SCHOOL LEADERS AND THE APPLICATION OF DISCIPLINE FOR AFRICAN
AMERICAN AND LATINO STUDENTS

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore, examine, and analyze the experiences of school leaders who are responsible for implementing discipline for African American and Latino students. This study specifically examined the personal and professional influences that impact how school leaders manage their leadership as head disciplinarians of their schools. The study was guided by three research questions: (1) how do personal and professional influences impact the disciplinary decisions made by principals towards African American and Latino students; (2) what tensions do principals experience between their philosophies and their practices; and (3) what types of training and professional development support do administrators have for addressing discipline challenges? The study included six urban school principals who currently serve as elementary school principals. The participants for the study engaged in one-on-one interview sessions that were guided by questions that helped deepen the understanding of how leaders make their decisions. The results of the study showed principals use their personal and professional experiences as a guide to enable them to resolve discipline challenges and that their leadership directly impacts the suspension and expulsion rates for African American and Latino students. The results of the study further pointed out the
need for school leaders to receive professional development dedicated to positive
discipline strategies for students.
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Betty Dawson Flanagan, who instilled in me at a young age that I could do anything that I set my mind to accomplish. My mother inspired me by living her life to serve the needs of others. She dedicated 37 years of her life to urban students in Oakland, California. I am so proud to be your daughter and know that you would be so proud of me for staying the course. I also dedicate this dissertation to my father, Vester Lee Flanagan Sr., who supported my dreams from the beginning of my life. I am honored to walk in your footsteps and appreciate all that you have done for me. You taught me how to take pride in myself and exceed expectations. You taught me how to stay positive and always reach for the stars. Mommy and Papa I thank you and love you from the bottom of my heart.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

School leaders are faced with the issues of disproportionate suspensions, office referrals, and expulsion rates for African American and Latino students. Educational researchers (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010) asserted that culture, effective communication, fairness, and equity played a major role with reversing the negative disciplinary trends that impacted African American and Latino students who were reprimanded for inappropriate behaviors in urban schools. School site based administrators are responsible for raising student achievement levels while maintaining order and safety through effective disciplinary policies. These disciplinary policies are created and implemented under the direction of the governing school board. Students who are found out of compliance with disciplinary policies face punishments that often exclude them from the learning environment, which contributes to lower levels of academic success (Arcia, 2006).

According to Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010), discipline sanctions employed by principals may damage the learning process in other ways as well. African American and Latino students who are removed from their classrooms become less bonded to school, less invested in school rules and coursework, and less motivated to achieve academic success. Principals are thus faced with increased numbers of students who feel marginalized and participate in inappropriate behaviors, which contribute to their removal from school and lower academic achievement levels.
The role of a principal has been historically about maintaining good order and
good housekeeping (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990). Principals feel pressure to keep
schools stable, as it is central to the role of the principal (Fullan & Ballew, 2001;
Wolcott, 1977, 2003), and good schools are seen as places where conflict of any kind is
absent or disposed of quickly. These expectations may contribute to the complexities of
balancing student achievement and school safety. Principals have the added burden of
satisfying the expectations of their teachers, other school site based staff members,
district level supervisors, school board, parents, and community members. Larson and
Ovando (2001) suggested, “The bureaucratic tendency to interpret all conflicts as a threat
to the stability of the institution often encourages educators to oversimplify conflict and
to overlook problems emanating from institutionalized systems of inequity” (p. 156).
When examining the challenges of addressing disproportionate discipline for African
American and Latino students, this oversimplification fails to bring to the surface
underlying causes or address complex social problems within a school (Larson, 1997).

The disciplinary conflicts that exist in urban schools could be connected to the
stereotypical media images of African Americans and Latino Americans. The issue of
race according to Monroe (2005) has influenced both media and scholarly depictions of
people of color. The images often feature cultures of violence, drugs,
antiauthoritarianism, and other negative stereotypes (p. 26). These influences can
manifest themselves in schools through the reactions of school staff members to
inappropriate behaviors exhibited by African American and Latino students.
School leaders face tremendous challenges related to student achievement and maintaining order and safety in schools through disciplinary policies. The disengagement of students may contribute to the depth of this issue for African American and Latino students. School leaders face the reality of contributing to the perceived marginalization of these students. Ogbu (2003) postulated that minority students’ engagement and resistance to successful performance in school can be influenced by two sets of factors: (a) the historical and current treatment of minorities by the larger society and by schools; and (b) students’ responses to their treatment. The decisions to enforce school rules for conduct can have major influences on how students perceive their places within the institution.

The influences that impact a school leader’s decisions concerning discipline for African American and Latino students has not been studied in depth. The role of the principal is to serve as the guide and role model for students. Principals also act as teachers to all of their students. Their disciplinary actions serve to correct inappropriate behaviors or cause them in some cases to intensify. Consequently, teachers’ leadership ability to be able to demonstrate a caring and supportive environment in order to ameliorate student discipline issues is critical for their students’ psychosocial development (Garza, 2009). There exists a lack of research concerning the external and internal factors that influence the disciplinary decisions made by principals. I sought to identify specific influences that guide the disciplinary decisions that are made concerning African American and Latino students.
Background of the Study

Six elementary school principals who primarily serve African American and Latino students in the West Contra Costa Unified School District participated in this study. The district serves urban students from the cities of Richmond, El Cerrito, Hercules, Pinole, El Sobrante, San Pablo, and Kensington. The principals who participated in this study serve students in the cities of Richmond, El Sobrante, and El Cerrito. The samples of principals for the study serve students whose incomes range from middle to low. All of the sites experienced challenges with discipline for African American and Latino students. This research is also connected to my own experiences as an urban principal who has struggled for years to deal with the complexities of promoting student achievement levels while maintaining order through suspensions and expulsions.

Researchers continue to look for the direct relationships between the actions of leaders and student achievement. Notably Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) found a moderate, but significant, association between the actions of the building principal and student results. Principals set the tone for student academic achievement levels and appropriate behaviors. The actions taken by principals to correct perceived inappropriate behaviors can have both positive and negative effects. Success is achieved when students’ behaviors are modified or corrected. The negative side effects of disciplinary actions include marginalization and alienation of students who do not feel invested in the institution.

District data (see Appendix A) have indicated that despite multiple interventions discipline issues continue to be a major issue for African American and Latino students.
The data collected by the district for middle and high school students clearly illustrates this point. Elementary schools are beginning to log their discipline issues into the district’s electronic recording system. Data for elementary schools was not collected as regularly as the secondary schools. This absence of consistent data is important to note because it can be assumed that the students in secondary schools with discipline challenges were probably in crisis during their times as elementary school students.

The numbers of office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions for elementary school students represent critical decisions that these principals made in order to address behavioral issues. The influences for these disciplinary decisions are not deeply examined. Principals have to respond to behavioral challenges while remaining accountable for student achievement, relationships with teachers, community, district, state, and federal mandates. Therefore, the identification of the specific influences that affect disciplinary decisions made by principals is necessary to understand how to address the challenges and provide support that will contribute to changing the negative path of discipline for African American and Latino students.

**Problem Statement**

Principals in the West Contra Costa Unified School District have been experiencing continued discipline issues with African American and Latino students. The problem is that too often principals are expected to address these behaviors punitively through the implementation of effective discipline policies. The execution of said policies is influenced by personal interpretations, mandates of the school district, state and federal laws, and pressure from colleagues who want consequences for behavioral infractions.
Principals are engaged in making disciplinary decisions that are, on the surface, designed to address inappropriate student behaviors. These decisions are contributing to the extensive removals of African American and Latino students from the learning environment.

Studies have continued to highlight the actions that principals take through suspensions and expulsions absent of the specific influences that impact these actions. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge by increasing the understanding of the specific influences that impact the disciplinary decisions made by current principal practitioners. The study will further examine the preparation programs that these principals engaged with, personal and professional experiences, and support desired to assist with their leadership that would positively affect the discipline statistics for African American and Latino students in the West Contra Costa Unified School District.

**Nature of the Study**

The study’s design used a grounded theory research approach. Creswell (2007) indicated that researchers using qualitative designs inquire into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study problems, qualitative researchers use emerging qualitative approaches to engage in inquiry, data collection, and analysis that are inductive and assist in establishing patterns or themes from participants. This design is appropriate for this study, which is completely dependent upon the data collected from the participants through qualitative research instruments.

The participants in this study were six elementary school principals. The participants were chosen because of their positions as principals at schools that have a
significant number of African American and Latino students. The participants included two White women, two African American women, one Latino man, and one African American man. The participants varied by race, age, and years of experience as school site principals. I am an elementary school principal of African American descent who has worked in the district for over seven years. The role of the researcher is to focus on understanding and exploring the issues shared by the participants’ experiences in the process (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007).

**Research Questions**

1. How do personal and professional influences impact the disciplinary decisions made by principals towards African American and Latino students?

2. What tensions do principals experience between their philosophies and their practices?

3. What kinds of training and professional development support do administrators have for addressing discipline challenges?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the underlying issues that influence the disciplinary decisions made by principals towards African American and Latino students. Through this study, I intended to identify the personal and professional influences that affect these disciplinary decisions. I further intended to explore the tensions between philosophical beliefs and actual practice, as well as to understand the desired support
needed to assist them with reframing the racially based discipline gap that exists between African American and Latino students and their Asian and White counterparts.

**Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was based on Greenleaf (1977) and Greenleaf and Spears’ (2002) theoretical model of servant leadership. Servant leaders are those who desire to serve others before themselves. Principals who desire to serve others through their inspirational leadership are making a conscious choice to lead with positive intentions. The difference between servant leadership and other collaborative leadership styles is that the leadership is guided by the care and attention taken by the servant (principal) to ensure that other priorities are met. Servant leadership is a long term, transformational approach to both life and work. The servant leader has a desire to serve and a willingness to sacrifice self-interest for the benefit of others (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). Greenleaf (1977) identified 10 characteristics as critical importance to the development of servant leaders: (a) listening, the need for a deep commitment to listening to others intently; (b) empathy, the need for others to be accepted for their personality traits and talents; (c) healing, the need for understanding others tribulations and using the opportunity to help them become content, productive individuals; (d) awareness, the need for general awareness of an individual’s circumstances as well as self-awareness in understanding issues involving values and ethics; (e) persuasion, the need to convince others rather than coerce compliance; (f) conceptualization, the ability to think beyond day-to-day realities to solve problems; (g) foresight, a characteristic that enables the servant leader to understand history, present realities, and consequences of future
decisions; (h) stewardship, the use of openness and persuasion rather than control; (i) commitment, a pledge to assist with the growth of each individual; and (j) building community, a recognition of the need to rebuild community as a life form (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002).

The servant leader develops a genuine tolerance for diversity. The servant leader embraces the understanding of others and provides venues for personal growth. Greenleaf (1977) based his theory on over 40 years of work in the field of management research, development, and education with major business institutions. He founded the Center for Applied ethics in 1985. This work can still be applied to the complexities of school leadership today.

The theoretical frameworks of equity and restorative justice are also examined in this study. Both frameworks of equity and restorative justice support the development of the principals’ capacities as caring individuals to assist student needs, similar to the tenets of servant leadership. Cavanagh (2009) asserted that Western culture values did not address the needs of people who felt powerless and marginalized. American schools current systems for managing behavior are fundamentally based on adversarial processes rather than the development of healing relationships. The concept of restorative justice originated with a restorative alternative (Zehr, 1995). As a result, training school staff was based on practices used in the legal system, focusing on conferencing (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). The application of the principles revolved around the use of conferencing in schools as an alternative to more punitive discipline measures, such as suspension (Cavanagh et al., 2007).
Schools that function with an equity focus similar to restorative justice seek to apply practices that promote fairness and access for all students. The expectation for all students is set high and the negative or deficit mentality towards students is not employed. Like restorative justice, an equity approach seeks to provide school leaders to lead with tools that promote access and positive communication. Therefore, this study focused on the common principals between servant leadership, restorative justice, and equity in order to determine the actions and support needed to assist principals with positive discipline.

**Glossary of Terms**

A glossary of terms is contained in this study to provide a clear definition of the relevant terms used in this study (See Appendix B.).

**Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations**

**Assumptions.** The study was confined to the interviews of six elementary school principals who serve in the West Contra Costa Unified School District. The purposive sampling decreases the generalizability of the findings. This study was not germane to all principals who manage the behaviors of African American and Latino students in California. Another assumption of this study was that the principals would answer the questions truthfully and according to their personal experiences as site based leaders. The final assumption was that the principals who also serve as my colleagues would exhibit a comfort zone with me expressing their thoughts because we share the same level of management within the district. I was a partner in the research to understand the issues
that affect the disciplinary decisions made by principals when addressing perceived inappropriate behaviors exhibited by African American and Latino students.

**Limitations.** There were limitations to quality in this study. The collection of the data took place during school hours, after school hours, late evenings, weekends, and online. There was no guarantee that the responses from the interviews would be exactly matched with the direction of the proposed questions. There was also a possibility of factors outside the control of the researcher (recent conflicts, stress, fatigue), which could influence responses (Creswell et al., 2007).

Based on the grounded theory design, threats to quality include the difficulty of determining when categories are saturated or when the theory is sufficiently detailed. My presence as a co-principal could have also produced bias, which is discussed further in Chapter 3. Triangulation, a peer review, and various reviews of the data collection were used to establish trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis. Therefore, threats to quality were limited as much as possible. Potential weaknesses of the study were the relatively small sample size and grade level specificity of principals, as well as the use of a single school district.

**Scope.** Interviews, observations, and discipline reports were used for this grounded theory study. The data collection and analysis were completed over a three-month span of time. Interviews and observations were incorporated into a 2-3 hour time period for each session during time periods that proved least intrusive for the principals. Participants were part of a purposeful sample of elementary principals. Participants were
chosen based upon their positions of service as principals at elementary schools with African American and Latino students.

**Delimitations.** Delimitations of this study included the following: (a) that the study took place from October through December 2012; (b) the location of the study was six elementary schools in the West Contra Costa Unified School District; and (c) the sample for the study consisted of principals of elementary schools.

**Significance of the Study**

Despite the limited scope and generalizability of the study, it may make a contribution to the understanding of how to support and what to include throughout the employment of urban principals responsible for disciplining African American and Latino students. The research provides a rich description of the context of the study and the findings emanating from analysis of data that may assist other educators who are challenged with discipline for African American and Latino urban students. Young students are a particularly unique group of individuals and exhibit a tremendous amount of behavioral issues (Weisman & Hansen, 2008). It is important that principals are provided with support and training that will prepare and assist them with improving the discipline challenges and promote positive interactions between students and school officials.

My seven years of service as an elementary school principal have afforded me the opportunity to experience the challenges that school leaders face who are responsible for administering discipline to African American and Latino students. My personal experiences have led me to believe that there needs to be a connection between the
principals and students as well as the principal and district office. The connection for both is understanding and continued support. Personal connections can breed more positive relationships across all levels.

Researchers such as Brown (2007) supported this observation. Brown examined the experiences of 37 students who were suspended or expelled from school. Her results revealed that rates of school exclusion were related to perceptions of school adults and disciplinary policies. Higher percentages of students reporting that they had good relationships with school adults were associated with lower suspension rates than those who felt disconnected from adults. Gregory et al. (2010) indicated the importance of school bonding for reducing the risk of delinquency. They contended that environments that encouraged school connectedness and caring relationships reduced discipline issues. Principals can benefit from having structures in place that give them a platform to express their needs related to leadership and receive ongoing support. This may contribute to the reduction of suspensions and expulsions for African American and Latino students in the West Contra Costa Unified School District.

**Implications for Social Justice**

Principals who are trained to lead as social justice leaders through servant leadership, restorative justice practices, and equity have the potential to change, profoundly, the direction of disciplinary actions taken towards African American and Latino students. It is imperative for school leaders to promote equity through models of leadership that can create restorative relationships (Cavanagh, 2009). These caring relationships with students through training and support of principals
can lead to more productive and safe school environments. This study has significant applications for social change by creating a new theory based on the commonalities of servant leadership, restorative justice, and equity practices in schools. The three theories combined can assist principals with encouraging all of their staff members, including their teachers, to respond to African American and Latino students who exhibit inappropriate behaviors with a solution-based lens instead of turning to removals. The goal would be to replace past discipline tools with an ethic of care that will promote opportunities for improved relationships with students.

**Summary of Content**

Chapter 1 presented the problem to be addressed through this study. This section provided background information and appropriate cited resources. This section described the purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature pertaining to school leadership, equity, discipline challenges for principals, and the psychosocial stressors for African American and Latino school children. It recognizes contributions that prior studies have made to the overall knowledge in these areas, as well as the theoretical framework that served as the foundation for this study. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative research design, methodology of the study, identification of the population, selection of the sample, and instruments used. Chapter 4 of this grounded study outlines the procedures for gathering, collecting, and analyzing data. Further discussion and interpretation of the findings of this study for each research question are addressed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Scope of the Literature

Individuals who enter school leadership positions, such as the principalship, bring their past experiences with them. Their pasts are not a static entity, but rather a dynamic one that interacts continually with persons and events within the social milieu. The work of a principal can often contribute to the limited distinction between personal and professional identities. In a review of the personal and professional selves of teachers, Day, Kington, Stobart, and Sammons (2006) asserted that there were unavoidable interrelationships between personal and professional identities: the evidence showing that teaching required a significant personal investment. Although these are writings of teachers, the same identity interrelatedness may be inferred of principals. This literature review focuses on three main areas that work to form a principal’s identity as a leader and, by extension, the approach to leadership practice. These areas are the personal and professional influences, tensions between philosophies and leadership practices, and an analysis of professional development support for administrators.

Personal Background and Professional Influences

There are several themes that emerged from the literature examining the impact of influences found in a principal’s background. Predominant themes include those highlighting the forces located both internally and externally that affect both feelings and decision making. These forces help shape leadership identity, defining moments or hardships endured by an individual, and the active embrace of the leadership role, which
at times seem extremely complicated. Other significant themes include those centering on
the influence of family, teachers, and mentors who play a part in fostering beliefs, values,
and attitudes early in life.

Young (2007), in his novel *The Shack*, quoted Frederich Buecher who in *Telling
the Truth* wrote,

You can kiss your family and friends good-bye and put miles between you, but at
the same time you carry them with you in your heart, your mind your stomach,
because you do not just live in a world but a world lives in you. (p. 209)

Much of this literature comes from work done on authentic leadership and from work
done primarily on the lives of teachers, as Collay’s (2006) writing on the development of
a teacher’s professional identity stated that each teacher carried within the values and
that reach back through a lifetime of socialization. Principals begin their careers as
teachers and it is safe to assume the same of them.

The literature on authentic leadership has a dual focus. One focus is on the
leader’s internal struggle to find his/her identity as a leader and the other is on the
importance of others in helping shape that identity. Sparrowe (2005) noted that authentic
leadership went beyond “to thine own self be true” (p. 15) to an authenticity that found
itself in the regard one held for others. He asserted that authentic leadership emerged
from a narrative process in which others played a role in constituting a leader’s
conception of self. Such a narrative recounts that the purpose and values of a person may
change over time and events but remain as a foundation for the individual. He argued that
although the self can be constituted in relation to others, the experiences gained were resolutely one’s own and unique to that individual’s identity.

Shamir and Eilam (2005) asserted that leaders constructed, developed, and revised their life stories to provide meaning. Through these stories leaders attained clarity of self-knowledge and self-concept that allowed them to discover their true leadership identity. This sentiment is reinforced in work done in France by Cohen-Scali (2003) on the construction of professional identity in young adults. She wrote about the importance of socialization for work and the significant role of social experience gained in the family or friendship circle. She further pointed out that a professional identity might form as early as childhood.

In addition to internal and external forces, leaders can be influenced by professional experiences that offer a defining moment for their practice. Researchers Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005) identified two forces that had a major impact on a person’s development as a leader. The first is a leader’s personal history (i.e., family influences, role models, educational work and experience, and life challenges) and the second major area to consider was trigger events; those dramatic and minor changes in a person’s situation. They viewed these forces as antecedents for, in this case, authentic leadership development. Such events work to forge that leader’s identity.

In work similar to that of Gardner et al., (2005), Cooper, Scandura, and Schreishman (2005) wrote of trigger events in the lives of leaders that altered their views of the world and their leadership styles. It is the interaction of the event and personal insight held by the leader that produces a behavior change. Bennis and Thomas (2007)
also noted the place of crucibles or severe tests that challenge leaders’ beliefs about their management roles. In their study of leaders, they found that every leader had undergone, at least once, a transformational experience or crucible. All researchers did not share this sentiment as Lowney (2003) pointed out. The author argued that individuals relying on the one defining moment of leadership miss a critical pillar of leadership. By solely focusing on a leader’s “defining moment” attention is often diverted from the years of preparation, habits, values, and self-knowledge leading to that defining moment.

