Factors Potentially Influencing Suspensions in an Affiliated Charter High School

Debra Denise Bryant

BA, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The disproportionate suspension rates of certain student groups are a concern that a school district in Southern California is currently facing. One particular high school, SF Affiliated Charter High School was cited by the Office of Civil Rights for suspending African American males at greater rates than all other student groups. This led to an investigation conducted by the Office of Civil Rights, a sub agency of the United States Department of Education to determine what was contributing to this dynamic. The purpose of this study was to investigate how characteristics including gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, may predict the likelihood of being suspended. Guided by Bandura’s social learning theory, this correlational study, specifically an explanatory research design, examined archival discipline data for 1570 students who received at least one discipline referral and/or one suspension during the 2013-2014 school year. Regression analyses indicated students who were Black, male, and living in poverty were at significantly greater risk of being issued an office referral or suspension than other student groups. By understanding the patterns of discipline outcomes associated with factors that could potentially predict suspensions, school administrators are now able to provide culturally responsive strategies to address students’ academic, social, and emotional needs. Over time, these practices may lead to positive student outcomes including a reduction in suspension rates and increased academic achievement.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Office of Civil Rights, a sub agency of the United States Department of Education, with a primary focus to protect students from discrimination, revealed that school personnel in an affiliated charter urban high school using the pseudonym (SF) located in Southern California is consistently implementing suspension and expulsion to address behavioral issues (United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2012). Specifically, significant concerns have been raised with regard to African American students. Some of the concerns are that students who receive multiple suspensions tend to participate in fewer extracurricular activities, have poor attendance, add to delinquent behavior within the community, and are more likely to be placed in special education programs (Hendricks, Sale, Evans, McKinley, & Delozier-Carter. 2010). According to the American Civil Liberties Union (2016), frequent suspensions prime students for entry into what has commonly been referred to as the school-to prison pipeline.

Ideally public schools aim to ensure that educational leaders provide a free and appropriate education to all students regardless of gender, socio-economic status, or ethnicity. Unfortunately, this is far from a reality, especially as it relates to racial and ethnic groups (Skiba, Horner, Choong-Geun, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011). Educational leaders seem to direct their focus on academic results and the achievement gap between minority students and their white counterparts; however, the disproportionate representation of discipline consequences issued to ethnic minority students receives much less attention (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Within the last decade, educational reform has focused on closing the achievement gap rather than correcting the inequalities that exist in education. Jensen (2013), believes that closing the achievement gap will not occur until the issue of social inequality has been eliminated. The United States Department Justice, Civil Rights Division and the United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights recognized that social injustice in schools needed to be addressed, on January 28, 2014 the United States Secretary of Education, issued a letter to assist public schools outlining the need to exam their discipline policies (Duncan, 2014). The letter indicated that the disproportionate use of suspension and expulsion for students of color and those with disabilities would be seen as discrimination and school districts would be subject to civil law suits (Epstein, 2014).

Recent national reports have documented concerns involving the use of school suspensions. Some of the most commonly used punitive discipline practices are discipline referrals, detention, and suspension (Academy of American Pediatrics, 2013). Losen and Martinez (2013) reviewed data from over 26,000 middle and high schools and it was estimated that over two million secondary students or one in nine were suspended during the 2009-2010 school year. In the same study 2,600 individual schools report suspending over 25% of the entire student population (Losen & Martinez, 2013). The study showed that although some students were suspended multiple times they were only counted once (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). While making a threat or bringing a weapon to school lead to suspension more reliably, these represent a small percentage of actual school behavior (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2012). Data from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) indicated that suspensions increase the likelihood that students will repeat the same behaviors, become truant, fail to graduate, develop substance abuse issues and possibly enter the juvenile justice center (OSSE, 2013).

Losen and Skiba (2010) and the March 2012, publication of the United States Department of Education Civil Rights Data (2012) indicate that the overrepresentation of African American students in school discipline consequences continues to be prevalent and the suspension numbers appear to be increasing over time. Thus, although the odds of a single minor or moderate discipline incident leading to school suspension are lower, the high volume of minor and subjective discipline infractions ensures that a greater percentage of out of school suspensions (Gregory, et.al, 2010). During the 2011-2012 school year, 1.2 million African American students were suspended nationally (Smith and Harper, 2015). Some disciplinary outcomes of suspension are not simply a direct relationship of student and behavioral characteristics, but are also in part determined by teacher attitude and the principal attitude toward discipline (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011).

A study conducted by Stanford Psychologists Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015), that teachers are more likely to view infractions of black students as a pattern rather than isolated incidents of misbehavior. Welch and Payne (2010) found that schools with higher number of African American students enrolled are more likely to have higher rates of suspensions, court action, and zero tolerance policies. A number of possible hypotheses are proposed as mechanisms to account for the disciplinary disparity and its relationship to race, socioeconomic status, and the issuance of discipline referrals (Skiba et al., 2011). Butler, Palardy, and Rumberger (2015), researchers from the University of California conducted a study examining the effects of socioeconomic, racial, and linguistic segregation on academic learning and student discipline in American high schools. The study found that highly segregated schools are linked to having disproportionate suspension rates and gaps in student-academic achievement, with black, Hispanic, and students with low socioeconomic status most significantly impacted.

The purpose of this study was to identify and understand if factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and discipline referrals affect the likelihood that a student was suspended from SF affiliated charter high school. A quantitative approach was used to address the study problem, using an explanatory, correlational design. This design was used to identify statistically significant factors associated with the disproportionate suspensions of identified groups of students. Specifically, significant concerns have been raised with regard to schools commonly issuing suspensions to African American students for defiant behavior (United States Department of Education, 2012). During the 2012-2013 school year, 4.6% of white students, as compared to 16.4% of black students received a suspension. When examining race and gender it was found that African American boys and girls have higher suspension rates than any of their peers ( ). The increasing use of suspensions and expulsions for African American students is concerning because it is unclear if suspensions change the student s’ behavior, improve their attitude toward school, deter them from associating with the wrong crowd or improve the safety of the school.

Rationale

The disproportionate number of African American students in suspension and expulsion are two to three times higher than the suspension rates for other ethnic groups at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2011). In California, nearly 366,629 students are suspended and 9,553 students are expelled resulting in a suspension rate of 5.7% and an expulsion rate of .01 % (California Department of Education, 2013). Further review of the data indicates that there are some differences in suspension rates at which some student groups are suspended. African American students make up 6.5% of the total enrollment with a suspension rate of 19 % (California Department of Education, 2014). At the school site under study, the current suspension rate for African American students at SF affiliated charter high school is 4.4% when compared to a high school located in Northern California. For this study the use the pseudonym ABC high school in Alameda County and their suspension rate for African American students is currently 3.1%.

In 2011, the Superintendent of SF district met with the Board and in the Spring SF Board adopted a School Discipline Policy and the School Climate Bill of Rights, which outlines requirements to student’s right to a safe and healthy school environment, positive and effective interactions, district-wide commitment to culture of positive and proactive approach to working with students (LAUSD, 2012). The Superintendent of SF’s district uses this as the focus to develop specific goals. One such goal is to decrease the number of suspensions for all students (LAUSD, 2012). The Superintendent of SF’s district is focusing on decreasing the suspension rate for schools with a rate higher than the Districts 0.6% suspension rate, however he noticed that African American students are being suspended at higher rate when compared to other ethnicities (MyData, 2012). The Superintendent of ABC unified school district also notices a gap is the suspension rates between African American students when compared to other ethnicities (Alameda Unified School District, 2015).

Table 1  
The percentage of total suspensions received by ethnic groups in ABC Unified 2013-14.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Ethnic Group | Percent of Suspension | Percent of enrollment in district |
| African American | 37% | 9% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 19% | 16% |
| White | 20% | 28% |
| Filipino | 7% | 7% |
| Asian | 12% | 30% |

The Superintendent of ABC unified is focusing on decreasing the suspension rate for African Americans students in schools with a rate higher than the districts 2.9% suspension rate for African Americans (Alameda Unified School District, 2015). According to the California Education Code (2010), schools have the right and responsibility to utilize suspensions to ensure that schools are safe, students can learn, and teachers can teach. The mildest form of school discipline is used to ensure that students understand school rules and policies. The most secure form of school discipline is used to exclude a student from the campus.

Rules and regulations are set forth in schools that apply to all students, however the challenge for school administrators and educators is how the codes of conduct are administered when they are applied to African American students. According to Morris (2012), when decisions are made about why and where policy is needed, there are certain attitudes, racial stereotypes, and standards that influence the decision- making. Research suggests that when teachers are given the opportunity to choose among several disciplinary options for a relatively minor offense teachers and administrators choose the more severe option for African American students than other students. Morris (2012) argued that in schools where the population is predominately African American or Latino, educators and administrators perceive a “racial threat,” which has been shown to affect their reaction to problematic students and there is a higher likelihood that punitive exclusionary discipline is practiced. The most recent suspension data for SF charter high school during the 2013-14 school year indicates that out of a total enrollment of 2, 263 during that year there were 13 suspensions. There are 157 African American students enrolled and they accounted for eight of the 13 suspensions. The suspension rate for African American students is 5.10 % (Student Discipline Data Reports, 2013).

The current suspension rate for the Districts is 1.30 %, but the suspension rate for African American students is 4.83 % (Student Discipline Data Reports, 2013). There are 12 American Indian/Alaskan Native students account for zero percent of the suspension rate, there are total of 217 Asian students enrolled and they account for zero percent of the suspension rate, there are 112 Filipino students enrolled and they account for zero percent of the suspension rate, there are 1,280 Hispanic students enrolled and they account for 0.39 % of the suspension rate, and there are seven Pacific Islander students enrolled and they account for zero percent of the suspension rate, there are 478 white students enrolled and they account for zero percent of the suspension rates.

The number of students that are on Free and Reduced Lunch is 1,380 and account for 0.80 % of the suspension rate, the total number of Males enrolled is 1,219 and they account for 0.41 % of the suspension rate, the total number of Female students enrolled is 1,044 students and they accounted for 0.77 % of the suspension rate.

These data indicate that there are gaps in the rates and severity of disciplinary actions administered to students based on race and socioeconomic status. School suspension is a reactive a punitive disciplinary practice that negatively impacts schools climates and has negative consequences for all students (Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2009). Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand if factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and discipline referrals affect the likelihood that a student will be suspended from SF affiliated charter high school.

Disproportionate disciplinary representation of African American students is a growing topic that has permeated literature on scholarship (Lewis, Butler, Bonner III & Joubert, 2010). The overrepresentation of African American students in suspension data is a national problem and a disturbing issue to schools across the United States (Stetson & Collins, 2010). Disciplinary exclusions of students have recently gained national media attention (Carr, 2010; Schwartz, 2011). Some of the concerns that have been raised in regards to African American students are lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates, and accelerate the path to juvenile offending (Brownstein, 2010). A study conducted by Horner, Fireman, and Wang (2010) examined the relationship between student behavior, peer status, race, and gender to decisions about school discipline. The study was conducted in an urban public school in a city located in the Southwest. They collected peer nominations and demographic information from 1,493 diverse elementary students. The participating sample was 43 % Caucasian, 35 % Hispanic, 20 % African-American, 1.5 % Asian, 0.5% American Indian, and 0.8 % decline to answer. The collected information was used to examine behavior (prosociality, overt and relational aggression, and impulsivity), demographic characteristics (race and gender), and context (peer states).

The study analyzed key variables that may have influence on how administrators and teachers’ decide to discipline elementary students. The researchers sought to determine if peer behavioral ratings of pro-social behavior, and overt behavior and relational aggression, impulsivity were related to at least one school enforced disciplinary action. This included out of school suspension, in school suspension, expulsion, corporal punishment, alternative placement or some other form of discipline. The study also examined contextual factors such as race, peer status, and gender, to determine if they were related to disciplinary actions issued by school personnel. For example, if African American students or Caucasian students are both judged by their peers as “overtly aggressive,” would one student be more likely to receive disciplinary action based on race? The results indicated that student’s race was the most significant predictor, with African American students more likely to be disciplined than other ethnic groups, including Hispanics, Caucasians, and those classified as other. The intent of this study will be to possibly provide educators with some understanding on how factors such as race, socio economic status, gender, and discipline referrals may have an impact on a student’s behavior and why these factors might be taken into consideration when issuing disciplinary action.

Definition of Terms

To facilitate your understanding of the study:

*African American*: This term refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa ([Rastogi](http://research.easybib.com/research/index/search?ft=contributor_full&search=%20%20%22Sonya%20Rastogi%22&medium=all_sources), [Johnson](http://research.easybib.com/research/index/search?ft=contributor_full&search=%20%20%22Tallese%20D%20Johnson%22&medium=all_sources),  [Hoeffel](http://research.easybib.com/research/index/search?ft=contributor_full&search=%20%20%22Elizabeth%20M%20Hoeffel%22&medium=all_sources), & Drewery, 2010).

*Disproportionality:* This term describes the overrepresentation of a particular group of people in a particular group or system (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2012).

*Exclusionary discipline:* This term describes suspension, expulsion, and other disciplinary actions leading to a student’s removal from the typical educational setting

(Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010).

*Expulsion*: This term refers to a procedural removal of a student, for a longer period, involving a decision by the superintendent and school board (Vincent, Sprague & Tobin, 2012).

*Gender:* is cultural and is the term to use when referring to women and men as social groups

(APA, 2010, p.71).

*My Integrated Student Information System (MISIS):* This term refers to a web-based system designed to help school personnel to use office referrals, suspension, and expulsion data to design school wide and individual behavioral interventions (LAUSD, 2014).

*Los Angeles Unified School District*: Serves almost all the schools in the city of Los Angeles, with a student population of over 800,000 (LAUSD, 2012).

*My Data:* Web based tool that allows school personnel to access student’s information such as test scores, suspensions and expulsions, students’ grades and attendance (LAUSD, 2014)).

*Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):* The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a United States law passed In December 2015, that governs individual states K-12 public education. The law replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (United States Department of Education, 2017).

*Positive Behavior Support (PBS):* This term describes a method for addressing school wide behavioral issues, classroom management, and individual support systems for students with and without special needs (Morrissey, Bohanon, & Fenning, 2010).

*Race:* A social classification enacted on individuals based on physical appearance, which

has contributed to social and hierarchal influences in society (Eisenhower, Suyemoto, Lucchese,

& Canenguez, 2014).

*School wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS):* This term describes a set of systematic prevention processes focused on developing positive and contextually appropriate relationships intended to facilitate the social and academic success of all students regardless of their race or ethnicity, in all school settings and all school types, including alternative schools (PBIS, 2011).

*Socioeconomic Status:* Socioeconomic status (SES) is the measure of the influence that the social environment has on individuals, families, communities, and schools (NCDPI, 2009).

*Suspension:* This term refers to the brief exclusion from school for a disciplinary infraction (Welch & Payne, 2011).

*Zero Tolerance:* Policy that mandates a particular consequence, i.e., suspension or expulsion without consideration being given to the extenuating and mitigating circumstances of the case allows authorities no such leeway (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013).

Significance of the Study

The current suspension rate for African American students at SF affiliated charter high school is 4.4 % when compared to two other high schools located in Northern California, the current suspension rates for African American students are for High School A is four and four tenths and for High School B eleven and three tenths (Alameda Unified School District, 2015). The Superintendent of SF’s district is focusing on decreasing the suspension rate for African American students in schools with a rate higher than the districtss 0.6% suspension rate for African American (MyData, 2012). If this study is able to assist SF affiliated charter high school in identifying a relationship between the variables such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and suspensions successfully, perhaps SF affiliated charter could serve as an example for other high schools that are experiencing the same problem.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Past research indicates that there has been overwhelming interest in racial disparity in school discipline (Butler, 2011). One identified cause of this was that African American students were simply more disruptive when compared to other ethnic groups (Skiba, 2010). However, there was little evidence found to support this theory, thus the impetus for this correlational study, specifically utilizing explanatory research design is to ascertain if other factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and discipline referrals are mitigating factors for students being suspended from SF affiliated charter high school.

The research questions and hypotheses that will be used to investigate this quantitative correlational study, specifically an explanatory design is:

1. What factors are important in predicting the likelihood of being suspended from SF affiliated charter high school?

Null hypothesis (H0): Factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status are not important when predicting the likelihood of a student being suspended from SF affiliated charter high school.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status are important when predicting the likelihood of a student being suspended from SF affiliated charter high school.

1. What are the predictive relationships between race/ethnicity and the total number of discipline referrals a student will receive?

Null hypothesis (H0): Race/ethnicity does not predict the total number of discipline referrals a student will receive?

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Race/ethnicity does predict the total number of discipline referrals a student will receive?

The variables that will be considered to address the research question are: race, gender, and socioeconomic status and will these variables increase the odds of a student that is, African American, Hispanic, White, Male, and Female being suspended.

Review of the Literature

The review of literature relevant to this study includes: (a) theoretical framework for school discipline-Social Learning Theory, (b) the purpose of school discipline and corporal punishment, detention, suspension, in-school suspension, out-of school suspension, expulsion (c) conceptual framework- Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory of Human Development (d)factors that contribute to disproportionate use of suspension (e) school classroom practices in general that impact student behavior (f) ethnic disproportionality (g) specific programs that districtss use to reduce suspensions and expulsions.

In conducting the literature review a thorough, extensive, and exhaustive review of current literature will be conducted. I gathered information through Internet searches, ProQuest, ERIC library databases, SAGE, peer-reviewed journals, periodicals of the Walden University Library, EBSCOhost, textbooks, LAUSD database, and Google Scholar and a variety of key terms and phrases are used in the search, including, *school wide positive behavior support, race, gender, socioeconomic status, discipline referrals, positive behavior support, zero tolerance policy, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), school safety, suspensions and expulsions, African American students and school discipline* until saturation is reached.

**Theoretical Framework**

Discipline in education is rooted in theoretical frameworks that are associated with social, behavioral, and cognitive sciences (Smith & Hains, 2012). Social learning theory, which describes “the process by which society attempts to teach children to behave like the ideal adults of that society”, provided the theoretical framework for this study (Miller, 2011, 225). The social learning theory explains behavior as an interaction of environmental, behavioral, and cognitive effects.

Theorists such as Albert Bandura developed a systematic program based on precursors that lead to aggression. In 1977, Bandura’s book *Social Learning Theory* analyzes human learning and self-regulation and the reciprocal causations between behavior and environment determinants (Ferrari, Robinson, & Yasnitsky, 2010). Bandura’s research focuses on the influence that family, peers, and school have on child development and self-efficacy. He found that family, peers, and school have a significant impact on a person’s life, which includes education, athletics, health and clinical problems that lead to stress, depression, and substance abuse (Bandura, 1977). These environmental factors result in out-of school suspensions and expulsions, which lead to students dropping out and an increased opportunity for delinquency and criminal activity (Anfinson, Autumn, Lehr, Riestenberg, & Scullin, 2010).

Bandura’s ideas influenced B.F. Skinner’s behaviorist framework, which focuses on people learning by the consequence of their actions (Ferrari, Robinson, & Yasnitsky, 2010). Skinner believed that it is possible to change and maintain behavioral consistency for long periods of time. This is known as operant conditioning (Smith & Hains, 2012). The operant conditioning model that schools have adopted is designed to reward students for appropriate behavior and punish for incorrect behavior. Schools use behavior modifications such as suspension and expulsion in an attempt to punish for incorrect behavior.

Behavior modification is the attempt to change a child’s inappropriate behavior by using a behavior modifier or reinforcement. Miller (2011) stated, “A behavior modifier changes the reinforcement contingencies so that desirable behavior is reinforced and thereby maintained while the undesirable behavior is ignored and thereby weakened” (p. 299). This method of behavior management, often used by teachers, is called “planned ignoring”. According to Miller (2011), “This method is used when a teacher ignores a student’s shout out in class, signaling to the student that the inappropriate behavior will not elicit the desired response from the teacher” (p. 234). Teachers must be very careful when applying this theory, as there could also be consequences for observing a student who “gets away” with improper behavior as they are “quickly imitated as well” (Miller, 2011, p.236).

**School Discipline**

**Corporal Punishment the**

Historically, governments, parents, religious leaders and educators have believed that “Corporal punishment was righteous and efficient” and “used appropriately, it would secure or restore order, discipline the body, and motivate the mind, imbue religious and moral lessons, and both punish and prevent aberrant behavior” (Axelrod, 2010, p. 265). For example, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, wooden canes were used to enforce discipline. By the 1850’s, the leather strap was introduced along with the hickory switch. The hickory switch was a thin green branch that was cut by the student (Randall, 2011).

Teachers used physical means to discipline students such as striking the student across the hands or buttocks with a cane, wooden paddle, leather strap, or wooden yardstick (Axelrod, 2010). To this day, the Supreme Court has not made a decision on corporal punishment, it has left the decision up to the states (Slavin, 2010). Corporal punishment is still legal in 20 states (Randall, 2011). The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan (2010) found that states that frequently use corporal punishment perform worse academically than those states that have banned the practice. In the 1800’s European ideas from theorists such as Philipp Emanuel von Fellenberg came to America with the idea that students learn better in a safe environment Students were no longer punished for academic errors, only for misbehaving (Farrell, 2012).

In the second half of the twentieth century, teachers began to look at the causes of student misbehavior and adopted policies such as removing the student from the educational environment, i.e., detention, time out, suspension, and expulsion (Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010). Teachers use these policies to remove a student from the educational environment, thus leading to more opportunities to interact with deviant peers. According to the Center for Disease Control (2010), out of school youth engage in physical fights, carry weapons, use alcohol and drugs, and engage in sex. Detention, suspension, and expulsion lead to denial of educational services and are disciplinary tools that schools still implement today.

**Detention-Discipline Tool**

Detention is a behavioral consequence that requires a student to remain in a certain area of the school for a specific amount of time during the school day (Advantage Press, 2011). Schools impose detention as a way to deter a student from minor infractions such as tardiness, chewing gum, and excessive talking. Detention can be implemented after school as long as the parent is informed that the student must remain after school. The result is that the detention will deter the behavior and the student will choose not to repeat the same behavior.

Detention is only one method that schools use to gain student compliance. Schools implement various methods, such as rewards and praise like student of the month, perfect attendance awards, “caught being good tickets” that can be turned in at the end of the week for some type of prize, while others use more punitive approaches such as suspension and expulsion.

**Conceptual Framework**

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory of Human Development, within this theory he labeled different aspects of the environment that affect a child’s development (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). The different aspects of the environment that affect a child’s development are: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The microsystem is the small immediate environment that the child lives in. This includes any immediate relationships and organizations that the child interacts with. How these groups interact with the child has an effect on how the child grows (Cyr, Euser, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van Ijzendoorn, 2010). The immediate settings are connected through the mesosystem, which describe how the different parts of the microsystem work together for the sake of the child for example, how the interrelations of a child’s school and home life connect. The exosystem includes other people and places, such as neighbors and extended family members. The final level in this theory is the macrosystem it’s the largest and most remote set of people and things that would have an effect on the child’s development, it includes government, economy, and war (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009).

Within microsystems, students’ personal characteristics effect how they perceive themselves, as well as how others perceive them such as family, teachers, administrators, and other students. These personal characteristics include socioeconomic factors, race, gender, discipline, self-control. Student’s behavioral issues may be attributed to these factors and teachers and administrators should take the time out to determine whether the behavior warrants the consequence. The microsystems are nested within the broader exosystem this includes the districts. District discipline policy defines the actions that administrators take in response to students’ behaviors.

Suspensions can affect students’ social and academic development. Under Bronfenbrenner’s theory, development occurs as children shift the way they identify and interact with their environments. Exclusionary discipline infractions can affect students’ development by causing a shift thus changing their academic microsystems. When suspensions are issued, students lose instructional time in their traditional school settings. Following suspension, students may see themselves and their teachers and administrators in a different way Students with multiple infractions may feel unwelcome in the academic setting (Cyr, Euser, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van Ijzendoorn, 2010).

**Suspension**

Suspension is a method that schools use to address student misbehavior. Welch and Payne (2011), define suspensiona**s** the relatively short-term removal of students from school for a disciplinary infraction. Suspensions are used for a variety of reasons. At times, suspensions are administered for a student that has disrupted the classroom environment, fighting, or threats of violence towards other students or staff. Although the goal of suspensions is to promote a safe environment, decrease violent behavior, and send a message that certain behaviors would not be tolerated (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). One disadvantage of suspensions is that school officials may apply rigid disciplinary consequences thus leading to an increase in out of school suspensions where certain groups of students become disproportionately impacted (Evans & Lester, 2012). The principal of the school recommends suspensions and the number of days that a student can remain out of school varies from 7-10 days. It can be no longer than 5 consecutive school days and no more than 20 school days, unless the student has transferred. The Board of Education makes the final decision on whether or not to continue the suspension. A student may not be suspended for being tardy or truant and the school must attempt other means of interventions prior to issuing a suspension (Public Counsel, 2013). The act for which a student is suspended must be related to school activity or school attendance while on school grounds, going to and from school, during lunch, or during a school sponsored activity.

Schools do not have to suspend a student the principal has discretion depending on the offense. Alternatives such as anger management, counseling, or community service during non- school hours, that is, Saturday school or clean up at the local park or beach. There are different types of suspensions that can be issued to a student out of school suspension- the student is prohibited from the school grounds for the duration of the time issued, in class suspension- the student is placed in a supervised classroom away from students to work and discuss behavioral issues, classroom suspension- student is suspended from a particular teacher’s classroom (Public Counsel, 2013).

**In-School Suspension**

In-School suspensions (ISS) are the removal of the student from their regular educational placement and are placed in a supervised classroom separated from their peers. Students are allowed to complete their classwork and are supposed to be supervised by certificated personnel (Welch & Payne, 2011). School personnel utilize in school suspension as an alternative to out of school suspensions to keep students in school for those who seek to avoid school and engage in illegal behaviors.

Often times schools do not have monies in their budget to pay a credentialed teacher during the school day to supervise the students in the ISS rooms and other school personnel such as instructional assistants are supervising the students. Although, the assistants are there to keep the students on task they are not certified to provide instruction, thus students are not receiving the same quality of instruction that is normally provided in the regular classroom setting (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). Data suggest that removing students from the educational environment and have experienced out of school suspensions are 10 times more likely to ultimately drop out of school (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). Therefore, using in school suspensions may prove to be cost effective and lead to less students dropping out because students are able to remain in school and focus on their studies, as well as receive intervention strategies to help them manage their behaviors.

**Out-of School Suspensions**

Out-of school suspension (OSS) is the removal from school for a specified number of days. The goal of out-of-school suspension is to promote a safe environment for students and staff and decrease violent behaviors (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). However, research shows that schools with higher rates of out-of school suspension rates are not safer for students and staff and students who are repeatedly suspended leads to academic failure and student’s participation in criminal activity (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). Students who fail to complete high school can expect to earn considerably less than someone who has completed high school (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). In addition, high school dropouts are more likely to become a part of the juvenile system (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013).

Martinez, (2009), states that school administrators may abuse zero tolerance policies to justify suspensions. School administrators should establish student codes of conduct that is enforced and equitable. This will allow school administrators to use professional judgment and discretion when making the decision to suspend student. Ensuring the safety of students, teachers, and staff is pertinent to maintaining a positive school climate. The administrator’s job is to ensure the acts of misconduct are addressed appropriately. It is therefore, important for administrators must refrain from displaying any indication of allowing disruptive behaviors to occur on their campus. Consequently, administrators are adopting more severe consequences such as expulsion to impose for unacceptable behavior (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013).

