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**The Dissertation Committee for Amy Patterson Lippa Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**SENSEMAKING AS A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING  
HOW ASPIRING ANTI-RACIST SCHOOL LEADERS ENACT  
THEIR LEARNINGS FROM A PRINCIPAL PREPARATION  
PROGRAM TO DISRUPT THE RACIAL DISCIPLINE GAP**

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by

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to David Scott, who passionately pursued this alongside me by keeping the family ship sailing.

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This dissertation emerges from an acknowledgement that robust research has shown that students of color receive a disproportionate number of disciplinary actions in American public schools compared to their white peers – a problem called the racial discipline gap.

Few studies have studied school leaders' sensemaking of the role of race in school disciplinary outcomes. Even fewer have considered how a specific type of leader – one known for aspiring to be anti-racist – makes sense of and frames the discipline gap and enacts the learnings from their principal preparation program to disrupt racial disparities in discipline outcomes.

The perspective of the school principal has been found to be among the strongest predictor for rates of out-of-school suspension and expulsion. The findings from this study suggest that the sensemaking and problem-framing of the racial discipline gap by

new school leaders is directly shaped by their identity as aspiring anti-racist leaders and the learnings from an anti-racist principal preparation program and their school contexts. The aspiring anti-racist leaders frame the problem at macro and micro levels, and enact both first and some second-order type change initiatives to interrupt factors of race from becoming patterns of race in school discipline. They demonstrate a limited approach to offering professional development to engage teachers in culturally relevant discussions and their formal data collection practices of discipline information is limited in scope. This creates a blind spot for them in fully understanding the ways race intersects with discipline in their schools.



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# **Chapter One**

## **INTRODUCTION**

My truth about issues of race exists through the lens of my own White racial identity development. My perspective about the racial discipline gap twenty-five years ago was anchored in a narrative that was unable to see the truth I can see today. Why? Because I was colorblind. This is my story.

### **Positionality**

I grew up in Killeen, Texas, near Fort Hood - a military post known for racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. I took pride in calling Killeen home. It allowed me to safely proclaim myself as colorblind - I didn't see color.

“Receiving” information was at the heart of most of my learning experiences. I learned facts in school, rarely thought of them out of the school context, and certainly did not extend my understanding beyond the application level. “The teacher is right,” was definitely the mantra of my culture, and if I felt like I suffered any personal academic or disciplinary injustices, it didn't matter - the word of the adult was final. I mostly accepted that.

As the daughter of a White, upper middle class school superintendent, I received the associated privileges of both income security and local home-town popularity. Our family was well-respected-for good reason actually. My parents lived according to their convictions. I can honestly say that I rarely, if ever, heard either of them utter ill words

about others. Their lack of judgment and sharing of goodwill toward others was recognized across our community. Regarding race, no one in my family was overtly racist. My father often was invited to speak at the Black churches on special occasions because of his relationship with the African American community.

I recognized that my church community was White and that once a year we did a shared Sunday night service with our sister church where most who worshiped were Black. It crossed my mind as odd, but I received that knowledge passively as “the way it was.” I mostly had White friends, but I also had friends from other races and ethnicities.

Enter college. I did the unthinkable – I had doubt. I became good friends with two people who didn’t believe in Jesus. Now, this was radical. I was so smitten with the conversations we had that I asked more questions in my college years than the combined total of the previous eighteen. The doubt led to questioning, which led to deeper uncertainty, and finally to downright confusion. I spent the early part of my twenties tangled in a web of uncertainty. I accepted that it was easier to be a receiver.

Enter career. My decision to become a teacher happened naturally. I come from a long line of educators. My first teaching job was located in suburban Dallas. I worked in a school that was considered “good.” It sat in a mostly White neighborhood in a mostly White district. However, there were those “apartment kids.” I remember the first time I heard that classification, I literally cringed. Apartment kids? I cringed because I knew it was wrong, but my state of colorblindness couldn’t name the reason why. What “apartment kids” means in the middle class, status quo world is that the apartment kids are less “desirable” to “teach” because they tend to come with “issues.” The

“neighborhood” kids, on the other hand, are viewed as better behaved, more White, and superior receivers of instruction. I knew that the dichotomy divided along racial lines, but instead of thinking of it in those terms, coding is used to mask the colors we saw.

The systematic adoption of the belief that apartment kids were somehow culturally deficient was institutionalized to the point of counting how many apartment versus neighborhood kids were in each class each year. The purpose was to maintain an appropriate and acceptable balance, so as to not “scare off” the neighborhood families.

The whole notion of “desirable” versus “undesirable” students was repulsive to me, however despite actively requesting to have those students in my class, I internalized my feelings and I said nothing. I still viewed myself as a “saver” of students and families, undoubtedly a colorblind and deficit perspective. I thought myself wiser than others for “wanting” those students and families. I was a proud, colorblind racist with a lot to learn.

I maintained my “learner as receiver” status and did nothing to overtly question the status quo. I knew something was wrong with this, but I could not yet articulate its broader meaning. I actually prided myself on being a “hands-on” and colorblind teacher who treated all kids fairly and equally. The time was 1995, so naturally I adopted a zero tolerance discipline approach to discipline. I foolishly accepted the cultural deficit thinking of my colleagues when it came to judging parents who did not show up for teacher conferences.

“Fairness for all,” I told myself and my students. That was until I met nine-year-old Ronald, an apartment kid who was Black. Ronald and I didn’t click. I thought I went

out of my way to create meaningful learning opportunities for him. I did not require him to be a “receiver” of information; I encouraged him to actively participate (as long as it was on my terms). I struggled with why I couldn’t get through to him. I treated all kids fairly. Equally. I gave him practical learning experiences. I encouraged freedom of expression. Why wasn’t *he* getting it?

The next academic year Ronald got a teacher whom I considered at the time to be mediocre. Yet, Ronald thrived in her classroom. What? Why didn’t he do that for me? After all, I was enlightened. I didn’t see color. I knew and executed best teaching practices. People came to me for ideas. It was known that I wanted the apartment kids in my class. It took a while for me to figure out one piece of the puzzle. Zero tolerance didn’t work. In an effort to be fair and treat everyone equally, I completely missed the concept of equity. Enter doubt again. The cyclical process of certainty, questioning, doubt started all over for me again. I began to feel that uncomfortable feeling I had first experienced in college. I have been uncomfortable ever since.

It is in this zone of discomfort where my growth occurs -where my learning occurs. It wasn’t until my second year of doctoral studies that I understood the ugliness called racism behind my colorblind ideology. How humbling it has been to be placed in a learning environment where my privilege was not accepted or promoted as correct. My personal level of racism was manifested through cultural deprivation perspectives and hidden from me behind my status quo, colorblind ideology. Through my realization of how I myself see color, I have learned to acknowledge, confront and deal with daily inconsistencies in my professional and personal life. I have learned to be reflective- a

process that is continually evolving. I first learned this from Ronald, but didn't realize the power of reflection until much later.

It is my belief that the American model of "learners as receivers" deepens racist views, marginalizes and stigmatizes non-White learners, all while shackling the privileged with myths of colorblindness and meritocracy. A learner as receiver model puts the centrality of the learning process on the information delivery person, most often the teacher. When students receive information from a status quo group of teachers, the possibility for transformational learning processes is near impossible. When textbooks and curriculum guides fail to account for institutional racism, how can teachers, who have themselves never interrogated how and why race matters, be expected to lead related conversations? Indeed, it requires a sophisticated teacher to navigate the topic of race with students, much less allow for the questioning of history as presented in textbooks. It is my belief that the passive acceptance of truth as presented by a narrative of a dominant group continues to perpetuate itself through this dangerous "learner as receiver" model.

My passive acceptance of the dangerous label, apartment kids, prevented me from reaching Ronald because it symbolized so much more about me. My acceptance of information without a critical lens disallowed me from uncovering my true self – my true beliefs, and ultimately another truth.

### **BACKGROUND**

The racial discipline gap occurs when students of color experience harsher discipline consequences at a rate beyond their representation in the student population.

Nationwide, students of color receive a disproportionate number of office referrals (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba et al., 2008; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008), suspensions (Council of State Governments, 2011; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Gregory et al., 2010; Losen & Skiba, 2010; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2008), and expulsions (Council of State Governments, 2011; Rausch & Skiba, 2004). These disciplinary actions, among others like in-school arrests (Advancement Project, 2005; Education Week, 2013; Kaba & Edwards, 2012) and school ticketing (Fowler, Lightsey, Monger, & Aseltine, 2010) by school resource officers, collectively create fertile pathways to dropping out of school (Balfanz, Byrnes & Fox, 2012; Balfanz, Spiridakis, Neild, & Letgers, 2003; Bowditch, 1993; Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011; Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Suh & Suh, 2007).

A 2010 report published by the Pew Charitable Trusts revealed that more than one-third of Black male dropouts between the ages of 20 and 34 were behind bars; this is three times the rate for Whites in the same category and stark in contrast to the 26 percent of young Black male dropouts who had a job (Western & Pettit, 2002). Considered alongside the fact that 68% of all males in state and federal prison do not have a high school diploma (Harlow, 2003), and that the United States has the highest

incarceration rate in the world (Tsai & Scommegna, 2012)<sup>1</sup>, one must wonder for what outcome we are more proficiently preparing our youth of color?

At the macro level, this problem is articulated through the statistics that connect student experiences with exclusionary discipline in the public school environment with incarceration rates in our prisons. This problem is called the school-to-prison pipeline (Noguera, 2003). This pathway is often routed through youth involvement in juvenile detention facilities. According to a document produced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, juvenile crime rates are dropping and the number of American youth in juvenile detention has dropped 41% between 1995 and 2010, however large disparities remain in confinement rates by race (2013). While this positive change in outcomes for youth warrants optimism as the pathway to prison is showing signs of being interrupted, the outcomes at the school level portray a different story. It appears that school discipline policies follow a reverse pattern: the rate of out-of-school suspensions in schools has increased by about ten percent since 2000, and Black students are three times more likely to receive this punishment (Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

### CONTEXT

Keeping students safe is perhaps the most important mission of public schools. The symbiotic relationship between teaching and learning cannot occur in classroom disciplinary climates plagued by chaos and disruption (Skiba et al., 2006). Daily, teachers across our country balance the factors of school safety and educational freedom in ways

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<sup>1</sup> In 2010, the rate of incarceration for countries comparable to the United States was about 100 prisoners per 100,000 population, while the United States was about 500 per 100,000 residents.

that are largely unconscious. At an operational level in a public school classroom, teachers have been trained to keep students safe and to minimize disruptions to learning. Teachers balance the safety and freedom to learn for the majority of students against the rights and personal liberties of the one, or few, who disrupt, or who are *perceived* as disruptive. The reproduction of punitive approaches to discipline occurs systematically in our educational systems. Teachers have largely been educated in school systems where the model for discipline has been rooted in obedience (Gartrell, 1997), and the penalty for disobedience is punishment (Bettelheim, 1985).

Punitive discipline methods have evolved since the mid-nineteenth century when corporal punishment – or spanking – was commonplace (Adams, 2000). The transition away (although not entirely) from a physical model for punishment - spanking, grabbing, and hitting – has been replaced by yet another punitive response– exclusion through suspension and expulsion (Adams, 2000). The use of exclusionary practices has further expanded through zero tolerance policies introduced by the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act in 1986. This “War on Drugs” was introduced in schools by way of rules that mandated zero tolerance for any drugs or alcohol on public school property (Edmiston, 2013).

While the punitive nature of discipline has evolved from spanking to exclusion, one trend has remained constant in school discipline practices across American public schools – racial disproportionality. Students of color have been disproportionately and negatively impacted by school discipline practices since desegregation (Bennett & Harris, 1982; Kaeser, 1979) Research has shown a history of racial disproportionality in school



discipline prior to the advent of zero tolerance in rates of corporal punishment (Gregory, 1995), suspensions (Kaeser, 1979) and expulsions (Bennett & Harris, 1982). Though the type of punishment has changed, *who* gets punished more tends to remain the same. While the widespread adoption of zero tolerance has been correlated with more opportunities for students of color to be punished (Hoffman, 2012), and while the visibility of racial disproportionality has become more evident through the implementation of zero tolerance policies (Skiba, 2000; Skiba, 2013), zero tolerance didn't *cause* the racial discipline gap.

The racial discipline gap is one form of an opportunity gap experienced by students of color. Opportunity gaps occur when groups of students experience a lack of access to educational offerings compared to another group of students. Student of color face gaps in opportunity in higher level, or advanced placement, classes (Ford, 2010; Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008; Tyson, Darity & Castellino, 2005), gifted and talented programs (Ford, 2010; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Troutman, 2002; Naglieri & Ford, 2005) quality teachers (Barr & Dreeben, 1983; Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012) and resources (Education Trust, 2006; Oakes, 1989).

Indeed, the loss of instructional time through punitive and exclusionary discipline strategies equates to a lost opportunity. New research shows that higher suspension rates are closely correlated with higher dropout and delinquency rates (Marchbanks, 2015) and this has enormous consequences for students (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Hemphill et al., 2006; Nichols, Ludwin, & Iadicola, 1999; Royer, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 2000) Morris and Perry (2015) demonstrate in their study of more than 15,000

Kentucky students that differences in suspension may cause 20 percent of the achievement gap, arguably the most widely known, and discussed, racial gap in schools. Perhaps most salient is the finding that students who are suspended do worse than their classmates on end-of-year tests, but also worse than they do themselves in years when they are not suspended (Morris & Perry, 2015). This is a clear example of lost opportunities.

Milner (2010) suggests that rather than focusing on achievement gaps between students, we should be focusing on opportunity. Milner posits that opportunity gaps persist when teachers' cultural ways of knowing, grounded in Eurocentric, middle class norms, takes precedence over those of their students (2010) and recommends several ways to interrupt the opportunity gap, one of which is to avoid context-neutral thinking and practices by understanding the important role culture plays in the classroom. This is salient in a time when student racial demographics continue to diversify at the same time that the race of teachers (and administrators) continues to remain mostly White.<sup>2</sup> Why is this important? Race has been shown to matter in the ways teachers interpret actions of students related to school discipline (Horner, Fireman, & Wang, 2010; Wright, 2015).

When it comes to student behavior, what is respectful or rude, and what constitutes a punishable offense, rests in the discretionary minds of teachers and administrators (Wright, 2015). Wright measured what he called “externalizing problem behaviors,” or acts of arguing, fighting, getting angry, impulsivity, and disrupting and

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<sup>2</sup> NCES data reflect an increase in the percentage of minority students enrolled in United States public schools from 21% to 44% between 1972 and 2008. During the same period, White students decreased from 78% to close to 56%. In the 2008-09 school year, over 83% of teachers and 82% of principals identified as White.

found that Black teachers are much less likely to find problems with Black students, specifically boys, than White teachers are with the same students.

Wright's (2015) findings corroborate findings that among students who were classified as overtly aggressive, African Americans were more likely to be disciplined compared to other groups (Horner, Fireman, & Wang, 2010), and African American students appear to be referred to the office for less serious, more subjective reasons (Skiba, Michael & Nardo, 2001). Indeed, implicit bias is implicated as a contributing factor to the racial disproportionality in school discipline.

Caudill (2015) found that deficit thinking was a prevalent "trap," for White principals' thinking about the poor performance of students of color. Principals proposed that students of color performed poorly in school due to the deficient family structure and negative cultural influences. Most did not view the systematic and institutional nature of racism as a viable explanation, and all were reluctant to address racial issues.

School leaders make sense of the ways that race and discipline intersect in schools and classrooms in a myriad of ways. Research supports Caudill's finding regarding the deficit perspectives administrators have toward Black students, especially boys, in discipline events with examples of principals describing youth of color as "unsalvageable," (Ferguson, 2001, p. 9) or using phrases such as "there's a prison cell in San Quentin waiting for him," (Noguera, 2003, p. 341). Deficit perspectives (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) fuel opportunity gaps (Milner, 2011) and are reinforced by stereotypes of negative child rearing practices and deprived home environments among culturally and racially diverse families and those living in poverty (Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klinger, &

Sturges, 2010). School leaders who maintain the status quo simply by placing the *blame* of the discipline gap on the shoulder of the student, or the student's family, do nothing to disrupt the problem.

School leaders, who have been trained in principal preparation programs that acknowledge and talk about the role of race, shape their sensemaking about the problem of the racial discipline gap in ways that may potentially disrupt a critical juncture in the school-to-prison pipeline. Indeed, principals matter because when it comes to disparities in discipline according to race, the perspective of the principal appears to be among the strongest predictor for rates of out-of-school suspension and expulsion (Skiba et al., 2015).

A growing interest on leadership for social justice continues to emerge within principal preparation programs (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; Dantley, 2002; Scheurich, 1998; Scheurich and Skrla, 2003; Theoharis, 2007). Social justice leadership embodies the overarching philosophy of a growing number of principal preparation programs. In a few universities, the application of anti-racist leadership within a social justice framework is accomplished in a purposeful manner (Lightfoot, 2009).

Several scholars provide a working and illustrative definition of what a principal preparation program with a focus on anti-racist leadership looks like in practice (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Lightfoot, 2009; Lopez, 2003; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Parker and Shapiro, 1992; Shields, Laroque & Oberg, 2002; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004; Soloman, 2002; Young & Laible, 2002). The general definition of a principal preparation program with a focus on anti-racist leadership

includes one where there is "appropriate attention to race and development of personal awareness," where the perspectives of students are shifted and allow for the challenging of the status quo "in search for viable solutions rather than restating the problem" (Gooden & Dantley, 2012, p. 244). Students in an anti-racist leadership programs develop a lens to "consider the impact of race and racism in education, and a mind-set to create an agenda to do something about it" (Gooden & Dantley, 2012, p. 244).

### **RATIONALE**

Students in traditional principal preparation programs have been ill-prepared to meet the demands of different racial (Brown, 2004; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Lopez, 2003) and ability groups (Theoharis & Causton, 2014). Indeed, principals struggle to address issues of equity (Bell, Jones, & Johnson, 2002; Brown, 2004; Rusch, 2004; Solomon, 2002) and many have not been equipped with tools to analyze racial or ethnic conflict in schools (Henze, Norte, Sather, Walker, & Katz, 2002).

Principal's perspectives are a key predictor of racial disparities in discipline (Skiba et al., 2015). This is a critical finding because principals have the purview to limit and deter the use of exclusionary practices, and to interrupt patterns of racial disparities in disciplinary actions in their role as instructional leaders in schools. Principals have access to the use of disciplinary management data (Torrence, 2002) and can analyze related data from a *balcony view* (Bloom, 2004) in terms of which teachers might be sending students to the office at higher rates and if race is a factor, and they can evaluate how teachers are choosing to address minor behavioral infractions. When a teacher sends a student to the office for a discretionary discipline referral, school leaders must balance

their responsibilities under the state law to support the teacher and to maintain a safe environment, while also considering the implications of lost learning time for the student. Discipline policy can be fraught with problems of ambiguity. The probable resistance (Theoharis, 2007) leaders for social justice face when confronting the racial discipline gap is “made sense” of in the minds of these new leaders in ways that are different than leaders trained in traditional preparation programs.

### **PROBLEM**

Numerous studies address the magnitude of the racial discipline gap (Adams et al., 2012; Arcia, 2006; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Fabelo et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2010; Krezmien et al., 2006; Office for Civil Rights, 2014; Skiba et al., 2002). While studies continue to explore the extent of the discipline gap across states, no additional proof is needed to *prove* that it is a real problem. Scholarship in this area needs research that explores ways to disrupt it.

Studies have looked at anti-racism in terms of how leadership programs should be framed toward purposes of racial equity (Young and Laible, 2001; Gooden and Dantley, 2012), how participants in leadership programs learn about issues of race in schools (Gooden and O’Doherty, 2014) and how programs can stimulate leadership identity development and problem-framing skills (Young, O’Doherty, Gooden, & Goodnow, 2011). Studies have also explored the sensemaking that school leaders do about race and demographic changes (Evans, 2007b). Young and colleagues (2011) provide evidence of the ways that students early in their principal preparation programs frame problems around first-order change and address these first-order changes through a frame outside

of their control.

To date, there is a dearth in research surrounding how school leaders who have been identified as aspiring to be anti-racist make sense of the discipline gap, frame it in their local contexts, and draw on their anti-racist lenses to disrupt it. Why is this important? It is important because the perspective of the principal has been found to be a key predictor of racial disparities in discipline (Skiba et al., 2014). Theoharis (2007) emphasized the resistance that school leaders face in enacting social justice leadership.

At a time when schools are faced with growing demands to increase student achievement, maintain a safe environment, and provide an equitable education for all students, the sensemaking that aspiring anti-racist leaders *do* around framing the racial discipline gap as a problem is critically important. Indeed, an understanding of the ways they enact their learning from their principal preparation programs will provide an important perspective to the growing body of literature in social justice leadership. This study fills a void in the literature by looking at how an anti-racist principal preparation program - an approach that is limited to a few programs – may impact how new school leaders make sense of, problematize, and disrupt the factor of race in local school environments.

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to determine how new school leaders, identified as being aspiring anti-racist leaders, make sense of this approach to leadership. The specific aim is to understand how aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of and frame a specific problem in public schools – the racial discipline gap. This study will explore how

aspiring anti-racist leaders use sensemaking to frame the problem according to first and second-order change, and enact their learning from the preparation program to disrupt the problem in an effort to reduce the discipline gap in their schools. From this point forward, the study participants will be referred to as aspiring anti-racist leaders. Aspiring anti-racist leaders are defined as new school leaders, within the first one to five years in administration, who have the title of assistant principal or principal and who identify as anti-racist.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions that guide this study include:

1. How do new school leaders identified as being anti-racist make sense of this approach to leadership?
2. How do aspiring anti-racist school leaders make sense of and frame the racial discipline gap and in what ways do institutional contexts shape this sensemaking?
3. How do aspiring anti-racist leaders enact this sensemaking to disrupt the problem and how do they navigate institutional barriers that they face?

### **BRIEF OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative approach is delivered through an interpretive case study design within the context of one anti-racist principal preparation program, across several student cohort groups. A cohort is a program design where all students in the same entrance year are expected to complete all required classes together as a group. All participants share the same preparation program experience, however the district and school settings for each recent graduate are different, as are their cultural, racial and economic world



experiences.

Interpretive case studies collect and analyze data to “develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering,” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28 as cited in Willis, 2007, p. 243). The primary focus will be on how aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense and frame the problem of the racial discipline gap and enact their learnings from their principal preparation programs to disrupt racially discriminatory discipline practices in their schools.

### **Participants**

The participants comprise a purposive sample of a group of five recent graduates of a large, public University where the principal preparation program within the College of Education centers race in a social justice leadership approach. Recent graduates, defined as those who completed the principal preparation program within the last six years, were nominated by professors within the university as being “aspiring anti-racist leaders.” Other eligibility requirements for participation in this study included: 1. a willingness to participate and a first-hand account of how they see themselves as “aspiring anti-racist leaders”, and 2. presently serving in an administrative position in a school as defined by principal or assistant principal status.<sup>3</sup>

### **Data Sources**

The methodology includes interview and contextual district and school-level demographic and disciplinary data related to the racial discipline gap. After a screening

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<sup>3</sup> One participant carries the title of administrative intern, which is equivalent to that of assistant principal. The classification system is unique to the school district for persons in their first year in school administration.

and selection process, five school administrators - three principals and two assistant principals - participated in two semi-structured interviews.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical frameworks that guide this study is incorporated more aptly as a blending of *approaches* for thinking about theory. Therefore, the use of the phrase *theoretical approach* describes the conceptual underpinning of this study. Two theoretical approaches - sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Evans, 2007b) and problem-framing (Slegers et al., 2009; Young et al., 2011) – anchor the theoretical considerations for the study.

#### ***Sensemaking***

Education scholars increasingly give attention to, and use, the construct of sensemaking. Sensemaking refers to the “making of sense of social actors that need to construct the situations they experience in a meaningful way” (Kapucu, 2007, p. 866). Karl Weick formally introduced sensemaking as a theoretical consideration in the organizational literature (1995).

Educational studies explore the process of sensemaking by examining the multiple contexts and the multiple messages students, teachers, and/or leaders must frame and interpret in order to craft actions and behaviors. Sensemaking done by school leaders has a strong representation in the literature (Coburn, 2001; Evans, 2007b; Salazar, 2012; Slegers et al., 2009; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Zimmerman, 2005).

Evans (2007b) extended a study about demographic change to explore how and why school leaders defined issues of race in the ways they did using a sensemaking

approach. Sleegers and colleagues (2009) explored school leaders' problem framing through a sensemaking approach, and argue that a sensemaking approach to problem solving is situated both in their current circumstances and their professional biographies (p. 152). The linkage between sensemaking and problem framing is made transparent through this work.

### ***Problem Framing***

Problem framing/reframing is a part of the theoretical approach because the sensemaking done around a problem involves framing, or having a point of view about a problem (Kolko, 2010). This study's approach focuses on the "situated and personal nature" of sensemaking theory (Sleegers et al., 2009, p. 152), but also considers the ways this sensemaking informs the participants' framing or reframing (Copland, 2000) of the problem of the racial discipline gap. Sensemaking largely manifests itself through the problem framing done by these aspiring anti-racist leaders about the racial discipline gap.

The following studies contribute to the way that sensemaking and problem framing is conceptualized in this study. According to Sleegers and colleagues (2009), people frame problems according to their current circumstance in an organizational context. Consideration will also be given to if, and how, participants reframe student discipline in ways that avoid "single solution traps," (Copland, 2000). Single solution traps are those where seemingly obvious solutions, often anchored by status quo mindsets, trap leaders into one way of framing a problem and single solutions.

