school system (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Furthermore, the cycle of disengagement, exclusion, and criminalization of students of color can be seen as a contributing factor to what has become known in both research and media as the school-to-prison pipeline.

The school-to-prison pipeline has been oft cited in research over the past fifteen years and can be described as the "growing pattern of tracking students out of educational institutions, primarily via 'zero tolerance' policies, and tracking them directly and/or indirectly into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems (Heitzeg, 2009, p. 1). The circumstances contributing to this phenomenon are numerous and commonly cited factors include academic failure, disengagement from school, and dropping out (Perry & Morris, 2014; Skiba et al., 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). The most prevalent factor cited in research is the use of zero-tolerance policies that systematically criminalize the behavior of school-aged children which can not only lead to, or exacerbate, the above-mentioned factors, but also provide a direct link to the criminal justice

system (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). According to the USDOE Civil Rights Data Collection (n.d.), although Black students make up only 15.5 percent of student enrollment, the account for 40 percent of all students who received at least one day of out-of-school suspension, 28 percent of all expulsions, and 22 percent of expulsions under zero tolerance policies. These statistics closely mirror the national incarceration trend wherein Black citizens make 13 percent of the United States population but account for 40 percent of the incarcerated population (Sakala, 2014). What is perhaps most telling about the comparison of disproportionality related to both school discipline and incarceration is the rate at which youth are referred to the criminal justice system from school. During the 2009-2010 school year, nearly 96,000 students were arrested at school and approximately 242,000 students were referred to juvenile courts by school officials (McCurdy, 2014). What is perhaps more concerning is that, based on a comparison of suspension to self-reported behavior, Shollenberger (2013) found that a substantial percentage of students who were later involved in the criminal justice system had not engaged in serious delinquency prior to their first suspension. As Skiba, Arredondo, and Williams (2014) pointed out, there is "a strong case that, above and beyond individual, family, and community risk factors, exclusionary school discipline makes a significant contribution in and of itself to a range of negative developmental outcomes" (p. 556). These problems raise important questions about the purpose of public education as well as the roles of those who are tasked with the education of our children.

Educators or Agents of the Criminal Justice System?

The function and use of discipline in school is a complex construct with sometimes conflicting, if not outright contradictory, viewpoints. Discipline in schools serves the functional purpose of ensuring the safe and orderly management of large numbers of students (Hirschfield,

2008) as well as theoretical and societal functions such as preparation for the subordinate

structures of the work place (Foucault 1977/1995) and acculturating children to the prominent

moral and civic values of American society (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Unfortunately, traditional

models of school discipline fail to account both for variability in student investment in the

discipline structures of the school as well as teacher preparedness to address deviations from the

expected norms (Colvin, Kameenui, & Sugai, 1993). Students may be subjected to harsh and

rigid responses to misbehavior that, in the worst-case scenario, may lead to the criminalization of

misbehavior either legally or symbolically (Hirschfield, 2008; Mallett, 2016). Furthermore, the

requirement that certain offenses be reported to law enforcement, the extension of this

requirements to other, non-criminal offenses, as well as the culture of surveillance and informing

established by such practices creates a system wherein school officials must precariously balance

their roles as educators and de facto agents of law enforcement (Curtis, 2013; Mitchell, 2014).

This process can create significant barriers that may cause students to question both the

legitimacy and trustworthiness of the educational system as well as their own place within this

system.

One salient example of how students may become disengaged from a system in which

they find no place can be seen in the work of Paul Willis (1977) in his ethnographic study of

working-class boys in industrial England. Willis described how a group of students from

working class families developed a sense of pride and identity that glorified the manual labor

jobs in which their fathers engaged and in which they anticipated participating when they grew

up. These jobs, which required little formal schooling, became paramount to the sense of

community for the students and, consequently, the structures and demands of school became

irrelevant. As such, Willis claimed the students developed a counter-school culture wherein those

who complied with the structures and demands of school were socially ostracized and those who acted with apathy and/or open defiance towards school demands were socially reinforced. This created a paradoxical relationship wherein the resistance exhibited by the students was an agentic doing against a system they saw as irrelevant thereby solidifying certain aspects of their social and academic identities. In doing so, however, the students' resistance against the system solidified their stations as part of a stratified social class with limited mobility. The students demonstrated how academic, social, and resistance identities, while distinct, interact meaningfully and operate vis-à-vis conditions situated in broader social contexts.

Ogbu (2003) described a similar process that occurred with young Black students in American schools. Ogbu (2003) found the students in his study academically disengaged both because they perceived their opportunities for success to be limited and because they perceived the knowledge and moors of schooling to be an imposition by White society. Furthermore, he noted that in addition to perceptions regarding a lack of opportunity, students worried that showing an interest in academics would ostracize them from their peers who might consider the behavior an attempt to act White. As Ogbu (2003) noted, some students felt that "to accept the White definition of the right way to talk or behave is to accept White judgment that Black language and cultural identity are bad and should be replaced by White language and cultural identity" (p. 389).

Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy (2016) used a symbolic interactionism framework to explore how structure, culture, and agency reconstitute and reify one another as part of the disciplinary process. They noted discipline is a cyclic mechanism wherein students make decisions based on contextual factors such as school culture, teacher behavior, and explicit and implicit structures. These same factors, as well as the manifestation of student behaviors, in turn

shape teachers' responses which, according to Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy reinforce certain

expectation and aspects of student and teacher behavior. Although this description fails to

account for behavior that does not arise from choice (e.g., a behavioral outburst from a child with

a mental health disorder), it does draw significant parallels to both the notions of performativity

and the ways in which *pouvoir/savoir* is enacted in particular *dispositifs*, especially as it relates to

the power of school officials to prescribe labels to students.

Similarly, Collins (2011) noted acts of resistance, in relation to the adverse labels

attributed to students by teachers, could serve as a reinforcement of "bad" labels by engaging in

acts that explicitly challenge teacher authority. Collins paralleled this resistance/reinforcement

paradox to the enactment of overt and hidden curricula. Apple and King (1977) provided a useful

framework for understanding these curricular constructs. They defined overt curriculum as the

explicit and intended instruction that occurs in the classroom (e.g., a math lesson on

polynomials) wherein the hidden curriculum is the transmission of certain values, beliefs, norms,

and historical relationships students learn through the structures and interactions that frame the

learning environment. In the case of students who are disciplined during a classroom lesson, they

may learn about their place, worth, and status within the learning environment, a process that

may reinforce or challenge the narrative notions of identity students construct over time.

The concept of identity is further complicated by perceptions of legitimacy regarding the

institutions that enact discipline upon students. As Hitlin and Kramer (2014) noted, the

effectiveness of disciplinary measures, insofar as they reduce certain behaviors that have been

deemed undesirable, is predicated on the perception of legitimacy the punishing organization

holds in the eyes of the individual being punished. Although this framework is limited by its

underlying assumption that labels can induce shame and, in turn, reduce the likelihood of certain

behaviors recurring, it does highlight an important concept regarding the ways in which relationships and perceptions can impact how discipline is perceived in the eyes of both the punisher and the punished. Unfortunately, this framework also operates from a deficit perspective by reinforcing the idea that there is something inherently wrong or dysfunctional in the individual. As Kennedy-Lewis (2014) noted, such sentiments are predicated on underlying assumptions that portray students as "decontextualized individuals rather than as members of groups that exist within a particular social framework and are impacted both by institutions as well as by the actions of individual educators" (p. 183). A more productive view of institutional legitimacy might explore the interaction of formal power and individual agency to explore how discipline is enacted and resisted by individuals and groups (Collins, 2011). It is from this perspective that poststructural paradigms are useful in exploring the disciplinary apparatus in schools.

Poststructural Explorations of School Discipline

Poststructuralism as a theoretical paradigm is nebulously defined and at times may seem convoluted or even contradictory. Although some may view such uncertainty as problematic in empirical studies, "the lack of clear definition reflects the purposeful elusiveness of [this] work [and] its aversion to clean positivist definitions and categories" (Agger, 1991, p. 112). Poststructural frameworks allow the researcher to reject the need to frame data representationally, a trap that can cause research of complex topics to become reductionist in nature (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011). In educational research, poststructural thought can be a powerful tool for destabilizing accepted truths in favor of rhizomatic approaches to exploration of the complexities of a system that is fundamentally human in nature (Hodgson & Standish, 2009). Building on the idea that all knowledge is partial and framed through specific lenses of

understanding, the following section explores some of the ways poststructural paradigms can be used to understand the constructs of discipline and identity.

Tyler and Cohen (2010) and Ward and Winstanley (2005) conducted studies that explored the impact of performativity on identity within organizations. Tyler and Cohen analyzed how organizational spaces are embedded with power and concurrently act as sights where power can be contested and negotiated. They found organizations require certain things from individuals in terms of self-presentation and performance and, consequently, shape individuals' expressions of identity. Simultaneously, the actions in which people engage cause these same organizations to materialize. Organizations therefore become representational spaces wherein the spatial embodiment and representation of gendered norms coerces individuals to "embody — to materialize — socially significant aspects of identity" (Tyler & Cohen, 2010, p. 195). Therefore, the organizations with which one interacts become important components of how one constructs and expresses identity.

Ward and Winstanley (2005) expressed similar dynamics regarding the relationship between individuals' identities and organizations but additionally drew from Butler's use of speech act theory. Specifically, the authors explored how illocutionary acts (i.e., acts that do something instead of simply representing something), in the process of LGBTQ+ individuals coming out to coworkers, constitute a renegotiation of identity within organizations. The authors claimed the act of declaring a sexual identity that does not conform to heteronormative expectations is "performative because the individual, in saying that they are gay, is also doing what they say, that is to say coming out at the same time" (Ward & Winstanley, 2005, p. 472). Such illocutionary acts highlight the agency in performativity or, as Butler (1990/2007) points to, as resisting by challenging normative constructs.

The notion of illocutionary acts as forms of resistance suggests the possibility of appropriating agency through performativity by taking control of individual narratives. Redman (2005) addressed this concept by exploring the dissonance between identity as a fabrication by and of narrative and identity as an antecedent to narrative. He claimed there is complex interaction between performativity and narrative that is locally negotiated, much like Foucault's concept of power. "Performativity and the concept of persons…afford opportunities to explore how specific narrative practices and performances 'materialize' capacities and attributes specific to particular places and times" (Redman, 2005, p. 40). This is to say narrative practices and acts of performativity should not be thought of as uniform across all possible situations, rather they occur as a result of many factors interacting in specific contexts.

Schools are prime spaces for enacting and contesting identity through the process of performativity. By design, they are the *dispositifs* through which cultural knowledge is transmitted and normalized. Additionally, students engage with and exist in schools for a significant amount of time as they develop physically, socially, emotionally, and morally. Butler's (1990/2007) work can help shed light on how performativity plays a role within schools to shape the development of adolescents. Davies (2006) contested that although students and teachers are understood to be autonomous beings with varying degrees of freedom, normalized expectations mask the degree to which individuals in schools are subjectified. This is done, at least in part, through the formal mechanisms of schooling. "Curriculum might present the terms of submission for students and what students are to become, while at the same time covering over the relations of dominance and submission" (Davies, 2006, p. 429). Thus, the schooling apparatus acts as part of a larger machine that shapes the individual through formal practices such as instruction and grading. This has serious implications for curricula since students must

navigate tensions between their own ways of knowing, being, and learning and those which are expected by teachers and other members of the school.

Foucault in schools. In educational research, Foucault's theories have been used to explore the ways in which various aspects of educational *dispositifs* enact, enable, and reproduce power relations. Consistent with Foucault's theorization, the ways in which enactments of *pouvoir/savoir* surface are varied and multi-directional. Despite such variance, there is a consistent pattern across the extant research base explicating how, regardless of origin point, *pouvoir/savoir* acts to normalize subjects and make visible deviations from the dominant *connaissance*. The following section explores examples of educational research that use Foucault's theories as a lens to understand issues of power in schools.

One of the ways in which *pouvoir/savoir* reveals itself in schools is through the social control students exert over one another. This control can be expressed in a number of ways as children develop a sense of identity and navigate the complex social expectations of adolescence. In a study exploring the interactions of classroom environments and student relationships, Cornelius and Herrenkohl (2004) found, in addition to being multifaceted, the power children exercise in the school environment is situational, guided, at least in part, by the variety of roles they might occupy and interactions they might have in any given school day. These interactions, and subsequent exercises of power, are not necessarily negative; they are simply productive forces that shape the behaviors of groups and individuals.

Side and Johnson (2014) and Walton (2005) explored how more coercive exercises of power also serve normative purposes in school. According to Side and Johnson, bullying performs two functions: it attempts to impose conformity and it sanctions the exclusion of those who do not confirm. This analysis is consistent with the way Foucault (1977/1995) described the

process of normalization and differentiation: "the disciplines characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale, around a norm, hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate" (p. 223). However, this process is not simply enacted from the bully unto the bullied. It is part of a broader relational pattern under which cultural mores and norms, milieu, peer expectations of the bully and bullied, and an array of other factors coalesce to create the individual exercise of power. Walton (2005) furthered this idea when writing about bullying, specifically as it relates to bullying towards LGBTQ+ youth. In his study, Walton asserted the act of bullying was a manifestation of the "social hierarchies that perpetuate negative associations with constructs of difference" (p. 70). From Walton's perspective, bullying is both an act of enforcing and a deviation from social norms.

In addition to being made visible through peer exchanges, the *pouvoir/savoir* construct can be found in the interactions between students and teachers. Hillier, Laurier, and Hillier (2012) analyzed the relationship between children as a social group and educational institutions to understand how the process of discipline attempts to normalize social behavior. At the crux of this query, is a fundamental issue wherein teachers are endowed with authority to wield *pouvoir/savoir* in the name of enforcing disciplinary procedures through curricular practices and formal classroom management; however, as Niesche (2013) noted, these same teachers are controlled by the *dispositifs* from which their *pouvoir/savoir* emerges. Additionally, Hillier et al. pointed out that despite the fact that there is an aspect of state-sanctioned control there is productive value in disciplinary measures that help shape young people into adults who are good citizens and contributing members of society.

Whether *pouvoir/savoir* is enacted amongst peers or between students and the adults who possess sanctioned authority, the *dispositifs* in which the individuals operate play a major role in

influencing power relations. Making the matter more complex is the fact scholars have

highlighted the makeup of these educational *dispositifs* in different but often complementary

ways. For example, both Pike (2008) and Piro (2008) discussed the structural aspects of the

physical environment as ways for establishing the conditions under which power can be

expressed. In Pike's study, she explored how the establishment of two different lunch programs

influenced the spatial aspects of lunchroom arrangement and, in turn, produced material and/or

symbolic divisions amongst the students participating in the different programs. As a result, the

physical structures and established policies created frontiers under which power was negotiated

and enacted on and between students. Piro likewise explored the physical structures of the school

but instead focused on security and surveillance within the school building. Piro claimed that

schools had not only begun adopting the architectural markings of juvenile detention facilities

but also, through their use of physical and technological surveillance techniques, had established

a system where students were either monitored or operating under the assumption they were

being monitored, much like the prisoners Foucault (1977/1995) discussed when describing the

Panopticon. Despite the concerns with such a system, Piro, much like Cornelius and Herrenkohl

(2004) whose study I discussed above, noted there are important productive components to these

physical arrangements that align with societal concerns for and about children. Piro suggested

that although there is reason to worry school instituting surveillance curriculums, there is also

reason to understand the need to keep schools orderly and children safe. Piro's positioning aligns

with Foucault's theories regarding resistance in describing how understanding the functioning of

pouvoir/savoir can help to problematize taken-for-granted concepts without completely

dismantling useful structures. Instead, one should understand that structures are temporary and

artificial and that they exist for pragmatic purposes.

Discourses of School Discipline

It should come as no surprise that enactments of power and knowledge as they relate to school discipline carry semiotic components that regulate how individuals interpret, discuss, and address student behavior within school and broader social contexts. The field of discourse analysis provides a useful framework through which these semiotic matters might be interpreted. Broadly speaking, discourse analysis refers to an approach to studying language for the purpose of understanding how language systematically shapes the social world (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005). Such analyses allow scholars to better understand the relationships between language and context in order to draw conclusions regarding the extent of what is meant, both explicitly and implicitly, by the various forms of communication we use (Gee, 2014). These forms of communication include interpersonal interactions, popular media such as books, movies, and music, news articles, policy documents, and any other modality through which one person may share thoughts and information with another. Understanding how a group or groups of people communicate can offer insight into what is valued, prioritized, excluded, etc.

Given the vested interest society at-large possesses, directly or indirectly, as it relates to the education of children, it seems inevitable that the topic of education, including the behavior and discipline of children in school, would come up regularly as part of educational Discourses in America. The prevalence of these Discourses is especially evident in the context of politics and news media. For the purpose of this section of the literature review, I conducted a Google News search wherein I looked for news articles using the terms "school safety," "school discipline," "school suspensions," "school violence," and "zero tolerance schools." I used several other terms derived from the above literature review in my initial search; however, other

search terms produced results unrelated to the topics of this dissertation or duplicative of the results found using the previously mentioned terms. Additionally, since the breath of sources was large and Discourses alter over time as events unfold and public opinion shifts, I narrowed the search to news articles occurring within the past 10-years. After an initial round of searching, four discursive themes related to school discipline emerged: Discipline as a Social Practice, Consumerist and Neoliberal Discourses, Criminal Justice Discourses, and Mental Health Discourses. From these, I conducted additional searches using terms common to overarching theme to find additional articles to either substantiate or refute the initial thematic groupings. My search results did not yield new or conflicting themes but did help to refine and organize each category. For this search, I included sources that would be considered major news outlets as well as lesser known, local publications, and pieces that would be considered opinion columns. My goal in this search was not to find empirical research or objective reporting, but rather to get a sense of how a wide range of individuals were discussing the issues in both research literature and public media. The following sections will explore these discursive themes both in the context of the aforementioned news media search as well as scholarly articles that connect to said Discourses.

  Discipline as a social practice. John Dewey (1903) posited an important component of schooling in America was to prepare students for the demands of meaningful participation in a democratic society. To this end, a degree of enculturation is inherent since students must become adept with the moors, customs, and expectations of the society in which they are expected to participate. Through the schooling process, students learn, both explicitly and implicitly, their role in society, how to interact with peers and authority figures, how to participate in politics, and how to engage with social problems (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006). As it relates to school

discipline, Vavrus and Cole (2002) discussed how classroom disruptions are contextualized social interactions in which participants navigate and negotiate both the expectations of the school environment as well as what constitutes disruptive behavior. As Varus and Cole (2002) noted:

> classroom participants jointly construct a *disciplinary moment,* a moment when a specific discursive or behavioral event is defined as a disruption and becomes a candidate for suspension. This co-construction of a disciplinary moment by classroom participants does not occur on a level playing field, however, since relations of power between teacher and students affect the interpretation of disruptions and the outcome for students in the classroom. (p. 90-91)

The co-construction of disciplinary moments as well as the inequitable power distribution mirrors social practices students may experience in the context of family, peer interactions, dealings with law enforcement, and employer/employee dynamics. As a result, public opinions related to school discipline can become intense and polarizing.

In an article for National Public Radio (NPR), Kamenetz and Bakeman (2018) discussed the shift from zero tolerance policies to what they termed "expanded tolerance." The authors described how public opinion has pushed back both against overuse of punitive discipline such as arresting students for shooting spitballs as well as against what some perceive to be softer forms of discipline such as diversion or the use of restorative practices. When considered in the context of discipline as a social practice, it is interesting to note that advocates on both sides of the debate regarding punitive discipline speak to preparing students for life after school. Proponents of preventative and restorative disciplinary paradigms point to the fact that these models help students take ownership over the underlying causes that perpetuated the events that

may have otherwise led to suspension, expulsion, or even arrest (Strauss, 2018); help students develop essential conflict resolution skills that will benefit them both in school and in life (Wright, 2017); and provided tiered levels of support that meet students at their individual level of need with the goal of helping them meet the expectations of their schools and communities (Mewes, 2012; Samuels, 2016). Proponents of stricter punitive disciplinary practices point to the fact that these practices undermine the authority of schools and teachers and ultimately compromise the ability of schools and classrooms to function according to the institutions' stated goals (Sperry, 2015). This notion draws on the concept that, if schools are intended to prepare students for life in American society, failure to uphold the integrity of the teacher/student authority dynamic can undermine the extant power structures (e.g., employment, law enforcement, etc.) that students will encounter in their adult lives. Additionally, some proponents of stricter disciplinary policies advocate a return to the use of practices such as corporal punishment for student misbehavior in order to reinforce the authority of educators and the educational institution (Doughty, 2012; Fox News, 2012). Whether one is advocating for disciplinary policies that are harsher or more preventative and restorative in nature, the connection between social concerns and school discipline remain inextricable.

Consumerist and neoliberal discourses. Neoliberal Discourses, those concepts associated with market-based capitalism, especially as they relate to social practices and institutions, are prevalent in relation to schooling and student discipline. In describing the association between schools and neoliberalism, García and De Lissovoy (2013) stated, "the ideology of neoliberalism foregrounds discourses of efficiency, consumerism, choice, and accountability in place of senses of collective responsibility" (p. 53). These principles are present in numerous ways in K-12 education including the competitive positioning of grade point

average (GPA), accountability for students, teachers, and schools in terms of high stakes assessment, and the emergence of charter schools as an alternative to traditional public schools. Apple (2004) further clarified this idea in claiming the formal and informal curricula of schools serve as a means for reproducing the dominant ideological values of society. That is to say, a concept such as GPA is important only insofar as there is a need to compete against other students for position in one's high school class which is a prerequisite for applying to the most competitive colleges, wherein students will again compete for the highest GPA to land the most prestigious jobs, in an attempt to gain positioning in the job market where they will once again compete against their peers for recognition, salaries, and titles after leaving school.

Although the progression from competing for high school class rank to competing for job title and salary may seem largely innocuous, the use of neoliberal policy and Discourse in public schools has been criticized for perpetuating policies that promote efficiency over comprehensive services, blame and rank schools instead of supporting and building communities, and promote the transference of essential services from public responsibility to private companies whose primary motivating factors may be driven more by profit than meeting the needs of students (Kennedy-Lewis, 2014). Specifically, as it relates to school discipline, public pressure and legislation may interact in ways that result in schools relying on punitive measures of social coercion. Kupchik and Monahan (2006) argued the use of elements such as

> police officers and technological surveillance in schools articulate larger mechanisms of social control in post-industrial societies. By increasingly relying on police officers and surveillance technologies, schools socialize youth into relationships of dependency, inequality and instability vis-à-vis the contemporary power dynamics of the post-industrialist labor market and the neoliberal state. (p. 617)

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These mechanisms usher students into the power imbalance of adult life, wherein reliance on a limited range of employment options, the use of monitoring tools such as social media, credit scores, etc., and the fiscal pressures of rising costs for housing, food, education, and child care coerce individuals into passive compliance with social expectations.

For students who do not comply with the demands of a neoliberal society, the repercussions can be severe. Teachers and administrators, acting in the name of safety, order, and efficiency of work, may rely heavily on disciplinary measures that remove students from the school environment and ultimately set the preconditions that exclude individuals from the neoliberal job market in the form of underemployment, homelessness, and/or incarceration (Mora & Christianakis, 2013). Those speaking in favor of severe disciplinary policies may rely on the notion that failure to remove disruptive students from the learning environment creates conditions under which those who are "ready to learn" are harmed by such practices. In an article for the New York Post, Petrilli (2015) claimed "low-income strivers — impoverished families who follow the rules and work hard to climb the ladder to the middle class — may be the most underserved population in America today" (para. 1). He advocated that schools, in particular charter schools who have been criticized for harsh disciplinary policies, be given the leeway to continue such practices because it promotes an opportunity for upward social mobility for "poor children who are ready to learn, follow the rules and work hard" (para. 16). Likewise, in an interview with the Chicago Tribune, former CEO of the Noble charter school network in Chicago, Michael Milkie, claimed that the use of strict disciplinary measures created an environment focused on safety and culture and that such measures promoted high levels of academic achievement and student success that promoted access to higher education for some of Chicago's poorest families, even though critics claimed that the charter school companies

success metrics were padded due to removing the neediest learners (Ahmed-Ullah, 2014). Such perspectives also play an important role as they relate to Discourses concerning school safety.

Criminal justice discourses. As mentioned previously in this chapter, the seemingly endless string of mass shootings in American schools has played a significant role in perpetuating the idea that schools must be made safer by any means necessary. As a result, conversations that mirror those of the criminal justice system have become increasingly prevalent in both scholarly literature and news media. Broadly speaking, criminal justice Discourses can be divided into two main categories: those that deal with the security of the school environment (much in the same way one might secure a retail store, bank, or prison) and those that deal with the ways in which students who commit offenses are disciplined, especially as it relates to the criminalization and persecution of infractions.

Following the tragic events at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on February 14, 2018 in which the lives of fourteen young men and women as well as those of three staff members were taken by a gunman, the United States news media was inundated with an unfortunately commonplace enactment of public reactions to an unspeakable tragedy: offers of thoughts and prayers from politicians; vehement, yet largely ineffectual arguments related to gun control; calls for improved mental health supports; recommendations for changes to school security procedures; blame, criticism, and disparagement of a variety of groups; and, ultimately, a call for a public commission to investigate the causes and responses to the school shooting. On January 2, 2019, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission (MSDPSC) released its findings related to this tragic event which started with the declaration, "school safety in Florida needs to be improved. We can do more and we can do a better job of ensuring the safety of students and staff on K-12 school campuses" (MSDPSC, 2019, p. 1). The recommendations in

this report included measures for "hardening" the physical building, establishing more well defined "code red" policies, implementation of more advanced systems for technological monitoring, increased the number of armed staff in schools, and increased response training for law enforcement personnel. After several months of investigation, the MSDPSC recommendations largely echoed a trend of recommendations following similar tragedies and popular commentary related to school security.