**Expulsion**

Expulsion is the procedural removal of a student, for a longer period, involving a decision by the superintendent and school board (Vincent, Sprague, & Tobin, 2012). The expulsion of a student is the most severe form of disciplinary action that school personnel can impose to a student for violating school rules (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). Expulsions should only be used in the most severe cases of behavioral misconduct such as bringing a firearm to school, sexual battery, bringing an explosive, selling a controlled substance, and brandishing a knife (LAUSD, 2012). Expulsions are to be used as a last resort effort when all other methods of interventions have failed, however, with the implementation of zero tolerance policies the use of expulsions has become the norm for many school districts.

Prior to a student being expelled from the school district a hearing is held at a district office. The parent is can bring an advocate or an attorney and the school must provide a 10 day written notice of the date, time, location, rights, and specific facts regarding the case (Public Counsel, 2013). The parent may postpone the hearing for 30 calendar days; in addition prior to the hearing the school must provide the parent or guardian a notice of the right to representation, a statement of facts regarding the case and a copy of the district’s disciplinary rules relating to the violation. These documents may be requested and received in the persons primary language and may request that an interpreter be present at the hearing (Public Counsel, 2013). During the hearing an administrative panel of three independent individuals must conduct a hearing within 30 days of the original date of the recommended expulsion. The hearing is recorded, the school presents evidence, the parent and student present evidence, witnesses to the event present evidence, and anyone who was harmed in the incident presents evidence (Public Counsel, 2013).

After all evidence is heard the administrative panel has three days to recommend to the School Board that the student be expelled from the district. The School Board must examine all the evidence and determine that there is substantial evidence showing that the student violated the Education code while on campus or other means of correction are not feasible or that the child violated a zero tolerance offense, such as selling or soliciting the sale of illegal drugs or prescription medications, Knowingly possessing or using illegal drugs, brandishing a knife, carrying or possessing a firearm, committing sexual battery, possessing an explosive device, and inflicting serious bodily harm on another (Public Counsel, 2013). A student may be expelled for up to one calendar year a condition known as suspended enforcement and the student attends a school outside of the local school district.

Due to the growing concerns of student safety schools have adopted the zero tolerance policy. A policy that allows schools or districts to mandate predetermined consequences for violated certain school rules (Hoffman, 2014). The expansion of zero tolerance policies have come under scrutiny because of its disparate impact on students of color and whether it is truly an effective and fair discipline tool that schools and districts should continue to implement. The bottom line is that exclusionary practices such as suspensions and expulsions send a message that when you break the rules you will be removed from school. Comparably, adults know that they can be sent to jail for having committed certain crimes (Melissa Institute, 2011). Yet, laws are still broken and students continue to be suspended and or expelled. Rather than encourage students to change or stop the misbehaviors, it is possible that the schools are inadvertently telling students, “You are a person so repugnant to us that you do not even deserve our attention or support” (p. 2). It is imperative that schools educate the parents, teachers, and students on how the school maintains school safety and it starts with developing relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

**Factors that contribute to Disproportionate use of Suspensions**

This review is not arguing that zero tolerance is solely attributed to schools disproportionate use of suspension and expulsion. Students bring their unique and individual characteristics into the school environment, some of which may generate negative behaviors (Teske, 2011). Although school personnel generally view zero tolerance as a viable approach to keep students and staff safe, the procedural aspects are broadly defined and are deemed harmful to students and may make schools less safe (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010).

According to Dupper, 2010, a vast majority of school districts in the United States has one or more vague catchall categories that include minor and major offenses, yet they are all treated in the same manner. Because many zero tolerance policies are vaguely defined, they are highly associated with bias when they are used to address discipline problems in school (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). For example, an eight-year student was suspended from her third grade class for two days for bringing a pair of cuticle scissors to open the wrapper on her breakfast sandwich. Due to the school’s zero tolerance policy the teacher believed that she had no choice but to report the students and now this student has a permanent suspension on her record (Brownstein, 2010). Another example, student in Columbus, GA was expelled for talking to his mother on a cell phone. He had not spoken to his mother in 30 days because she was on deployment in Iraq (Brownstein, 2010).

The inconsistent application of suspensions and expulsions is further supported by the impact zero tolerance policies have on racial disparity. According to a study conducted by the United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights African American students are suspended nearly three times the rate and expelled at 3.5 times the rate as White students (Brownstein, 2010). According to Hoffecker, (2013), “The Los Angeles Unified School District suspended 5.9 % of all students. But the suspension rate among Black males, 23 %, was more than four times the rate among white males, 5 %” (p. 2).

The lack of training to deal with disruptive students and cultural understanding create an environment that will increase the likelihood that African American students will be suspended or expelled. There is much work to be done in teacher education programs around culture and how culture affects teaching and learning (Boneshefski & Runge, 2013). The inclusion of culturally responsive instructional practices will help prepare teachers to make connections with their students’ existing mental schemes, learning styles, cultural perspectives, family, and community (Boneshefski & Runge, 2013). Schools do not utilize their in-school resources such as school psychologist, counselors, and mental health experts to work with students and families to help manage the student’s behavior. School administrators and teachers can implement many strategies to create a safe school climate without having to implement the zero tolerance policies.

**Race**

**Effects of Exclusionary Practices**

The adverse effects of out-of school suspension and expulsion are quite profound. The student is excluded from the instructional program and sent home without any intervention and research has shown that schools with higher suspension and expulsion rates are not safer for students and faculty nor do they reduce student’s misbehavior (Lamont, Devore, Allison, Ancona, Barnett, Gunther, & Young, 2013). Disciplinary removal of students has negative effects on student outcomes. According to Skiba (2010), Removal of students does not change student’s behavior; suspensions are associated with school dropout and juvenile incarceration.

There is no data showing that out-of school suspension or expulsion reduce rates of disruption or improve school climate (Losen & Skiba, 2010). This suggests that exclusionary practices are ineffective strategies when addressing certain student behaviors. The belief behind exclusionary practices is that when a student is removed from the instructional program this will lead to a change in their behavior (Losen & Skiba, 2010). However, longitudinal studies have shown that students suspended in the sixth grade are more likely to be referred to the office or be suspended by the eighth grade. This type of purging the school of students with behavioral problems leads to long-term negative consequences for the students being excluded from school.

Numerous studies have found that suspensions and expulsions contribute to students dropping out of school, heightened risks to students’ mental and physical wellbeing (Losen, 2011). In addition, studies have found that suspensions and expulsions contribute to the racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile detention system (Teske, 2011). One organization, *Fight Crime: Invest in Kids* (2009), states that troubled kids do not need extended unsupervised hiatus from school because it leads to the risk of engaging in substance abuse and violent crime (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011). It is imperative that schools focus on building teacher-student relationships because all stakeholders play a role in building positive culture and climate in schools.

**Teacher- Student Relationships-Classroom Management**

Relationships play a very important role in our lives whether it take place in the home, at work, or at school. Students may spend more time in school than they do at home and as a result some of the most influential people that they encounter are educators. It is very important that teachers connect with their students and develop professional relationships with their students. According to Kiriakidis and Lakes (2013), when teachers have a consistent classroom management system where students feel respected and welcomed this saves instructional time and improves the school climate.

The American Federation of Teachers (2010) believes that when teachers codify and explain rules inside and outside the classroom, give examples of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, and develop positive behavior support systems that provide fair and consistent consequences for students’ inappropriate behaviors gives the teacher the ability to control the class and maintain student compliance. However, it is important for teachers to model and promote convivial relationships and ethical reasoning by teaching students problem solving skills and resolution techniques which can be used inside and outside the classroom (Kiriakidis & Thornton Johnson, 2011). Teachers take on many roles in their classrooms and not only do they teach students how to read and write they also teach them valuable social skills which is the unwritten part of the curriculum. Also, when students know that teachers believe they can achieve at a greater level and be successful they will become invested in the learning process and spend their time actively engaged in the learning (Kortering & Christenson, 2009).

**High Expectations for Students**

Teachers need to communicate high expectations for students by engaging them in activities that encourage higher order thinking (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011). To illustrate this teachers first establish academic goals by looking beyond traditional expectations. They invest in students achieving obtainable goals and assume full responsibility for moving students forward to meeting those obtainable goals and taking time to reflect and self-evaluate (Way, 2011). Teachers must also track students’ progress and keep students apprised of their performance. Student progress is monitored and assessed on a continuous basis, and adjustments are made in the teaching and learning process to benefit all students (Brackett et al., 2011).

The atmosphere in classes is derived from appropriate subject content, warm and caring interactions, and skilled instruction. Teachers need support to ensure that students remain on task and behavior concerns do not interfere with the students learning process, thus parental involvement plays a crucial role in a student’s academic success (Brooks, 2009).

**Parental Involvement & Proactive School Discipline Practices**

Parental involvement, in general refers to parental interactions with school personnel. Parental involvement in a child’s education has a strong impact on academic performance (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Parental involvement and the impact it has on student behavior starts with communication between teacher and parent. For example, parents would like teachers to contact them not only when their child misbehaves, but they would also like to receive calls to know when their child is doing well in class (Brooks, 2009). Reynolds (2010) found that the first point of contact between educators and parents should set the tone for the type of relationship desired by both the school and parent. The first call should take place early in the school year to build trust and foster a working relationship between parent and teacher (p. 157).

A study conducted by Hanover Research Group (2012), found that school districts decided to use different approaches such as Saturday school, social workers, Project Re-Direct, direct calls home, and behavior contracts to decrease suspension rates and increase parental involvement as a means of handling behavior issues. A high school in one school district utilizes Saturday school as an alternative to suspension. The school contacts the parent students were given the choice to attend Saturday school or serve the suspension. The parent is contacted and informed of the student’s actions and choice. Parents need to sign paperwork granting consent to attend Saturday school. Those students who fail to attend Saturday school must serve their suspension and the parents and student must attend a conference with the schools administrator.

An elementary school and a middle school in another school district use social workers to involve parents by focusing on home visits, providing transportation to meet school personnel, and allowing more flexible time for parents to meet with teachers. Social workers meet with the families in their homes to discuss possible strategies to reduce negative behavior (Losen, 2012). A middle school in another district utilizes a half-day on site program that is operated by a credentialed teacher in an isolated, on site classroom and focuses on academics and behavior modifications. Parents must meet with the Principal and the Project Re-Direct teacher to discuss placement, program rules, and what the student will accomplish while being enrolled in the program. If any problems occur the Project Re-Direct teacher communicates with the parent and students may only be enrolled once a year (Hanover Research, 2012). An elementary school has two programs for calling home. Initial calls at the beginning of the year in which teachers contact all parents and establish open lines of communication and the second call is an unexpected call called “glad calls” in which teachers contact parents at work and share something positive about their child to share with their coworkers.

Elementary and Middle schools use behavior contracts for at-risk students or students who have been suspended to avoid future suspensions. Students and parents meet with counselors or administrators to discuss the cause of the previous suspension and strategies one can use to avoid future suspensions and develop consequences if the contract is broken. The student writes down the agreed upon consequences, signs the contract, the parent agrees to their role and signs, and the administrator places the contract in the students file. If the contract is broken, the parents, student, and administrator review the contract in a conference and implement new consequences (Hanover Research, 2012). These are just a few preventive measures that some school districts are implementing to include parents in the schools discipline policies.

**Resources for Teachers to Use in the Classroom to Address Student Behaviors**

School districts must implement systematic changes in their approach to discipline and behavioral interventions. Schools that have implemented effective alternative strategies have reported reductions in office referrals (The National Association of School Psychologist, 2013). A study conducted by McNeal & Dunbar, (2010) found that although zero tolerance was put in place to promote student safety. Schools need to establish a universal handbook that clearly defines what constitutes a violation of zero tolerance policy and provide a fair, appropriate, and equitable response.

The National Association of School Psychologist, (2012) recommend that schools utilize a team of people such as administrators, mental health experts, legal, social workers, parents, counselors, community members, teachers, and students to research and develop discipline policies that are provide school personnel with alternative strategies to suspensions. Some of the alternatives that they discussed are: Violence Prevention Programs that include a prevention curriculum, such as Second Step and Resolving Conflict Creatively Program. The Second Step program is used in PreK-8 it is a research based program that schools can implement inside and outside the classroom to teach students core emotional, social and problem solving skills (Espelage, Low, Polanin, & Brown, (2013).

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) is a comprehensive, school-based, violence-prevention program designed for use with children in kindergarten through eighth grade. The program is based on the theory that aggressive and violent behaviors are learned and therefore can be affected through education. The primary goal of RCCP is to increase children’s levels of knowledge regarding ways in which to approach conflict situations, to develop children’s conflict resolution skills, and to promote children’s positive interpersonal and intergroup relations (Zehr, 2013).

The National Association of School Psychologist, 2013 also recommend social skills trainings to provide interventions for students with emotional and behavioral disorders and early interventions that target low levels of inappropriate behavior before they escalate are: Stop and Think (Project ACHIEVE) and Positive Adolescent Choices Training (developed for African American youth). Project ACHIEVE is an innovative school reform and school effectiveness program whose ultimate goal is to help design and implement effective school and schooling processes that maximize the academic and social/emotional/behavioral progress and achievement of all students (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).  The Positive Adolescent Choices Training (PACT) program is designed to reduce the chances that African American and other at-risk adolescents will become victims or perpetrators of violence.

Although the program was developed especially for sensitivity to the needs of African American youth techniques used in the program are applicable to, and are frequently used with, multi-ethnic groups. W. Rodney Hammond Ph.D., Associate Professor of the School of Professional Psychology at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio developed the program. The programs mentioned above provide teachers and students with social skills curricula as well as positive behavior supports that lead to improved student learning where students and staff can feel safe.

**Culturally Relevant Disciplinary Training Strategies**

Although zero tolerance policies were developed to keep schools safe, students are recommended based on referrals, suspensions and expulsions for African American students (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). The need for school personnel to utilize their resources such as the counselors to create discipline panels that includes all stakeholders, parents, teachers, and school staff to create equitable discipline practices.