A leader’s overt embrace of leadership is another major component that researchers have encountered as necessary in identity formation. Lord and Hall (2005) built on the development of a leadership identity and wrote that self-knowledge might play a key part in leadership development. They suggested that the role of the leader needed to become part of one’s self-identity along with the self-confidence needed to try developmental leadership activities. They argued for a deeper approach to leadership development that moved away from overt behavior styles to looking at the acquisition of skills that promoted the development of a leadership identity. According to Bennis (2003) a study completed at the University of Virginia on the learning experience of 60 managers found that two key motivational factors for learning guided leaders--a need to know and a sense of role. The leader needs to know who he or she is as a leader and then assume the role of authority based upon the understanding of what the role affords him or her to do as a figure of authority. Leaders who have a clear knowledge of who they are can more effectively lead with a defined sense of purpose.
In addition to internal and external influences, and to define moments to form professional identity, researchers look at values and beliefs as helping shape such an identity. Kouzes and Posner (2007) discussed the importance of leaders’ values as guides and as anchors to what they care about. They state that leaders have come to understand the values, beliefs, and assumptions that drive them. In order for leaders to embrace their positions as leaders, it is critical that their beliefs are used as a guide to execute their leadership practices. The leaders’ thoughts and feelings serve as both the foundation and guide through their leadership experiences.

Michie and Gooty (2005) in their work on values, emotions, and authenticity agreed with the notion of recognizing a leader’s thoughts and feelings. The authors utilized Harter’s (2002) definition of authenticity that highlighted the importance of a leader’s thoughts and feelings, as these appear consistent with his/her actions. Argyris and Schon (1980) suggested that there are two theories of action for effective behavior, which were described as espoused theory and theory in use. When analyzing leadership, espoused theory refers to the words leaders use to convey what they do, or what they would like others to think that they do. The second theory, theory in use, is described as the theory that actually governs actions. The leaders’ assumptions about themselves, others, and their environment are the factors that guide the theory in use theory.

Pagano (1991) stressed the use of autobiography as a bridge between theory and practice and a way for potential educators to see who they really were. She asserted that as individuals we acted in the ways we did because of the beliefs we had about the way the world worked. She further asserted that knowledge and stories about the acquired
knowledge helped the leader to develop a sense of identity. The storytelling process begins the development process for the leader who is learning how to shape practices through the connection of theory and lived experiences.

Begley and Johansson (1998), reporting on two studies focusing on personal and professional values of school administrators, stated that it was values and conceptions of the desirable that motivated individuals and groups to act in certain ways to achieve a particular end. The desirable behaviors are the visible sign of resolution that the leaders seek to achieve. These outcomes would be determined by the types of actions that they take to resolve issues. Leaders who demonstrate the ability to inspire positive changes can influence individuals or groups within their schools to behave in a manner that mirrors their values. Their findings implied that the values leaders held played an important role in their problem solving.

Albinger (2006), in a qualitative study with principals, suggested the importance of family and community in forming values. Through the utilization of in-depth interviews, he generated data that provided some insight into the connection between a principal’s individually constructed knowledge and his/her actions. The findings suggest that values play some part in the development of a worldview and act as a filter for the acquisition of knowledge. Similarly, Gardner (1995) looked at the complex processes of self-definition and self-identification that leads an individual to see him/herself as a member of a group, a holder of certain beliefs, values, and attributes and as one who practices certain behaviors. These processes can take place throughout life and help one find and resolve issues relating to personal identity.
In addition to the literature on authentic leadership, values, and beliefs, and the embrace of leadership, insights on the background of principals can be extrapolated from the literature on teachers and how their background affects their attitudes toward teaching and their decisions to enter the teaching profession. Lortie (1975), in a quantitative study, conducted interviews with 94 teachers in which he delineated five pulling factors to teaching that drew on background experiences. The five pulling factors were interpersonal, service, continuum, material benefits, and time compatibility. Working with students (interpersonal), service to others (service), and liking school (continuum) were examples of the major influences that encouraged these educators to enter the field.

The first pulling factor deals with the leaders interpersonal reasons for entering a leadership role. The choice to move from the classroom to the office is driven by personal convictions. The second pulling factor, service, refers to the desire of the leader to use practice to lead not only individual classrooms but also an entire school. The third pulling factor for leaders refers to continuum; the gradual process of utilizing leadership experiences on a much larger scale. The fourth pulling factor for leaders involves material benefits. School leaders are paid higher salaries and receive higher levels of recognition for positive student outcomes. The fifth and final pulling factor, time compatibility, refers to the leader’s ability to put in the necessary hours to effectively manage the demands of a principalship. All of these pulling factors influence the type of leader who enters the field and may contribute to leadership identity. The principals’ background and experiences are infused in each of these pulling factors, which are influenced by the leaders’ thoughts and values.
Huberman (1989) described teachers’ motivations for entering their careers. In an empirical study, he examined the initial and later motivating factors and satisfactions of 160 secondary teachers. The results of the study yielded three types of motivators, which were earlier identified in Lortie’s (1975) study. He found that the motivating factors could be categorized as active, material, and passive motivation. Active motivation constitutes deliberate choice, and examples include the pleasure and satisfaction found in contact with students. A principal enters the leadership role in an attempt to influence larger numbers of students. Serving as a site-based administrator affords the leader an opportunity to actively engage with students directly. Material motivations are related to financial gain such as salary, working conditions, and security. Principals share similar benefits such as paid vacations and medical coverage but enjoy the added benefit of higher salaries for their work.

Passive motivators refer to entering the profession out of motivation to do something void of having anything else better to do. It could be assumed from the research that some leaders may find themselves engaged as principals due to their perceived ideas about what would be the next logical step in their careers following the classroom. All of these motivators offer possible reasons for school leaders to make the gradual steps to serve as a principal. While addressing the motivations for entering the teaching profession and later the principalship, these studies did not implicitly state how these motivations impacted their practices. They did however provide evidence as to the importance of an individual’s background with regards to motivating them toward a
profession and, in some ways, how individuals might execute their duties once they are engaged in the profession.

While most individuals do not go into the field of education to become principals, it can be assumed that some of the factors found in their backgrounds that lead them to become teachers may also influence their decisions to enter site administration as a principal. Other factors may include working with a principal who inspired them or having a family member or well-respected acquaintance that encouraged them to enter school site based administration. These are just a few of the many possible influences that could stimulate the interest of an educator to consider becoming a principal.

McGough (2003), using the personal stories of 23 principals, found that principals’ professional identity is influenced by a variety of background factors. These include impressions of schooling and teachers formed in early childhood, a personal orientation to learning, a story about oneself as a learner, and the movement through a common development sequence. He further noted the potency of childhood influence on a principal’s professional realm. He asserted that such influences, generally positive, as a reason for the difficulty in implementing or changing school policies.

Dubin (2006) interviewed several randomly selected principals about various facets of their professional practice. The writer makes reference to the work of Sparrowe (2005) who found that a principal identified a basic tenant of leadership as to know oneself. Sparrowe referred to a clear sense of self and an ethical balance that formed his identity, rounded him, and his vision for the school and served as an anchor when the pressures of the job were a challenge. In Dubin’s (2006) analysis of the interviews, he
discovered that a principal’s value system, both personal and professional, subtly affected decisions he or she made on a regular basis.

**Tensions Between Philosophies and Leadership Practices**

Ruff and Shono (2005), in an empirical study of three urban elementary school principals at various career stages, examined mental models as a way to communicate the underlying aspects of instructional leadership. Results described qualitative differences in the mental models utilized by principals having differing levels of experience and reputation. The mental model of the less experienced principals focused on the right set of programs for the school compared to those of the more experienced principals who looked for ways expectations could be promoted. These mental models moved from the specific to the global as principals gained experience.

Over the past decade, changes in schools, communities, and educational policy have increased the demands for principal leadership and required new skills and even more demands on their daily schedules. The influence of educational reforms and the changing student body, expectations of teachers, parents, and the community all contribute to the complexity of the principal’s job. Duke (1988) found that principals new to their jobs often felt a sense of anxiety, frustrations, and self-doubt. “Alienation, isolation, and frustration often mark the work of those who lead schools” (Daresh & Male, 2000, p. 99). Research conducted by Davis (1998) found that principals were often required to present a demeanor of calm and control in hostile, unpredictable conflict laden situations. Principals are required to make decisions in situations that they may feel uncomfortable facing.
The work of the principal is extremely fragmented. A leader who desires to start projects and complete them may find that the work of a school leader does not function in a standard or uniform manner. This fragmentation is due to unscheduled meetings, random interruptions, calls from the central office, teacher conflicts, cafeteria chaos, and other emergencies that may affect the day. Most of the work occurs in face-to-face verbal interactions with school personnel, memos, meetings with team leaders, phone conversations, and meetings with parents. The workday of the principal is so fast, hectic, and unpredictable that he/she rarely has an opportunity to engage in constructive team building. According to researchers Peterson and Kelley (2001) and Mintzberg (1973) more than half of the principal’s time was consumed by unscheduled meetings, student discipline issues, and unexpected central office directives. The challenge of managing personal beliefs about leadership and the actual practice of leading a school can be in conflict with each other.

Using a focus group approach, Rayfield and Diamantes (2004) asked a total of 20 practicing administrators to examine a list of duties performed by principals found in various articles, publications, and textbooks in order to establish construct and content validity in defining the job of today’s principals. Six of the 20 administrators served on an expert panel to examine the survey items. The research found that the pressures and expectations of the principals gave clues as to why so many teachers avoided becoming future principals. According to Peterson (1984) principals were not apprised of organizational goals. While the central office may grant principals a degree of freedom and discretion, it also holds principals accountable for the schools effectiveness. Systems
that fail to provide organizational support make learning expectations and values problematic.

Boyan (1988) found that few researchers have systematically examined the interaction of personal and situational variables of administrators at work. Sosik (2000) reaffirms the need for additional research to help identify the extent to which a leader’s personal characteristics and personal meaning, which may be situationally and culturally specific, influence each other.

In the area of early leadership experience, context appears to play an important role in the actions that principals take towards their work. Their backgrounds and personal and professional experiences help them shape their roles to accommodate both their personal beliefs and situational experiences related to site administration. Gronn and Ribbons (1996) found a connection between the sums of cultural, historical, and situational circumstances that might constrain their leadership role or modify their beliefs about leadership.

Instructional leadership researchers Hallinger and Heck (1996) and Ruff and Shono (2005) pointed to the importance of experience as a way to inform a principal’s practice. Hallinger and Heck (1996) reviewed a variety of qualitative studies on the relationship between the principal’s role and school effectiveness conducted between 1980 and 1995. One group in these studies, those examining mediated effects with antecedent variables, noted the importance of principal leadership and hypothesized that administrative behavior was influenced by an internal process (e.g., past experiences, beliefs) and external factors (e.g., organizational factors, environmental variables, and
These types of personal and professional experiences can play a major role in how principals approach their leadership.

**Preparation and Professional Development for School Principals**

Preparing principals to serve as leaders is extremely important and, like their personal experiences, it guides their professional identities as leaders. Nicholson, Harris-John, and Schimmel (2005) found that prior to 1980 there was wide consensus held by the educational practitioners that professional development was a luxury. Policymakers felt that professional learning required time and energy that principals could better spend in their buildings. Goldhammer et al.’s (1971) early study found that principal’s time was often misused by central office administrators for irrelevant tasks. When time was available, principals lacked skills and knowledge to address critical issues. The earlier views of professional development did not consider the importance of capacity building for reflective practice, which has been an important purpose of professional development.

According to Nicholson et al. (2005) it was not until the 1990s that the link between successful schools and well prepared leaders was translated into principal learning and development programs. The dominant belief during this time period was that expertise resided outside the school community and could be found in universities and state departments of education. Outside experts continued to influence the relevance of professional development programs for administrators. These earlier programs’ structures were criticized for their lack of continuity alignment and fragmentation.

The literature concerned with principal preparation and professional development reflects a movement away from solely relying on university-based classroom instruction.
to a more nuanced approach blending academics with real life experiences. These types of training programs offer a balance between theory and practice. They also encourage collaboration with others through the use of internships and the cohort model. In addition, what is realized is that principal preparation constitutes a career long commitment to continued professional development and reflective practice.

The task of improving principal preparation programs has been in transition for over 20 years. These efforts have at their foundation a curriculum connected to standards organized around a model of effective leadership (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Lashway, 2003), provisions for real life experiences through improved internships and opportunities to gain administrative experience (Engel, 1990; Ginty, 1995; Heck, 1995), and efforts to ensure administrators receive ongoing professional development with time to reflect and take advantage of the expertise of experienced mentors (Daresh, 2004; Short, 1997; Sosik & Lee, 2002). This type of preparation, if done in a meaningful manner, moves away from a one size fits all type of preparation to one that takes into account the values, skills, and beliefs one brings to the preparation program. This type of preparation has the potential to reinforce or modify, in some way, these belief skills and values that help to shape the leader’s identity.

The university model for principal preparation has led to the development of other types of programs that effectively assist principals with receiving adequate training. These programs include the job-imbedded professional development component, mentoring, and reflection as tools that can assist principals with gaining the skills necessary to lead. These new options in concert with the university models can have both
positive and powerful influences on principal behavior. Drago-Severson (2004) identified
two types of learning that were essential to preparing leaders for their work. One was
informational learning and the second was transformational learning. Drago-Severson
(2004) asserted that informational learning helped to increase knowledge and skills in
adults as a way to possibly change their attitudes and competencies, and transformational
learning assisted in developing abilities to better manage the complexities of life and
work. Practicing leaders are thus able to manage their leadership responsibilities with a
balanced approach to leadership that includes new skills that they have learned as a result
of their experiences.

Principals involved in preparation programs are engaging in the beginning stages
of embracing their new roles as leaders. The preparation programs offer assistance with
their initial socialization into their new roles. Cohen-Scali (2003) noted that that this
course of study indeed could lead to the adoption of new cultural practices and could
affect patterned behavior. She further asserted that the ability to integrate oneself into a
course involved progressive adhesion to the values fostered within it.

The literature concerned with the programs available for future school principals
and their preparation is abundant but does not seem to investigate past the completion of
these programs and their real life implications for entry into the field. Darling-Hammond,
LaPointe, Meyerson, and Orr (2007) acknowledged that existing knowledge on what the
graduates of these programs actually did is limited. Murphy (2005) found that most of
this preparation took place in university-based programs that focused on criteria as a
result of the formation of the ISSLC standards. These standards were designed to
improve the knowledge performance and skills of potential principals in preparation programs (Murphy, 2005). Jackson and Kelley (2002), in a review of preparation programs, also noted that these standards could be used to drive the licensure and professional development of principals. Like teachers, principals would be provided with specific standards that outline the expectations for their practice according to a defined set of performance expectations commonly known as standards.

These standards, as argued by Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) could be looked at as a starting point. The most promising preparation programs possess the following commonalities: a clear vision of strong school leadership, a curriculum integrating both theory and practice, well designed internship experiences, mentoring opportunities, a reliance on cohort models, time for reflection, and an emphasis on continuous learning.

Engel (1990) conducted a study that examined the content and methods of instruction at five universities in Michigan. He concluded that if principal preparation programs were to be more relevant, then methods that stressed doing rather than listening must be utilized. The work completed by Pohland, Milstein, Schilling, and Tonigan (1988) on a principal preparation program at the University of New Mexico found a movement toward a greater emphasis on the “education of the workplace,” which increased the use of practitioners and the institution of field-based programs. The earlier work of Peterson (1985) called for experiences that shaped the values, skills, and norms of principals and how they could be accomplished. His work revealed the need for mediated entry into administrative preparation. New principals would be provided support through their work as interns with a school district. They would be afforded the
opportunity to work full time in the field while gaining support to enhance their leadership skills in preparation for school site based leadership. He further noted the importance of organizational socialization as an important influence on new administrators.

Ginty’s (1995) qualitative study of six new school administrators aimed at identifying the complex interactions and often hidden beliefs of beginning principals. Ruff and Shono (2005) indicated that participants stated their most helpful experiences were those emphasizing the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for effective school administration. Heck (1995), in a quantitative survey of 150 beginning administrators including assistant principals, found that the effects of organizational socializations might be stronger on administrative performance than professional socialization. He found that significant field experience was identified as an important need in preparing administrators, but noted the clinical aspects of most university programs were weak.

Milstein and Kruger (1997) agreed with other researchers concerning the importance of the essential elements of a good principal preparation programs. They asserted that academic offerings must emphasize leadership skills as well as the knowledge base required for the roles for which the students were preparing. In particular, they stressed the importance of the internship experience. They found that these experiences had a profound influence on the participant’s individual beliefs, attitudes, and values. They argued that such experiences made the difference between cultivating moderately and highly successful administrative performances.
Grogan and Andrews (2002) found that changes in preparation programs have been slow to follow the changes in the changing role of principal and most still prepared individuals to be top down managers. The main focus of these programs was understanding what constituted good schools and good classrooms. Cistone and Stevenson (2000) noted the importance of economic, social, and political conditions in shaping professional practice and also noted a promising principal preparation program in Miami-Dade County that focused on the skills needed by principals in that context. Morrison (2005), in writing of her own professional preparation, wrote that although some classes did address the realities of leadership, she wished more had dealt with the hard realities. She too advocated for increased time to interact in real life situations in order to practice the skills of leadership in a school environment.

The criticism of principal preparation programs has led to increased dialogues concerning the needed structures that will support new leaders. Lashway (2003), noting Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno, and Foley (2001), wrote of a Public Agenda Survey that found 69% of principals and 80% of superintendents felt that typical programs were “out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s school district” (p. 22). Wraga (2004) found that preparation programs typically concentrated on the managerial and neglected the functions inherent in the institution of schooling. He called for these programs to focus their emphasis on educational improvement instead of institutional maintenance.

McGreevey (2005) quoted Dr. Arthur Levine, Dean of Columbia University’s Teacher’s College, on a four-year study entitled Education School Leaders in which he
stated that the “majority of educational administrative programs range from inadequate to appalling even at some of the nation’s leading universities” (p. 2). McGreevey (2005) also noted the work of Dr. Frederick Hess, Director of Education Policy Studies at the Enterprise Institute, who studied principal preparation programs, and found that these programs were still preparing principals for conventional school leadership and not for the rigors of modern accountability, management, and team leadership.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2007), in a study examining eight pre- and in-service principal preparation programs, found some hope in programs that had a twenty-first century leadership vision, along with the integration of theory and practice into well prepared internship experiences. The participants who attended varied universities expressed their success and excitement connected to their internship experiences. The study highlighted the importance of affording future leaders the opportunities to have authentic experiences with leadership before assuming these positions in the real world. Innovative Pathways to School Leadership (2004) studied six programs in various states targeting future principals. It found the best preparation programs had a vision and viewed the principal as a change agent, were meaningful and relevant, and connected to the standards. The induction component was also available for participants.

The use of cohorts in principal preparation programs has become increasingly popular. These cohorts assist new leaders with embracing their new roles as school leaders with a support system of colleagues during and after the completion of their preparation programs. Cohorts serve as networks and support systems of like-minded peers who will support each other and help lessen the loneliness and isolation that is often
experienced by principals. Teitel (1997) found that one reason the University of Massachusetts shifted to a cohort model was because of the strong bonds that might be formed among cohort members. Another reason was that these groups, as they entered the principalship, led to the formation of support networks that benefited students. Teitel (1997) through a self-assessment done by him of students in the program found that support and connection among students was the primary benefit of the model.

Barnett, Bascom, Yerkes, and Norris (2000) found benefits in cohorts to students both in preparation programs and in interpersonal relations when students left their programs. In a qualitative study with seven Canadian and 216 American universities to determine faculty perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of cohorts, the majority of participants using a cohort model felt the model fostered team building, mutual support, and collaboration. Stevenson and Doolittle (2003) noted that their use of a cohort model in a university-based preparation program was intended to build community and foster collaboration and collective leadership as a way to model the real life of a school. Research done by the Englert, Fries, Goodwin, Marting-Glenn, and Michael (2004) found that in six programs studied, all used the cohort model and emphasized that far from disbanding at the end of the program the cohort tended to be a source of support to members as they progressed with their careers.

Lashway (2003) found that after years of neglect, professional developers were taking aim at the critical induction period during which the principal’s career choice was either undermined or validated. The former sink or swim model is being replaced with structured experiences where mentoring plays a major role.
Pounder and Crow (2005) argued that attracting and retaining competent school leaders required collaboration among universities, school districts, and professional associations to establish a career long approach to administrator development. Browne-Ferrigno (2003), in an exploratory case study analyzing the professional growth of 18 administrators, found that “experience” was the most commonly reported need before assuming leadership. She drew upon the work of Caffarella and Barnett (1994) and Newcomer-Coble (1992), who noted that the process of becoming a principal began much earlier when teachers engaged in professional activities with principals and fellow teachers. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) appeared to advocate for a career long professional development beginning well before formal entry into a preparation program and emphasized that such experience molded an aspiring principal’s conceptions of the principalship. Of the individuals she studied, only those with well-formulated post-program goals showed the most evidence of enthusiasm for their future and sustained engagement in their learning.