In a piece for Time Magazine, Rochman (2012) described how the public, who had been "shocked to the core" following the murder of twenty children and six staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary, may more openly embrace the recommendations of certain security experts who advocate for national guidelines for school safety including screening points, security equipment, and emergency response drills. In addition to physical security measures, there has been a rising debate surrounding the need for increasing the presence of armed security guards in schools (Mazzei, 2018; Porter, 2015) as well as calls for and against arming teachers (Holpuch, 2018; Way, 2018). Such recommendations for increased security have been met with resistance in many circles as opponents question the effectiveness of these measures (Cascio, 2018; Plummer, 2012), the unintended impact on schools and communities (Tucker, 2013), and the fiscal responsibility of tasking underfunded public schools to divert resources from educating students to adopting costly security measures (Haslett, 2019). Kupchik and Monahan (2006) critiqued the increased demand for school security measures in noting:

> surveillance systems in schools, as with computers in schools, function as symbols of 'progress,' as technological fixes to social problems. Regardless of their immense expense or questionable efficacy, these technologies are politically expedient interventions because they are flashy, quantifiable and (ostensibly) controllable. (p. 626)

This idea highlights a core concern that increases in school security may, in practice, be largely symbolic and, in some ways, detrimental to the actual functioning of the school (Fisher, Gardella, & Tanner-Smith, 2018; Servoss, 2017; Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Beyond the physical environment of the school building, Criminal Justice Discourses permeate broader school discipline Discourses in relation to how the behavior of students should be addressed by schools. As noted earlier in this chapter, zero tolerance policies have played a role in reshaping the response of educators to student misbehavior. There is substantial overlap between this component of the "Criminal Justice Discourses" theme, as well as those of both the "Discipline as a Social Practice" and "Neoliberal and Consumerist Discourses" themes. The distinguishing factor that separates this part of the theme from the others is the focus on the criminalization of behaviors in school. In the MSDPSC (2019) report, a section was dedicated to describing the shooters school discipline history and providing recommendations related to school discipline. The report noted that the shooter had been referred to a school diversion program instead of police for an act of school vandalism and criticized the district for not integrating and aligning its diversion program with that of the Department of Juvenile Justice. This notion caries the unfair implication that, had the school involved law enforcement and/or entered the shooter into some form of registry, the shooter may have been incarcerated and unable to commit the crime and/or rehabilitated and released into society, while ignoring the fact that recidivism rates in the United States approach 80 percent (Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2005). Nonetheless, harsh discipline practices still garner widespread public support that has significantly altered the relationship between schools, students, and their families. Payne and Welch (2010) described this phenomenon:

the criminalization of students is another result of the intensification of school discipline. Endeavoring to address school crime and delinquency, schools often control and punish students in a manner that is similar to the treatment of suspected and convicted adult criminals…the actions of rule-breakers and troublemakers are defined frequently with criminal justice language…students, sometimes called "suspects" or "repeat offenders," are subjected to "investigations," "interrogations," and "searches" by dogs or SROs, who sometimes will report "needing backup." Students may then be involved in "lineups" and school "courts" before being punished with, among other things, in-school suspension, which is analogous to solitary confinement (p. 1021)

Anderson (2016) detailed an interview with a student from a school that implemented harsh disciplinary policies who described a climate where students felt "unwelcome and under siege." Others such as Na and Gottfredson (2013), Fields and Emshwiller (2014), and Bracy (2010) have found that issues related to high level security including the use of School Resource Officers (SROs) go beyond impacting school climate and can increase the likelihood that students will become involved with the juvenile justice system over minor, non-criminal behavior which can become characterized under nebulous criminal terms such as disorderly conduct.

Despite concerns about blurring the lines between school discipline and law enforcement activities, proponents of stricter disciplinary policies assert that many parents, teachers, and students describe their campuses as unsafe, chaotic, and dangerous due to the fact they perceive disciplinary policies to be soft and without accountability (Algar, Hicks, & Italiano, 2019; Cederlof, 2019; Ullman, 2016). This logic extends beyond the desire to suspend or expel students for serious misconduct and suggests that schools can remedy "hostile" classroom environments by holding students accountable to a strict code of conduct (Sperry, 2015).

Furthermore, in many states, the reach of school discipline may encompass behaviors outside campus boundaries wherein schools may be allowed or even required to monitor and punish misbehavior that occurs in the community or online if that behavior is perceived to impact the school environment (American Civil Liberties Union, 2012; Kravets, 2011; Walsh, 2016). This can lead to situations wherein a situation that would not have, on its own, warranted law enforcement involvement, can come under the purview of school administrators and, in turn, their SROs. Unfortunately, when viewed through the lens of the underlying rational for increased law enforcement involvement and criminal justice mechanisms on campus (i.e., improved student safety) the policy recommendations of those who would prefer stricter policies fail to account for a lack of empirical data that supports the effectiveness of said policies (Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011). Neither does the need for improved student safety justify law enforcement involvement in obviously minor issues such as refusing to say the Pledge of Allegiance (Phillips, 2019), excessive absenteeism ("Student Arrested for Too Many Absences," 2018), or dress code violations (Castle, 2018). Nonetheless, calls for and against stronger criminal justice ties are prevalent components of the school discipline and safety debate.

Mental health discourses. A common alternative to criminal justice and punitive disciplinary practices mentioned above focuses around a mental health-oriented approach to addressing student behavior. Increasingly, concepts such as PBIS (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014), Restorative Practices (Pavelka, 2013), and Trauma Informed Care (Walkley & Cox, 2013) have gained traction as schools have come under criticism for excessive use of exclusionary discipline practices and law enforcement involvement that disproportionately impacts students of color (USDOE, 2016b). Schools that embrace a culture built around social emotional learning and mental health well-being point to positive shifts in overall school culture (Ashley, 2016;

Nachtigal, 2016), reductions in exclusionary discipline (Cohn, 2015) and improvements in the social emotional competency of students (Berlinksi, 2018). Criticisms of these approaches to student discipline echo those in previous themes. Most often, opponents decry what they perceive to be soft approaches claiming they fail to hold students accountable (Cederlof, 2019), disempower teachers (Platt, 2018), and foster a false sense of improvement based on artificially deflated referral and suspension data (Brodsky, 2016). Despite philosophical disagreements over how student discipline ought to be addressed in schools, there appears to be a large consensus on both sides of the debate indicating the mental health needs of students must be addressed to improve student conduct and reduce violent and disruptive behaviors in schools.

Following nearly every school shooting over the past decade, a common refrain from the public and from politicians has been that the mental health needs of the shooter were not identified or addressed appropriately and that this, at least in part, contributed to the acts of violence committed against the schools (Fox, 2013; Friedman, 2009; Kranz & Bruek, 2018; MSDPSC, 2019). As a result, there has been widespread support (at least vocally, if not in substance) from a politically diverse group to improve mental health supports both in schools and in the community at large (Emma, Ehley, & Ducassi, 2018; Jacobson, 2018; New York Times, 2018; Osher, 2016). While some criticize the unexpected interest convergence as a way to divert attention from substantive discussions about gun control (Harlow, 2018; Kranz & Bruek, 2018) others view the situation as a chance to advance long overdue talks about community and school mental health funding (Stang, 2019; Wasco & Frost, 2019). In both cases, the need for stronger mental health supports, especially for students who are struggling in school or showing early signs of concerning behavior has become commonplace in the public discussion.

Conclusion

Over the past twenty-five years, American public schools have seen a rise in the use of exclusionary discipline practices as well as increased involvement of law enforcement in school disciplinary matters. Practices that arose from the War on Drugs led to zero-tolerance policies that became codified into law such as the Gun-Free Schools Act and the No Child Left Behind Act. Over time, policies that were intended to address severe disciplinary issues on school campuses such as the possession of a gun or the distribution of drugs became farther reaching as schools applied such principles to a variety of offenses from willful disobedience to truancy. As a result of the widespread application of zero tolerance policies, estimates indicate approximately one out of every nine children in school today will receive out of school suspension during their educational career. This can have a serious impact on the academic performance of students, the relationships students and families have with their schools, and the ability of teachers to serve their primary role of educating students. Furthermore, concerns about exclusionary discipline become even more pronounced when considering students of color, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at an increased risk of receiving exclusionary discipline and the negative consequences associated with such practices. The consequences of these actions make visible issues of power, agency, and resistance as schools become battlegrounds for reinforcing and contesting existing power structures and for enculturating individuals into their societal roles. In this section, I discussed discourse analysis as a framework for understanding how language used in policy, day-to-day interactions, media, etc. interact to reinforce or challenge the disciplinary structures in schools. Specifically, I identified four common discursive themes: Discipline as a Social Practice; Consumerist and Neoliberal Discourses; Criminal Justice Discourses; and Mental Health Discourses as the relate to school

discipline. I will discuss these themes more in chapter three where I will use them as part of the initial a priori coding process for this study. Ultimately, this study will explore how D/discourses associated with school discipline play out in the implementation of policies and practices in one school district.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the ways in which various D/discourses related to student discipline are conceptualized and enacted in one school district. By analyzing the intertextual connections between the D/discourses of staff in Riverside School District and those of broader school discipline discussions, the thematic deviations of D/discourses within the district itself, and the linguistic features present when staff members discuss school discipline, I sought to understand the ways in which the roles of Riverside staff members, the enactment of discipline, and the discussion of disciplinary practices converge to develop a specific disciplinary paradigm within the district. Specifically, I aimed to answer the following questions:

(1) To what extent do the D/discourses in which Riverside School District staff members engage align with prevailing D/discourses in broader society related to student discipline?

(2) In what ways do Riverside School District staff members leverage and deviate from prevailing D/discourses related to student discipline to construct a disciplinary paradigm unique to the district?

(3) What do the linguistic features of Riverside School District staff members' discussions of school discipline indicate about the ways in which individuals engage in particular roles and leverage certain Discourses to enact discipline in the school district?

Personal Disclosure

For the sake of transparency and in the interest of providing readers of this study a better awareness of my impact on the data generation and analysis, it is important to discuss the

multiple roles I hold in this analysis including the relevant discourse communities to which I belong. During the period when the interviews in this study took place, I was a district level administrator in Riverside School District and had spent the majority of my career in the district. Consequently, I claim membership in a variety of relevant discourse communities related to this position including that of a Riverside employee in general, as well as more specialized communities such as those of a district administrator as well as that of a special education and English for Speakers of Other Languages professional. These memberships gave me unique insight into the Conversations that drive the inner workings of the district in which this study took place; however, membership in these communities also required me to be conscious of my inherent assumptions as an encultured member of the district. It is also important to note that, as a doctoral student and scholar, I belong to other discourse communities whose lexicons, D/discourses, and schemas align with and diverge from those of a Prekindergarten through twelve educator in significant ways. Further, I am a parent of a young child with a learning disability who attends school in Riverside School District. Because of this, I have found myself caught in the tension of having to both defend and critique the policies of the school district as I sought to navigate the logistical and administrative tasks of an employee as well as the advocacy aspects of both my roles as an educator and a parent. These multiple memberships undoubtedly impacted the lenses through which I analyzed the data in this study and when possible, I have attempted to highlight how my different memberships may have impacted my analysis.

As an insider conducting this study, there are additional factors of note that may have impacted my analysis. All of the participants in this study are individuals with whom I have worked in one or more capacities over the past twelve years. In many cases, this was beneficial to the analysis as I have long standing rapport and trust with the participants. It is important to

note, however, that I did hold a position of institutional authority in the district and this may or may not have impacted the ways in which participants responded (e.g., sharing personal beliefs versus communicating official stances). Furthermore, common D/discourses the participants and I share may have impacted the background knowledge they assumed I possessed when responding to interview questions, especially as it related to concepts such as situated meaning and figured worlds. Gee (2014) highlighted two concepts that are important in this regard: recipient design and participant design. Recipient design refers to the fact that when individuals speak or write, they do so with consideration of who they take their recipient to be. For example, a doctor may speak differently to a patient about a disease than to other doctors. In the case of this study, my participant's responses may have been impacted by their view of me as a colleague, friend, district administrator, researcher, or any combination of these and other identities. Gee identified the second concept, participant design, as the way in which speakers or writers design language in terms of how they want recipients to be, act, and feel. By positioning recipients in certain identities, speakers or listener may try to entice the recipient to be whom the speaker wants or needs the recipient to be in a certain context. During the analysis, I aimed to be transparent when leveraging insider knowledge to make claims about the data.

Theoretical Framework

      Power, knowledge, and the disciplinary apparatus. Michel Foucault's conception of knowledge and power offered a lens through which I explored the institutional conditions guiding and influencing specific ways of knowing, being, and understanding oneself. Schools, simultaneously operating as institutional structures and sites of social and political contestation (insofar as the needs and interests of children, communities, politicians, employees, etc., are negotiated and become manifest in both codified and uncodified ways), are prime spaces for

exploring how particular discourses are shaped by and, in turn, shape established power structures.

A central component to Foucault's conceptualization of power is the idea of *pouvoir/savoir* (power-knowledge). In his early works (e.g., *The Order of Things, 1970/2002; The Archaeology of Knowledge, 1972/2010*), Foucault focused on *savoir* primarily in the context of discursive formations, namely how knowledge was situated in terms of its own internal relations as well as its relationships with external discourses and social institutions (Ennis, 2008). The cyclical notion of knowledge highlights its productive components in that knowledge is simultaneously altering the discursive formations to which it is attached and being altered by said formations. As such, Foucault posited that knowledge is "the field of coordination and subordination of statements in which concepts appear, and are defined, applied, and transformed" (1972/2010, pp. 182-183). This idea allows Foucault to avoid the objective/subjective binary of knowledge (i.e., there is a universal Truth or all knowledge is based on individual experience) by complicating the idea of knowledge as an intersubjective construct.

Intersubjectivity of knowledge is foundational to the concept of knowledge politics and ultimately the establishment of the connectedness of the knowledge and power constructs. Pels (1995) noted, "knowledge politics exemplifies a natural proximity between empirical and normative judgments, it is more than a mere representation of the world, but actively intervenes in it" (p. 1036). Knowledge is neither a simple byproduct of power (i.e., those with power determine knowledge) nor is it a homologous pairing with power (i.e., knowledge is power). Rather, *pouvoir/savoir* expresses a complex relationship in which knowledge and power

continually influence and reconstitute one another. In this way, *pouvoir/savoir* becomes an exercise of the discursive practices it constitutes.

Although Foucault had not yet explicated the connectedness of the *pouvoir/savoir* relationship in *The Archaeology of Knowledge (1972/2010)*, he laid important groundwork for the concept by differentiating between *connaissance* or consciousness/knowledge and *savoir* or discursive practice/knowledge. According to Foucault, *connaissance*, the discipline of knowledge, exists within the broader scope of *savoir* and represents the formalized knowledges that may be taken as truth or fact in any given time period. The existence of *connaissance*, however, is predicated on the ways of knowing dictated by *savoir*. Foucault clarified this relationship in noting:

> By *connaissance* I mean the relation of the subject to the object and the formal rules that govern it. *Savoir* refers to the conditions that are necessary in a particular period for this or that type of object to be given to *connaissance* and for this that enunciation to be formulated. (1972/2010, p. 15, footnote 2)

This suggests an agency of sorts for knowledge, as expressed in the term *savoir*, and adumbrates the productive aspects later articulated in the *pouvoir/savoir* construct.

The development of power and knowledge as connected ideas flows naturally from the *savoir/connaissance* distinction. By positing *savoir* as a precondition for *connaissance*, Foucault established a normative aspect of *savoir* that arranged the *pouvoir/savoir* construct as a political activity. "Because objects of knowledge are invariably constituted by means of specific patterns of symbolic power, the occultation of 'reality' can only be revealed from a knowledge-political perspective that eschews all appeals to an independent reality" (Pels, 1995, pp. 1033-1034). *Pouvoir* is therefore conceived as diffused throughout society since its connection to *savoir*,

which, as previously stated, is predicated on normative conditions, dictates the preconditions to produce *connaissance.* As such, *pouvoir* stems from *sine qua non* micro- and macro-political activities derived from historical and contemporary social structures (Ennis, 2008; Oliga, 1990). Such political frontiers pave the way for the *dispositifs* on which discursive formations are built.

 Pouvoir/savoir and its associated political implications are closely tied to the notion of what Foucault termed *dispositifs*. Translated loosely as "apparatus," "mechanism," or "deployment," *dispositif* describes the networks by which local and historical relationships, couched in various sanctioned structures, establish fields of power and knowledge within the social organization (Ennis, 2008; Eriksson, 2005). As Foucault (1977/1995) noted, "what the apparatuses [*dispositifs*] and institutions operate is, in a sense, a micro-physics of power, whose field of validity is situated in a sense between these great functionings and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces" (p. 26). *Connaissance*, therefore, develops out of a *dispositif* of *pouvoir/savoir* (Ennis, 2008).

 If, as Foucault (1977/1995) claimed, *dispositifs* represent a broad assemblage of variables that ultimately constitute and privilege certain relational elements, then we can make visible their functionings given the historical formations they represent. In this sense, the interplay of discursive and nondiscursive elements within a given *dispositif* make manifest the productive and relational aspects of *pouvoir/savoir*. The organizing role of *dispositifs* should not be confused with an exercise of power, oppression, or subjugation, rather this role highlights the normative conditions of Foucault's theories. In relaying such normative aspects, *dispositifs* set the circumstances through which *pouvoir/savoir* gets expressed and, in turn; establish the boundaries of acceptable behavior, legitimized knowledge, etc.

The conditions established in given *dispositifs* set the stage for productive/relational interactions that regulate groups and individuals. Acting simultaneously as spaces of control and resistance, *dispositifs* "are etymologically and genealogically indissociable from regulation and government…their very multiplicity necessarily opens spaces of misunderstanding, resistance and flight" (Legg, 2011, p. 131). By constituting boundaries of social regimentation, the possibilities of opposition and resistance are inevitably created. As Ennis (2008) noted, "the institution produces the subject; the disciplinary mechanism, the individual" (p. 244). Power and resistance are not antipodal in this sense, but rather they exist as necessary conditions of the social order.

As *dispositifs* introduce means of supervision and control, individuals are subject to processes of normalization. These processes constitute more than enactments upon the body; they are exercises of regulation over the ideas, values, and desires of the individual. However, such normalizing methods do not necessarily lead to homogenization. Rather, the processes of normalization results in the production of differences as deviations from the established *connaissance,* constituting a foil to what is considered good, right, or acceptable (Ryan, 1991). Consequently, the differences establish hierarchical positionings and produce the inequalities necessary to maintain the functioning of the dominant enactments of *pouvoir/savoir*. In return, the inequalities arising from these differences pave the way for acts of resistance.

Foucault conceptualized resistance as a construct naturally originating from the discourses giving rise to *dispositifs* in the first place. Just as *pouvoir/savoir* creates differences in its attempt to normalize, structures that exist to exert control naturally create spaces from which to oppose their control. The construct of resistance, from Foucault's perspective, is more complex than simply positioning constructs as diametrically opposed forces. Ennis (2008)

asserted, "resistance does not simply pit force against force; it challenges the discourses in which practices are framed and, out of their elements, composes counter-discourses" (p. 267). Thus, political actions emerge as localized and disperse while they are simultaneously produced by and representative of the power structures from which they emerged (Pickett, 1996). The cyclical process of power production illustrates that *dispositifs, pouvoir/savoir*, and resistance are interrelated concepts working in conjunction to produce and challenge one another.

Although the multifaceted relationship of Foucault's constructs provides a unique space from which to engage the concept of discursive formations in the context of disciplinary apparatuses in schools, his writings are most useful for analyzing the ways metastructures arrange, rearrange, and interact to establish the conditions under which discipline is enacted. Foucault presents power as a broad and omnipresent idea where concrete examples of conformity and resistance may be hard to ascertain. Pickett (1996) described this problem in saying, "the fact that everything is dangerous means that there are multiple opportunities for resistance" (p. 461). Therefore, in order to understand the ways in which formal and informal power are enacted, it is helpful to understand the discursive interactions that give way to both policy and practice.

Knowledge politics. One way in which the discursive interactions of power can be investigated is through an exploration of the politics that govern certain ways of knowing, acting, and being. Broadly speaking, knowledge politics encompasses the notion that ways of knowing, particularly concerning what is considered valued or legitimate, are constantly negotiated and evolving. A study of knowledge politics may include posing questions such as: What knowledge is legitimate and under what circumstances? Who has a right to establish and/or challenge official knowledge? How can/should such knowledge be used and by whom? Who are the

experts and what are their roles in relation to official knowledge? As Apple (1993) pointed out, the exploration of such questions allows us to understand whose knowledge is sanctioned and who is, in turn, relegated to the margins since the definition of knowledge inherently creates insiders and outsiders.

The idea of knowledge politics becomes increasingly complex when considering how the concept plays out across multiple spheres within a system. K-12 education, for example, exists in the midst of many overlapping fields of knowledge such as the knowledge that is considered necessary for membership in American society (e.g., that which is needed to get a job, to access social goods, to engage with popular culture, etc.), the knowledge of the particular culture and/or region in which the school is located, the knowledge of education as a field (e.g., the standards being taught, the required coursework for graduation), and the knowledge of the institution in which the education is occurring (e.g., the differences between a small, rural, religious school and a large, urban, public school). Each of these fields are representative of some group or groups' form of legitimized knowledge and reflect the interests of those with the agency to act as experts and decision makers (Ali, 2007; Apple, 1993).

An understanding of the knowledge politics of the district's disciplinary practices is essential to the analysis of this study. Combined with the concepts of *dispositifs* and *pouvoir/savoir*, knowledge politics is crucial to the development of a more in-depth understanding of the ways in which various discourses are reflective of, and contribute to, the construction and reification of various ways of knowing. Additionally, the notion of discourse communities can be helpful in both identifying and understanding the ways in which language can be used in specific circumstances and by specific individuals to create meanings that can contribute to the understanding of this study.

Discourse communities. Discourse communities refer to the idea that within certain groups, common interests become codified in language, concepts, and semiotic indicators that allow insiders to demarcate their membership as somebody who is an expert, in the know, or otherwise relevant to the community in which the individual is participating. Most words and phrases carry with them a wide range of possible meanings and understandings. Speakers and writers use unconscious devices such as collocational patterns (the positioning of grammatical devices to indicate meaning) and nominalizations (the condensing of complex ideas into compacted terms based on known Conversations) to provide clarity to their intended meaning without the need to fully explicate their ideas (Gee, 2014). The juxtaposition of the terms "strong" and "coffee" for example, limit the number of possible meanings for the word "strong" primarily to a descriptor for coffee that is highly concentrated rather than, for example, a cup of coffee with a high level of physical prowess. Without such devices, language would require words with much more precise, limited meanings and/or more extensive descriptors to clarify meaning. Discourse communities leverage both unique combinations of such language devices as well as specialized contexts of language uses to further provide clarification of intended meaning. Discourse communities provide a framework by which, members "will hear these usages without any sense of confusion, recognizing a move from one discourse community to another, with a simultaneous shift in values, meanings, understandings and interpretations" (Little, Jordens, & Sayers, 2003, p. 74). This can be seen in the field of education where two high school teachers speaking about a referral can very likely be taken to mean an office discipline referral for student misbehavior as opposed to a doctor who may refer a patient to a specialist or a small business owner who may consider joining a referral program to improve her business network and customer visibility. Members of discourse communities are tied together via their

common interests, goals, activities, etc. and these commonalities form the basis for the unique patterns of language usage (Borg, 2003; Little, Jordens, & Sayers, 2003). To this end, membership in a discourse community requires a degree of language socialization to enculturate individuals into the specialized usage of vocabulary, concepts, and semiotic assumptions.

Language socialization is a key component to ensuring continuity and assimilation to the culture of a particular discourse community. As Duff (2010) noted:

> the core theoretical premise of language socialization is that language is learned through interactions with others who are more proficient in the language and its cultural practices and who provide novices explicit and (or) implicit mentoring or evidence about normative, appropriate uses of the language, and of the worldviews, ideologies, values, and identities of community members. (p. 172)

In discourse communities, this process is essential. A novice teacher may enter the profession with knowledge of the discourse communities to which he already belongs, ideas about the D/discourses of the field of education, and perhaps some firsthand experience with these D/discourses based on his internships; however, becoming an insider in the school and district in which the teacher works involves being recognized as such by others who already hold this status. Through the process of language socialization, a new teacher gains "an ability to participate in new discourse communities by using language appropriately [including] cultural knowledge about ideologies, identities or subjectivities, affective orientations, linguistic and nonlinguistic content (history, mathematics) and practices valued by the local community" (Duff, 2010, p. 173). As a result, a new teacher begins to use the language and, subsequently, negotiate, reproduce, and/or challenge the explicit and implicit values of the school in which he works. In this way, understanding the discourse communities from which participants may be pulling is

important to my overall analysis. Additionally, as an insider in the Riverside School District, I aim able to make visible aspects of participants' language that may not be obvious to those who do not belong to the discourse community of the school district at large. At the same time, as an outsider of the narrower discourse communities that exist among the participants in this study (e.g., an administrator at a particular school, a member of the superintendent's staff) I will have to rely on other tools of analysis to draw conclusions about the meaning of my participants' statements.