The importance of culturally relevant disciplinary programs needs to be implemented. The inclusion of culturally responsive instructional practices will help prepare teachers to make connections with their students’ existing mental schemes, learning styles, cultural perspectives, family, and community (Boneshefski & Runge, 2013). For example, one school implemented a partnership program aimed at reducing the suspension and expulsion rates of African American and Latino males.

The school formed a task force of students, parents, school staff, and community members and devised a series of interventions that were student led (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012). The students were trained in public speaking data collection, analysis, provided survey to faculty and staff, conducted focus groups with their peers, and presented their findings to the faculty during a professional development meeting. The administrators took their findings and began to provide intensive support to those teachers with excessive referrals and this led to more than a 75 % decrease in discipline referrals (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012).

Lastly, school administrators should advocate for culturally responsive curricula in lieu of cultural mismatch, unexamined assumptions, and stereotypes (Albrect, Skiba, Losen, Chung, Middelberg, 2012). Culturally responsive curricula will assist teachers in developing skills to understand students’ culture, which will assist teacher in making connections in culturally appropriate ways with students of color and students with disabilities (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012).

**Behavioral Interventions for Students**

Schools offer alternative placement programs for students who misbehave, however the infraction does not warrant a suspension from school (Hanover Research Group, 2012). Some school districts are utilizing time out rooms, Behavior Intervention Centers, Saturday school, and *Genesis*. Time out rooms are classrooms where a student who is misbehaving can be sent to calm down and discuss what occurred in the classroom and possible alternate behavior choices. At the conclusion of the academic period the student is then released and may return to the next class period. Schools keep records of how many times the student is sent to the time out room, the reason, the teacher who send the student, and the frequency (Hanover Research Group, 2012).

Licensed counselors oversee Behavior Intervention Centers (BIC) and students who have already spent one period in the time out room and continue to have behavior issues spend the rest of the day in the centers. The counselor works with the student by providing counseling support and anger management strategies, and also assists with helping the student complete his/her class assignments.

Saturday School is offered once a month and is voluntary for middle and high school students (Hanover Research Group, 2012). It is offered as an alternative to suspension and students must have parent permission in order to attend. If students decide to attend it is for four hours and a credentialed teacher or administrator supervises students. Students are given a campus beautification project or they work on assigned classwork. School personnel meets with each student individually to discuss why they were placed in Saturday school and different choices they can make in the future to avoid being suspended or returning to Saturday school.

*Genesis* is an alternative learning program that is housed in a mobile unit on a few high school campuses in different districts. It is a program for students that have been suspended long term (Hanover Research Group, 2012). A staff member who is working toward their teacher certification and providing one-on-one instruction oversees the program or students are taught through a computerized program called *NovaNET*. Students take career aptitude test, research career fields, and complete a final project in the career field of their choice. Lastly, the Genesis coordinator meets with the student to strategies on how to address their behavioral issues and what students need to do to avoid being suspended in the future.

**School’s Responsibility for Maintaining School Safety**

Schools need sound disciplinary systems to maintain school safety and increase academic achievement (Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2012). In a public poll taken by Rose & Gallup, (2010) parents listed fighting, violence against school personnel, and gangs as some of the biggest problems faced by schools (Algozzine & McGee, 2011). A survey conducted by Johnston, Burke & Gielen (2011), at a high school in Philadelphia reported the following, 12.4% of high school students self-reported being in a fight, 5.9% reported carrying a weapon, and 27.1% of the students reported having property deliberately damaged or stolen on school property (p. 239). School districts adopt codes of conduct to establish rules and regulations of expected behaviors and policies to deal with minor infractions, such as tardiness or chewing gum and more serious infractions, such as assault with a deadly weapon and fighting (Lamont, Devore, Allison, Ancona, Barnett, Gunther, & Young, 2013). The code of conduct provides expectations for social behaviors and informs parents and students of the importance of supporting the district’s behavioral expectations. However, zero tolerance policies were developed to ensure that consistent and firm consequences implemented in schools would provide students with a safe and secure environment (Hoffman, 2012).

**Background of Zero Tolerance**

In the 1990’s most schools adopted a disciplinary approach known as “zero tolerance” (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010). The theory behind the policy was that by banning weapons and threats of violence in schools, a safe climate would be created for staff and students (Brownstein, 2010). Zero tolerance is defined as “a predetermined mandatory consequence that is applied to a violation of a school rule without accounting for the seriousness of the behavior, or situational context” (Melvin, 2011, p. 719). Initially, zero tolerance was defined to consistently enforce suspension and expulsion policies to respond to carrying a weapon, drug possession, and violent acts that occur on a school campus (Welch & Payne, 2012). As this policy began to gain more attention, school systems in California, Kentucky, and New York began to adopt the policy. Zero tolerance was established to enforce harsher penalties against anyone who was involved with the selling or distributing of narcotics, however schools adopted the policy to mandate severe consequences regardless of the severity or circumstance (Skiba, 2010).

In 1994, former President Bill Clinton signed the Gun Free Schools Act. This Act led to zero tolerance becoming a national discipline policy. This policy mandates that if a student is found in possession of a firearm they will receive a mandatory 1-year expulsion from the school district (Skiba, 2010). Since the Clinton Administration has implemented the Gun Free School Act into law some states, board of education agencies, and local school districts, including California, have expanded the zero tolerance policy considerably beyond the scope of weapons. This has resulted in more students being suspended and expelled from school for minor infractions such as tardiness, disrespect, and insubordination (Dupper, 2010). However, the punishment should fit the crime, when the behavior is trivial it should be addressed in the classroom. It is possible, that many of the behavioral problems could be curtailed if the teacher has sufficient classroom management and behavior techniques (Melissa Institute, 2011). All minor infractions should be handled at the classroom level and when this is not possible then the administrator or Dean should be able to assist and support the teacher with alternatives to suspension.

Zero tolerance policies are intended to send a no tolerance message relative to drugs and weapons in schools (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). A seminal study conducted by Gorman and Pauken, (2003), reported, “The advantages to zero tolerance policies include holding the wrongdoers responsible for their own actions” (p. 24). The policy was put in place to arm Principals and staff with tools to keep their schools safe (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). School administrators have emphasized that there are many forms of violence prevention and ways to keep schools safe. Zero tolerance policies were intended to calm the community concerns due to media reports of violence in schools (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010).

**Ethnic Disproportionality in Discipline**

There is a history of inconsistent use of suspensions and expulsion in school settings. The overrepresentation of African American students in suspension data is a national problem and a disturbing issue to schools across the United States (Stetson & Collins, 2010). As Fries & DeMitchell (2007) reported, “Over the last 25 years national, state, district, and building-level data analyzed in the 1980’s by Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson revealed that students of color have been suspended at rates two to three times than other students” (p. 215). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2014), revealed that suspensions and expulsions seem to be common forms of punishment for African American students in American schools for the past thirty years. (Hoffman, 2014). Most of the studies conducted in the past that examined disproportionality found that African American males are more likely than Whites to be suspended or expelled (Losen, 2011). Research shows that African Americans are often referred to the office for being defiant. However, data shows that African American students are not the only students that are overrepresented in suspension data. American Indians and Native Alaskan students are also disproportionately suspended and expelled, American Indians and Native Alaskan students represent less than 1% of the total student population, however they account for 2% of out-of-school suspensions and 3% of expulsions (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2012). Black girls are suspended at a 12% rate higher than girls of any other race or ethnicity and most boys and American Indian and Alaskan girls are suspended at a 7% higher rate than white boys and girls of other races (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2012). Suspension rates for students with disabilities are more than twice more likely to receive out of school suspensions 13% than students without disabilities 6%. According to Losen & Skiba, (2010), African American and students with disabilities are referred to the office more often for disrespect. The study conducted by Skiba, Shure, & Williams, (2011), shows that disproportionate suspension and expulsion rate for African American students is due to the disproportionate number of times they are sent to the office.

**Specific Programs Districts Use To Reduce Suspensions and Expulsions**

Schools have adopted Restorative Justice Programs. Restorative Justice Programs aim to put key decisions into the hands of those most affected by crime and involve those who have a stake in a specific offense to collectively identify and address harms and needs (Hanover Research, 2012).

Schools have also adopted a uniform policy, which helps to improve student discipline and achievement. Supporters of school uniforms note improved self- esteem and other non-cognitive gains. School uniforms provide safety in schools by making it easier to identify who belongs on the campus and who does not belong on campus, prevents gang violence, and reduces theft (Gentile & Imberman, 2010).

Schools have also made changes to their bell schedules to improve discipline, such as starting school later, having two lunch periods so less students are out at the same time, allowing less time between classes, adding additional class periods to the day so students are able to catch up on credits or take classes that tailored to their interests (Bowen, 2010).Schools current overemphasis of exclusionary practices as a response to prevent school violence is unwise and unproductive (Losen, 2011).

Schools have adopted zero tolerance policies to send a message that disruptive behavior will not be tolerated (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Schools have the right to keep their campuses safe, however, zero tolerance policies are used inconsistently and with too much ambiguity to ensure that they are equally applied to all students (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Data on the overrepresentation of African American students indicate that exclusionary practices may exacerbate the difficulties these students already exist in their lives (Welch & Payne, 2011).

This review has found that zero tolerance in some cases does not contribute to school safety or improves student’s behavior; however, there are still some concerns about the fairness and effectiveness of zero tolerance discipline (Skiba, 2010). The concerns stem from the 2001 implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) schools are required to decrease the use of suspensions and expulsions by examining alternatives to suspension and expulsion without sacrificing students’ educational opportunity (Skiba, 2010). Perhaps if schools look into some of these programs they can avoid suspending and expelling students of color disproportionately.

Implications

Based on the findings of this study the project a professional development for all staff that focused on culturally responsive pedagogy should help the staff be more responsive to students needs and gain a better understanding for the cultural differences. This may have an impact on reducing the number of discipline referrals and suspensions being issued to students.

Summary

The local problem addressed in this correlational study was to understand if factors such as race, socio-economic status (SES), gender, and discipline referrals had some effect on the suspension rate at an affiliated charter school. The rationale was based on recent national reports that have documented issues involving the use of out of school suspensions and overrepresentation of African American students and peer-reviewed journal articles that document the over-representation of African American students in a range of disciplinary consequences, including discipline referrals and suspensions. Key terms that specifically relate to the study were defined and cited. The significance of the project study may assist schools in exploring other factors when issuing discipline consequences. Included as well were the guided research questions that were used to guide the study. An in-depth literature review presented key terms, theoretical and conceptual foundation, and an overview of the topics that related to the project study.

Section 2 addressed the methodology for the correlational study, specifically utilizing explanatory research design, an overview of the research method and design, the appropriateness of the design, and the population, and sample. The final portion of Section 2 focused on information about the informed consent, data collection procedures, data analysis, and the validity and reliability of the study.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

Quantitative research is empirical way of thinking where the data are in the form of numbers (Neuman, 2011). The purpose of this quantitative study, sought to explain how one variable affects another. A correlational explanatory design was selected because I was seeking to investigate what factors that is race, gender, socioeconomic status influence the odds or probability that a student will be issued a suspension. In addition the study sought to explain who is more vulnerable to school suspensions that is, African Americans, Hispanics, Whites, Males, Females. Utilizing correlation analysis the data was assessed from an extant database comprised of detailed information concerning all documented office referrals and school suspensions throughout the course of one school year.

One of the most prevailing stereotypes suggests that students of color, particularly poor African American males are more likely to be suspended due to being classified as overtly aggressive (Horner, Fireman, & Wang, 2010). Aside from gender, race, and socioeconomic status, the purpose of this quantitative correlational design, an explanatory design was to explore what factors are important in predicting the likelihood that students will be suspended from an affiliated charter high school, located in Southern California. This study assessed the relationship between race, gender, and socioeconomic status alongside the number of number of discipline referrals and school suspensions being issued to students.

Several options are available to researchers when making the decision to conduct a project study. Quantitative research identifies a research problem based on a need for an explanation of why something occurs or the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2012); qualitative research summarizes results through interviews, observations, and narratives (Stangor, 2012). Mixed methods research collects both quantitative and qualitative data to ensure that they have a complete understanding of the problem (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). There are three ways to distinguish each research design: data collection, data analysis, and reporting (Creswell, 2012). For this study a qualitative design would not provide answers to the research questions because qualitative research questions are stated in general and broad terms, data are collected based on individuals or participants that are observed by the researcher, interviews conducted by the researcher, and narratives (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). The researcher analyzes data into larger meanings of understanding such as groups or themes (Creswell, 2012). Lastly, the report is written using flexible, subjective language (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Mixed methods would not be suitable to address the research problem and action research, which often utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data focuses on addressing practical problems that individuals face within an educational setting (Creswell, 2012).

The research design that was best suited for this study is the quantitative design, correlational design, specifically an explanatory research design. This design was specifically selected because the research questions will seek to discover the simple association between two or more variables. Specifically, because the six steps outlined by Creswell (2012) for conducting a correlational design, specifically an explanatory research design, the researcher begins with correlating two or more variables, data are collected at one point in time, the researcher analyzes all participants as a single group, the correlational test is reported, specifically the strength and the direction, lastly conclusions are drawn from the statistical test results.

An experimental research design was not selected because the study did not attempt to explain whether an intervention will make a difference for one group as opposed to another group (Creswell, 2012). There are no interventions involved in this study. Another form of quantitative research is survey research design, there are two types cross-sectional and longitudinal. For this study, the cross-sectional survey design was not selected because the study did not attempt to examine the current trends, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions (Creswell, 2012). A longitudinal survey design was not selected because the study was conducted in one year and the study did not attempt to examine a trend over time nor was there a follow up (Creswell, 2012). Based on the purpose of this project study a correlational design seemed to be the most suitable approach to answer the research questions and explain the relationship among the variables.