Houle (2006) examined the Urban Principal’s Academy (UPA) in Connecticut, and discovered that it was set up as a way to provide continuous, yearlong professional development for principals in high priority schools. Houle found that UPA provided a sanctuary and forum for a free exchange of ideas between participating principals, university faculty, state education department personnel, and local school leaders. Hallinger (1999) wrote that professional development was a necessity with the expanding knowledge base and the increasing complexity of a school leader’s role. However, ensuring high quality professional development was not without its own set of
challenges. Baron (2008) highlighted the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) report that recognized how complicated and challenging professional growth was especially for those working with high-risk students.

Less frequently utilized, but increasingly noted in principal preparation programs and in professional development is mentoring and reflection as tools to focus principals on their practice and, by extension, their roles as leaders. Daresh (2004) wrote that mentoring was an essential formation and socialization throughout various states of principal professional development. Drawing on previous work with mentors, Daresh and Arrowsmith (2003) noted one benefit of mentors was making people feel that they belonged in their new careers.

The research shows that at every stage, principals must be supported and well connected with other principals, mentors, and coaches in their district. Peterson (1984) unearthed the fact that commitment to the overall mission and broader goals of the district could be encouraged. Socialization, which is an important aspect of professional development by design, can serve as an ongoing effort to support effective leadership. How superintendents socialize principals into their work is critical to the success of the principal. Crow (2004) identified three stages of socialization. The first year principal learned his or her professional role in the school system. In the second stage, which occurred during the second, third, and fourth years, new principals needed to feel a sense of achievement and contribution to the success of the organization. The third stage of socialization happened during the fifth year and beyond, when the principal’s need for continual support, encouragement, and ongoing collaboration was most critical.
Preparation programs that provide potential principals with the skills necessary to lead combined with continuous professional development support from local school districts are critical to the success of principals. The literature noted in this section points to the challenges of principal preparation programs, the promise of programs that offer support before, during, and after principals enter the field, and the importance of ongoing professional development for school leaders.

**My Study**

As the reviewed literature has demonstrated, a lack of understanding on what specific influences affect the decisions that principals make with regard to discipline still exists. The purpose of my study was to examine how personal experiences, professional tensions, and professional preparation of school principals influence their leadership practices. Important for this study is the knowledge that the thoughts, beliefs, values, and professional preparation associated with principals’ approaches to leadership are deeply embedded in their identity as leaders through influences found in their background, experiences with tensions between their philosophies and practices, and their professional preparation. Equally important is the realization that all three of these factors contribute to the delivery of their leadership as school principals who are responsible for the discipline of students. Thus, the following questions guided this study.

1. How do personal and professional influences impact the disciplinary decisions made by principals towards African American and Latino students?
2. What tensions do principals experience between their philosophies and their practices?
3. What kinds of training and professional development support do administrators have for addressing discipline challenges?

The literature examined, as part of this study, established that the background (Argyris & Schon, 1980; Bennis, 2003; Chawla, 1999; Collay, 2006; Gardner, 1995; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May & Walumba, 2005; Huberman, 1989; Lord & Hall, 2005; Lortie, 1975; McGough, 2003; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Sosik, 2000; Sparrowe, 2005), preparation (Barnett, Bascom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Cohen-Scali, 2003; Ginty, 1995, Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Heck, 1995; Milstein & Kruger, 1997; Sosik & Lee, 2002; Wraga, 2004) and the early leadership experiences (Barnett, McCormick, & Conners, 2001; Gooden, 2005; Leithwood & Stager, 1989; Papa & Baxter, 2008; Ruff & Shono, 2005; Trider & Leithwood, 1988; Young, 2007) of principals can influence their identities as principal. The literature, however, is lacking in two key areas. The first key area is the depth to which the literature has uncovered the influence of personal and professional influences on the leadership practices of principals. The literature mentioned the importance of these two factors, but the literature has failed to identify, explicitly, the impact of the tensions between personal philosophies of leadership and professional practices. It is noted that experiences influence the practices of principals, but there needs to be an understanding of how these practices originate as a result of the conflict between personal values and professional demands.

The second area in which the literature is lacking has been in detailing what professional development truly means to school leaders who are actively engaged as school site principals. The literature noted that professional development could assist
practicing principals but it did not elaborate on the expressed needs of those individuals who are currently engaged in the field. It the goal of my study to dig deeper into the lives of practicing principals and examine how their personal experiences, tensions between their personal philosophies, and professional development influence their approach to the practice of implementing discipline for students as school leaders.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was based on Greenleaf (1977) and Greenleaf and Spears’ (2002) theoretical model of servant leadership. Servant leaders are those who desire to serve others before themselves. Principals who desire to serve others through their inspirational leadership are making a conscious choice to lead with positive intentions. The difference between servant leadership and other collaborative leadership styles is that the leadership is guided by the care and attention taken by the servant (principal) to ensure that other priorities are met. Servant leadership is a long term, transformational approach to both life and work. The servant leader has a desire to serve and a willingness to sacrifice self-interest for the benefit of others (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). Greenleaf (1977) identified 10 characteristics as critical importance to the development of servant leaders (a) listening, the need for a deep commitment to listening to other intently; (b) empathy, the need for others to be accepted for their personality traits and talents; (c) healing, the need for understanding others tribulations and using the opportunity to help them become content, productive individuals; (d) awareness, the need for general awareness of an individual’s circumstances as well as self-awareness in understanding issues involving values and ethics; (e) persuasion, the need to convince
others rather than coerce compliance; (f) conceptualization, the ability to think beyond day-to-day realities to solve problems; (g) foresight, a characteristic that enables the servant leader to understand history, present realities, and consequences of future decisions; (h) stewardship, the use of openness and persuasion rather than control; (i) commitment, a pledge to assist with the growth of each individual; and (j) building community, a recognition of the need to rebuild community as a life form (Greenleaf, 1977).

The servant leader develops a genuine tolerance for diversity. The servant leader embraces understanding of others and provides venues for personal growth. Greenleaf (2002) based his theory on over 40 years of work of the field of management research, development, and education with major business institutions, and founded the Center for Applied Ethics in 1985. This work can still be applied to the complexities of school leadership today.

The theoretical frameworks of equity and restorative justice are also examined in this study. Both frameworks of equity and restorative justice support the development of the principals’ capacities as caring individuals to assist student needs, similar to the tenets of servant leadership. Cavanagh (2009) asserted that Western culture values did not address the needs of people who felt powerless and marginalized. American schools current systems for managing behavior are fundamentally based on adversarial processes, rather than the development of healing relationships. The concept of restorative justice originated with a restorative alternative (Zehr, 1995). As a result, training school staff was based on practices used in the legal system, focusing on conferencing (Cameron &
Thorsborne, 2001). The application of the principles revolved around the use of conferencing in schools as an alternative to more punitive discipline measures, such as suspension (Cavanagh et al., 2007).

Schools that function with an equity focus similar to restorative justice seek to apply practices that promote fairness and access for all students. Researchers such as Arriaza (2003) pointed to the fact that teachers that came from backgrounds that were different from their students were more likely to be out of cultural sync with students of color. This disconnect contributed to the lack of understanding between the students and school and could reinforce the elements of low expectations for students. In an institution built on the premise of equity, the expectation for all students is set high and the negative or deficit mentality towards students is not employed. Like restorative justice, an equity approach seeks to provide school leaders to lead with tools that promote access and positive communication. Therefore, this study focused on the common principals between servant leadership, restorative justice, and equity in order to determine the actions and support needed to assist principals their disciplinary leadership.
The purpose of this study was to identify the personal and professional influences and the tensions stemming from the differences of philosophical approaches that affect the disciplinary decisions made by elementary school principals. The rationale for selecting a qualitative design approach was based on two fundamental reasons. First, the qualitative design allowed me to document at the very basic, detail-level work and experiences of school leaders, thus helping me to understand meanings from their perspectives of principals who experience the challenges of maintaining order in their schools on a daily basis. Second, this design allowed me to reflect personally and academically on the experiences of others in ways that revealed a deeper connection to the study of school discipline (Hatch, 2002).

**Research Questions**

1. How do personal and professional influences impact the disciplinary decisions made by principals towards African American and Latino students?
2. What tensions do principals experience between their philosophies and their practices?
3. What kinds of training and professional development support do administrators have for addressing discipline challenges?

**Research Design**

The methodology selected for this study is phenomenology, which is designed to show the details of lived experience through the viewpoint of the participants. I
documented such phenomenon utilizing various sources, a process described by Yin (1994) as triangulation. This tradition often used in educational research includes interviewing, observations, reviewing journal logs and other artifacts in search for meaning (Hatch, 2002). This approach was selected based upon my personal interest as a school administrator and the flexibility that this tradition allows in the data collection and analysis. Applying appropriate disciplinary strategies for elementary school students is very complicated, yet phenomenology lends itself to understanding such complex processes through the actual experiences of school principals and their practices--more specifically, their discipline actions toward students.

This phenomenological study is similar to a case study in that its focus is on finding meaning in the participant’s experience. The main difference is that phenomenology attempts to probe the “inner experience” of the individual, as opposed to the single phenomenon or unit.

**Population and Sample**

The population for this study was 15 elementary school principals purposely selected from schools in Contra Costa County. This group of principals was asked to participate in the study via electronic correspondence with permission from the district’s superintendent. A sampling of six principals participated. According to Creswell (1998), a typical sample for interviews in a phenomenological study ranged from 5-25 individuals. A key criterion for selecting these individuals was that all of them had experienced the issue of elementary school discipline for the two targeted student populations. Additionally, the following criteria were used. Participants had to (a) be
currently serving as an elementary school principal; (b) be willing to participate in two 3-hour interview sessions; and (c) be willing to have their interviews taped on a digital recorder.

The participants for the study varied in terms of personal and professional backgrounds. The following table provides profiles of the study participants (see Table 1).

Table 1  

*Participant Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
<th>Known Reputation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal June</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>23 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Tina</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Sheila</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Vice Principal</td>
<td>3 years; 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Diane</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Vice Principal</td>
<td>1 year; 4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Sebastian</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Vice Principal</td>
<td>5 years; 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal David</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Vice Principal</td>
<td>3 years; 2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Role of the Researcher**

My role as researcher was extremely vital to stimulating authentic responses from the participants. I designed the interview questions to encourage the participants to share both their professional and personal experiences in search for meaning and understanding. I am an African American elementary school principal with student populations that include African American and Latino students. This study was motivated based upon my current and past positions as both elementary principal and vice principal.
As a sixth year principal, my experiences informed my belief that principals must be aware that discipline is primarily implemented for students who have been traditionally marginalized. Due to the nature of the qualitative study, I suspended my personal beliefs regarding disciplinary practices.

According to Ganong and Coleman (2006), it was the researcher’s responsibility to put forth extensive efforts to treat participants with fairness and dignity. I exercised the best judgment in the process of interviewing, observing, and following participants to ensure that the methodology steps outlined and the quality of the data collected were credible. I disclosed all relevant information that applied to the rationale and conduct of my study.

As an African American woman researcher, I was very careful to construct my interview questions to avoid any personal bias. My colleagues were asked to speak from their own personal experiences. They were further assured that their identities would be protected and that their participation was voluntary. The option of discontinuing the study was available to them at any time during the course of the research. In order to establish trust, it was essential for me to create a comfort zone for my participants to lessen their fears and limit the chances of them responding to me in a superficial manner. I further refrained from asking leading questions or infusing my personal beliefs and opinions. My approach provided a level of comfort and security for the participants to expose both their personal and professional experiences.
Data Collection

Merriam (1998) asserted that the qualitative case study proceeded in data collection and analysis like other traditions and the findings were written as a comprehensive and rich description of the case. For this study, the interview was the primary method of data collection to uncover and analyze the meaning of elementary school discipline practices toward African American and Latino students. All of these data sources documented the perspectives of the six principals. These interviews were used concurrently with observations and face-to-face meetings in the mornings and late evenings. The primary reason for selecting these types of data collection methods was that they appeared less obtrusive in respect to the participant’s time and locations.

The data collected was recorded using a digital voice recorder. This afforded me the opportunity to listen to the interviews and capture major themes to deepen my understanding. I also used handwritten field notes in order to record data during the interview that the recorder may not capture such as facial expressions, body movements, etc. These notes were used to record questions that I had for each participant. The questions recorded in my field notes assisted me with clarifying data gathered during the interviews. The notes resulted in additional phone calls or emails when needed. The notes, along with the voice recordings, were transcribed and coded in order to discover major themes from the participant’s responses.

Face-To-Face Interviews

Upon approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I initially contacted 15 elementary school principals who have the targeted student populations for face-to-face
interviews, an appropriate number for the phenomenological interview. I ended up interviewing the six sample participants. The interviews were conducted at times and locations that were convenient for the participants. This included school sites in the morning, late evening, or alternative locations away from their school sites. The interviews were conducted following the recommendations by Hatch (2002) for educational research. These are (a) construct open-ended questions, and (b) prepare questions in advance in order to guide the interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a systemic approach to finding meaning so what is learned can be communicated to others (Hatch, 2002). The analysis began with a rich description of the experiences that were to be collected through the data collection process. A general assessment of the data collected was made by ensuring three key factors: (a) the correct description of the data sources, (b) collecting the data in a timely and proper manner, and (c) confirming that the research questions were answerable from the data descriptions.

The raw data from the interview sessions were organized into labeled file folders for qualitative analysis. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed shortly after each interview. Hatch (2002) recommended transcribing and analyzing the data shortly after collecting in order to correct any major gaps before it was too late to do anything about it. Open coding of the interviews, suggested by Merriam (2002), was used to name and develop categories or themes that emerged during each interview.
Validity

To ensure validity in my study, I adopted Merriam’s (2002) model of describing and analyzing the meaning of the principal’s experiences. Several steps were employed in order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. This process involved coding and categorizing the data in order to extract major themes and patterns that characterized the responses provided by the participants. The further validation of the data included member checking by taking written narrative notes of the participants’ statements during the taped interviews. I was also able to review the written documents and audio recordings with the participants so that they could judge the account for accuracy and credibility. The principals were asked throughout the interview sessions to verify the statements that I captured in my written recordings for both verification and additional insight.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 provided a detailed discussion of the research methodology and research design for my qualitative study. A population of 15 principals was requested to participate. Data was collected from all six principals who participated with the study. The data analysis for my study involved coding and categorizing the themes and patterns discovered through the interview sessions. Chapter 4 introduces the principals who participated with the study; Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study; and Chapter 6 presents conclusions and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 4

PRINCIPAL PROFILES

Introduction

I have divided the study’s findings into two chapters. Chapter 4 captures the biographical story of participants. I decided to portray them this way given the centrality of personal backgrounds as a determinant factor to their actions. Thoughts, beliefs, values, and attitudes are embedded in principals’ identity as school leaders through influences found in their background, preparation, and early leadership experiences (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). They act as guides (Kouzes & Posner, 2007) and as filters (Albinger, 2006). The biographical data contained in this chapter is essential to understand how these leaders make their decisions. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings that were unearthed and categorized into overarching themes as a result of these personal interviews.

The participants for this study were six principals who currently serve elementary school students in Contra Costa County, which is located in Northern California. The ages of these principals ranged from the mid-20s to age 60. The gender of the principals included four females and two males. The racial and ethnic background of the principals was also varied with one African American male, one Latino male, two African American females, and two White females.

All of the participating principals completed advanced degrees in conjunction with their administrative credentials. Four of the participants received their administrative education and credentials from the California State University system, two from the
University of California system, and one from a private institution. All six principals shared the desire to engage in administrative assignments that were located in an urban setting.

A commonality among all of the participants was their desire to empower their students through effective teaching and how they were able to take their passions with them through the challenge of school leadership. All of the participants served as classroom teachers. Two of the six participants worked in both elementary and secondary schools. Four of the six participants served as assistant principals prior to their principal appointments. All of them served as teacher leaders and were encouraged by a colleague or mentor to pursue or assume the leadership role of principal.

This chapter will provide a brief biography of each principal focusing on the path to school leadership and this study’s research questions which center on personal and professional influences, tensions, and needed professional development or professional support for practicing principals. The purpose of this chapter is to gain a deeper understanding of how personal and professional experiences influence the development of values, beliefs, and attitudes when implementing discipline for students. In order to protect the identity of each principal, pseudonyms are used to ensure that their identities remain protected.

**Principal Lisa IX**

Lisa is a White female, 50-years-old, leading a higher performing elementary school located in a middle class neighborhood. I previously served as principal of a similar school in the same city less than three miles from her school. She is an extremely
warm and welcoming person who strives to treat everyone that she meets with respect. That respect is shown to both her students and parents. She prides herself with being the type of principal who exits the office and truly makes everyone feel welcome by extending a warm greeting in the morning as children arrive and a similar toned farewell to the students and their families at the end of the day.

Lisa has served as an administrator for 15 years. She served as a vice principal for one year and is currently entering her fourteenth year as a principal. She began her career in education as a teacher at Title I schools. These schools are designated by the state and federal government as having, in some cases, higher levels of poverty, free or reduced lunch programs, and low test scores as measured by annual standardized tests. Lisa shared with me that all of her teaching experiences took place in schools that are considered lower performing. Her administrative assignments have placed her in areas with greater financial resources than those that she served as a classroom teacher.

Her early life began with her family living in a very diverse community. She lived and socialized with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. She went to school with children from many different walks of life. When she was seven years old, her family moved to a community that was predominately White. She remembers feeling the culture shock of being in a homogenous community. Although she was White, she was not used to living in a community where there was no diversity. She recalls being teased by her classmates about the appearance of her eyes during the allergy season. Her eyes would swell up, and her classmates would call her racially charged names such as “Chinese Girl.” This was one of her first experiences with overt racism. This was also an
experience that would follow her into adulthood and support her when faced with such issues.

I asked Lisa to describe her experiences in education to date and how those experiences led her into becoming a principal. Lisa began her teaching career on a Native American reservation. She spent approximately eight years on the reservation and later moved to her current district, which is in an urban setting. The school recently became designated as a Title I school and has now updated her experience as a principal of a Title I school. This is an important fact to note because for many years her administrative experiences were only in schools that were not identified as being Title I schools.

When questioned about her decision to move from the classroom to the principal’s office she shared an enlightening story. She worked previously at a school that had an enrollment of over 1,100 students. She was assigned at the site as a fourth grade teacher and noted that there were a lot of dedicated and dynamic teachers at the school. Unfortunately, many of the students from the school were not adequately prepared for middle school. It was during this year that she realized there were no real accountability mechanisms in place to support all students. It was clear to Lisa and the other teachers that they could emphasize what they wanted in the curriculum without having accountability systems in place. That year made her think about what it would be like to lead a school that promoted consistency and true collaboration. “We were all doing our own thing and there was no accountability” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012). Luckily for Lisa, the state standards were put into place for California’s public
schools, and it appeared that the district was in full support of making sure that sites followed the instructional targets described for each grade level.

Lisa felt that it would be a logical career move for her to pursue working at the central office level in the Curriculum and Instruction Department. During her tenure as a teacher, Lisa served as a mentor teacher in science and felt that her skills and talents could be utilized to train teachers in order to assist them with supporting all of the students in the district by working in the Curriculum and Instruction Department.

Another highly respected colleague advised her that she should engage in being a site-based administrator before accepting a position at the central office level. The mentor encouraged her to pursue a principalship so that she would gain a deeper insight into what was truly needed to support higher student achievement levels through effective teacher training.

Lisa received her training through a district led program in conjunction with the California State University system during the 1990s. A professor who served as a principal with a nearby urban school district also encouraged her in her Tier I administrative credential program. He described for his students his experiences serving as a principal during the 1960s in an urban district. These stores fascinated Lisa and encouraged her to take on the challenge of serving as a principal. She advises during the interview that following her credential program and first experiences with serving as an administrator, she lost her desire to move to the central office as an administrator or obtain a position with the Curriculum and Instruction Department. Her true calling was to
advocate for all students through effective leadership and collaboration with classroom teachers as a principal.

When discussing the major differences between being a teacher and principal, Lisa quickly informs me, “I am a counselor, trainer, accountant, and paper pusher” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012). When the conversation focuses on African American and Latino students, it is evident that Lisa is bothered by what is going on in the district. She advises that it is important for school leaders to make sure that we have time and patience when working with our students. She makes it clear that in order for our students to raise their proficiency levels, it is critical that positive behavior is encouraged. She mentions that she has engaged in a few conversations with colleagues about the suspension and referral data for African American and Latino students. She also mentions that there are few conversations among principals. The discussions about student data have been mainly facilitated by outside consultants.