Context of the District

According to EDStats (2019), as of the 2018-2019 school year, the State of Florida had more than 2.8 million enrolled Pre-K through twelve students broken down by the following race/ethnicity categories: White – 37.4 percent; Hispanic – 33.9 percent; Black – 21.9 percent; Two or More Races – 3.6 percent; and Asian – 2.8 percent. Additionally, Florida is home to six of the twenty largest school districts in the United States (NCES, 2001) including twenty school districts that fall into Florida's "large" (more than 40,000 students) and "very large" (more than 100,000 students) size groups (EDStats, 2019). Riverside School District, where this study takes places, has an enrollment count of approximately 75,000 students broken down by the following race/ethnicity categories: White – 61.3 percent; Hispanic – 23 percent; Black – 7.6 percent; Two or More Races – 4.8 percent; Asian – 2.9 percent (EDStats, 2019). According to the most recent data supplied by Riverside School District for this study, during the 2016-2017 school year, there were 8,324 out-of-school suspension events resulting in 20,429 days of out-of-school suspension. Despite a relatively high percentage of White students and low percentages of students of color when compared to statewide data, Riverside follows state and national trends, in which students of color receive a disproportionately high percentage of exclusionary discipline, especially

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among Black students who are more than two and a half times as likely to receive out-of-school suspension when compared to their White peers. Furthermore, students of color in Riverside School District experience significant over identification for special education services, especially under the categories of Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities and Intellectual Disabilities, a trend that is particularly troubling given the fact that roughly 22 percent of students with disabilities in Riverside spend the majority of their instructional time in settings other than the general education classroom (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], n.d.). During this same timeframe, Riverside School District ranked thirty-second out of Florida's sixty-seven counties in graduation rates; however, despite the middle-of-the-road ranking in regard to graduation rates, there are significant concerns in relation to who receives a high school diploma. FLDOE reported that Black students with disabilities, in particular, have a graduation rate that is more than 20 percent lower than that of the district as a whole. Although these statistics do not paint a picture of a district facing any greater crisis than many others in the state or nation, as a whole, the data do point to trends that are particularly troubling for certain groups, especially when considering who is impacted most severely at the nexus of discipline, disability, and high school completion.

Like many districts, Riverside's disciplinary practices are governed by a student code of conduct that is made available on the district's website. The code of conduct outlines several components of the district's approach to discipline including its progressive discipline policy, timeframes in which discipline may occur, and placement review procedures. Perhaps most interestingly, the code of conduct also contains a document that the district refers to as its "discipline matrix." According to the code of conduct, the purpose of the discipline matrix is to increase consistency and equity among the district's nearly 90 schools (i.e., two students who

commit roughly the same offense at two different schools would receive roughly the same consequences). The district does this by identifying consequences as potential, mandatory, or not allowed based on the type of referral given. For example, a student who receives a referral for having fireworks on school grounds must have the item confiscated, may receive consequences such as detention or out-of-school suspension ranging from one to five days, but may not receive an out-of-school suspension of more than five days or a recommendation for expulsion. Although this ostensibly creates what the district believes to be reasonable boundaries around the consequences that could be assigned (e.g., the district does not allow out-of-school suspension for tardiness), it also creates a system where coding of a referral may be assigned based on the desired consequences rather than a reasonable assessment of the student's actions. To illustrate, the infraction of disrespect towards staff or students is considered a level one incident code and no amount of out-of-school suspension may be issued for this offense; however, an administrator who wished to give the student out-of-school suspension could instead decide to identify the infraction as disruptive behavior, a level two incident code that allows up to five days of out-of-school suspension.

If the purpose of the discipline matrix is to ensure equity and consistency, practices such as incident code manipulation call in to question the structures that ensure assignment of consequences are done appropriately. For the most part, the district has determined that a school's principal is the final authority when determining how an infraction is coded and what infractions are given as a result. All disciplinary appeals for consequences resulting in five days of out-of-school suspension or fewer, including less intensive punishments such as detention, in-school suspension, etc., may only be made to the principal, even if the principal is the individual who initially assigned the consequences. Parents and students may only request district level

appeals when out-of-school suspensions exceed five days. Consequences such as expulsion or disciplinary alternative placements are automatically decided at the district or school board level. The code of conduct does not allow for appeals of consequences that do not follow the discipline matrix. In such instances, a parent or student would have to identify and contact the appropriate assistant superintendent who oversees the principal in question and hope that they receive a favorable response to their request to reconsider the consequences. Because of this, many parents and students are subject to the discretion of the school principal, regardless of whether or not the principal follows the outlined code of conduct, with little to no recourse should they feel disciplinary consequences are assigned inappropriately.

Methods

As I mentioned in chapter two, discourse analysis is valuable tool for understanding how language shapes thought and actions. As Fairclough (2013) noted, discourse analysis allows the research to understand "an element or 'moment' of the political, political-economic and more generally social which is dialectically related to other elements/moments" (p. 178). Although there are many approaches to discourse analysis, ranging from methods that use syllable by syllable analysis of utterances in conversations (Mautner, 2009) to others than take largely contextualized approaches to meaning making in language (van Leeuwen, 2009), for the purposes of this study, I use Gee's (2014) framework for discourse analysis.

Gee's approach to discourse analysis offers two specific advantages in the context of this study. First, Gee's (2014) framework assumes "all language is political and all language is part of the way we build and sustain our world, cultures, and institutions" (p. 10). When considering the political nature of schooling in general, as well as the political implications related to school discipline, as outlined above, it would be remiss to depoliticize an analysis of this topic.

Secondly, Gee (2014) drew a distinction between what he referred to as capital "D" Discourse, those that "[combine] and [integrate] language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity (p. 46) and little "d" discourse, those that reference "language-in-use or stretches of language (like conversations or stories)" (p. 52). Such a distinction is essential to this study since I explore instances of intertextuality between broad public Discourses and the various D/discourses used in the district where this study takes place, the ways in which individuals in the district talk about discipline, and the interplay between the language used by professionals in the district and the enactment of disciplinary policies.

Study design. During this study, I use a discourse analysis framework through a case study design. According to Gerring (2004), case study designs use "intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units … observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time" (p. 342). This study primarily consists of interviews with staff members from Riverside School District; however additional documents such as the district's code of conduct, discipline matrix, and disciplinary data are used to supplement and contextualize the analysis. Additionally, Gee's (2014) framework for discourse analysis allows me to identify how broader Discourses of school discipline are reflected in the language and actions of school district staff as well as how these staff deviate from prevalent Discourses to create Discourses that are unique to Riverside. This combination of methods and design serves as an effective means for understanding how language, thoughts, and actions come together to form a disciplinary paradigm in the school district.

Data sources. The following section describes the participants in this study including recruitment and interview procedures. Due to the fact that Riverside School District does not

currently have a large number of individuals of color serving in administrative positions, and revealing the race and gender of participants in conjunction with their position would make the participants easily identifiable to others in the school district, it was necessary for me to take additional steps to ensure the anonymity of participants. As such, all participants are referred to using gender neutral names and pronouns. Furthermore, the race of participants is not discussed in conjunction with their positions. As needed during the study, I address any race or gender-based themes by referring to individuals based solely on the necessary category (e.g., "two of the female participants noted…") without connecting race and/or gender to the individual's position.

Participants. The participants in this study were selected from a convenience sample of employees of Riverside School District whose job responsibilities and experiences included student discipline. The sample was intentionally constructed to be representative of several categories including position (i.e., instructional staff, school-based administrators, and district administrators), race, and gender. Ultimately, the final participant list included eight participants. Of these, three were district administrators, two were school-based administrators, two were instructional staff, and one was a former district administrator. Three of the participants were female and five were male. Additionally, five identified as Caucasian and three identified as individuals of color. The following is a list of participants and the roles they held in Riverside School District at the time of this study:

- Kai – A high school assistant principal

- Jesse – A middle school assistant principal

- Parker – A middle school general education teacher

- London – A high school special education behavior specialist

- Blair – An assistant superintendent

- Hayden – A district administrator

- Avery – A district administrator

- Dakota – A former district administrator who left Riverside School District

Recruitment. Participants in this study were recruited based on my knowledge of their position within the district and the insight I believed they could provide such as perspectives on specific disciplinary practices within Riverside and knowledge regarding interactions between various groups of staff, families, and students. In recruiting participants, I was mindful of my position in the district, especially due to the officially authority that I had, or was perceived to have, over individuals in the district. Staff who knew of me, but did not know me directly, may have felt compelled to participate due to my institutional authority. Additionally, staff with whom I did not have a relationship may have been more reluctant to speak honestly for fear of professional repercussions. As a result, I made the decision to recruit from known participants who were more apt to decline participation if they were uncomfortable and to speak more openly and honestly due to a history of trust and mutual respect.

Each participant was contacted directly by me in person, via phone, or via social media. In order to be considered for the study, the individual's job role must involve a direct association with student discipline (e.g., developing policy, writing referrals, assigning disciplinary consequences, etc.). Each participant was explicitly informed of the purpose of this study and their right to refuse or end participation at any time. Due to my role as both a researcher and district administrator, it was especially important to be explicit in this regard in order to minimize the risk of individuals feeling compelled to participate. Initially, nine individuals were contacted for participation in this study. Of those, seven agreed and were responsive in scheduling interview times. Two agreed but were unresponsive when trying to determine an

interview time. During the data analysis process, I began to notice patterns of tension with concepts related to the district's discipline policy. This led me to question how I, as a district administer who struggled with his feelings about our policies, procedures, and actions, would have answered had I been a participant. Since I had already begun the analysis, I was concerned that adding myself as a participant later in the study would have compromised the data since I was already aware of the emergent themes and Discourses. In order to further explore this line of thinking, I recruited an additional participant, Dakota, who is a former employee of Riverside. Dakota and I worked together to implement the pilot study I referenced in chapter one, we both served in the same dispute resolution focused position before being promoted to other district positions, were both outspoken about our concerns related to Riverside's disciplinary practices, and both left the district feeling frustrated with the lack of substantive change in this area. Dakota's viewpoint is not meant to replicate my own as this would not be possible. Our experiences, perceptions, positioning, and a variety of other factors are unique to each of us. This interview did, however, contextualize a viewpoint of somebody who was heavily involved in and critical of the district's disciplinary practices. Dakota's interview provided a forum for exploring some of the tensions and questions that had emerged for me during the analysis and allowed me to use the semi-structured nature of the interview to delve into the discomfiting structures that led to the line of questioning in this dissertation. Additionally, the fact that Dakota was removed from their employment in the district gave me an opportunity to explore the perspectives of somebody who was unconstrained by concerns about whether or not they would be viewed as a "good employee" and who was at least partially removed from the enculturated Discourses of somebody who worked in Riverside on a daily basis. In chapter five, I also supplemented this perspective with a reflection of my perspective looking back as a former employee.

In total, interviews I conducted interviews with eight participants. After conducting the interviews and reviewing transcripts, I performed an initial review of the interview data. This initial review indicated a high degree of data saturation with several key themes and ideas being repeated across individuals. As a result, I opted not to recruit any additional participants. Additionally, during the interview recruitment stage, all participants agreed to participate in follow-up questions, if necessary; however, the analysis did not suggest a need for more questions.

Interviews. After initial contact, interviews were scheduled with each of the eight participants. Participants were given the ability to determine the times and locations that would be most convenient for them. This ranged from interviews in their offices during work hours to meeting on non-workdays at a local coffee shop, or afterhours via virtual meeting platforms. Ultimately, three participants engaged in their interviews in their workspaces (London, Avery, and Hayden), three engaged in their interviews in community locations (Kai, Blair, and Parker), one participated via phone (Dakota), and one participated in an interview virtually via Skype (Jesse). Each participant was provided general information about the study including its purpose and their reason for selection. Although my university's Institutional Review Board determined consent was not needed for this study, participants were provided an optional consent form (see Appendix A).

During the interviews, I utilized a semi-structured format to elicit participants' responses. Semi-structured interviews have the benefit of allowing for "the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing…leeway for following up on whatever angels are deemed important by the interviewee; as well as the interviewer has a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge producing participant" (Brinkman, 2014, p. 286). Each participant's interview was

based off the same initial set of 11 questions (see Appendix B) with deviations allowed as needed to further probe participants' responses. Interview lengths ranged from approximately thirty minutes to an hour depending on the depth of participants' responses. Each interview was recorded and transcribed following the procedures listed in the section below resulting in 96 pages of interview transcripts.

Data Analysis

   Being, doing, and saying: Engendering a semiotic understanding of language. As I discussed above, Gee's (2014) approach to discourse analysis serves as my analytical framework for this study. According to Gee, language derives its meaning, not from definitions, but rather from individuals being and doing. For example, one cannot talk about school discipline without discipliners and disciplinees (being) engaging in the act of discipline (doing). In a manner similar to Foucault's (1977/1995) cyclic description of power and resistance, however, language is not simply the outcome of being and doing, instead it reinforces, shapes, and challenges what it means to be and do. Because of this, an analysis of how individuals discuss discipline can be insightful vis-à-vis the ways in which discipline is enacted and the ways in which discipliners and disciplinees enact their roles. Gee (2014) described this process in noting "how people talk about marriage or anything else is never just a decision about saying (informing), it is a decision about doing and being" (p. 7). An analysis of language, therefore, is an analysis of how individuals think, act, and establish identity.

   During this study, I primarily leverage two constructs from Gee's (2014) framework: tools of inquiry and building tasks. For the purpose of this study, the term tools of inquiry referenced concepts that can be used to analyze what is being accomplished in a specific excerpt of language. Gee identified six specific tools that can be used for this purpose: social languages,

Discourses, intertextuality, Conversations, situated meanings, and figured worlds. Social

languages refer to the "varieties of languages [used] to enact and recognize different identifies in

different settings" (Gee, 2014, p. 45). The language a principal uses in a staff meeting to be

recognized as an educator, and more specifically, as a principal, would be different than the

language she uses at a sporting event to be recognized as a fan of a particular sport and team.

Discourses, as referenced in chapter two, are uses of language, actions, ways of thinking,

symbols, and other socially significant components to enact socially recognizable identities.

Intertextuality is the direct or indirect allusion to other spoken or written text. Conversations

(with a capital "C") refer to instances when spoken or written texts "allude or relate to themes,

debates, or motifs that have been the focus of much talk, writing, discussion, argument in some

social group with which we are familiar" (Gee, 2014, p. 46). Gee further clarified this in noting

that on many societal issues such as abortion, smoking, or affirmative action, most people know

what the sides are, how the issues are discussed, and which types of people tend to fall on which

sides of the argument. Situated meanings reference the ability of language to take on different,

specific meanings depending on the context in which the language is used. Gee illustrated this

point using the example of spilled coffee wherein if somebody were to say "get a broom and

clean the spilled coffee" one would picture coffee in a form such as beans or grounds whereas if

that person were to say "get a mop and clean the spilled coffee" one would likely picture liquid

coffee. People who are familiar with the English language immediately make the assumption

regarding the meaning of the word "coffee" based on the context or, situated meaning, in this

case the known uses for a mop versus a broom. This is similar to the example above in the

discourse community section where the word referral can hold a different meaning depending on

who is speaking (e.g., a teacher, a doctor, a business owner, etc.). Finally, figured worlds are

"simplified, often unconscious and taken-for-granted theories or stories about how the world works that we use to get on efficiently with our daily lives" (Gee, 2014, p. 95). Figured worlds act like simulations in which individuals take a perspective of a concept based on their values, experiences, expectations, etc. If someone were told to picture a classroom, for example, he might think about classrooms he attended while in school, classrooms that he has seen on television or in movies, and classrooms he has visited when attending functions for his children. From these experiences, this person would be able to develop a prototypical idea of what a classroom should be, which could then be modified based on other descriptors (e.g., a college classroom versus a kindergarten classroom, a student-centered classroom versus a traditional lecture style classroom). The use of figured worlds allows individuals to communicate more efficiently by reducing the need to describe every situation in detail; however, problems can arise when participants are pulling from different prototypical figured worlds (e.g., a student and a teacher who have different figured worlds related to appropriate adult/child interactions).

The second of Gee's (2014) constructs that is important to my analysis is the idea of building tasks. According to Gee, whenever people speak or write, they use language to construct reality in seven areas. As a result, there are seven things about which one might ask questions for any given piece of language: significance, practices (activities), identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge. Each of these seven areas or, building tasks, has subsequent questions that one might ask. Table 1 describes the type of questions for each building task. It is important to note that for each building task, the question could be asked using each of the six tools of inquiry listed above (e.g., How are situated meanings being used to build relevance? How are Conversations being used to build relevance?). By considering each of these building tasks across the six tools of inquiry, one can ask 42

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separate questions about any given piece of language. Although not every building task and tool of inquiry combination yields fruitful data for this analysis, it is nonetheless important to use these questions as a foundation to understand the overlap of my participants' discourses in order to draw conclusions about my research questions.

Table 1: Discourse Analysis Questions for Gee's Building Tasks

Building Task	Question
Significance	How is the tool being used to build relevance or significance for things and people in context?
Practices (Activities)	How is the tool being used to enact a practice (activity) or practices (activities) in context?
Identities	How is the tool being used to enact and depict identities (socially significant "kinds of people")?
Relationships	How is the tool being used to build and sustain (or change or destroy) social relationships?
Politics	How is the tool being used to create, distribute, or withhold social goods or to construe particular distributions of social goods as "good" or "acceptable" or not?
Connections	How is the tool being used to make things and people connected or relevant to each other or irrelevant to or disconnected from each other?
Sign Systems and Knowledge	How is the tool being used to privilege or deprivilege different sign systems (language, social languages, other sorts of symbol systems) and ways of knowing?

Note: Adapted Gee (2014, p. 140-141)

Three-stage analysis process. For this study, I use a three-stage process to analyze the interview data: a priori analysis, emergent analysis, and building task analysis. During my interviews, each participant was digitally recorded using the Voice Recorder Pro app. These interviews were stored in a password protected folder on my personal iCloud Drive. Next, I imported each audio .m4a file into iMovie on my computer where I combined the audio file with

a random photo from my personal library and exported it as an .mp4 in order to meet YouTube's guidelines for uploading files. Each file was then individually uploaded to a personal YouTube channel that was set to private so it could not be indexed or discovered by any individual who did not possess a direct link. No other individual was given a link to any interview file during this study. For each video, I enabled closed captioning to allow YouTube to auto-caption the videos, a process that generally took two to three hours per video. After captioning was complete, I downloaded a text file transcript of each video and made corrections to the transcripts. Since this study focused on thematic language patterns as opposed to other methods of discourse analysis that focus on utterances, pauses, etc., I opted to transcribe the interviews using a clean verbatim method (i.e., word-for-word but removing stutters, filler words such as "um" and "uh," and any other nonsensical sounds). Once the transcription process was complete, I imported each .docx file into Dedoose, a web-based program for conducting qualitative data analysis. At this point, I was able to begin the data analysis procedures outlined below.

   Stage 1: A priori analysis. In chapter two, I identified four discursive themes related to school discipline that emerged from the news media and scholarly articles that I used as part of my literature review: Discipline as a Social Practice, Consumerist and Neoliberal Discourses, Criminal Justice Discourses, and Mental Health Discourses. During my first stage of analysis, I use these themes as a priori codes in order to develop a better understanding of the overlap between common disciplinary Discourses and the language-in-use (discourses) of my study participants. The benefit of using a priori codes as part of a deductive analysis comes from the fact that I am able to thoroughly draw connections and establish a sense of intertextuality, a concept that is important during the later stages of analysis. During this stage, I look to understanding how my participants positioned themselves in relation to the issues of concern and

broader Discourses. Additionally, this portion of the analysis allows me to explore whether or not any of the discursive themes are absent or minimally leveraged. Just as in noting intertextuality, absence of the discursive themes is important in the third stage of my analysis as I draw conclusions about the participants' use of figured worlds, situated meanings, etc. to convey their positions related to student discipline.

Stage 2: Emergent analysis. During my second stage of analysis, I examine the same interviews using an inductive coding process to develop an understanding of the concepts and meanings that naturally evolved from my participants' discussions. Throughout this stage, I aim to understand how the Discourses of Riverside employees (as well as any smaller, sub-Discourses to which the participants belonged) diverged from the broader Discourses of school discipline. This allows me to better comprehend the ways in which Riverside staff discuss and, in turn, conceptualized student discipline.

Stage 3: Building task analysis. During the third stage of analysis, I use Gee's (2014) six tools of inquiry and seven building tasks to better understand the context of the "who-doing-whats" (p. 63) in relation to discipline in Riverside School District. This portion of the analysis focuses on how language is used together with actions and ways of being to enact discipline as an activity in schools. The third stage of analysis is intended to make visible the patterns that outline how "we act, think, value, and interact in ways that together with language render *who* we are and *what* we are doing recognizable to others (and ourselves)" (Gee, 2014, p. 48). To this end, I utilize a *Building Task Analysis Sheet* that I developed to aid me in examining the interview data (see Appendix C). The process for analyzing D/discourses can vary greatly based on the purpose and style of the analysis. For the purposes of this study, I am interested in broad connections, trends, and patterns in Riverside's disciplinary D/discourse. Because of this, I spend

more time focusing on the metastructures of the participants' interviews than on specific discursive markers such as turn taking, fronting, or hedging. Through an analysis of the D/discourses at work in participants' interviews, I endeavor to make empirical claims about the nexus of beliefs, intent, and actions of Riverside staff.

Journaling. Throughout the analysis process, I maintained a journal with sections for each interviewee. This journal allowed me to draw connections between the intention of each stage of analysis so that I could be contemplative of the goals of each stage, even when working in a different stage. Additionally, this journal acted as a space wherein I could be reflective about my role as an active participant in the discourse construction including ways in which my multiple roles, phrasing of questions, and other factors may have played into participants' answer. This journal also provided me an opportunity to draw connections between the interview discourses and the practices that I, as an insider, am aware of as well as to make note of the assumptions that participants' make about my insider knowledge when discussing topics (e.g., leveraging situated meanings specific to employees of Riverside School District staff). Although this journal does not act as a formal data point in my analysis, it is an important tool for framing and substantiating claims that I make based on interview data.

Convergence, agreement, coverage, and linguistic details. The term validity is rooted in positivists paradigms and has, at best, a tenuous relationship with qualitative research (Stenbacka, 2001). Mishler (1995) asserted the term validity does not fit within the qualitative paradigm and suggested researchers instead use the term trustworthiness to describe the quality and transparency of issues in a qualitative study. Others such as Connelly and Clandinin (2000) have advocated for the term verisimilitude to describe the quality of a research study ringing true, as closely as possible, to the experiences an observer might expect, insofar as it allows the

reader to understand the decisions made by a researcher. For the purpose of this study, I rely on the four elements outlined by Gee (2014) as hallmarks of a discourse analysis that exhibits validity, trustworthiness, or verisimilitude: convergence, agreement, coverage, and linguistic details. Convergence references the fact that the analysis should maximize compatibility and agreement when answering the 42 questions outlined above. Agreement encompasses the notion that other insiders (i.e., those who would fulfill similar roles to the participants) and researchers in the area of concern would tend to support the conclusions drawn in the analysis. Coverage indicates the data and findings can be applied in some ways to other, related situations. Finally, the concept of linguistic details references the idea that a discourse analysis should tie its findings to details of linguistic structures since the purpose and functions of such structures have been widely researched and vetted in the field.

Conclusion

In this case study, I seek to develop a better understanding of how staff members in one district leverage various D/discourses related to school discipline to develop and enact a disciplinary paradigm. To do so, I address the following questions:

(1) To what extent do the D/discourses in which Riverside School District staff members engage align with prevailing D/discourses in broader society related to student discipline?

(2) In what ways do Riverside School District staff members leverage and deviate from prevailing D/discourses related to student discipline to construct a disciplinary paradigm unique to the district?

(3) What do the linguistic features of Riverside School District staff members' discussions of school discipline indicate about the ways in which individuals engage in particular roles and leverage certain Discourses to enact discipline in the school district?

In answering these questions, I use Gee's (2014) approach to discourses analysis through the lens of the Foucault's concepts of power, knowledge, resistance, etc. I examine interviews from eight Riverside School District staff members via a three-stage analysis beginning with an a priori analysis, an emergent analysis, and finally a building task analysis. Through this process, I seek a deeper understanding of the nexus of being, doing, and saying as it relates to discipline within Riverside School District.

Chapter 4: Intertextuality of Societal Discourses

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which educators in Riverside School District leverage various D/discourses to construct and enact a disciplinary paradigm. Through investigating instances of intertextuality, localized Discourses, and discursive features, I explore the following questions:

(1) To what extent do the D/discourses in which Riverside School District staff members engage align with prevailing D/discourses in broader society related to student discipline?

(2) In what ways do Riverside School District staff members leverage and deviate from prevailing D/discourses related to student discipline to construct a disciplinary paradigm unique to the district?

(3) How do the D/discourses used by Riverside School District staff members reflect particular ways of saying, being, and doing that lead to the enactment of disciplinary practices within the school district?

In this chapter, I use an a priori analysis to provide an understanding of the overlap of broader disciplinary Discourses and the practical discourse of Riverside staff members. Such instances of intertextuality are important because they establish and reference webs of meaning that provide insight regarding ideas of cultural significance (Leitch & Palmer, 2010). Of the four themes that I identified in chapter two, Discipline as a Social Practice was the most prevalent theme with 83 uses among the interviewees. Next most frequent was Criminal Justice Discourses with 34 uses, followed by Consumerist and Neoliberal Discourses with 27 uses, and finally Mental Health

Discourses with 5 uses. The following sections will describe and analyze the context of these occurrences.

Assimilation into Structures of Power

During my analysis of news media and scholarly literature, discipline as a social practice presented in two primary categories: the reification and reproduction of power and the assimilation of students into society. Although both components of this theme were present, the assimilation of students was more prevalent in the participants' interviews. Parker, as a social studies teacher, saw this as a particularly important component of their job:

> I feel like it's my duty to teach the children how to behave, as well as their academics. I feel like I need to teach them how to be a person, as well as, what the state standards are…what goes on discipline-wise in the classroom just falls into my duty as a teacher and just as a person, as an adult in their life that they look up to. (Parker, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

Similarly, Jesse noted:

> We are helping kids become citizens of our communities, future citizens, and so behavior and the modeling of that behavior…their interactions, any non-academic behavior that they display, should be to the discipline examples that we teach them, deliberately and purposefully. (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

In both of these examples, the participants highlighted the importance of developing students as citizens. According to these participants, this development occurs both through explicit teaching and the modeling of expected behaviors. Parker shared an example of this in their classroom:

> Sometimes you do discipline a child and it's so quick and you know that, "oh, I shouldn't have done that that way." I did that in fact just this week. I handled the discipline wrong

this week but then I apologized, and I felt like after I apologized, and the child accepted

my apology, then we both felt better. (Parker, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

Kai echoed a similar sentiment:

If discipline is punitive, if you looking in for that frame, they wouldn't want to be around

me. They wouldn't want to come to me but the reason they say they want to come to me,

because they know that when they come to me, I will be firm but fair. I'm gonna give

them an equitable chance and, if I have to stand up for them, I will. If they were right, I

will say it. If they were wrong, I will say it. (Kai, personal communication, March 23,

2018)

These sentiments suggest a strong association between the disposition of the educator and the

ability to discipline productively. Without the ability to accept responsibility for one's wrongs

and model positive reconciliation, it would be difficult to authentically teach a student how to

accept responsibility, make amends, and move forward with an improved ability to self-regulate

and engage in socially acceptable behaviors. In doing so, Parker and Kai suggest a reframing of

the traditional structures that drive the operation of the classroom and school environment.