Leadership and change have been inextricably linked (Heifetz, Linsky, & Grashow, 2009). A particularly salient study showcases how researchers developed a tool

to conceptualize problem framing as a resourceful, innovative way to think about organizational change (Young et al., 2011). This tool – a continua of problem framing orientations – connects problem framing to change initiatives according to first and second-order change. First-order change is consistent with adjustments made to the existing structures, but no real change to organizational culture. For example, change is centered at the student, family, or teacher level with no attempt to disrupt the culture of the organization. Second-order change – on the other side of the continua – represents leadership actions toward changing the capacity building and school culture to systematically address problems.

### **Conceptual Flow of Two Theoretical Approaches**

A conceptual flow ties the two theoretical approaches together through a cohesive, coherent application of a real-world example. The conceptual flow for this study conforms to the following logic:

A principal preparation program trains aspiring school leaders with an explicit anti-racist leadership approach that challenges students to reflect on and interrogate their own identity. New school leaders leave the program and interact with real world problems, like school discipline, and make sense of related problems by framing them according to, and influenced by, their identities as “aspiring anti-racist leaders.” They enact their sensemaking and problem framing through leadership actions that target either first or second-order change in schools.

### **Definition of Terms**

The definition of terms provides the situated context of the meaning of words as they are applied in this specific study. Multiple definitions exist to explain concepts, therefore the articulation of the author’s selection of definitions help guide the reader in

making sense of ideas.

### ***Anti-Racist Leadership***

Anti-racist leadership is a type of leadership disposition that views educational problems through a lens of racial awareness and is not afraid to challenge existing structures that lead to institutional racism.

### ***Anti-Racist Leadership Preparation Program***

Anti-racist leadership preparation programs center race as one of the many forms of social injustice to challenge students to view educational problems through a non-status quo lens.

### ***Civil Rights Act of 1964***

A federal law that authorized federal action against segregation in public accommodations, public facilities, and employment. The law was passed during a period of great strength for the civil rights movement, and President Lyndon Johnson persuaded many reluctant members of Congress to support the law.

### ***Cohort***

Principal preparation program design where all students in the same entrance year are expected to complete all required classes together as a group.

### ***Cultural Racism***

Cultural racism is more informal institutional racism, but similarly consists of the beliefs, symbols, underlying cultural rules, and norms of behavior that directly and indirectly communicate and endorse the superiority of the dominant American culture, which happens to be White, generally made up of English and other Western European

cultures.

### ***Discretionary Student Removal***

According to the Education Code, teachers are authorized to remove students from the classroom learning environment to maintain effective discipline in the classroom.

### ***Discipline Gap***

Racial and ethnic disparities in discipline rates across public schools (Monroe, 2005).

### ***Disparate Impact***

The effect of policies and practices that, although not adopted with the intent to discriminate, nonetheless have an unjustified effect of discriminating against students on the basis of race.

### ***Disparate Treatment***

Treatment based on policies and practices that involve claims from individuals who have been subject to adverse disciplinary action and allege that have been intentionally treated differently according to race.

### ***Ethnicity***

Assumed immigration status and beliefs shared about nationality, history, language and traditions (Oyserman & Oliver, 2009).

### ***Expulsion***

The main difference between *suspension* and *expulsion* is the amount of time a student must stay out of school. A suspension may only last for a certain number of days,

per the state administrative code, but an expulsion can last up to one year.

***First-order Change***

Changes made within the existing structure of organizations doing more or less of the “same old thing.”

***Individual Racism***

When a teacher consistently refers African American students to the office for the same behaviors exhibited by White children, it is individual racism.

***In School Suspension (ISS)***

An alternative setting that removes students from the classroom for a period of time, while requiring students to attend school and complete their work.

***Institutional Racism***

When a school leader consistently notices this pattern of African American students repeatedly referred by a teacher, but fails to critically address it, then that is institutional racism.

***Out-of-School Suspension (OSS)***

An alternative setting away from the school environment that removes students for a period of time, while requiring students to complete their work at home.

***Overrepresentation***

Overrepresentation is the term used to describe an event where a group of students classified according to race are represented statistically at a rate disproportionate to their representation in the population.

### ***Punitive***

Punitive is used interchangeably with the concept of exclusionary discipline.

### ***Race***

Associated with beliefs about phenotypes that distinguish groups of people and are associated with various levels of power within a society (Oyserman & Oliver, 2009).

### ***Restorative Discipline Approaches***

Approaches to schoolwide discipline that seek to address behavioral and disciplinary issues through mediation and personal accountability rather than punitive punishments (Graham, 2015).

### ***Second-order Change***

Change that is consistent with adjustments made *to* the existing structure that exceeds existing practices. Second-order change breaks with the past and conflicts with prevailing values and norms.

### ***Status Quo***

The existing state of affairs, especially regarding social or political issues. To maintain the status quo is to keep the things the way they presently are.

### ***Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964***

Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on, among other things, the basis of sex in public schools and colleges.

### ***Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964***

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial



assistance.

### ***Zero Tolerance***

The policy of applying laws or penalties in a strict, often exclusionary, manner to infringements of a code in order to reinforce its overall importance.

### **LIMITATIONS**

Participants include graduates of a principal preparation program focused on anti-racist leadership who are serving in school leader positions within the past one to four years. Therefore, the discretionary decisions to make connections to other school leaders and/or similar contexts is entirely up to consumers of this research study.

High school principals and assistant principals deal with increasing discipline issues. The lack of high school participants in this study limits the conversation surrounding the contextual environment at the secondary level as compared to the experiences of the participants in this study who represent four elementary and one middle school. However, the landscape of the discipline gap spans elementary, middle and high school, so the perspectives of the elementary and middle school leaders captures authentic voices from the field.

While the participants were purposefully selected for being new to school leadership, there is an inherent dearth of quantitative data to support their record of equity as it pertains to the discipline gap. Records are only maintained at the district level through the state education website, so the quantitative type of data included in this study that represents the “numbers story” behind race and discipline at the participants’ schools is limited to what each a. collects in their schools, and/or b. was willing to share with me.

## **DELIMITATIONS**

The scope of this focuses only on one sample of the school leadership population - recent graduates of a principal preparation program focused on anti-racist leadership who have been identified, and who self-identity, as being aspiring anti-racist leaders. This study will not include perspectives of other disciplinarians in the school, such as teachers. In this study, the policy problem is limited to the racial discipline gap, therefore other inequities in school discipline, such as the overrepresentation of students with disabilities is not a topic under consideration, despite being of critical importance to the work of social justice leaders.

An important conversation in the school-to-prison pipeline is the training and use of school resource officers in schools. Only one participant in this study works in a school environment that includes a full-time school resource officer. Therefore, this school factor in the racial discipline gap is absent from the conversation in this study.

## **ASSUMPTIONS**

This study seeks to examine how aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of the racial discipline gap and draw on their preparation programs to frame and respond to racially discriminatory practices. Several assumptions are inherent in the purpose of the study. First, there is the assumption that aspiring anti-racist leaders have the knowledge and skills to become a leader for equity in discipline practices and policies. Second, it is assumed that the elimination of the racial discipline gap is a goal of the participants of the study and that they have had previous opportunities to make sense of the racial discipline gap at their school and district.

Finally, all participants identify with being anti-racist and have been identified by others as aspiring anti-racist leaders, therefore there is a general assumption that these individuals think, and act, beyond traditional or status quo responses to the racial discipline gap. As stated earlier, a general assumption made in this study is that racial awareness is not possible through the adoption of colorblind perspectives and the very nature of the label “aspiring anti-racist leader” necessarily implies that these participants do not identify with colorblind ways of thinking.

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

This study will expand conceptions of how principals conceive their role in anti-racist leadership as it relates to classroom management situations where students of color are disproportionately referred for disciplinary actions. Similar to Fenning and Rose (2007), rather than continuing to repeat the status quo and continue to look for ways to fix the students, this study will consider how school leaders who have been identified, and self-identify as, aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of their identities toward anti-racist leadership. The findings from the study will contribute to the consideration of how principal preparation programs can better design (Capper, et al., 2006; Lightfoot, 2009; Mckenzie et. al, 2008) and prepare (Gooden & O’Doherty, 2015) leaders for the work of racial equity.

How aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of the discipline gap as they navigate the intersection between the problem as a real, living challenge in their work lives juxtaposed against their identity as aspiring anti-racist leaders is an important and practical contribution to social justice and sensemaking scholarship. In addition, the

ways that these aspiring anti-racist leaders frame the problem (Slegers et al., 2009; Young et al. 2011) through their sensemaking approaches ultimately limits or expands their ways of thinking about solutions to the racial discipline gap and offers a better understanding of these inter-related processes of sensemaking and problem framing toward enactment.

### CONCLUSION

The discipline gap operates alongside the academic divide, or achievement gap, between students of color and their White peers. The overrepresentation of Black students in school suspension coincides with opportunity gaps that limit academic prospects for students of color (Ford, 2010; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Troutman, 2002; Naglieri & Ford, 2003; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). This evidence, in conjunction with the substantial influence that principals have upon schools, inspires a focus on the sensemaking and problem-framing that aspiring anti-racist leaders *do* around the discipline gap.

At a time when schools work to eliminate the race-based achievement gap, the anti-racist leadership of principals is of paramount importance. The consideration of the effectiveness of student removal from the learning environment juxtaposed against the consideration of who is being removed is a real problem for school leaders. The social justice responsibilities of aspiring anti-racist leaders intersect in meaningful ways with their roles as instructional leaders.

Traditional responses, largely anchored in deficit perspectives (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) are symbolic of a status quo response, and have done little to combat the discipline

and achievement gap. Aspiring anti-racist leaders have the purview to enact changes to the disciplinary environments of schools, especially as it relates to approaches to discipline. As such, students who have been identified as aspiring anti-racist leaders offer important insights into the sensemaking around the inherent conflict of student removal from class to limit disruptions and the social justice goal of equity and anti-racism.

## Chapter Two

Chapter Two anchors the study by providing the empirical foundation for specific literature themes that directly relate to the three research questions. Recall that the conceptual flow joins the two theoretical perspectives of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and problem framing (Young et al., 2011) to understand how aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of, and frame, the racial discipline gap. A first step in the research process requires a conceptual understanding of what it means to be identified as an aspiring anti-racist leader using an anti-racist approach to leadership. Three research questions guide the research plan.

1. How do new school leaders identified as being anti-racist make sense of this approach to leadership?
2. How do aspiring anti-racist school leaders make sense of and frame the racial discipline gap and in what ways do institutional contexts shape this sensemaking?
3. How do aspiring anti-racist leaders enact their learning from the preparation program to disrupt the problem and how do they navigate institutional barriers that they face?

The review of literature is organized according to the following streams of applicable research: (a) sensemaking in organizations; (b) problem framing according to first and second-order organizational change; (c) principal preparation programs with a focus on anti-racist leadership; (d) the racial discipline gap; (e) school discipline policy; and (f) school discipline policy as influenced by the school principal.

## SENSEMAKING

Karl Weick, creator of sensemaking in organizations as a theoretical perspective, offered the literal translation as the “making of sense,” (1995, p. 4). By structuring the “unknown,” (Waterman, 1990, p. 41), sensemakers make sense of events placing stimuli into some type of framework (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51). To engage in sensemaking actions, a person is triggered by an ambiguous event that disrupts their work and forces them to deal with it. Klein, Moon, and Hoffman (2006) referenced sensemaking as a way of understanding connections between people, places and events that are occurring now or in the past, in order to predict future outcomes and act accordingly. Sensemaking goes beyond interpretation; it is how individuals “author” their understanding and interpretation of it (Salazar, 2013). Sensemaking offers a way of understanding the process by which different meanings are attributed to the same situation, and its strength as a framework is in its ability to provide the most comprehensive description of the sensemaking process at both the individual and organizational levels.

A logical application of sensemaking is in the analysis of organizational disasters (Weick 1990; 1993). Related studies informed the articulation and refinement of Weick’s seven properties of sensemaking (Mills, 2010). The application of sensemaking in the current study situates itself well within the original ways Weick conceptualized the making of sense in disaster situations. The racial discipline gap truly has disastrous outcomes for students of color, and an application of such a framework situates itself in a ripe space for proper analysis.

## **Seven Properties in Sensemaking**

Sensemaking involves seven key properties (Weick, 1995, p. 3). These include: identity, retrospect, enactment, social contact, ongoing events, cues, and plausibility. An illustrative example of the seven tenets of Weick's framework is useful as an explanatory tool. According to Weick (1995), an "instance of sensemaking," is created through someone noticing something, or an event, that does not fit, a "discrepant set of cues," (p. 2).

For example, anecdotal stories of Black students coming into the office more than others would create such an instance. Second, the discrepant cues are recognized through retrospection, or looking back over "elapsed experiences" (p.2). Sensemaking is like cartography – the key is to create a map that adequately represents the current situation (or problem in the case of this research) that an organization is facing (Weick, 1995). Third, plausible explanations are offered to clarify the cues and their relative rarity. Fourth, an object is created that was not present before but now there for noticing. Fifth, the speculations do not generate widespread attention right away. This is especially relevant in this study because, while the problem of the racial gap has recently been published from a federal source, the situation has largely been framed as a discipline problem for and about students and their families, not a problem of the institution itself. Finally, issues of identity and reputation are involved. As Weick suggests, "passive social intelligence about hidden events is often slow to develop because there are barriers to reporting the events" (p.2). An expanded explanation of each of Weick's seven sensemaking factors is described below. Weick's conception of the *fallacy of centrality*



will also be explored.

### ***Grounded in Identity Construction***

Identity pertains to the manner in which a school leader defines his or her role in an environment. Responsibilities are significant factors in the determination of how people develop their self-identity (Salazar, 2013; Weick, 1994). Identity pertains to a person (or group's) sense of who they are in a situation; what threatens this sense of self in the situation, or setting; and what is available to enhance an "efficacious" sense of self (Clegg & Bailey, 2008, p. 1403). Making sense of what's out there is self-referential because what is sensed, and how it is seen, bears on the actor's identity (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Identity is especially germane in this study because the self-identification of the participants as "aspiring anti-racist leaders" directly interacts with their sensemaking processes.

### ***Retrospective***

The notion of elapsed time is pertinent to retrospect (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is influenced by how far people look back, and how well they remember the past (Clegg & Bailey, 2008). Actions are only known once they happen; therefore, attention is directed to experience (Salazar, 2013; Weick, 1995). Values or priorities highlight the projects, services, policies, and practices that might be important to that individual. The experiences that an individual chooses to refer to, or emphasize, provide additional insights into his or her belief system or agenda (Weick, 1995) and the experiences that an individual chooses to leave out or ignore are just as important in sensemaking (Clegg & Bailey, 2008; Weick, 1995).

### ***Enactive of Sensible Environments***

According to Weick (1995), sensemaking is the “feedstock of institutionalism” (p. 36), which implies a *this is the way things are done* mentality (Salazar, 2013). Understanding the school culture, what gets dropped or done too late, and the *norms* of the school can all shed light on the belief and value systems that take place within a school. Weick uses the term *enactment* to describe how people in organizations tend to “produce part of the environment they face” (1995, p. 30). They construct reality through their actions. Perhaps a salient example is one offered by Weick (1995) where a football coach adopted the practice of drawing out the first 20 plays of a football game without adjustment. In a sense, the coach “creates the defensive environment his offense will face” once he initiates the 20 plays (Weick, 1995, p. 31).

### ***Social***

Sensemaking is influenced by the actual, implied, or even imagined presence of others. Sensible meanings are congruent with those for which there is “social support, consensual validation, and shared relevance,” (Clegg & Bailey, 2008, p. 1403). The conduct of the sensemakers is contingent on the conduct of others (Weick, 1995, p. 39), and decisions are made either in the presence of others, or with the knowledge that they will have to be understood or acceptable to them (Burns & Stalker, 1961, p.118).

### ***Ongoing***

Sensemaking is a continuous process because, according to Weick (1994), people are always in the middle of things. Interruptions to the *flow* of normal activity could result in an emotional response such as relief, anger, or anxiety (Weick, 1994). The

introduction of a new policy, or staff development regarding discipline practices, might disrupt the normal day-to-day activity of an administrator or teacher. Understanding how and when an interruption to one's flow will occur has the potential to lessen the negative impact of a significant change (Salazar, 2013).

### ***Focused on and Extracted by Cues***

Sensemaking is focused on and extracted by cues. People in their daily life are confronted with a number of cues – too many to notice (Clegg & Bailey, 2008). A person will only notice a few cues, because of his own filter. Understanding how individuals respond to paradoxes, problems, and new issues can highlight knowledge and understanding of that individual (Salazar, 2013). Weick (1995) illustrates an example of the use of cues for when a person is lost in a forest without a map. He explains that they might use trees, rocks, stars, paths, etc. in order to help them find their way back home. The cues, or acts of faith, help people deal with the state of being caught in a dilemma, such as being lost.

### ***Driven by Plausibility Rather than Accuracy***

To make sense is to answer the question, “What’s the story here?” (Clegg & Bailey, 2008). Sensemaking is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995). People start with an outcome in hand – a verdict, a choice – and then render that outcome sensible by constructing a plausible story that produced it (Weick, 1995, p.121). Perhaps the most salient description of this factor in sensemaking is that “sensemaking is not about truth and getting it right,” but rather about continued “redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates

more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 415). What is plausible for one group, such as principals, may prove implausible for teachers (Weick et al., 2005).

### ***Fallacy of Centrality***

The fallacy of centrality is the general belief that an event must not be going on if a person doesn't know about it. An interesting insight regarding the fallacy of centrality is, according to an example of battered child syndrome used by Weick (1995), experts overestimate the likelihood that doctors would know about the phenomenon if it were actually taking place. Similar to the racial discipline gap, making an assumption that everyone knows about it may fall prey to the fallacy of centrality.

### **Applications of Sensemaking in Education Literature**

Numerous studies have applied a sensemaking approach to explore how individuals make sense of policy implementation (Coburn, 2001; Lin, 2000; Spillane, 1999; Spillane et al., 2002), student demographic changes (Evans, 2007b), reading policy (Coburn, 2005) and accountability policy (Saltrick, 2012; Seashore Louis, Febey & Schroeder, 2005).

Spillane et al. (2002) maintained the importance of individuals' specific and unique worldview, which interacts with the contexts and cues people receive to help them frame information in ways that make sense to them. These cognitive processes manifest themselves through what can be called the “artifacts” of sensemaking, that is, the words, actions, and behaviors that tell us about the sense that individuals made and may suggest a relationship between meanings made and specific words, actions, and behaviors

(Weick, 1995).

Sensemaking theory has also been explored as being rooted in both collective and contextual environments (Coburn, 2001; Lin, 2000; Spillane et al., 2002). Yanow (1996), and Coburn (2001) emphasized the collective nature of sensemaking by building on the notion that policy implementation is broader than individual interpretation of policy guidelines. Coburn (2001) analyzed the sensemaking of teachers working in professional learning communities regarding reading instruction and found that local policy actors mediate norms, belief systems and practices through a process of collective sensemaking.

According to Spillane and colleagues (2002), sensemaking is also contextual. They explored policy implementation through a cognitive sensemaking lens in the context of school districts' responses to mathematical reform and found a "zone of enactment" for the space in which teachers make sense of, and operationalize, reform ideas (p.159). Lin (2000) studied the implementation of social policy in prisons and found that without an understanding of the context of policy, there is little chance for policy fidelity.

Numerous studies have extended a sensemaking framework to the work of school leaders. Many sought to understand how leaders make sense of teacher hiring and performance (Ingle, Rutledge & Bishop, 2011), programs to improve instructional leadership (Carraway & Young, 2015), academic tracking in higher education (Gonzalez, 2008), inclusion (DeMatthews, 2012; Salazar, 2013) and how they frame sensemaking around data use (Park, Daly & Guerra, 2002). Heinhorst (2013)

explored the sensemaking that principals do to engage low income and minority parents and found that principals have connate constructions of parental involvement. He recommends the creation of a uniform meaning of parental involvement that includes both what the school values and what parents' value as meaningful parental involvement behaviors, which might allow for more effective communication between home and school in ways to help students do better in schools.

Significant to this study, Evans (2007a) studied school response to demographic change. The findings revealed that individual and shared meanings about race influenced the ways in which schools respond to demographic change. Similarly, Evans (2007b) extended the 2004 study and explored the sensemaking of school leaders about demographic change related to how and why they defined issues of race in the ways they did. Evans (2007b) found that the school leaders addressed race to varying degrees in their process of making sense of demographic changes in their schools.

Few studies have utilized sensemaking theory by giving attention to race and racism problems specifically. Similar to Evans (2007b), I extend the sensemaking framework to include consideration of how school leaders, inclusive of principals and assistant principals, address race specifically in their process of making sense of the discipline gap. Using a three-theory approach, this study will explore how new school leaders as recent graduates of a principal preparation program with a focus on anti-racist leadership make sense of the racial discipline gap, frame the issue according to first and second-order change, and enact their leadership to disrupt the problem.

## **PROBLEM FRAMING**

In the context of a problem, the sense people make around it involves framing, or having a point of view about the problem. According to Kolko (2010), a frame is an active perspective that both describes and changes a situation. Through sensemaking, a frame is a larger and broader way of viewing the world and situations within that world (Kolko, 2010). Problem framing necessarily links to opportunities for change.

Johnston, Friedman and Shafer (2014) asserted the ways remedies to problems were framed by the media suggested which solutions were legitimate and who played a role in enacting them. Their work employed Entman's (1993, 2005) typology to classify frames as a function of defining a problem, identifying causes, conveying a moral judgment, and suggesting remedies. An adapted excerpt of InGenius by Tina Seelig offers a compelling perspective on problem framing. Two questions are posed: What is the sum of 5 plus 5? and What two numbers add up to 10? The first question has only one correct answer, and the second question has an endless number of solutions, including negative numbers and fractions. These two problems represent two approaches to problem framing. By changing the frame, there is the possibility for wider range of potential solutions.

### **Problem Framing in Educational Leadership**

Framing research specific to education focuses primarily in the area of leadership and problem framing. Bolman and Deal (1993) suggest that the leader's ability to reframe a problem involves a conscious effort to analyze a situation using multiple lenses. Cuban (1990) suggests that framing a problem is a subjective process dependent

upon the perceptions of the person who interprets the data and does the refining (p.2).

Copland (2000) recognizes problem framing ability as a way to avoid “predetermined” solutions to problems. Copland (2000) employs a useful and relevant analogy to illustrate the problem-framing processes of school administrators.

Imagine a situation in which a teacher approaches the principal with a complaint about a particular student’s behavior in class and demands that the student be removed and placed in another class. Initially, it is important for the principal to understand that the teacher sees the problem as residing with the student (p. 8).

Copland (2000) explains that “a principal employing expert skills in problem framing would recognize that the teacher has framed the problem with a preconceived solution, and this recognition would trigger a reflective process,” and that, from the teacher’s perspective, the embedded solution is to move the student out of the classroom (p.8). According to Copland (2000), a skilled problem-framer will understand the dangers of the narrowly defined problem attached to a single solution and will look deeper in the nature of the problem to formulate an unbiased interpretation.

Copland (2000) found that three cohorts of students in a principal preparation program differed significantly in problem framing ability as associated with their level of exposure to problem-based learning in their leadership preparation. Results suggest that purposeful exposure to problem-based learning is associated with greater problem framing ability. Slegers and colleagues (2009) provided another perspective on school leaders’ problem framing relevant to this study. Using sensemaking theory, their study showed that the way school leaders frame problems was embedded in their professional



biographies and the situated context of their current circumstances.

### **Problem Framing and Change Initiatives**

Problem framing has also been explicitly linked with its relationship to change initiatives. Heifetz and colleagues have a nuanced approach to describing change approaches in that they see leadership and change as inextricably linked (2009). They purport that leaders often fail to distinguish between technical changes and adaptive changes. Technical changes are attempts to fix ordinary problems without changing the system. These may appear to help but are ultimately ineffectual on their own because leaders have wrongly diagnosed the kind of change needed. Adaptive changes constitute something bigger and address fundamental values that demand innovation, learning, and changes to the system itself. These changes tend to interrupt the status quo.

A similar stream in educational research links problem framing with leadership change approaches according to first and second-order change (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Young et al., 2011). First-order change is characterized by adjustments made within the existing structure doing more or less of the *same old thing*. First-order change is an extension of past knowledge within existing paradigms consistent with prevailing values and norms (Marzano et al., 2005). On the other hand, second-order change is consistent with adjustments made *to* the existing structure that exceeds existing practices. Second-order change breaks with the past and conflicts with prevailing values and norms. Adaptive and second-order change is invariably more challenging than technical or first-order change because schools are anchored in status quo systems.

Recall that a particularly useful tool has been recently developed to conceptualize problem framing as a resourceful, innovative way to think about organizational change. Young and colleagues (2011) created and deployed this tool in a research study with students in a principal preparation program. Students' problem framing disposition was analyzed according to their approach to first and second-order change. Polar ends of the spectrum include problem framing oriented toward first-order change on the left side, and problem framing oriented toward second-order change on the right side (Figure 2.1). First-order change problem framing centers the problem at the individual or campus level, and includes factors of student and family, teacher and classroom, and administrator and campus. In contrast, second-order change actions reflect change through capacity building and school culture.

This study investigated the changes in problem framing (as well as leader identity) through analysis of problem-based narratives. Comparison of pre-program and end-of-program data analysis supported that the majority of participants exhibited movement toward second-order change problem framing by the end of the two-year program. The current study draws directly on the work of Young and colleagues (2011) to assess how aspiring anti-racist leaders frame and/or reframe the racial discipline gap and translate this into action toward either first or second-order change.