During the interview, Lisa mentions about her experiences with issues of race. It was interesting to hear her paint a clear picture of how the topic of diversity changed during the various decades. “In the 1970s we went through diversity training; in the 1980s we did potlucks sharing ethnic foods, and in the 1990s we talked about multiculturalism, and today we are looking at equity” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012). It was interesting to learn about Lisa’s experiences with issues of race. It was evident from the conversation that there had been several attempts over the decades to discuss the issues of race delicately, which was constantly a topic in urban education. She mentioned that the recent work that her staff did as a result of receiving
culturally relevant teaching strategies training has truly benefited the teachers and students.

The issue of race has been large for Lisa and the district that has had Office of Civil Rights complaints related to disproportionality with suspensions and expulsions for African American and Latino students. Lisa mentioned that in her experience she has noted, “Teachers listen to each other” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012). Her point was that perceptions of students are often tainted by the negative experiences of peers with the same students. As a leader, Lisa empowers her staff members to form their own opinions of students and strive to support rather than punish them. Teachers are encouraged to have conversations with students and problem-solve issues before sending the students to the office. Lisa admits that over the years, she has noticed that some teachers have lower expectations for some groups of students over others.

I asked Lisa to expand on that thought and explain how her beliefs assist her with dealing with such overt acts of discrimination. Lisa talked specifically about the Gifted and Talented Education Program (GATE). Third grade teachers are asked to fill out district surveys for all of the students enrolled in their classrooms. These surveys ask the teachers to rate the students’ academic performances, social skills, and highlight any other talents that should be taken into consideration. According to Lisa, “Teachers act as gate keepers.” She further asserts, “Students who are White or perceived as good students are the only ones recommended for the program” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012).
Lisa believes that all students should have access to the curriculum and that our jobs as elementary school educators is to make sure that our students are prepared for junior high school and life. The connection between the school and parents is an important component of Lisa’s leadership philosophy. She believes and encourages her staff to build positive relationships with staff members. Building trust between the school and families assists both with making sure that students are successful. Discipline phone calls should not be the only contact with families according to her. “Discipline is an opportunity for education not punishment” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012).

Lisa is a leader who is not afraid to conquer uncomfortable situations. She felt comfortable with me as an African American to discuss her interactions with her African American parents. This is important to note because her comments could potentially spark an offensive response from me, the interviewer. During our discussion, I offered my own experiences with African American families and highlighted my frustration with not having as much participation as I would like. Lisa agreed that she too experienced challenges with her African American families. Lisa shared, “Many of my African American parents are young and don’t have any trust for the system” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012).

Lisa shared that she was even the subject of complaints downtown from African American parents who felt marginalized. Lisa and her staff remain committed to reaching out to all of their families and are committed to bridging the gap in communication that may appear from time to time. The Latino parents appear to be more active than the
African American parents. According to Lisa, “The Latino parents are very supportive, want change for their children, good behavior, and many times feel that their children are being picked on” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012). She mentioned that the PTA at her school is led by the White and Asian parents. There is little to no participation from the African American or Latino parents.

How do these personal and professional experiences influence Lisa’s approach to leadership? How does she deal with pressures and frustrations? “My attitude sets the tone.” Lisa believes that her outlook on situations in her school influences her students, parents, and staff members. She believes, “We have to give choices to our students” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012). She is convinced that her leadership must be built from a platform of high expectations, kindness, forgiveness, and choice.

As a principal, Lisa has created a foundation that is built on building relationships and engaging in a partnership with students and their families. She is a leader who has not only studied the issues of race and tolerance, but also lived it. She strongly believes in the power of encouraging all students to be successful and downplays the moments when students are sent out of the classroom to the office.

Principal Savanah XX

Savanah is a White female, who has roots in the Deep South, and ultimately was a part of her community’s desegregation efforts. I sat in utter shock and disbelief as my colleague, who I knew as a very smart, assertive, and strong leader, shared history that I only knew of by way of my family’s stories and history books that I read in schools. Savanah is respected as a principal who does not accept failure as an answer. She is in her
late 40s, yet she looks like she is still exploring her 30s. Her life’s story and the connection to the questions that my research seeks to answer about school leaders and their influences on their practices offers deeper insight into the complexities of personal and professional influences on leadership decisions related to discipline for students.

Savanah was in elementary school during the 1960s. There was only one mulatto student. Her family set its roots in a southern city that was heavily populated by military families. Although segregation was the law of the land during her early years, she remembers limited exposure to the ills of Jim Crow. She was a very young girl when John F. Kennedy was assassinated and later Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These two men were iconic to the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement. Both men and the history that they made were done prior to my existence on this earth. Savanah was the product of “reverse school busing.” She explained that she was one of the White kids that rode the school bus to the other side of town during her sixth and seventh grade years to attend a middle school that was primarily African American. Savanah comes from a religious family that is Pentecostal. According to Savanah, “At Sunday dinner my parents would host sailors and missionaries from all over the world” (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012). It was evident during our interview that Savanah was born into a family of social justice leaders. This information would not have been known through our limited interactions at district-mandated meetings.

Savanah’s neighborhood was not segregated. She did, however, know that in other parts of her city, neighborhoods were divided by race according to which side of the railroad tracks you lived. Following more aggressive desegregation laws, her high school
was 65-70% Black, and she felt embraced by her new friends. When the movie *Roots* came out in 1976 she recalls that there were a lot of schools that had race riots. “My friends would not let anyone do anything to me” (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012). She does tell the story of the school’s talent show where she sang a folk song and received less than favorable responses from the audience. These early experiences with the issues of race would be the foundation for her work as a social justice leader.

Savanah stated that she decided to become a principal because as a teacher she always took a curiously desirable lead role. She wanted the grade level and hallway teams to collaborate. When she began teaching, she was one of the oldest teachers and was given responsibilities by her principal as the “Teacher in Charge.” By her fifth year in teaching, her district hired 500 new teachers due to class size reduction. The district was in need of training and support for the many new teachers that entered the classroom. “I attended the Peer Assistance Review (PAR) coach training in Santa Cruz. The program was in two parts (a) support for new teachers to the field, and (2) support for veteran teachers who were in need of additional support with their practices” (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012). She was engaged as a PAR coach for a couple of years. “Coordinating folks makes my life easier” (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012).

Savanah decided that it was time to move on and receive her Administrative Credential and Master’s degree. During the early 2000s when she graduated from her program, there was limited training on discipline. “It was not the focus that it is now”
(Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012). Her program had a major focus on changing or shifting the attitudes of teachers to support all kids. There was a lot of emphasis on reading professional writings that focused on getting teachers to change their mindsets about students. Her responses about her administrative credential program point out the lack of focus on discipline disproportionality or the negative impact of office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions for students.

Savanah then mentioned the platform of her leadership that involves serving as a model for her staff and students. Her site offers a unique program that centers on educating students with extreme behavior issues. The majority of the students are African American and Latino. When she first assumed her position at the site, the students were running out of the classroom and engaging in physical and verbal behaviors that were causing them to be either suspended or expelled. This particular program by design is supposed to support students with coping skills that would divert them from engaging in negative behaviors.

Interestingly, Savanah seems to have described her experiences as a lead teacher as a major driving force behind her leadership style. Her style resulted in her ability to stabilize her current teaching staff and guide them through the process of true collaboration, shared vision, respect, and cooperation.

However, such change did not come easily for Savanah. She acknowledges the challenges of dealing with staff members who did not necessarily subscribe to her leadership style, which included a vision to support all students. Her superintendent saw the effectiveness of her management and continues to support her. Managing students
with extreme behavior issues through a philosophy of not giving up on any student is very difficult in practice. I sensed from her comments that Savanah not only believes in social justice but also actually lives it. Her lived experiences, along with her natural born leadership skills, have shaped her professional life. Savanah did not make any mention of the lasting effects of her administrative program relative to her professional practice.

In the interview, Savanah mentioned the importance of seeing herself as a life-long learner. She cautions that principals must be afforded opportunities to speak with each other and share best practices. She is aware of the issues that she and her colleagues face when dealing with discipline for students. According to Savanah, the principals have had a couple of consultants speak to them about their discipline data. I asked her if she and her colleagues engage in conversations about the data and the student populations that dominate the discipline data. After a long pause she says, “The number of grievances, (long pause) we don’t really talk about it; we know what is going on, but we don’t really talk about it” (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012). I assume that the grievances are those made by teachers against principals for perceived unfair acts.

Savanah seems to be very emotional and humble when discussing the communication that needs to take place between administrators. She sees herself as being the beacon of light that will continue to work in the trenches to support her students, teachers, and families. This belief comes up over and over during our discussion. This leader leads with grace, care, and love. She is a leader who gains her power from the empowerment that she inspires in others.
Principal Thomas XXX

Thomas is a Latino American male in his early 30s who has served as both an elementary and secondary level administrator. At the beginning of the interview, he makes it clear that he did not have intentions of becoming an administrator. “It has been a life changing experience; my personal goal has always been to be a classroom teacher” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). His career path was truly focused on working with students in the classroom although he shares that he always knew that he would assume a position of leadership at some point, not necessarily in the capacity of a principal. He goes on, “I did not expect to be a leader in the community where I taught, and where I attended myself” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). He is the only participant in this study who was a student, teacher, and later an administrator in the same district and community that reared him. This is unique to his leadership platform because he is actually giving back to the community that helped shape who he is today.

When discussing his early years as a school leader, Thomas shares a story about his transition from the classroom to the office as an administrator at the same site. It was evident that he was very close with the staff and established strong bonds of friendship with his colleagues. He shared, “It was challenging because people that I was friends with, colleagues, I then became their boss and had to evaluate people like that; even though they were good friends, I had to be the boss.” He goes on, “The experience of having to write up friends was not a good one” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). His experience, unlike the other participants in the study, seemed to
have another layer of complexity that was not an issue for the other participants who did not have a previous working history with their staff members.

When asked about how he dealt with the changing attitudes towards him from his friends on the staff, Thomas mentioned that he felt tension from his staff. “Some of my friends changed. I keep going back to my department, and there were things that I didn’t see, because I was in my classroom.” He continues, “As an administrator, I would get a chance to observe, and I did not accept some of the practices that I observed.

They let me know that they did not appreciate what I had to say about their unacceptable practices, in my eyes” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). He explains that some of these teachers were more veteran than he in both age and in years of teaching experience. He still highly respects those colleagues to this day, but understands that as an administrator he has both a moral and professional duty to evaluate them based upon their professional practices.

I could sense during the interview that Thomas was a very caring, passionate, strong, and sensitive leader. He is a Latino man serving a school that is predominately filled with African American and Latino students. It can be assumed from his responses, tone, and body language that he is a leader who sees himself in all of the Black and Brown faces that sit in the classrooms in his school. This is not just a school or a school district; this is home, and he is in a position that affords him the power to be a part of the empowerment that he wants his students to feel in the community. He was the third principal that I interviewed, and I felt overwhelmed with emotion during the whole interview. As an African American woman educator, I felt as though he was telling my
story as well. I would say hello to him at principal meetings but did not know him, and here we are discussing his life and his leadership experiences in the raw during the late evening following a full day of work for him.

I asked Thomas to discuss his credentialing process as he began his path towards school leadership. He begins with sharing his disconnect from the university system when he was working on his undergraduate degree. This sense of disconnect continued while he worked on his teaching credential. I asked him to describe his administrative credential program. He shared, “It is funny; it wasn’t until my administrative credential program that I really felt a part of a university, versus where I attended school for my BA and my Teaching Credential” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). I wanted him to go deeper with his reasons for making that statement. He said, “In this case, I really enjoyed the level of dialogue that we engaged in.” He continued, “We had a lot of opportunities to discuss race, and how race affects us in our careers in work and everyday lives” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012).

The issue of race was huge for Thomas. His administrative credential program was designed to support school leaders who were interested in working with urban educators and students. As a man of color, it was a true gift for him to be a part of a program that provided a safe place to discuss the major influences that race has on the world. He further shared, “People perceive that race doesn’t matter, but in reality when looking at statistics, race does matter, and still in this time and year to sit down with people who still don’t believe that race plays a role” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). He has issues with people who work in communities with a large
Black and Brown population still believing that race does not matter. “It was fun and challenging to sit down and have dialogues with folks who are going to enter administration” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). He says of his administrative classmates, “I hope that I inspired them to look at race differently, and I feel that I learned from them skills that will enable me to better serve my community” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). Thomas was able to learn from his schoolmates that there were people who worked as teachers in communities of people of color who were ignorant to their daily struggles with race because they had no lived experiences with those challenges.

Throughout the interview, Thomas would relate his lived experiences to his work as a principal. His inspiration from his administrative credential program came from listening to the viewpoints of individuals who were not aware of the challenges of race. I repeat this finding because it shaped the remainder of our discussions. Thomas is the child of parents who did not speak English. His parents worked very hard and did not have time to sit down with him to discuss issues of race. His earlier upbringing began with challenging times, and his parents were working very hard to make ends meet. His community afforded him the opportunity to interact only with Black and Brown children. He goes back to his conversation about his role as a principal and how he is a steward of promoting success for his students. He stated that he strives harder, based upon his experiences, to give more to his community. The interview comes to a pause for a couple of minutes while we both share an emotional moment. The recorder is turned off out of respect. We continue the interview and discuss more about race.
Thomas is clearly a man, a visionary, and a powerhouse who is giving back to his community. I wanted to find out if there were any other opportunities that he had to engage with people from other cultural backgrounds. “In high school, I was on the wrestling team and I ran track; we did have competitions with white students from other places, that was it” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). The conversation goes back to his college years pre administrative credential program. “My first year of college in the dorms, I saw very few Black and Brown faces; the food was a challenge for me” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). Thomas continues to describe his sense of marginalization at the university, “The food, the music in the dorms, there were no rhythms that matched what I knew.” He did share with a slight laugh, “There were white kids who listened to rap and hip hop music; they actually knew the lyrics” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). He was again sharing an important insight into race and cultural identification.

When discussing his leadership style and his philosophy about discipline, Thomas discussed how important it was to show students he cares and cares about their families. He works very hard to build relationships with his African American families who he feels are not as comfortable being involved at school. He says, “I try harder to gain their voices” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). He wants them to feel comfortable with him and, in turn, encourages their children to feel comfortable and a part of the community. “Sometimes, I feel like I am making more enemies” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). He is committed to his open door policy for all of his families. His personal background as a man of color, his connection to the
community, and his professional preparation for leadership are tools that he relies upon daily.

Thomas assumes that his Latino families feel more comfortable with his leadership. “We finally have one of our own who has made it!” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). He speaks Spanish and looks like many of his families. He recalls working at another site, which has a large population of African American and Latino American students. “The teachers were predominately White, and there were two White administrators” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). He shifts the outlook of race to the perspective of the minority population (White Administrators at a primarily school of color.) “They felt invalidated by the Black and Brown families; whereas, I felt comfortable speaking with the African American and Latino families about the discipline issues that took place with their children” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). This experience was powerful and insightful for Thomas. He was able to see his peers experience the type of isolation that he experienced at different stages of his life. These experiences would serve as his leadership platform to include everyone and strive to validate the voices of all of his stakeholders.

Thomas is frustrated by the suspension rates of African American and Latino students in his school district. He has implemented a policy with his staff that is assisting with reducing the numbers of students that are being sent out of the classroom. He is working closely with his staff to implement alternative strategies that limit classroom removals. He wanted to share his analysis of the differences in student engagement that
he noticed between the elementary and secondary levels. He breaks his thoughts down into very distinct categories.

In elementary school, it is a beautiful experience. Children are more nurtured and are pushed and socialized to do their best, get their education, and go on to college.

He further discussed the physical contact: We give a lot of love and hugs to the younger kids’ (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). In high school the hugs don’t happen as much. We need to continue to teach social skills, academics, and self-esteem. . . . It is troubling to see the numbers of African American and Latino students who are suspended and later end up in prisons. (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012.)

Principal Thomas has a philosophy about discipline that is rooted in his belief that effective teaching can assist with reducing the numbers of students who are removed from the classroom via office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. He has one major question that he asks of himself and his staff, “What is the teacher doing in the classroom?” His administrative experiences have informed him of the importance of making sure that classrooms promote instruction that can be assessed by all students. His role as a leader is to provide his teachers with support mechanisms that they can employ that will reduce the number of disciplinary removals. He believes, “Suspensions don’t work, conversations with students and parents are much better to change inappropriate behaviors” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012).
The influences of family, personal experiences, and race play a major role in Thomas’s approach to leadership, which he sees as being an advocate for his community. His commitment to students as a teacher has remained the platform of his leadership. His participation in an administrative program that was geared towards the challenges of urban school leadership has shaped his path as a leader with a mission to assist others with success.

**Principal Alexis XIII**

Alexis is a 40-year-old African American female and the principal of a suburban elementary school. The school recently became a Title I site. I knew Alexis previously as a teacher with another school district some years ago. We were later reunited as administrators at our current district. One of the reasons that she was selected for this study was that she was a principal who served at a site with significant numbers of African American and Latino students. Her site also houses a program that supports students with extreme discipline issues. Her background in education includes serving as a lead teacher for 10 years, a vice principal, instructional specialist, and principal for four years. Her professional experiences as an educator afford her a wealth of knowledge and experience that helps to shape her leadership.

Alexis possesses a bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and is considering future enrollment as a doctoral student. She is also a wife and a mother, two positions that are extremely important to her. Her desire to promote change is an important component of her leadership platform.
At the start of the interview, I asked Alexis, as I did the other principals, to discuss her reasons for becoming an administrator. I wanted to gain a deeper insight into the reasons or influences that guided her towards assuming the role as a school leader. “I feel like I am a part of a large number of teachers who probably walked into a principalship because they felt that they could affect change on a much broader level” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). She noted that the move from the classroom to administration was intended to take her knowledge and experiences to foster the movement of an entire school.

I was at a school in San Francisco; the principal that hired me was away on leave. The new principal came from Sacramento, and would visit my classroom and would say that I should consider moving into leadership. He planted the seed. (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012)

She begins to discuss her family background, “You know, my family is a group of educators, and it just seemed as though [administration was my next natural step” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). She continues, “Ultimately, my decision to go into leadership came from the encouragement of another administrator” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). She received her teaching credential from a California State University. She taught during the day and attended classes in the evening. The program was innovative because students were able to apply the theories that they learned in class to their full time intern teaching positions. Her early experiences were in an urban setting. The program’s duration was “one intensive year” according to Alexis.
Alexis begins to discuss her administrative credential program. “I received my admin and master from a CSU; at the time the focus was on urban education” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). She continues, “I can’t say that it didn’t prepare me. Actually 10 years later, administration has changed” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). She explains that like the teaching credential you receive a wealth of skills, but it is up to you to continue to update your knowledge base to meet the demands of the ever-changing field of education. When asked about the preparation that she received related to discipline, she explained, “No, it did not, we talked, it was more along the lines of policy with regards to education. . . . It was very far removed from actual classroom settings, and it was very broad” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). This is one of the factors that affected how Alexis approaches her leadership tasks.

Alexis is an extremely reflective leader who is constantly examining and refining her practice based upon her teaching and administrative experiences. “I also reflect upon previous principals that I worked with and the strategies that they utilized in order to manage their schools” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). She would use these observations along with the skills that she used in the classroom that were successful with her students. Her professional observations and experiences have contributed to her focus as a leader who promotes equity and cultural respects. Alexis admits that her administrative credential program did not offer explicit strategies to deal with the discipline issues that may arise with African American and Latino American
students. Besides educational policies, her administrative program focused narrowly on curriculum and instruction.

Alexis does remember her program focusing on cultural differences. “We always looked at it through that lens. The actual coursework for explicit strategies or plans to roll them out at your school, I don’t remember” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). During her administrative preparation period, she was aware of the issues of discipline for African American and Latino students. Her early preparation was primarily focused on the academic struggles of the students rather than their discipline issues. She spoke about the discipline data for African American and Latino students and felt that my questions made her reflect upon the absence of direct instruction on how to support these two student groups with positive discipline. “At that time the major discussion was about universal access for students of color” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). As an administrator, she stated that she was trained to make sure that students received equal access to the curriculum.

Alexis’ personal background provided even deeper insight into the other influences that have guided her practice as a school leader. She comes from a family of educators, and at an early age was made aware of the importance of a quality education and how an education affects one’s position in society. “Particularly on my mother’s side, all of my aunts, my four aunts were all teachers and received their master’s degrees in educational leadership.” She further stated, “None of them took the leap into administration” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). She then describes her childhood, which was extremely unique. “I am a product of southern parents who
came to California immediately after college with high expectations for themselves and their two daughters” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). She continues her thoughts, “Interestingly, we grew up in the 1960s and school was highly structured” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012).

Alexis recalls from kindergarten through junior high school seeing very few students of color. She attended a very high performing elementary school, and she was also a GATE student. In middle school, she saw even fewer African American students. “I remember when I was in the eighth grade, I went to a higher performing middle school where we were being harassed” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). By the time she was in the eighth grade busing began, and more students of color were beginning to attend her school. “My eighth grade year was the best, because I had so many cool friends” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). Her parents did discuss racism with her and her sister, but instilled in them the determination to do their best no matter what the challenges.