Instead of unidirectional authority under which the educator is largely infallible, the ability to

acknowledge a student's viewpoint and sense of agency are of worth can help establish a sense

of value and trust in the educator/student relationship.

Among the participants, it was common to hear that relationships were a key component

of creating a positive discipline climate. In order to authentically teach and model, several

participants noted the necessity of moving beyond positional authority and instead interacting in

ways that suggested family, mentorship, and being a role model. As London stated:

I want to know what they're interested in. I want to know about them. I take an interest

and I care, and kids can tell when you're sincere and can tell when you're making it up.

(London, personal communication, March 16, 2018)

Jesse shared another perspective, describing a time they couldn't build a relationship with a

student who was ultimately sent to an alternative school before returning to Jesse's school and

finding success after developing meaningful relationships with other staff members:

I do know the counselor was definitely meeting with him and reaching out to him and I

don't know what approach he took, but I mean it made very strong impact on this

particular young man." (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

Jesse also described their own damaged relationship and the impact that had in noting:

Even towards the end of my time there, sometimes I see him in the hallway and we never

got over our, I mean he really didn't like me. We were not able to get over that, right? I

am happy that he was able to come back and find connections with other staff members.

(Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

In the case of Jesse and the student with whom they lost a relationship, the student can be seen

engaging in simultaneous acts of resistance and acquiescence, consistent with Ennis's (2008)

description of counter discourses. After having been sent to an alternative school, an act the

student likely attributed to and/or associated with Jesse due to their involvement in the

disciplinary process and the fact that they were the administrator representing the school in the

Disciplinary Alternative Placement hearing, the student did not see Jesse as a trusted adult in the

school building. Despite this, the student acknowledged that the disciplinary structures Jesse

represented were legitimate and became what Jesse referred to as a "model student."

Multiple participants shared a belief that sending students away to be disciplined violated the relationships they were trying to build. Referencing office discipline referrals, Dakota stated:

> I have always tried to teach teachers [sending students to the office] means that you have empowered somebody else at that point. You have basically let a student know "I can no longer handle you." (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

Parker echoed those sentiments:

> I wouldn't want to call somebody in to discipline a child that did something wrong in my room because I feel that it gives away a part of our relationship. I feel like, if I discipline the child, then they know that they're accountable to me and themselves. (Parker, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

Dakota described this topic in more depth, noting especially, the fact that teachers need to consider both the immediate relationship with the students and the symbiotic relationship each teacher has in the long-term development of students:

> They [teachers] need to see themselves as the person who is creating the student that they're handing to the next teacher and the next teacher, and then to graduation, and then to society, to culture, to the neighborhood, their community. Like they're responsible for that and that's huge! That's huge! That's not just making sure that I help a student pass an assessment, and that's parenting. You just became responsible for a kid! And I really believe that – yeah. I mean – and to me, even though they're a teacher, I felt when I was in the classroom as a teacher, I'm responsible for these kiddos while they're with me. And I wouldn't sacrifice one of my own – like, they're all mine! They're all mine. They're all mine. It doesn't matter. And they belong to all of us, so we're all responsible for them in some way. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

There is an interesting tension here related to disciplinary Discourses. When examining Discourses in news media, there were repeated references to the fact that allowing teachers to remove disruptive students empowered teachers to have control over their classrooms (Doughty, 2012; Sperry, 2015). Parker and Dakota tell a different story, however. From their perspective, sacrificing the opportunity to change a child's behavior for the better is a sacrifice of both their relationship and the classroom autonomy. They renegotiate a taken-for-granted *savoir* related to "common sense" views of discipline and control and reframe the connection between discipline and professional autonomy. Blair shared a similar opinion when considering school administrator's autonomy to make disciplinary decisions in their schools:

> From the district, I can't dictate to a principal how they should help a teacher discipline a child. I'm like so far removed from that child, it's not reasonable to think I can guide that decision…to me it's like it immediately undermines their role and also makes their role harder because now they're waiting for the district to correct them. (Blair, personal communication, March 22, 2018)

These thoughts align closely with a number of scholars who point to the fact that relationships are foundational to effective discipline in schools (Gregory et al., 2016; Sterrett, 2012; Townsend, 2000). Interestingly, however, the concepts of citizenships and relationships were far more prevalent in school-based staff than they were in district-based staff.

Overwhelmingly, district-based staff expressed a more transactional account of the social components of student discipline. When considering discipline as a social practice, concepts of order, safety, and productivity permeated the discussions of this group of participants. This suggests a district-view of a *dispositif* wherein adherence to structure and procedure is correlated with positive outcomes and autonomy to make decisions is likely to be viewed as problematic,

regardless of whether the decisions made are good or bad. When asked about what discipline means to them, Hayden, for example, shared "I guess if you're talking about a broader sense you may or may not equate discipline to laws or religious beliefs or anything like that also provides some kind of structure for an orderly society" (Hayden, personal communication, June 21, 2018). Although slightly less procedural, Blair's description also focused on the operation of the learning environment as opposed to the development of a child:

> I very much lean towards this idea that it's a positive opportunity to change behavior to help a student learn what would be a more appropriate way of behaving. So when I think of it from the child's perspective, the discipline is meant to help that child learn better behavior, behavior that would allow that person and the people around them to be successful in their learning. (Blair, personal communication, March 22, 2018)

It is, perhaps, unsurprising that district-based staff would have a more procedurally oriented view of discipline than school-based staff due to the nature of their roles. While school-based staff are tasked with both building relationships and executing disciplinary procedures, district-based staff are predominantly charged with developing-procedures, training staff, and monitoring the implementation of system-wide expectations. This suggests a significantly different view of the *pouvoir/savoir* relationship from each group's perspective. For school-based staff knowledge and power were connected with the ability to autonomously implement practices and make decisions about those practices. For district-based staff, knowledge and power were representative of a structural and operational view wherein district staff members were responsible for transmitting sanctioned knowledge to school-based staff so that they could implement appropriate practices. That is not to say that district-based staff didn't express care for

students; however, their descriptions of discipline were more heavily grounded in process than personhood.

Despite the difference in relational/procedural perspectives between district and school-based staff, both groups leveraged Discourses associated with the reproduction of societal power. Avery, describing a problem they observed with the process by which schools request change of placements to settings such as alternative schools or self-contained special education programs noted:

> If they've had one bad altercation or this is the parent that's the squeaky wheel that won't stop calling us, they take a ton of time out of the administrator's time and energy, then it'd just be easier if this one family would stop contacting me. So I'm gonna give them the harshest punishment that I can to kind of see if I can get rid of them and not have to deal with it anymore. (Avery, personal communication, March 15, 2018)

In this instance, Avery is expressing frustration with interactions they have had with administrators who are inequitably applying disciplinary consequences. Another participant, describing their frustration as a Black educator whose race comes into question when disciplining students shared, "I think it makes my colleagues feel uncomfortable. I don't think it's just, I think because of my skin, I have faced inequity and so I'm more sensitive to it." In discussing a specific disciplinary situation in which a student was disciplined by a teacher for having pants below his waistline, an issue that is commonly targeted at students of color, the participant shared:

> I was not seen as the hero of equity; I was seen as oh I'm being soft on this Latino kid…
> If it was your child, you would be outraged…I said I refuse to do that. If you want that

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then you have to find someone who's willing to be inequitable, who's willing to do

something outrageous for no reason. That's not me.

Parker also expressed frustration with disciplinary processes that marginalize children:

Sometimes it just seems unreasonable. Like, did anybody just talk this through with the

child? Because if you did you might not need to go any further and I think sometimes that

gets skipped because so many infractions happen. This is what we do we've got to get the

paperwork done and get to the next one but I think that happens too often because I'm

working in school where there is a lot of disciplinary infractions and unfortunately there

are a lot of kids in line waiting to be disciplined by some administrator or administrative

assistant… I mean it's just not ordinary for schools to have that many disciplinary

problems, but we do at our school. (Parker, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

Although the participants did not generally mention explicit reification and reproduction of

power in the excerpts above, the conversations referenced a number of issues common to this

theme, including exclusion of "problematic" members of society, harsher consequences for

students of color, assumptions of favoritism when educators of color discipline students of color,

and an assembly line mentality when disciplining students from low socioeconomic

backgrounds. It is important to note here that these conclusions are drawn from insider

knowledge of the participants, backgrounds including the schools at which or with which they

work (such as with Parker) and the roles the participants occupy in the school district (such as

with Avery). Overall, the Discipline as a Social Practice Discourse was highly utilized by the

participants. In chapter two, I discussed how this Discourse manifests both in terms of those who

feel overly harsh discipline can lead to poor outcomes and the reproduction of social inequities

and in terms of those who feel overly lenient discipline erodes the social fabric and undermines

the authority of teachers and institutions. The participants in this study tended to lean more towards Discourses associated with the dangers of overly harsh discipline; however, as I will discuss in the next Discursive theme, those views were not universal, even within the interviews of individual participants.

Students or Criminals?

In the interviews with Riverside employees, concepts related to environmental hardening and technical surveillance, much as might occur in a prison or bank, were absent from the interviews, despite their prevalence in the broader Discourses. Instead, Riverside employees primarily discussed Criminal Justice Discourses in regard to the criminalization of disciplinary practices. The process of discipline, as discussed by the participants, reflects a broader societal shift where language associated with crime, prosecution, and punishment supersedes language of teaching and developing. As Hirschfield (2008) pointed out, "the problems that once invoked the idea and apparatus of student discipline have increasingly become criminalized" (p. 80). This represents a shift in the formalized structures of school discipline wherein the act of discipling a child has become rooted in the idea that misbehavior is closely equated with criminal behavior. The broad theme of criminalized disciplinary practices is reflected several ways throughout the interviews, including the use of terms historically associated with law enforcement, law enforcement style investigation, and the adjudication of student misbehavior.

In describing their first year in Riverside School District, Kai shared the following account:

> When I first got to the county I'm in [school districts are divided by county in Florida], I had this like five-page referral, which is the longest I've ever had. And it was accounting for a student who was Hispanic, written by a teacher who was a Caucasian male, and it

had things like "the student had a bladed stance." Well, first of all, that terminology is not education terminology. So, the background of the person, the person is kind of a wannabe police officer. They had some military experience but they, I think the ideal dream would be on the SWAT team. So, they're bringing the SWAT mentality into education…This is not a SWAT. We're not coming in with guns blazing and I refuse to expel the boy or give him out-of-school suspension [for sagging pants and disrespect]. I had him do something light like a level one lunch detention and write an apology letter but, also, I talked to the teacher that you know, we don't do that here. But the sad thing is, we did do that here.

(Kai, personal communication, March 23, 2018)

In the interview, Kai described how the teacher got the student's attention to reprimand him for dress code concerns by grabbing the student by the backpack and physically turning him around, to which the student responded with "disrespectful" comments. This experience highlights how a minor issue, that could have been addressed via a conversation (if it even needed to be addressed at all), turned into a teacher demanding exclusionary discipline through framing a minor, discretionary problem as dangerous, criminal behavior. What is more, the behavior of the teacher, in this case, was far more serious than that of the student; however, there was an innate assumption that the authority of the teacher led to presumed control over both the behavior and body of the student, a right that the student did not possess. Had the student forcefully grabbed and turned the teacher around to yell at him, it would not have been surprising to see involvement from the School Resource Office or local law enforcement agency given the teacher's reaction to sagging pants. In this case, there is a clear divide in beliefs related to knowledge politics and the agency over one's body. It is assumed that the teacher has both moral right over the student's body (the right to determine what dress is appropriate) and physical right

over the student's body (the right to physically move the student to discipline him). The student is given no opportunity to express his view of appropriate dress or appropriate physical interaction and is thus deprived of the opportunity to assert his own agency and view of legitimized action.

Law enforcement language did not only show up in the interviews via reference to other's actions, it was also utilized by Riverside School District staff in their descriptions of student discipline. Blair, for example, had this to say when discussing how administrators would handle discipline given the frequency of a student's misbehavior:

> Whether you discipline a child that is a repeat offender versus a kid that you barely know and messed up one day, human nature is that you're not gonna stick to a rule very well anyway. (Blair, personal communication, March 22, 2018)

In the broader context of this excerpt, Blair was advocating for flexibility to allow more principal discretion regarding disciplinary consequences. Specifically, Blair was criticizing "contracts" that would exclude fifth grade students from the end of the year field trip for any office discipline referral given after spring break. This exemplifies the fact that, even in advocating for more appropriate disciplinary consequences, law enforcement terms such as "repeat offender" are still part of the D/discourses in Riverside School District. Similarly, Parker, whose interview heavily focused on family, mutual accountability, social emotional learning, and other such topics, also found themself utilizing law enforcement language:

> I mean, if you think about a school as an institution and you think about discipline as, perhaps maybe if you thought about it as a crime, there has to be some standard of consequence. If you think about it that way, like in society, there's a standard of

consequence if you run a stop sign or something like that. So, I think there has to be a

standard of consequence. (Parker, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

As in Kai's quote, the comparison of student misbehavior to crime highlights a shift in

understanding regarding school discipline and its underlying purpose.

Among both school-based and district-based administrators, Criminal Justice Discourse

manifested itself in discussions of investigation, adjudication, and due process. Interestingly,

although there was some overlap, investigation and adjudication were primarily found in the

interviews of school-based administrators while issues of due process were primarily found in

the interviews of district-based administrators.

When asked what factors should be considered when assigning disciplinary

consequences, Jesse responded:

Anytime any kind of students, an incident with students, would take place outside of

academics or behaviors, now you begin an investigation where you're speaking with

witnesses, you're collecting witness statements, and you're processing. Once you collect

all that evidence, you're talking with parents, you're talking about teachers,

administrators, the kids, by the time you get to really think of any discipline that takes

place, you're talking hours for every single incident. (Jesse, personal communication,

February 28, 2018)

Similarly, Kai shared:

Sometimes the incident is kind of like cut dry – you hear what the teacher said, you hear

what the student said, and you make a decision. Sometimes it's a little bit more intense or

complex and then you would hear what the teacher said, what the student said and do an

investigation. You would call in three or four students or witnesses. You do that a lot of

times, the teachers say who witnessed it and the students say who witnessed and you

might pick some on your own, some random ones. And then you try to find some truth

because when the incident happens, there's two perceptions. (Kai, personal

communication, March 23, 2018)

In both cases, the school-based administrators described lengthy fact-finding processes to

determine consequences for misbehavior. The use of terms like witnesses, investigation, and

incident by both administrators once again makes a direct connection between student behavior

and criminal conduct. This follows from a particular train of thought in criminal justice theory

that ties a direct link between the accumulation of evidence and the ability of an investigator to

determine the likelihood that a suspect has committed a crime (Blair & Rossmo, 2010;

Kuykendall, 1982). By framing the disciplinary processes in such a way, students become seen

through a lens that frames their behavior in particular set of expectations about crimes and

criminals. Kuykendall, for example, described a process known as the criminal act continuum by

which an individual who commits a crime engages in steps that include conceptualizing a crime,

planning a crime, acting on the plan, and either escaping justice or being apprehended and

prosecuted. By identifying student in this way, the disciplinary model allows only for "justice" or

"escape from justice" instead of teaching students how to improve their social emotional

competencies and coping skills to engage in more productive behaviors in the future.

Furthermore, when considering such a process across the number of disciplinary incidents that

may occur in any given school, the amount of time that could be spent on instructional

leadership, coaching, and other transformative practices that is lost to "investigations" is

staggering.

In addition to spending time investigating student misbehavior, administrative time may be spent in "hearings" that mimic, to some extent, court proceedings wherein school and district staff determine whether or not a student is permitted to remain at their assigned school. Jesse described this process:

> But then from a process standpoint you go down and the chart and, in our district, once you come to a certain number of level two and three referrals, you can request that a student receives a change of placement to an alternative school, or at least you can request a hearing where we will, as a committee, decide where the student should remain or go. (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

Jesse also shared a particular experience in one of their hearings:

> At the hearing I presented my case, all the things that I had done to try to help him adhere to the school rules and school expectations and, as well as, the records of referrals and investigations and witness statements and everything else. This was a change of placement, I should clarify, for continuous disobedience and continuous disruption of the school setting. (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

From a district perspective, Hayden described their involvement with the disciplinary hearing process:

> Most of the time they're just coming then presenting the case and asking where to go from there. They want to be compliant with all the legal issues as well as district policy and things of that nature. (Hayden, personal communication, June 21, 2018)

As with investigations, these hearings involve the use of significant human resources. Hearings in Riverside School District typically include a hearing officer, who works as an independent contractor in the district specifically for such instances, a district administrator, a school-based

administrator, the student, and the parent. On a case-by-case basis, others may be involved as well. This is again, a significant loss of instructional time for the student and a significant usage of staff time that is not spent directly supporting students.

Criminal Justice Discourses, of all of the ones identified in this study, are most closely tied to concerns about the school-to-prison pipeline. As staff begin using language that reflects criminal proceedings, students become increasingly treated as criminals instead of students who are in the process of learning to be responsible members of society. Ultimately, thinking of students as criminals and treating them as criminals can lead to their involvement with the criminal justice system (Hirschfield, 2008). It is also interesting to note that, despite some usage of law enforcement related language among teachers, Criminal Justice Discourses were almost exclusively found in the interviews of administrative staff. Knowledge in the sense of *pouvoir/savoir* is continuously shaped and negotiated by participants who are insiders to a given *dispositif.* In the case of educational functioning, Criminal Justice Discourses have become engrained in the *savoir* of the profession in this time period and have become so interconnected with the school vocabulary, that participants utilize these Discourses even when explicitly stating things that would seem incompatible with the notion of criminalizing student behavior. This may be as a result of shifting away from interpersonal and relationship-based interactions when teachers send their students elsewhere to be disciplined, as Dakota and Parker referenced in the previous section.

Who Deserves a School's Resources?

The Consumerist and Neoliberal Discourses discursive theme was one of the more complex a priori codes to analyze in this study. Although concepts that emerged in the interviews related to efficiency, productivity, etc. could have fit in this section, they were often tightly

entwined with overlapping Discourses both from the a priori codes and from emerging themes. In the emergent analysis section below, I will identify additional areas where neoliberal concepts overlapped with other concepts to form new Discourses unique to Riverside School District. Within this discursive theme, however, two topics were prevalent: different expectations for students based on socioeconomic status and deservedness of resource allocation.

Numerous studies have shown that there is a link between teacher expectations and student success (McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Pantaleo, 2016; Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006). Although none of my participants explicitly stated that students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds were less likely to be successful, the repeated comparison of Title I schools (those that receive additional federal funding due to high levels of poverty) and non-Title 1 schools highlights the potential for implicit expectation bias, something that educators must remain aware of and work to combat. When the discourse communities to which teachers belong hold assumptions about particular groups of students, those expectations are transmitted through repeated discourse until they become engrained in the accepted *savoir*. Jesse, for example, discussed difficulties with restorative practices when working with students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds:

> Restitution at times was warranted, so that was always and that's a tricky one when you're working in a Title 1 school with families who don't have resources. One kid does something to another that could financially warrant a restitution - I would look for that sometimes the restitution would have been of other means. (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

In this instance, Jesse was aware of the fact that financial restitution may or may not be a reasonable way of repairing harm when student behavior resulted in things such as property

damage. Instead of assuming that, since the most obvious form of repairing harm could be difficult, no restoration could occur, Jesse acknowledged that they could work with the students to find alternative means for repairing harm without going directly to punitive measures.

Kai discussed differences between the way they would apply certain disciplinary expectations to schools with high and low socioeconomic statuses:

> I'm more willing to focus on dress code in an urban school or a title one school that's failing because we know that a certain bandana or something that can confirm a community or organization that is at odds with another one and that can erupt in violence. Or a certain hat turned a certain way. But in an affluent school where you're not having that kind of gang violence, those kinds of things, to worry about somebody's shorts, if they are three-quarters above their knee, is not the biggest thing I think we should be concerned about. (Kai, personal communication, March 23, 2018)

In Kai's excerpt, they discuss why, as an administrator, they would treat dress code differently in different environments. Although they are clear that gang violence is their primary motivation, there are two assumptions inherent in this line of thinking. The first is that poor, urban schools are likely to be violent and as such, require a higher level of surveillance and control. The second, related assumption is that schools that are affluent deserve more freedom and less direct administrative control. This is similar to the line of thinking in the broader Criminal Justice Discourses that assumes poor, urban schools need higher levels of security and surveillance, despite the fact that there has been little correlation observed between higher levels of security and improved school safety (Bachman, Randolph, & Brown, 2011).

London also expressed similar assumptions when discussing how schools can share information about improving behavior:

Well how come Cardinal O'Sullivan [pseudonym for a local, private Catholic school]

doesn't have so many referrals? They don't have these things. What can we do there?

How about Cardinal O'Sullivan? Why don't they have these problems? And I know a lot

of it is parent involvement, which we can't control, but we can make an effort to make

sure the kids know we care so we can try to change those behaviors. (London, personal

communication, March 16, 2018)

Like Kai's statements above, London appears to be coming from a place of concern for students

and a desire to improve school culture. However, London's statement is also similar to Kai's in

that it assumes the students at an expensive, private school have parents who care more, and thus

can behave more appropriately. This statement discounts a multitude of factors including the

private school's prerogative to exclude students at will. Both London and Kai's statements,

despite their best intentions, are couched in deficit-based thinking about students from low-

socioeconomic backgrounds.

Another common talking point related to Consumerist and Neoliberal Discourses is the

fact that schools have limited resources and are, therefore, unable to meet the needs of all

learners. This is reflective of Petrilli's (2015) claims about "low-income strivers" and the

assumption that school resources should be reserved for students that "are ready to learn, follow

the rules and work hard" (para. 16). This perpetuates a neoliberal assumption that, given limited

resources, individuals must compete and that those who are most deserving will win. Jesse

highlighted this thinking:

You have one teacher with 28 students. You have one [student] that's making like

impossible – cursing, throwing things, suddenly out of his seat, calling out, not even

answering, just calling out different things. It really does make you wonder; how do I

weigh this out? Where do you draw the line? What's fair? (Jesse, personal

communication, February 28, 2018)

Similarly, Avery stated:

As an administrator, you have hundreds of students that you're trying to oversee...and

you're overseeing quite a few staff members and so to know the intricate ins and outs of

every student is just something that, unfortunately, because of the amount of personnel

that we have, is not possible. (Avery, personal communication, March 15, 2018)

Not all Riverside staff members agreed with this viewpoint; however. Blair for example was

adamant that students should not be treated as if they were engaging in a business transaction and

that the district, therefore, should not dictate standardized discipline procedures in noting:

The idea that you can dictate, to any great degree, how to make decisions – whether it's

instruction, or discipline – to me is a fallacy. That like it's this bureaucracy that is at its

highest level of like "I'm gonna tell you exactly what to do." We don't have widgets, we

have children. (Blair, personal communication, March 22, 2018)

Dakota also resisted the notion that time and resources constraints should justify the

marginalization of certain groups of children, while simultaneously providing some context for

understanding the pressures and difficulties teachers face:

I wrote an article at one point early on in my career…the premise of it was exactly...how

do we help teachers understand that that one student is just as important as all of the other

students, if not more important? Again, without compounding it with the pressures that a

teacher faces in terms of all of the compliance, and regulatory, and assessment, just all of

those pressure that they face. I think that teachers experience a lack of support in a lot of

cases to the degree that it's easy for them to have a sacrificial lamb and to believe the

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adage that those other students aren't able to learn because of the behavior of one or two

students. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

London shared similar thoughts regarding the pressures teachers face that may lead to

withholding resources from certain students in favor of excluding them:

> When you have someone coming into your room, doing an observation, and they're the
>
> one that's deciding whether or not you're getting that highly effective or effective
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> [observation rating] and your raise is tied to it, it makes a difference. (London, personal
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> communication, March 16, 2018)

These excerpts highlight the tension that many educators face as they attempt to support students

while meeting the demands of their jobs.

Neoliberal education policies have created conditions where competition (between

schools, between teachers, between students, etc.) leaves the education community fighting for

the scraps of underfunded education programs. Teachers and administrators that feel the pressure

of evaluation scores, school grades, and similar metrics that drive employment and financial

stability may make difficult choices at the expense of certain students. For staff in Riverside

School District, this tension is palatable as staff would seamlessly move from discussions of

student equity to a lack of time. This is perhaps most evident in another quote from Jesse that

highlights the tensions they felt when working through disciplinary issues:

> My very first year as an administrator, I was in my office talking with a young man who
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> had just been in an altercation. My principal walked in the office and he's like "what are
>
> you doing, you've been talking to this kid for 30 minutes, it was a simple case let's go."
>
> And I told him that I was investigating, and I needed to get some more information. I was
>
> trying to get everything together. He had been an administrator, an assistant principal and

principal for some years and he understood or, in his mind, a fight is a fight, and this is how many days suspension he will get. We have other things to get to. We have to look at cafeteria procedures, we have to look at this system for this mess, this parent meeting, this committee meeting. That the reality of that is, three administrators that run a school of 1,200 warm bodies in that school on a daily basis and [it's] sometimes hard to justify spending an hour on an incident when you're responsible for so many different things. I remember thinking, going home and thinking, "man this guy's such an asshole, he doesn't get it. I can't believe he told me that. The value of a child is, we cannot treat that lightly." And I can't say that, even after my final year, I had any better handle on that balance than I did during my first year. (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

Mental Health as a Proxy for Preventative Frameworks

Although mental health played a significant part in the broader school discipline Discourses, it was largely absent in the interviews with Riverside School Staff. The only staff member with multiple mentions of mental health during the interviews was Avery, although that is not surprising given their professional mental health background. The lack of a focus on mental health may be due, in part, to the fact that many of the articles referencing mental health and school discipline focused around issues such as school shootings, a tragedy that has thankfully been absent from Riverside School District.