Figure 2.1

*Adapted Problem Framing and Equity Identity Continuum*

**Problem Framing Continuum**

| <b>First-order Change</b>   |  |   | <b>Second-order Change</b>   |   |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Student/Family</b><br>Students or parents held responsible for results                           | <b>Teacher/Classroom</b><br>Individual teachers held responsible for results   | <b>Administrator/Campus</b><br>Administrator or campus held responsible for results and/or campus-wide structures | <b>Capacity Building</b><br>Intentional development of individuals and teams to increase ability to respond to needs | <b>Culture</b><br>Intentionally addresses operating norms & behaviors that disrupt deficit thinking                   |
| -Saturday School<br>-Parent Phone Calls<br>-Parent Training<br>- Reward/Punishment discipline focus | -Disconnected professional development<br>-No teacher support<br>-Punitive measures for poor-quality classroom management approach | -Increased visibility w/o relationships<br>-Punitive discipline stance/zero tolerance<br>-Monitoring w/o support  | -PD<br>-Equity audits at classroom and school level<br>- Relationship building<br>-Student engagement                | Develop shared:<br>-Vision<br>-Discipline culture<br>-Community<br>-Adult actions consistent with cultural competency |

**ANTI-RACIST PRINCIPAL PREPARATION PROGRAMS**

It is necessary to explore social justice leadership to fully appreciate a principal preparation program that focuses on anti-racism. Social justice leadership provides the context for this type of education experience within a principal preparation program.

There continues to be a growing emphasis on social justice leadership in the literature,

with more recent application of anti-racist leadership specifically.

### **Social Justice Leadership**

As a result of the expanding literature devoted to social justice leadership, Capper and colleagues (2006) conducted a comprehensive review of related scholarship and proposed a framework for conceptualizing the preparation of leaders for social justice. The resulting framework for social justice leadership preparation considers the intersection between two dimensions of a framework – what students must learn and the corresponding program structure to support their learning. Pertaining to what students must “believe, know and do to lead social just schools,” Capper and colleagues (2006) define one part of the intersection, the “horizontal dimension,” as one that attends to the critical consciousness, knowledge, and practical skills focused on social justice with students (Capper et al., 2006, p. 212). The “vertical dimension” identifies three components of a preparation program that support focused student learning. These include curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The three-by-three framework results in nine defined attributes critical to the preparation of social justice leaders coupled with an overall “sense of emotional safety,” as described by Young and Laible (2000) to be able to take intellectual and emotional risks toward social justice aims.

A collective group of scholars produced a commentary paper similar to the framework suggested by Capper and colleagues (2006) and suggested a structure and content for principal preparation programs whose aim is to prepare leaders for social justice work (McKenzie, et.al, 2008). Both theoretical contributions agree that the alignment between what students in a preparation program should learn and the structure

and content of the curriculum must advance the goal of preparing leaders to “lead schools out of the mire of entrenched inequities” (McKenzie, et al, 2008).

Theoharis (2008) asserts that principals must have “arrogant humility” to be leaders for social justice. Tillman (2003) broadens the discussion and adds a critical perspective. In her study, Tillman (2003) highlighted the nature of who is represented in educational administration and points to the “dismal” data reflecting the lack of racial and ethnic diversity across the field of educational administration. Simply put, there is a “dearth” of people of color across school leadership. As a result, the recruitment and selection of persons of color is a vital ingredient in a principal preparation program with a focus on anti-racist leadership.

In their review of the social justice literature related to school leadership, Capper et al. (2006) found that recommendations related to race and ethnicity received the greatest attention from scholars. Indeed, preparation programs have done little to provide students with an intellectual understanding of racism and race relations (Lopez, 2003; Young & Laible, 2000).

### **Anti-Racist Leadership**

Capper et al. (2006) propose a leadership framework that incorporates nine specific ways to intersect issues of race in student learning. One example of how issues of race are situated within one of the nine attributes described in the framework proposed by Capper et al. (2006) is the intersection between curriculum and critical consciousness. Curriculum has the opportunity to raise student consciousness about power and privilege, and for example, White racism, and the ways in which schools are typically structured to

perpetuate inequities. A second example of one the nine attributes is the cross-over between curriculum and skills. This is especially germane to this study. For example, curriculum in a social justice leadership program related to skill development might expose particular knowledge of racial problems with exclusionary remedies to discipline, and would then go a step further to engage students in consideration of ways to disrupt such practices as school leaders.

According to Rusch (2004), as faculty who operate from privileged positions design leadership programs, discussions around issues of gender and race are often limited. Likewise, Gooden and Dantley (2012) asserted that as leadership preparation programs have merged the technical skills of school leadership with the commitment to changing the contexts of schools through a social justice agenda, an emphasis on race has received less attention.

McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) offer a practical description of ways that principal preparation programs might confront race as a barrier to equity in schools. They employ the concept of “equity traps” as an analogy to the systems of beliefs held by educators that prevent them from “believing that their students of color can be successful learners” (p. 602). McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) purported that if principals (among others) hold the “dysconscious perception that some children are at a deficit because of race, poverty, culture, behavior, home language,” and therefore, believe somehow that these students are incapable of performing at high levels, they lower their expectations of them (p. 603). According to McKenzie and Scheurich, this type of thinking is an example of an equity trap and must be confronted in principal preparation programs

through the identification and understanding of equity traps through purposeful coursework and activities.

Shields and colleagues (2002) employed a dialogic approach to explore complex issues of race and ethnicity as implications for school leadership through the construct of multiculturalism in Canada. They asserted that school leaders must develop a “historically informed and politically shaped conception of antiracism pedagogy that extends beyond multiculturalism,” and move from the historical context to consideration of one’s own racial identity. Shields et al. (2002) offered suggestions that center both the content and process of antiracist programs for school leaders in Canada.

The nature of the principal preparation programs considered in this study was developed according to the framework outlined by Gooden and Dantley (2012). Therefore, an explanation of this framework is necessary for accurately describing what is meant by a principal preparation program that focuses on anti-racist leadership. Gooden and Dantley (2012) prescribe a five-part framework to specifically center race in leadership preparation. The framework consists of five essential elements that include a prophetic voice; self-reflection; a grounding in critical theoretical construction; a pragmatic edge that supports praxis; and the inclusion of race language. A prophetic voice is described by the authors as one where the message of anti-racism is challenging, and “demands a radical and indeed revolutionary response to its call” (p. 241). For example, a prophetic voice interrogates why there are racial disparities in discipline and provides reasons why this practice must stop.

The second element of Gooden and Dantley’s framework for educational

leadership programs is critical self-reflection (2012). The third ingredient is a critical theoretical grounding that demands that the “process of theory production must not divorce itself from the realities and particularly the atrocities of everyday life” (p. 242). The third element of the framework builds on critique through praxis, which means that the students in principal preparation programs must go beyond the acknowledgement and critique of inequities, but “must also offer solutions, tactics, or strategies to tackle these discriminatory practices” (p. 243). The final ingredient in a framework for leadership preparation that centers on race must include race language that locates race within a broader, historical context linked to other political, economic, and cultural concerns. The centering of race necessarily includes consideration for constructs of racism and colorblindness.

### ***Racism***

Borrowing from the work of Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997), this study employs a definition of racism as “an institutionalized system of economic, political, social, and cultural relations that ensures that one racial group has and maintains power and privilege over all others in all aspects of life” (p. 2). Lopez (2003) describes how racism has been reduced to broad generalizations about others based on the color of their skin, an individual construction, versus the social construct of racism that acknowledges the institutional and systematic forms of racism. Lopez (2003) asserts that the reduction of racism as personal is a slippage, where the “idea of a neutral social order is protected and racism is maintained by the downplaying, or ignoring, of the role of White racism in a larger social order” (p. 69). Anti-racism education is the “beginning of a new approach



to thinking, feeling, and acting,” and involves having the self-awareness, knowledge and skills to challenge, interrogate, and interrupt any and all manifestations of racism (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997, p.3).

### ***Colorblindness***

Colorblindness is the “racial ideology that posits the best way to end discrimination is by treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity” (Williams, 2011, p. 1). “The belief that colorblindness will eliminate racism is not only shortsighted but reinforces the notion that racism is a personal – as opposed to a systemic – issue” (Lopez, 2003, p. 69). Colorblindness is talked about as an ideology that comprises ways of thinking and talking that affirm our belief in individualism without recognizing the many remaining barriers to equality (Burke, 2013). Research literature categorizes colorblindness as a theoretical consideration with identifiers such as “color blind perspective,” “color-blind racism,” and “color-blind racial attitude theory.”

Colorblindness operates at the institutional and individual level. During slavery, racism was overt and emerged from the eugenics movement, anchored in notions of genetic inferiority of Blacks and other non-White races. With legalized segregation supported by the *Plessy v. Ferguson* U.S. Supreme Court decision, Blacks and other racial minorities began to protest and initiated court cases that challenged legalized segregation (Henry, 2009). The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which found that the separation was inherently unequal, stymied the era of overt national racism (Henry, 2009). Modern racism presents itself in ways that are largely invisible to

White society. This invisible racism manifests through colorblindness and is largely anchored in the idea of meritocracy. Contemporary views of colorblindness align with the idea that “if one could squelch racist laws by eliminating racist talk and the belief systems that underlie such ideas, then race would no longer matter and individuals could be judged as individuals separate from their racial category,” (Henry, 2009, p. 145). A color-blind perspective maintains that people have equal access to economic and social success, regardless of race (Frankenberg, 1993). In schools, a color-blind perspective might be demonstrated through a principal purporting that he or she does not “see race,” when making disciplinary decisions and that all students are treated equally.

Color-blind racism is detected through the statistical proof of racial disparity in disciplinary and academic outcomes for students of color, despite the willingness of many school officials to acknowledge that truth. The sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) has argued that all this means is that the nature of racial discourse has changed and that there is a new way of expressing prejudicial attitudes, which he calls “color-blind racism.” Colorblind racism is the dominant racial ideology in post-civil rights America, and unlike its predecessor (Jim Crow racism), it is subtle, apparently nonracial, and avoids traditional racist discourse. Color-blind racism is the modern, yet subtle, successor to Jim Crow racism – the more overt, “tangible,” racism that Whites are familiar with (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Color-blind racism refers to the changing nature of racial discourse and the current expression of prejudicial attitudes (Doane, 2007).

Similarly, color-blind racial attitude theory posits that the White perspective is one that characterizes racism as a horrible thing of the past. Rather, color-blind attitudes

reflect the “seemingly benign position that race should not and does not matter” (Gushue & Constantine, 2007, p. 323). As referenced by Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee and Browne (2000), the American Psychological Association (1997) asserts that, “to get beyond racism and other similar forms of prejudice, we must first take the differences between people into account,” (p.2) This sentiment was echoed by Justice Blackmun in a famous affirmative action case, “In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way, and in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently” (Public Broadcast System, n.d.)

As highlighted in Pollock’s study (1994) in a California high school, a failure to discuss issues between adults and students, principals, and school resource officers may be “failing to understand some of the root causes of the racial gap” (Bedell, 2009, p. 18). Noguera posited that when educators fail to understand the students, the punishment typically lacks compassion, and is indicative of prevailing stereotypes and a fear of "urban" students (2005).

According to Moore (2008), polls on racial attitudes consistently report that Whites are more racially tolerant than ever. Some refer to this as the myth of a post-racial America. These polls indicated that respondents do not care if minorities live in their neighborhoods or if people marry across the color line, however the same polls found that Whites object to government anti-discrimination policies, such as affirmative action and school busing. Moore (2008) explained that the data also showed that Whites believe racism is no longer a major problem and that existing racial inequality is the product of a deficiency in the behavior of minorities.

Bonilla-Silva (2003) suggested that through his investigative questioning of hundreds of college students and Detroit residents the myth of colorblindness was uncovered. Many Whites expressed hostility and misunderstandings regarding Black individuals. Bonilla-Silva's study (2003) led to the classification of four manifestations of colorblindness, which included attachments to the ideals of meritocracy, the natural occurrence of racial segregation in society (housing, schools, etc.), deficit perspectives about Blacks, and a general minimization of racism.

People working from a colorblind point of view generally believe that the safest interpersonal policy is not to acknowledge someone's race (Henry, 2009). Tatum (1997) argued that a colorblind perspective is more about civility and manners. She suggested that colorblind individuals have primarily learned that it is impolite to mention or discuss race, thus avoiding talk about race altogether. In a colorblind society, White people can effectively ignore racism in American life (Fryberg, 2010), justify the way things are through lenses of meritocracy, and feel more comfortable with their relatively privileged standing in society (Williams, 2011). This is logical since they are unlikely to experience disadvantages due to their race. Most minorities, however, regularly encounter difficulties due to race, and experience colorblind ideologies quite differently. Colorblindness creates a society that denies their negative racial experiences (Williams, 2011).

Colorblindness as a theoretical consideration is critical to this study. One of the biggest barriers to finding a solution to the problem of the racial discipline gap is the fact that race is a topic that school leaders generally do not feel comfortable talking

about (Bedell, 2009; Pollock, 1994). The moving away from colorblindness is a shared trait among the five participants in this study – a trait developed through their participation in the anti-racist principal preparation program.

### **THE RACIAL DISCIPLINE GAP**

The racial discipline gap is the overrepresentation of students of color in disciplinary events. These include overrepresentation in office referrals (Krezmien et al., 2006; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2008), suspension (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Gregory et al., 2010; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Wallace et al., 2005), and even Class C Misdemeanor violations on school grounds – a practice referred to as school ticketing (Fowler et al., 2010; Fowler, 2011; Texas Appleseed, 2007). In this study, the primary focus on the discipline gap is on the use of exclusion, through office referrals and suspensions, to address discretionary rule violations.

No single factor can fully explain the racial discipline gap. However, zero tolerance policies are also seen as contributing factors to racially disparate disciplinary outcomes (Gregory, 1996; Skiba, et.al., 2000; Skiba et al., 2006; Townsend, 2000) because of the upward trend in the rates of suspensions and expulsions of students (Fowler, 2011; Heitzeg, 2009; Kim, Losen & Hewitt, 2010; Skiba, et al., 2006). Recall, however, that the racial discipline gap precedes the introduction of zero tolerance policies in schools.

### **Zero Tolerance and Juvenile Justice**

Data trends contradict the effectiveness of zero tolerance and indicate its negative

impact on the relationship of education with juvenile justice. Petteruti (2011) reviewed data from several national studies and reported that the growing use of school resource officers has led to an increase in juvenile justice referrals. This reflects a shifting in discipline away from schools and an increased reliance on arrests as a form of school discipline.

The tradition of police offering services to schools is long-standing, but it is in the last twenty years that assigning officers to work in schools has become prevalent.

Between 1997 and 2007, there were approximately 6,700 more school resource officers in schools. However, the data<sup>4</sup> show that the number of SROs decreased between 2003 and 2007 after increasing considerably between 2000 and 2003 (James & McCallion, 2013). The National Center for Education Statistics conducts a School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSCS) that collects data on the types of schools that use SROs. Data from the 2007-08 school year reveal that the presence of SROs is greater in high schools, urban schools, and schools with enrollments greater than 1,000 (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Richart, Brooks, & Soler (2003) conducted a study in Kentucky and found that the overwhelming majority of referrals from schools to juvenile court were found to be for status offenses, such as truancy or being out of the reasonable control of the school. This report highlights the over-reaching that can be attributed to zero tolerance when it is applied to subjective classifications of disruptive or non-compliant behavior.

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<sup>4</sup> A report conducted by the Congressional Research Service used data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics Law Enforcement Management Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey to determine the number of school resource officers deployed in schools, however the LEMAS survey does not collect data on the types of schools where SROs serve.

The Advancement Project (2005) examined the confluence of zero tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline practices across three urban school districts<sup>5</sup> and found that the increase in police presence has fueled the school to prison pipeline. Students in these districts experience risk of falling into the pipeline through systematic suspensions, expulsions, general discouragement, and pressures of high-stakes testing.

A comprehensive study in Texas examined over twenty of the largest school districts and found that most districts have increased the number of police officers (Fowler et al., 2010). The ticketing of students significantly increased over the two-to-five-year period of the study, and students of color and special education students were found to be disproportionately represented in Class C misdemeanor ticketing on school campuses. Students as young as five were found to have been issued tickets. As a result of this study, the state legislature has progressively limited the purview of school resource officers to issue tickets.

In Chicago as recently as 2010, 27,000 juveniles were arrested in Chicago, and over 5,000 of them were taken into custody at school. The same pattern of disproportionality exists here with more than 66% of those arrested being students of color. Indeed, the symbiotic relationship between schools and prisons rests on the fertile grounds of zero tolerance.

### **Schools and Prisons**

The increase in exclusionary punishment through zero tolerance mirrors the

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<sup>5</sup> The Advancement Project report gives a detailed account of the school to prison pipeline in Chicago, Denver, and Palm Beach, Florida.

punishment applied to adults through incarceration in prisons. Indeed, the faces of students who are most significantly impacted by harsher and exclusionary school disciplinary policies are disproportionately overrepresented according to the color of their skin. Zero tolerance approaches to discipline have direct consequences for students, and the disparities in outcomes are most pronounced for Black students. The Office for Civil Rights has documented the growing trend of racial overrepresentation of students of color in disciplinary events across every state in the United States (2014). Arcia (2006), Fabelo et al. (2011), Skiba et al. (2006), and Texas Appleseed (2010) found that these exclusionary consequences disproportionately impacted students of color, especially African American students.

In recent decades, there has been a noticeable “intensification of formal controls in schools” (Welch & Payne, 2010, p. 25). Indeed, this growing pathway between schools and legal systems is labeled the “school to prison pipeline”, “which refers to a growing pattern of pushing students out of schools and into the juvenile and adult criminal systems (Heitzug, 2009). Many urban schools mirror our adult prison systems in their approach to control and surveillance. Noguera (2003) described how the purpose of schools to sort, socialize, and maintain order and control function interdependently to reinforce social norms through discipline. He questioned the “social contract,” of schooling and articulated how and why broken contracts contribute to the school to prison pipeline, a phenomenon that illustrates the linkages between schools and prisons. Foucault (1974) suggested that power and authority work through school discipline. He posits that normalizing judgments, such as the distribution of rewards and punishments,



are the most important instruments of disciplinary power.

Noguera (2003) offered a rational explanation for these problematic trends, and he questioned why the growing efforts of schools to maintain order and safety resulted in the neediest and most disadvantaged students being most likely to receive punishment. Noguera described how students are expected to obey school rules and comply with adult directives in exchange for an education (2003). He went on to explain how a certain degree of individual freedom is relinquished to receive the benefit of an education and that most students tended to comply with this “implicit social contract,” (Noguera, 2003, p. 343). However, this traditional disciplinary model has not been effective for students who are not receiving the benefits of an education (Noguera, 2003). “Finding ways to produce safe and orderly schools need not compel us to turn schools into prisons or detention centers,” (Noguera, 2003, p. 350).

According to the Office for Civil Rights (2014), African-American students without disabilities are more than three times as likely as their White peers without disabilities to be expelled or suspended. Meier, et al (1989) asserted that the disproportionate impact of disciplinary actions by race constituted a second generation of discrimination indicative of systemic racial bias in the public schools. The discretionary nature of code of conduct (formal rules) violations supports this claim (Vanderhaas, 2003). When a teacher applies a zero tolerance approach to discretionary disciplinary events, the environment produces fertile grounds for racial disproportionality.

There have been various methods employed by researchers to study racial disparity in discipline events in schools. Quantitative studies employ statistical

techniques to measure the extent of the problem of overrepresentation by race and other factors, while qualitative studies approach the problem through a lens that asks bigger questions related to *why* and *how*. Some local preventive and culturally sensitive strategies offer promise, but there is little empirical research testing specific interventions for reducing the racial discipline gap.

### **Quantitative Studies**

Quantitative studies typically use different ways to measure and explore racial overrepresentation in disciplinary data (Gregory et al., 2010). Some methodological tools include the use of the composition index, risk index, odds ratio, and weighted risk ratios to describe discipline disparities by subgroups of the populations. Originating in the field of special education, the composition index (Chinn & Hugher, 1987; Donovan & Cross, 2002) compares the proportion of those served in special education represented by a given ethnic group with the proportion that group represents in the population, or school enrollment. Problems with scaling and interpretation have led the field of educational policy toward the use of the risk index (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Skiba et al., 2008; Westat, 2005). The risk index is the proportion of a given group in a given category. To interpret the risk index, a ratio of the risk of the target group to one or more groups may be constructed, termed a risk ratio (Parrish, 2002).

Wallace and colleagues (2008) used logistic regression through the use of the odds ratio. In 2005, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs issued a guidance to state and local agencies regarding the calculation and interpretation of risk indices and risk ratios (Westat, 2004, 2005). According to Gregory

et al. (2010), weighted risk ratios, a benefit described by the aforementioned policy guidance, account for differences in the size of racial and ethnic groups. Various measures have been used to describe the racial discipline gap, and studies tend to isolate variables in search of relationships to understand what predicts the discipline gap.

Gregory et al. (2010) explain the racial discipline gap according to poverty, neighborhood characteristics, and low achievement. They also use a typology to describe contributing factors; these include differential behavior, differential selection, and differential processing. Differential behavior is the rationale that certain racial and ethnic groups “misbehave” more than other racial and ethnic groups (Gregory et al., 2010, p. 62). Differential selection explanations consider the institutional policies such as racial profiling or educator bias. The differential processing hypothesis asserts that racial discrimination occurs in courts and correctional systems. In schools, this relates to subjective judgments in sanctioning such as school suspension decisions. These explanations cover a wide range of possible reasons for the racial discipline gap, and studies touch on one or more of these *types* of reasons described by Gregory and colleagues (2010) even if not precisely described using the same language.

The Zero Tolerance Task Force (APA, 2008) validates findings by researchers who have found that Black students are more likely than White students to be suspended from school (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Gregory et al., 2010; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2005), more likely to receive disciplinary referrals (Krezmien et al., 2006; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2008), and more likely to be disciplined for minor infractions (Office for

Civil Rights, 2014). Black students are more likely than White students to be referred to the office for defiance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008) and noncompliance (Skiba et al., 2008).

Quantitative studies have examined classroom referrals and the impact of individual and school characteristics on the application of disciplinary practices. Individual characteristics are defined by race and gender. School characteristics are defined by racial composition of student body, measures of socioeconomic status, school level (elementary and secondary), and school disciplinary policies. As demonstrated throughout the literature review, innumerable studies show overrepresentation of African Americans in referral and disciplinary data.

Most studies include secondary type schools, middle and high schools, as the disciplinary context. However, relative to the nature of suspension decisions at the elementary school level, Vanderhaas (2003) suggested that where high poverty is concentrated, children who are Black are more likely to be suspended for code of conduct types of violations (discretionary) versus violations of law. According to the U.S. Department of Education, African-American preschool students were more than four times as likely as White preschool students to receive more than one suspension (2014). McElderry and Cheng (2014) investigated the relationship of school exclusion with a variety of factors and found that mother's age and education level, parent involvement in school, and parent satisfaction with school reduced likelihood of school exclusion.

It remains a highly consistent finding that race and ethnicity remain a significant

predictor of discipline even after controlling for various measures of family income (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2008; Wu, Pink, Crain & Moles, 1982), grade point average (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986), and differential behavior (Skiba, et al., 2002).

A recent study found that African American students continue to face high risk of expulsion or suspension from school relative to White children even in models that control for a set of socio-demographic and economic characteristics (Kaushal & Nepomnyaschy, 2009). Rausch and Skiba (2004) conducted a study in a Midwestern state and found that Black students experience a greater risk of suspension when compared to their White counterparts in suburban schools, not just in the urban schools most associated with disciplinary problems. Thornton and Trent (1988) found that the racial discipline gap in suspension rates was greater at higher socioeconomic schools that had been recently desegregated. Eitle and Eitle (2004) reported decreased rates of disproportionality in school suspension rates in schools after resegregation.

Using a national sample of 294 public schools, Welch and Payne (2010) tested the racial threat hypothesis within schools to determine if the racial composition of students predicts greater use of punitive controls, regardless of levels of misbehavior and delinquency. Results of multivariate analyses support the racial threat perspective finding that schools with a larger percentage of Black students are more likely to use extremely punitive discipline and are more likely to implement zero tolerance policies.

In a North Carolina study, Kinsler (2011) used infraction data to investigate gaps in punishment within and across schools and found that the statewide racial discipline

gap is largely generated by cross-school variation in punishment. This study also found little evidence that Black students are treated differentially according to teacher or principal race. Recall that this stands in contrast to the findings of Wright (2015) where Black students received more favorable behavioral ratings from Black teachers than from White teachers.

The literature affirms that students in urban school districts are more likely to be suspended from school than students from rural and suburban areas (Evenson, Justinger, Pelischek, & Schulz, 2009). Taken together, all of this suggests that urban school districts and suburban school districts with higher concentrations of students of color are more likely to have both discretionary and non-discretionary zero tolerance policies than majority White school districts. These facts are symbolic representations of geographic and racial inequality in the school-to-prison pipeline (Noguera, 2003).

Even when suspension rates drop, studies show that disparities in suspension rates according to race remain (Office for Civil Rights, 2014). After understanding the multifaceted trends in the racial discipline gap, one must wonder if staff perceptions and racial climate may be an important prediction of racial disparity. Vavrus and Cole (2002) found a higher incidence among African Americans for violations of interactional codes where students allegedly questioned the authority of the teacher.

Evidence for bias theories is not wholly conclusive (Kinsler, 2011; Theriot, Craun, & Dupper, 2010) from a quantitative perspective, however, the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity suggested that racial disproportionality in school discipline implicates implicit bias. Implicit bias is defined as the mental process that

causes us to have negative feelings about people based on characteristics like race, ethnicity, gender, age, and physical appearance (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2015). This cognitive process happens in unconscious ways, so people are not necessarily aware of the negative racial biases that develop over the course of their life. For example, Theriot, Craun, and Dupper (2010) found significant differences between minority and non-minority students in school exclusion, however the disproportionality was not sufficient to prove bias on the part of school administrators or teachers. Other reasons may include societal stereotypes, implicit bias, and a cultural mismatch between teachers and Black students.