Alexis shared a story that really struck a chord with me and made both of us reflect upon the courage and love that our families put into making our lives the way that they are today. As two African American women discussing race, our conversation turned to a historical journey, which gave me an even deeper understanding of her path to leadership. Her parents set the bar high, and school was always first in her life. Her parents were always accessible for parent conferences and any other activities that were related to school. “High school was a challenge because it too was a very prestigious and competitive environment” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). During
her preparation to become a teacher, she reflected upon the covert racism that she experienced as a student of color at the school. She realized as an adult that there were teachers who engaged in racist behaviors through subtle veils of discrimination.

Alexis shared the experiences of her mother who had trouble obtaining a job as a teacher in California due to her obvious southern accent. Her mom would apply for jobs and would show the potential employers who were shocked that she was the person behind the paper application. Alexis shared the fact that in 1950s San Francisco, her mother was not allowed to enter the staff lounge at the school where she taught. She learned from her family that racism in her words was “operationalized.” She was taught not to allow racism to block her from her goals. I felt a true connection to Alexis because I too come from a mother and father who are southern products and who rose above racism and oppression to make a better life for their children. Alexis was taught by her parents, “You are just as good if not better” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). This phrase of affirmation from her parents would serve as part of her leadership foundation when facing challenging situations. She recalls her knowledge of her aunt and uncles attending school and then picking cotton in the Deep South during the summer. She is a leader who has a connection to the past and uses it to ground her work for equity and social justice.

Alexis works diligently with her staff to manage discipline with other methods besides classroom removals. Like her mother, her school has fewer than two teachers of color. She has engaged in culturally responsive professional development trainings with her staff in order to promote cultural understanding and improved communication. She is
not afraid to admit that being an administrator is a truly challenging position that she works at every day. She is aware that many of her families are weighed down by the negative perceptions of people of color in the media. She works closely with her staff to promote a learning environment that is both supportive and academically rich. Like her parents, Alexis has the same expectations of her teachers and her students. Again, she is not afraid to admit that her goal and expectations are a true challenge at times to achieve.

A great deal of Alexis’ leadership is built on the platform of building trusting relationships with her students, teachers, and parents. Alexis feels that her personal commitment to excellence has had a major impact on her work as a school leader. She is concerned about the outreach to her African American and Latino families. Alexis does admit that there appears to be less of a response from her African American families. She shared two important mantras that guide her work (a) “You can do it!” This is shared with both teachers and students, and (b) “There may be struggles and errors, but there is always an opportunity to regain your place” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). Her effective leadership is definitely influenced by these two phrases that guide her work.

Principal June XXV

June is an African American female in her mid 50s who is entering her twenty-fourth year of working as an educator and her tenth year as a principal. Her current assignment is in an elementary school in an urban setting. She has a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree. She is clear that her original goal was to serve students in the classroom as a teacher. She did not enter teaching with the initial desire to be a school
principal. “I had no thoughts of becoming a school leader but I had all of the thoughts of being a school teacher which I enjoyed and loved” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). She found teaching to be rewarding but would also think to herself, “As I worked through teaching, I decided that I wanted a change, I wanted to try something different” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). She also spoke of her observations of other administrators and how it made her reflect upon the types of decisions that she would make as a school leader. She stated, “If I were the principal, I would do that differently” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). She quickly admitted that through her own practice as an administrator she realized that her earlier assumptions were not accurate and the administrators were making good decisions. It was interesting to hear her perception of leadership change once she assumed the same level of leadership as her previous principals.

As with the other participants, I asked June to discuss her administrative preparation program. She was very candid about her administrative program and said, “I don’t think that any program that I have gone through prepared me to work with urban children to be perfectly honest” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). She continued her thought by adding a very profound statement about the early influences that played a major role in preparing her for her work as a school leader. She stated, in a serious but honest tone, “I think that my own background, my own knowledge, and the idea that I grew up in urban areas helped me more than anything” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). She immediately started to discuss her teacher-credentialing program.
June went through an urban intern program. This program was operated by the California State University system. It was designed to support new teachers with preparing themselves to work with inner-city students. She is adamant that what really equipped her was the fact that she was raised in the inner city and understood how children from the inner city thought. She further explained, “Understanding how inner city were educated and how they were thought of by adults and teachers” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012).

June enjoyed being raised in the inner city and attended schools in the district where she currently serves as a principal. She sees herself as a true inner city person and feels how parents feel when they walk into schools. “They feel as educators that we look down at them and I connect with that right away and how that feels. I can see it in their eyes and on their face” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). June shares in detail how her lived experiences afford the ability to understand what schools feel like for families who at times may feel marginalized. Her leadership is guided by her belief that she has to put herself in the place of her families in order to ensure that her school is run in such a manner that families feel welcome. During the interview she mentions her thoughts about the children. She says, “I also understand how our kids feel. ‘You are not listening to me.’ ‘You are not giving me a chance to explain myself’” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012).

June feels that the adults at schools do often not show respect to kids. She is committed to making sure that her students are given voice by encouraging her staff members to give students an opportunity to express themselves before passing judgments
about their behavior. June admits that there are times when educators do assume that they know everything and that the students do not know anything about their own communities. June is clear that a lot of the discipline issues that take place in schools are due to a disconnect between the schools and the communities that they serve. June mentioned several times during the course of the interview the importance of building trust and showing the students and families that the school is part of the community and honors the community that it serves.

June’s leadership is guided by her earlier experiences as a child growing up in a family with proud parents who expected her to get her education. Her parents were not college educated, yet her mother was a registered nurse who went through a two-year registered nurse program. She describes her parents, “They knew the importance of education, and they were people who came from the south when everyone was migrating from the south” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). She continues, “They knew and came with the importance of her and her three brothers and sisters receiving a good education. I am the only one of the four of us that went into education” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012).

I asked June questions about her experiences with race. Children at her elementary school, which was predominately African American, were being selected based on their academics to attend a school across town that was filled with White children. She says, “They were trying to integrate the schools. This was the 1960s, and they wanted to make sure that they got the proper folks into the school” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). June learned at an early age about the effects of
racism and was in the middle of the Civil Rights Movement as a young child. I questioned her about the impact on her family; I wanted to know how her family felt about her being one of the students selected for integrating into the White school across town. She stated, “I didn’t want to go, I was afraid, and I told my parents that I was afraid” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). She continues, “They asked me, ‘Why?’ I said, because I am Black, and they are not going to like me, they won’t treat me nice” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). She is taking me to a scary and sad time in American History when discrimination and racial hatred were a way of the world in America.

Race was in June’s world whether she chose to look at it or not. She is truly appreciative of the strength and tenacity that her parents displayed during this frightening period of her life. She adds, “My parents were scared but said that this was an opportunity for me that could lead to other opportunities in the future” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). June was also on the first bus of integrated students at her high school as well. When she got off the bus she remembers

When we got off of the bus there was a group of students and parents carrying a casket, one of the administrators told my mother that there were 2,000 White kids there and 100 Black kids and there was no way that we could win at anything.

(June, personal communication, December 10, 2012)

I am left speechless and can barely contain the shock on my face.

She explained that her experiences integrating in those predominately White schools were an incredibly valuable experience for her. She stated, “I look at it now as
the best experience of my life. It taught me everything. It taught me how to deal with another culture, the dominant one. It taught me how to successfully do that” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). She continues,

Let’s be clear: coming from the inner city, you have very little exposure to White America. I was only dealing with my own people, African American. It taught me about the game playing, the political, when to speak, how to speak and when not to speak. I would not be in the position that I am in without those experiences.

(June, personal communication, December 10, 2012)

June explains that it was rough. She has taught her children and grandchildren about fairness and not to worry about whether or not someone likes you. Her parents did not allow them (she and her siblings) to fall into the trap of impeding their success by worrying about what other people thought of them.

June is a respected administrator who has served students in two inner city school districts during her tenure. I met June a few years ago during a parent/teacher conference that I had with her son and daughter-in-law concerning her grandson. At the time, June was working at another school district. Our interaction with each other was very professional and I could tell that she was a grandmother who was very educated, articulate, and strong. She recently moved to my present district, and it took me several months to figure out that I met her previously at my old school site. She was chosen for this study because her site has had issues with discipline and has undergone several changes in leadership due to the complexities of the site with both students and staff members.
I had no idea that this principal who I briefly met in my past was so effective because of her life story. When she sat in the conference some years ago concerning her grandson, I had no idea that I was speaking to a piece of living history. Unfortunately, the teacher that she came to discuss was having difficulties communicating with her African American and Latino students. June has been extremely successful with stabilizing her staff and encouraging the students at her site to carry themselves with pride. She is the first to admit that the work is not easy and that she puts a lot of effort into what she does as a school leader.

June’s experiences can be seen as impacting her reported approach to her practice. As a school leader, June brings with her all of the lessons from her childhood, teaching experiences, and school leadership experiences. She is clear about her belief that she must treat her students, staff, and community members with respect. She supports her teachers and has done work with them centered on positive communication. She does an exercise with her staff to remind them to think of the students when they engage in conversations. She understands that teachers sometimes get frustrated, as she explains, “I do an exercise where I ask them to close their eyes and visualize your classroom, think about what your classroom looks like and feels like for your students” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). Teachers are encouraged to look at their practices and imagine what their school sites look like for their students.

In talking with June it was interesting to see how she has internalized her work and guides her work by how it impacts the lives of others. Her passion to support the
students from her community and empower her teachers and parents is honorable. She is a true leader who is willing to do what it takes to ensure excellence.

**Principal Stephen II**

Stephen is an African American male in his late 20s who has served as an elementary school vice principal and principal. He is a very easy going man who has a warm smile and enjoys sharing his humor as he speaks. He displays a very lighthearted and kind disposition. I have known him for the past few years from a distance. He began his administrative career at the same site where he served previously as a classroom teacher and later vice principal. He was able to follow in the footsteps of a previous administrator who was able to turn the climate at the school from negative to positive. Like many urban schools, the site is surrounded by high poverty and crime. The students were able to find peace, a sense of pride, and purpose at the school. For Stephen, being a part of a legacy of change has inspired him to carry the torch. He knows that he is walking in the footsteps of a leader who made history at the school.

Stephen has spent his entire career working in underperforming schools. He is truly inspired by the changes that he and his colleagues made at the school. He shared with me the fact that he believes that his mission in life is to help others and that he is a true team player. His upbeat tone and body gestures suggest that he is excited about his work and is motivated to stay in the struggle to assist his students with achieving excellence. Stephen shared with me that he believes that all of his students are successes and that includes the students who sometimes stray from the path to success. I was able to observe him communicating with his colleagues and students. The level of
professionalism and respect that he showed all members of his school community
overwhelmed me. I wanted to stay at his school for a couple of days and soak in the
positive environment that this young leader encourages through his practice.

Stephen began his early life in a state outside of California. The son of very young
parents, his grandmother took the lead as his guardian. He explained to me that his
grandmother did not allow him to make any excuses about who he was. “My
grandmother said, ‘Boy you better go to school and do your best! It doesn’t matter if you
are Black or not!’” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012). This
message was significant for Stephen because his community was predominately White.
He shared that he could count the number of African Americans, Latinos, and Asian
students on one hand. I asked him to share how this experience affected his leadership.
He explained, “During my elementary school years, I saw very few people that looked
like me, but I knew that my grandparents wanted me to do my best and I did” (Stephen,
personal communication, December 11, 2012).

Stephen was born, like me, years after the death of Civil Rights leader Dr. Martin
Luther King, Jr., and, like me, learned about him through family members and exposure
in school. We shared a moment with this topic because, like me, he was never called a
racial slur but was aware of subtle forms of racism that do not use the “n” word. He
described one of his teachers in the third grade who communicated with him in an
inappropriate manner but disguised it by using a sweet tone and kind words. He asked me
if I ever watched the show “Everybody Hates Chris.” The show is a comedy that is based
on the early life of comedian Chris Rock. There is a character in the show that is the
comedian’s White teacher. Throughout the series, she makes racial comments to Chris Rock that are so racially stereotypical of African Americans that they are funny.

We laughed about the show and then talked about his experience.

Well, my teacher was giving out field trip slips, and she told everyone in the class to have their parents sign their permission slips. She knew that I lived with my grandparents and said to me that she knew I didn’t have parents so my guardian could sign the paper. (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012)

He explained that he knew who his parents were and communicated with them. They were very young and not ready to be parents at the time. I felt his emotion as he continued:

I know how my kids feel when they see their classmates’ mother or fathers come up to the school and they have a grandmother or an aunt come up to the school. Man, I remember those days. I was made to feel like something was wrong with me. I would hold back my tears and tell my grandmother who would remind me that I was somebody and that I did have parents and an extra bonus with having her. (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012)

Stephen details his later years in both junior high school and high school as being very different. He reunited with his parents, and they moved to the Bay Area where he attended schools with students from all racial backgrounds. “I was so happy to live in a community where there were all kinds of people. I can truly say that I can communicate with people from all walks of life because of the experiences in my life” (Stephen,
personal communication, December 11, 2012). This communication is evident by observing this leader as he engages in his work with his students.

I wanted to understand why Stephen made the decision to enter site-based leadership. He asserted, “Well, I knew it was time for me to make a move to a more challenging job. I wanted to see how I could use what I learned and observed to move an entire school” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012). He stated that he had wonderful role models in his former principals, and he incorporates part of them into what he does. I asked him to describe his administrative preparation program. He quickly cuts me off and lets me know that he did not attend a traditional program like many of our colleagues in the district.

My program was not like PLI (Principal Leadership Institute at U.C. Berkeley). I know that a lot of principals in our district went through that program. My program was quick and really didn’t teach me everything that I needed to know about working in urban schools like mine. (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012)

He mentioned that he felt that administrative credential programs have to do a better job of preparing their students with what happens in real life. “I received a lot of theory and good books and articles to look at, but that was not enough” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012).

During the interview Stephen often referred to the lack of time that he had to speak with other principals. “There are times when I wish that we could talk to each other about what is going on in our schools. Our principals’ meetings are so packed with stuff”
that we aren’t even given time to talk to each other about how things are going” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012). I got the sense that Stephen appreciates seeing his colleagues but wants to have more time dedicated to engaging in meaningful conversations about their practices. I asked him to elaborate because he and his school have a great reputation.

Yeah, well, I still have issues with my staff and I have to deal with evaluations and everything else. Sometimes you just need a place to vent to people who understand what you are going through. Believe me everything is not perfect. (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012)

Stephen feels that it is important that all principals receive training and support:
I know that I am a younger principal, but there are others who are more veteran that want additional training in different areas. A lot of things that we do on this job are what I call on the job training. (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012)

He feels personally responsible for making sure that all of his kids learn and that suspensions and office referrals cease. Stephen made the connection to classroom instruction. “I have said this a million times and stand by it. A lot of times kids are bored and they act out. We need to have powerful and interesting teaching in our classrooms” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012). Stephen seems convinced that the underlying problems relating to discipline issues are found in classroom instruction. He is also committed to doing whatever it takes to support his teachers with implementing inspiring curriculum that meets the needs of all students.
Stephen is a leader who has a vision that his students will succeed and can be encouraged to reach for the stars. Although he is the youngest participant in this study, his experiences and vision for his students makes him an important voice for current and future school leaders.

**Conclusion**

The personal stories of these principals point to a group of interesting and dedicated educators who are at different stages in their careers as school principals. All of them shared stories that echoed their experiences with race, power, struggle, hope, and sacrifice. All of the principals have developed a reported way to approach their leadership practices. The individual interviews with these principals recounted their journeys to service as elementary school principals. It was evident that all of these principals were confronted with defining moments in their careers when the decision was made to make the leap to serve as a school principal. They all seemed to have learned lessons from their experiences that helped to shape their leadership practices consciously or unconsciously. Many of those past lessons and lived experiences resonated enough with them to allow them to incorporate those experiences in meaningful ways as they carry out their leadership duties.

This chapter sets the stage for the next chapters, which will look at commonalities and differences among the principals and connect this study to what has been written about principals’ approach to their school leadership practice. It gives the highlights of the principals’ journey to school leadership and how their beliefs, professional training, and other outside influences impact their reported leadership approaches.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

In the previous chapter, I discussed the study’s participants. I depicted their paths to school site leadership as principals. I also described the factors that influenced their leadership practices. The intent of Chapter 5 is to analyze the data collected through the interviews and to uncover the common emerging themes as a way to dig deeper into the values and beliefs underlying their approaches to leadership.

My study aimed to address the questions, “What factors influence how school leaders apply discipline for African American and Latino students?” I formulated this research question into the following three operational questions:

1. How do personal and professional influences impact the disciplinary decisions made by principals towards African American and Latino students?
2. What tensions do principals experience between their philosophies and their practices?
3. What kinds of training and professional development supports do administrators have for addressing discipline challenges?

In addition to answering these questions, I also set out to provide a forum in which participants could be given an opportunity to offer in-depth perspectives. It was critical to design a study that enabled the voices of the participants to be heard. The data is organized to enable those voices to emerge in the most authentic form possible. I provided direct responses from the participants that are categorized by themes that emerged through analysis of their experiences.
Thus, this chapter is organized by patterns and themes. I used open coding to create the major emerging themes. After that, I assembled them into the axial coding process and then utilized the selective coding process in order to connect the responses for the final phase. Participants were not simply utilized as data producers from my research. My study used the biographical accounts of the principals and their leadership journeys to gain deeper insight into understanding the concepts uncovered through their own testimony.

Each part of this chapter provides feedback from the participants around general themes related to the research questions. The participants openly expressed their perspectives, their experiences, and how their practices have been influenced. This chapter contains direct responses from the participants in order to share those responses through their own words rather than summarizing their thoughts. This type of research reporting allows for the experiences of the participants to be told through their voices enabling them to speak for themselves.

I developed the research question subheadings based upon the responses of the participants. I did this after carefully engaging in open axial and selective coding. The subheadings provide a direct connection between each question, subthemes, and the response of both groups. In the sections that follow, participants speak to their perceptions of leadership and the effects of personal influences and professional support needed to assist them with their leadership practices. Furthermore, efforts were made to provide an opportunity for participants to share their biographical accounts related to both their personal and professional lives. It appears that their perceptions of leadership did
not begin when they became principals, but prior to their official appointments as school leaders.

Research Question 1

*How do personal and professional influences impact the disciplinary decisions made by principals toward African American and Latino students?*

My initial analysis yielded 14 overarching themes. I then synthesized these initial themes and came up with three themes (a) Principal’s Views of Leadership; (b) Personal Experiences; and (c) Professional Experiences. Each of these themes offer a deeper understanding of how the participants rely upon various factors related to personal and professional experiences when making disciplinary decisions.

Participants’ Views of Leadership

The first theme for this research question is the participants’ view of leadership. Quotes from the individual interviews are provided in this section and in corresponding sections in order to capture their direct comments related to the uncovered themes. The participants spoke extensively about their perceptions of leadership and how those perceptions guide their work. Two of the participants described their entry into leadership as a progression from their work in the classroom. I discovered that for four of the participants moving into leadership was not originally on their minds.

June recounted, “I went into teaching 24 years ago, and I think at that time I did not intend on becoming a principal. I had no thoughts of becoming a school leader” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). Her comments suggested that the role of school leader was not initially a goal that she wanted to achieve. Classroom
teaching for three of the five principals gave them a sense of leadership that was their
first introduction to true leadership. Savanah commented, “My principal would always
leave me in charge when she was off campus. I was the lead teacher and leadership came
naturally for me” (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012).

In the case of two of the participants, their leadership came about as the result of
influences from others who admired their work in the classroom and suggested that they
consider moving into site leadership before they considered assuming the responsibility.
Alexis stated, “I was working with a new principal who was just starting and had energy
and new ideas and suggested that I would be good at leadership” (Alexis, personal
communication, December 7, 2012). The suggestion of moving on to leadership seemed
to resonate with all four of the female participants. They communicated similar
experiences of moving into leadership as the result of a supervisor or mentor who saw
them as leaders and made the suggestion to them.

The two male participants articulated their progression to leave the classroom and,
unlike the female participants, detailed internal reasons for moving on to leadership
positions. Stephen related, “Well, I knew that I needed to step it up and move on to be a
principal. The kids needed guidance, and I could do more as a principal. I knew it was
time to move on to the next level” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11,
2012). Similar sentiment was offered by Thomas who stated, “As a principal, I knew that
I would be responsible for making sure that students who looked like me would be
served. I felt it was my duty to move on to support students on a higher level” (Thomas,
personal communication, November 28, 2012). The contrast from the female participants
suggested that their movement to leadership was influenced by an outside force and was motivated by extrinsic influences while the male participants were motivated to move into leadership through intrinsic motivators.