Although direct mental health discussions were not prevalent, there were mentions of behavioral frameworks that support social emotional and mental health development. Dakota for example, when asked what they would change about discipline in Riverside, said the following:

I would've wanted people to incorporate more school-wide system. So, incorporate more positive behavior supports, incorporate more social-emotional learning. Make those

connections between academics and behavior, Maslow and Bloom and all of those things. I think I would have wanted more opportunity for teachers to get meaningful professional development, engaging professional development, professional development that they could truly walk away and implement something that would helped them in the classroom. I think I would have wanted us to have more opportunity to be with the board members and the superintendent. And have our own restorative circles and really talk through things and be transparent and open. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

Avery also espoused the need for such frameworks:

Our hope is always that they are using things like the alternatives to the suspension and that they're being proactive. They're using their PBIS or using RTI, they're looking at social-emotional learning standards and things like that. Integrating morning meetings and doing social skills groups and all of that. But they're, to me, I feel like the harsh reality is that oftentimes, school teams, you don't see them doing that a lot of times. (Avery, personal communication, March 15, 2018)

As a former staff member in Riverside School District, this was a common refrain. From the beginning of the pilot studies that I mentioned in chapter one, there was an expansion of vocabulary use related to restorative practices, trauma informed care, social emotional learning, and other similar frameworks; however, there was a lack of systematic implementation of frameworks that support the mental health of students. Given the fact that these frameworks were not part of the day-to-day work of many staff members, it is not surprising that they were frequently absent from discourses related to student discipline.

A Priori Summary

Although three of the four discursive themes used in the a priori analysis were widely represented, there was considerable variation in the ways in which participants engaged with such Discourses. Additionally, despite the fact the participants leveraged Discourses that were prevalent in the broader societal context, the connection with those Discourses was, at times, tenuous. This loose connection highlights the ways in which Discourses, as a representation of broader knowledge politics, are constantly negotiated and redefined based on the contexts in which they operate. In the next section, I will explore issues related to school discipline that arose from the participants' discussions using an inductive process of emergent analysis.

Chapter 5: Systems of Support

The goal of the emergent analysis in this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how D/discourses in Riverside School District deviate from those in the broader social Discourses. More so than a divergence, however, I found an evolution of Discourses wherein the common societal Discourses were morphed, combined, and/or disassembled to create new Discourses unique to the district. Scholars have called this phenomenon discourse synthesis, a process by which new Discourses are constructed based on other, existing Discourses (Plakans, 2009; Segev-Miller, 2007). This section explores two such examples of discourse synthesis: Systems of Practice and Professional Development and Support.

Systems of Practice

Systems of Practice refer to the network of interactions that govern the day-to-day work of educators in Riverside School District. Within the Systems of Practice Discourse, components of Discipline as a Social Practice, Neoliberal and Consumerist Discourses, and Criminal Justice Discourses can be seen. The Systems of Practice Discourse covered a variety of topics including processes and procedures; expectations and roles; disconnects between different groups within the district; logistical concerns and resource management; and control over the work of educators. Despite the broad range of topics, three primary themes emerged: navigating district and school policies; district, school, and teacher tensions; and disciplinary policies – especially regarding the use of the discipline matrix.

Navigating district and school policies. Like many facets of education, the establishment of disciplinary policies and procedures is complicated for a variety of reasons, not

the least of which is extreme variability in the beliefs, skills, and motives of the individuals involved in implementation. Blair described this challenge:

> I think with teachers, discipline is similar to grading, in a way. I always feel like if you put ten teachers at a desk and talk about a topic like discipline, you're gonna get ten different belief systems and you're gonna get ten different opinions because any one of those things the really – the positive and negative reinforcers, consequence, punishments – as adults, we've developed our own ideals of what those things are and their impact. So, when you get a group of teachers together, you start talking about something like this, you kind of go into it knowing there's going to be some just, differences of opinion about how to discipline children. And so, my hope for teachers in the discipline is that we work towards getting more agreement around what we believe are the best practices and what we believe are the right layers of discipline that literally create positive change. (Blair, personal communication, March 22, 2018)

Blair's comparison of discipline practices to grading practices is interesting in this excerpt. As I mentioned in chapter three, there are areas in which my status as an insider in the district allowed me to make claims based on my participants' presumptions about my background knowledge. This is one of those cases. In the year prior to Blair's interview, Riverside School District had begun discussions about moving from traditional A through F letter grades to standards-based grading. These discussions were not only full of varying opinions, as Blair noted, but fights among administrators, parents, students, local media, and other constituents. The fact that Blair used this particular comparison highlights the perceived contentious nature of disciplinary policy. This is further reinforced by the fact that, a year after this interview, Blair and I worked together on a discipline committee where this comparison was discussed in greater detail.

Like Blair, Dakota noted both the need to work towards consensus around disciplinary practices and the difficulty in achieving that goal:

I think I would have wanted more opportunity for teachers to get meaningful professional development, engaging professional development, professional development that they could truly walk away and implement something that would have helped them in the classroom. I think I would have wanted us to have more opportunity to be with the board members and the superintendent. And have our own restorative circles and really talk through things and be transparent and open… And being willing to listen to each person's belief system and figure out how to continue to validate people who may not have believed similarly to myself or to our team or to what we believed were best practices. To listen to that. To validate that. To incorporate those things in some way. To not dismiss people, but to help people make a fundamental paradigm shift. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

Although Dakota also mentions professional development, which is covered in more detail in the subsequent theme, this excerpt also emphasizes the disconnect among Riverside staff members as it relates to discipline and the need to come together to find common ground.

Kai also described a disconnect among practices, however; their perspective focused more on differences in implementation within their school:

What do you focus on first in school? Do you start right on the curriculum, day one or do you take time, two or three days, building your classroom norms? Building on systems that work that really will perpetuate to the last day of school. Or do you generate the algorithms [referencing math content] you learned in college and then realize in December – this is not working – and trying to reset. but the kids all know who you are,

they know your weaknesses, they know your strengths, and they do play to that. (Kai, personal communication, March 23, 2018)

Although many descriptions about disciplinary policies throughout the interviews highlighted larger scale policies (e.g., the ways in which schools or teachers interact with district policy), Kai reminds us that each classroom is a microcosm of the broader difficulties Riverside School District faces. For Blair, this starts with building a system of supports within the building:

You have to build it over time. I'm a big believer in systems theory and that basically, as a principal, you can't manage it all. You can't do it all unless you've built, over time, the systems. So, what I mean by systems is, like, your ideas, your rules, your procedures, are understood. And they're tight enough for people to basically function well, efficiently, and effectively within the school…everybody in the building clearly understands what it is we're trying to do. (Blair, personal communication, March 22, 2018)

In comparing Blair's statement to Kai's point, you can see that Blair believes the most effective way to ensure teachers do things like building classroom routines and developing positive relationships with students is to develop a system of expectations that is clear and tight enough to provide consistency (tight being a term often used in Riverside to reference policy or procedures that have little flexibility).

From the district perspective, Riverside staff shared similar thoughts to Blair's desire to develop sustainable structures at the school level. Hayden described how they try to ensure consistency among schools:

I try to make sure that the district is compliant with all statutes and regulations to protect the district legally. Of course, from the district office, we try to support the schools and make sure they're making good decisions. Also, to protect them legally but making good

decisions for the students as well as just trying to support them to maintain that orderly

and safe environment. At the same time, I also have to kind of police certain procedures

to make sure that the student and parents' rights are upheld. They may or may not be

knowledgeable about this thing, so that's another piece to it. (Hayden, personal

communication, June 21, 2018)

Although Blair and Hayden speak about the school in different terms (i.e., systems theory versus

regulation and policing), both describe a process by which decisions are made and distributed

from a higher authority. In both cases, this is more akin to a bureaucracy than a system view of

schools. In a system, each part is connected to the integrated whole and, in turn, must be viewed

through the lens of ecological, networked communities (Capra & Luisi, 2014). In a bureaucracy,

on the other hand, decisions are made and distributed as the networked components of the

organization are subordinate to the structures they support.

 Dakota shared a perspective that connected with both Hayden and Blair. In Dakota's

interview, they recognized the need for immediate response while simultaneously building a

larger framework from which schools should operate:

 That's really the biggest challenge with systems change efforts is you have to weigh the

 need to continue to react and respond to challenging behaviors in students who are

 experiencing trauma and become aggressive. You have to continue to respond to that but

 you also have to start developing a prevention framework, which I think we were starting

 to build out, by talking more about social-emotional learning, by focusing on the

 functions of behavior and really helping people understand universal precautions and a

 prevention framework through positive behavior support and things. Where that takes

more time and effort, but you can't keep plugging all the holes in the ship if you aren't

building a better ship behind you. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

Dakota's response encapsulates the challenge faced by both individual schools and the broader

district. Students with challenging behaviors are often in need. When this happens, both the

wellbeing of the student who is exhibiting challenging behaviors as well as those around that

child must be addressed. When educators struggle to meet these needs, it is often the child

exhibiting behavior who becomes viewed as expendable to "protect" the learning environment

for other children. As a result, these children are removed from school and the cycle of

marginalization continues. Riverside is in need of a paradigm shift that reduces exclusion and, in

turn, promotes equity and compassion for its students. If schools and districts continue to react in

the ways they have been reacting, they will continue to get similar behavioral outcomes. To use

Dakota's metaphor, districts must plug the holes in the ship (addressing immediate behavioral

needs) while simultaneously building a better ship (establishing more equitable, productive

behavioral models).

District, school, and teacher tensions. Whether considering the need to establish

disciplinary practices from a systems or directive model, tensions are likely to appear. This is

especially true in a large system where, even with representation, there will likely be those who

make decisions and those who have to implement those decisions. Additionally, even among

those who are making decisions about disciplinary policy, there is bound to be disagreement over

a variety of issues. Within their individual school, London expressed frustration over their

disconnect with school-based administration over the appropriateness of certain disciplinary

practices:

I actually posted a meme to social media a week or so ago about a kid in a pool who was pouring a bottle of water over his head and it says something like "when we give the kid who's skipping class OSS as a punishment, what are we doing" and I got roasted by my admin for that…you know, "why would you post that" and "what do you expect us to do" and "what's the solution." And well the solution is to try something else…find out why he's skipping class. (London, personal communication, March 16, 2018)

In London's case, their school had recently undergone a change in administration and the new principal was shifting disciplinary paradigms that had traditionally been more punitive. Although some of the assistant principals were supportive of this change, others were not. Parker shared similar frustrations:

They have to just get through and follow the consequences that are mandated by our school, in our school district, and move on to the next case the best they can. Because it's just so, in the thousands, every school year, and it's inordinate. I mean, it's just not ordinary for schools to have that many disciplinary problems, but we do at our school. (Parker, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

In this excerpt, Parker seems to express concern over both the way in which school administrators mandate certain consequences and the feeling that this is supported or encouraged by the school district.

Just as the teachers in this study conveyed frustration over the decisions of school-based administrators, the assistant principals in this study shared similar thoughts about district-based administrators and policies. Jesse shared an example of their concerns about the district/school disconnect:

You find really delicate ways which were sharing information and ask for a change of

placement and you don't have the minimum number of referrals of the level whatever and

district office will say well you need to keep dealing with it. Have you done this? Have

you done that? (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

Later in their interview giving a specific example they noted:

So, I did request for the change of placements and, at that point, it's funny because it was

my very first time in [Riverside] where I was asking for a change of placement. And the

individual that oversees that department for our district called my school and asked for

me and spoke with me and said "hey one of these referrals that you submitted for review

was coded incorrectly so I'm going to reject your request for a hearing. You don't have

the minimum number of referrals" and I was furious. (Jesse, personal communication,

February 28, 2018)

Although the context of this excerpt when considering Jesse's interview suggests they were

frustrated at the lack of trust in their judgement and the fact that the change of placement to an

alternative school was denied based on procedural issues, there is also an implication that the

school was not supported in finding other ways to address the student's misbehavior.

Kai also made note of the school/district disconnect, though they were less critical of the

circumstances:

One size does not fit all because the district is so large, it encompasses the county. There

are very big swings in diversity and socioeconomic makeup of the western part of the

district whereas in the eastern part versus the central part versus another part. And so I

think that sometimes the district, we rightfully so, it's like the president of the United

States. You're making vast constitutional laws, but the states have to kind of find what

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works for them because in one state, the state of Texas is very different from Arizona, which is very different from North Dakota...So, you got to find how you live in that reality and I think the district makes a broad declaration and the schools have the find a way to live in it. (Kai, personal communication, March 23, 2018)

Kai's statement acknowledges that top down decisions regarding discipline may be problematic but relates it to a broader political Discourse regarding states' rights in the federal government. Although Kai and Jesse shared different experiences, both acknowledged a disconnect.

Two of the district administrators interviewed for this study, Hayden and Avery, saw the tensions between school and district as less problematic than the school-based administrators. Hayden noted:

I think there weren't a pretty good place I think that we've advanced education not only for the administrators about different things but also, we've advanced different outreaches and things to make parents more knowledgeable about their rights. (Hayden, personal communication, June 21, 2018)

Similarly, Avery shared:

I think they're pretty open to the conversations that we have. They are open to us questioning kind of "hey, I see that I'm reading this referral or this infraction. I don't see how you coded it this way. Help me understand." And so sometimes, even those conversations alone can maybe, change the infraction or change the outcome. I think they're pretty open to like our collaborative conversations and working collectively with myself, as well as, the rest of our group. (Avery, personal communication, March 15, 2018)

Although both of these excerpts paint the picture of productive relationships, it is not that neither Avery nor Hayden sees a disconnect. Outside of the context of these interviews, both have expressed that problem to me, to one extent or another. However, it is clear that the disconnect is seen as a systematic issue by the school-based administrators whereas, for the district-based administrators, it may appear more isolated to individual schools or administrators. This points to a disconnect between school and district views related to who has the power to determine legitimized knowledges and, thus, implement certain practices.

Blair, despite being a district-based administrator, is a former principal and works closely with principals in schools on a day-to-day basis. Their view of the disconnect was more akin to that of the principals:

> I think we undermine the power of the principal and basically, they become more insecure in their ability to make the right decision based on the situation at that school…That the tension that we feel right now, I didn't feel years and years ago. There was a lot more focus on "you're the principal, you're gonna make decisions, you're gonna make some mistakes, that's okay we're gonna learn from them. But we trust you to understand the big picture, but we trust you to make decisions about things that happen in your building." And I think that's where the tension has developed is that we've now made the principalship contingent on I need to know exactly what to do and somebody above me at the district needs to tell me that. I really think that's a critical, critical problem for us going into the future. We have to trust, we have to hire, recruit, train, trust principles to make decisions in that school based on the big ideas of the district. But the individual decisions, they gotta make them. (Blair, personal communication, March 22, 2018)

Considering the quotes above, Hayden and Avery share a belief that part of the role of a district-administrator is to question and guide school-based administrators to help ensure bad or illegal decisions are avoided as much as possible. Blair expresses more understanding of principal mistakes and notes that failures are part of learning to do the job well. Blair doesn't indicate that they would turn an eye to mistakes, rather that they would treat those mistakes as opportunities for professional learning and growth.

Dakota also weighed in on the notion of district/school tensions and held a view that was somewhere in between those expressed above:

> I think when you become a district-level employee there becomes an often times, whether it's intentional or whatever. There's a belief that you no longer understand what the day-to-day feels like in a classroom. And so, I think there's a little level of that. Your district, I'm school. I also think again, like I was asking people to take personal responsibility for their actions in situations. And to make difficult changes. Change philosophies, change beliefs, change traditions, change histories, change things that have worked for a period of time. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

Dakota's perspective acknowledges both the actual and perceptual divides of district-based and school-based staff, however, they also shared that long standing practices may be difficult to change without outside intervention and support. Dakota further expanded on this notion:

> I think a systems change process of like positive behavior supports in the school has to have administrator buy-in. Because if the administrator isn't reinforcing the appropriate behaviors of the faculty and validating the work that they do and believing in their strengths, applying the exact same principles that we ask teachers to do, with administrators and other faculty aren't doing that with the adults in the community, then

it's never gonna become a systemic change. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5,

2019)

This view aligns with the bureaucratic approach that Blair and Hayden shared previously in that

schools need to have directives that dictate approach behavior in order for substantive change to

occur.

        The discipline matrix. Although the section above highlights a broad tension between

different parties in the district, perhaps nothing was more divisive in the interviews than the

discipline matrix that the district uses to determine consequences for misbehavior. Before

discussing the participant's views of the discipline matrix, I believe it is important to

contextualize a couple points. First, the discipline matrix is not a concept unique to Riverside. As

Jesse mentions in their interview, the district in which they previously worked used a similar

document. Second, the discipline matrix is often taken to be synonymous with the discipline

policy in Riverside. Although the discipline matrix is only one section of the district's Student

Code of Conduct, which, is itself, only one part of the district's broader disciplinary policy, the

discipline matrix is by far the most discussed. Finally, although the discipline matrix lists

consequences as potential, mandatory, or not allowed, I have often heard potential consequences

talked of as if administrators must select from one of the potential consequences for any given

infraction, thus giving no leeway for other options not listed in the discipline matrix. Whether or

not that is the intent of the discipline matrix, it is often the practice in Riverside. During their

interview, Jesse shared a view that highlights this issue:

        Even when it's things outside of a matrix, the first time a kid's in the office, you are

        establishing a relationship. It's sad that we don't get to do that with, you know, all of our

        kids. When you have more than thousand students, for this context at least, you really

only end up making relationships with kids that need that additional support. But on the first visit, we establish some common ground. As your administrator, I get to tell you what I'm about and what I expect, and I get to see how a kid reacts. I never really, to be honest, stuck by the matrix too much for the first offense. To me the first offense, the first time you were in my office for a behavior, we were going to talk about it, and I was going to give you my opinion on it, and I'm gonna give you a chance to rectify the situation. (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

Jesse also shared an example of when they believed the discipline matrix prohibited them from assigning a harsher consequence for a behavior when they believed one was warranted:

If a student says, if a student calls a girl something really inappropriate, some really rude things, and the school wants to pursue, let's say, one day of out-of-school suspension, the matrix might say for the first offense, you are limited to a conference or in-school suspension. In those type of instances, it does create some frustration for school. (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

For Jesse, in both of these situations, they shared frustration over the fact that the matrix was the determinant of what consequences were allowable. Interestingly, Jesse did appear to be more willing to go against the matrix to assign less harsh consequences than to assign more than the matrix allowed.

Kai shared the ways in which their school tried to work within the discipline matrix while also exercising a degree of autonomy and professional discretion:

There's a matrix by the district that's taken into consideration but the matrix, the district has a lot of possible outcomes. So, it'll say consequence was a 2F [fight without injury], I'm just making up something, and then it might say here are the possible consequences

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and it has a range of things that can happen. It might say this is not appropriate, expulsion

for example, but it might say OSS is possible, ISS is possible, detention is possible,

parent conference is possible, student conference is possible. So, then it gives you a lot of

that. So, then we kind of, at our school narrowed it down to say, okay you need a little

more clarity to try to have some kind of equity to that. And so, we would say in this

specific 2F, all these are possible, but this is kind of what we would kind of want to see

the ISS versus OSS, etc. (Kai, personal communication, March 23, 2018)

For Kai and their school, they attempted to navigate the disciplinary structures by determining

what potential consequences, allowable by the discipline matrix, were acceptable in which

circumstances.

From Blair's perspective, the approach that Kai took was still more limiting then they felt

was appropriate for school-administrators. Similar to the feelings they expressed above about

district/school tensions, Blair noted:

Back to the matrix, I think there is some part of the organization and again, it could be the

district and its comfort level with principals as well, so it's everybody, that we're trying

really hard to say that whatever we do and what we do in another school, that attempt at

standardizing, I just don't believe in. I think there's a level of you know information

that's necessary the policies and procedures that basically clearly define you know what

our overall ideas about discipline are. They're trying to be more specific in terms of what

you do as a principal, I don't believe in it. (Blair, personal communication, March 22,

2018)

Thinking back to Blair's earlier statements about building systems over time, they again

advocate for an idea that by defining the boundaries and building capacity for staff to make

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decisions within those boundaries, leaders can balance the need for ensuring consistency with the broader philosophy of the school or district while simultaneously leaving room for individuals to make decisions that they believe are right given the context of each situation. For tasks this to be accomplished, most of the participants agreed a higher level of support and professional development would be needed in the district.

Professional Development and Support

The discursive theme regarding professional development and support encompassed a broad scope of what it means to develop and grow as an educator. Participants discussed issues ranging from educator's engrained viewpoints to formal training options. Ultimately, three concepts emerged in this area: deep-seated beliefs; training and mentoring; and developing a culture of change.

Deep-seated beliefs. Teaching is unique when compared to other professions that require specialized training and/or degrees. Rarely would a patient assume he had more knowledge of medical practices than a doctor, simply because the patient had been treated for an illness, or a better understanding of civil engineering than an experienced engineer, simply because he had driven on roads and bridges; however, people often point to their own experiences as students when criticizing the pedagogical practices of teachers. Although such issues can lead to larger questions about organizational and political control over the work of teachers (Ingersoll, 2009), it also highlights how teachers can develop a sense of their own pedagogical beliefs long before they ever chose the teaching profession (Goodson, 1991). As the participants in this study shared, background, beliefs, and experiences can all play a significant role regarding educators' disciplinary practices.

Parker described how their experiences as a parent and choosing teaching as a second career shaped their disciplinary philosophy:

I think I had seen examples of what not to do. Those probably stand out to me there first, like the examples of teachers I did not want to be like, probably from my personal memories as a student. And then I had very wonderful teachers in my life that influenced me. And then, as I started teaching, I had just life experience. I became a teacher at the age of 40. I had already been raising a child so I feel that my life experience helped me there too and I just had an idea of what my classroom would always be. So, as a second career, I had thought about it long and hard about what my classroom would be, what I wanted it to be, what I wanted it to be for me, what I wanted it to be for kids, and it's the classroom that I imagined and it's that helped me to drive myself into the direction that I wanted to be in. I just knew always knew that I was going to have a loving classroom and that I was going to have a classroom where we were a family and we dealt with our stuff. (Parker, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

Although Parker discussed how their background positively influenced their teaching practices, Kai described challenges they faced as an administrator when teachers' backgrounds worked against the disciplinary philosophy Kai was trying to implement in their school:

A teacher who may have had little experience with discipline, so it backs up to their personal background. A lot of people teach the way they were taught. And, if you were taught in a way that was very, very, very, very homogeneous, in a county that was very homogeneous, at a school that was very homogenous, in a community that was very homogeneous, with consequences that were very homogeneous for those people, then you begin to go into education looking for the same interaction. But if you teach in a

school that has some heterogeneous mixtures, diversity, male-to-female, African

American, disabilities, LGBTQ, then your reaction sometimes may be an overreaction to

a child having response to something the teacher's doing. (Kai, personal communication,

March 23, 2018)

This is not to say teachers from a particular background cannot develop skills and broaden their

perspectives; however, it does emphasize the need to provide pre-service and early career

teachers which the supports necessary to develop new experiences and perspectives.

Dakota likened this process to their own personal experiences and struggles in particular

academic areas:

I'll use myself as an example, I'm not good at Math. Math has never been a strong suit for

me. And when I was studying for the GRE, I had a tutor who said, Math is just a different

language. And I said, that's great, that makes a lot of sense, but I needed to learn that

language a lot earlier because now my brain isn't ready to learn a new language…I think,

for a lot of teachers. it is the same thing. They're like functionally, behaviorally illiterate,

essentially. They've made it this far without having to know it. So, they're going to fall

back on the traditional ways that they've engaged with behaviors or address behaviors

and just – in most cases, feel defeated because it didn't work. And in other cases,

sometimes, we reinforced by it because some of it does work in a way but not in a right

way. So, I don't think teach it and I don't think – or I don't think they learn it and I don't

think they learn it early enough that it's part of their repertoire, part of their toolbox.

(Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

Some teachers may develop "language" skills around behavior based on their own experiences

early in life via interactions with parents, teacher models, etc. Others might begin this process

much later and may feel lost and frustrated much like Dakota. Teacher preparation programs, professional development, and mentoring supports must be available to meet the needs of educators to develop more than just technical skills by focusing on philosophy and belief systems in addition to pedagogy.

Unfortunately, building leaders may also struggle with their perceived lack of knowledge, skills, and background to support children. Jesse shared the following:

> You know we're not behavioral specialists, we're not school counselors, we are people with educational leadership degrees trying to do budgets and ensure school safety. We're also trying to teach kids how to navigate the system...Other times it's the opposite. As an administrator you can get a feeling like you just, you can't, you're not going to be able to learn in that school. You might be dangerous, or you want to just be negatively impacting the learning of other students in my school and I need you to be somewhere else. (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

Of all the interviews I conducted during this study, this excerpt was one of the most difficult for me to hear on a personal level. Jesse's quote underscored the idea that often times, the children most in need of adult support may be pushed out, not because educators don't care, but because they have not been supported to develop the skills and belief systems that enable them to support students in the ways they most need. Jesse assumes the need for specialized skills like those a behavior specialist or counselor might use to support students and likens themself to a managerial functionary. Without supporting Jesse to grow and expand that mindset, it is unlikely that Jesse would be able to lead teachers in their school to do the same.

Training and mentoring. When discussing what they would change about the district's disciplinary practices, participants often pointed to the need to support staff in skill development.