### **Qualitative Studies**

Quantitative studies tend to explore the *what* of the racial discipline gap by measuring the degree of the problem using statistical methods, while qualitative studies look more deeply into possible reasons why. Some explanatory factors cited in the literature include racial bias, stereotypes, and cultural mismatch theory.

Bleecker (2007) used racial identity and cultural conflict theory to describe the racial consciousness of Washington state counselors and assistant principals and the degree to which each construct explains the disproportionality for students of color in disciplinary referrals (among other things). While the findings were limited, racial bias on the part of educators is believed to have contributed to the overall problem.

Some qualitative studies also employ bias theories, which propose that White teachers' discipline may be influenced by media stereotypes of Black aggressive students (Chu, 2014). Research has shown that racial stereotypes and implicit bias remain

widespread in schools (Ferguson, 2001; Howard, 2008; Kirwan Institute, 2015). Skiba and colleagues (2006) explored the perceptions of school staff regarding disproportionality, and found evidence of racial and behavior stereotyping. Losen (2015) and Welch & Payne (2010) reported that higher Black enrollment predicts a higher likelihood of more severe punishment.

In an ethnographic study of disciplinary practices at an urban elementary school, Ferguson (2001) documented the seemingly unconscious process whereby racial stereotypes may contribute to higher rates of school punishment for young African American males. Noguera posited that when educators fail to understand the students, the punishment typically lacks compassion, and is indicative of prevailing stereotypes and a fear of "urban" students (2005). Mainstream views of African American life are connected to threatening images through media portrayals of violence, drugs, and anti-authoritarianism (Monroe, 2005). According to Noguera (2003), Black student resistance is often coded as misbehavior. In another ethnography of a high school in California, Pollock (1994) found that race was more easily used to describe student-to-student conflict, but was never used to describe adult-to-student conflict. This failure to discuss issues between adults and students, principals, and school resource officers may be "failing to understand some of the root causes of the racial gap," (Bedell, 2009, p. 18).

Researchers have also explained this gap using cultural mismatch theory, which maintains that conflict exists between teachers and students as a result of the tension between the teacher's majority and student's minority culture (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Townsend, 2000). For example, Fenning and Rose (2007) argue against the status quo



response of just looking at factors internal to the student. “Coupled with anxiety on the part of school personnel that they must always be in control of student behavior, those who are not perceived as fitting the social and behavioral norms of the school are subsequently labeled as dangerous or as troublemakers” (Fenning & Rose, 2007, p. 537). The work of Townsend (2000) and Monroe and Obidah (2004) asserts that culturally responsive instructional and discipline management strategies can mitigate school exclusionary responses to student misbehavior. Both have offered alternative models for disciplinary consequences that aim to keep students in the classroom learning environment.

Mixed method approaches to exploring the racial discipline gap include observations and quantitative analysis. Using a large nationally representative longitudinal data set, Bates and Glick (2013) examined a set of multiple, repeated behavioral observations of the same children by different teachers. The results indicate there are differences in behavioral ratings children receive based on their race and ethnicity. According to Bates and Glick (2013), “teachers’ ratings tend to be consistent with the societal stereotypes associated with the racial and ethnic groups when rating students’ externalizing behaviors” (p. 1188). Black students are more likely to be rated as exhibiting more problematic behaviors in school, while Asian students are perceived as exhibiting fewer of these behaviors (Bates and Glick, 2013).

However, these results also indicate that students do not receive the same ratings from all teachers and corroborates findings from Wright (2015) that if teachers are of the same racial/ethnic group as the student, the ratings are less consistent with these

expectations (Bates & Glick, 2013). Recall that Black children receive more favorable ratings from Black teachers (Bates and Glick, 2013; Wright, 2015). These studies highlight teacher-student racial-congruence as a contextual factor helping to counterbalance stereotypes. Black students suffer most and are stereotyped most negatively, and are the least likely to have a minority teacher who might be able to look past these stereotypes when assessing the student's behavior. In other words, the results are consistent with a stereotyped world in which Asian students are viewed as a model minority, while Black students are viewed as oppositional or behaviorally difficult by the dominant group (Wright, 2015).

### **Federal Policy and the Racial Discipline Gap**

For students of color in public schools, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 offers vital legal protection. Titles IV and VI protect students from discrimination based on race in connection with all academic, educational, extracurricular, athletic, and other programs and activities of a school, including programs and activities a school administers to ensure and maintain school safety and student discipline (Office for Civil Rights, 2014). When schools respond to student misconduct, Titles IV and VI require that the school's response be nondiscriminatory.

Titles IV and VI protect students over the entire course of the disciplinary process, from behavior management in the classroom, to referral to an authority outside the classroom because of misconduct. This is important because the decision to remove a student from the classroom through a referral carries the same protection for students as formal removals through suspensions and expulsions. In other words, a decision to

remove a student should be given great consideration by the classroom teacher.

According to the Dear Colleague Letter (Office for Civil Rights, 2014), the initial office referral raises concerns to the extent that it entails the “subjective exercise of unguided discretion in which racial biases or stereotypes may be manifested.”

The School Discipline Guidance Package is a federal policy that states, “Schools violate Federal law when they evenhandedly implement facially neutral policies and practices that, although not adopted with the intent to discriminate, nonetheless have an unjustified effect of discriminating against students on the basis of race” (Office for Civil Rights, 2014, p.11). A facially neutral policy is one that does not appear to discriminate on its face, but has the application, or effect, of being discriminatory.

Both Title IV and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (1964) prohibit schools from intentionally disciplining students differently based on race. The clearest case of intentional discrimination would be a policy that was discriminatory on its face: one that included explicit language requiring that students of one race be disciplined differently from students of another race (Office for Civil Rights, 2014). This type of intentional discrimination is commonly referred to as an example of *disparate treatment*. “More commonly, however, intentional discrimination occurs when a school has a discipline policy that is neutral on its face (meaning the language of the policy does not explicitly differentiate between students based on their race), but the school administers the policy in a discriminatory manner” (Office for Civil Rights, 2014, p. 7).

Another example includes types of unintentional discrimination. For example, if a district’s zero tolerance policy impacts students of color at a rate disproportionate to

their representation in the district or school, this has implications related to federal anti-discrimination rights granted to individuals through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which makes the decision-making responsibility of school leaders of paramount importance. This type of discrimination described by the Civil Rights Act is commonly referred to as *disparate impact*.

The SDGP outlines a prescriptive example of the principles of disparate impact and disparate treatment and how violations of these might be determined by the Office for Civil Rights (Office for Civil Rights, 2014). The SDGP also recommends ways that educational institutions can mitigate discriminatory practices by offering research-based examples of specific processes and actions that can be taken to mitigate violations specific to disparate impact and disparate treatment.

The SDGP, as a federal policy executed through the legal principles of disparate impact and disparate treatment, has significant implications for principals and assistant principals. As the persons ultimately responsible for the delivery of disciplinary sanctions on students, school leaders play an important role in discipline policy (Deal & Peterson, 1990). Indeed, school leaders serve as the local actors for changing local policies and practices that discriminate according to race, as specified in the SDGP policy.

#### **STATE AND DISTRICT-LEVEL DISCIPLINE POLICY**

School discipline policy is generally defined as the written contracts between schools and students regarding appropriate behavior. These contracts are formalized through local student codes of conduct. At the district level, local school boards adopt

and implement a student Code of Conduct that prohibits certain behaviors and defines standards of acceptable behavior on and off school campus, as well as specifies the consequences for violations. The state law requires each school district to define misconduct that may – or must – result in a range of specific disciplinary consequences. The ranges of possible school responses to student misbehavior consists of a rehabilitative and restorative type approach on one end, and a punitive, exclusionary approach on the other end of the continuum.

To gain context for the meaning of the racial discipline gap, it is necessary to understand the nature of exclusionary disciplinary consequences in the context where the participants work. Indeed, when scholars refer to the racial discipline gap, or disparities in disciplinary outcomes by race, it is most often centered on the disparities in school sanctions that exclude students, usually through office referrals, suspension and expulsion. The Education Code is set of state laws governing public education in the state where the study was conducted. An examination of exclusionary disciplinary policies as allowed through the Education Code will precede discussion about exclusion and its impact on students.

Throughout this study, the use of the term punitive is also used interchangeably with the concept of exclusion. While in theory, punitive discipline policies include a wider range of actions, such as school ticketing or corporal punishment (spanking), the nature of punitive discipline as discussed in this study is exclusion – or removal from class or school.

Exclusionary disciplinary practices have increased in the last decade, and the

culprit is the culture of zero tolerance. Exclusionary disciplinary policies follow procedures outlined in the Education Code. These practices will be considered through the lens of their application as a policy from the state and local school district levels. Exclusionary discipline will also be explored through the examination of the impact such practices have on students.

### **Education Code and Exclusion**

Exclusionary responses to student behavior infractions are being increasingly employed in public schools (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001). As described in Chapter One, exclusionary disciplinary policies are actions or consequences for students that result in removal from the learning environment at any level. The lowest level of student exclusion is a disciplinary referral. While this type of exclusionary disciplinary practices may not be labeled as a suspension or expulsion, the nature of the disciplinary consequence is exclusionary due to the fact that the student is being removed from the learning environment. Suspensions and expulsions are briefly discussed in the Education Code.

The local school district is authorized to decide what types of offenses should call for suspension. Suspension is limited to three days per offense under the SEC. Also noteworthy, the law makes no mention of in-school suspension. A recent revision of the SEC created an alternative to expulsion through alternative education programs. The SEC includes both mandatory and discretionary placements in the alternative education programs. There are offenses for which a student must be assigned to an alternative education program that include: felony offenses, assaults leading to bodily injury, certain

alcohol and drug offenses, inhalant offenses, public lewdness, and indecent exposure.

Discretionary placements are also offenses for which a student may be placed in an alternative education program (AEP). School districts can send students to AEPs for reasons other than those listed in state law, provided that the district code of conduct advises the students that removal might occur. Expulsion is reserved for only the most serious offenses and is available only with students who are at least ten years old. The SEC outlines the types of conduct that require expulsion from school. Procedures that accompany expulsions are more extensive than those involved in suspensions. The property rights of students to receive a public education are guaranteed through the Fourteenth Amendment. In turn, students are afforded appropriate levels of due process. Interestingly, the Education Code does not delineate how much process is due prior to an expulsion. Schools have increasingly relied on the authority granted to them through the Education Code to employ exclusionary remedies to disciplinary problems.

### **Academic and Psychological Impacts of Exclusion**

Although the argument for exclusion as a form of punishment among educators is compelling in terms of eliminating classroom disruptions and safety concerns (Gorman, 2002), the overall educational effectiveness of exclusion, at any level or degree, is unsupported (Advancement Project, 2011; Arcia, 2006; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fabelo et al., 2011; Jimerson et al., 1997; Oakes, 1994; Public Policy Research Institute, 2005; Royer, 2003). Students who exhibit the most challenging behavior have been suspended multiple times, yet suspension does not appear

to reduce future negative behavior events (Christle et al., 2004; Crowell et al., 2000).

In the academic and socio-emotional context, research into the educational outcomes of students demonstrate the harmful effects on students who experience disciplinary consequences that exclude them from the learning environment (Arcia, 2006; Fabelo et al., 2011; Giroux, 2003). The academic and psychological implications of exclusionary disciplinary policies, namely suspension and expulsion, have far-reaching societal consequences.

Indeed, there is a logical link to the loss of instructional time resulting from suspensions and how that may be contributing to lowered academic performance. Several studies found a strong positive relationship between time engaged in learning and student achievement (Brophy, 1988; Greenwood, Horton & Utle, 2002). Gettinger (1985) evaluated the extent to which spending less time than needed for learning affects overall achievement in fourth and fifth grade students and found that spending insufficient learning time has a direct negative effect on achievement. Student suspensions have been shown to significantly increase the risk of academic reading underperformance (Arcia, 2006) and have been linked to student dropout and not graduating on time (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003).

According to a study at Texas A& M University, disciplinary referrals at school are the single greatest predictor of future involvement in the juvenile system (Public Policy Research Institute, 2005). Exclusionary disciplinary measures have short and long-term implications for students' academic success and psychological well-being. Studies reveal a correlation with suspensions and negative student academic outcomes



(Chu, 2014; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Oakes, 1994) and emotional outcomes (Nichols et al., 1999; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Suspension from school has implications for academic tracking, level of quality instruction, grade retention, and school completion.

Suspension has also been linked to special education referrals and lower level academic tracks (Oakes, 1994). Suspensions that result in placement in an alternative educational setting have also been critically examined in the literature - while the student has the ability to continue to receive an education, the quality of such programs has been shown to suffer from disjointed curriculum and non-certified teachers (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000).

Studies have corroborated the association between suspension and grade retention (Christle et al., 2004; Rodney, Crafter, Rodney, & Mupier, 1999) and between suspension rates and dropout rates (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Royer, 2003), however there are inconclusive findings as well. For instance, Jones (2013) studied students at a large Southeastern high school and found that early discipline, characterized by exclusionary school discipline received by a student in the 9th grade, was predictive of lower academic achievement (as measured by GPA) in the early years of high school, but it was not predictive of dropout status later in high school. There has been some debate around the validity of research on the relationships between suspensions and grade retention and suspensions and school completion. It has been suggested that the academic ability of students interferes with the validity of correlating suspension with grade retention. Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, and Soufe (1997) performed a group comparison study and found the groups did not differ significantly on measures of

intellectual functioning at age 5 and at the end of third grade.

Finally, exclusion has a psychological component. Nichols, Ludwin, and Iadicola (1999) found that out-of-school suspension sanctions in elementary school can lead to emotional and psychological distress and often lead to recurring behavioral problems. Skiba & Peterson (2000) purported that students who have a history with suspension become less interested in school and seek out anti-social peers in middle school. Suspensions have also been associated with increased risk for antisocial behavior (Hemphill et al., 2006). No doubt, the cycle perpetuates, and the student removal through suspension serves only as an ineffective punishment for changing disruptive behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

Over one-third of secondary students in one study reported that the practice is “not at all” helpful and that they would probably be suspended again (Costenbader & Markson, 1998, p. 59). The Zero Tolerance Task Force corroborates this finding and available evidence suggests that students in general regard school suspension and expulsion as ineffective and unfair (Skiba, et al., 2006).

### **Non-Exclusionary, Non-Punitive Discipline School-wide Approaches**

Non-exclusionary, non-punitive disciplinary approaches fundamentally and philosophically operate differently than punitive, exclusionary-type approaches to discipline. There is a growing body of research promoting less exclusionary (Losen, 2015; Skiba et al., 2015) approaches to discipline. The focus on the review of related literature is to support general trends in non-exclusionary, non-punitive discipline approaches in schools.

The most germane classroom management approaches in the context of this study includes preventive, restorative, and culturally responsive approaches to discipline that stymie the momentum toward punitive and exclusionary based disciplinary models. In general, research supports that principals with a greater orientation toward a prevention orientation serve schools with fewer suspensions and are more likely to report using conflict resolution, individual behavior plans, and other preventive approaches (Skiba & Edl, 2004).

### ***Preventive approaches***

In the past decade, there are two universal, preventive-type approaches to school-wide discipline that tend to be employed, and studied, most frequently in public schools. These include School Wide Positive Behavioral Supports (SWPBS) and Social and Emotional learning (SEL).

SWPBS is a universal approach that describes a set of ideas rooted in a broad research base that includes a set of strategies designed to improve behavioral success through the use of non-punitive, proactive, systematic techniques (Fallon, O’Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012). SWPBS programs evolved out of several amendments that were added in 1997 to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Perhaps one of the most notable PBS programs is Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS). PBIS is a school-based system that has been shown to correlate with a decrease in office discipline referrals (LaFrance, 2010) decreased suspension rates (Evertsen, 2013); improved academic outcomes (Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun, 2008; Sailor et al., 2006), improved prosocial behaviors (LaFrance, 2009);

increases in all measures of organizational health (Bradshaw & Leaf, 2010) and reduced dropout numbers. PBIS has also been correlated with improved perceptions of school safety (Horner, et al., 2009).

Other studies show less promising results of program impact. Ryoo and Hong (2011) reported no statistically significant relationship between PBIS implementation and schools' accountability, as measured through standardized test scores. Bradshaw, Mitchell, and Leaf (2009) reported no relationship between PBIS and achievement.

PBIS is organized to support students across school-wide, non-classroom, classroom, and individual student routines. Associated practices include giving a small number of positively stated behavioral expectations, clear definitions for rule violations, active supervision, high praise rates, and explicit social skills instruction (Eber, Sugai, Smith & Scott, 2002; Lewis & Sugai, 1999). According to the literature, fidelity is critical to the success of PBIS with disparities in outcomes associated with high and low levels of program fidelity (Horner et al., 2009).

In fact, the 81<sup>st</sup> Legislative Session in Texas required the implementation of PBIS in the Texas Juvenile Justice Department. A status report submitted to the Legislature showed the following positive outcomes after implementation. For youth in secure facilities, the number of incidents reported were four times greater in non-school settings than in school; where PBIS was implemented, the percent of disciplinary referrals for Hispanic and White students decreased, and there was an associated increase in academic performance in all categories of measured outcomes (Texas Juvenile Justice Department, 2012). Noticeably absent from the summary of findings are positive outcomes for Black

youth.

While results are generally positive regarding the efficacy of SWPBS classroom management approaches in terms of decreasing the reliance on exclusion as a remedy for discipline, the impact of PBIS programs in dismantling the racial discipline gap is not substantiated in research. However, the SWPBS framework is seen as a promising framework for integrating culturally and contextually responsive practices (Fallon, O’Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012).

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) historically situates itself in the same period as SWPBS. In the last two decades, there has been an “explosion” of interest in SEL. Like SWPBS, there have been hundreds of evaluations of various types of SEL programs (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich & Gulotta, 2015). SEL programs operate in thousands of schools across the United States and world. SEL comprises five competencies that provide a foundation for maintaining high-quality social relationships and for responding to life challenges. These include: self awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making.

Like SWPBS, SEL is a framework that serves as a guide for the development of programs. Some examples of SEL programs include Roots of Empathy (Cain & Carnellow, 2008; Santos, et al., 2011; Schonert-Reichel, et al., 2012); Positive Action (U.S. Department of Education); and Meditation (Black, et al., 2009; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). Meta-analysis of 213 programs showed a relationship to fewer discipline problems in school and improved positive attitudes toward self and others (Durlak et al., 2011). SEL was also associated with reduced aggression among students.

One experimental study found that students who participated in an SEL program had fewer referrals and in-school suspensions, but there were no differences in rates for out-of-school suspension (Farrell, Meyer, & White, 2001). No direct evidence exists to support the effectiveness of SWPBS or SEL as an intervention to reduce racial and ethnic disparities, however both have been shown as effective in improving school climate (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

### ***Restorative Approaches***

Restorative approaches to discipline seek to address behavioral and disciplinary issues through mediation and personal accountability rather than through the issuing of punishments (Graham, 2015). The tradition of restorative-type approaches emerges from criminology (Lattimer, Dowden, & Muise, 2001). Restorative justice has been shown to effectively reduce recidivism rates in Canada, Australia and the United States (Schiff, 2013).

Similar to SWPBS and SEL, restorative approaches are evidence-based discipline programs that are implemented at the individual and school-wide levels. Restorative approaches to discipline have grown considerably in the past decade (Gonzalez, 2012). Restorative approaches, also called restorative justice, is generally defined as a discipline approach that engages all parties through a collective, and balanced approach that brings together all people impacted by an incident, issue or behavior (McCluskey, 2008; Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006). Restorative justice practice tends to build on existing behavior management frameworks within the school environment, such as peer mediation, SWPBS, and other existing frameworks (Gonzalez, 2012). The efficacy

of restorative approaches rests in reduced suspensions (Cavanaugh, 2009; Gregory et al., 2014) and their potential for reducing the discipline gap.

### *Culturally Responsive Approaches*

Behavioral systems cannot be universally applied without appropriate attention to race and culture. Conflict results when differences exist between cultures, specifically when the thinking, behaviors, and expectations of the dominant cultural group are imposed on individuals from groups outside the dominant culture (Patton & Day-Vines (2004). Recall that Milner recommends several ways to interrupt the opportunity gap, one of which is to avoid context-neutral thinking and practices by understanding the important role culture plays in the classroom (2011).

Culturally relevant teaching was introduced into scholarship by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) challenged traditional status quo notions that one must “act White,” to be academically successful (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Ladson-Billings (1995) argues against the adding on of multicultural courses, but rather promotes an exploration of culture by teachers of self and their students. Her theory in actionable terms suggests that culturally relevant teaching includes an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness.

Townsend (2000) and Monroe and Obidah (2004) assert that culturally responsive instructional and discipline management strategies can mitigate school exclusionary responses to student misbehavior. Both have offered alternative models for disciplinary consequences that aim to keep students in the classroom learning

environment. Culturally relevant teaching enables students to relate course content to his or her cultural context.

Monroe proposes a blueprint for closing the discipline gap through cultural synchronization (2005). This builds on the stream of research that shows Black students are most successful when taught in culturally relevant ways (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). Milner (2010) offers a framework for culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2006) in diverse urban classrooms. Milner (2010) builds on Ladson-Billings (2006) conceptualization of culturally relevant pedagogy. Specifically, this type of approach expands the scope of culturally responsive discipline to all aspects of the school climate. The premise of Milner's work is that White teachers are able to build cultural competence, build relationships with students, and grow a deeper understanding of self and students through the process.

#### **SCHOOL LEADERS' ROLE IN DISCIPLINE POLICY**

In the context of national conversation about exclusionary discipline and the racial discipline gap, several studies have examined the contributions of school and student characteristics to rates of racial disparity in school discipline. Skiba and colleagues (2015) joined the conversation by sharing their findings that school-level variables, including principal perspectives on discipline, appeared to be among the top – if not the strongest – predictor of racial disparity in out-of-school suspension or expulsion. Mukuria (2002) explored the role of principals in predominately Black urban middle schools with high and low suspension rates and found that several factors contribute to lower suspension rates including high parental involvement, a structured



environment, school-wide discipline programs, and mutual respect among students and teachers.

Skiba and Edl (2004) surveyed 325 school principals in Indiana in an effort to better understand their attitudes toward school discipline. Results indicate that principals hold very different perspectives on school discipline and are evenly divided regarding the efficacy of zero tolerance approaches. Skiba and Edl (2004) clustered the principals among three distinct perspectives; prevention orientation, support for suspension, and pragmatic prevention. Outside the obvious explanation of prevention orientation and support for suspension classifications, a pragmatic prevention disposition agrees with the supporters of suspension regarding its role in encouraging students to think about their behavior, but they were also least likely to believe that suspension and expulsion were their only options. As would be expected, principals with greater orientation toward a prevention orientation served schools with fewer suspensions and were more likely to report using conflict resolution, individual behavior plans and other preventive and rehabilitative programs.

## **CONCLUSION**

School administrators struggle to make sense of the daily structures and happenings that may be significant for the academic success of students in the classroom. The lens through which school leaders make sense and frame the racial discipline gap has direct implications for the culture of learning in their schools. The uniqueness of the participants' anti-racist sensemaking in this study is the fact that all self-identify as aspiring anti-racist leaders with views that disrupt the status quo. This study specifically

extends the cognitive nature of sensemaking at the individual level, with an appreciation for the problem-framing nature of sensemaking and the “aspiring anti-racist” identity of each participant working in the context of school leadership.

The racial discipline gap has been framed according to its contribution to the school-to-prison pipeline and by its persistence in U.S. schools. Quantitative and qualitative studies point to the abundance of evidence that show the severity of the problem and plausible causes of the problem. As the persons ultimately responsible for the delivery of disciplinary sanctions on students, school leaders play an important role in discipline policy (Deal & Peterson, 1990).

Principals with a prevention orientation toward discipline served schools with fewer suspensions (Skiba & Edl, 2004) and the perspectives of principals is among the strongest of precursors of racial disparities in discipline (Skiba et al., 2015). The adoptions of preventive and restorative type approaches show promise for decreasing suspension rates, as well as other exclusionary measures. However, it is difficult to enact systematic changes without first addressing the underlying biases that lead to racial disparities in discipline (Graham, 2015). Recent research has merged the philosophy of positive behavior supports (PBS) with culturally and contextually responsive practices (Fallon, O’Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012) that may not only decrease the use of exclusionary responses, but may also begin to get at the root causes of why the racial discipline gap persists.

School leaders who have been trained in an anti-racist principal preparation have the knowledge and training to disrupt the racial discipline gap. Understanding the processes that aspiring anti-racist leaders experience in their sensemaking and problem-

framing of the racial discipline gap might provide insight on the difficulties that these leaders face when transitioning from learners to “doers” of anti-racism.

## **Chapter Three**

Chapter three outlines the research design and methods used in this study. The purpose of the study and the research questions will be revisited following a rationale for using a qualitative interpretive case study approach. The research design will be presented according to the conceptual flow of the three theoretical perspectives – sensemaking, problem framing, and racial identity development. Finally, the methods for data collection and analysis will be presented with a discussion of validity.

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to explore how aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of and frame the racial discipline gap and enact their sensemaking to address the problem. The conceptualizing of self as anti-racist leader toward anti-racist leadership frames the first part of the study because their identity is central to sensemaking (Weick, 1995). The sensemaking and problem-framing processes will also be considered according to how their institutional contexts shape this sensemaking. I will consider how they enact this sensemaking toward implementation of first and second-order change within school environments and how they navigate any institutional barriers they face.