The project study was conducted at an affiliated charter urban high school under the pseudoname (SF) located in Southern California. This campus has approximately 2494 students in grades nine-twelve. The racial composition of the 2494 students enrolled in the 2013-14 school year was 496 Caucasian students which make up 19.9% of the population, 1394 Hispanic students which make up 55.9%, 197 African American students which make up 7.9%, 7 Pacific Islander which make up 0.3%, 116 Filipino which make up 4.7%, 271 Asian which make up 10.9%, and 13 Alaskan which make up 0.5% of the total population.

The school consists of approximately 52% socioeconomically disadvantaged students based on eligibility for the free or reduced lunch program (CDE, 2014). 334 of the student population are classified as English Language Learners, 269 are Spanish speaking, 8 speak Vietnamese, and 29 speak other languages, Tagalog, Farsi, Chinese, Russian, Armenian, and Korean.

The sampling strategy that was used for this study will be convenience sampling. Convenience samples will be chosen because of the participant’s availability and willingness to be studied (Creswell, 2012). The students were identified using existing data sets. Convenience sampling is cost efficient and took less time and assisted me in gathering useful data and information that was not be possible using probability sampling techniques, which require formal access to lists of population (Lund, 2012). Participants with at least one discipline referral and/or one suspension were selected to participate in this study. The study included all students regardless of race who meet the criterion.

The sample size (N=1570) was comprised of those students who were enrolled in SF affiliated charter during the 2013-14 school year and received at least one discipline referral and/or one suspension. The statistical level of significance for this study will be set at p = .05 (Creswell, 2012).

The targeted population included students from SF affiliated charter high school who were enrolled during the 2013-14 school year and received at least one discipline referral and/or one suspension. Students who were issued referrals for afterschool detentions and tardiness were not be included in the study and students who have not received any discipline referrals were not included in the study. The reason why these students were excluded from the study is because the data might not be relevant to assist the researcher in answering the guiding questions. Archival data of discipline referral records for all on-campus and off-campus suspensions for the 2013-14 school year were obtained, in which the identities of both adults and students remained confidential.

All schools within this district are required to input discipline referrals into the My Integrated Student Information System (My Integrated Student Information System, 2012). The study population was developed using data from the MISIS system at SF affiliated charter high school, located in Southern California. The study population was developed from the sample size of N=1570. Specific variables were included in this study to perform statistical analysis. Student’s race, gender, socioeconomic status, discipline referrals, and suspensions were used to comprise the final participant sample. The selected participants were high school student’s grade 9-12th who attended an Affiliated Charter high school, located in Southern California. The mean age was 13.8-19, the racial composition was diverse, approximately half of the student population receives free or reduced lunch, and approximately 400 students are English Language Learners.

For the purpose of this study, no new data was collected and MISIS is a data system that encompasses all aspects of school operations and with this system school personnel have the ability to provide a detailed account of a student’s discipline record (LAUSD, 2012). Archival data was used to collect the data that was needed to complete this study. Prior to gaining access to the archival data permission was granted from the district director in addition a data use agreement was completed and signed by the school district (LAUSD, 2013). The data use agreement is located in the Appendix of the proposal. Office discipline referral data and suspension data were drawn from the My Integrated Student Information System (MISIS**),** which contained SF affiliated charter school’s discipline data. The data is housed at SF affiliated charter and includes data on student’s race, gender, socioeconomic status, suspensions, and office referrals. The archival suspension data and the office referral data are compiled by the school district in accordance with state of California mandates.

In documenting the construct validity, the uses of discipline data referrals were identified as a systematic and standardized way of making informed database decisions about behaviors in school (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010). When working with archival data it is important to note that the researcher does not have quality control, therefore there may be inaccuracies in the data collected (Lodico, Spaulding, Voegtle, 2010). When archival data is used the researcher must try to ensure that the results are valid by inspecting any model, template or documents used in the original collection of the data, as well as consult or interview anyone who had a role in the initial data collection process (Lodico, Spaulding, Voegtle, 2010).

MISIS is a fully integrated data system that keeps track of a student’s educational records from grades K-12 as long as they remain within that particular school district (LAUSD, 2012). Major components of the system include, but are not limited to tracking a student’s attendance, discipline, health, grades, schedules, and counseling records (LAUSD, 2012).

Data within the system contains discipline data from K-12 for each student (LAUSD, 2012). By using the archival data this provided the researcher with a detailed account of the student’s disciplinary record. Without access to the MISIS system, the researcher would not be able to gain access to determine the number of office discipline referrals and suspensions accumulated by all students and all ethnicities (LAUSD, 2014). Utilizing correlation analysis the focus was on data fields within the system that provided detailed information on the number of office referrals and school suspensions participants had received throughout the course of one school year.

The data collection process utilized archival discipline data of students at SF affiliated charter high school within the My Integrated Student Information System (MISIS) for one school year. The data collection process began with a lengthy process of submitting the research proposal to the school district. The proposal must clearly identify key elements and had to be presented in the correct order (LAUSD, 2010). The researcher had to include the Title of the Project, Institutional Support, Purpose, and Research Questions along with the hypothesis, Target population, selection procedure, Instrument, Ethical Procedures, Anticipated Benefits, Burden on Research Subjects, and Data Requests (Appendix B).

This was submitted to the districts Committee for External Research Review (Appendix C). Approval was received from the Committee for External Research Review and Walden University Institutional Review Board and data was collected. Approval was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Committee for External Research Review and data files were made available for access.

Two analytical methods were considered to answer the research questions: logistic regression analysis and bivariate correlations. Each of these methods were discussed as to how they related to the research questions in this study. To answer the first research question: What factors are important in predicting the likelihood of being suspended from school? Logical regression was useful in addressing this question because it allowed the researcher to predict the odds of being suspended given additional factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

The second method that was used to answer the second research question: What predicts referrals? Does race/ethnicity matter? This method of analysis that was selected to answer this question is bivariate correlations because the question sought to determine the relationship between the number of suspensions and race.

The SPSS Graduation Package (22.0) was used to analyze the archival data from the 2013-14 school years which was received from district personnel from the My Integrated Student Information System (MISIS) (LAUSD, 2014). This database contains the following information data on student absenteeism, suspension, expulsion, office referrals, race, gender, and socioeconomic status. District personnel omitted any student identifiers that would break confidentiality and compromise the student’s identity.

For this study one school, an affiliated charter high school, was the focus and one demographic, the data may only be applicable to this school or schools of similar size or demographics, or similar discipline plans. According to Tobin (2011), 30 years of data exists on racial inequality in schools, therefore it would seem plausible to extend the study to the national level rather than limit it to the small sample size, one school, or one district. The choice to use archival data leaves the researcher with no quality control in collection of their data (Lodico, Spaulding, Voegtle, 2010). There may be inaccuracies in the data that is collected because someone else other than the researcher collects the data at the school site with some type of pre-established instrument (Lodico, Spaulding, Voegtle, 2010). The time frame was only for one academic school year, which limits how much data can be collected.

The scope of this study was to investigate potential predictors of school suspensions at SF affiliated charter school. Therefore, generalizing the results to large populations of students beyond the local setting may be limited (Creswell, 2012). However, it may be possible that the sample could be generalized to other affiliated charters with similar discipline data.

Understanding that ethical consideration is the process of conducting and reporting, the researcher will report finding with integrity, honesty, and objectivity (Lodico, Spaulding, Voegtle, 2010). Prior to collecting data, a proper permission and cooperation letter was obtained from the Director of Student Services (Appendix B) of the prospective district and I conducted all aspects of the project study in an ethical manner as outlined by the standards and requirements of Walden University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Walden University, 2010).

The research plan was reviewed and once approval was received I began to collect and analyze data. The recorded data reflected data sources that were used and any steps that were taken to refine or correct the data. Statistical procedures were reported as well as assumptions, limitations, and scope delimitations.

This project study did not involve any human participants; therefore parental consent and student assent to conduct this study was not necessary because the data collection process was part of the normal procedures that took place at SF affiliated charter high school and district personnel omitted any student identifiers that would break confidentiality and compromise the student’s identity, however proper permission and a cooperation letter from the Director of Student Services of the prospective district granting access to the student data was completed prior to data collection and analysis. The researcher will distribute data, collect data, analyze data, and offer reflections on the results (Creswell, 2012). The Superintendent of Schools as well as the Principal of the selected school were contacted to request permission to use the school discipline data for the selected one-year period (LAUSD, 2014).

All documents were kept in a locked, secured location. Confidentiality of the records for the study were shredded to ensure that all information regarding schools and school districts involved remain anonymous.

A detailed discussion of the quantitative research method that was employed in the study was discussed in Section 2, and provided an overview of the research method and design, the appropriateness of the design, and the population, and sample. As well as, information about the informed consent, data collection procedures, data analysis, and the validity and reliability of the study. Section 3, provided a brief description of the proposed project, the goals of the project, the rationale, literature review addressing the project, lastly I discussed the necessary resources, supports, and barriers of the project, proposal for implementation and roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

**Data Analysis Results**

The quantitative data were successfully analyzed using SPSS Graduation Package (22.0). descriptive statistics were used to analyze the frequencies and percentages for demographic variables, as well as, the frequencies and percentages for disciplinary variables. Spearman rank-order correlations and phi coefficients were utilized to examine relationships between the variables. Chi-square was used to examine the relationship between ethnicity, gender, poverty, and suspensions. These tests were used to examine the relationships between student’s race, gender, socioeconomic status, discipline referrals, and suspensions. Graphs were constructed to explore how the variables were related, and the results were analysed and interpreted. To determine the reliability and validity of the data collected from the SPSS Graduation Package (22.0), the data were validated and double checked by the Director of Student Services and a statistician.

**Quantitative Findings**

Data collected for this study were prepared and organized in an excel database and then input into the SPSS Graduation Package (22.0) for analysis. The data were collected utilizing the archival discipline data of students at SF affiliated charter high school within the My Integrated Student Information System (MISIS) for one school year. The coordinator from the Director of Student Services provided the data in an excel database omitting student identifiers. The results of the analyses are presented according to the research questions and the hypothesis.

Descriptive statistics were used to investigate the relationship between the variables; race, gender, socioeconomic status, discipline referrals, and suspensions. Preliminary analyses indicated that referrals and suspensions were related to some demographic variables. Poverty was related to greater frequency of both referrals and suspensions, meaning that those in poverty were more likely to have suspension and/or more referrals.

Suspension and referrals both declined with increasing grade, indicating that students experience these events with less frequency as they advance through the grade levels. Moving from freshman to senior is associated with a decline in both disciplinary actions. Gender was related to referrals, with females receiving fewer than males. However there was no significant gender difference in suspensions. Referrals and suspensions differed significantly in likelihood between ethnicities; however the specific differences were not investigated in preliminary analysis because this was the purpose of the hypothesis testing.

**Descriptive Statistics**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Frequency | Percent |
| Gender | Female | 1173 | 45.9 |
|  | Male | 1384 | 54.1 |
| Ethnicity | AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE | 14 | .5 |
|  | ASIAN | 225 | 8.8 |
|  | BLACK | 192 | 7.5 |
|  | FILIPINO | 120 | 4.7 |
|  | HISPANIC | 1468 | 57.4 |
|  | PACIFIC ISLANDER | 7 | .3 |
|  | WHITE | 531 | 20.8 |
| Grade | 09 | 665 | 26.0 |
|  | 10 | 601 | 23.5 |
|  | 11 | 634 | 24.8 |
|  | 12 | 657 | 25.7 |
| Poverty | No | 999 | 39.1 |
|  | Yes | 1558 | 60.9 |

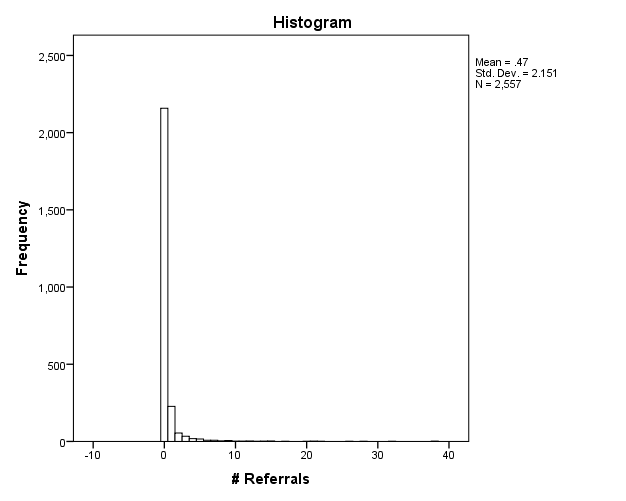
Table 2. Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Variables

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Frequency | Percent |
| Suspended | No | 2510 | 98.2 |
|  | Yes | 47 | 1.8 |
| Suspension Type | CLASS SUSPENSION | 7 | .3 |
| Type | IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION | 32 | 1.3 |
|  | OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION | 8 | .3 |
| Referrals | 0 | 2158 | 84.4 |
|  | 1 | 227 | 8.9 |
|  | 2-5 | 123 | 4.8 |
|  | 6-9 | 26 | 1.0 |
|  | 10+ | 23 | .9 |

Table 3. Frequencies and Percentages for Disciplinary Variables

Table 2 and Table 3 provide information showing that the sample was a slight majority male with 1384 (54.1%) male students and 1173 (45.9%) female students. The sample was a majority Hispanic (45.9%), with the next most common ethnicity being White (20.8%), followed by Asian (8.8%), Black (7.5%), Filipino (4.7%), American Indian (.5%) and Pacific Islander (.3%). The sample showed that 60.9% of the students received met the criteria to receive free or reduced lunch. When looking at the suspension rates (98.2%) of the students had never received a class suspension, in class suspension, or out of class suspension. However, the sample was a majority of students (84.4%) who have not received a referral, with (8.9%) of the students receiving one referral, (4.8%) receiving 2-5 referrals, (1.0%) receiving 6-9 referrals, (.9%) receiving 10+ referrals.