During the interviews, this was expressed in the need for formal professional development, mentoring, and modeling. Parker shared how they believed one of the most effective ways to learn about disciplinary practices is to see firsthand when others are doing it well:

> Well I do definitely think that, if you're struggling in that area, the best thing is to find out who's doing it and how does it work for them. So, my method might not work for everybody, but my method could work for some people…I think maybe teachers seeing how other people do it and how it works for them is a very good thing – something that teachers don't get to do enough. We don't get to get out of our four walls enough. (Parker, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

One Black participant shared an example of how being brought into a disciplinary situation with a Black student helped to open up a White colleague's eyes regarding another way to approach disciplinary conversations:

> I was sitting in a meeting with a Latino male and I had a Caucasian female sitting with me. And I just talked to him real talk like, dude that ain't gonna fly… I just talked to him how I would talk to my nephew and he responded for the first time and she was like wow…The student felt affirmed and they felt that the consequences were fair. The adult felt like there's a way to handle things where you're not just giving out consequences and not thinking through what you're doing. And so, I felt like it was a win-win for my colleagues, it was a win-win for me.

For both participants, the ability to share and model provided opportunities to open dialogue and change practices.

Participants also discussed the need for broader systems of support that established a framework from which all staff could operate. Blair noted:

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That idea of training and realizing that people are ultimately responsible for trying to

discipline kids in a way that makes a difference for that child…You have to, as a leader

in your building, you have to have enough leadership ability that you can make good

decisions that align with the overall idea of the district. But there is no secret document or

there is no document that's going to tell you exactly what to do in every situation. So for

those principals can think that way is my job to help them understand that I want you to

be a responsible critical thinker and I want you to be aware of what the overall ideas are

and I want you to discipline in that way based on what you believe is the right thing to do

at that point in time…You need to use good judgment. You should you should be trained

in a way to make good judgments but there's no way to there's no way to dictate your

decision. (Blair, personal communication, March 22, 2018)

Similarly, Dakota shared:

I think some of that is has to be done through coaching. I think some of that has to be

done through helping administrators understand the impact that those decisions have.

And again, not just the short-term, so not just what functions for their behavior, but long-

term outcomes and consequences and how that decision, which may be made, in what

way that benefits them or increases morale. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5,

2019)

Both participants noted that support extends beyond individual interactions. Developing systems

in which educators can operate and providing relevant training, systems, and supports can help

promote individual efficacy which, ultimately supports the notion of developing a culture where

growth is expected and valued.

Developing a culture of change. The idea of culture played an important role in the participants' interviews. Almost every participant mentioned some aspect of the ways in which school and district culture directly impact the efficacy of staff to implement positive and effective discipline models.

Avery discussed how such culture must strike a balance between setting an example at the highest levels of leadership while not falling into the trap of top-down directive approaches:

> Some of it has to be with the conversations within the schools because we all know that system change doesn't always work the best top-down. I think you'd have to have the schools involved and have the itinerant staff involved in having some conversation of what's working, what's not working but ultimately, in the end, some of it does need to start from like our leadership. I think just because, if the thoughts of our leadership aren't changing, then you know I mean we can't expect things to be changing and trickle down in terms of their vision and their philosophies and their thoughts on what's most important. (Avery, personal communication, March 15, 2018)

Dakota expressed similar sentiments:

> It starts with superintendents and board members who understand and believe in and champion the most difficult faculty and student that they have. It comes from people who continue to advocate for all end of the educational continuum and spectrums. And then it goes all the way down to each individual teacher being supported to and believing in a framework and a model that is really and truly about being responsive to each student's needs and integrating a multi-tiered system of support. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

These thoughts connect closely with many of Blair's comments mentioned above wherein a broad vision and clear expectations must be balanced with the input and autonomy of those who are responsible for implementation.

The need for support at all levels is clear in the participants discussions, from broad systems approaches such as vision setting and developing guidelines to hands on modeling, mentoring and coaching. The staff in Riverside generally seemed to believe that not enough was being done at any level to provide staff with the tools and resources necessary to effectively implement disciplinary practices.

Emergent summary

The emergent analysis underscored the variance of perspectives present within even a small sample of Riverside employees. Although the participants were connected via broad themes, similar language and thoughts were used in very different ways to express the tensions of the disciplinary paradigms within the district. The thematic nature of the inductive analysis provided insight into how employees operating under similar guidelines and stated visions can interpret and implement in vastly different ways. In following section, I will explain the ways in which the D/discourses that emerged during the first two stages of analysis resulted in recognizable patterns that describe how participants constructed a reality of disciplinary practices in Riverside School District.

Chapter 6: Constructing a Disciplinary Reality in Riverside

The importance of language extends beyond the simple conveyance of ideas. It is only when language is used in conjunction with context that its meaning becomes evident. For example, the word achievement, in its broadest sense, refers to some form of accomplishment; however, when it is contextualized in terms of education, and specifically high-stakes assessment, achievement takes on a very specialized meaning related to higher student test scores. Context and meaning are essential, but when examining Discourses, it is also necessary to study the ways in which language constructs identities, realities, and other socially significant ways of being, doing, and thinking. Gee (2014) described how certain phrases, when uttered by a person with the right authority and in the right context, can bring into existence certain conditions in the world. For example, an umpire who says the word "strike" during a baseball game in which he is the home plate umpire creates the strike by virtue of speaking the word. Such actions are known as direct speech acts.

Although direct speech acts, such as the example above, are ways of creating reality through language, the practice of building things is more often a negotiation of the rules, structures, and relationship that guide human interaction. In order to be recognized as an educator among other educators, for instance, one cannot simply pronounce himself an educator. Without the ability to use the right language, at the right time, and in the right contexts, that individual would be seen as an outsider by those who are recognized as educators. Thus, the state of being recognized as an educator comes into existence only upon the arrangement of the right

conditions through which the individual can be recognized. Gee (2014) termed the process through which reality is constructed vis-à-vis language "building tasks." According to Gee:

> Whenever we speak or write, we often (and often simultaneously) construct or build seven things or seven areas of "reality." Let's call these seven things the "seven building tasks" of language. In turn, since we use language to build these seven things, a discourse analyst can ask seven different questions about any piece of language-in-use. (p. 32)

The seven building tasks Gee identified are: significance, practices, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge. Table 1 in Chapter 3 details the building tasks and their associated questions. This section will explore how employees in Riverside School District used the concept of building tasks to construct a disciplinary reality in the district.

Significance and Connections

The building task of significance references the use of language to render judgement regarding the importance of an object, event, individual, etc. In exploring this concept, one should ask the question: "How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?" (Gee, 2014, p. 32). Similarly, connections reference the ways in which language is used to make people, things, or ideas linked or relevant to one another. The purpose of this section of the analysis is not to understand every instance of a participant using discursive markers that render concepts more or less significant or connected. Rather, this section explores, as a whole, what concepts are made more or less significant or connected in the district's D/discourses related to discipline and how the participants tend to accomplish that building task. Although certain topics such as educator's backgrounds and the

use of preventative frameworks were given significance via the participants' discourses, two issues stood out above all others: consistency of disciplinary policies and control over disciplinary practices.

One area to which the participants frequently attributed significance was in regard to the consistency of district processes. Participants walked a delicate balance in this area often times expressing an understanding of why individuals on the other side of the Conversations engaged in certain behaviors or made certain decisions, while simultaneously advocating for a change to a different form of consistency (i.e., consistent adherence to district procedures versus consistent allowance of professional discretion). Jesse provided such an example:

> I've only worked for two major districts inside so, for systems like those, you typically
>
> have a matrix that set some parameters for how you assign, how you process situations
>
> and when a discipline a consequence is to be assigned, how that takes place. So that is
>
> helpful, and, in some instances, it does help align the practice but because that's also
>
> limiting in how you sometimes make decisions or how you process information. (Jesse,
>
> personal communication, February 28, 2018)

In this excerpt, Jesse begins by normalizing the use of a discipline matrix in Riverside School District through hedging their conclusion statement. The connection is built through an assumed equivalency of the matrix and aligned practices. Instead of leading with their assertion, the statement "that's also limiting…" dislocates the need for autonomy in decision making. In doing so, Jesse reinforces the need for a consistent paradigm and strengthens the position of the discipline matrix as that paradigm. Hayden also emphasized the significance of the discipline matrix as a primary position but hedged their assertion in a different way:

I think really district policy and the code of conduct and everything is designed to protect

student rights again, and to try to ensure that environment that's conducive to learning…

if I had a child in the disciplinary situation, that's the way that I would want them to be

treated. I want to make sure that that child's due process rights and things were protected.

(Hayden, personal communication, June 21, 2018)

In Hayden's statement, they attributed the need for consistency in procedures to an exercise in

protecting the due process rights of students. This also carries an unstated implication of

protecting the district that is hidden via the broader Discourse about legality and liability found

in district training's and procedural materials such the code of conduct and manifestation

determination procedures. Hayden hedged their statement very differently than Jesse. While

Jesse relegated their assertion to a subordinate phrase, Hayden's assertion was in the focal

position of their statement with the hedging "and to try to ensure that environment that's

conducive to learning" acting as an afterthought. This juxtaposition draws a distinction between

the school-based administrator who focused on discipline as a need for control of their school

and the district-based administrator who focused on discipline as a legal process.

This view is reinforced by another district administrators who built relevance related to

the issue of consistency. Avery noted:

I mean our hope is always that they are using things like the alternatives to the suspension

and that they're being proactive…but I feel like the harsh reality is that oftentimes school

teams you don't see them doing that a lot of times…I mean there's a good percentage of

those meetings that teams are requesting a change of placement to an alt [alternative]

school and, I'm not saying that that shouldn't be an option necessarily, but I guess my

hope would be that would be less prevalent in terms of they would be wanting to work

with the child…as opposed to just acting as though they just want to get rid of the child.

(Avery, personal communication, March 15, 2018)

Like Hayden and Jesse, Avery discussed the need for a consistent process for assigning disciplinary consequences. Avery differs in that they advocate for preventative framework implementation prior to requesting a change of placement; however, the use of a nominalization in change of placement serves as a way to condense implications of larger district processes. Riverside's manifestation determination procedures and disciplinary alternative placement procedures (two processes by which students may be changed to a different school placement based on behavior) both explicate a requirement that schools provide evidence that certain steps have been taken prior to requesting changes (e.g., a certain number of incidents have occurred, a functional behavior assessment has been conducted, etc.). Considering this context, Avery is giving weight to the need for technical compliance with procedures similar to what Hayden expressed in their statement above.

Consistency was repeatedly referenced as a significant component of Riverside's disciplinary paradigm and was tightly connecting with the issue of power distribution within the district. London shared how the conflict between consistency and autonomy manifested for them:

You never want to break any kind of policy. You follow the policies as best you can but, sometimes, you have to look at some things. Rules are made so that they have to be changed because there's no bend in them and so you're looking to, this is what the district says I have to do. I don't believe that. I mean, I just gonna send you, it's gonna set you off, you have to be able to have that ability to make that conscious decision and…then talk to your supervisor and say, "I don't agree with this and I didn't follow it because."

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And if they can see that you're coming from a place of interest for what's best for the kids, I can't see them arguing with you. (London, personal communication, March 16, 2018)

Interestingly, London, as a teacher, expressed a greater, perceived locus of control in relation to disciplinary consequences than Jesse did in the excerpt above. This could be due to the fact that the scope of discipline is drastically different between their roles and Jesse, as an assistant principal, was likely to receive more pushback for consequences that included exclusionary discipline than London was for the types of consequences district policy allows them to assign as a teacher. London also used social languages to enact an identity as a teacher who is willing to push back against the established rules and expectations for the betterment of their students. This trope is popular in movies related to education (e.g., Lean on Me, Dead Poets Society, etc.) but may also explain how London leveraged an extant Discourse to exert their own sense of control within the district.

Parker provided a different perspective about how they maintained a sense of control over their disciplinary practices.

When I discipline a child, I think about what they did, the motivation, I ask them about why they did something and I feel like I've talked it through with them. And then I tell them the expectation that I'd rather see, that we need to see, in order for our class to keep going. So when I discipline a child it probably looks a lot different than when an office discipline happens or a discipline outside of my room happens and I think, personally, I don't want somebody else to discipline a child in my classroom because I don't want to give away the opportunity for me, their teacher, to help them get better at whatever it was that they did. (Parker, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

Like London, Parker conveyed a great sense of control within the confines of their classroom. It was only by handing discipline over to an external agent, in this case the school's office staff, that they felt like they lost the ability to control their disciplinary paradigms. Whereas London believed they could negotiate with outside forces, Parker exhibited their control by refusing to engage outside forces.

At the assistant principal level, Kai expressed how their control was limited by a systematic "one-size-fits-all" approach:

> The one-size-fits-all model that might have been great 40-50 years ago is not for the day and age we are living in. And so, leadership has to value that and has to understand that, it has to reflect that and then, you have to be able to make known throughout the system. That can't reside in one school or reside in one department. It has to be able to permeate the entire district and that's because a consistent message with the intent and the letter of the law. (Kai, personal communication, March 23, 2018)

Kai drove their point home by leveraging a larger district Conversation related to school versus district control. When the district's current Superintendent took office in 2012, there was a great deal of discussion regarding returning power and control to schools instead of situating decision making at the district level. This shifting and ill-defined balance of power has resulted in an ongoing debate in Riverside about the "looseness" and "tightness" of policies (as referenced above in one of Blair's excerpt). Kai leveraged this idea in their discussion by pointing to the fact that "tight" policies, those that leave little discretion for schools, are "not for the day and age we are living in."

Looking back at one of Dakota's earlier quotes, we can see how concern over control manifests in tension between different categories of staff in Riverside School District:

I think when you become a district-level employee…there's a belief that you no longer understand what the day-to-day feels like in a classroom. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

Dakota also shared that, for reasons such as this, it is important to involve the voices and input of people who are responsible for implementation:

I think a systems change process of like positive behavior supports in the school has to have administrator buy-in. Because if the administrator isn't reinforcing the appropriate behaviors…then it's never gonna become a systemic change. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

To parallel Dakota's thoughts to the idea of local control that Parker and London discussed, administrators are most likely to feel empowered when they can make decisions about their own school building and teachers are most likely to feel empowered when they can make decisions about their own classroom.

Regardless of perspective, participants seem to have agreement over the idea that establishing and context and consistency within said context is essential; however, it must be tempered with input from those implementing and the autonomy to make decisions. As Blair noted, to establish such "buy-in," the district must allow for a framework that guides beliefs and support individuals in establishing practices aligned with those beliefs:

My job as an assistant superintendent is to basically have clarity around what I believe our policies and procedures dictate that involves the right mindset. It involves the right knowledge about how to change children's behavior and involve knowledge of what is the expectation. (Blair, personal communication, March 22, 2018)

Although there are certainly differences of opinion in participants' discourses over what makes consistency and control significant, it is clear that there is broad agreement over the fact that these are ideas of import within Riverside School District. It is through a discussion of practices that more variance can be seen.

Practices and Identities

The building task of practices refers to "a socially recognized and institutionally or culturally supported endeavor that usually involves sequencing or combining actions in certain specified ways" (Gee, 2014, p. 32). Gee used the example that providing encouragement to a student would simply be an action, providing mentorship as an advisor in a degree program would constitute a practice. The purpose of this building task is to understand the practice or practices a given piece of language is attempting to enact. Since the discourses in this study came from the interviews instead of observable discourses in the action of enacting discipline, there was no data in this area that provided direct evidence of patterns of practices across Riverside. However, when looking at this building task in connection with the identities building task, there are key relations that can be drawn to connect the *who* and the *what* of discourse analysis.

Identities, in the context of this framework, are the ways in which language is used to attribute a particular socially significant identity or role to an individual or to oneself. For this to work, language must be used in the correct time and place and combined with the right actions to make the identity recognizable. For example, a teacher may only be recognized as a teacher in the classroom if he is speaking and acting as a teacher. An adult in the classroom who is dressed in a bathing suit and is drinking a cocktail would not be recognized as an individual acting in the capacity of a teacher by students or other adults in the building. Likewise, a teacher who is attending an Individual Education Plan meeting for his own child may be saying and doing

things to be recognized as a teacher in one moment, in order to signal knowledge of the system and practices, and then suddenly change to other language and actions that single him as a parent who is advocating for his child. I have found myself in this particular situation multiple times as I used different identities as a teacher, administrator, and parent to help advocate for the needs of my own child in the district. In combining practices and identities, this section will explore how the participants' discourses are being used to enact practices and/or depict identities.

Although there was overlap and among roles (i.e., teachers, school-based administrators, and district administrators) there were certain trends that were prevalent within each group. Since this study is interested in patterns of D/discourse, I have organized this following section by role with the understanding that identities and practices that appear in any given role are not, necessarily, unique to said role. Each section will outline both the identities and practices the roles constructed for themselves and the identities and practices they constructed for others. It is also worth noting that, of Gee's tools of inquiry, social languages were by far the most useful tool for analysis due to its close association with who participants perceive themselves to be.

Teachers. Among the teacher participants in this study, the two most common identities constructed via their discourses were those of a relationship builder and of a morally guided dissident. As illustrated by earlier quotes, both Parker and London viewed relationship building as key to their success in creating positive discipline cultures. Parker shared the following thoughts:

> I wouldn't want to call somebody in to discipline a child that did something wrong in my room because I feel that it gives away a part of our relationship. I feel like, if I discipline the child, then they know that they're accountable to me and themselves. (Parker, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

And:

> I just knew always knew that I was going to have a loving classroom and that I was going
>
> to have a classroom where we were a family and we dealt with our stuff. (Parker,
>
> personal communication, March 1, 2018)

As Parker noted in these excerpts, relationships and a family like atmosphere are akin to mutual

respect and the ability to successfully manage conflict and problems. Similarly, London

described the importance of their relationship with students:

> I haven't met many kids I haven't been able to reach, and I don't know how I do it. I'm not
>
> patting my own back, I'm not showing some hubris here, I just I don't know. I want to
>
> know what they're interested in. I want to know about them. I take an interest and I care,
>
> and kids can tell when you're sincere and can tell when you're making it up. (London,
>
> personal communication, March 16, 2018)

Although London framed the relationship differently (care and interest versus a family) both

teachers help to the idea that relationships are the key to a successful classroom culture.

As referenced above in the significance and tension sections, both London and Parker

saw themselves as willing to stand up against injustice as it relates to disciplinary consequences.

For London, this related to breaking the rules, when necessary, if it meant doing something in the

best interest of a student. "You have to be able to have that ability to make that conscious

decision and…then talk to your supervisor and say, 'I don't agree with this and I didn't follow it

because.'" For Parker, moral dissidence was reflected in their refusal to give away their

relationship and, in turn, control over the discipline model:

> I feel like if I discipline the child then they know that they're accountable to me and
>
> themselves it's us in the classroom and their classmates if somebody else is disciplining

the child outside of the classroom then I feel like they get removed from the situation it

becomes a punishment. (Parker, personal communication, March 1, 2018)

By maintaining control over discipline, Parker refused to allow their students to become part of a

broader disciplinary problem they saw at their school.

By building their identities and practices in relation to fighting against unjust systems,

Parker and London are simultaneously building an identity that portrays those who implement

such disciplinary practices at their school as unreasonable. Parker, for example, expressed

frustration at the number of students referred to the office for disciplinary reasons describing it as

"in the thousands, every school year, and it's inordinate. I mean, it's just not ordinary for schools

to have that many disciplinary problems, but we do at our school." London was even more

critical of their school's disciplinary paradigm, describing discipline in their school as

"inappropriate." Above, London referenced a meme they posted to social media that compared a

child pour water over their head in a pool to giving a child out-of-school suspension for skipping

class. London described the response from one of their administrators:

I got roasted by my admin for that…you know, "why would you post that" and "what do

you expect us to do" and "what's the solution." And well the solution is to try something

else…find out why he's skipping class. (London, personal communication, March 16,

2018)

In this quote, London expresses a willingness to not only publicly challenge the prevalent

practices but also the resolve to stand by those challenges in the face of confrontation by their

administrator. Interestingly, despite London and Parker both exhibiting a sense of determination

to avoid practices, administrators at both the school and district level painted a different picture

of teachers' ability when it came to managing classroom discipline. Although this is a seeming

contradiction of internal and external identities, it is important to note that, due to participant selection, the generalizations that administrators make are reflective of their experiences with teachers with whom they worked whose practices may align with and diverge from those of Parker and London in a variety of ways.

School-based administrators. Similar to the teachers, school-based administrators in this study tended to see themselves as relationship builders. In addition to this, they also built identities as firm but fair disciplinarians and arrangers of impossible tasks.

In describing their ability to build relationships, both Kai and Jesse provided examples of being able to connect with students in instances when their colleagues could not. Kai proved an example of an interaction with a student and another colleague during a student conference where they described the interaction as "I just talked to him real talk… I just talked to him how I would talk to my nephew and he responded for the first time." In Kai's view, this gave them the opportunity to show a colleague that by building a relationship and treating a student with respect, they could move past the incident and improve a student's behavior without knee-jerk reactions that lead to exclusion. Similarly, Jesse described how they used conferences as a chance to not only address infractions, but also to build connections:

> The first time you were in my office for a behavior, we were going to talk about it, and I was going to give you my opinion on it, and I'm gonna give you a chance to rectify the situation. (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

Despite a stated desire to build relationships, Jesse and Kai both also described practices that establish identities of administrators who are torn between what they want to do to support students and what their duties require of them. Jesse juxtaposed their statement above with a description of the challenges they had connecting with students beyond the disciplinary

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moments. "When you have more than thousand students, for this context at least, you really only end up making relationships with kids that need that additional support." Kai also shared concerns about their capability to move forward with equitable disciplinary practices; however, for Kai, the biggest problem was in the perceptions of their colleagues. As Kai noted:

You will stand out because you're having tough conversations in a system that was created or had perpetuated that [over disciplining children of color is] the norm. So, then you have to have tough conversations with other administrators, tough conversations with principals and other APs [assistant principals]. You have to have conversations with your discipline assistance or deans and sometimes you have to be unpopular. You have to have your colleagues look at you and say, "here you go again," and that's not always pleasant. It's a job, you want to keep your job, but you wrestle with "can I go to sleep knowing I did the right thing." And fighting for equity is not always appreciated. It's right, but it's not always appreciated. (Kai, personal communication, March 23, 2018)

The excerpts from Kai and Jesse highlight only two of the problems that they shared during their interviews related to the difficulty performing tasks of administrators. Other issues that reflected these practices included the need to handle administrative tasks such as lunch duty or fire drills, the need to deal with employee discipline, and the time constraints of assessment and teacher evaluation.

Despite both Kai and Jesse identifying themselves as relationship builders, from an administrative, disciplinarian position, both wanted to be seen as firm and consistent in their discipline approaches. Kai described their approach as follows:

If the student's in my grade level or not, they tend to come to me because they feel like they're gonna get a firm, but they know, I don't play, and that is a core, I don't play. I

don't play the radio, I'm not gonna go back and forth with you. But they know I'm fair

and they, when they're wrong, they'll come out of my meeting saying, "thank you." Even

when they're wrong, they'll come out thanking me because I'm gonna have them honest

with what they did. I'm also gonna try to find fair consequence and usually try to have

some kind of reconciliation. (Kai, personal communication, March 23, 2018)

Jesse expressed a very similar sentiment:

As a site-based administrator, I think people that worked with me and got to have an

opinion over my practices…I would hope that everybody thought I was consistent and

clear if nothing else. I was not always nice but always pretty consistent. (Jesse, personal

communication, February 28, 2018)

Both Kai and Jesse built an identify around the notion that they could be firm and hold

students to high expectations while remaining flexible and focusing on building meaningful

relationships with students. This, perhaps, accounted for why they both viewed the district as

inflexible and authoritarian. These views are also reflected above in the district, school, and

teacher tensions section.

District-based administrators. Similar to the school-based administrations, district staff

repeatedly reflected the fact that, although their opinion may not always be popular, they tried to

be consistent in the way they handled issues. Interestingly, this was not as explicit in district-

based administrators' interviews; however, the theme was clearly present. Avery, for example,

described the way that others view their disciplinary practices:

I think they're pretty open to the conversations that we have. They are open to us

questioning… And so sometimes, even those conversations alone can maybe, change the

infraction or change the outcome…I think they're pretty open to our collaborative

conversations… because our role is not to change an administrator's view, it's just to get

them thinking about whether they actually follow the student code of conduct. (Avery,

personal communication, March 15, 2018)

In this quote, Avery discusses how it is not their role to force an administrator to make a change,

simply to question and collaborate; however, when considered in the context of the responses

from school-based administration, it is clear that the suggestions are perceived differently at the

school level. Additionally, Avery repeatedly asserts the authority to question an administrator

and then hedges the assertion by using terms such as openness, collaboration, and "get them

thinking." This is consistent with the district Conversation of school versus district authority.

This is part of a prevalent belief I often heard from district administrators that schools receive too

much leeway and a belief by school-based administrators that the district is too controlling.

The district-based staff repeatedly pointed to the need to protect student rights and remain

legally compliant as a motivator for their involvement in school-based discipline. Hayden

provided this description of the district's role:

I would imagine the primary reason for much of what we do surrounding discipline is to

maintain an environment that's safe for students, as well as, conducive to learning…I

kind of float back to the code of conduct a lot, it also guarantees them [students] certain

rights of due process and to make sure they're treated fairly. (Hayden, personal

communication, June 21, 2018)

Dakota provided a similar thought process of their time in Riverside and related to an aspect of

their current role in a different educational setting:

I deal with that in my day-to-day where I have faculty…who are telling me they need

more academic freedom. And I agree with some level of that freedom to make those

decisions. But at the same time, there is often a need to reduce inconsistent or I mean

sometimes what can be illegal behaviors, essentially. Like it is setting up a system that's

intended to protect people from making mistakes that they may not realize they're

making. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

Avery, Dakota, and Hayden all expressed views that suggest there is a lack of expertise

regarding some of the legal requirements related to educational practices and that, the role of the

district, is to provide the guidance and frameworks that help to prevent mistakes that could result

in serious consequences.