The research questions that guide this study include:

1. How do new school leaders identified as being anti-racist make sense of this approach to leadership?
2. How do aspiring anti-racist school leaders make sense of and frame the racial discipline gap and in what ways do institutional contexts shape this sensemaking?

3. How do aspiring anti-racist leaders enact their sensemaking to disrupt the problem and how do they navigate institutional barriers that they face?

#### **RATIONALE FOR QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the study is to understand how school leaders make sense of the racial discipline gap in terms of their problem framing of local discipline issues, therefore a qualitative research approach is most congruent with this aim. According to Willis (2007), interpretivism does not align with recipes for technical approaches. Rather, the process for data collection and analysis is more open-ended, and in this case, guided by a plan congruent with the theoretical frameworks. The factors associated with sensemaking will best be discovered through delving into the minds and attitudes of the people central to disciplinary decisions – the principals and assistant principals within school contexts. The substance of the data will come through the interview process.

#### **CONCEPTUAL FLOW**

A conceptual framework explains the main things to be studied – the key factors, constructs, and the presumed relationship between them (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For the purposes of this study, the language of conceptual flow is used to describe the landscape of how it is organized. This conceptual flow weaves the general theoretical framework of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) with problem framing (Young et al., 2011). Special consideration is given to how each participants' identity (a central factor of sensemaking) as an aspiring anti-racist leader was groomed through their principal preparation program and how this identity shapes their sensemaking and framing of the racial discipline gap.

## **Sample**

This study employs a purposive sample of five recent graduates of a large, public university, where the principal preparation program within the College of Education centers race in its approach to social justice leadership. A small number of cases facilitates my close association with the respondents, and enhances the validity of the in-depth inquiry into the school setting (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). The selection of the five participants was purposeful in that it allowed me to develop a relationship with them and enabled me to feel comfortable when reaching out to them to ask clarifying questions.

The number of participants is consistent with previous research employing the theoretical framework of sensemaking (Coburn, 2001; Coburn, 2005; Evans, 2007b;). The five participants - two assistant principals and three lead principals - were nominated by the college professors as aspiring anti-racist leaders based on their proven practice in the program and through the observations of their actions in the schools.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, they all self-identity as aspiring anti-racist leaders. They were given a copy of their rights as participants and all gave verbal consent to participate.

Aspiring anti-racist leaders in this study are defined as persons who completed a principal preparation program with an explicit focus on anti-racist leadership and who are known for, and self-identity as, aspiring to be anti-racist leaders. The use of the adjective, aspiring, is also purposeful in that it emphasizes the developmental nature of

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<sup>6</sup> As part of their experience in the preparation program, college professors regularly observed the students in their school environments and through their work doing the participatory action research project.

anti-racist leadership. Research question one addresses the ways in which each participant views his or her evolving identity and work as an anti-racist leader.

### **Anti-Racist Principal Preparation Program**

The five participants in this study all graduated from the same principal preparation program. The principal preparation program, henceforth described as the preparation program, is situated at a large, public, university in an urban environment located in the southwest United States. The mission of the preparation program is to prepare leaders who are ready to transform schools into educational environments committed to academic excellence and equity for every child.

The program in this study comprises the attributes of an exemplary principal preparation program, as determined by leading scholars in educational administration. These include: having a highly selective selection process (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007; Orr, King & LaPointe, 2010), cohort-based learning model (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002;), university-district partnerships (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007; Jackson & Kelly, 2002), a focus on the use of data (Copland, 2003; Datnow, Park, & Wohlsetter, 2007), a strong internship component (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007; Orr, 2011; Orr & Orphanos, 2007; ), and finally, an emphasis on social justice (Capper, et al., 2006).

### ***Program Vision***

According to the program director, the vision of the program is to provide graduate students with multiple opportunities to reflect on how race plays a personal and

professional role in their lives and in the lives of the students they serve. The program director believes, according to research, that if students study in the principal preparation program with an explicit focus on anti-racist leadership, then they will develop a keen awareness of inequities and beliefs that may enable them to fight institutional racism in schools.

### ***Program Design and Content***

The preparation program emphasizes the following: 1. extensive reflection (as a means of learning and as a model for future leadership practice); 2. social justice with a particular focus on anti-racist leadership (to develop understanding for leadership action and advocacy); 3. collaborative problem solving; and 4. use of data for school study, action research and problem solving. The program is aligned with national leadership standards – the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC).<sup>7</sup>

The program is a two-year, 39-hour credit program. The cohort of ten to sixteen students spends seven hours per day, four days per week, spanning eight weeks of the summer together. The purpose of the first summer session is to immerse the students in the cohort structure. The summer curriculum is designed to support the vision of the preparation program, which is to expose students to inequities in schools that occur at the institutional level.

An initial 8-week nontraditional course engages students in problem-based learning by conducting a school study and equity audit (Gooden, 2012; Skrla et al, 2004;

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<sup>7</sup> Most principal preparation programs the universities employ the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) Standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2002) as guidelines to develop programs and courses (Tubbs, 2008).



Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). In addition to aiming to change incoming students' views to incorporate a building level perspective, this course introduces and emphasizes the core theory of action of the program. That is, if leaders are to be more reflective, collaborative, and focused on addressing social justice issues in education, then they must engage with complex school-based problems to solve as a cohort and as individuals.

Curriculum for the first summer session, similar to the courses offered for the remainder of the program, supports anti-racist leadership and includes readings, videos, discussions, and learning experiences designed to expose students to the concepts of race, privilege, and individual, cultural, and institutional racism. Through purposeful design, co-teachers who hold different racial identities deliver the first summer curriculum. According to the program director, providing diversity in perspectives and experiences offers students opportunities to deeply explore their own racial identity relative to privilege and colorblindness.

Specific learning opportunities, named “powerful learning opportunities,” (PLO) include learning activities centered on students’ interaction with content and material that provides glimpses into historical and institutional mechanisms that contribute to inequities in schools. One example of a PLO serves the purpose of “using racial reflection as a pedagogical tool,” (Gooden and O’Doherty, 2015) where students reflect on their own racial identity. During the first summer session, students write racial autobiographies, or brief auto-ethnographies, written by students and may be shared amongst faculty and cohort members. The assignment directs students to recount one or more significant events in their lives that involved asking really serious questions about

their racial identity or their reaction to the racial identity of someone else, as it relates to their identity. Other examples of PLOs in the program experience include the PAR project as part of their internship and the in-depth equity audit of a local school conducted during the first summer session.

### ***Explicit focus on race***

According to Gooden and Dantley (2012), the centering of race as a framework for leadership preparation consists of five “ingredients,” (p. 237). Within the context of the preparation program in this study, the following examples demonstrate how the program aligns with Gooden and Dantley’s recommendations (2012). First, in reference to the first ingredient, *a prophetic voice*, the preparation program reconsiders how its role in leadership preparation explores key issues in education by constantly modeling how problems, traditionally framed through status quo responses, can be reframed “with appropriate attention to race and the development of personal awareness.”

A second and third element of Gooden and Dantley’s framework for educational leadership programs is critical self-reflection and a grounding in critical theory (2012). One example of how critical self-reflection is implemented in the preparation program is through the writing of racial autobiographies. Recall that the objective is to have students develop a greater awareness of race for the purpose of moving away from racial “unconsciousness and colorblindness toward acknowledgement of privilege and commitment to future action,” (Gooden and O’Doherty, 2015, p. 225). The third ingredient is a critical theoretical grounding that moves beyond the writing of racial autobiographies as a tool for self-reflection, but also includes as a mechanism by which

future consideration is given to educational instances of oppression in order to consider alternative explanations and solutions for status quo responses.

The fourth tenet of the framework involves a “pragmatic bent,” (Gooden & Dantley, 2012, p. 243). This refers to the call for preparation programs to “free leaders to become subversive in their professional practices as organic intellectuals who see their work as being wider and deeper than getting teachers to prepare students to take a regimen of standardized tests”(p. 243). The PAR project was designed for this purpose.

The final, and fifth, ingredient in a framework for leadership preparation that centers on race must include race language that locates race within a broader, historical context linked to other political, economic, and cultural concerns. Throughout the program, issues of race, among other avenues for injustice such as gender and class discrimination, are centered as part of the curriculum. School law, instructional leadership, and using data to inform instruction and decision-making are all considered alongside issues of race, class, and gender privilege.

#### **SOURCES OF DATA AND COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

The phenomenon under investigation is the ways that aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of and frame the problem of the racial discipline gap in their local contexts. Interviews are the primary source of data. Ancillary data in the form of university- and school-level reports or records are used as supporting evidence.

The qualitative component of the interpretive case study consists of two interviews with each of the five aspiring anti-racist leaders. Transcriptions of each interview were completed. The interview protocol for this study (Appendix B) is a

reflection of a revised and adapted set of questions from two previous studies. One study explored the resistance that school leaders face in promoting socially just schools and how they draw on their preparation program to address these challenges (Gooden et al., 2015). The second study investigated how school leaders from an exemplary principal preparation program make sense of inclusion as it relates to special education policy (Salazar, 2013). Permission to adapt questions from the first study was granted via direct communication and permission to use, revise and adapt the second interview protocol was granted via email on April 12, 2015.

Prior to conducting interviews, each participant was presented with a consent form indicating their willingness to join the study and an acknowledgement that their involvement would be completely voluntary and anonymous. They were told that at any point they could terminate their membership in the study. Each participant gave verbal consent per the guidelines of the Internal Review Board specifications - no written consent was collected in order to protect privacy interests.

Interviews occurred between August, 2015 and October, 2015. The duration of each interview was between 45 and 60 minutes. A digital recorder was used to record all interviews and handwritten notes were taken throughout the interview process. The hand-written notes helped me remember to circle back to key points when clarification was needed about a specific topic. Each interview was transcribed for the purposes of analysis. All digital copies of the interviews have since been destroyed and the names of both the participants and their work locations have been given pseudonyms to protect privacy interests.

The format of the interviews is best described as semi-structured, because it allowed for the introduction of ideas that I had not considered (Willis, 2007) when drafting the interview questions. However, a general list of guiding questions was employed to ensure that all research questions were given ample consideration. The interview questions draw largely from the theoretical framework of sensemaking and problem-framing, but also included race-specific questions to ascertain the ways that the respondents make sense of the racial discipline gap and to understand ways that each talk about race. Prior to each interview, I reread, and sometime revised, the questions to ensure that questions were easy to understand. I asked one participant to help me reword two questions for my use with future participants when, on one occasion, a participant didn't fully understand the question as written.

Sensemaking requires an understanding of the culture, norms, expectations, language, and general consideration of the ways things are done in schools ( Salazar, 2013; Weick, 1995). To more completely understand the environmental context of the preparation program and the current school, the following school-level documents were included for analysis:

- (1) demographic information of students, and, where available, teachers, at each school;
- (2) history of school discipline according to race as found in the Office for Civil Rights Data Collection for the 2011-12 school year (most recent available);
- (3) local code of conduct guides for each district and/or school if applicable; and
- (4) discipline data as recorded by participants for the current school year, when

provided;

(5) principal preparation program course syllabi and website; and

(6) campus websites

The approach to data analysis follows a step-by-step guide developed by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006). Accordingly, the first step included preparing the data for analysis. Interviews were transcribed within three weeks of the event, and any notes from school-related documents were sorted according to their relevancy to the sensemaking process as described by the participants.

Data clean up and preparation involved the continual merging and compartmentalizing of interview transcriptions and my notes. A complementary exercise in this stage of data analysis is data reduction, whereby I reduced my collection of notes and other documents to only what was needed for analysis. According to Glaser (1978), memoing is a way to “write up ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 72). Using memos ties together the different pieces of data into conceivable clusters and surpasses a surface level of synthesis of data. It allows the coders to transcend the predetermined categories based in theory and unearth larger themes.

Coding provides an opportunity to organize the data by labeling parts or sections of documents. The coding process includes development, redevelopment, finalization, and application of the code structure. The final coding has been completed solely by the researcher, a method preferred by some experts (Janesick, 2003; Morse, 1994). Janesick (2003) describes the single coder process as a “choreographer” who constructs his or her

own dance.

Data reduction also includes the use of conceptually grouping thoughts and ideas together through a coding scheme. Saldana (2009) provides a coding manual that directly influenced the coding approach taken in this study, and the coding methods employed in this study incorporate a blended, multi-faceted approach to data analysis. Elemental methods, exploratory methods, and “themeing” methods were merged to create the unique coding approach for this study.

According to Saldana (2009), there are multitudes of coding approaches and the first cycle of the coding process largely divides the numerous approaches into larger methods, or groups of coding approaches. The first method used in this study is an elemental method, which according to Saldana (2009), is a primary approach used in qualitative data analysis whereby basic but focused filters assist in data review and build the foundation for future coding. For example, I first employed an elemental method of initial coding (Charmaz, 2006) to incorporate descriptive, theoretical, and inferential ideas that were congruent with both sensemaking theory and the research questions. Initial coding is the breaking down of data into small parts to compare and contrast. The goal of initial coding is to allow for “all possible theoretical directions” (p. 46). As such, codes were developed using concepts from sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and problem framing theory as it relates to first and second-order change (Young, O’Doherty, Gooden and Goodnow, 2011), and anti-racist leadership according to how the participants described the work.

The second cycle coding method employed in this study, classified by Saldana

(2009) as an exploratory method, is holistic coding. Holistic coding (Dey, 1993) relies less on line-by line approaches to coding, rather, the approach takes a more whole-scale approach that Dey refers to as “coder as lumper,” (Dey, 1993, p. 104) where text can be coded in sections as small as one-half a page to an entire interview transcript. As described in Appendix C, the codes developed along holistic themes that attached to singular sentences or entire paragraphs within the interview transcriptions. The analysis of the interviews depend less on delineated categories in this stage, but rather on the “thematic strands extracted from the material by the dint of the researchers’ interpretive and conceptual efforts” (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006, p. 488).

Finally, according to Saldana (2009), an outcome of coding can be the development of a theme or set of themes. “Themeing the data” involves identifying themes, or a “phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (Saldana, 2009, p. 139). Perhaps the most succinct way to describe the way a theme functions is to borrow from the words of Auerback & Silverstein (2003) – a theme is “an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas” (p. 38).

As such, with the help of the approaches of initial coding, holistic coding, and themeing, the final coding categories emerged through a co-constructed set of events and served as the primary guides to the data analysis process. Whether codes were created, recreated, and revised early or later in the process is less important than the conceptual and structural framework applied to the coding process. In this study, codes relate to one another in a coherent way that supports the research study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Accordingly, the coding scheme for this study is congruent with the design of the



research questions (Appendix C).

### **Data Quality**

Prior to manually coding interview transcripts, I consulted a doctoral graduate student to establish reliability in the coding scheme. To increase reliability, the graduate student and I coded the statements from one 45-minute interview separately. Intercoder reliability is the extent to which two or more individuals, or coders, agree (Miles & Huberman, 1996). The goal was to reach between-coder agreement in the 90% range to ensure that measures of reproducibility were highly efficacious. Measures of reproducibility are the likelihood that different coders who receive the same training will assign the same value to the same piece of content. We reached over 92% intercoder selection of exact coding choices in the first attempts, and reached 100% interrater agreement after discussion of ideas.

I employed the expertise of others to solicit critical feedback regarding my descriptions, analyses and interpretation of findings. These advisors include: the members of this dissertation committee, peers with a similar research interest in school discipline policy, and a former colleague who has strong familiarity with sensemaking as a theoretical construct.

According to Babbie (2008), validity is a term to describe a measure that accurately reflects the concept it is intended to measure. Simply put, validity refers to the truth value – do the findings of the study make sense (Miles & Huberman, 1994)? Validity in qualitative studies refers to constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility involves establishing that the results are believable (Trochim, 2006). The purpose of the study is to describe or understand an event from the participant's eyes, so the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results. As such, member checking is important for ruling out the possibility that participants' words are misinterpreted or that their perspective is misrepresented (Maxwell, 2005). Member checks were conducted while collecting data and throughout the period of data analysis. During data collection, I communicated with them to clarify excerpts from the transcription when there was a lack of clarity. Throughout the data analysis stage, participants were provided with related analysis done *about them* as sensemakers of the racial discipline gap. On two occasions, participants modified what was written about them. These were minor changes that did not change the way that the data was presented from a substantive perspective.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results can be generalized to other contexts or settings. The sample includes principals and assistant principals who are recent graduates of a principal preparation program with a focus on anti-racist leadership. The results of this study will not be largely generalizable to school leaders of all schools and districts across the country, however interpretation of the findings will be determined by the consumer of this research study. The work of aspiring anti-racist leaders applies to those who, similarly, identify as aspiring anti-racist leaders. It is up to the reader to make critical judgments about the generalizability of the findings. Questions of how far the conclusions can be generalized are relevant to transferability.

Dependability is based on the assumption of replicability. It is concerned with

whether the same results would be obtained if observed a second time (Trochim, 2006). Dependability emphasizes the need to account for the context within which the research occurs. Miles and Huberman offer a set of relevant questions to guide the researcher to ensure issues of dependability are thoughtfully considered (1994, p. 278). These questions were considered throughout the process of refining the research questions to ensure clarity of purpose, ascertaining “meaningful parallelism across data sources,” and to confirm that data quality checks were being maintained (i.e., through the member checking process). Finally, confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed by others (Trochim, 2006). I sought the expertise from a peer in my graduate program to confirm that the words of the participants were appropriately characterized within the two theoretical perspectives, and according to the coding structure.

### **CONCLUSION**

The interpretivist paradigm posits that researchers' values are inherent in all phases of the research process and that truth is understood through dialogue (Crotty, 2008). According to anthropologist Franz Boas (1928), all knowledge is up for interpretation - we cannot separate ourselves from what we know. My past experience as a teacher and administrator provides an operational understanding of the work of principals. This contextual understanding impacts my interpretation of what I saw and heard at the interview sites. The validity checks performed help to mitigate any bias in my interpretations. Findings emerged from the stories that the school leaders told, and the factors associated with how they make sense and frame the discipline gap surfaced throughout the interview process. These findings are presented in chapters four and five.

## Chapter Four

The specific aim of this study is to explore how the sensemaking about the racial discipline gap of aspiring anti-racist shapes “strategic choices and influences leadership practices” (Sleegers, Wassink, van Veen, & Imants, 2009). Identity is a central theme in sensemaking (Weick, 1995), therefore the acceptance of the label of self as “aspiring anti-racist leader” is central to one’s sensemaking approach. Chapter Four solely addresses the first research question.

Recall that the study sample includes five aspiring anti-racist leaders who graduated from a principal preparation program with a focus on anti-racist leadership. The purposive sample was generated by professor nominations – each nominee name was recommended based on their reputation in the program for aspiring to be anti-racist in their work. The five participants all self identify with an anti-racist leadership leadership style. Explanations from university professors and staff, as well as self-portrayals, will be provided to substantiate what is meant by the phrase, “aspiring anti-racist leader.” All participant and school names have been replaced with pseudonyms, and in all cases, descriptive details of student disciplinary events have been disguised.

### RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

*How do new school leaders identified as being anti-racist make sense of this approach to leadership?*

The purpose of this study is to explore how aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of a particular school racial problem, and to explore how they enact this sensemaking to

create first- or second-order change initiatives through problem framing in their institutional contexts. The self-identification of each participant as aspiring to be anti-racist and what this means in terms of anti-racist leadership is central to the sensemaking and problem framing about the racial discipline gap. Recall that the nature of the principal preparation program experience is firmly rooted in anti-racist leadership. The program includes coursework across all classes that specifically emphasizes social justice leadership with a focus on anti-racism.

### **FIVE ASPIRING ANTI-RACIST LEADERS**

According to Weick (1995, p. 18), "sensemaking begins with the sense-maker." This study uses an approach to defining sensemaking that is narrowly tailored to a limited number of school leaders. The five participants in this study both self-identity and are identified by preparation program professors as aspiring to be anti-racist in their approach to leadership. They are relatively new to school leadership with no participant having more than three years of experience. Professors and staff members from the university where each participant received their preparation training collectively described aspiring anti-racist leaders as those who do the following:

- Work passionately to resist, challenge, and ultimately dismantle the structures of institutionalized racism;
- Recognize the need to challenge the status quo of racism, and engage others in conversations about race, and model racial awareness and interventions in daily practice.

According to one professor, the students nominated as being aspiring anti-racist

leaders have demonstrated the following attributes in their daily work and school lives (Personal Communication, 2015). She reflected:

They each grappled with issues at their campuses that they felt were examples of institutionalized racism. Instead of just ignoring them, they asked questions; they had the words to professionally push back on policies that they saw as discriminatory. They voiced their concerns and opened up dialogues around race. Whether the problem centered around retention, test scores, or discipline referrals, they started the conversations.

The participants of the study also contributed to the definition of an anti-racist leader in relation to their personal racial identity as being White, or in the case of Victor, Mexican-American. Before sharing their conceptions of self as aspiring anti-racist leaders, a general description of each participant is provided to give their contextual and biographical background.

Recall that one participant identifies as Mexican-American, while the rest are White, mirroring the general school leadership demographics of our country (NCES, 2010). While this was not planned in the research design, the outcome is not necessarily a weakness in methodology. Two participants are assistant principals, and three are lead principals. Two work in charter school settings, and three work in traditional public schools. Four work in elementary schools, and one works in a middle school. They all graduated within the past seven years from the anti-racist principal preparation program. Participants have between less than one and three years of experience in school administration. Only one participant has been at the current respective school for more than one year. Table 4.1 displays relevant demographic and facts for the five participants

and their schools in this study. To be clear, “experience” signifies the number of years, prior to this school year, where the participant served in a school with the equivalent title of assistant principal or principal. Participants and schools were given pseudonyms based on the researcher’s remembrance of previous life experiences and events that correlated with interview details. They have no meaning to the participants or consumers of this study.

**Table 4.1**

*Sample of Aspiring Anti-Racist Leaders*

| <b>Pseudonym</b> | <b>Sex</b> | <b>Role<sup>8</sup></b> | <b>School</b>          | <b>District Type</b> | <b>Race/Ethnicity</b> | <b>Experience<sup>9</sup></b> | <b>Years Current School<sup>10</sup></b> |
|------------------|------------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Holt</b>      | Male       | AP                      | Munch Middle           | Urban                | Caucasian             | 2                             | 2  |
| <b>Jimmy</b>     | Male       | P                       | HP Elementary          | Urban                | Caucasian             | 3                             | 1  |
| <b>Ursula</b>    | Female     | AP                      | Nolan Elementary       | Suburban             | Caucasian             | 0                             | 1  |
| <b>Terry</b>     | Male       | P                       | Clifton Charter Elem.  | Charter/Urban        | Caucasian             | 2                             | 1  |
| <b>Victor</b>    | Male       | P                       | Ivy Charter Elementary | Charter/Urban        | Caucasian             | 3                             | 1  |

In the sections below, I introduce the participants and describe their school environments. Presentation of demographic information is unique to charter and public schools, therefore data are presented differently according to the availability of published reports. One interesting circumstance of the participants’ work contexts is that three of

<sup>8</sup> AP means assistant principal. P means principal.

<sup>9</sup> Experience means years of experience in school administration not including current 2015-16 school year.

<sup>10</sup> Years Current School includes the current 2015-16 school year.

the school leaders work in schools that use the International Baccalaureate program for the approach to curricular design. This was not intentional in the research design. Ivy Charter and Clifton Charter Elementary are a part of the Charter school district, while HP Elementary, Nolan Elementary, and Munch Middle are part of public school districts.

Ivy Charter Elementary, Clifton Charter Elementary, and Munch Middle are all IB schools who share socio-emotional approaches to schoolwide discipline.

The IB is a curricula framework that places importance on holistically educating children through the development of intellectual, personal, emotional, and social skills to live, learn and work in a global society. <sup>11</sup> According to one study, improved classroom management and fewer discipline problems were reported after the implementation of the IB program. Specifically, since IB implementation, the “school environment had changed from one focused on student behavior problems to one focused on educating the students to be good human beings” (Texas A&M University, 2010).

Charter School District employs two of the participants in this study. There are a few important district trends that are important contextual considerations. First, the Charter district is considered a fast-changing district. This means that the current trend of increased economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and at-risk students is expected to continue in the geographic area. For example, between the 2011-12 and the 2013-14 school years, the charter district experienced increases in percentages of at-risk students (29.2% to 51.3%), economically disadvantaged students (32% to 55.2%), and

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<sup>11</sup> Founded in 1968, the IB program is a non-profit educational foundation offering programs of international education in countries across the world.



students who are classified as Limited English Proficient (4% to 24.9%). The charter district is also designated as a fast growing district with a growth of over 437% since 2010. Growth is expected to continue to grow more than 150% over the next nine years.

Terry and Victor, both of whom are lead principals, represent the Charter district. Both are new to this district, and both have had the opportunity to hire many new staff members. This is reflective of the fact that the Charter district is fast growing and employs about 61% of teachers who have three or fewer years of experience. State reporting captures information, including demographics, about the district as a whole, rather than for the individual schools within the charter district. Demographic information for the school level is only available as provided by the principals.

Holt and Jimmy represent the Urban school district. Both have worked in the Urban district since beginning their careers in teaching. The Urban district represents a large, fast-growing metropolitan area. One interesting contextual factor is that Urban was identified as having significant disproportionality in discipline events according to race by a longitudinal-statewide study. Jimmy mentioned it, but only as something that happened in the past.

Finally, Ursula represents the Suburban district, which is geographically adjacent to the Urban district. The Suburban district has the greatest percentage of Black students compared to other districts in the study sample. The demographic information for each school and district will be shared within the profiles of each participant.