The next step was to examine the distribution of referrals to determine which test would be appropriate when determining what predicts referrals? Do race and ethnicity matter? After viewing the distribution, particularly the mean and variance, negative binomial model was selected as the best distribution type. Figure 1 below shows that the referrals are not normally distributed, and it looks like Poisson or Negative Binomial. Negative binomial was selected as the best distribution type because the variance is much larger than the mean. The mean was .47 and the variance was 4.628.



*Figure 1.* Frequency vs. # of Referrals

Spearman rank-order correlations and phi coefficients were utilized to examine relationships between important study variables. Suspensions were positively correlated with poverty (*r* = .062, *p* < .01) and referrals (*r* = .333, *p* < .01), as well as negatively correlated with grade (*r* = -.053, *p* < .01). Gender was correlated with referrals (*r* = .114, *p* < .01) such that males had a more referrals. However, gender was not correlated with suspensions (see Table 4) below.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Table 4. Correlations between Important Study Variables* | | | | | | | |
|  | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|  | 1. Poverty |  | - |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Gender |  | -.028 | - |  |  |  |
| 3. Suspended |  | .062\*\* | .021 | - |  |  |
| 4. Grade |  | -.041\* | .030 | -.053\*\* | - |  |
| 5. Referrals |  | .066\*\* | .114\*\* | .333\*\* | -.151\*\* | - |
| *Notes: All values are Spearman Rank-Order or phi Correlation Coefficients as appropriate. Poverty and Suspended coded 1=No 2=Yes, Gender coded 1=Female 2=Male.*  \*\* *p* < .01, *\* p* < .05 | | | | | | | |

A chi-square test was used to examine the relationship between multiple ethnic groups and the variables.

Table 5.*Results of Chi-square Test for Relationships with Ethnicity*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Gender** χ2(6) = 13.654, *p* = .034 | | | |
|  | Female |  | Male |
| AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE | 8(6.4) | 6(7.6) | | | |
| ASIAN | 101(103.2) | 124(121.8) | | | |
| BLACK | 78(88.1) | 114(103.9) | | | |
| FILIPINO | 60(55) | 60(65) | | | |
| HISPANIC | 708(673.4) | 760(794.6) | | | |
| PACIFIC ISLANDER | 2(3.2) | 5(3.8) | | | |
| WHITE | 216(243.6) | 315(287.4) | | | |
|  |  |  | | | |
|  | **Poverty** χ2(6) = 138.23, *p* < .001 | | | |
|  | No |  | Yes |
| AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE | 5(5.5) | 9(8.5) | | | |
| ASIAN | 83(87.9) | 142(137.1) | | | |
| BLACK | 80(75) | 112(117) | | | |
| FILIPINO | 63(46.9) | 57(73.1) | | | |
| HISPANIC | 453(573.5) | 1015(894.5) | | | |
| PACIFIC ISLANDER | 3(2.7) | 4(4.3) | | | |
| WHITE | 312(207.5) | 219(323.5) | | | |
|  |  |  | | | |
|  | **Suspended** χ2(6) = 43.616, *p* < .001 | | | |
|  | No |  | Yes |
| AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE | 14(13.7) | 0(0.3) | | | |
| ASIAN | 225(220.9) | 0(4.1) | | | |
| BLACK | 178(188.5) | 14(3.5) | | | |
| FILIPINO | 120(117.8) | 0(2.2) | | | |
| HISPANIC | 1438(1441) | 30(27) | | | |
| PACIFIC ISLANDER | 7(6.9) | 0(0.1) | | | |
| WHITE | 528(521.2) | 3(9.8) | | | |

*Note. Numbers in parentheses indicate expected values.*

Overall results were that Gender was not related to ethnicity; however poverty and suspensions were related to ethnicity. Viewing any of the numbers, the first number is the one that was observed in the data that was collected, and the one in parentheses is what one would expect if there was no relationship with ethnicity. Looking at the number of students suspended by ethnicity, Black participants were more likely to be suspended. The data shows 14(3.5), thus resulting in 14 Black students receiving a suspension. However, if they had suspensions at the same rate as the population overall the researcher would expect only 3.5 (3 or 4) to have been suspended. Thus, the rate of suspension is much higher than expected and the 219(323.5) value shows that fewer White students were suspended than one would expect if ethnicity did not matter.

Quantitative data were used to address the research questions (RQ) in the study.

RQ1: What factors are important in predicting the likelihood of being suspended from SF affiliated charter high school?

* Null hypothesis (H0): Factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status are not important when predicting the likelihood of a student being suspended from SF affiliated charter high school.
* Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status are important when predicting the likelihood of a student being suspended from SF affiliated charter high school.

Specific variables that were included in this study to perform statistical analysis. Student’s race, gender, socioeconomic status, discipline referrals, and suspensions

Quantitative data for answering RQ1 were analysed using binomial logistic regression. A binomial logistic regression model examined ethnicity, poverty, and grade level as predictors of suspension.

*Table 6. Binomial Logistic Regression Predicting Suspension Likelihood*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Estimate(*SE)* | Wald χ 2 | *df* | Sig. | Odds Ratio |
| Ethnicity |  | 17.006 | 3 | 0.001 | 0.000 |
| Asian | -16.041(2637.779) | 0.000 | 1 | 0.995 | 0.000 |
| Black | 2.221(0.66) | 11.325 | 1 | 0.001 | 9.212 |
| Hispanic | 0.953(0.618) | 2.380 | 1 | 0.123 | 2.594 |
| Poverty | 0.807(0.406) | 3.957 | 1 | 0.047 | 2.242 |
| Grade |  | 3.016 | 3 | 0.389 | 0.000 |
| 10 | 0.013(0.415) | 0.001 | 1 | 0.975 | 1.013 |
| 11 | 0.096(0.408) | 0.056 | 1 | 0.813 | 1.101 |
| 12 | -0.796(0.534) | 2.223 | 1 | 0.136 | 0.451 |
| Referrals | 0.143(0.029) | 25.098 | 1 | 0.000 | 1.154 |
| Constant | -5.537(0.678) | 66.613 | 1 | 0.000 | 0.004 |

The oddly high estimate for students whose ethnicity is Asian was due to there being no suspensions for this group.

*Table 7. Binomial Logistic Regression Predicting Suspension Likelihood*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Estimate(*SE)* | Wald χ 2 | *df* | Sig. | Odds Ratio |
| Ethnicity |  | 17.01 | 2 | .000 | - |
| Black | 2.221(0.66) | 11.33 | 1 | .001 | 9.21 |
| Hispanic | 0.953(0.618) | 2.38 | 1 | .123 | 2.59 |
| Poverty | 0.807(0.406) | 3.96 | 1 | .047 | 2.24 |
| Grade |  | 3.02 | 3 | .389 | - |
| 10 | 0.013(0.415) | 0.00 | 1 | .975 | 1.01 |
| 11 | 0.096(0.408) | 0.06 | 1 | .813 | 1.10 |
| 12 | -0.796(0.534) | 2.22 | 1 | .136 | 0.45 |
| Referrals | 0.143(0.029) | 25.10 | 1 | .000 | 1.15 |
| Constant | -5.537(0.678) | 66.61 | 1 | .000 | 0.00 |

*Notes*. *Reference groups are: Ethnicity = White, Grade = 9. Omnibus* χ 2 *(7) = 66.455, p < .001. Nagelkerke pseudo R2 = .160.*

Table 7 results displays the odds of being suspended compared to that of the reference group. The results show that Black students are 9.21 times as likely to be suspended compared to white students, and Hispanic students are 2.24 times as likely as White to be suspended. Referrals were interpreted a little different because referrals were on a numbered scale. Therefore, for each additional referral, the chance of suspension is 1.15 times as high. In other words a 15% increase for each referral.

*Table 8. Binomial Logistic Regression Predicting Suspension Likelihood*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Estimate(*SE)* | Wald χ 2 | *df* | Sig. | Odds Ratio |
| Ethnicity |  | 25.26 | 2 | .000 | - |
| Black | 2.495(0.646) | 14.92 | 1 | .000 | 12.13 |
| Hispanic | 1.011(0.614) | 2.71 | 1 | .100 | 2.75 |
| Poverty | 1.034(0.398) | 6.74 | 1 | .009 | 2.81 |
| Grade |  | 6.01 | 3 | .111 | - |
| 10 | -0.345(0.388) | 0.79 | 1 | .375 | 0.71 |
| 11 | -0.306(0.379) | 0.65 | 1 | .419 | 0.74 |
| 12 | -1.247(0.511) | 5.96 | 1 | .015 | 0.29 |
| Constant | -5.337(0.67) | 63.54 | 1 | .000 | 0.01 |

*Notes*. *Reference groups are: Ethnicity = White, Grade = 9. Omnibus* χ 2 *(6) = 39.971, p < .001. Nagelkerke pseudo R2 = .097.*

A binomial logistic regression model examined Ethnicity, Poverty, and Grade Level as predictors of suspension. Ethnicity was limited to Black, Hispanic, and White, because among the other groups there were no suspensions. Without any suspensions, standard errors of estimates were inflated, so the groups were excluded. The resulting model indicated significant prediction of suspensions (χ 2*(6) = 39.971, p < .001*). Three significant effects emerged as important. First, Black students were significantly more likely to be suspended (Wald χ 2 = 14.92, *p* < .001, OR = 12.13), estimated at 12.13 times more likely than White students. Second, Poverty was also associated with greater risk of suspension (Wald χ 2 = 6.74, *p* =.009, OR = 2.81). Students living in poverty were 2.81 times more likely to be suspended than non-impoverished students. Third, students in Grade 12 were significantly less likely to be suspended than Grade 9 (reference group) students (Wald χ 2 = 5.96, *p* = .015, OR = .29). Grade 12 students only had 29% of the risk of suspension of Grade 9 students.

Grade 9 students risk of suspension being 3.45 times greater than that of Grade 12 students. Taken together these results suggested a much greater increase risk of suspension for Black students compared to White students. Furthermore, risk is significantly increased for students in their first year of high school and those in poverty.

Quantitative data for answering RQ2: What predicts referrals? Does race/ethnicity matter?

* Null hypothesis (H0): Race has no correlation to referrals.
* Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Students of color are more likely than their White peers to receive a referral.

Research question number 2 was analysed using negative binomial regression to predict the number of referrals from ethnicity, gender, poverty, and grade. Negative binomial regression was chosen for this analysis due to the distribution of referrals, which was overwhelmingly zero, with increasing numbers of referrals decreasingly likely.

A negative binomial regression was conducted to predict number of referrals from Ethnicity, Gender, Poverty, and Grade. Once again some ethnicities (Native American / Alaskan Native and Pacific Islander) were excluded due to low sample size and too few referrals to create a distribution of similar shape to other groups. Negative binomial regression was chosen for this analysis due to the distribution of Referrals, which was overwhelmingly zero, with increasing numbers of referrals decreasingly likely. In addition, it was observed that the variance (4.628) was much greater than the mean (.47). This over dispersion usually indicates negative binomial is a good choice. Several models utilizing Poisson and Negative binomial regression were tested, and the final model presented here was chosen due to having the best fit statistics, particularly Log Likelihood and AIC.

The overall negative binomial model included data from 2536 participants, and was highly statistically significant (χ 2(7) = 766.54, *p* < .001). The analysis was conducted with SPSS Statistics version 22 using the Generalized Linear Models procedure. Results are summarized in Tables 9 and 10.

*Table 9. Negative Binomial Regression Model Statistics for Referral Count*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *n* | Log Likelihood | AIC | χ 2 | *df* | *P* |
| 2536 | -1965.484 | 3947.024 | 766.539 | 7 | .000 |

Table 10. *Negative Binomial Regression Parameter Estimates for Predicting Referral Count*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *B* | *SEB* | Exp(*B*) | Wald χ 2 | *p* |
| Intercept | 3.874 | .3895 | 48.118 | 98.896 | .000 |
| Ethnicity |  |  |  |  |  |
| ASIAN | -1.695 | .3066 | 0.184 | 30.573 | .000 |
| BLACK | 1.086 | .1443 | 2.963 | 56.692 | .000 |
| FILIPINO | -.648 | .2676 | 0.523 | 5.86 | .015 |
| HISPANIC | .137 | .1082 | 1.147 | 1.605 | .205 |
| WHITE | - | - | - | - | - |
| Gender |  |  |  |  |  |
| Male | .904 | .0836 | 2.469 | 116.832 | .000 |
| Female | - | - | - | - | - |
| Poverty |  |  |  |  |  |
| Yes | .737 | .0914 | 2.09 | 64.961 | .000 |
| No | - | - | - | - | - |
| Grade | -.581 | .0369 | 0.559 | 247.821 | .000 |

Multiple significant predictors of referrals emerged from the analysis. Ethnic groups Asian (*B* = -1.695, Exp(*B*) = 0.184, χ 2 = 30.573, *p* < .001), Black (*B* = -1.086, Exp(*B*) = 2.963, χ 2 = 56.692, *p* < .000), and Filipino (*B* = -.648, Exp(*B*) = 0.523, χ 2 = 5.86, *p* = .015) all significantly differed from White participants. Asian and Filipino students received fewer Referrals than White students, while Black students received more Referrals than White students. Similarly, Referrals were more numerous for students who were Male (*B* = .904, Exp(*B*) = 2.469, χ 2 = 116.832, *p* < .001) or in Poverty (*B* = .737, Exp(*B*) = 2.09, χ 2 = 64.961, *p* < .001). Grade level was negatively associated with Referrals (*B* = -.581, Exp(*B*) = 0.559, χ 2 = 247.821, *p* < .001), meaning that number of Referrals decreased with increasing grade level from 9 to 12. In summary, students who are Black, Male, live in Poverty, and in lower Grades tend to have more ,referrals. Black male students are predicted to have 2.963 times more referrals, and for each increase in grade the number of referrals is expected to be 55.9% as numerous. Furthermore, students who are Asian or Filipino, female, not in poverty, and in higher grades, tend to received fewer referrals.