The principals’ perception of their leadership is always interwoven and connected to all previous experiences. Each participant communicated their perceptions about leadership with the belief that they were personally responsible for the lives of their children. Some of the participants also discussed the importance of their leadership connecting them to the communities that they serve. The connection with the children and the parents was a common theme that the participants felt measured their abilities as a school leader. Thomas asserted, “I try harder to use my position to make sure that my families feel heard. It is important for me to have my African American and Latino families feel as though they are part of the school community” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). His view of his leadership offered an understanding of the how school leaders utilize their position as a lever to encourage and empower families that have been traditionally marginalized from urban schools.

The participants connected their views of leadership to both building positive relationships as Thomas suggested as well as gaining the trust of their students and parents. June asserted:

Some of our parents have had poor experiences with schools; they don’t feel comfortable or confident to participate with our schools. It is my job to make them feel welcome and support them with feeling welcome because we are all in this together. (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012)
All of the participants believed that their leadership was measured by the success of their abilities to unify their school communities. Lisa stated, “I make myself visible every morning; greeting my families and making them feel welcome. This is a major part of my job. I want all of my families to feel welcome at our school” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012).

The participants’ views of their leadership influences their leadership style. I found that these leaders were heavily influenced to perform their duties based upon their belief about how leaders should execute their duties. This leads to the next major finding within this theme, which places focus on the personal experiences of each leader and how they connect to their positions as principals.

**Personal Experiences**

The participants put into words experiences from their life histories that have had profound influences on their leadership approaches to managing discipline. The connection to their lived experiences offers deeper understanding to who these leaders were and how that identification resonated with their leadership actions. The participants, who varied in age and ethnicities, connected on the subject of race and how it impacted their personal lives. I initially did not perceive that the issue of race would resonate with all of the participants and discovered through my research that it would be a common platform for all of the participants in varied forms. The connection to their leadership approach with students and discipline is intertwined with their personal experiences.

Thomas stated,
Race does play a role in our lives and in our careers. What I had issue with during my administrative credentialing program is that there were people who felt that race did not matter. These people are working in communities with large black and brown populations. (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012)

Thomas’ recounting about his credentialing program pointed to the fact that he, like the other participants, suggested that the issues connected to race could not be ignored and played a major influence in their leadership decisions.

I discovered that participants Thomas and June attended and graduated from the same school district where they currently serve as school leaders. They both described how their positions were especially important to them because they took ownership of making sure that they were looking out for the best interests of their community members. June commented, “I understand where these families are coming from. I grew up in this community and feel like it is my responsibility to look out for my folks. You know, this is the community that grew me” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012).

June and Savanah were both participants with school desegregation. June explained,

I can remember when I was in elementary school, kids were being selected, based upon intelligence, black kids to be bused into another all white school. This was the 1960s, and they wanted to make sure that they got the proper folks in. (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012.)
Her experiences with race did not stop in elementary school as her fear of hostile White families who did not want her or the other African American families enrolled at her new school.

June noted, “The same thing happened in high school. When we got off of the bus, there was a group of parents and kids carrying a casket right by us” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). According to June’s account, the casket represented, what would happen to their bodies if they entered the school that was historically White. June’s experiences with race at a young age, during a time of racial conflict, was also communicated by Savanah who is White. “I grew up in Virginia, am 50+. By the time I got into middle school, desegregation was happening, and I was one of 65 students reversed bused into an all Black neighborhood” (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012). Her experience, like June’s, continued in high school. Savanah said,

In high school desegregation had been fully implemented, and we are talking Black and White. It probably went to 65-5% Black and when Alex Haley’s “Roots” came out in 1976 on television there were lots of schools that had race riots. (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012)

These two participants had very strong views about the importance of them looking back at their past experiences to connect with what was going on in our inner city schools today. Both participants offered many examples of how they communicated with their staff members, students, and parents based upon their earlier lived experiences. I discovered that both of these participants used their earlier experiences with racial
hostility to guide their practices as reflective school leaders who promoted equity and were constantly monitoring and assessing their sites for any visible signs of overt or covert racism. Both participants declared their resolve to make sure that their children were treated with respect and given an opportunity to learn from any mistakes that they may have made with their behavior.

Participants Thomas and Stephen, the two male participants and also the youngest members of the study, provided two perspectives of their personal experiences that also seemed to resonate with the issues connected to race. Participant Thomas remained in his community, which was comprised of Black and Brown faces. His transition to university life was a major culture shock for him. Thomas stated, “My first year in college, there were only a few black and brown faces which was a challenge for me, even the food, which was different” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). The feeling of being different and feeling out of his element were similar to the feelings experienced by students who felt marginalized by their schools through classroom removals. This experience stuck with him and empowered him to encourage his students to do their best because they could.

Stephen who was the youngest participant within the study grew up in a community where the number of African Americans was extremely low. Absent from the community was true diversity. He related, "You are the loner; you don’t look like everyone else. In hindsight it taught me how to communicate with people from different races” (Stephen, personal communication December 11, 2012). Both participants learned through their earlier experiences how to cope with being a member of a group that was
not readily represented in their communities. Both detailed their commitment to making sure that their students and their families were encouraged to engage with their schools in a positive manner.

The participants all emphasized the important roles that their families and personal beliefs played with their leadership decisions. Five of the six participants are mothers and fathers. Two of the six participants are also proud grandparents. All of them spoke about the connections they made with their personal relationships and beliefs and the connection to their leadership. Alexis proudly shared that she came from a family of educators. She recalls her aunts sharing how they picked cotton during the summer in the Deep South in order to pay for their college tuition during the fall and spring. Alexis stated, “I was taught at a young age that you have to do your best. There are no excuses; you are the best” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). Her parents infused this belief in her and her sibling. I uncovered that she was using her early teachings from her family with her students and staff members. Her personal philosophy of self-greatness guided her work and encouraged her when she was dealing with complicated discipline matters.

The connection to family and personal beliefs resonated with all of the participants. Stephen has relied heavily upon the lessons that his grandmother taught him as a young man about having pride in himself and always being on his best behavior. These messages remained in his head and as he mentioned, “I learned early in life about the connection between care and compassion. Discipline should be about tough love, not punishment” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012). Personal
experiences and beliefs that I discovered through my research heavily influenced the way the leaders viewed themselves and the way their perceived leadership was communicated to their stakeholders. This leads to the third major factor, which is the professional experiences of the participants. Professional experiences like personal experiences shape and guide the direction that school leaders take with their leadership practices.

**Professional Experiences**

All of the participants highlighted the influence that their professional experiences have had on shaping their leadership practices. Three of the six participants described themselves as former teacher leaders. The connection was made to their abilities to work with all students including those with moderate to extreme discipline issues. June, Savanah, and Lisa all served as teacher leaders who were later encouraged to move into a leadership role. The ability to demonstrate leadership while working in a self-contained classroom was a positive indicator to these participants that their former supervisors saw something in them that spoke volumes about their leadership potential. Savanah voiced, “My principal would often leave me in charge when she was off campus, I felt as though I was the veteran lead teacher who could guide the others who were also younger than me in age an experience” (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012).

Savanah’s position as the lead teacher at her former site lead to her involvement with a program designed to support new teachers who entered the field of education. Her skills as a leader were thus enhanced from her earlier experiences as a lead classroom teacher, teacher coach, and much later vice principal and principal. Like Savanah’s experience, Lisa, too, served as a lead teacher who later advanced her professional
leadership experiences in schools. Lisa communicated, “I served as a lead mentor science teacher for years. I always knew that this could lead to a role where I would be in charge of a school” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012). Lisa did admit during the interview that her work as a lead mentor teacher inspired her to look at securing a position as a member of the district’s Curriculum and Instruction Department. The common factor is that both participants took their classroom leadership skills and employed them to move on to the next level.

Both of the male participants served as successful vice principals for several years. They commented that their experiences as vice principals and later principals gave them insight into the types of challenges that they could experience as school leaders. Thomas was the only participant who moved from being a teacher to an administrator at the same site. He declared, “It was very hard for me to move from being in the same department with my colleagues who were also my friends to being their boss” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). This experience was even more challenging for him because, as he continued,

I did not agree with some of the practices that I saw in their classrooms. It was hard having to write up folks that were my friends, that I respected, and that were older than me in age and experience. (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012.)

Stephen had a similar experience as he moved from being the vice principal at his site to principal. “I learned a lot about how to speak to kids and get to the root of the issues with their behavior” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012). As
vice principal, Stephen, like Thomas, spent most of his days dealing with discipline. Both expressed their concern with seeing large numbers of African American and Latino students being sent out of the classroom. They both described using their roles as sources of support for their students and staff members by promoting change.

The final theme that seemed to resonate with all of participants was their views of themselves as agents of change. All appeared frustrated at times with the direction of education but seemed to feel that their roles as leaders could contribute to making positive changes with the system. Lisa asserted, “I see my leadership as a place where I am in control of making the world a better place for my kids” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012). The issue of change was also paramount for June who asserted, “I make it clear to my families that I am about equity; no one group is more important than the other at my school. We are in this together and can make positive changes as a team” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012).

I discovered that change for the participants implied a much larger issue. These leaders were acknowledging that our system of education was indeed flawed. They were all in agreement that our system of education was dysfunctional and in need of agents of change to reverse the current trends of destruction. Thomas mentioned,

I am committed to saving the lives of my kids, I will not allow them to continue to be the Black and Brown faces that fill the prisons in California. We have to teach our kids how to behave as well as teach our teachers how to support them in times of trouble. We can do this. (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012)
The connection that these participants made to a very broken system designed to punish kids rather than teach them seemed to lead to the next question, which examines the tensions that school leaders experience between their philosophies and practices.

**Research Question 2**

*What tensions do principals experience between their philosophies and their practice?*

Data were structured within 14 initial themes. Deeper analysis of these themes assisted me with the discovery of three basic themes. The responses are organized in the context of the three identified themes for this research question: (a) Leadership Style, (b) Personal Beliefs, and (c) Professional Pressure. These three themes assisted me with understanding how the participants coped with the tensions that impacted the relationship between their leadership philosophies and practice.

**Leadership Style**

The first theme for this research question is the participant’s views of their leadership styles. All six of the participants detailed how their leadership styles were at times in contradiction to their leadership practices. I discovered that these tensions greatly affected how the participants developed and implemented their leadership styles. Three of the participants relate how their leadership styles were flexible and thus adjusted according to the needs of their schools. These adjustments have brought them discomfort and, on a number of occasions, caused them to question exactly what was their leadership style. Savanah communicated,
When I first arrived at my school I had to let the staff know that I had high standards. I was also suspending kids from one class that had extreme behaviors left and right. I knew that this wasn’t exactly holding up high academic standards that I constantly preached about. (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012)

Stephen also felt this sentiment, “It is hard for me to go into a classroom and say “good job when I know that the students are not being engaged. In the back of my mind, I know that I have to remain positive no matter what” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012). The perception of being an instructional leader resonated with all of the participants. They seemed to struggle, as Stephen and Savanah depicted, with the fact that they had to display leadership styles that were positive even though they felt deep down that they were delivering messages to their students and staff members that they felt did not speak to leadership styles that they wanted to share with their school communities.

All six of the participants saw their leadership styles as being very welcoming but admitted that there were situations where they felt that they could not execute this style of leadership. June voiced,

Our children just want to be heard. A lot of times the adults won’t listen to them. I have kids in my office who don’t even know why they were sent there. I hate when I have to punish these kids. I know that they are not always wrong. (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012)
Like June, Stephen felt frustration with the students’ voices not being heard. Stephen explained, “Kids today need someone to listen to them. It is so hard when you want to give the kids another chance but you know you can’t. We can’t seem as though we are not tough on bad behaviors” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012).

The participants seemed to struggle with their roles as instructional leaders and promoters of safety and guidance for their sites.

Two of the participants emphasized that they saw their positions as leaders in the same light as a guide or support provider. They were also aware of the fact that because of their positions as the enforcers of disciplinary actions towards students, their styles would be modified by the practices that they felt they had to employ. Thomas said

I am trying so hard to make my African American families feel more a part of our school community. I want to support the families with feeling comfortable with me and the school. Sometimes, I feel like I am making more enemies because I have to suspend their kids. (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012)

This conflict between personal philosophies about leadership and employed practices was very complicated and could not be connected to any one factor.

I was able to unearth from the participants’ responses that their leadership styles were not built on a solid platform. Each of the six participants had very strong convictions about what their leadership styles were but admitted that those styles would often be modified or discarded based upon the type of situation that they faced. Alexis stated.
It is so hard for me sometimes, I know who I am and what I believe, but when I am at work, I have to do things that I may not necessarily believe in like sending students home when I know all they did was laugh, sneeze, or ask to go to the restroom. I am the principal and this is my job. You go with the flow. (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012)

As an administrator myself, I definitely could relate with the sentiment of my colleagues. These discussions were very hard for each of them, and I found myself sharing my stories or reassuring them that I was making no judgments about their conflicted feelings concerning leadership styles. I reassured each of them that examining these tensions would give voice to the daily struggles that we encounter in our practices. I felt pain, as well, because I too have adjusted my style in order to fit the complex situations that I faced. Removing students from their classrooms is not an easy concept to discuss or admit to being a part of. This leads to the next major finding, which examines how personal beliefs can conflict with the practices engaged by school leaders.

**Personal Beliefs**

All six of the participants had very strong personal beliefs about how children should be treated and how their leadership positions often conflict with their beliefs. Stephen asserted,

>You know, suspensions and expulsions don’t work. We push our students further and further away. We need to teach them how to respond in positive ways. I know that this is a part of my job but I don’t like it. (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012)
Stephen’s sentiment is an example of how personal beliefs about correcting inappropriate behaviors contradict with the practice of imposing disciplinary sanctions. Stephen continued, “I truly believe that our students need instruction that is engaging and challenging, this would help eliminate over half of the drama” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012). Stephen, like the other participants, knew that they could not admit their feelings without facing disciplinary actions themselves or an angry staff.

Alexis said,

I really feel that I am a politician sometimes. I know that these babies are not the problem all of the time. I feel that the teachers don’t give them a chance. If I want to avoid a union grievance, then I have to take action. (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012)

Stephen and Alexis were very clear that they believed that some of the issues leading the students out of their classrooms and into the office were due in part to an issue that could have been resolved within the classroom. I discovered that both of them were not willing to express their personal beliefs out of fear that their personal beliefs could lead them into trouble with the staff. The political connection that Alexis spoke about and the possible conflict with the teachers’ union seemed to resonate with three other participants.

Lisa recounted,

I learned a long time ago that I have to be careful with sharing my views. It is like our president discussing the economy. One sentence can bring all types of issues
for you like a grievance. I try to avoid those. (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012)

Like Lisa, Thomas communicated,

It is so tough sometimes. I know that I have to be careful with how I deliver my message. I am here to protect the students. I know they need me but I can’t be so obvious with my beliefs if you know what I mean. (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012)

Three of the participants have implemented policies at their sites that required their teachers to follow several steps prior to sending students to the office for progressive discipline. June asserted, “I ask my teachers to fill out the referral form which has a list of steps that they took to assist the child with improving their behavior before sending them to me in the office” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). Her policy, like that of two other participants, came about as a result of their beliefs about students remaining in the classroom with a second intent to avoid being seen as unresponsive to discipline issues.

I previously mentioned that five of the participants are mothers, fathers, and grandparents. This fact, according to two of the participants, followed them to their school sites. Three of the participants mentioned that they think about how they would want their own children treated and feel overwhelmed when they have to punish students for infractions that they did not feel warranted intervention. Alexis stated,

I am always questioning, How I would feel if this was my child receiving this punishment? Again, I know that my job is to show that I can handle discipline
issues, so I do send kids home against my better judgment. (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012)

This theme seemed to continuously allude to the next major finding, which provides a deeper understanding of how professional pressures contribute to the tensions experienced by school leaders.

The six participants all shared accounts of how they dealt daily with the pressures that they encountered on a professional level. These pressures contribute, like the previously discussed themes, with the tensions that the participants experienced in their leadership roles. I was able to condense those professional pressures into three themes: (a) District Mandates, (b) Staff Expectations, and (c) Relationships with Students and Parents.

**District Mandates**

All six of the participants were focused on making sure that they were in compliance with the mandates required of them by their school district. Stephen shared:

- We are expected to monitor our discipline data and have been told that we have to lower the numbers of suspensions for our African American and Latino students.
- We don’t know how to do this when the kids are constantly sent to us for trouble.

(Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012)

The participants are aware that their school district has been faced with legal challenges focused on the numbers of suspensions and expulsions for African American and Latino students. Alexis voiced, “This is on my mind constantly. If it was up to me, none of my babies would be sent home, but this is how it is unfortunately” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012).
communication, December 7, 2012). I found that both of these participants seemed overwhelmed by the expectations that were placed on them by the district to lower the number of suspensions and expulsions. They both harbored feelings of frustration because they knew about the mandates but wondered if they were realistic to their situations.

Participants Stephen, Thomas, and June shared their discipline reports from the district with their staff members on a monthly basis. June asserted, “I want my staff to be aware of what we are doing, I do see the eyes rolling at me, but these are our kids, and this is our discipline story” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). She further offered,

We are told to lower the number but with limited support, and it seems at times that directives are given without looking at each school on a case by case manner in order to come up with a plan to help. (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012)

The struggle to communicate with the students in positive ways both inside and outside of the classroom has led the district to mandate culturally responsive training and discipline training for all schools to attend with teams. Lisa commented,

I do use the culturally responsive strategies and encourage the staff but not everyone is on board. It is also frustrating because we get good programs, but they don’t stick, and we are back at ground zero with discipline. (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012)
The pressures that the participants experienced from the district mandates lead to an area that seemed to influence all of our discussions, and that factor was staff expectations.

**Staff Expectations**

The participants throughout this study have referenced the connection between the staff’s expectations and their practices. I, too, agree with the participants that this is an area of our work that plays a major role in how we conduct our leadership, while at the same time it can also be a source of great stress. Alexis declared, “I sometimes question if I am here to satisfy the teachers or educate the children. I know that we have to manage our teachers, but sometimes they demand that we give in to their needs over the children” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). Like Alexis, June was also very passionate:

> We are under so much pressure to keep everyone happy at the detriment of the students at times. I struggle with this every day. It eats at me. What keeps me going is knowing that I have the skills and the systems in place to keep them happy and look out for my students. (June, personal communication, December 7, 2012)

The expectations of the staff based upon the participants’ responses seemed to center on their punishing students that their colleagues felt were inappropriate. Savanah asserted, “I had teachers file grievances on me because they felt that I was defending the students over them. This is not a battle. It is about fairness and equity with me” (Savanah, personal communication, December 7, 2012). I discovered an undertone that seemed to resonate with the participants in different forms. They were engaged in conflicts with
their staff because of their beliefs that the students should be inside of the classrooms. The threat of the teachers’ union becoming involved was an unspoken line in the sand that the participants were reluctant to step over unless they really had to. Lisa told,

   I try to keep the peace and model for the teacher’s positive ways to communicate with even the toughest kid. Sometimes it just doesn’t work and I have to suspend the student against my will because it’s my job. I know the union won’t be far behind if I don’t do something. (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012)

This assertion helped me to understand that the pressure from the staff could override participant beliefs and the main factor was limiting the interactions with the teachers’ union who would point out that the participants were in some way negligent.

Two of the participants admitted that they did whatever it took to keep their staff members happy even if it meant giving in to a suspension that they knew was wrong. Both of these participants asked that their direct quotes about this matter not be included and I am thus offering my summary of their sentiments out of respect for their privacy. I was informed by both participants that I could summarize the fact that they feel conflicted about their positions and at times feel that this is an area of weakness for them in their leadership because they are succumbing to the threats of the group. This insight provided a raw examination of how these two participants dealt with the tensions from their respective staffs by making them feel as though they are in control when it comes to having students sent out of their classrooms and punished. These professional pressures
were real and offered another opportunity for understanding the pressures that staff expectations could have on school leaders.

Three of the participants expressed the importance of getting to a place where the staff would buy into the notion of the restorative justice model. This model is being implemented in the district and seeks to utilize other strategies besides suspensions to encourage students to make different decisions about their behavior. Savanah voiced,

I am working desperately with my staff to implement the restorative justice model. We are using culturally responsive strategies but we need more help. I want to see us move away from having any suspensions at all. (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012)

This participant was clear that she was willing to do what it took to get her staff on board but knew that there were going to be some resisters. Stephen stated:

Wow, if I could get to the level of having my teachers look at what they are doing and just talk to the kids, I mean ask them; talk to them about what is bothering them, it would really turn things around for all of us and there would be no need to suspend students. (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012)

I discovered the idea that the staff and the participants could one day be on the same level with discipline seemed to be more of a dream than a reality. All six of the participants were conflicted with how to deal with the staff expectations while managing the needs of their students. I was able to determine with certainty that this is an area of the discussion that does not have an easy solution and will continue to be an area that the participants and their successors will struggle with. The challenges of staff expectations
leads directly into a discussion about how these issues affect the relationships with students, parents, and community members.