It is interesting that both school-based administrators and district-based administrators

see one another in such an adversarial light. This is due, at least in part, to the practices and

identities each must enact. School-based administrators must deal with the day-to-day

management of their school buildings and, in most cases, experience few direct repercussions for

the disciplinary decisions they make other than interpersonal conflict that they must resolve with

students and families. District administrators, on the other hand, rarely have to deal with day-to-

day issues regarding how to make a learning environment function effectively; however, they

often see the broader trends of exclusionary practices across the district and are tasked with

addressing the most severe cases where violations of student rights result in severe repercussions

such as lawsuits and due process hearings.

Relationships

In the context of this framework, the relationship building task refers to the ways in

which language is used to signal the relationships individuals have, or are trying to have, with

one another (Gee, 2014). Like the practices building task, relationships are less visible via

interview than via direct observation. For example, during a direct observation, a researcher

might note that a student who referred to a teacher by their first name was signaling a different relationship than had that same student referred to the teacher by the more formal salutation that is typically expected in a classroom. Nevertheless, the interview data in this study still offered insights into the ways in which participants conceive of and discuss their relationships with one another.

Many of the discursive markers that point to the ways in which relations exist in Riverside School District have already been outlined in this chapter. For example, in the district, school, and teacher tensions section, Parker and London discussed the disconnect between their disciplinary philosophies and those of their school-based administrators. In both cases, the teachers resisted practices they felt were unfair by refusing to engage in the expected disciplinary processes at their respective schools. The actions they conveyed signal they had teacher/administrator relationships that were based more on hierarchical structures than the horizontal structures one might see in other settings. This can be noted in the fact that the teachers engaged in resistance activities as opposed to activities where the administration and teachers worked collaboratively to negotiate and implement mutually agreeable policies. Another example of relationships in the participants' interviews was in the disparate ways in which school-based administrators perceived their relationships with the district-based administrators and vice versa. Although Avery and Hayden described relationships in which they were deferential to school-based administrators as they provided guidance and support, Kai and Jesse both described their relationships with district administrators as ones were they had to fight for what they believed to be appropriate due to their perception of the district's inflexibility and control.

One set of relationships that I have not explored thus far are the ones that exist between the school district and the families of students. More often than not, participants in this study implied a relationship involving families and schools were unidirectional. Parents were generally painted as passive recipients of information and notification rather than meaningful partners in the education and discipline process. Blair best summarized this view of the relationship:

> I see that the rules and regulations or the rules of discipline being set by the people in the building. Those ideas or rules you know would be communicated to the community to the parents. If there is an objection, if somehow a parent or the community felt like "well that's too severe" or "too easy," I don't know that that's ever happened very often, but I guess I still see discipline being defined by people in the building and pushed out to people in the community, with a feedback loop from the community in terms of anything that would be something the community didn't support. (Blair, personal communication, March 22, 2018)

Blair's description of the relationship as consisting of information being "pushed out" with the opportunity of feedback is interesting since, presumably, the most likely families to object, or even know about, a school's disciplinary practices are families who have been impacted by said policies. Those families are apt to be the same ones who advocate for their children to receive a lesser consequence or for another person's child who engaged in some wrongdoing against their own child to receive a harsher consequence. By virtue of their personal stake in the outcome, those families are also less likely to have their objections validated since they may be seen as biased in the outcomes. Additionally, it is important to note that all schools in Riverside School District have a School Advisory Council that meets once per month throughout the school year. According to a district informational brochure, some of the stated of this group are to "participate

in identifying school needs and developing plans for meeting those needs" and "assist in preparation and evaluation of the school's Success Plan." The School Advisory Council is open to all parents and community members and would seem to be a primary opportunity for proactive input and feedback, even if final decisions were left to the discretion of the school's administrative team.

Blair was not the only one who described a unidirectional, dictative relationship between parents and schools. Avery noted:

> As far as, like, to parent responses, they vary widely. You know some parents understand the issue and why it's needed, others parents have questions about the progressive nature of our discipline, for instance why would a student be disciplined without a history but maybe they do a serious infraction that caused a major disruption… parents don't understand that that one-time event may elicit some kind of a consequence…they struggle with the nature of the level of consequence. (Avery, personal communication, March 15, 2018)

As in Blair's description, Avery painted a relationship wherein families are informed of consequences and, if they don't agree, receive an explanation as to why the school and/or district's decision was warranted. Families are described as having little agency in such a relationship.

In Blair and Avery's descriptions, families are provided notification of procedures or issues; however, as London notes, not even that much communication is guaranteed.

> I don't know how many times a referral is written, a consequence is given, and no one has called home. The parent has no idea the kid has ISS or OSS until the admin gets it and processes the referral and makes that call. "I never knew my kid got written up for this

two weeks ago. They didn't tell me." My belief is that communication needs to be open.

(London, personal communication, March 16, 2018)

London described an extreme manifestation of the unidirectional, dictative relationship wherein even notification is an afterthought as if writing a referral and suspending a child is a matter of course that requires no special consideration on the part of the school.

Although the predominant view of the school district/family relationship was one in which the families were passive recipients of information, not all participants saw this as the way the relationship should exist. Dakota, in particular, described a changing dynamic and expectation:

I think, more and more, families and students expect that there's a level of mutual respect in a classroom. And that's a big shift for educators and I don't know that that's something that they're taught, or experience, or that they're comfortable with, in many cases.

(Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

Jesse described a time when this type of dynamic played out in an interaction with a family in their school when Jesse and a family member collaborated to find ways of improving a student's behavior:

The student had no parents in his life, lived with grandpa. Grandpa…was incredibly cordial, always take my call. We would talk and try to strategize how he was gonna tag team at home with me to support my efforts from school and I was going to support what he was doing at home. (Jesse, personal communication, February 28, 2018)

In Jesse's interaction, they were not simply informing the family of a consequence or telling a family member what to do about the student's behavior. Instead, Jesse described an instance of collaboration and mutual support.

Politics and Sign Systems and Knowledge

The politics building task is useful for looking at how language establishes, distributes, and/or withholds social goods (Gee, 2014). This is a fairly complex task to accomplish in language because a social good form one individual's perspective may not be considered a social good from another's perspective. For example, a teacher may try to encourage a student by commenting on how well-behaved the student was being day. From the teacher's perspective, he is providing positive reinforcement in the hopes that the student will continue the behavior by offering the student status as a social good (i.e., being recognized as a good student). However, thinking back to children in Willis's (1977) study that I described in chapter three, some students may not perceive the status of being a "good student" as a social good. In Willis's study, the children from working class families had constructed identities rooted in a counter-school culture. For these students, labeling them as "good students" is actually denying them a perceived social good by lowering their status with peers.

The sign systems and knowledge building task also ties in closely with the notion of status and the distribution of social goods. Sign systems and knowledge are the various ways in which language and knowledge can be privileged or marginalized. In the United States, there exists a well-known Conversation in which one perspective privileges the English language as the only expected and, therefore, most valuable language. Those who cannot speak fluent English may be seen as less intelligent and less valuable members of society, regardless of their knowledge, skills, background, and contributions when conversing in their heritage language. By equating mastery of the English language with intelligence and a lack of mastery with a lack of intelligence, those on the side of the Conversation that privileges English as the only American language deny those who do not speak fluent English a variety of social goods (e.g., being seen

as intelligent, being seen as a "real" American, etc.). Sign systems and knowledge extend beyond isolects. This notion extends to the language of a particular group (e.g., lawyerly language versus common language), different communication mediums (e.g., spoken language versus written language) or knowledge types (theoretical knowledge versus applied knowledge).

This section describes how certain sign systems and knowledge were used to distribute or withhold social goods in the participants' interviews. These two building tasks had a good deal more variability in responses than previous tasks. Participants discussed a wide range of social goods. Kai for example, discussed how using social justice and equity-oriented language denied them the social good of peer acceptance:

> You will stand out because you're having tough conversations in a system that was created, or had perpetuated, that that's the norm…You have to have your colleagues look at you and say "here you go again" and that's not always pleasant. (Kai, personal communication, March 23, 2018)

Dakota, on the other hand, described how a previous principal who reframed their language around a parent's actions changed their viewpoint from one that denied a parent a social good to one that attributed a social good to the parent:

> When I was a Paraprofessional…a parent came into the office and she was loud, and she was aggressive. She was yelling at everybody. And the Principal at one point got up, walked out into the office, deescalated the situation, and she walked back in and my student was still in the office and I said, "Oh my God, can you believe that parent walked into that office like that?" Like how rude and disrespectful. And the Administrator looked at me and she said, "I tried to look at it from a different lens…for a parent to be that passionate that she was willing to walk in here, embarrass herself, raise her voice,

possibly get like have the police called on her. To me, that says that she's that engaged."

And I get chills -- like I get chills just thinking about that because that frame of mind is

just amazing to me…that totally and completely changed my view of what I think about

parents and blaming parents. Because that woman took the time to drive the bottom down

to that school in complain. That's somebody who cares. Now they don't care the way that

I want them to care. She didn't handle it the right way, but I can't judge her. I have

absolutely no right to judge her. (Dakota, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

Dakota's example highlighted an important component of both the sign systems and politics

building tasks. The fact that they were able to adjust the lens from which they viewed the

parental interaction is a prime example of how the perspective of the individual assigning or

denying goods is essential in determining whether or not an individual has access to said good.

The attribution of social goods is therefore closely tied to *pouvoir/savoir* wherein those with the

power to dictate the valued sign systems and knowledge are ultimately the same ones who get to

determine whether or not an action gives an individual access to a particular social good.

Despite the variability among participants when it came to the politics and sign systems

and knowledge building tasks, one theme did emerge repeatedly in my interviews. Nearly all of

the participants in this study discussed the need to adhere to protocols and sanctioned practices in

order to gain and maintain status in Riverside School District, though how this played out for

different groups varied. Previously, I discussed how a quote from Jesse highlighted a disconnect

between district and school-based staff:

The individual that oversees that department for our district called my school and asked

for me and spoke with me and said "hey one of these referrals that you submitted for

review was coded incorrectly so I'm going to reject your request for a hearing. You don't

have the minimum number of referrals" and I was furious. (Jesse, personal

communication, February 28, 2018)

When looking at this excerpt through the lens of knowledge and politics, the district

representative privileged knowledge related to compliance as opposed to knowledge about

practices. Jesse's description of the interaction paints a picture where there was little to no

concern about whether or not the school had implemented appropriate behavioral interventions,

instead the district representative determined whether or not a student could be considered for an

alternative school placement based on whether or not the school had met the minimum

compliance requirements outlined in the district's Disciplinary Alternative Placement

procedures.

Another quote I previously discussed from London demonstrates the privileging of

compliance and technical knowledge form a different perspective:

When you have someone coming into your room, doing an observation, and they're the

one that's deciding whether or not you're getting that highly effective or effective

[observation rating] and your raise is tied to it, it makes a difference. (London, personal

communication, March 16, 2018)

London discussed this topic in the context of teachers who were afraid to voice their opinions to

make changes in the district based on a fear that they would face retaliation from their

administrators. In this case, teacher observations were morphed from their stated objective of

improving teaching practices (even if such a claim is debatable) to a tool that would be used to

ensure compliance lest the teacher be denied the social good of high ratings and potential raises.

Privileging of compliance via the distribution or withholding of social goods was not

only found among and between staff in Riverside School District. Kai described how these same

practices can impact parents and students directly. When asked about the role parents should place in the disciplinary process, Kai shared the following:

> Now there are sometimes where, let's say the consequence is an in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension, a parent might say "hey instead of Thursday and Friday, can we do Friday and Monday because Thursday they have a test." And so is the goal for them to fail their test or is the goal for them to have a concept of actions and I feel like the goal is concept of action, not trying to fail. (Kai, personal communication, March 23, 2018)

Although Kai's intent in this excerpt is to demonstrate flexibility and a consideration for the context in which a suspension is issued, there is also an unstated undertone of forced acquiesce. Kai assumes that, when the consequence of a suspension is given, that the parent should accept the school's decision on the matter and, if they do, the school may allow for the social good of flexibility regarding when the suspension occurs, but not if it occurs. This is similar to a comment I previously discussed from Blair where they noted that disciplinary procedures are shared out to families instead of developing them collaboratively.

Building Task Summary

The building task analysis highlighted several ways that language, context, and action work together to create meaning surrounding the district's disciplinary paradigm. Several themes emerged across building tasks including issues of authority and control, disconnects among the various groups within the district, and the attempts of each group to exert identity, enact agency, and obtain social goods. Overall, the building task analysis revealed patterns that suggest the *dispositifs* within the district are poorly understood and, in turn, create confusion over who has the right to define and enact disciplinary practices

Conclusion

This previous three chapters explored a variety of ways in which D/discourses are enacted and transformed within Riverside School District. From the a priori Discourses, the district heavily used Criminal Justice Discourses, Neoliberal and Consumerists Discourses, and Discourses related to Discipline as a Social Practice. Despite the clear prevalence of these Discourses; however, the district did not simply adopt the Discourses as their own. More often than not, broad Discourses were modified in ways that fit the prevalent enactments of *pouvoir/savoir* which, in turn, redefined and reimagined said enactments. The building task analysis also provided insight into a situation where unclear definition of the district identity often left various groups of staff members feeling at odds and pointing to one another as reasons why the district struggled to enact a coherent disciplinary paradigm. In the next chapter, I discuss how the various D/discourses found in the analysis interact and examine potential implications for future disciplinary practices in Riverside School District.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Introduction

Language, action, and being are integrally related components of Discourses that shape the paradigms guiding disciplinary practices. These Discourses are largely constructed vis-à-vis nexuses of power and knowledge that enable certain groups to determine what it means to be good or bad and to decide which students are included or excluded. Over the past quarter century in the United States, Discourses about public safety and school discipline have become increasingly entwined. Simultaneously, laws that are ostensibly aimed at improving school safety have led to legal justifications for removing students from school. Although such laws initially began under the pretense of keeping drugs, guns, and violent acts out of schools, states and school districts have been given wide latitude to expand the scope of zero-tolerance policies to include a range of discretionary offenses such as disrespect and disobedience.

Although inflexible zero tolerance policies that remove students from school for discretionary offenses are, in and of themselves, problematic, the outcomes such policies perpetuate are even more concerning. A wide body of literature points to the fact that children from certain subgroups, most notably children of color, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who identify as LGBTQ+ are systematically excluded from the school system. In turn, students who are subject to systemic exclusion face marginalization and omission from the social goods that one would expect to accompany educational opportunities. Consequently, the social inequities that have historically disprivileged these groups are passed down generationally further reinforcing the social gaps that allow those

who control the knowledge/power dynamic to reinforce their own social standing at the expense of others, even if such actions occur without intent or malice.

The study aimed to understand the patterns of knowledge, power, and resistance that manifested in a disciplinary paradigm for one school district. Using Gee's (2014) approach to discourse analysis, I explored how eight staff members in Riverside School District intertextuality drew from broad societal Discourses, constructed localized Discourses, and established patterns of actions, thoughts, and values that both reflected and shaped the district's approach to student discipline. In doing so, I sought to answer three questions:

(1) To what extent do the D/discourses in which Riverside School District staff members engage align with prevailing D/discourses in broader society related to student discipline?

(2) In what ways do Riverside School District staff members leverage and deviate from prevailing D/discourses related to student discipline to construct a disciplinary paradigm unique to the district?

(3) How do the D/discourses used by Riverside School District staff members reflect particular ways of saying, being, and doing that lead to the enactment of disciplinary practices within the school district?

During this study, I used a poststructural framework based on theories of Michel Foucault. This framework helped to situation issues of power, knowledge, and resistance in terms of their cyclical and productive properties. As I analyzed the interviews of my participants, I was particularly focused on the ways in which they were influenced by other Discourses and, in turn, established and enacted D/discourses that made visible the semiotic components that resulted in certain ways of disciplining students.

In this chapter, I will discuss the three stages of analysis and their associated research questions in light of my theoretical framework and the extant literature. I will then examine how themes emerged across the multi-stage analysis and the theoretical implications these findings present. Next, I will discuss how the theoretical concerns can lead to substantive changes in disciplinary practices in Riverside School District. Finally, I will reflect on my own personal thoughts as somebody who, during the course of the study, transitioned from being an encultured member of the district's D/discourses to an outsider looking in and provide recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

During the course of this study, each stage of analysis was primarily focused on answering one of my research questions; however, each stage of analysis also provided insights into the broader findings which I will discuss in a subsequent section. Within each section of analysis, findings were divided in themes and subthemes. These will not be reiterated here theme-by-theme as this information is outlined in chapter four. Instead, I will focus on synthesizing the key points of those themes to clarify how each stage of analysis provided insight regarding my research questions. In the following section, I will highlight key issues that emerged from each discrete analysis and situate the implications in light of the broader research base.

Instances of intertextuality. When I reviewed news media and scholarly literature, four discursive themes were prevalent: Discipline as a Social Practice, Consumerist and Neoliberal Discourses, Criminal Justice Discourses, and Mental Health Discourses. Of those four themes, all but Mental Health Discourses played a significant role in the interviews with Riverside staff members. Although I discussed the different sides of certain Conversations related to these

Discourses in chapter two, participants generally did not take sides in the Conversations and, if they did, they were more likely to adopt different sides of a Conversation to express certain ideas or viewpoints than to identify as firmly positioned on one side or another. For example, in the literature, the Discipline as a Social Practice theme included disagreement over whether or not firm disciplinary practices better prepared students for the expectations of society. Some, such as Doughty (2012), claimed that students who repeatedly misbehave should be removed from school so that teachers can exercise their authority to maintain control of their classrooms and those misbehaving students could be compelled to behave or removed for the sake of other students. Others such as Strauss (2018) argued that positive disciplinary models help students learn from their mistakes and develop the relationship and problem-solving skills that better integrate them into society. Parker, while clearly in favor of relationship-oriented approaches to discipline did not see this as an affront to their authority; rather they saw relationship building as essential to developing a sense of authority in the classroom. Such melding of Conversations was common in the participants interviews.

Within the Discipline as a Social Practice theme, participants most often discussed the ideas of reproduction of power and assimilation of students. Generally speaking, staff in Riverside heavily favored the notion that the removal of students was not an effective tool for reducing misbehavior. Although there were some exceptions to this (see for example Jesse's description of a student who they sent to an alternative school that returned later to be a "model student"), the general consensus was that, in order to teach students to be better citizens, they need to have an opportunity to build meaningful relationships with people in their school building. This is consistent with Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy's (2016) findings that discipline is cyclical wherein student's behaviors are shaped by factors such as culture and teacher

expectations. When teachers expect students to misbehave, it is likely the student will misbehave, which reinforces the teachers view of the student in a continuous process that ultimately results in failure, removal, and in extreme cases, incarceration. Several participants such as Parker, Dakota, Kai, and Blair shared examples of how mutual respect, high expectations, a willingness to admit to one's wrongs, and teachable moments can create spaces where students feel safe learning from their mistakes and can work together with their peers and teachers to improve their behavior.

More so than the other themes, Criminal Justice Discourses reflected an assimilation of language that was reflective of non-educational terminology. Terms such as hearings, investigations, due process, witnesses, and appeals were used often when discussing both the process of determining whether or not a student misbehaved as well as what types of consequences would be most appropriate to addressing the behavior. The reasoning for this is likely twofold. First, policies and social structures that guide the development of school disciplinary models are heavily skewed towards the notion of criminalizing behavior which, in turn, forces teachers to act as agents of criminal enforcement in schools (Curtis, 2013). This is indicative of a broader social paradigm that considers school to be a tool through which students are not only integrated and enculturated, but also positioned hierarchically among one another and in relation to adults to prepare them for deference to societal authority figures such as bosses, police, and politicians (Foucault, 1977/1995; Hillier, Laurier, & Hillier, 2012). Secondly, the educational landscape has been increasingly marked by conflicts that are resolved through the legal system, especially in the area of special education (Mueller & Carranza, 2011). Staff members are increasingly part of situations such as due process hearings wherein they must sit through depositions, endure questioning by attorneys, and await judgements that adjudicate their

professional practices. In Riverside School District, the department that oversees special education programs is also the department that oversees discipline and other legally contentious issues such as school choice and bullying complaints. Therefore, it is not surprising that language associated with criminal justice and legal proceedings would make its way into disciplinary policy, professional development, and practices.

Consumerist and Neoliberal Discourses most often revealed themselves as discussions about lowered expectations of poor students and the deservedness of resource allocation. During the interviews, more than half of the participants made reference to Title I schools that implied an expectation that misbehavior, especially violent misbehavior, would be more likely to occur. For some participants this manifested as a description of why certain policies are more appropriate in impoverished schools than in affluent schools (Kai) and for others it came about when discussing why private schools may experience less behavior problems than Title I schools (London). Regardless of the context, there was a consistent belief that poor students were more likely to misbehavior. This is concerning since teacher beliefs about a student's behavior can influence a student's likelihood to engage in misbehavior (McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Pantaleo, 2016; Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006). Additionally, such thinking perpetuates the notion that poor people are poor because of innate flaws the prevent achievement and success, thus forcing those without means to continue living without means without any meaningful, systemic ability to break free from a cycle of poverty (Foucault, 1972/2010; Side & Johnson, 2014). The idea of deservedness is not only reserved for students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, however. Participants in the study also commented on the allocation of limited resources in schools, especially as it related to the time and effort of educators. Avery and Kai provided two examples where they believed the effort to address a

student's behavior was inefficient due to the number of other tasks educators must face. Although this view was not unanimous across participants, it was prevalent enough to warrant mention.

Discourse synthesis. Although there were multiple examples of participants using prevailing Discourses related to school discipline to describe their own beliefs and practices, there were also many times when parts of different Discourses were combined and changed to reflect patterns of belief and action unique to Riverside School District. This process, known as discourse synthesis, reflected the ability of Riverside staff members to productively negotiate and reconstitute established frames of knowledge (Ennis, 2008). In a system as large as Riverside School District (approximately 75,000 students and 10,000 employees) and given the varied roles that so many individuals occupy, the need to construct paradigms that fit the district's reality is unsurprising. As it relates to discipline, systems of practice and professional development and support were two Discourses that emerged from the participants' interviews.

The systems of practice Discourse encompassed the idea that Riverside, as a large system, is complexly interrelated – a state of being that allows it to serve a vast number of students while also creating tensions, conflicts, and contradictions. Participants in the study were keenly aware of the fact that there was often misalignment between the various groups in the district (e.g., between teachers and school-based administrators, between schools and the district office, etc.). Frequently, the tensions between these groups manifested in disagreements over disciplinary practices and policies. London, for example, shared an example of how they got in trouble with their assistant principal because of a meme they posted that criticized suspending students for skipping class while Jesse shared concern over the district's control regarding whether or not they could change a student's placement to an alternative school. Such conflicts

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are indicative of knowledge politics in action. Each group, believing themselves to have a perspective best suited to determining disciplinary practices, attempted to enact their own form of legitimized knowledge regarding best practices for student discipline and each, in turn, was faced with questions of power and agency that dictated whose knowledge was valid and whose practices were acceptable. Such institutional representations of the knowledge/power dynamic make clear issues of opportunity, representation, oppression, and influence (Ali, 2007).

With tension related to knowledge politics and questions as to who has the ability to determine and implement systems of practice comes the issue of indoctrinating employees to particular ways of thinking about and implementing discipline. That is to say, assuming an official paradigm of disciplinary practices is established, employees must then be enculturated into the fields of legitimized knowledge. This is difficult as each employee has membership in one or more discourse community that unconsciously influence ways of thinking and acting (Little, Jordens, & Sayers, 2003). A teacher for example may belong to a discourse community related to the profession, to the district, to the school, and to the team on which she works. She may also belong to discourse communities based on her family background, religious beliefs, political affiliations, and any number of other factors. Just as the participants in this study demonstrated intertextual usage of various Discourses to express their own disciplinary beliefs, staff throughout the district are pulling from a wide variety of backgrounds as they navigate and negotiate their disciplinary practices. Participants shared how such matters created complications in enacting their view of discipline such as when Kai discussed working with staff who struggled with diverse populations after coming from homogenous backgrounds and when Blair explained how principals need to establish frameworks that they can work within to build consensus. Such

factors created a number of issues that I will address further in the "A district at odds with itself" section below.

The nexus of language thought and action. Although there is important information to be gained through understanding the Discourses being used by Riverside School District employees, the significance of the participants' interviews is best understood when considering the way language is parsed into ways of thinking and acting. The knowledge that Discourses are associated with are essential for understanding the frames in which participants operate; however, as Foucault (1970/2002; 1977/1995) theorized, knowledge (and its associated Discourses) is not simply transmitted (i.e., participants are not simply using it), it is a productive force – simultaneously shaping those that use it and, in turn, being shaped by their actions. The third portion of my analysis focused on how language was used to enable and enact social practices.

Most notable among the findings in this section was the way in which power, relationships, and formal structures interacted to privilege or disprivilege certain ways of thinking and acting. Participants generally expressed both a desire for a consistent district process for handling discipline as well as frustration when they viewed existing processes as limiting, unjust, or otherwise ineffective. The ways in which this materialized varied based on the role and the perceived power differential; however, the underlying issue was the same. It was especially notable that none of the three groups perceived themselves as having the authority to dictate disciplinary paradigms. London and Parker both felt the ability to make decisions lie with their school-based administrators; Kai and Jesse both described instances where they felt blocked by district directives; and both Avery and Hayden used language that implied deference to school-based decision making. Many participants pointed to "decisions from the top;" however,

Blake, the participant with the highest official position, pointed to principals as the decision makers and framed the district's role as "providing a framework." The lack of clarity regarding how decisions are made and communicated may have contributed to the feelings of confusion regarding how discipline should be enacted as well as leaving each participant feeling as if the power to make decisions lie elsewhere.

Within the context of confusion and powerlessness, common ways of constructing a sense of purpose and identity could be seen among each group. Just as Cornelius and Herrenkohl (2004) described power enactment among students as being variable depending on the variety of roles they may occupy during a school day, participants in this study enacted their own power and identity based on the variety of ways in which they interacted with the larger school system. All four school-based participants described themselves as relationship builders when interacting with children and each of the five current administrators (two of whom also belong to the school-based category) described their struggle to reconcile their beliefs, the expectations of their position, and their obligation to students. Participants described states of constantly navigating different ways of being based on the situations they were facing and the people with whom they were interacting. Foucault (1977/1995) explained this phenomenon as a micro-physics of power through which individuals in any given structure negotiate their status while establishing and challenging the boundaries of legitimacy and authority.