### **Terry – Principal at Clifton Charter Elementary**

Terry is a White male who is in his first principalship position at a

charter elementary school. Terry was a teacher for three years followed by serving as an instructional coach in a school where 98% of students were economically disadvantaged. Terry reflected about his first experience:

I don't come from a high-needs area like that, and seeing kids that really needed help and really needed a good teacher that was going to change their life was really important. I had a class of students that, in fourth-grade, fourteen of my seventeen were reading at a second-grade reading level or below, and I was a second-year teacher and I just had to figure it out.

Terry displayed a heightened sense of awareness when recalling how many students were reading below grade level. He credits his experience at that school with shaping his ideas of education by saying:

I draw on that every day as a leader, in how I'm working with kids, because I didn't have all the tools, I didn't have all the knowledge, but I wanted to make a difference and I wanted to make an impact on how I could do that, and that's what I'm trying to inspire in my teachers as well.

Terry's administrative experience includes serving as an assistant principal at a charter school in another district for two years prior to becoming the principal at Clifton Charter Elementary. Terry recounts his path to leadership as a result of frustration over having little control over making a difference in students' lives outside his own classroom. He remembers it this way:

I can make a change in that kid's life or in that class's life for that moment, but then it was just very limited to just that group of students and I wanted to get into a role where I wasn't just making a change for them but for an entire school.

Clifton Charter is a part of the Charter Urban school district. The Charter Urban

school district is governed through a Board of Trustees and is accredited by the State Education Agency. Clifton Charter is an early elementary IB school that is working to receive accreditation as a Primary Years Program. Clifton offers services in grades pre-kindergarten through grade 2. The master plan includes adding one grade level each year until the school becomes a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school. Clifton Charter generally reflects the demographics of the district and is a majority-minority campus.

**Table 4.2**

*Clifton Charter Demographic Information Compared to Charter Urban District*

|  | <b>School<sup>12</sup></b> | <b>District</b> |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>African American</b>                        | 5%                         | 4%              |
| <b>Hispanic</b>                                | 60%                        | 68%             |
| <b>White</b>                                   | 30%                        | 22%             |
| <b>Other/Two or More Races</b>                 | 5%                         | 6%              |
| <b>Economically Disadvantaged<sup>13</sup></b> | 48%                        | 60%             |
| <b>At-Risk<sup>14</sup></b>                    | nr                         | 51%             |

**Victor – Principal at Ivy Charter Elementary**

Victor is a Mexican-American male who is in his first head principal position at an elementary charter school. Prior to entering administration, Victor obtained a theology degree and transitioned from work in college student ministry to classroom

<sup>12</sup> The data reflects a verbal account shared by the principal. No official demographic report was shared with me for Clifton Charter Elementary.

<sup>13</sup> Economically disadvantaged is determined by the state and means students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or other public assistance.

<sup>14</sup> At risk is determined by the state and means at-risk for dropping out of school for factors including, but not limited to, unsatisfactory performance on a state standardized test, grade retention, and/or is pregnant or a parent

teaching. Victor spent a total of four years in the classroom as a teacher. Victor's first principal, as well as several other colleagues, recommended that he become a principal. He was purposeful about applying for and attending the principal preparation program with an anti-racist focus. He said, "If I am going to do it, I'm going to do the one that gives me the best preparation possible."

Victor's career in educational leadership was also heavily influenced by his grandfather and father. According to Victor, he describes his grandfather in the following way:

He's still working in an impoverished neighborhood in Mexico. He could have retired twice over, but it's still about giving kids an education because that's the only way they will get out of poverty.

Victor's administrative experience includes serving as an assistant principal at a public elementary school before transitioning to becoming the principal at Ivy Charter elementary. Ivy Charter Elementary is part of the Charter Urban school district – an open enrollment, tuition-free charter school district that offers an IB education. There is an application process through a yearly lottery, which takes place each spring. Priority admission is given to children of staff and siblings of current students.

The enrollment for the 2015-2016 school year for Ivy Charter Elementary is 687 students. Ivy offers classes in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Ivy Charter Elementary serves a majority-minority student population.

**Table 4.3**

*Ivy Charter Demographic Information Compared to Charter Urban District*

|  | <b>School<sup>15</sup></b> | <b>District</b> |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>African American</b>                        | 4%                         | 4%              |
| <b>Hispanic</b>                                | 84%                        | 68%             |
| <b>White</b>                                   | 9%                         | 22%             |
| <b>Other/Two or More Races</b>                 | 3%                         | 6%              |
| <b>Economically Disadvantaged<sup>16</sup></b> | 71%                        | 60%             |
| <b>At-Risk<sup>17</sup></b>                    | nr                         | 51%             |

### **Holt – Assistant Principal at Munch Middle School**

Holt is a White male in his third year of administration, and serves as an assistant principal at Munch middle school. His prior administrative experience was at the high school level. Before working in administration, Holt was a high school physics teacher for six years. Holt knew that he wanted to be a principal his junior year in high school when he was given the opportunity to teach a chemistry lesson. According to Holt, his high school chemistry teacher knew the content of chemistry well, but was a “terrible teacher.” Holt claims that this motivated him to want to help change that:

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<sup>15</sup> The data reflects a verbal account shared by the principal. No official demographic report was shared with me for Clifton Charter Elementary.

<sup>16</sup> Economically disadvantaged is determined by the state and means students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or other public assistance.

<sup>17</sup> At risk is determined by the state and means at-risk for dropping out of school for factors including, but not limited to, unsatisfactory performance on a state standardized test, grade retention, and/or is pregnant or a parent

Too many of my friends hated school. And too many loved school and wanted to maximize their potential. And I knew that I wanted to be involved in school somehow and I thought that principal would be the best way to go.

Munch Middle School is located in the Urban School District. Recall that Munch is also an IB school. Specifically, the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program provides the framework for Munch academics, campus-wide activities, instructional design and community service. Compared to Urban ISD, Munch middle has fewer percentages of African American and Hispanic students, and greater percentages of White students. It also has fewer students who are classified as economically disadvantaged. Six percent of the teaching staff at Munch middle school is African American, which is similar to the percentage of African American students (5%).

**Table 4.4**

*Munch Middle Demographic Information Compared to Urban District*

|                                   | <i>Students</i> |          | <i>Teachers</i> |          |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|----------|
|                                   | School          | District | School          | District |
| <b>African American</b>           | 5%              | 8%       | 6%              | 6%       |
| <b>Hispanic</b>                   | 30%             | 60%      | 11%             | 29%      |
| <b>White</b>                      | 49%             | 26%      | 71%             | 62%      |
| <b>Asian</b>                      | 11%             | 4%       | 2%              | 2%       |
| <b>Other/Two or More</b>          | 5%              | 3%       | <1%             | <1%      |
| <b>Economically Disadvantaged</b> | 27%             | 60%      |                 |          |
| <b>At-Risk</b>                    | 30%             | 53%      |                 |          |

**Jimmy – Principal at HP Elementary**

Jimmy is a White male who began his work career as a minister. He served a youth pastor for three years. According to Jimmy,

I did urban youth ministry for three years and liked it, but again there was something missing and I think part of it was not getting to see the kids every day. You saw them on Sundays and maybe if you did events during the week, but there was something missing and my wife was actually the one that said, ‘Why don’t you look into teaching?’

Jimmy described his experience in obtaining his teaching certificate in the following way:

It's kind of scary how easy it is to get certified to teach, so I did an online certification. I started the program in June and was in a classroom by August. I'd never done any student teaching. I wasn't in front of kids ever.

He talked about the expediency of getting a job as a result of the online program, but lamented the fact that the quality of the program did not adequately prepare him for the job.

My first day in the classroom was my first day with kids, and I got hired on a Friday and I went to new teacher training the next week and had kids the week after that. The online certification program is a terrible program and I would never recommend it for anybody.

Jimmy transitioned from teaching to administration after four years and credits his grooming as a leader to his first principal. He remembers the conversation in this way with his principal saying, "I'll be blunt with you, it's because you can work with Black and Brown kids. You have a way of working with students."

Jimmy's first administrative experience involved serving as an assistant principal for three years followed by working in the central office. Jimmy is in his first lead principal position at a public elementary school. He describes his transition from central office back to schools as purposeful. According to Jimmy, he had "his eye on" the job for some time. He credits working in central office with affording him the opportunity to be more selective when applying for principal jobs. The biggest thing that attracted Jimmy to the position was the amount of diversity at the school. Demographic data supports that HP is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse campuses in the district. Jimmy said:



When we say the word diverse we say it has a lot of African American students or has a high population of Hispanic students but this one truly is a very diverse population. We have our largest population of Hispanic students but we have a large African American population, a large White population, a large Asian population, and two more races. We have over 20 different languages spoken here and a huge refugee population, so it's a really diverse campus.

Jimmy has worked in high poverty campuses – 99% low-economic status for students – and at more affluent campuses, and while he claims to enjoy both, he says that he is drawn more to Title I campuses. He means that he thinks “there's value in the kids looking different than each other and coming from different backgrounds.”

HP elementary is in the Urban Public School District. HP elementary is an ethnically and racially diverse school as indicated in Table 4.5. Compared to the demographics at the district level, HP has double the representation of African American students, 7% fewer Hispanic students than the district level, and almost 10% fewer White student representation. Seventy-three percent of students are categorized as economically disadvantaged. Sixty-three percent of students are classified as “at risk.”

**Table 4.5**

*HP Elementary Demographic Information Compared to Urban District*

|                                   | <i>Students</i> |          | <i>Teachers</i> |          |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|----------|
|                                   | School          | District | School          | District |
| <b>African American</b>           | 15%             | 8%       | 7%              | 6%       |
| <b>Hispanic</b>                   | 53%             | 60%      | 29%             | 29%      |
| <b>White</b>                      | 18%             | 26%      | 63%             | 62%      |
| <b>Asian</b>                      | 8%              | 4%       | 0%              | 2%       |
| <b>Other/Two or More</b>          | 6%              | 3%       | <1%             | <1%      |
| <b>Economically Disadvantaged</b> | 73%             | 60%      |                 |          |
| <b>At-Risk</b>                    | 63%             | 53%      |                 |          |

**Ursula – Assistant Principal at Nolan Elementary**

Ursula is a White female who is in her first administrative position. Ursula started teaching in 2006 and taught 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at a Title I school for five years. Then, she became a master teacher, which means that she worked very closely with teams of teachers and developed weekly professional development for them. After her year as a master teacher, she spent three years as an instructional coach prior to her current role as administrative intern, the equivalent of an assistant principal.

Ursula chose her current administration position, in part, because her principal and fellow administrators let her be herself. She said:

I wanted someone who would let me shine and do my thing, and not ignore what

I said and say, ‘That’s not important.’

She relayed a story about sharing reading data with her principal that showed disparities in progress and relating that to teacher effectiveness. She said:

I really looked at the teachers and these are teachers who are really helping our kids be better readers and these are some of the people that I think we should really support and figure out how we can help them because kids are not learning in this class, and no one is doing anything about it. My principal says ‘Yeah, awesome, let’s do it,’ and then we sit around and talk about it.

Ursula is an “administrative intern.” The title of “administrative intern” is distinct to her school district, but the job description and credential requirements are synonymous with that of an assistant principal in other school districts. Ursula has a background in Art History and once believed that she would be a curator. Her decision to pursue a career in education emanated from her wanting to do something that was at once, interesting, but also impactful. Ursula was purposeful in her decision to pursue a master’s in leadership, versus curriculum and instruction, because her passion is “helping develop people who can think and feel so that we’re a better society.”

Nolan Elementary is in the Suburban Public School District. Nolan is a majority-minority school that is ethnically and racially diverse as indicated in Table 4.6. Fifty percent of students are categorized as economically disadvantaged and 54% are classified as at risk.

**Table 4.6***Nolan Elementary Demographic Information Compared to Suburban District*

|                                   | <i>Students</i> |          | <i>Teachers</i> |          |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|----------|
|                                   | School          | District | School          | District |
| <b>African American</b>           | 13%             | 17%      | 2%              | 6%       |
| <b>Hispanic</b>                   | 58%             | 47%      | 40%             | 20%      |
| <b>White</b>                      | 20%             | 24%      | 51%             | 69%      |
| <b>Asian</b>                      | 5%              | 8%       | <1%             | 2%       |
| <b>Other/Two or More</b>          | 3%              | 4%       | 6%              | 3%       |
| <b>Economically Disadvantaged</b> | 50%             | 52%      |                 |          |
| <b>At-Risk</b>                    | 54%             | 53%      |                 |          |

The context where each participant works is an important consideration for two primary reasons. First, all five schools in the sample represent a region in the United States where the population is growing, but the representation of African American families in the area is one of the only places in the country where there is population decline. Second, all five schools represent student populations where there is a majority-minority, which means that students of color, representing both Black and Hispanic families, account for over 50% of the student population. Perhaps the participants in this study are purposefully working in diverse school settings since the purpose of their principal preparation program was to develop leaders for the changing demographics of our country. A comprehensive description of anti-racist leadership as developed through principal preparation program follows.

## IDENTITY AND ANTI-RACIST LEADERSHIP

Recall that the first research question posed, “How do new school leaders identified as being anti-racist make sense of this approach to leadership?” The ways that the participants made sense of anti-racist leadership was critical to this study because of the central role identity plays in sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Some of their accounts explored the main topic of the study – the racial discipline gap – however, the purpose of the first research question was to explore the nature of their identities as anti-racist leaders while doing their work.

In sensemaking, participants’ perceptions are the focus of analysis therefore their descriptions of self as an aspiring anti-racist leader are central to their personal identity (Weick, 1995). A question was asked of each of them, “How would you describe what it means to be an anti-racist leader?” The aspiring anti-racist leaders made sense of the work of anti-racist leadership according to their aspirations toward being a bolder, more confident anti-racist leader.

When asked to describe anti-racist leadership, a unifying theme across responses was the notion that an anti-racist leader cannot operate with a colorblind lens. Rather, they emphasized how “seeing” race and institutional barriers is integral to the work of anti-racist leadership. Holt said, “Being an anti-racist leader means you’re not afraid to ‘see color’ and to make decisions that take into account the complex social workings of all things race, class, gender related.” Jimmy talked about his anti-racist lens enables him to do a job that he otherwise would not be equipped to do.

Ursula reflected that racial awareness infers the acknowledgement of personal

racial bias. Recall that colorblindness is rooted in claims that race doesn't matter, and claims of not seeing race, when in fact, Ursula centers her own admission about seeing race as central to her work as an anti-racist leader. She said, "I think I have been referred to as an anti-racist leader because I think that others see me as willing to acknowledge and question my racial biases." Holt said:

I am a White, able-bodied, male. I am the definition of privilege. It was humbling and it took multiple attempts before I was able to open up and see it. You have to be persistent with it. But once I was able to see the world through the anti-racist lens, it really did change my view on everything.

All participants recognized the work of anti-racist leadership through the recognition of systematic mechanisms that disadvantage some students and the need for consideration for equity. For example, Jimmy shared the importance of recognizing equity as different than equality. According to Jimmy:

If you give everybody the same thing, there are systemic things that have gone on in the past that just giving somebody a certain amount isn't going to get them to where they need to be. Some need more than others.

Ursula describes an aspiring anti-racist leader according to mindsets of equity. She described anti-racist leaders as those who "work tirelessly to ensure educational equity for all students, especially students who are traditionally marginalized and have inequitable access to educational opportunity compared to privileged students."

Jimmy related mindsets of equity to being a reflective practitioner according to the questions he poses to himself. For example, he uses the following consideration to guide his daily practice, "What is good for all students? -Vs -What is good for a certain

group of students?” Jimmy elaborated by talking about the importance of detecting who is being marginalized and reflecting on why that is happening. He said, “It’s a tougher approach to leadership, but it is the right approach because it is equitable and socially just.”

Terry specifically acknowledged race as a disadvantage for students and considered his work as an anti-racist leader to “create an environment where students who are disadvantaged because of their race are given the opportunity to success where they otherwise would not have the same opportunity elsewhere. He elaborated by saying:

I work to create systems that protect their equal access to education to help them be successful. An anti-racist leader understands the racial achievement gap and dedicate themselves to making change in educational access for students of color.

Terry specifically used active verbs such as *create*, *dedicate*, and *making change* to situate the work in the context of doing something toward the purpose of equity. Bardo also used active verbs to conceptualize anti-racist leadership according to the acknowledgement of, and active resistance to, systemic and personal barriers to educational access. He said:

Anti-racist leadership means that you make an intentional and systemic effort to eliminate any and all obstacles, both personally and systemic, to ensure the academic and overall success of all students regardless of color, race, culture, and/or language. It means to do whatever it takes to ensure an equitable education for all students.

Bardo linked acknowledgement of equity issues to anti-racist leadership that resists barriers. Others also talked about the theme of resistance. Regarding resistance, Holt said:

The status quo in education is inequity, as we're constantly reminded by every type of measure, whether academic or discipline based, yet as soon as someone wants to do something different, the resistance from others is always immediately high. I know I'm not afraid to do things differently, and my evidence for that starts as a classroom teacher and continues through as an administrator.

According to the five aspiring anti-racist leaders, increasing confidence to talk about race and moving the conversation forward with staff, is also commensurate with the work of anti-racist leadership. Terry related an example of anti-racist leadership when using a book from the preparation program experience to talk about race with his staff. He noticed that staff members were expressing attitudes about students that he felt were wrong. He described teacher actions like saying kids were out of control, or saying kids need to be medicated because they were hyper, or sending students to the office for minor offenses. As a result of these things, he decided to do a professional development to explore biases:

I used *Courageous Conversations* to set it up. I told them 'We're going to talk about some things that are difficult, we need to stay engaged. We can't get out of this, we're going to be uncomfortable, we're going to have to accept non-closure. This is going to be a tough conversation, but I want you to be honest with yourselves, I want you to be honest with your group, I want you to share your experience.

Holt also specifically linked anti-racist leadership to professional development as a tool to promote racial awareness amongst staff. He said:

I feel that an anti-racist leader must be able to make decisions that, especially at the time, will be unpopular and misunderstood, but with the right professional development, these decisions will eventually be understood and even appreciated.



Victor included the notion of interrogating the status quo as relevant to having conversations about race in anti-racist leadership. He contributed to this theme by saying:

It means to ask the tough questions, have the difficult conversations, and above all, it means to strongly refuse our current reality as the norm.

Jimmy captured the essence of anticipating status quo responses as a way to reroute conversations toward equity when conversing with staff. Jimmy said:

Anytime that I hear a conversation that might be going in a different way, I usually try to stop that right away and remind people about the reason why we are doing this and why we are here.

Ursula expanded this notion of anti-racist leadership to include linking the conversations about race to the recruitment of others.

An anti-racist leader recruits others to fight the good fight and is transparent about her actions, explaining what she is doing to create equitable educational opportunities and why this work is important.

Terry connected anti-racist leadership to recruitment of idea-sharing through book studies as mentioned previously, but also talked about the difficulties of anti-racist leadership when other teachers and staff members are not ready to have race-related conversations. According to Terry, "I'm more comfortable talking about race, but I know that my teachers aren't there, and that gives me pause."

The fact that other adults feel uncomfortable, generally speaking, to talk about race was shared by several participants. Victor talked about indirect approaches to conversations with teachers about race when he described his experience with one teacher

related to discipline. He recalled from a previous experience how one teacher was sending more African American students to the office. He said:

I never really engaged him like, "It's a matter of race," it was more like, 'Okay, what's happening, what are the behaviors, just try to give some leeway to the student, what things can you give in and then what things do we really need to work out?'

Victor expanded the discussion about having conversations about race when he considered possible solutions. Referring to the education of teachers about issues of race, Victor said:

Knowing that makes me realize that we need to somehow add to what their programs or their backgrounds in education did not do, whether through conversations or systems at school. Even if their [program] was great, it didn't expose them to this [racial awareness] most likely.

Some also talked about the missed opportunities to talk about race in reference to anti-racist leadership. Holt gave specific examples of his increasing confidence in talking about race, but when asked about missed opportunities to talk about race, he responded by saying:

I have definitely missed some opportunities, but I try to learn from them, I reflect on them, I will be transparent with some groups online where I can share my failures.

Several tied their beliefs about anti-racist leadership to the importance of creating cultures for professional learning communities where race is a safe topic to explore. Holt talked a lot about the delicate balance of keeping staff engaged while pushing them to see

things differently and said:

Race is an extremely difficult topic to discuss and one that must be approached in a way that pushes the thinking of the staff, but also a way that doesn't immediately alienate the staff as well. I'm still definitely in the 'aspiring' category because I have not yet done full staff professional development with race as the focus, but I have started to sprinkle conversations with those willing to have them and those able to handle some pushing of their thoughts.

The major themes of anti-racist leadership as shared by the participants were anchored in the movement away from colorblindness toward racial awareness. This lens of racial awareness was credited for allowing them to see the role of race and equity in schools. The aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of their roles as anti-racist leaders according to their emerging and developing identities toward bolder responses to the status quo and increasing their comfort levels in talking about race informally and formally through professional development.

#### **SENSEMAKING AND IDENTITY**

The aspiring anti-racist leaders in this study capture the essence of the developmental nature of anti-racist leadership, hence the use of the adjective, aspiring. Recall that Ursula described how she believes others see her as an aspiring anti-racist leader because of her willingness to admit and confront her own racial bias. This is important as it shows that aspiring anti-racist leadership is not an admittance to bias-free leadership practice, rather it is the acknowledgement of the ever-present role of race in our lives. The nature of anti-racist leadership is captured well by Holt. He said, "My

identity as an anti-racist leader confers the capacity to see race, which creates the opportunity to understand. This capacity to understand unleashes the power to disrupt.” Participants also described the reflective, retrospective nature of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Terry said:

I definitely am much more critical of myself then, now, than I was then. I realized that I would quit on kids, even though I didn't think I did then. I look at it now and I can think of times when I didn't do what was right for kids, and I didn't know any better necessarily, and I wish I had that time back to do it again.

Victor reflected on his feelings of both pride and shame about one's own identity. He recalled a time with his daughter where he stopped talking in Spanish and quickly switched to English when someone else walked up. He said he thought to himself, "Why did I just do that?" He then realized that it was because he felt inferior. He reflected:

I didn't want that person to think that that I'm an ignorant Mexican person that doesn't know THE language, but then I realized it's because I fully recognize that White person is the dominant race and the English language is the dominant language. I realized that was in there and that I cannot pass that to my daughter.

When asked how he plans to disrupt the oppressive feelings within his own daughter, he said:

Ultimately, she'll have her own journey. I needed to go through it. I needed to go through those spots of continued enlightenment and she'll have to do the same, but at least I can do my best to set it up and create some pride in who she is and some pride in her language and pride in her culture, so she doesn't grow up with that deficit and all that I didn't realize I had.

Holt spoke about the missed opportunities to talk about race in terms of his own

limitations.

That's about me not being where I want to be yet. Or confident in my role or myself in my leadership abilities. Personal fear or fear of relationship building. If I am doing it at the wrong time. The wrong place. That I could make it worse.

According to Victor, "You cannot be an anti-racist leader in the shadows. You don't have to be flamboyant, but others, if they have spent some time with you, should have a definite feeling of where you stand and what you stand for." Ursula shared an experience where she directly asked another teacher to explain what she meant by using the term "thug" to describe a student. She described how she developed a reputation for "speaking up."

Victor described emotional and cognitive restructuring of his thought processes toward racial awareness. He said:

It's engrained in the fabric of every person; it's engrained within the system that we have, and it's a system that will continue to do the same if administrators and teachers continue to be inadequate in their ability to serve others of different races and language.

The aspect of identity is central to sensemaking (Weick, 1995). The unique identities of the sample of participants in this study – aspiring anti-racist leaders – is reflective of five new school leaders who represent a journey toward anti-racist leadership. The purpose of the first research question was to conceptualize the work of these aspiring anti-racist leaders according to anti-racist leadership. This is important because it was the purpose for the sample selection.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to share the context for the participants' journey toward anti-racist leadership through their sensemaking about their identity as aspiring anti-racist leaders. This chapter described the participants as aspiring anti-racist leaders by their own accounts and through those of faculty professors in their preparation programs. This chapter also linked aspiring anti-racist leaders to their work through the sensemaking they do about anti-racist leadership.

Chapter Five will explore the sensemaking and problem-framing patterns of these aspiring anti-racist leaders by specifically examining how they make sense of a particular educational problem - the racial discipline gap. Chapter Five will also provide findings for the second and third research questions.

## Chapter Five

School leaders' actions to implement equitable disciplinary practices are influenced by how they make sense of, then frame, events where race intersects with discipline. I argue that sensemaking connects leaders' identities to their use of problem framing, which necessarily intersects with conceptions of appropriate action through a reframing of the problem away from status quo responses of exclusion. The action, analyzed through the lens of first- and second-order change, not only connects with the aspiring anti-racist leaders' problem framing, but serves as an example of leaders who assume the role of "sensegiver" to their school organizations (Thayer, 1988). Recall that problem framing involves the activating of a perspective that both describes and addresses a situation (Kolko, 2010) according to first- or second-order change (Young et al., 2015).

In this study, sensemaking is considered as an active process of making meaning from situations, past and present, mediated by prior knowledge and deeply embedded in the social context. Recall that a specific aim of this study is to explore how the sensemaking of aspiring anti-racist leaders new to school leadership positions shapes "strategic choices and influences leadership practices" (Sleegers et al., 2009).