**Relationships with Students and Parents**

The participants all discussed the connection between their disciplinary decisions and the relationships that they established with students, parents, and community members. Both of the male participants discussed this topic in great detail and were very open with their desires to bridge the gap between the school, students, and parents. Stephen declared, “I know how I felt as a kid growing up, and it is a bad feeling to not feel as though you are a part of the school” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012). This participant related his early life with how his students felt when they were sent out of the classroom. Stephen asserted, “I want my school to be a place where the students and their parents want to come. I know they don’t like hearing from us only when their kids get in trouble” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012). This connection to the students and the parents seemed to also be a major source of concern for Thomas who shared, “I feel responsible to all of my students and community. This is my community and I have to make sure that things are right for all of the families. My door is always open to them” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). Both participants admitted that they do not like suspending students. According to Stephen, “Those suspensions pull us further apart and don’t do anything to correct the students’ behavior. Now, we have a hurt child and an angry parent” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012). Although both participants desired to have positive relationships with their students and parents, they were aware that their disciplinary
decisions would not always be met with a positive response from their students and their parents.

June asserted,

I know that my teachers want to teach the kids lessons about their behaviors but I remind them that some of our parents had negative experiences in school, especially our African American parents. We can’t keep telling them that there is a defect with their children. (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012)

This participant described the protocol that she used with her staff members in order to encourage them to reach out to the families before the behaviors in the classroom were out of hand. She admitted, like the two male participants, that this was an area of struggle because some of her staff members did not know how to reach out to the students because they could not relate to them. This lack of relation I unearthed was passed on to the parents through their children who went home and shared their feelings of marginalization. Lisa related, “I have found that it is so hard to get parents involved when they don’t trust you. I have explained this to my staff over and over again” (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012).

The six participants seemed to all have similar views about the importance of building trust with the students and their parents. The breakdown of communication between the school, students, and parents suggested another layer of pressure that contributed to the professional tensions experienced by the participants. This leads to the final research question, which will provide an analysis of the types of preparation and
professional development available to school leaders for addressing discipline issues in schools.

**Research Question 3**

*What kinds of preparation and professional development do administrators have for addressing discipline issues?*

The responses from the participants concerning the types of administrative preparation program and the opportunities for professional development related to disciplinary decisions uncovered a triangle of interconnected themes. All six of the participants provided their candid reflections of their early preparation programs, professional development after becoming employed as school leaders, and their perceptions of what is needed to adequately support school leaders once the formal preparation and the random workshops about discipline end. I was able to capture these themes and organize them into the following (a) types of administrative preparation programs, (b) professional development opportunities, and (c) administrative support network.

**Types of Administrative Preparation Programs**

The initial step towards becoming a school leader involves the completion of a university or college based program designed to prepare candidates for site-based leadership. Savanah and Lisa attended programs that were connected to their district’s aspiring administrators’ program. These types of programs afford teachers the opportunity to move from the classroom to the office by working with a group of teachers who currently serve in the same district. Lisa commented:
I was inspired to join the program because they were other powerful teachers who joined. The program was mainly focused on the theory of education. We touched upon discipline but it was not a discussion that dominated our classes. I definitely was not prepared for what I would encounter with student behaviors. (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012)

This sentiment was also put into words by Savanah who was part of a cohort of teachers who moved from the classroom to administrative positions. Savanah recounted, I remember hearing about discipline but it really wasn’t urban inspired if you know what I mean. We got the very basics about how principals are supposed to be the head of the school and discipline was supposed to be handled by us only (Savanah, personal communication, November 15, 2012).

Both participants admitted that they did not feel that their programs provided them with the type of exposure to disciplinary training that they needed to execute their duties. Lisa commented,

Well, back then, we weren’t really talking about the equity thing. It was about schools being multicultural, not all of the discipline data that we look at now. Things are different now and I hate to say it, but I am glad. We needed to have more conversations about who we were really sending out of our classrooms and by far it is the black and brown faces (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012).

June, similar to Savanah and Lisa, decided to attend a university program that provided a more formal type of preparation program. She focused on her feelings about
the limited exposure that her program provided for engaging with discipline challenges. June asserted,

I enjoyed my program but it wasn’t enough. The things that we read in the books did not match what was happening in the real world. We were focused on multicultural education, more than discipline. Yes, that was the buzz word back then, multiculturalism, it almost seemed like we were studying everything and nothing about discipline issues with inner city kids. (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012)

All three participants mentioned the omission of a discipline focus with an emphasis on multiculturalism. They also articulated the same opinion that this was not enough for the tasks ahead of them as school leaders.

Two of the participants worked full time and attended programs that were designed for them to implement the theory learned in the classroom with their work experiences. This model of preparation allowed the participants to work in a school district near the university so that they could attend their classes in the evenings. Alexis recounted,

I was able to work in a district that was in the same city as my university. I must admit that we did not spend much time on discipline. You are really taking me back and I don’t recall much being said except that we needed to make sure that we were able to have safety in place for our students. (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012)
Her lack of memory about discussing discipline in her program provided confirmation of the limited access that she received on the topic. Alexis commented, “Well, I know that we talked about discipline but it was on a superficial basis. I can honestly say that I don’t feel as though I received all of the preparation that I could have used with my job” (Alexis, personal communication, December 11, 2012).

Stephen attended a program at a non-traditional university and, like Alexis, worked during the day and attended classes during the evening and on weekends. He was very candid about his program and articulated,

Well, my program was not a cohort model like some of the others. We talked about the students and discipline from a legal viewpoint. It was all about us making sure that we knew the policies of our districts and the Ed. Codes.

(Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012)

His comments spoke volumes about the absence of authentic opportunities for administrative candidates to receive support that equips them for working with urban youths. Stephen further expressed, “I definitely was not prepared to handle the types of discipline that I have to deal with every day. My program dropped the ball on that one” (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012).

Only one of the six participants attended an administrative preparation program that was focused on preparing school leaders for working in urban settings. Thomas was impressed with his program and felt that he graduated from the program along with his cohort members’ feelings as though they had what was needed to make a difference in the urban districts that they sought to serve. Thomas recounted, “For the first time in my
professional life, I was able to enjoy having courageous conversations about race and inequalities” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). His experience was very different from the other five participants who felt that they were not as equipped to deal with the complexities associated with discipline for urban students. Thomas asserted, “I was part of a cohort that talked about what was really going on in our schools. We could truly connect what was going on with our kids with what was taught in the program” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012).

Thomas was also impressed to discover that his preparation program offered an extended leadership support program. The same professors who taught him in his credential program ran this program. Thomas voiced,

We could sit down with each other each month because we were all principals and share our stories of how we were dealing with our leadership. More than 85% of those conversations were about how we dealt with student discipline problems. (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012)

He described a program that assigned him a mentor who would visit his campus for the next two years and the power of being able to have courageous conversations about leadership and the challenges with his colleagues. The program that Thomas participated in is not the typical experience of school leaders. I discovered that upon the completion of other participant’s respective programs, the support ends, and it becomes the responsibility of the school district as the employers to support their employees. This leads to the second major finding for this research question, which examines the participant’s views of professional development.
Professional Development Opportunities

The participants spoke at length about the importance of having opportunities to engage in professional development trainings. These trainings offer the participants engagement with presentations that expose them to strategies that they can utilize at their sites. I discovered that this particular category was intertwined into many of our discussions about their leadership practices. The participants spoke about professional development as though it was a necessary accessory to their practices. June declared, “I really appreciated learning about the philosophies of Restorative Justice. We have to look for alternative ways to work with our children and our teachers in order to avoid relying upon kicking the kids out of class” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012). June described her district’s efforts to require that all of the sites from elementary to secondary choose a discipline program that they felt would resonate with their community. She further asserted, “To tell you the truth, we don’t get these trainings on a consistent basis; they are hit or miss” (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012).

The sentiments relayed by June pointed to the fact that these participants were open to receiving support with how they execute their disciplinary strategies. Lisa said, We have had culturally responsive training, and it does help to stop issues before they escalate. I will have to tell you that over the years our district has implemented a number of programs that start off strong, but we don’t ever stick with them. (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012)
I unearthed an area of concern for the participants that they felt warranted further attention. Thomas commented,

I think our district needs to have everyone on the same page with discipline. We have to talk about it more often and come up with programs that work. My style is definitely closer to restorative justice. Kids should learn from their mistakes and not be punished for every little thing. I feel so guilty sometimes. (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012)

The Restorative Justice Discipline model that the participants described is designed to have school leaders work with their staff members to implement school wide systems that void the use of office referrals and suspensions. The goal is to work with students and staff members to build relationships with each other that are built on trust and rethinking past practices of classroom removals. I, too, was excited about this model but questioned how we could implement such a progressive discipline strategy with the current climate at our school sites. Our colleagues expect to have students disciplined who are perceived as being inappropriate in their behaviors, and removal from the classroom is usually the first line of defense. Stephen expressed,

I don’t know if my staff will really go for this one. I have shared what I learned about it with them, but there are three people on the staff that keep mentioning the teachers’ union as if I am asking them to consider something that is wrong. I need help with this on a regular basis. (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012)
Two of the participants felt that the district offered great programs but there was no follow through with the implementation. Thomas suggested, “Well it is great to have these programs but we need to get the training all year round. It’s not good to start a new program and then we don’t get professional development past the first presentation” (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012). I found that for all of the participants, the professional development that they received related to discipline was not consistent. The district mandated programs were often presented with limited or no follow up professional development opportunities. Alexis said, “I enjoyed the BEST Training and would love to have the program work at my school. I know that I need more help and consistent help with having the program installed as a permanent part of my school’s culture” (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012). Like Restorative Justice, the BEST program was another program that participants could select in order to support them with positive discipline at their sites.

The most profound discovery was the connection of professional development with their abilities to implement positive discipline strategies at their sites. I discovered that the participants’ exposure to effective professional development would influence the strategies utilized with their school communities designed to promote positive discipline. This insight would lead to a follow up discussion aimed at understanding what principals defined as the support network they needed as leaders.

**Leadership Support Network**

As a practicing administrator, I am aware of the loneliness and isolation that school leaders face. All six of the participants offered suggestions that would assist
current and future school leaders with their leadership responsibilities. The participants, who ranged in their chronological ages as well as professional years of service, articulated the types of supports that they thought needed to be in place. Savanah asserted, “Our district needs to realize that we have to provide support for principals. We deal with a lot, and it is hard to have the weight of the world on your shoulders” (Savanah, personal communication, December 7, 2012). Her comment seemed to resonate with the other five participants. Lisa remarked,

We all have good ideas that we can share about discipline, but we never get time to talk to each other. We really have an opportunity to share the wealth of knowledge that we have right here in our district. (Lisa, personal communication, December 7, 2012)

The concept of sharing best practices was a common theme with all of the participants. Stephen communicated,

I would like to sit down with a more veteran principal and learn how they put their discipline policies in place. I do my best with what I have. I don’t want to look like I don’t know what I am doing. (Stephen, personal communication, December 11, 2012)

Thomas voiced a similar thought:

Well, I think at principal meetings, we should be allowed to have some time to talk to our colleagues about what is working best for them with their students. Maybe if I was allowed time to talk with another principal, I could really walk
away with new tools in my box. (Thomas, personal communication, November 28, 2012)

I found that the participants were particularly interested in having opportunities to discuss their practices and ask questions of their colleagues.

Two of the participants described the benefits of having retired principals come to the schools and serve as mentors for the current principals. June said,

We have some really good retired principals who could come back and work with new and veteran principals. It would be wonderful to have another pair of administrative eyes working with us and supporting us with positive discipline for our children. (June, personal communication, December 10, 2012)

Mentoring seemed to end after the completion of their respective administrative preparation programs. Alexis related.

I know that some of the retired folks wouldn’t mind coming back to support us. I would love to see how they would manage some of the discipline issues that we deal with every day. Sometimes you get frustrated and give in to suspension because you get burned out with trying to avoid it. (Alexis, personal communication, December 7, 2012)

Building the leadership capacity of the participants through an administrative network was insightful. These participants were not only conscious of their leadership skills but also welcomed and desired to have a network available to them that consisted of mentoring, collaboration time, and opportunities to communicate and decompress with their colleagues at principal meetings. The connection to all of these requests was based
on the premise that the district would afford these opportunities to take place. The network would need the support of the school district in order to materialize and function effectively. Lisa declared,

Our kids, teachers, and district would truly benefit from giving principals opportunities to share their ideas with each other. This would make principals feel supported and help the district improve its discipline data, which shows that we are not serving certain kids. (Lisa, personal communication, November 7, 2012)

**Summary**

This chapter provided a forum in which the perceptions of the six participants were heard in conjunction with the guiding research questions for my study. The participants articulated their perceptions of disciplinary leadership. In addition, they described the effects of their leadership styles, how they managed tensions between their personal beliefs and practices, and professional development needs. These perspectives offered deeper insight into understanding how these leaders perceive their leadership and its influence on the disciplinary policies and challenges that they encounter.

An interesting revelation was discovered based on the review of the literature in Chapter 2 and the findings in this research. The participants mentioned several of the same concerns about their perceptions of leadership and how it influenced the decisions that they made about discipline for their students. In addition, the participants discussed characteristics of effective disciplinary leadership and their beliefs about what was needed to sustain positive practices and sustainability of programs that were designed to support positive discipline at their sites.
In regards to the personal and professional influences that impact the participants’ disciplinary decisions, three overarching themes were formed and the participants offered their views of leadership, personal experiences, and professional experiences. The section about the tensions that participants experienced between their personal philosophies and practices led to three predominant themes including leadership style, personal beliefs, and professional pressures. The final section uncovered the preparation programs available for school leaders. This discussion yielded three themes from the discussions with the participants about the types of credential programs available, professional development opportunities, and finally a description of the types of support that the participants themselves identified as necessary assistance.

Consequently, one may not be able to draw conclusive findings based on this study nor can one prescribe a set framework of strategies to ensure that all of the participants would find success with their leadership as related to discipline. However, a focus has been generated and needs to continue if current and future school leaders want to correct the direction of discipline for African American and Latino students. Chapter 6 will conclude my study and offer recommendations for further research on this topic.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to examine the experiences of school leaders who are responsible for implementing discipline for African American and Latino students. My study examined the personal and professional influences that impact the disciplinary decisions employed by school leaders and identified the specific areas of support that school leaders believed were needed to assist them with resolving discipline challenges.

I applied theoretical servant leadership, equity, and restorative justice as three key theoretical constructs to build some understanding of what the findings tell. This chapter is organized into seven sections (a) Discussion of Findings, (b) Implications, (c) Limitations, (d) Contributions, (e) Recommendations for Action, (f) Recommendations for Further Study, and (g) Final Thoughts.

Discussion of Findings

The research findings for my study uncovered the connection between personal and professional influences and their relation to how school leaders executed their disciplinary decisions. The study also found a link between disciplinary decisions and exposure to professional development trainings focused on discipline strategies. What I discovered was that at each stage of their lives, by interacting with people, by being in various contexts, and by quietly observing someone, these principals took something away from that experience. Their leadership was guided by the experiences that they have encountered in both their personal and professional lives. The values, beliefs,
dispositions, and attitudes, along with behaviors congruent with these inner elements of their personhood, either became a part of their identity or were discarded as being at odds with whom they were as individuals. Thus, these participants made decisions about student discipline that was often at odds with their beliefs.

Although a major focus of this study looked at the influences that contributed to the disciplinary decisions made by school leaders, an underlying goal was to ascertain how the findings of this study could help identify the necessary skills to cope with leadership pressures. My study uncovered a huge connection between the challenges of discipline connection to one’s self-identity as a leader. The views that these leaders had of themselves influenced how they executed their duties and framed their leadership practices related to discipline. The participants who saw themselves as members of the community were compelled to avoid suspensions and expulsions at all costs. I was also able to determine that the participants who were not originally from the local community felt a major obligation to follow the rules and also promote fairness. I further discovered that the abilities of the participants to motivate teachers and other staff members to approach disciplinary challenges with more positive strategies absent of suspensions and expulsions was also connected to how they viewed themselves as leaders. A principal is in a unique position to challenge the way schools do their jobs (Barnett, McCormick, & Conners, 2001). The following discussion of my research findings was organized according to the research questions that guided the study.
Personal and Professional Influences that Impact Disciplinary Decisions

A principal’s values matter. Beliefs matter. Managing guilt and frustration matter. The participants all seemed to have an idea of whom they were and how their personal histories and views of the world including how they view themselves as leaders greatly influences how they executed their duties. Participants June and Savanah felt that it was a natural progression for them to move on to leadership roles because past administrators often trusted them to serve as lead teachers. They saw themselves as leaders who were willing to stand in and stand up because they possessed skills that were strong enough to manage their sites absent of the administrator.

Two of the participants did not see themselves as leaders initially but were influenced by entities outside of themselves. Participants Alexis and Thomas were encouraged to go into leadership because of the support of an authority figure who saw something inside of them that spoke to the possibilities of them becoming site leaders. Lord and Hall (2005) built on the development of a leadership identity and wrote that self-knowledge may play a key part in leadership development. I found that these participants were constantly questioning who they were as leaders and how their views of themselves as leaders affected the way that they managed student discipline challenges.

In relation to the theoretical model of servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977), the participants seemed to put the needs of their students ahead of themselves and chose to lead their sites with positive intentions. I discovered that their choices to be leaders were based upon their convictions to use their leadership to support students and to make true change by empowering both their students and teachers with positive alternatives to
traditional exclusionary practices such as suspensions and expulsions. All of these participants served as co-administrators prior to their current appointments. Their professional experiences with discipline played a major role in how they considered disciplinary actions in their current leader roles. I found that these leaders relied heavily upon their past experiences with other administrators and were heavily influenced by their observations. A key component of this theory relies upon the idea that my view of leadership is guided by my desire and conviction to put the needs of others ahead of my own. The participants shared incidents of judging past administrators based upon their perceived view of their leadership. I found that these participants were passionate about how their roles as lead teachers or vice principals exposed them to the complexities of school leadership and to the management of inappropriate student behaviors. I found through the interviews that these leaders who came from backgrounds that included experiences with discrimination and marginalization were willing to be the leaders who would change the current practices. They also found that this type of change did not come easy and could at times be met with opposition from staff members through such avenues as union grievances.

This finding has also been supported by studies that discovered that school leaders utilize their personal beliefs to guide their practices. Begley and Johansson (1998) found that personal and professional values of school administrators motivated individuals and groups to act in certain ways to achieve a particular end. This thought is in alignment with the theoretical framework of restorative justice. This framework supports allowing students to learn from their mistakes without sending them away from the learning
environment. Teachers and administrators are trained and encouraged to teach students conflict resolution strategies that exclude old practices based on classroom removals. School leaders who believe that their leadership should be used to promote positive changes will use this belief to guide their work and encourage others to share their vision. The personal and professional experiences I found were intertwined and seemed to be employed throughout the work of these leaders. The participants seemed to point to the fact that students were being punished rather than taught how to modify their behaviors.

**Tensions Experienced Between their Philosophies and Practice**

One of the biggest challenges facing these participants was their approach to dealing with the fragmented nature of their jobs. I found that these leaders wanted to have a leadership style that focused on being in classrooms and making themselves visible and accessible to both students and staff members on a regular basis. Such work fragmentation would often prevent them from engaging in follow through with positive solutions to discipline issues. The struggle to implement and to promote positive changes in their schools and encourage positive behavior were often overshadowed by other demands of their jobs. I found that these participants struggled with the knowledge that they were contributing to the suspension and expulsion rates for the district. According to Boyan (1988), few researchers had systematically examined the interaction of personal and situational variables of administrators at work. School leaders are often challenged to suppress their philosophies and make decisions that are perceived as suitable for the situations that they are confronted with. A leader who truly believes that all students should be in class instead of at home on a suspension has to silence that belief and
implement a suspension in order to be perceived as following appropriate protocol. These types of internal struggles with personal beliefs and the demands of the leadership role create tension that becomes a normal part of the work of a principal.

The personal philosophies of these participants were in contradiction to the demands of their positions. These participants had a major struggle coming to terms with just how conflicted their jobs were with their personal beliefs about students and the necessity for them to remain inside their classrooms. I found that these participants put on an outward appearance of confidence and control when they actually felt tormented and confused inside. This finding was supported by the work done by Davis (1998) who observed that principals were often required to present a demeanor of calm and control in hostile, unpredictable conflict-laden situations. Their decisions were often made under uncomfortable circumstances that require an immediate response.