**Conclusion**

Hypothesis 1 testing revealed that significant predictors of suspension were ethnicity, grade level, and poverty. Specifically Black students and those in poverty experienced more frequent suspensions than white students and those not in poverty, respectively. Also, grade level 12 students had significantly less likelihood of suspension than Grade 9 students.

Hypothesis 2 testing revealed that significant predictors of referrals were poverty, gender, grade, and ethnicity. As with suspensions poverty was related to greater number of referrals. Referrals declined with increasing grade level. Males received more referrals than females. Compared to white students, Black students had more referrals, while Asian and Filipino student had fewer.

Section 3: The Project

**Introduction**

The findings from Section 2 indicated the need for a professional development that would focus on culturally relevant pedagogy. The purpose of the proposed project would allow all staff to be more responsive to students needs and gain a better understanding about cultural differences, which may result in less students of color being suspended.

In Section 3, I will provide a brief description of the proposed professional development project, including the rationale and the goals for the genre and design. The review of literature will focus on professional development and culturally responsive pedagogy. Then I will provide specific details about the project, which will include the resources needed, implementation process, time table, and the roles of the people involved. In the final section, I will present the plan for evaluating the professional development project, justification, evaluation goals, and implications.

The proposed project will be a professional development training session on culturally relevant pedagogy. Colleges and higher education do not adequately prepare the teachers for teaching diverse students with culturally responsive teaching practices (Siwatu, 2011). Thus, there is a need to provide professional development training for new and veteran teachers in order to help teachers better understand and utilize culturally responsive teaching strategies. The training will integrate the standards of quality professional development by providing teachers with an opportunity to utilize their professional learning communities (PLCs) as job-embedded professional development.

**Goals**

The goals of this professional development model will be to provide all staff at SF charter high school with the knowledge and skills for teaching culturally relevant pedagogy. The professional development will provide staff at SF charter high school a comprehensive model of culturally responsive teaching: a pedagogy that will be implemented across disciplines and cultures to engage students while respecting their cultural integrity. The proposed professional development will be developed to help participants:

1. Cultivate a deeper understanding of culturally relevant teaching strategies
2. Examine the complexity of the neighborhoods where students reside
3. Attain culturally relevant teaching models that may be embedded into teachers daily instruction
4. Learn how to create an environment in the classroom where it is safe for teachers and students to share so that each individual can gain a deeper understanding of how their life experiences shape the lives of their students
5. Reflect on cultural biases
6. Improve teachers understanding about the impact of ethnicity and culture in their classrooms

**Learning Outcomes.** The intended audience for the proposed professional development is all staff members at SF affiliated charter high school. After completing the proposed professional development, the participants should be able to:

1. Define culturally relevant pedagogy and be able to identify what it means to be a culturally proficient instructor?
2. Identify what Culturally Responsive Practices look like personally and instructionally through modeling and instructional scaffolding.
3. Identify the role in which school culture plays in shaping barriers that prevent teachers from contributing to positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes for all students.
4. Create culturally relevant lesson plans that specify ways to continue their learning and understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Rationale

The rationale behind selecting professional development as the project genre is based on the outcomes of the findings from the data collection and the literature review. Both the research and the findings from the data collected showed the need for this project, indicating that professional development in the form of improving culture within a school and providing teachers with professional development that allows staff to work together to implement positive behavioral interventions in the classroom (Flynn, Lissy, Tazarates, & McKay 2016).

From the data collected, one can see that students of color with low socio-economic status are being suspended at a higher rate than their peers. A binomial logistic regression model examined ethnicity, poverty, and grade level as predictors of suspension. The findings from the data analysis showed that Black students were 12.13 times as likely to be suspended compared to White students and Hispanic students are 2.24 times as likely as White students. Poverty was also associated with greater risk of suspension. Students living in poverty were 2.81 times more likely to be suspended than non-impoverished students. To adequately address these issues school personnel need to be prepared with the relevant content knowledge, experience, and training to work with a wide range of students (Hulan, 2015).

The findings from the data provide quantitative data as to why the problem exits, the data analysis showed, that students who are Black, Male, live in poverty and in lower grades tend to have more referrals and were predicted to have 2.963 times more referrals. From ninth through twelth grade the number of referrals for Black males was expected to be 55.9% as numerous. One of the goals of this professional development is to empower the participants so they can cultivate ethnically diverse students’ individual abilities, as well as their academic abilities.

Teachers will be able to examine the quantitative data and use this examine what cultural differences may exist between themselves and their students and how their beliefs could potentially affect the quality and efficacy of teaching and learning (Gay, 2013). This could help to create a link between teachers being able to recognize the role language and culture play in influencing how students learn.

Focusing only on demographics, suspension data, and test scores may not give teachers a comprehensive view of their students. Thus, the need for professional development that can assist teachers in improving their academic instruction and reduce behavioral issues (Owen & Wettach, 2015). Currently, large disparities is suspension rates for students of color and students with disabilities suggest the need for training on culturally responsive practices, which in turn could have positive effects on the classroom environment and reduce disruptive behaviors (Owen & Wettach, 2015). For the project study, the professional development model was selected to provide teachers with skills, tools, and language needed to transform their classroom environments into places where student success is promoted and positive behavior is fostered (Flynn, Lissy, Alicea, Tazartes, & McKay, 2016). In the study conducted by Flynn, Lissy, Alicea, Tazartes, & McKay (2016), utilized the Ramapo approach to train public school teachers in New York. The Ramapo training is a professional development program whose purpose is to increase classroom and behavior management skills. The professional development is organized into a Toolbox containing six content areas in four levels that build upon each other. The first two levels are organized around strategies relevant for all children, they are Role Modeling and Building Relationships, the next two content areas are clarifying expectations and establish structures and routines, the third level, adapting to individual needs, so teachers can focus on children who need more intensive support. The top level focuses on responding, reflecting, and repairing strategies to assist teachers with addressing students in crisis. The strategies in this toolbox are supported by research on effective classroom management and creating a positive school culture. The findings from the study showed preliminary evidence that suggest that the Ramapo professional development training program was related to decreasing disciplinary actions against students and provided strategies to support learning outcomes.

Another study conducted Owen & Wettach (2015), focused on two professional development programs developed by The Curry School of Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning at the University of Virginia that have been shown to improve teacher effectiveness and improve student outcomes. The My Teacher Partner Program (MTP) which is web-based and teachers are able to reflect on interactions with students and meet one-on-one with coaches to develop an action plan to address culturally responsive teaching strategies and to address behavioral issues in the class room (Owen & Wettach, 2015). The other professional development program is the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), this is an observational tool that outlines and measures teacher’s behaviors and how they link to student academic gains (Owen & Wettach, 2015). The studies mentioned provide professional development programs that can aid teachers in intentionally creating classrooms that are culturally responsive where students are engaged and behave in ways that are beneficial to their learning.

The focus of the proposed professional development training has been designed to utilize professional learning communities (PLCs) as job-embedded professional development may allow teachers opportunities to discuss the value of culturally responsive practices, the skills they have, and what skills they perceive they are lacking. In addition, PLCs provides teachers with time to plan, engage in meaningful dialogue, and share best practices for instructing diverse learners.

Review of the Literature

The literature review for the proposed professional development training will begin with the theoretical framework for framing this culturally responsive professional development project Critical Race Theory (CRT), a scholarly review of literature that will examine components of professional development, principles of effective professional development, benefits and barriers of effective professional development, and teacher’s perceptions of culturally responsive professional development. The next section will address effective culturally responsive professional development for teachers to support the needs of diverse students. Lastly, using Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to examine issues of social justice.

For the project study, the online library on the Walden University website provided access to sources from the educational databases of Education Research Complete, ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE and Thoreau. The search began by using keywords *culturally relevant* *pedagogy, professional development, teacher perceptions, minorities, teacher, professional learning communities (PLCs) and culturally responsive teaching, and culturally responsive educational practices, critical race theory (CRT).*

**Theoretical Framework**

Teacher education programs often struggle to provide educators with the tools to teach and support students of color (Cook, 2015). Critical Race Theory or CRT is described as a theoretical method that analyzes the appearance of race and racism in an attempt to understand the socio-cultural forces that shape how people respond, perceive, and experience racism (Brizee, Tompkins, Chernouski, & Boyle, 2015). Prominent CRT researchers such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams confront and challenge the beliefs and practices that enable racism to continue while also seeking ways to overcome systemic racism (Degaldo & Stefanicic, 2013). In schools, as well as, in teacher education programs critical race theory (CRT) provides a needed explanation as it relates to issues such as equitable access to high quality teachers for our most undeserved students (Lynn, 2014).

In Howard’s (2010), case study of pre-service teachers, teacher candidates expressed concerns about lacking the skills needed to address the complex nature of race, ethnicity, and culture. The reason, they explained, was that they did not feel comfortable discussing race and did not want their comments to appear racially insensitive, racist, or politically incorrect (Howard, 2010). By designing professional learning tasks that include faculty members who are willing to engage in critical reflection and racial awareness, having pre-service teachers recognize that reflection is a never-ending process, and recognizing that all aspects of teaching have explicit and implicit racial and cultural implications, pre-service teachers are more likely to develop a conceptual understanding when addressing racial issues in the context of teaching and learning (Howard, 2010). Thus, this professional development project design will create opportunities for teachers to learn and model culturally responsive skills and instructional strategies.

**Professional Development**

Administrators and districts are constantly exploring ways in which professional development can foster teacher learning and how it is expected to enhance their teaching practices (Kennedy, 2016). Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017), refer to effective professional development as structured professional learning that results in shifting teacher’s practices and assist educators in improving student learning outcomes. Professional development, therefore, is a constant learning process, job-embedded, is of sustained duration, and supports collaboration (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). As a result, changes occur in teachers practices which then leads to improvements in student learning (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).

Professional development that is collaborative and job-embedded not only can serve as a source of usefulness for teachers, but can also result in improvement internally at the school level and beyond (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). In education, professional development seeks to not only hold the teacher accountable for student learning, instead use it as tool to revolutionize the way learning and instruction take place in U.S. classrooms (Gulamhussein, 2013). As Gulamhussein (2013) found, in this era of higher standards and teacher evaluations being based in part on student achievement districts have to do more by developing new approaches to teacher learning, approaches that create actual changes in teacher practices and change student learning. Hence, the challenge districts and schools face is how to create opportunities is how to create opportunities for teachers to grow and develop their teaching practice, so in turn, they can help students grow (Gulamhussein, 2013). Thus, leading to the next section where the following are included: principles of effective professional development, characteristics of effective professional development, benefits of effective professional development and barriers to effective professional development.

**Principles of effective professional development**

As Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017) expressed, effective professional development is critical to teachers learning and improving student outcomes. Effective professional development is often seen as an important strategy to enhance teacher knowledge by exposing them to something beyond a basic concept (Gulamhussein, 2013). Effective professional development should emphasize practices that support the skills students need to be critical thinkers and problem solvers (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Teachers that merely keep students working from the beginning of the period until the end is not enough to prepare students for college or work in the 21st century. Schools and districts need to know that professional development workshops that are less than 14 hours, like the workshops commonly held at school sites did not have an effect on student achievement (Gulamhussein, 2013). As Gulamhussein (2013) noted, professional development longer in duration allows teachers to time to apply and practice the skill in one’s own classroom. Gulamhussien (2013), also noted that one study conducted by Levin, He, and Allen (2013), showed that teachers may need as many as 50 hours of instruction, practice, coaching, and modeling before implementing a new teaching strategy in the classroom. Simply increasing the amount of hours teachers spend in professional development alone, is not enough, time must be spent on supporting teachers during the implementation phase (Gulamhussein, 2013).

Effective professional development needs to offer teachers opportunities for learning that is interactive, sustained over time, and be organized in such a way that teachers can implement new learning in their own classrooms (Goodnough, Pelech, & Stordy 2014). It should allow for follow-up and continued teacher support as needed, and involves evaluation and joint participation (Goodnough, Pelech, & Stordy, 2014).

According to Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017), effective professional development integrates most, if not all, of the following elements: (1) focuses on teaching strategies associated with specific curriculum that will support teacher learning; (2) focuses on teachers incorporating active learning, where they design and try out lessons which provides them with opportunities to engage in the same style of learning that is central to student development; (3) creates a space where teachers can collaborate and share ideas in order to create communities that have a positive impact on school culture and instruction; (4) provides coaching and support, experts share their knowledge and focus directly on individual teachers’ needs; (5) offers feedback and reflection; (6) provides teachers with ample time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect upon new strategies that could assist in enhancing their expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, and technology.

A study conducted by Goodnough, Pelech, & Stordy (2014), asked teachers to complete a questionnaire during a one-week institute that focused on how to create action research projects in STEM teaching and learning. One of the questions asked teachers to identify the characteristics of effective professional development and it was found that 90 %of the teachers felt that the professional development had to be connected directly to student learning. They described how the strategies that they develop during the professional development should be practical, meet curricular outcomes, include strategies to address diverse learners, and should include an assessment tool that can reach all students.

The second theme that emerged was that 80 % of the participants felt that it is important to have opportunities to share and collaborate. This was described as having an opportunity to go to other schools and observe best practices, as well as, being able to share and work collaboratively during the professional development process. Goodnough, Pelech, & Stordy (2014), noted that participants also identified having adequate time to engage in the professional development and ensuring that the content presented is grounded by subject matter for middle and high school teachers and by grade-level for elementary teachers.