Theoretical Analysis and Implications

The discursive issues highlighted in the analysis uncover important features regarding the ways language and action interconnect to form systematic patterns of disciplinary practices in Riverside School District. These issues are only part of the bigger picture, however. As I discussed in chapter two, nationwide patterns of exclusion and criminalization of behavior

(patterns that are also reflected in Riverside's student data) have perpetuated and reinforced existing social inequities. As rates of exclusion and incarceration among certain populations continue to grow, so to do discrepancies in educational attainment, wealth distribution, and social mobility (Mallett. 2016; Skiba et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2007). Such problems are indicative of larger social structures that create the *dispositifs* through which knowledge may be determined, power enacted, and stratification produced (Foucault, 1970/2002, 1972/2010). In the following section, I will explore my data through a poststructural lens, primarily grounded in the work of Michel Foucault, in order to make visible the ways in which Riverside's disciplinary practices contribute to and resist the hegemonic disciplinary frameworks that are prevalent in the American school system.

D/discourses: Power, knowledge, and control. A central theme in the participants' interviews was a dislocation of power and control. As I mentioned previously, each group of participants perceived decision making authority to be situated with another group. This has significant implicants in relation to both *pouvoir/savoir* (i.e., socially situated knowledge/power dynamic) and *puissance/connaissance* (power/knowledge as it relates to formal, sanctioned knowledge). To some extent, every participant discussed the importance of a framework that could guide staff in Riverside to make acceptable decisions regarding student discipline. In nearly every case, the need for a framework was discussed as something constructed externally from the participants (e.g., London and Jesse discussing committees for the discipline matrix; Dakota indicating the belief that structure and belief need to start at the top; Blair discussing the need for the district to set a vision principals could work within and principals to set a vision that teachers could work within, etc.). Although the need for a framework and clarity is not, in and of itself, problematic, the fact that participants almost universally saw themselves has having little

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control (Hayden being one notable exception) raises the issue of who, in Riverside, gets to determine sanctioned knowledge.

Foucault (1972/2010) discussed *connaissance* as a relationship between a subject (such as discipline) and the formal rules by which the subject is governed. Within Riverside, these formal rules take the form of policy such as the student code of conduct, the discipline matrix, manifestation determination procedures, disciplinary alternative placement procedures, etc. In developing each of these policies, decisions are made by relatively small groups under the direction of an individual or individuals whose role specific knowledge has ostensibly put them in the position to coordinate the policy development. In some cases, such as with manifestation determination procedures, this is done by a group of individuals who are responsible for conducting manifestation determination reviews with oversight from their assigned supervisory staff, with little to no input from other constituents. In other cases, such as with the student code of conduct, there is a small committee made up primarily of those with sanctioned positional authority along with either individuals who have been outspoken about the procedures or who are viewed as doing a good job related to discipline (i.e., adhering to the expected structures and practices). In either case, only those with sanctioned institutional authority, either directly by virtue of their position or indirectly by virtue of their appointment, are given an opportunity to have voice in the development of disciplinary frameworks. In doing so, Riverside has used networks of relationships within the confines of its organizational structure to construct a particular *dispositif* related to the discipline of its students (Ennis, 2008). This is vastly different from other practices that impact the work of teachers (e.g., modifications to the bell schedule, raises, etc.) in Riverside which, by virtue of the district's instructional master contract, must be made available for comment and be subject to ratification. Although the bureaucratic procedures

associated with committee work and/or experts making policy are more efficient in terms of time spent on the task, they are inherently problematic. Just as the participants' interviews conveyed a theme related to the deservedness of resources, the fact the efficiency of policy is put above inclusiveness of input expresses a belief that the continued exclusion and marginalization of particular groups of students is less important than the need to ensure agreement with issues such as changes to a school's bell schedule.

Not only do matters of control impact the *puissance/connaissance* dynamic in Riverside, they also have significant implications for issues of *pouvoir/savoir*. *Pouvoir/savoir* implies a productive aspect of knowledge and meaning making. By situating the construction of disciplinary frameworks as external and inaccessible to most staff, students, and families, Riverside School District has established boundaries of what is acceptable in terms of both behavior and the response to behavior, without considering the fact the *connaissance* to which they have given authority may be in conflict with the *savoir* that various groups have constructed among and between themselves. Especially when considering frameworks such as the discipline matrix, the expected assignment of consequences and the assumption that consequences will progress in severity as misbehavior continues, limits the scope through which members of the district community can operationalize their disciplinary practices. Such an enactment of power also creates spaces for resistances, however, as Parker shared in their refusal to send students to the office to be disciplined. Their act of resistance prevented students from being caught in a *dispositif* that assumes certain progressions of increasingly severe consequences and instead creates a space through which students are empowered to construct a vision of their ideal learning space. This act, while small in scale, highlights how omission from co-constructing knowledge related to disciplinary paradigms leads to a disconnect among those responsible for

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addressing disciplinary incidents. Although some participants, such as Blair, advocated for the ability to work collaboratively to create frameworks, this process did not, at a systemic level, come to fruition in Riverside.

A district at odds with itself. Riverside School District is not uncommon in the fact that there is disconnect between various members within the organization. Especially given its size, Riverside cannot possibly satisfy every individual's needs at all times. Despite this, there is a clear detachment between various groups that are all tasked with actualizing the district's disciplinary framework. This is especially visible in the way that each group points to another as having authority while minimizing their own agency in the disciplinary process. Pels (1995) noted that institutions are often subject to patterns of knowledge-political negotiation wherein specific arrangements of symbolic power can manifest a series of independent realities. In Riverside, this is seen vis-à-vis discounting one's own agency and pointing to others as the decision makers. In part, this may be viewed as blaming which could be considered a type of resistance against guilt-by-association. All of the participants agreed that the district needed to improve its disciplinary practices; however, in denying agency, each rejected a causal relationship in the district's disparate outcomes. In doing so, participants gave themselves a social good (i.e., fighting for better outcomes in an unjust system) while denying the "others" who made decisions the same social good.

One way that participants attempted to reconcile the discordant relationships was to define the necessary "tightness" and "looseness" of district policy. Although Blair was the only participant that directly used the phrase "tight" to describe district policy, others referenced this common district Conversation through situated meanings in their interviews (see for example Hayden's description of policing procedures). Within Riverside, the idea of tight and loose refers

to policies that are subject to a high level of district control and minimal school discretion (tight) versus policies that provide guidance with schools having wide latitude to implement in the ways they see fit, if at all (loose). This construct also bears resembles to Weick's (1976) notion of tightly and loosely coupled systems.

According to Weick, the terms tight and loose coupling are indicative the degree to which parts of an organization are interdependent on one another. In a school where the administrator was regularly part of professional learning communities, conducted regular walkthroughs of classrooms, and invited teachers to be part of school leadership teams, one would consider the work of the administrator and teachers to be tightly coupled. Conversely, in a school where administrators took a hands-off approach, gave instruction or guidance, and otherwise worked independently of the teachers, the relationship would be described as loosely coupled. In Riverside, the idea of loose policies and loose coupling are almost synonymous. If, for example, district administrators created a policy that schools were expected to follow, there is an assumption that district staff must be directly involved in its execution through compliance monitoring in order to ensure the policy is followed (hence Hayden's description of policing). If, on the other hand, the policy is not explicitly monitored, the assumption is schools can follow it insofar as they see fit, following an do first/ask for forgiveness later mantra. Jesse provided an example of how school-based staff see this as an act of resistance when they noted that they would not typically follow the discipline matrix for students who received their first referral. This knowledge-political act of resistance implied that Jesse believed the *savoir* they negotiated among their staff and fellow administers was a better fit for the schools needs than the expectation of tight adherence to a policy.

Although the district appears to treat loose/tight policy and loose/tight coupling as synonymous, they may actually be better served by drawing a distinction between the two related constructs. If the various groups within the district were able to move past the disconnect and issues of control that I have already noted, they could begin to establish a framework in which they saw themselves as more interconnected (i.e., tightly coupled). Increasing the involvement of various constituents in one another's work not only would provide greater insight regarding the work each group does; it would also provide an opportunity to create greater avenues for input and consensus building. In this situation, loose policies would become more effective as they would be seen less as acts of resistance, and more as a jointly negotiated *dispositif* through which those with day-to-day responsibilities could confidently and responsibly engage in their work.

Unfortunately, the interviews with my participants did not paint a picture where interconnectedness and autonomy are balanced components of the broader system. As a whole, the participants recognized that the district has not found a way to systematically engage in disciplinary practices that improve student outcomes. Nonetheless, participants were more apt to identify others within the system as barriers and reference the *savoir* associated with their own discourse communities as foundational to changing district practices.

Insiders and outsiders. The concept of insiders and outsiders in Riverside flows directly from the omnipresent "other" that led to the idea of a district at odds with itself. Previously, I discussed how the lack of interconnectedness, the claiming of social goods for oneself while denying them for others, and willful acts of resistances against the dominant *dispositifs* suggest a fracture in the sense of community and a lack of trust within the district. Ultimately, this manifests as a sense of participants helping students succeed in spite of one another rather than because of one another. Foucault (1977/1995) claimed in *Discipline and Punish* that the

existence of the prison as an institution leads to the production of prisoners. By establishing boundaries regarding what it means to be a prisoner, the conditions under which one would become a prisoner, and the behaviors one must follow in order to no longer be a prisoner, the prison becomes a catalyst for generating that which it is designed to contain. In schools, especially as it relates to discipline, this process can be seen playing out through defining and codifying misbehavior and, in turn, enacting punishment upon those who are deemed deserving of it. In addition to creating insiders and outsiders in terms of staff contribution to the development and implementation of policy as I discussed previously, this system creates insiders and outsiders of students and their families.

The concept of knowledge politics is especially important in considering how Riverside's disciplinary structures create insiders and outsiders. Not only are there issues regarding who has the authority to make policy from a staff perspective; as several participants noted, students and their families are completely left out of the decision-making process regarding what constitutes misbehavior and the appropriate responses to such behavior. Although this may prove minimally impactful for students and families who already operate within the sanctioned knowledge of the dominant *dispositifs*, students and families who have historically been on the margins have their status as others reinforced by their exclusion from the discipline conversation and their subsequent exclusion from the learning environment. Speaking of a similar problem in regard to the adoption of a national curriculum, Apple (1993) noted that the underlying assumption of a uniform culture, and thus a justification for failing to represent the voices of other cultures, leads to policies that only value the culture of those who create the policy. Even in attempting to incorporate a pluralistic view of acceptable behavior and appropriate response, it is nearly impossible to avoid sterilizing differences in an attempt to encapsulate them in a blanket policy,

thus reinforcing the hegemonic structures. As Oliga (1990) stated, "power and resistance must be seen as dialectical: while discipline seeks to normalize or repress individual differences and autonomy in the interest of domination" (p. 37). Without a true sense of community input with representation from those most impacted by the extant policies, Riverside will continue to create figurative outsiders who have been excluded from contributing to the sanctioned knowledge and literal outsiders who will continue to be denied educational opportunities.

Identity and culture building. In order to move past some of the issues noted above, Riverside must develop a clearer understanding of who it wants to be in regard to disciplinary practices. There is a clear message within the district that disproportionate exclusion of certain subgroups of students is problematic; however, the prerogative for changing these patterns is often more focused on improving the outcomes indicated by disciplinary data and not on improving practices and the associated structures. Dakota and Kai both discussed how failing to understand and internalize certain values and core practices creates divisions that pit staff members against staff members and staff members against students.

When considering the need for a coherent district philosophy, the most salient example of such practices in Riverside can be found in the district's "common vision of instructional excellence." The common vision highlights five student actions that the district believes would be indicative of instructional excellence. These actions include things such as "all students will build strong content knowledge and apply learning to new contexts" and "all students will take ownership for their learning and reflect on the learning progress." From these actions, the district establishes its "key priorities" and the associated actions that guide practices at the school and district level. Noticeably absent in the core vision for instructional excellence is any mention of the social and interpersonal skills students need to learn and display in order to stay in the

learning environment to achieve the content-focused core vision. Consequently, there are not any

formal district, school, teacher, etc. actions that are codified into the district's framework. As a

result, there is an implication that the *savoir* of import in the district is related to teacher

knowledge of instructional practices and that effective disciplinary practices are less valuable.

Revisiting a quote from Jessie, "we're not behavioral specialists, we're not school counselors, we

are people with educational leadership degrees trying to do budgets and ensure school safety."

Without a districtwide *dispositif* that values teaching behavior and engaging in effective

disciplinary practices, it is not surprising that staff members may not see disciplinary practices as

an important component of their work.

Eriksson (2005) claimed "the ontology of power can be approached only through a whole

historical network, which implies various forms of knowledge, institutional practices, juridical

and economic systems, and cultural relationships" (p. 598). Considering this in relation to the ill-

defined disciplinary paradigm in Riverside, if the district is not explicit in constructing a vision

of how it believes student behavior should conceptualized, taught, and addressed, one can only

rely on the historical patterns to provide insight into what it means to engage in discipline, thus

reinforcing the patterns of practice that led to disparate disciplinary outcomes in the first place.

Absent a clear understanding of the ontological nature of discipline in Riverside, the district will

only construct disciplinary paradigms in relation to what it has done not what it seeks to do.

Implications for Practice

Although much of this study focused on theoretical issues such as language, knowledge,

and power, there are important implications for practice that can be understood in light of the

data and subsequent analysis. First, the district currently privileges pedagogical practices over

social emotional practices without a systemic acknowledgement that these two constructs are

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interrelated. If the district began to think of each person's role as essential for supporting the social emotional growth of every child, it could set a foundation where students felt connected to individuals and their schools which would, in turn, support academic learning. As Parker pointed out:

> I think because the culture of my class and the relationship between me and my students is more than just, "let's get to work" and "this is what you need to know to pass the test" that I have an easier understand and easier time getting to that level of understanding with the kids.

This shift is only possible, however, if Riverside explicitly acknowledges the importance of teaching social emotional skills and adopting equitable disciplinary practices as equal priorities along with its other stated objectives such as building strong content knowledge and developing critical thinking skills. When the district has a formal framework such as its common vision of instructional excellence and key priorities, those ideas that are not explicitly acknowledged as important are implicitly inconsequential.

Although it is important for Riverside to make a conscious shift in its disciplinary paradigm and acknowledge the importance of each person's role in supporting the social emotional growth of every child, this cannot happen via a top down approach. The district already has a culture of insiders and outsiders wherein, even those ostensibly on the inside, view themselves as lacking power and agency within the system. There is certainly a balance to be reached. Riverside cannot engage in endless debates about disciplinary practices that try to incorporate the ideas of every person possible while still engaging in the work that is essential to the district. However, neither can it engage in directive, authoritarian approaches that allow only those with formal authority or assumed specialized knowledge contribute to the disciplinary

savoir. The district must find ways of establishing a more coherent framework while incorporating the voices of those who are impacted by the policies, especially students, families, and those tasked with direct disciplinary interventions.

Finally, within its established framework, Riverside also needs to create a coherent system of professional development and support to help staff members feel empowered to meet students' social emotional needs and engage in more equitable disciplinary practices. Currently, Riverside has a confusing arrangement of PBIS initial trainings, boosters, and follow-up trainings with schools repeating trainings, skipping certain trainings, or partially engaging in the training process. In addition, there are separate trainings related to Trauma Informed Care, Restorative Practices, behavior interventions, and a number of other related topics. For staff members, it is nearly impossible to navigate the variety of trainings available and to determine how to implement components of sometimes contradictory frameworks. After developing a coherent identity related to school discipline with the input of a variety of constituents, Riverside needs to clarify a system of support that helps staff members develop the skills to implement the disciplinary frameworks.

Looking Back After Leaving the District

Working in Riverside was a constant sense of tension for me. As an administrator, my role was to ensure our district's programs ran effectively to meet the needs of the students we served. Unfortunately, my positional responsibilities did not always align with ethical positioning. Some such situations were relatively straight forward such as when I would need to reduce a position at one school in order to increase a position at another school. Although there were ethical tensions related the ratio of students-to-teachers that a school would have to deal with due to my actions, the total number of teacher allocations I was given to assign were limited

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and, ultimately, I felt I was making the best decision I could given the resources that were available to me.

Issues related to student discipline were unfortunately much more complex. Often times, my staff members or I would be directly involved when schools were seeking to change the placement of a student with a disability to a more restrictive environment such as a self-contained classroom or an alternative school. Knowing the student outcome data associated with such placements in our district and nationwide, I always worried that each decision was a possible condemnation for the child involved, especially if that child was young. I worked diligently to put systems in place that would help protect students from being placed in such situations unless all other options had been exhausted; however, in retrospect, many of these were simply barriers and hoops that schools would jump through, much like in Jesse's complaint about a specific number of incidents preventing them from recommending an alternative school placement.

In my time as a Riverside employee, I tried to address the bigger culture in addition to procedures. As Dakota put it, we were often trying to plug the holes in our ship while building a better ship behind us. Our biggest effort at doing so was via the pilot study that I referenced at the beginning of this paper. Our hope was that by developing models where shifted disciplinary paradigms resulted in substantive changes for students and schools, that we could help others see that there was a better way to address student discipline. What we didn't consider was the fact that participants were mired in the current *dispositifs*, faced with competing directives, and still voiceless in the greater change process.

Looking both back on my time in the district as an employee and forward as a parent and advocate, it is my dearest hope that Riverside can begin to craft an identity as it relates to

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disciplinary practices. From this identity, that must shaped by a wide variety of constituents, especially those who are most impacted by the district's disciplinary structures, systems of practice can be developed to begin moving from a theoretical understand of discipline to a transformation of school and classroom practices.

Seeds of Change

During my interview with Dakota, they shared hope about the direction in which Riverside is moving:

> I got a text two days ago from Jordan [pseudonym], who sent me a picture of an SEL [social emotional learning] training and all of the administrators. And [they] texted it to me to say, I wanted you to know that this is happening. That the thing that you started, that seed that you planted at some point has grown. People have cultivated it. The sun has shown on it, rain has fallen and something had happened. And [they were] very clear to say like ,this isn't the end. But I saved that text because that was so powerfully important for me because in the education field, you also never see the end of anything. So, to know that I had any kind of an influence on making a shift like that is just, like that is, it just makes my heart grow.

Dakota and I sat in the circle together on that rainy day in 2015. Each of us was the lead district representative for one of the two schools engaging in our restorative practices pilot. We presented together as board members teared up over the data we shared, fought with paid consultants who we believed were reinforcing hegemonic disciplinary structures that we were pushing against, and ultimately, we commiserated over our failure to make the changes that we felt would improve the lives of our students. Ultimately, we both left Riverside.

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As I mentioned previously, Riverside has a history of being fractured in regard to its perspectives about discipline and the supports it provides to its staff. Recently, however, the district has worked to develop a social emotional learning framework to serve as a guide for teaching students how to act and interact in the school system instead of relying on punishment as the primary deterrent. There are still concerns. The framework was largely constructed via a partnership with an outside agency and the majority of the representatives were school or district level administrators; however, more teachers had input into this process than has happened previously in the district. There has been a conscious effort to synthesize and clarify the overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, disciplinary models used throughout the district, and efforts have been made to clarify professional development supports. Although there is a long way to go, my hope is that Riverside is on the path to making substantive changes for the students and community it serves. I hope that studies such as this one will help to situate the questions that might be asked and will make visible the structures that perpetuate unjust practices so that those who have the power to determine knowledge and practice can reflect on ways to make the disciplinary paradigm in Riverside, and districts like it, more equitable.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored disciplinary practices in one school district from the perspective of staff members. By exploring staff perspectives through a discourse analysis framework, I was able to gain insight into the ways language and action interacted to create a disciplinary paradigm within the district. In future studies, it would be helpful to expand the scope of this research to include additional methods of data collection and additional perspectives.

When designing this study, I made the conscious decision to select participants with whom I had a relationship. This was done in order to help mitigate the impact of my position

within the district since there was a chance that those with whom I did not have a relationship may have been reluctant to discuss their views openly. Unfortunately, despite the benefit of this approach given the circumstances, it also meant sacrificing a greater breadth of opinion, especially considering participants with whom I had a relationship were also more likely to share some degree of commonality in regard to views and disposition. Future research without the complications associated with being internal member of the district could provide an opportunity to explore a wider range of D/discourses by including a broader cross section of participants including staff members who have significantly different perspectives on school discipline, students, families, and other members of the district.

Another area where additional exploration is warranted is through direct observation of disciplinary enactments. Certain building tasks such as practices and signs systems and knowledge could have been explored in entirely different ways if I had the opportunity to see language-in-action as it related to discipline occurring in schools. Future research would benefit from a perspective that allows comparison between the ways in which participants discuss discipline and the ways in which they enact discipline.

Finally, as I discussed in the previous section, Riverside School District has begun the process of establishing a framework for social emotional learning. The hope is that this process will begin to change the interactions between educators and students, the way the staff think about disciplinary practices, and ultimately improve the outcomes for students. It would be worth monitoring the district's progress in this area. If Riverside experiences the outcomes it is seeking, revisiting this discourse analysis to explore how the D/discourses have evolved in light of changing practices could provide insights that help other districts seeking to engage in system change related to school discipline.

Conclusion

In this study, I sought to develop a better understanding of the ways in which D/discourses related to school discipline manifested in actual disciplinary practices. By using Gee's (2014) methods for discourse analysis through a poststructural theoretical framework, I was especially interested in the interaction of power, knowledge, and action that translated staff member's language into disciplinary enactments. In examining broader societal Discourses related to school discipline, I found that certain themes such as social practices and law enforcement language were prevalent in both news media and scholarly literature. Although participants in this study did leverage those external discourses, they did so in ways that were unique to Riverside School District. The combination of external Discourses, memberships in various discourse communities, and the negotiation of knowledge politics among staff members ultimately reflected a school district that was struggled to find its identity and belief structure related to student discipline.

During my analysis, I identified several areas where participants' D/discourses shed light on tensions, inconsistencies, and senses of marginalization within the district. Although each staff member was able to share examples of success and expressed pride in the work they engaged in with students, they also shared frustration at the fact that they felt they were doing so in spite of district structures. Through my analysis, I highlighted areas where these issues were most salient. Ultimately, Riverside must address issues of power, culture, and marginalization if it is going to create a system for more equitable disciplinary practices. It seems that the seeds have been planted for this work, but moving forward, it will be important for the district to ensure representation of its most marginalized populations, develop structures to guide the way

discipline occurs in schools, and to provide the tools and resources necessary for staff to

meaningfully engage this work.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

USF
UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA

Informed Consent to Participate in Study Involving Minimal Risk

You are being asked to take part in a study. Studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the investigator to discuss this consent form with you. Please ask him to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

I am asking you to take part in a study called: **Disciplinary D/discourses: Navigating and Negotiating Disciplinary Paradigms**

The person who is in charge of this study is Michael Bailey**.** This person is called the Principal Investigator.

The study will be conducted at your worksite, another location of your choosing, via virtual conference software, or if you prefer at the USF College of Education.

Purpose of the study

This study is being conducted in order to understand how district discipline policy and practices align with broader discourses about student discipline.

Why are you being asked to take part?
I am asking you to take part in this study because you have been identified as an individual who has a role in implementing disciplinary practices in the district. As a result, you can tell the principal investigator your experiences and observations related to student discipline, its implementation, and impact.

Study Procedures:

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in 1 interview lasting approximately 1 hour in length with the possibility of a follow-up interview if additional clarification is needed after the initial data analysis.

The interview will take place at your worksite, another location of your choosing, via virtual conference software, or if you prefer at the USF College of Education. The primary investigator will ask for permission to tape record your interview. You can at any time refuse to be tape recorded. The principal investigator and his faculty advisor are the only people who will have access to the recording. The information will not be identifiable to any other persons. The data will be maintained for five years after the final report is submitted to USF as required by university rules. The electronic data will be deleted after the final report is submitted.

The questions you will be asked will related to your experiences and beliefs related to student discipline.

Total Number of Participants

Up to 10 employees of Pasco County Schools will participate in the study.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this study.

Risks or Discomfort

This study is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Costs

The is no cost for participating in this study.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The principal investigator has no conflict of interest in conducting this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

I will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:
- The Principal Investigator and his faculty advisor.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

I may publish what I learn from this study. If I do, I will not include your name. I will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Michael Bailey at 813-956-1204.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the study, call the Dr. Zorka Karanxha at 813-974-6040.

Consent to Take Part in this Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in this study. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____   _____

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study   Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this participant speaks the language that was used to explain this study and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This participant has provided legally effective informed consent.

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent   Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Study: Disciplinary D/discourses: Navigating and Negotiating Disciplinary Paradigms

Principal Investigator: Michael Bailey

Interview Structure: Semi-Structured

Method: Descriptive/Narrative Context Questions

- What does the word discipline mean to you?

- Tell me about the role discipline does play in your school/this district. What should it play?

- Can you describe the ways discipline is used?

- What do you hope happens with students as a result of your disciplinary practices?

- When decisions are made about assigning consequences for a student for an infraction, what factors are taken into consideration?

- Can you give me an example of a student you disciplined and what came out of it? Can you think back through this process and reflect?

- In what ways do your beliefs about discipline align with those of the district as a whole?

- In what ways do your beliefs differ?

- How do you think others view your disciplinary practices? How do you know?

- If you had an opportunity, in what ways would you change the way discipline is handled in the district?

- Is there anything else you'd like to share with me regarding your beliefs about student discipline or the ways that discipline is handled in this district?

Appendix C: Building Task Analysis Sheet

Building Task: Question:		
Tool of Inquiry	**Excerpt**	**Implication**
Social Languages		
Discourses		
Intertextuality		
Conversations		
Situated Meanings		
Figured Worlds		