The sensemaking approach focuses on the "situated and personal nature" of sensemaking theory (p. 152), but also considers the ways this sensemaking informs the participants' framing or reframing (Copland, 2000) of the problem of the racial discipline

gap. This study's approach to sensemaking takes into account how aspiring anti-racist school leaders frame problems according to their current circumstance in an organizational context (Sleegers et al., 2009) by making sense of institutional factors complicit in the racial discipline gap. Connecting problem-framing with viable solutions will be considered using the adapted continua developed by Young and colleagues (2011) where problem-framing is directly linked to different types of change initiatives adopted by school leaders (See Figure 2.1). This problem-framing scale, or continuum, measures change according to first and second-order approaches.

This study will explore the relationship between sensemaking and problem framing, and is similar to Evans' (2007b) sensemaking about matters of race. As described in Chapter Four, the participants in this study share a common, important distinction— they all identify as aspiring to be anti-racist in their approach to leadership. In this chapter, I consider what participants chose to talk about, in what ways they spoke about the complexities of school discipline policy locally and broadly, and what actions each participant has taken to reconcile their beliefs about discipline with what they have noticed in their experiences.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION TWO**

*How do aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of and frame the racial discipline gap and how do their institutional contexts shape this sensemaking?*

The second research question has two parts, and will be considered in two separate sections. Analysis related to the factors of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) are



embedded within the logical flow of findings as they emerged and according to how the sensemakers framed the racial discipline gap as a problem.

### **Sensemaking and Problem Framing of the Racial Discipline Gap**

The first part of the second research question explores how aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of and frame the racial discipline gap. Sensemaking is as much about what participants don't say, or leave out, as what they say. One area that received little attention by the sensemakers was the relevance of zero tolerance policy on their sensemaking. The only participant that mentioned zero tolerance was Terry. He said:

We all talk a little about policies being flexible enough that you can work with kids. Zero tolerance policies set the expectations, but don't allow you to work with kids.

Policy concerns contributed very little to their sensemaking about the discipline gap. The knowledge that any participants had about the national attention given to the racial discipline gap through the January, 2014 joint press release by the Departments of Justice and Education was very limited. If a school leader had heard about any national-level policy focus, it was through their principal preparation program. One participant did mention that a statewide study pertaining to the racial discipline gap prompted his previous district to eliminate all suspensions as a whole-scale attempt to eliminate the achievement gap. He recalled that the negative press seemed to be the impetus for such a move, and he lamented the fact that no substantive talks about race surfaced as a result. Rather, he viewed the policy to disallow suspensions as an impulsive reaction to public pressures with no substantive rationale.

Despite the fact that little knowledge exists within these school leaders regarding the national policy focus on the racial discipline gap, they all believe that national and local attention to the issue will make a difference. According to Terry, “The more we have the discussion, the better we are going to be able to think about these issues.” Terry believes that people aren’t talking about the discipline gap in schools much, but believes the focus is more on police and race. He said, “I don’t think people are making that connection between schools and race. Without initiating the conversation, there are very few educators that bring it up or really know about it.”

Ursula made sense of the lack of knowledge about problems by reflecting on a previous experience. Ursula recalled how exposure to a large-scale problem made a difference in her school. She talked about the time a central office administrator came to her school to show data about the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted and talented. Ursula described how the attention to this “problem” actually made a difference for practice at the school level. “I do think that when people who are in positions of authority call attention to these things it makes a huge difference, even if it’s just providing information.”

Educational policy pertaining to the racial discipline gap at the national level, such as the School Discipline Guidance Package, had little impact on their sensemaking about the racial discipline gap. Some had heard about national or state level reports or research related to the racial discipline gap, but they talked less about them when framing the problem. This is not due to the fact that they deemed it unimportant. Rather, they used what they knew and saw from their experiences in schools to describe the nature of the

problem of the discipline gap. This speaks to the ways that sensemakers extract cues from their environment to make sense of things (Weick, 1995). One point that both Ursula and Victor highlighted was that, while national press about the discipline gap may not filter down to the school level in meaningful ways, the fact that there is conversation about it is undoubtedly a positive thing. This is consistent with ways the aspiring anti-racist leaders made sense of anti-racist leadership according to having conversations about race.

The ways that these aspiring anti-racist leaders view their role in the grand scheme of education anchors one aspect of their identities as leaders, which connects directly to their consideration of the factors that contribute to the discipline gap. Indeed, the anti-racist identity tied to their values held by each of the aspiring anti-racist leaders in this study grounds their sensemaking around the clarity of what contributes to the racial discipline gap.

The making of sense that these individuals *do* around the racial discipline gap, at the national and local levels, necessarily happens through reflection of past events, what Weick refers to as retrospection (1995). The ways that these aspiring anti-racist leaders view their role in the grand scheme of education anchors one aspect of their identities as leaders. They all feel a tremendous sense of responsibility for the educational opportunities made available for students in their respective schools. Holt said:

I believe education is really it. It's everything. It shapes who you are, it is what can get you to where you want to be. It opens doors. It is lifelong and it is far beyond what happens inside the school walls.

Victor believes that it is his responsibility to afford every student the best education possible because it can either continue a cycle of incarceration or it can really help break apart from that and create a new path for kids. He said, “It’s too important to not let my excuses of my own limitations hinder that child’s opportunity.” According to Terry:

Education is really the platform to make change in people’s lives, and in kids’ lives. We are the ones that will either make it or break it for a lot of kids. Having a quality education is what’s going to make an impact in their lives to help them have a chance to do something with their lives.

Ursula reflects on her personal experiences in school to describe her passion for education. According to Ursula:

As an educator, I was educated in a White silo. I’m used to a school that presents things in a very White-dominated way. That’s what I see perpetuated. I’m looking at exploring other ways of reaching kids.

The sensemakers described past experiences with punitive school climates, deficit perspectives by adults, and cultural misunderstandings to frame the institutional problem of the discipline gap. Recall from Chapter Four that the aspiring anti-racist leaders believed anti-racist leadership includes the interrogation of systematic and institutional mechanisms that disadvantage children of color.

### ***Punitive Nature of School Discipline Approaches***

Participants view the macro level nature of the racial discipline gap as representative of the punitive nature of schools as an institution. Victor noted how the

punishment mindset is so “engrained” in the minds of teachers that it can be difficult to switch to non-punitive approaches to classroom management. Ursula observed, “Some, not all, teachers really rely on somebody getting in the kids face and just yelling at them, and making them feel [badly].” Terry and Jimmy shared that many teachers’ first line of defense is punishment as evidenced when teachers ask things like, “What fun activity can we take away?” Terry shared the example of teachers taking away field trip privileges from students as a punishment for classroom behavior. When he looked at who was being excluded, he realized it was by and large boys of color. This is an example of Terry using an informal equity audit through observation.

Holt contemplated why teachers oftentimes think narrowly about the linkage between discipline and punishment and said:

They’ve been in our education system. They have lived through it. It’s the model. It’s all they know. It’s a strong system. It’s a strong status quo system that is slow to change and behavior and punishment in general is something that very few people study or read about. Human behavior is very complex.

Holt’s words reflect how sensemakers focus on and extract cues from their environment in their sensemaking process (Weick, 1995). This is reflected in the accounts given by the aspiring anti-racist leaders in this study. Deficit perspectives represent a second way that sensemakers problematize the discipline gap.

### ***Deficit Perspectives and Cultural Misunderstandings***

The aspiring anti-racist leaders in the study talked about how cultural misunderstandings and deficit perspectives about students often lead to punitive responses to discipline in traditional school environments. Victor said:

It goes back to our system as it is, no wonder these kids are going to have tendencies to have discipline issues, because even the system, the way it's structured, is kind of designed to go against them to some extent. And if the teachers come in, even with all good intentions, come in with this defective or polluted point of view, it's natural that the kid will likely be disciplined more than others.

Terry expanded on the nature of deficit perspectives held by some teachers with whom he has worked. Terry shared his experiences as a bilingual teacher when he would hear teachers talk about the bilingual students using phrases like 'those poor kids,' and 'bless their hearts,' or 'they are never going to get there because they have to learn another language.' According to Terry and Ursula, these deficit perspectives - low expectations for achievement and higher expectations for misbehavior - exacerbate the problem. According to Ursula,

My general thoughts about it is that we have predominantly White educators who are conditioned and brought up to have assumptions about people of color that doesn't manifest itself when you are working in a bank or you are doing some other kind of work, but it manifests itself in education in lots of big, ugly ways. If you have been brought up with these assumptions, which most of us have, then your brain is wired to look for evidence to back up what you learned.

Ursula's account for deficit perspectives is a powerful description of the ways in which education as an institution is different than other industries. This demonstrates how teachers and administrators have opportunities to see and think about race in ways that may not be as visible to persons working in other industries. Holt talked extensively about the socio-cultural dynamics at play in schools that fuel deficit perspectives at both the student-to-student and adult-to-student levels. According to Holt, who works in the only middle school in the study:

For some of the neighborhood kids, this is the first time they have had kids that don't look like them in classes or the first time they have been around kids that haven't grown up with abundance and it creates some race/class/gender issues student to student. Students flat out tell other students things like, 'You're Mexican, you should be mowing my lawn,' or 'Refugee students from Iraq are terrorists.'

Holt has seen a lot of name calling that shows a lack of awareness of privilege, but he articulated that it may possibly indicate the opposite, that students are aware but flaunt their power and status. Jimmy noticed deficit perspectives among parents related to the middle school feeder pattern in his attendance zone. He intimated that parents' decision to not attend the middle school was often based on the more diverse student population at the middle school and fear of the unknown.

We have a lot of families that live in this area, a more affluent area right around our campus, even though we're a Title I campus, but they don't send their kids here because of the middle school we feed into.

The problem framing that the aspiring anti-racist leaders do at the macro level is commensurate with higher-level interrogations of systematic and institutional mechanisms. These aspiring anti-racist leaders extracted cues from their environments to isolate larger structures that appear to contribute to the racial discipline gap (Weick, 1995). Rather than focus on the child or family factors, typical of the status quo response to why Black boys and girls get sent to the office more frequently, these aspiring anti-racist school leaders framed the problem at the institutional level to make sense of the contributing factors. As described earlier, at no time did a participant place the *cause* of the racial discipline gap on the students and families. This is reflective of second-order

problem framing (Young et al, 2011). The sensemaking done at the micro level, or school level, also has strong ties to the personal identities of each participant.

At the micro level, situated in the various schools where these participants work, the sensemaking done around the racial discipline gap is grounded in the evolving identities of each aspiring anti-racist leader toward anti-racist leadership. I attempted to collect data from each of them about the current school year regarding any disciplinary data they have, but especially according to race. When asked during the interview process to share discipline data collected at the local level, only three participants were able to complete the task, and two of the three delivered documents only after several months. In all cases, those who submitted data did not have it readily available, indicating that the data was not being used at the time. Various reasons included not having any data to report and confidentiality concerns. This is interesting and especially relevant to Weick's (1995) conception of identity in the sensemaking process as discussed earlier.

As such, the participants in this study demonstrate the close link between one's character and their school's image by their motivation to preserve a positive organizational image and repair a negative one through association and disassociation with actions on the very issue of why there is an intersection of race and discipline. Perhaps the most salient example of this is in the ways that the aspiring anti-racist leaders see themselves as disruptors of racial factors in discipline. They gave examples of ways that they interrupt displays of racial incidences in discipline, but they gave less substantive examples of true disruption. They appear to be somewhat disconnected from potential realities that fall outside their perceptions of racial patterns in discipline. What



this means is that most claim to not have a discipline gap that reaches a level of significance, yet the lack of data collection regarding race and office referrals makes it impossible to know the truth of their *perceived* reality. Indeed, only three of the five aspiring anti-racist leaders in the study submitted current specific race-based discipline data to me.

Ursula was the only participant who conducted a current equity audit of classroom disciplinary referrals for the current year. Near the end of my data analysis and writing of results, about three to four months after interviews, Jimmy, Terry and Ursula submitted discipline data to me. Terry gave me an informal half-page snapshot of discipline according to the nature of incidents and a separate set related to the breakdown of suspensions by race. Jimmy gave me a copy of the school report for reportable disciplinary events as required at the district level.

Ursula submitted an equity audit several months after my request and shared with me how the data surprised her because African Americans represent 25% of all suspensions, but only represent 13.2% of the student population. She was also surprised that White students were moderately overrepresented. According to her audit, she found that Hispanic students have been underrepresented in office referrals this school year. When sharing this information with me, she said that having the information made both her and her fellow administrative colleague much more aware of this reality. She said, “It has seemed to me and our substitute assistant principal that our African American students have been greatly overrepresented among students who have visited the office for discipline over the last few weeks.”

Appendix D shows data collected from the Office for Civil Rights in the 2011-12 school year, for the public schools in the study. The 2011-12 school year is the most recent time period available. No data was available for the charter schools. While none of the participants worked at the schools during this time, the data provide a contextual backdrop to understanding the school environments prior to Holt, Terry, and Ursula assuming leadership positions at the schools. All three schools, but especially Munch Middle, had an overrepresentation of Black students in either in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension rates (Appendix D).

The aspiring anti-racist leaders did not collect formal, ongoing, quantitative data regarding race and discipline throughout the current school year, and when they did, it was a result of responding to my request. When asked about the racial discipline gap at the local level, I framed the question around where each participant sees evidence of race and discipline intersecting.

While a discipline gap may or may not be currently present in the corresponding schools in the sample, the sensemakers made sense of the factors that could lead to one. Therefore, references to the intersection of race and discipline refer to the local conceptions of how these aspiring anti-racist leaders “notice,” then make sense of, the role of race in discipline. Indeed, this speaks to the institutional context of sensemaking as it pertains to a problem. Similarly, and in accordance with Weick’s (1995) notion of enactment of environment, these aspiring anti-racist leaders build narratives to help understand what they think, organize their experiences, and control and predict events by implementing changes to the disciplinary culture of their respective schools.

## **Institutional Contexts Shape Sensemaking**

The following findings relate to the second part of the second research question which explored ways that institutional contexts shape the sensemaking about the discipline gap. People are a part of their environments; they act, according to Follett (1924), and receive stimuli as a result of their own activity. Weick (1995) offers the example of two police officers patrolling in a squad car, and a teenager giving them the middle finger. They can ignore, stop, or return the gesture. The police officers create an environment that they have to deal with once they respond to the teenager. The police officers are very much a part of their own environments. In accordance with enactment of sensible environments, Weick asserts that people act, and in turn, create the materials that become the “constraints and opportunities they face,” (1995, p. 31). People impose categories on their realizations in accordance with their acting as if there is something out there to be discovered.

The participants drew on their previous and current institutional contexts to make sense of why the racial discipline gap exists. These institutional contexts include their preparation program, previous schools where each taught, and their current schools. Each retrospectively reflected on happenings to extract “cues” from their environment and then bracketed into the categories of “why” the discipline gap exists (Weick, 1995).

As part of the interview process, I specifically asked the participants to share their own accounts of how the program impacted them specifically related to “seeing” race in school events, as well as its influence on their development as aspiring anti-racist leaders. This is important because of the way the study sample was selected – all five participants

attended the same principal preparation program.

### ***Institutional Context of the Principal Preparation Program***

The principal preparation program shaped the sensemaking about the discipline gap and anti-racist leadership. Each participant talked about the impact of the principal preparation program on their development as an anti-racist leader. Like others, Victor gave credit directly to the preparation program for being a "life changing experience." Victor said the learnings from the program enabled him to see that there are "racial tendencies" spanning disciplinary decisions.

The participants joked about the lack of focus on the managerial side of the job within the principal preparation program. Jimmy said:

All those [other] experiences were so much more important to me than the budget piece. Now, am I great at budgets? I don't know because it's one of those things that they told us, you're going to learn that on the job.

He described the holistic nature of the anti-racist preparation program by highlighting the ongoing focus of race and other equity issues within the program design.

Jimmy said:

Other programs, which are good programs but may have one course on race, class, and gender, and that's your check box for getting your requirements, but this program, it was in everything we talked about whether it was talking about budgets or scheduling – it was always through the lens of equity and social justice and anti-racist leadership.

Recall from Chapter Four that as the aspiring anti-racist leaders made sense of their work as aspiring anti-racist leaders, they highlighted several ways they identify with

anti-racist leadership. One aspect of anti-racist leadership according to their accounts is the movement away from colorblindness. Interestingly, while Holt, Jimmy and Victor *confessed* to some colorblind tendencies prior to entering the program, most of these aspiring anti-racist leaders had an orientation toward social justice prior to entering the principal preparation program, even if not having the language to talk about it. Ursula and Victor indicated that they specifically sought out the program because of its reputation for having a strong social-justice orientation.

Ursula noted that her willingness and ability to detect racial bias increased significantly throughout the principal preparation program, however she also shared that she already came with an intuition for detecting racism. Ursula reports having interest in “the cultural phenomenon that is racism” since her first teaching job. She said that her growth was directly related to the way the program focused on developing leaders who question the status quo and look for ways to make educational opportunities more equitable for students of color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Jimmy also already had a passion for racial equity coming into the program, and that had to do with my upbringing and experiences he had as a student. He said that his passion was *solidified* even more through the program. He said:

That’s helping me with decisions I’m making now. I come at problems with a different outlook than other people do who didn’t get that experience.

Jimmy also poignantly described his movement away from colorblindness. He described how he has had friends killed by police growing up. He recounted how he

noticed at a fairly young age that he was treated differently than his friends of color, but he said, “But again, my answer was everybody just needs to have the same amount and we’ll all be okay.” He credits the preparation program for allowing him to understand the difference between equality and equity. He said:

It took the program to show me that no, that’s not necessarily the case, because if you give everybody the same thing, there are systemic things that have gone on in the past that just giving somebody a certain amount isn’t going to get them to where they need to be. Some need more than others. That was a switch for me for being in the program.

Victor also gave credit to the program for his movement away from colorblind thinking. He related a powerful example of letting go of colorblind perspectives linked to deficit thinking as taking a "red pill."<sup>18</sup> He talked about once he swallowed that red pill of racial awareness, he began to realize how he felt about African Americans. He said:

I still feel uncomfortable when I see an interracial couple. The program made me aware of these feelings that I have. Now that I recognize it, I can fight it.

Holt is the only participant who admittedly came into the program *green*, or not having a framework for social justice already present. The notion of green relates to being new to anti-racist and equity-minded leadership. In terms of Helm’s model (1995), this is commensurate with the pseudo-independent stage, which involves having an intellectual understanding of the unfair advantages of growing up White, yet a limited understanding of systematic and institutional ways that people of color experience

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<sup>18</sup> The red pill is a popular culture symbol representing the choice between embracing the painful truth of reality (red pill) versus the comfortable ignorance of illusion (blue pill). These terms were popularized in the 1999 film *The Matrix*.

oppression. This stage may reflect some color-blind tendencies. According to Holt:

I entered it not really knowing what social justice meant, not really hearing that term before. I was definitely unprepared to talk about race, class and gender issues, but that changed after the program.

Regarding how the principal preparation program specifically helped him to be racially aware, Holt recalled,

I am a White, able-bodied, male. I am the definition of privilege. It was humbling and it took multiple attempts before I was able to open up and see it. You have to be persistent with it. But once I was able to see the world through the anti-racist lens, it really did change my view on everything.

Terry related his experiences in the preparation program with ambitious goals for reinventing educational opportunities for students by saying, “It really gave me the tools to look at ways to reinvent education for a lot of kids, and rewrite their story.”

Recall that the aspiring anti-racist leaders talked about their identities toward anti-racist leadership in terms of moving away from colorblindness, but also in terms of having confidence to talk about race. The participants also credited the program for developing this trait within them. Victor talked about the influence of the preparation program on not only his level of comfort to talk about race, but also reflected on how it impacts him as a parent. He reflected:

In very simple terms if I had never gone to graduate school, I never would have participated in conversations about race. I would have never been able to identify my own prejudice, I would have never been able to identify my erroneous way of seeing things, which in turn affected the way I’ve raised my little girl.

Jimmy attributes both the program and a former mentor with his sense of leadership efficacy:

I think if I hadn't gone through the UT program, and if I didn't have a principal that worked with me the way he did when I was a teacher, I don't think I would have been able to do this job because there would be way too many questions that I would have right now. I still have questions, but I feel comfortable with making decisions and I think it's because of all the experience that I've had so far, all the people that I've come into contact with, and the way the program was set up.

Some, but especially Terry, credited the preparation program for specific anti-racist actions they have taken with their staff. Recall Terry's incorporation of *Courageous Conversations About Race* (Singleton & Linton, 2006) to explore biases with his staff to move teachers from a place of colorblindness to racial awareness.

An equity audit, in the truest sense, is a data collection activity that spans all areas of a school or district environment to detect differences in factors including, but not limited to, school resources, teacher placement, discipline rates, and gifted and talented labels (Gooden, 2012). Its purpose is to analyze the body of data collected to identify, locate and isolate areas of improvement. Terry reflected on how the preparation program helped him enact equity audits on his campus. He said:

I was able to apply the idea of an equity audit on our campus by looking at the discipline data and then addressing that through professional development with the teachers by having conversations with them.

Terry and Ursula were the only two who explicitly gave examples of providing professional learning opportunities to staff about race specifically, and Ursula's example



was a reflection back to her previous work with the culminating activity from her preparation program. Terry, in the example described above, conducted an equity audit and then created and led a professional development about exploring biases, talked about being solutions-oriented and solutions-focused. He said:

So we talked about exploring our biases, seeing how we can hold them accountable, and then we watched a TED talk on the danger of the single story, and talked about how we can, as teachers, create single-stories for our students or groups of students. Then we challenge the teachers to change that story for those kids.

Prior to starting his current job as principal, Jimmy conducted an equity audit based on his learnings from the preparation program. He looked at performance and discipline trends.

So when I did the equity audit of the campus before I got here, I saw those gaps, and it makes me more aware of those things and how kids are being treated when they're doing certain things, like what amount of kids are being sent to the office and what race are they coming to me. Are they really doing things that are that much different than the other kids in the class that look different but it stands out?

All of the participants unequivocally tied their identities as anti-racist leaders with their learnings from the preparation program and all attributed their ways of thinking about racial equity directly to the program. Indeed, the institutional context of their preparation program instrumentally shaped how they make sense of the discipline gap.

### ***Institutional Context of Previous and Current Schools***

All participants retrospectively considered their own experiences as students and teachers at previous schools, as well as their current situations, to make sense of and frame the discipline gap (Weick, 1995). They reflectively considered how they think of

situations, events, and situations through a different lens now. Jimmy's recollection of how his friends of color were treated differently in high school speaks to how even though he knew something felt wrong, his lack of an intellectual understanding of racism disallowed him from seeing it. He said:

I grew up with predominantly African American friends and I had one or two Hispanic friends that I can remember growing up, so that was the culture I grew up in. I learned early on that something was different in the way that I was being treated than my friends. We'd be doing the same stupid stuff at school, but I wouldn't be getting in trouble like they would. I noticed differences early on and how they were treated.

They were all able to remember their own deficit perspectives or implicit bias they had when retrospectively remembering events. Several lamented their chosen course of actions and wish they could go back and do things differently for kids. Ursula has an interesting story in terms of her experiences in contexts that shape her sensemaking. She was raised in a privileged environment and attended selective schools. While no one explicitly taught her about racism prior to the preparation program she had a heightened sense of social justice and equity that came somewhat naturally for her. The institutional context of her own experiences as a student shaped her thinking about privilege and elitism in ways that turned her off from replicating those systems.

Holt, Victor and Terry work in school districts that employ a social-emotional learning (SEL) approach to discipline, which directly shapes their sensemaking about the purpose of cultivating relationships with students to create positive, non-punitive disciplinary climates. They used the SEL framework and available resources, like the

SEL district leader, to make sense of ways to move staff away from punitive approaches. Victor, Terry, and Holt also work in IB schools where a focus on global citizenship shapes their conception of classroom management through a SEL approach. Victor's work with redefining the meaning of discipline with his staff was anchored by the tenets of SEL already in place, which he claims helps to support his larger mission of moving away from punitive discipline approaches. He said:

One of the things we started is...again tying it back to IB...we take in actually what it means – discipline. It's the understanding that you're going to take that incident as a learning opportunity, so you need to give this in the understanding as to what happened, what's a better decision, what's a better way of doing things. so it's not a punishment policy thing

Terry also credits his previous experience at another SEL school with moving him away from punishment as a mindset to discipline.

It was a big part of everything they were doing there. I started to view discipline and working with students as a learning opportunity, as opposed to a time to hand down a punishment because a kid did something wrong.

Terry reflected on how working in a charter school may influence his ability (in a positive way) to set expectations related to doing what is best for students. He was referring to the fact that charter districts operate under contractually-free obligations, meaning that teachers and staff can lose their job at any time. He said, "I think it makes it a little easier as far as talking to teachers about 'This is the way we're going to run things at this school and if you're not ok with that....' Terry hinted that if teachers aren't ok with that, there would be a somewhat easy process of dismissal. An interesting

suggestion in his story is that while his words may seem harsh (in that he mentioned that he could somewhat easily terminate a teacher), he talked about it in the context of building relationships with teachers and letting them know why things would be a certain way. He used the following example:

We've had teachers sending kids to the office for fairly minor offenses – disruptions and different things – and we'd send them back. We would walk them back in the class and say they need to be in class. And they'd come back to us, then after a couple of times it was, 'Okay, we need to talk. We need to talk about why the kid needs to be in class, why they are not to be here in the office,' and after two weeks the teacher got it.

This is interesting because in the public school context, principals have less authority to send students back to class when teachers refuse to readmit them. Recall that the Education Code has clear guidelines about processes that must be followed before students are sent back to class. While no participant in this study from the public school context described this state policy as a barrier, Terry's reflection highlights how the organizational context within the charter district gave him a greater sense of autonomy to deal with teachers regarding office referrals.