It was very difficult for me as a current administrator to listen to the pain expressed by my colleagues. Like them, I questioned myself and often felt that I was making decisions about my students that ultimately left me feeling guilty and empty. There were times during the interviews with my participants that the tape recorder was turned off as we both shared tears of guilt and our anguish over our contribution to the discipline disproportionality that our district has desperately sought to remedy. We consoled each other through this research process, and after each session, I was confronted with the reality that the work of a school leader has been built on the foundation of dealing with tensions. My research helped me to unearth the fact that
school leaders who were successful have established systems within themselves that allowed them to feel comfortable with being in a state of discomfort more often than not.

The participants expressed feeling pressure from within themselves and how the external pressures added yet another layer of pressure. I unearthed the fact that these participants were struggling with their emotions and the charge to foster safe schools that promoted order and learning. I found myself reflecting with each of the participants about the many times that all of us would sit in our offices or cars and cry thinking about how we contributed to negativity in the lives of our students. We had a sense of helplessness and despair when discussing the realities of our discipline polices. My study caused me and the participants to confront a very ugly reality. We struggled with maintaining order at our schools at the expense of the very students who needed to be on campus and in class. We sent these students away because it was our job. The tensions between our guilt and positions of power were very hard to admit to. My study unearthed the fact that school leaders were in a constant state of contradiction with their personal beliefs and realities of their positions. The demands of the job, along with their personal beliefs, were a constant area of challenge for these leaders. The literature that examined the experiences of school leaders and the connection to their practices was very clear. My study found that personal and professional experiences were a definite source of tension for these leaders. Navigating through the desires of teachers, parents, community members, and district officials seemed to be in constant battle with what these leaders truly believed about what was needed to lead their sites effectively towards more positive discipline experiences for students. Hallinger and Heck (1996) agreed with this finding.
through their review of qualitative studies on the relationship between the principal’s role and school effectiveness. The equity theoretical framework connected to my research findings. School leaders have a responsibility to provide access to all students so that they are afforded the opportunity to achieve academic success. Equity is not achieved when students are removed from the learning environment. Like the participants, I struggled with promoting equity. We all believed and agreed with the goals of the framework, but in practice we have often been far removed from the goals of the theory. My study determined that equity was threatened for students who demonstrate inappropriate behaviors. This painful statement is evident by the numbers of students who are suspended and expelled for behaviors that are deemed unacceptable.

**Training and Professional Development Support for Administrators**

The participants for the study received their administrative credentials from programs that varied in both intensity and focus. One participant attended a program that was considered non-traditional and was designed to offer the candidates a microwave-type experience to complete their credential and quickly enter schools as principals. Four of the participants participated in more traditional programs, which offered classes in educational theory and the opportunity for their participation with employment with local school districts as interns. This model allowed them to work full time while attending classes in the evening and on the weekends. Only one of the participants participated in a program that was committed to administrative work conducted in urban schools with an equity focus. Unlike the other participants, the program followed the cohort model and continued support past the completion of the coursework to obtain the credential.
The denial of access to the curriculum was a huge concern for all six of the participants. They all believed that their students deserved to be in school learning and that their removals sent a message that they were not worthy to access the core curriculum. I agreed with their sentiments and reflected upon the countless numbers of educational minutes that our students lost forever when they were sent out of the classroom. Tears of pain again would impede the interviews with the participants at various points. We all shared the burden of knowing that when we endorsed student removals through suspension and expulsions that equity was not being achieved for these children.

The participant who attended the cohort model program felt the most empowered to engage in the work of a principal because of the added three years of additional mentoring. His leadership support program provided a veteran mentor and the opportunities for his co-participants to tell their stories which were audiotaped and transcribed. The five participants who did not participate in this type of program described feelings of isolation and complete confusion when they first entered their positions. I discovered that five of the six participants concluded that their credential programs did not adequately prepare them for the challenges of dealing with discipline in urban schools. They described their programs as very limited in scope when it came to the issue of discipline. I found that the connection between the preparation programs and the execution of disciplinary strategies were interconnected. The literature supported this finding, such as the work completed by Nicholson et al. (2005) who found that it was not
until the 1990s that the link between successful schools and well prepared leaders was examined.

All six of the participants expressed their beliefs that the universities and colleges must do a better job of supporting individuals who decided to become principals. Participants seemed to be open to the idea of having additional support to assist them with managing student discipline issues. Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) acknowledged through their research that existing knowledge on what the graduates of these programs actually did was limited. These leaders were not comfortable asking the universities and colleges to provide them with extra support. I found that these leaders were aware that there were programs that were finally bridging the theory with actual practice.

I discovered that my administrative preparation was the same as the participant who participated with the cohort model. This type of preparation afforded me the safety net to discuss the true frustrations, challenges, and successes that I experienced as a school leader. We did discuss race and the connection to the discipline disproportionality that was taking place in not only California but also nationwide. I discovered through my research that there were many practicing principals who worked hard to complete their administrative credentials but graduated feeling limited in their capacity to deal with inappropriate student behaviors effectively. Discipline was not an area that programs have placed a laser like focus on in connection with student achievement levels.

My research determined that a disconnect existed between the universities and school districts. There is an absence of discussion between the two entities that are both focused on preparing, retaining, and supporting school leaders. The participants shared
emotions that were both hopeful and fearful. They wanted to change current disciplinary practices but felt overwhelmed by the idea of challenging the existing system, which utilizes suspension and expulsions as the weapons of choice to combat negative student behaviors. The findings of Lashway (2003) pointed to a survey which found that 69% of principals felt that their credential programs were out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s schools. The issue of discipline has thus been inadequately addressed and school leaders were experiencing feelings of isolation and despair.

I found myself reflecting on my own cohort members who are currently serving students in various school districts throughout California. My findings continued to return to the fact that administrative preparation programs and school districts had to work as a team to produce leaders who were empowered to use alternative strategies to deal with inappropriate student behaviors. According to researchers Stevenson and Doolittle (2003) the use of the cohort model in a university-based preparation program builds community and fostered collaboration and collective leadership as a way to model the real life of a school. All six of the participants welcomed the idea of forming cohorts where they could exchange ideas with their colleagues and offer support and mentoring for the new leaders who entered the district. The findings of Pounder and Crow (2005) further supported the idea that in order to attract and retain competent school leaders there must be collaboration among universities, school districts, and professional associations. The six participants were clear that their training must be ongoing and must offer up to date strategies that could be used with today’s urban students.
My study found that the topic of professional development seemed to be an area that all six participants felt was lacking in the district. The professional development opportunities were limited in scope and were often fragmented. All six of the participants suggested that the district provide follow up support when different behavior programs are introduced. These leaders felt that they did not have a solid program that they could follow or policies that were clear enough for them to use as a reference point. My study found that the district offered a board approved discipline policy, which was left to the interpretation of each site level administrator. These leaders concluded that having a mentor or serving as a mentor would truly benefit the implementation and monitoring of programs introduced to site based leaders.

The research demonstrated that principals at every site must receive support that would assist them with making positive disciplinary decisions. According to researchers such as Hallinger (1999), professional development was necessary and contributed to the expanding knowledge base of practicing school leaders. The six participants suggested that the district should allow time during principals’ meetings to give the leaders the opportunity to communicate with each other and share best practices. I agreed with their suggestions that the district solicit the school leaders to offer topics that they believed were important to address. They all agreed that the conversations about discipline were limited to receiving reports that showed dismal data detailing the behavioral demise of African American and Latino students. These data reviews were not followed up with effective strategies to support specific sites with strategies that they could use to correct these trends.
I discovered that it difficult to limit my own thoughts about the topic. I, too, felt that we would benefit from having time to meet with our colleagues in a safe place where we would not be judged. The desire to appear strong and successful was an unexpected finding that my research revealed. We were more concerned with the outward opinions of others and refrained from asking for help or clarification when presented with professional development sessions that were intended to focus on discipline. The most revealing finding was the fact that the professional development offered fell far below its goal of giving these participants the training that they needed to deal with discipline challenges. The need for effective and consistent professional development was deeply entrenched in my findings and is an area that the district must take immediate steps to improve.

Conclusions

The task of applying discipline for school leaders is extremely challenging and complicated. It is a topic that needs further attention and evokes feelings of guilt, frustration, and anxiety for school leaders who must also ensure adequate levels of student achievement. The participants of this study shared insights into this topic that has not been prominent in current research which is focused on the work of principals. All six of these participants chose to enter school leadership as a challenge to enhance their skills as educators. They were all confronted with the realities of school discipline and their roles as head disciplinarians. My study determined that there was a lot of support needed to keep these leaders motivated to employ strategies that correct inappropriate student behaviors with limited use of suspensions and expulsions.
The tensions between personal philosophies of equity, justice, fairness, and professional experiences revealed important insight into how these leaders struggled with their lived experiences and their place when dealing with professional pressures. Leaders are often making decisions about student discipline that are not necessarily in alignment with their beliefs that children should remain inside of the classroom and not be excluded from the learning environment. Furthermore, discipline should be utilized in order to teach students positive strategies related to their behavior as opposed to further marginalization from the school. The pressures of reducing school suspensions and expulsions as mandated by the school district and state added another layer of complexity and challenge for these leaders. Maintaining safe school environments and the appearance of supporting colleagues and leading effective schools was a major source of concern for these leaders.

The need to have administrative credential programs that are designed to truly address discipline challenges that exist in urban schools was another major finding discovered through this research. The participants were open to the idea of being assigned mentors during and after their administrative credential preparation programs. My research determined an urgent need to bridge the gap between universities, colleges, and school districts. There needs to be more outreach between administrative credential programs and school districts. Future and current school site leaders would benefit from having leadership support that is available to them throughout the duration of their practice.
Finally, professional development opportunities provided by school districts must be consistent and involve the voice of the school leaders. Effective professional development would involve opportunities for school leaders to meet with each other and share best practices, and allow the school leaders the opportunity to have input with what types of professional development is presented. Affording school leaders the opportunity to express their professional needs would ensure more buy in and lead to more leaders feeling supported and heard. Effective professional development would assist the district with ensuring that all of its leaders are equipped with support systems that keep them encouraged and inspired to implement positive behavior strategies that assist with reducing and finally eliminating suspensions and expulsions except in the case of extreme matters.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. Although the sample was somewhat diverse with regards to age, gender, and racial and ethnic backgrounds, the group was rather small with six individuals participating. The group represented principals from the same urban school district and there was little diversity with respect to their administrative preparation program or their propensity for further formal education. I, the researcher, am a practicing principal with the same district and was somewhat familiar with the participants although we did not have relationships outside of casual encounters during district-mandated meetings. I believe that my position and connection to the participants as colleagues might have led to a familiarity and ease with the interviewees that could have impacted what was said. I believe it may have led to a
higher level of comfort and openness on the part of the participants. Future studies however, should include principals from other districts.

Another limitation was the participants themselves. Each of these principals was extremely reflective about him or herself and his or her leadership experiences related to discipline. For some, it seemed to be part of their disposition. For others it has been fostered by their experiences as lead classroom teachers or vice principals prior to becoming principals. Although self-reflective thoughtfulness is what a researcher desires, not all principals were reflective and results of the study might have yielded limited information with a less reflective group of participants.

**Implications**

The primary purpose in writing this dissertation was to understand how the personal and educational background, preparation, professional development, and leadership experience of school leaders influenced their approach to disciplinary decisions for students. Reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions is directly related to social justice issues within the nation. Such an understanding of those various influences should help individuals in making decisions about whether to pursue the principalship; new and veteran teachers who are currently or will be serving as leaders in urban school districts; schools of education in colleges and universities in preparing aspiring principals; and school districts in supporting their principals with professional development and mentoring support that will assist their leaders with managing the challenges of discipline for students who have been overrepresented with the numbers of suspensions and expulsions. Many urban school districts are in need of school leaders
that can assist them with reducing and eventually eliminating their suspensions and expulsions. A school cannot hope to turn around without talented leadership (Leithwood, 2008).

This study has implications in three areas: for the individual who is considering becoming a principal or currently serving as a principal, the colleges and universities that prepare potential principals, and the urban school districts as they seek to hire and retain school leaders committed to making positive changes with student behaviors. First, in terms of implications for the individual, this study revealed that individuals came to the job of principal with a particular set of beliefs, skills, attitudes, and values shaped and modified over time resulting from their interactions with family, teachers, schools, and the early years of their careers. They brought to the profession their notions of how the school should run based upon their beliefs and experiences. In turn, these values, beliefs, skills, and attitudes affected their approach to disciplinary leadership. It is important that individuals who serve as school leaders understand who they are and what they believe will impact their leadership decisions. They must also be aware that their beliefs may be in conflict with the nature of the position. They may have to execute actions that conflict with their beliefs and go against their better judgment. This tension thus becomes an area of their practice that they have to be prepared to face. There may be times when they step away from their beliefs in order to be successful with their practice.

The second implication was for colleges and universities that prepare individuals for future administrative positions. These institutions should take the background and early leadership experiences of the individual into account in determining the set of
beliefs and values about education and leadership that he or she will bring to the program. In developing learning experiences for students, it is important to challenge them in ways that can help clarify, expand, or modify their beliefs, values, and attitudes as well as examine the relationship to different leadership approaches. Opportunities to provide mentoring for graduates should be in place in order to support these new leaders with what they learned in the program with their real life experiences in the schools. Finally, colleges and universities must keep their information relevant by communicating with current practitioners and sharing their experiences with the new leaders.

The third implication is for urban school districts. Districts have to be aware of the needs of their principals and offer meaningful professional development opportunities. All six of the participants for this study suggested that the district provide consistent and relevant professional development designed to support them. The key is affording principals opportunities to express their needs, collaborate with each other, and design meetings that have a collaborative component built into each session. Furthermore, consistency with disciplinary policies and programs would greatly benefit the leaders with promoting and implementing school climates that are focused on positive discipline instead of student removals.

**Contributions**

This study made a contribution to the field of educational leadership in that it unearthed, through the voices of the principals, how their background, preparation, and early leadership experiences influenced their approach to disciplinary leadership and the added connection of opportunities for professional development to assist them with their
leadership challenges. Specifically, it used the words of the principals to identify the various sources of their values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors as they related to making decisions about discipline as school leaders.

This study also made a contribution in that it raised questions for individuals, for colleges and universities, and for school districts to ask themselves about the support that is being provided for school leaders concerning disciplinary decisions in urban school settings. These questions focused on the need to assist school leaders with knowing who they were as leaders, what they believed, and how those beliefs and values determined how they might approach the leadership of a school focused on confronting disciplinary challenges. In addition, it is important to know how these values and beliefs stand up to influences that are in opposition. In the next several years thousands of new principals will be hired to replace retiring principals or others that opt to leave the field of education. These individuals must understand their core beliefs and values as leaders as well as be equipped to manage the challenges that they will face.

**Recommendations for Action**

From the interviews, recommendations emerged that would assist urban districts with supporting their principals with effective tools that they could utilize in order to manage disciplinary issues. The kind of support that principals need begins with the training that they receive at the universities and colleges. Administrative credential programs must be connected to the issues that current leaders face related to discipline challenges. The curriculum and opportunities to engage with principals who have been
working in the field and have established strategies for dealing with discipline issues should be employed.

Peer collaboration is another area that the principals identified as an area of immediate need. Principals would like to be afforded opportunities to meet with other principals and share best practices. Many times, new principals or veteran principals who are dealing with overwhelming discipline challenges would benefit from learning new strategies, venting their frustrations with their colleagues, or just being heard by someone who understands where they are coming from. Overall, principals were isolated within their schools, and they make discipline decisions based upon the pressure that they feel at the moment in time that they find themselves confronted with an issue.

An additional recommendation was the implementation of discipline programs, policies, and procedures that all school sites follow. Principals want consistency with the programs utilized to support students with positive behavior and ongoing and consistent professional development. Unlike literacy or mathematics trainings where a consultant comes for a couple of sessions and leaves, the principals wanted ongoing follow up trainings where they feel supported and empowered to lead their staff and promote more positive strategies to correct inappropriate student behaviors.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

The following is a list of recommendations for further study that has no ranking of importance or priority.

The first consideration for future study will be to examine the types of administrative programs available to urban leaders who deal with discipline challenges.
Through focus groups, an analysis of these programs and the content covered could offer feedback that could be utilized to enhance the curriculum so that school leaders graduate with a better sense of how to deal with discipline issues.

- Exploring the connection between engaging curriculum and discipline issues. The focus could be on how to bridge the gap between the classroom and the office through enhancing the instructional practices employed in urban classrooms.
- Supporting principals with stress management strategies that can be shared with teachers to minimize frustration and burn out with students who need support with their behavior.
- The study was conducted with four women and two men. The study needs to be continued with gender balance.
- The study was conducted with two White women, two African American women, one African American male, and one Latino male. The study needs to be continued with principals from other ethnicities.

**Final Thoughts**

It was very challenging and insightful to complete this research. As an African American woman who serves as an elementary school principal and the stepmother and aunt to African American and Latino males, I found myself experiencing a range of emotions. It was as if I were looking at my own lived experiences in both my personal and professional lives. Some of the compelling evidence that was gathered was very disheartening, especially fathoming the number of my colleagues who struggle every day
with the complexities of imposing disciplinary actions that are in some cases unnecessary. I saw the faces of the students that I personally sent home on suspensions or referred for expulsions knowing that I had to do my job, and part of it required removing students who were out of compliance with the Education Codes.

For example, one powerful moment was when I had to stop one of my interviews in order to share tears with one of my participants. Out of respect for him and the need to refocus myself as a researcher, we had to take a couple of minutes to embrace our pain and comfort each other by reminding ourselves about why our roles are so important to improve the lives of our students. As the daughter of a mother who endured and rose above the oppression of racism in the form of Jim Crow, I was faced with the reality that institutional racism is still alive and, to a huge degree, is a major part of my work as a school leader. Two of my colleagues, one White and one Black, are in schools committed to equity and social justice because they were the kids who integrated segregated schools. I discovered as school leaders that our history follows us wherever we go and is always the foundation of who we are and how we see the world.

My study enabled me to take an even more critical and analytical look at how the position of school leaders can be used for good and in some cases for something less than good. Encouraging students to aim for high levels of academic achievement yet removing them from the school is an example of how complex this topic is. It was very difficult to see that efforts continued to discriminate, alienate, marginalize, and isolate with unfairness, and with methods of social exclusion of African American and Latino American students. I further understand that these issues begin for some students in
kindergarten, go through high school, and into young adulthood. This study focused on school leaders who serve in elementary schools where I discovered students had already begun to form positive or negative behavioral identities.

It was insightful to listen to my colleagues describe their challenges on managing their moral beliefs with the demands of their jobs. I, too, struggle with making decisions about student discipline that I know are not the answer. I found that we as school leaders are more isolated than we think. I learned that we are a group of professionals who needed help but have too much pride to ask for it. We want to be seen as the experts when behind the scenes we feel pressure, guilt, and frustration. I discovered that we are a group of practitioners who welcomed support and yearned for consistency and ongoing access to strategies that we could utilize with our students, staff members, and parents to bring about changes.

I know that our work is not easy and that this research will not offer a solution to all of the challenges that we face as principals. I do, however, feel as an African American leader and a parent that there are opportunities for change. As a social justice leader, I know that I have the power and influence to bring about the changes that I would like to see in our schools. Time, commitment, and a vision of equity for all students can be achieved. This research offers an opportunity for those educators who have a social justice stance to influence others and begin the dialogues that will promote change. Our moment is now, and the lives of our students now and in future generations are in our hands. I know that we can find appropriate ways to manage discipline and with continued work elimination of suspensions and expulsions for students.
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Appendix A

District Discipline Data 2011-2012 (K-12)

African American Students (Suspensions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Defiance Suspensions</th>
<th>Other Suspensions</th>
<th>Total Suspensions</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,026</td>
<td>1,605</td>
<td>3,632</td>
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African American Expulsions Total: 30

Latino American Students (Suspensions)

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<th>Defiance Suspensions</th>
<th>Other Suspensions</th>
<th>Total Suspensions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1,726</td>
<td>1,356</td>
<td>3,088</td>
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</table>

Latino American Expulsions Total: 22

Source: California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS)
Appendix B

Glossary of Terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure a common understanding of the key terms used in this study.

- **Discipline issues** are defined as school disengagement, represented by defiant conduct (Garcia-Reid, Reid, & Peterson, 2005).

- **Marginalization** is a term used for a group of individuals who have been socially isolated by others by a set of established norms (Marshall & Oliva, 2006).

- **Restorative Justice** involves probing beyond retribution to discover deeper solutions to heal damaged relationships. Healing the harm to relationships is critical to the need to respond to any behavior that interferes with building or maintaining the dignity of individuals (Cavanagh, 2009).

- **Servant Leadership** is a leadership model first pioneered by Robert Greenleaf. According to Greenleaf (1977) and Greenleaf and Spears (2002), servant leaders were those who desired to serve others before themselves. The difference between servant leadership and other collaborative leadership styles is that the leadership manifests itself in the care taken by the servant leader to ensure others’ priorities are being met. It is this conscious choice that inspires one to lead. In his work, Greenleaf (1977) described leaders as those who could change society in lasting ways.