When planning for effective professional development, Guskey, Roy, & Von Frank (2014) identified the importance of establishing a professional learning community. Professional learning communities may consist of teachers and administrators and should meet monthly to engage in data dialogues to inform instruction, improve student outcomes, and conduct regularly needs assessments to promote and support effective teaching practices and increase student achievement (Guskey, Roy, & Von Frank, 2014). Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017), identified action steps that schools and districts should take when implementing effective professional development. The first step is to adopt standards that will be used to guide the design, evaluation, and funding of the professional development. The second step is to evaluate the use of time and create bell schedules that increase opportunities for teachers to learn, collaborate, and participate in peer coaching and observations. The third step is to conduct needs assessment using data from staff surveys to assist schools in establishing quality professional development that is relevant and meaningful. The fourth step is to identify experts and coaches to support teachers learning. The fifth step is to provide technology to provide opportunities for teachers to have on-going collaboration via online social forums. The final step is to provide flexible funding and offer continuing education units for attending workshops, institutes, and seminars that will provide educators with ongoing support to improve their knowledge, skills, and outlook necessary for generating change.

**Benefits of effective professional development**

Professional development, if implemented effectively can provide some benefits for the participants (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). The first benefit includes allowing teachers to engage in the same learning activities they are designing for their students (Darling-AHammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). As Goodnough, Pelech, & Stordy (2014) stated, educators describe the importance of developing strategies that will assist them in teaching diverse learners. Another benefit that effective professional development provides is ongoing support to teachers (Gulamhussien, 2013). Teachers need support while they make attempts to implement new strategies to help them get through the challenges or frustrations they may face (Gulamhussein, 2013). In addition, teachers noted the importance of having other kinds of supports, such as having the support of the administration, district personnel, mentors and coaches to guide them as they theorize and implement new strategies in their classrooms (Goodnough, Pelech, & Stordy, 2014).

The examination of student work and student data is another benefit of effective professional development. Analyzing student work collaboratively gives teachers with a focus on structured learning that could result in changes to their practices and determine what instructional strategies may or may not be working and for whom (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). The professional development workshop that I designed is an effective way to provide teachers with a new perspective regarding taking risks, sharing failures, and provide opportunities to connect with students cultural backgrounds.

**Barriers to Effective Professional Development**

Professional development is aimed at having a positive impact on student learning and provide teachers with the necessary tools to support student learning (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). However, there are times when the well-designed professional development does not improve student achievement (Kennedy, 2016). There are some barriers that schools face when attempting to implement effective professional development (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Among these barriers are lack of time allotted to learn, practice, and implement newly acquired knowledge and skills; challenges of teaching diverse learners without specific professional development to address students’ learning needs; lack of resources such as curriculum materials and technology; and financial constraints (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).

A New America report from Tooley and Connally (2016) identified system-level obstacles to implementing effective professional development beyond the school and classroom and concluded that there are four areas where improvement is needed to provide effective professional development in schools. Districts need to identify teacher’s needs; develop new approaches that move away from the “sit and get” models and implement active learning strategies that will assist teachers in creating real changes in their practice; hire coaches that have expertise with the teachers’ grade level and subject, provides observable feedback and provide suggestions for improving teaching practices; districts need to create systems to track what is working and why and what is not working and why.

When planning for effective professional development schools and districts will still face obstacles that can affect teaching practices and hinder its impact on student learning and achievement.

**Teacher’s Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Professional Development**

Professional development for teachers should be an ongoing process in which teachers are able to assess their teaching practices in order to support students’ needs (Yurtseven, 2017). As the diversity of this world increases, todays teacher must be equipped to educate students who come from variety of cultural beliefs, values, languages, and different abilities (Mette, Nieuwenhuizen, & Hvidston, 2016). It is important that educational institutions take culturally responsive professional development into consideration because it allows teachers a safe space to explore cultural differences and learn how to proactively work to understand, respect, and meet the needs of students from culturally different backgrounds (Brown, 2014).

Some of the strategies that teachers are able to use during instruction are: scaffolding students’ cultural knowledge and learning styles to create a classroom community that is student centered and provides high levels of support (Mette, Nieuwenhuizen, & Hvidston, 2016). However, it is difficult to conduct a professional development on culturally responsive teaching, especially when teachers have their personal perceptions and biases towards culturally diverse students. In order to become culturally proficient, the research suggests that teachers must experience a personal transformation through deep self-reflection of their own biases, attitudes, and beliefs about others (Mette, Nieuwenhuizen, & Hvidston, 2016). Deep reflection of their own personal histories and experiences could possibly help teachers recognize and overcome their negative biases towards specific groups.

**Cultural Competency through Professional Development**

As demands for deeper and complex student learning intensifies schools and districts are working to create new opportunities for teachers to learn and refine the skills needed to develop 21st century thinkers (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Professional development has to go beyond techniques so that teachers are prepared to develop student competencies such as deep mastery of the content, critical thinking skills, and the skills needed to solve complex problems (Goodnough, Pelech, & Stordy, 2014). Often participants are subjected to a “sit and get” type of experience rather than participants working collectively to share their knowledge and skills to help their students learn (Hulan, 2015). According to the Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017) effective professional development includes: (a) deepening teachers’ content knowledge; (b) opportunities for reflection, research, and practice; (c) takes place during the school day; (d) occurs overtime; (e) involves collaboration among teachers and administrators in deepening their pedagogical practices; (f) creating professional learning communities (PLCs).

In Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) study that looked at culturally responsive practices as whole school reform, it was discovered that the use of embedding cultural competency throughout all communications and professional development trainings constructed teachers understanding of race, culture, and the impact it has in the classroom. The Center for Effective Education Development and Accountability and Reform Center’s Innovation Configuration (IC) created a matrix that can be used as a guide for teacher preparation in the creation of culturally responsive pedagogy (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). The matrix outlines some of culturally relevant teaching practices and themes that teachers can implement in their classrooms. Some of the themes, practices, and recommended approaches listed are: Instructional engagement; Multicultural awareness; High Expectations; Critical Thinking; Social Justice; collaborative teaching; responsive feedback; modeling; and scaffolding; child centered instruction; assessment; and relevant materials (Aceves & Orosco, 2014).

The themes, practices, and recommended culturally responsive teaching approaches were used to develop some of the learning tasks for this project. I also took into consideration studies related to multidisciplinary instruction under the aegis of culturally responsive teaching. These studies have found that using culturally responsive strategies in conjunction with teaching different disciplines have demonstrated more success than teaching alone.

A study conducted by Gehlbach (2014), investigated teachers who integrated rap music as a tool for teaching poetry to African American students enabling those students to outperform other students at other schools within the district. The study also explored the importance of parent involvement in the classroom. Parents were invited to the class to share their wisdom and knowledge with students which allowed for students to learn from parents in their community. The study suggest that diverse students benefit from the use of cultural characteristics where their cultural identities are nurtured and the students personal experiences are connected to their learning.

A study conducted by (Averill, Anderson, & Drake, 2015), conducted a joint practice-based research study with colleagues at another institution to provide training to pre-service and in service teachers to develop their capabilities in teaching mathematics using culturally responsive practices and the challenges they faced. Participants included four experienced New Zealand European teachers, two male and two female, and seven classes ranging from elementary to secondary math.

The student teachers were New Zealand European, others were indigenous Maori, Pacific Nations, and Asian ethnicities. The interview data reported adds to the importance of coaching, teacher educator modelling, discussion of mathematical pedagogy, and implementation of culturally responsive practice (Averill, Anderson, & Drake, 2015). The professional development indicated that coaching and modeling enable student teachers to participate, reflect, and discuss pedagogical practice in relation to culturally responsive teaching strategies. The student teachers receiving the support found that this helped them to better understand their students and teach them mathematics with greater success.

There are similar studies that support the use of pedagogy of cultural responsiveness. Johnson & Fargo (2014), conducted a study with twenty-one teachers in two elementary schools in a large urban school district in a southwestern state. The training provided elementary school science teachers with skills needed to improve science instruction and facilitate culturally relevant pedagogy. The training implemented new science curriculum combined with learning conversational Spanish. The findings from the study showed that students attending the school whose teachers participated in this professional development demonstrated significantly larger gains on the state mandated science assessment.

Several other studies I found in the literature review influenced the design of this project. A study conducted by Li (2013), investigated a professional learning approach, for teachers known as the “cultural worker continuum” proved to have a direct impact on students’ success. There are three stages that teachers would experience to become effective cultural workers. The three stages include: cultural reconciliation; cultural translation; and cultural transformation.

Polly, McGee, Wang, Martin, Lambert, & Pugalee (2015), conducted a non-experimental study with 291 elementary mathematics teachers from two school districts: one large urban district and a suburban district to bolster standards based math instruction and develop cross-cultural and diversity training. The study was designed to be learner-centered, offer active learning activities that were collaborative, teacher owned, and supportive of changes in their teaching practices, and introduced culturally responsive teaching strategies. The findings indicated that after implementing professional development, that included modeling, peer coaching, and support from a culturally responsive leadership team, there was a direct impact on improving student outcomes. Data indicated that students of the teachers who participated in this study experienced significant gains in mathematics as noted in the pre and post test results (Polly, McGee, Wang, Martin, Lambert, & Pugalee 2015).

Culturally responsive teaching strategies do not come naturally to most teachers. Research implies that providing pre-service and in-service professional development for educators to develop their cultural and linguistic awareness is imperative to prepare them for teaching diverse student populations (Bower-Phipps, Tate, Mehta, & Sature, 2103; Grant & Gibson, 2011; Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Irvine, 2003; Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). Teacher education programs must realize the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) as a “personal and professional developmental process” (Gay, 2013, p. 59). According to Gay, (2013), the purpose of CRP is to empower teacher educators to realize diverse students’ academic success while respecting their identities and diverse backgrounds as meaningful opportunities to create optimal learning environments.

**Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**

The use of professional learning communities (PLCs) have been used by educators as the foundation for improving student achievement, addressing culture , and operate under the notion that improved learning for students is continuous systematic process where teachers analyze their teaching practices to achieve better results for the students they serve (DuFour, 2013).

Professional Learning Communities allow for support and training through regular meetings, ongoing discussions of strategies and effective classroom practices, and feedback from peers and group leaders, and self-reflection. A study conducted by Sharratt & Planche (2016), principals must be able to and willing to work alongside teachers to develop common curriculum, common placing plans, and common assessment based on ongoing collection of data.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) allow principals and teachers a safe, supportive, and creative environment to explore cultural differences and address issues of social justice (Mette, Nieuwenhuizen, & Hvidston, 2016). Strong leadership is necessary in order for educators to talk about race and the achievement gap between White and non-White students. Thus, through PLCs educators can critically examine race related matters and culturally responsive pedagogy to provide the hope of ensuring that issues of equity in the educational system and target ongoing efforts to close the achievement gap (Mette, Nieuwenhuizen, & Hvidston, 2016).

Thus, from the comprehensive literature review, the goal of this project design will provide educators with skills to acknowledge cultural differences and improve the ways in which teacher preparation programs address issues of race and racism. This work is important, yet difficult, especially as society continues to diversify.

**Project Description**

The proposed professional development will occur at the school site over a 3-day period during the summer of 2018. Teachers will be compensated, they will be paid their hourly rate each day they are in attendance. Funding for the project will be provided through the school budget, which allows a percentage to be allocated for teacher’s salaries. During which time the participants will have the opportunity to internalize the definition of culturally responsive education, recognize what culturally responsive practices look like at the personal, organizational, and instructional levels, and determine if these strategies can be implemented in their classroom practices (Heitner & Jennings, 2016). In addition, teachers will be able to identify the role of school culture, prejudice reduction, gain knowledge in constructing and creating culturally responsive systems that can be implemented in the classroom, and develop an understanding of contributive, additive, transformative, and social action models as they apply to teaching and learning.

The proposed professional development training will begin with a PowerPoint presentation on the conceptual frameworks of cultural responsiveness. On the first day of the presentation, teachers will be introduced to dimensions of culturally responsive education based on the research of Banks (2006). On the second day of the professional development teachers will focus on the dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy based on the research of Little (2009). This information can be viewed in Appendix A.

On the third day of the presentation, teachers will examine characteristics of culturally responsive teachers based on the research of Villegas & Lucas (2002). The final stage of the presentation will give teachers the opportunity to examine culturally responsive responsiveness by reading vignettes and discussing what is happening on the institutional, personal, and practice levels and what culturally relevant teaching strategies teachers will be able to implement in their classroom. Teachers will also have to consider what they would do if the student were in one of their classes.

The professional development will take place at during the month of August prior to the start of school to provide teachers with time during the 2018/2019 school year to implement, practice, and reflect on culturally relevant teaching strategies. The professional development trainings will start at 8:00 in the morning and end at 3:00 pm. The six-hour trainings will allow enough time to facilitate all of the training activities and allow time for collaboration, feedback and reflection. According to Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017), collaborative approaches have been found to be effective in promoting school change by providing teachers with a basis for inquiry and reflection into teachers’ own practices, which allows for teachers to take risks, and solve problems.

In order to ensure that communication and support are ongoing, participants will be asked to submit reflective journals via email after each training session. Throughout the 3-day period, participants will have the opportunity to continue to foster challenging conversations and extend their own learning about what it means to be culturally relevant through reflective journals.

Through this model teachers will receive professional development that will train them in teaching diverse populations. Often professional development that teachers receive is a one-shot, hit or miss incident, leaving the participants without time to follow up or additional sessions to meet the specific learning needs of teachers (Hulan, 2015). This proposed professional development training will be designed to allow participants to have 18 hours of professional development time by meeting for 3 days.

**Resources**

To conduct the proposed professional development training, the following resources will be needed. Establishing a location, copies of the books, journals, note pads, pencils, pens, highlighters, laptop, large sticky note pad, and refreshments for morning and afternoon. Existing supports entail the school where the professional development will occur. The school will provide a meeting room, tables, chairs, access to the internet, a tv and camera, a document reader, a projector and a screen that are needed for the professional development trainings.

In addition to the training materials, a commitment from the Principal and his school staff is needed. The participants will need to commit to three days in the month of August, prior to the start of school, and agree to being compensated at their hourly rate. During the school year principal will also need to provide substitute coverage and release time for the participants to provide coaching and to observe classes.