Holt employs his own type of restorative approach within the existing SEL framework implemented in the public school context. He sees the two approaches as mutually compatible with SLE framework serving as a preventive-type measure and the restorative piece as a way to bring dignity to students when events have already occurred.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION THREE**

*How do aspiring anti-racist leaders enact this sensemaking to disrupt the problem and how do they navigate institutional barriers that they face?*

## **School Leaders' Enactment of Sensemaking**

In this section, I address the first half of the third research question, which explores how aspiring anti-racist leaders enact their sensemaking to disrupt the problem of the racial discipline gap. Participants framed disciplinary problems through the lens of racial awareness, and enacted their leadership at varying levels to interrupt potentially discriminatory practices using either first - or second-order change tactics. To classify their actions as disruptive is perhaps an overstatement. Their identities as aspiring anti-racist leaders connects each of them with framing problems and solutions toward institutional disruption, however, there were less substantive examples of second-order type change disruptions to the status quo.

Using the sensemaking done by these aspiring leaders tied to their big beliefs about disrupting the racial discipline gap in their local contexts, the following analysis will explore the connection between the specific collective beliefs they shared about equitable approaches and their problem framing disposition toward either first - or second-order change.

To organize the following section, I will show how their personal beliefs connect to their identity as aspiring anti-racist leaders. The aspiring anti-racist leaders enact their sensemaking to describe their approaches to discipline. Three shared beliefs will be described and supported by unifying themes. After describing the shared beliefs and connected actions, I will explore the ways the aspiring anti-racist leaders tie their sensemaking about these beliefs to actions. The first commonly held belief of these aspiring anti-racist leaders is that the traditional public school model of punitive

consequences for discipline is not commensurate with the larger goal of learning.

### ***Employing a Non-punitive Approach***

All of the participants in this study identify with non-punitive approaches to discipline. Every aspiring anti-racist leader believed in a learning-based, versus punitive-based, approach to discipline. Each recounted examples of how they purposefully shape their school cultures around positive discipline approaches tied to learning. For example, Terry talked about how he now views discipline as a learning opportunity as opposed to a time to hand down a punishment because a kid did something wrong. He has started to rephrase his discipline around questions such as, ‘Why did you do what you were doing?’ and ‘How do I better understand that and help you learn from this situation,’ as opposed to just punishing a kid because he did something wrong that was bad and here’s your punishment that you get because you did that. Victor talked about redefining the purpose of discipline with his entire staff at the start of the school year. Jimmy revealed to teachers that office referrals should be a last resort because he believes there is no value for students when they receive punishment for discipline events.

Ursula shared that her disposition toward discipline rests on the side of restorative practices. According to Holt, restorative approaches are the key to eliminating suspensions as disciplinary consequences. He defines restorative approaches in the following way:

It’s opening a line of dialogue, really about, ‘What happened, how do you think it made the other kid feel, why did you do this.’ You bring in, oftentimes, both students and they talk together and they realize that they have more in common than they thought. Or that one student didn’t realize they were hurting the other

student.

Terry used the word *rehabilitative* to describe his approach. Similar to restorative approaches, recall that rehabilitative approaches privilege things like learning, forgiveness, and non-retribution.

I work in an elementary school and if it's not rehabilitative now, when's it going to be. It's all got to be rehabilitative right now. That's the whole goal with everything that I'm doing. There's no point in giving a punishment just to give a punishment; it all has to be about learning. It's about having a changed behavior, otherwise, what am I doing; I'm just getting rid of a kid to get rid of a kid.

Consideration of non-punitive discipline approaches was considered alongside the importance of classroom learning. Participants also shared a belief in the importance of avoiding the loss of instructional time as a discipline remedy.

#### ***Avoiding loss of instructional time***

A second shared belief is the importance of avoiding taking students away from the instructional classroom. As demonstrated by their statements about keeping students in class as a top priority, these school leaders share the common belief in the importance of minimally disrupting classroom learning for discipline events. According to Jimmy:

If we don't want them here in the office then we try to stress that with them, because when they're here they're not working. We'll help whenever we need to, but we don't want it to become a revolving door where they're just sending kids to the office.

Victor specifically mentioned how his knowledge of the discipline gap has directly shaped how he thinks about keeping students in class. When comparing his current practice to previous experiences, he recalled:

Did I make that kid never get in trouble or eradicate the incidents that happened? No, but I felt I [am] better about [allowing] the student to spend more time in the classroom, where otherwise that would not have been the case.

Recall that Terry shared the example of enacting a policy that students could not be disallowed from attending a field trip for behavioral consequences. He also talked about walking students back to class when they were sent to the office for minor offenses like disruption. He said:

We would walk them back in the class and say they need to be in class. And they'd come back to us then after a couple of times, it was 'Okay, we need to talk about why the kids need to be in class, why they are not to be here in the office,' and after two weeks the teacher [gets] it.

Jimmy classified the sending of students to another teacher's classroom as one way that teachers avoid office referrals. I found this interesting because while doing work in a different classroom may be a productive use of time, there is still a loss of instructional learning opportunity. He said, "For the most part, the teachers handle themselves in the classroom or they'll rely on a co-teacher. Like if a kid just needs a place to cool down they'll send them over to their room with work, or something like that." Terry linked the avoidance of missed instructional time with a second-order type problem-framing. Rather than focus on a deficit within the student or teacher, he talked about looking for systematic barriers. According to Terry,

School is all about making sure that students learn, so whatever we're doing we have to make it so that kids are learning during that time. They come to the office, then I need to figure out what is that barrier that's keeping you from learning. Why are you here right now and how do I eliminate that barrier and get you back in the class so you can be learning, because if you're not in there you're not learning.



The consideration of removing barriers for learning has implications for creating environments of trust and relationship-building. A final shared belief that characterized the aspiring anti-racist leaders' identity as a sensemaker of the intersection of race and discipline is their collective belief in the importance of cultivating relationships. Each privileges relationship-building approaches over teacher-directive approaches to create and sustain a positive classroom culture.

### *Cultivating relationships*

A third shared belief amongst this group of aspiring anti-racist leaders is the importance of building relationships when it comes to discipline and classroom management. This was reflected in Terry's consideration of the removal of barriers. According to Ursula, "an effective teacher will figure out how to build a relationship with a child to [reach] him or her so that they're a team. It's not a 'me vs. you' thing."

Terry shared the impact of a TED talk that he listened to by Rita Pierson, where she talked about every child needing a champion. He said that his primary focus as a leader right now is trying to inspire each of his teachers to be a champion for students. He said:

To develop that relationship with that student is going to make the impact in their life. Everything we do here, school is all about making sure that students learn, so whatever we're doing we have to make it so that kids are learning.

Terry, Victor, and Holt recalled stories from working with students where students expected to be given an office referral, but these school leaders, in all three individual accounts, decided to make the issue a learning opportunity versus the alternative of

sending the student away during instructional time. All three school leaders shared how each student escalated their behavior before realizing that an exclusionary punishment wasn't inevitable. According to Holt, students often say things like, "No one has ever believed me before."

Terry described his particular incident with a student who ended up yelling out, "Why are you not going to send me to the office?" He told the respective student that the goal was to keep her in class and that she needed to sit back down and go back to work. In all the similar stories shared by these participants, a shared story element was a disbelief on the part of the student that a) they weren't being punished, and b) that they had never encountered an adult who cared about their feelings or 'their side of the story.' In two separate stories told by different participants, students began crying uncontrollably and later told each one of the participants that they have never had an adult in school demonstrate a level of care about them and their learning like that.

Ursula talked about shifting perspectives from a teacher-centric approach to a learner-centric approach. She remembered one story in particular:

The teacher was teaching in a very specific style, lots of direct teach, very linear, focused on compliance, and what they would see was that a good portion of their students, at least enough to notice, weren't successful in the classroom. I would employ coaching techniques to try to shift the person's mindset of instead of 'the kids have to meet me where I am, you need to meet the kids where they are. You need to try to get inside their heads so they're able to learn.

As described earlier, Holt, Victor, and Terry work in school districts that employ a social-emotional approach to discipline. According to Holt:

If we are going to be a socio-emotional district and take that to heart, then we have to listen to the kids. It's definitely easier not to listen and just do what you want to do to them.

It is interesting that on two occasions there have been examples of the aspiring anti-racist leaders referring to it being easier to do leadership outside the scope of their identities. For example, recall that Jimmy said detecting patterns in who is being marginalized is a tougher approach to leadership. Similarly, Holt refers to “not” listening to students and doing what you want to them as the easier answer. This hint within their sensemaking patterns speaks to the struggle that may exist in being a leader for equity.

The situation of the racial discipline gap is interpreted through the lens of how they personally “see” it in their contextual environments. In the examples that accompany how the aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of the discipline gap, the ways that they draw on various cues relates specifically to how they frame the discipline gap from previous and current contexts. When connecting the group-proclaimed “causes” of the racial discipline gap it is interesting that the beliefs tied to the causes are congruent with the proposed remedies at the local level. This is true except in the area of deficit perspectives and cultural misunderstandings.

### ***Sensemaking about Non-Punitive Approaches Linked to Action***

Recall that the sensemakers attributed the nature of U.S. punitive discipline systems to the racial discipline gap. Non-punitive and preventive, or restorative-type, approaches to discipline consequences embody the approaches used by the aspiring anti-racist leaders in this study. Generally, preventive and restorative-type approaches tend to

be commensurate with second-order change, where the framing of the discipline centers the learning, rather than a focus on retribution for a singular student as the “cause” of the problem who needs “fixing.” On the contrary, a first-order approach to change would center a policy approach whereby a punishment may be rendered similar to that prescribed through a discipline code of conduct. Holt said:

It’s a way of bringing dignity to both students. You are in it for the long run. You are not trying to fix a student.

When talking about implementing restorative disciplinary approaches Holt said, “I feel like I can get the [in-school] suspensions down to virtually zero.” When asked about his specific approach he said:

I say to the kid “What happened?” I like to hear their perspective. Their side of the story. I take for granted that I am listening to 12 and 13 year olds, sometimes 14 year olds. I know that the truth maybe their truth and there maybe some things left out but I can usually get a good feel for what actually happened. Just listening to them.

Victor employed a second-order change initiative when, together with his staff, they redefined discipline, according to the tenets of ‘discipline as learning.’ Together, within the framework of the SEL approach, they deconstructed the meaning of discipline and redefined it so that discipline incidences would be taken as a learning opportunity in order to give students an understanding of what happened, what might be a better solution, and consideration of what is an example of a better way to do it next time. The focus on punishment is absent from their new conception of discipline. This does not imply that punitive measures are never used, rather, the focus shifts from retribution to

learning. The focus is on culture change, versus a first-order change that centers the student, family, or teacher as the target for change.

Jimmy reflected on the damage office referrals can have for defining students in long-lasting ways, but said less about how he approaches change within his school disciplinary culture. He said:

I've been really upfront with my staff that I'm not big on referrals. I think it's just a paper trail system for kids, that follows them for the rest of their school life, and I don't like that.

Ursula talked about how looking at events, such as hitting or fighting, as not being automatically assigned a formal disciplinary referral tied to something punitive. She told about the process by which she allowed the student to express sorrow and regret, and then practiced with the student on how to approach the victim using words to say 'I'm sorry.' Prior to selecting a consequence, Ursula talked about following up with the classroom teacher to learn about any history of related behaviors and deciding who would call the parents. Because the student was early elementary, no punitive response was selected, however Ursula did say that with older kids there might be a more punitive-based consequence, unless there is a disability. She qualified this by saying that punitive, in her mind, did not mean exclusionary. This is an important distinction because punitive responses tend to equate with exclusionary in-school or out-of-school suspensions.

### ***Sensemaking about Avoiding Loss of Instruction Linked to Action***

Jimmy shows evidence of first-order change problem framing in his example of encouraging teachers to find alternate ways to solve discipline problems that sending

students to the office. While he stresses the importance of instructional time, the change initiative is centered at the classroom level, rather than systematic culture change to address belief systems about the importance of instructional time as a priority over teacher and classroom level quick fixes. He did not show any evidence of supporting his teachers through systemic changes to the disciplinary cultures, rather he emphasizes that teachers should avoid sending students to the office. There is little systemic support for culture change in this example.

Ursula shared her experience about how she handles teachers who tend to send students to the office frequently. Her response is also centered at the level of a first-order type change initiative. She said:

We go in and observe and give them feedback, and give them ideas on things they could do differently, or if they're having an issue, we go to the classroom and work with the student there and de-escalate whatever's going on, and get them back into learn. But let's not get them out of the classroom because that's what's not going to be helpful.

Ursula doesn't explicitly discuss a second-order approach to office referrals, however, while the response she gives centers first-order change, the nature of the action privileges keeping the student in class, and also going a step further by offering support to the teacher through classroom visits, and modeling how to work with students to de-escalate a situation. Terry described stories of teachers who send students to the office for fairly minor offenses.

We've had teachers sending kids to the office for fairly minor offenses – disruptions and different things – and we'd send them back. We would walk them

back in the class and say, 'Hey they need to be in class.' We need to talk about why the kid needs to be in class, why they are not to be here in the office, and after two weeks or so, the teacher got it.

Terry's story leans toward a first-order change response as well. Terry's example of disallowing students from missing field trips as a punitive discipline response is also a first-order change initiative, yet aimed at changing the culture of excluding students from field trips, a learning opportunity. However, Terry also described the emphasis on professional development as a future tool to combat office referrals, which tends to be a second-order change type response, albeit not one he has introduced yet.

### ***Sensemaking about Cultivating Relationships Connected to action***

In addition to the belief in relationship-building between teachers and students as it relates to classroom management, several participants extend this belief into their own personal leadership styles. Victor and Jimmy talked extensively about the time they spend building a positive relationship with their teachers and staff, a second-order change type response. Victor's staff includes 75% of teachers with less than five years of teaching experience. Victor committed to spending 30-45 minutes individually with each teacher at the beginning of the school year to understand their beliefs and expectations and to "build a strong culture of trust, collaboration and excellence." Terry shared that his leadership style centers relationship-building with students. He said, "My whole leadership style is to figure out ways that we can inspire kids, and find out what it takes to make sure they learn while they are here."

Holt also talked at length about the conversations he has with students who come to the

office for a referral. To describe his approach to relationship-building, he said:

I try to put myself in their shoes. That is often where these behaviors manifest. These behaviors are always a result of something else. Whether something is going on at home or really boring class or an issue between a classmate. The issue is rarely at the teacher personally. I have to remember that and I have to remind my teachers of that. This behavior is often, almost always, a function of something else.

A noticeably absent consideration under the topic of cultivating relationships as it relates to enactment through problem framing is the idea of cultural competency and the confrontation of deficit perspective as central points of focus for professional development or learning opportunities. While the leaders talked about the importance of professional development offering to raise racial awareness, their approaches were more strongly linked to first-order change when dealing with deficit perspectives and cultural misunderstandings.

They all demonstrated the knowledge and skills to create second-order changes related to deficit perspectives and cultural competency, however the emphasis around cultural misunderstandings and deficit thinking is anchored in their problem framing, with few examples of participants *doing* something substantive to change the culture. In short, they talked about it as a problem and framed it accordingly, but few gave examples of doing something about it specifically at the organizational level.

### **Navigating Institutional Barriers**

Part two of the third research question explores how aspiring anti-racist leaders navigate institutional barriers they face. Many participants shared that the most



challenging barrier to doing anti-racist work is other adults. Specifically, Holt gave an example of other adults who are uncomfortable talking about race. According to Holt:

Campus administration. The adults. The barriers are the adults. That's about it. Whether it's other admins, teachers, or the community. Race talks are not anything that anyone is comfortable or trained or competent in having, therefore defense mechanisms pop up really early and throw up barriers really quick to any kind of talk about change.

Ursula's retelling of the story with the teacher who called a student a "thug," was reflective of a barrier to doing her work. Yet, at the same time, she realized that calling the teacher out gave her an opportunity to develop a reputation for being outspoken. Victor characterized barriers as the deficit mindsets that tend to correspond with his prediction of if students of color will be targeted for discipline. Victor commented:

If teachers come in, even with all good intentions, come in with this defective or polluted point of view, it's likely that the kid will be disciplined more than others, so it's about working with teachers to support students.

According to Holt and Ursula, it's often the adults who want a punitive response. According to Holt, "It is often the adults that want to send them to in-school suspension or home without even critically evaluating if that is effective or not." The aspiring anti-racist leaders in this study experience frustration with adults who are not in a similar racial identity stage, even if they realize the lack of knowledge on the part of those teachers. The colorblind nature of the contact stage in Helm's racial identity model, and the accompanying "lagging development" of other adults is challenging for these aspiring anti-racist leaders. Indeed, the manifestation of racism through colorblind attitudes and deficit thinking is difficult for these aspiring anti-racist leaders to navigate.

They talk about strategies to move others along, however I did not hear of a comprehensive plan for dismantling these barriers to doing the work of anti-racism.

While all participants found conversations around race to be necessary, many shared how the “receiving” end was not always as ready and willing to engage. Also, mindsets of punishment that persist among educators and parents, in general, were described as a barrier to offering disciplinary remedies that fall outside this paradigm. There were two primary ways that these aspiring anti-racist leaders navigate barriers and these include the solicitation of ideas from anti-racist networks, and disallowing factors of race from becoming patterns of race.

#### ***Form Purposeful “anti-racist” Networks***

While the participants in the study did not explicitly talk about institutional barriers to addressing the racial discipline gap (outside their framing of U.S. punitive models for discipline), they did talk about the importance of having networks of like-minded individuals to talk about race-related topics. Interestingly, many did not have an expansive group with whom they felt shared their perspectives about race.

According to Holt,

An anti-racist leader surrounds themselves with other social-justice minded educators, which is much easier to do now because of spaces like Twitter. What energizes me is twitter and my people. My collective network of people online.

Ursula related stories where she commiserates with other administrators to problem-solve. She said that while they may not be on the same level in terms of anti-racism, that their conversations seemed to move them in that direction. Jimmy talked

about how fortunate he feels to have an assistant principal who recently graduated from the same principal preparation program, but that there were not many people with whom he could have deeper, race-related conversations. Jimmy and Victor also mentioned each other as people they each call to talk about related issues. Victor talked about the good fortune of having a counselor who sees things that others don't see. He said:

She didn't go through the program but she went to [a social justice program], so she has some understanding of and had been exposed to some extent about the aspects of race.

Terry related how he also talks about related issues with his social emotional leader at the district level. He expressed frustration over not having more principals who share equitable mindsets about discipline.

### ***Factors of Race and Patterns of Race***

While participants gave singular examples of the saliency of race and discipline at their schools, each had systems in place to disallow factors of race to become patterns of race. This idea of *factors of race* versus *patterns of race* is critically important. Factors of race are the products of what Ursula described when she talked about the disconnect between a largely White educational workforce interacting with a growing population of students who are non-White. These classroom factors included things like teachers in Terry's school disallowing the Black boys from attending field trips or teachers sending students of color to the office at a higher rate in the case of Victor. Where these aspiring anti-racist leaders differed from colorblind administrators was in their ability to notice these factors of race, thus giving them the ability to interrupt them from turning into

patterns.

Ursula explained:

Right now we're just trying to make sense of this teacher who [is] taunting kids. It's like, do you really know what you're doing? So I've been documenting, and I try to make sense, that's kind of my approach. I've been documenting every time we're called to a classroom, no matter the classroom. I have a Google sheet. I put when, who called, who is requesting the help, what I did about it.

Terry expanded on this notion of detecting when race may intersect with discipline. He described how he and his staff confront related issues.

We started to notice some attitudes about kids manifest themselves from teachers, whether it's sending a student to the office for a minor offense or in an RTI (response to intervention) meeting saying 'these kids are out of control', or a student has severe ADHD and really needs to be medicated when you've known him for two weeks. Just kinds of things that I felt were wrong; attitudes about kids that rubbed me the wrong way. So we decided to do a professional development to explore our own biases.

Most described proactive, rather than reactive, approaches to deter race from becoming a pattern in discipline outcomes. Informal equity audits are one example. Most talked about using observational data to understand factors of race and discipline within the school environment. Ursula described one confrontation with a teacher.

She called a kid a thug because he wears the White tank tops and baggy shorts, and he's eight. He was in her class. She's supposed to love this kid and she's saying in a loud voice, in front of other teachers, that this kid is a thug. So I turned around and said, 'what do you mean, what are you talking about?' So she gets red and says, 'Well, I don't mean it like that'.

This refusal to back down and allow others to feel uncomfortable is a good example of how disrupting factors of race can push others to see, even if not in conscious ways, their

own patterns of implicit bias. Ursula explained about a second interaction with the same teacher regarding a similar racist behavior.

Then a few months later she said something else along those lines, and she stopped herself and said ‘Oh I shouldn’t say that, “Ursula’s” not going to like it.’ I was sitting right there next to her in the lounge, so she was trying to make me into the bad guy, but I guess I developed this reputation, at least with her, for speaking up.

Terry’s story about boys of color being systematically denied the privilege of attending field trips is another example of disallowing factors of race from becoming a pattern of race. The value system inherent in the school culture trumped any ability of a teacher to remove boys of color from the field trip experience. Holt described how he works to be better equipped to detect when race might become a problem. He said:

I hope to be better at identifying opportunities before I get there. I am getting better at thinking, ' Wait, this is about to happen, I need to better prepare myself.'

The aspiring anti-racist leaders in this study all employed strategies to interrupt factors of race from becoming patterns of race in their local school contexts when they noticed them. Their interaction with past and current school environments shaped how they made sense of race and discipline, and this interaction inspired action on behalf of these aspiring anti-racist school leaders. They demonstrated different levels in their ability to detect racial factors, however they were all aware of ways that race operates through school discipline. What this means is that while some have shown evidence of formal data collection practices, their actions tend to be limited to what they learn through observations.

The aspiring anti-racist leaders worked to interrupt, sometimes in subtle ways, and other times, through initiating dialogues at the institutional level through staff meetings. Indeed, they respond to the environment through some type of first - or second –order change action, but perhaps most importantly, by reflecting about how they can better handle situations in the future.

### CONCLUSION

Aspiring anti-racist leaders made sense of the racial discipline gap in accordance with their views on race. That is, they shared examples of how they believe race matters. While each participant sits along various points in a racial awareness continuum, this does not mean that they do not have racial biases in their personal lives. What makes them different was that they recognized their biases and confronted them through acknowledgement of colorblind tendencies and active recruitment of opposing thoughts. A few participants shared their vulnerabilities around individual racism.

The aspiring anti-racist leaders shared examples of how the institutional environments influence their sensemaking about discipline. Each gave explicit examples of ways he or she influences the disciplinary culture of the school in purposeful and meaningful ways, especially as it relates to redefining the purpose of discipline around learning and creating a culture where students are not pulled from instructional learning times as a first measure. Ways that these aspiring anti-racist leaders appear less purposeful about connecting their sensemaking to problem framing toward enactment is in the area of cultural competency. While these school leaders share beliefs about the deficit perspectives held by many adults and students about non-White students, their

approach to change seems to be centered less on second-order change initiatives, and more focused on the teacher level.

These school leaders share ideological stances on the punitive and intractable nature of American public school discipline approaches. They unequivocally relate the difficulty in changing to more learning-based, or restorative types of discipline approaches to the fact that the punitive model is what teachers know and have themselves been brought up in. Their anti-racist identities, while continuing to evolve, drive their thought processes and in turn, how they both think about discipline, and how they respond to events when race and discipline intersect. Through the redefining of discipline within their school contexts, these aspiring anti-racists aim to create school cultures that do three primary things: 1.) privileges restorative approaches over punishment, 2.) prioritizes keeping students in class versus issuing office referrals, and 3.) focuses on the building of relationships between administration and teachers, between teachers and students, and between students and students. In terms of action toward anti-racist leadership as framed by Capper (2015), conducting informal equity audits is perhaps the most explicit anti-racist action taken by all of the participants, and only Terry gave substantive examples of second-order changes resulting in professional development offerings.

In terms of how these aspiring anti-racist enact their learning from their principal preparation program, the preparation program was given credit by every one of them for being life changing. The principal preparation program directly impacted these leaders' ability to see race, start to talk about race, and to begin to lead accordingly using an

adapted sense of Theoharis's arrogant humility, named passionate humility.

Finally, while these aspiring anti-racist leaders talked about institutional barriers, their focus was on confronting the barriers for change. They consciously work to deter any issues of race that they confront from becoming patterns of race within their contexts. The greatest barrier faced by these participants was the institutional racism that is woven into the fabric of American society through deficit perspectives. All participants talked about the disciplinary problems in terms of the inadequacy of the adults. The inadequacy was largely anchored in deficit perspectives justified through colorblind mindsets. Navigating barriers happens largely through anti-racist networks informally developed by the initiative taken by these aspiring anti-racist leaders. The principal preparation program, while lauded for directly impacting their leadership disposition, has not directly contributed to the formation of these "anti-racist" network coalitions.

Zero tolerance had little impact on their sensemaking about the discipline gap in terms of its influence. This was a surprising finding considering the amount of research that links zero tolerance to increasing racial disproportionality. This does not mean that zero tolerance has no influence, however the sensemakers in this study did not point to zero tolerance as an influencer. They did also not cite it as a barrier to their work as anti-racist leaders.



## Chapter Six

This dissertation had three primary purposes. The first purpose was to expand how anti-racist leadership is conceptualized as a form of practice, and understand ways that an anti-racist identity shapes the work of new school leaders. The second purpose was to explore how aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of, then frame, the problem of the racial discipline gap and understand how institutional contexts shape this sensemaking. The third purpose was to learn how aspiring anti-racist leaders enact this sensemaking to disrupt the problem and how they navigate institutional barriers they face.

We know from previous research that graduates of traditional preparation programs have been ill-prepared to meet the needs of an ever-growing, ever-diversifying student body population. A substantial amount of research exists to show the growing use of exclusionary discipline policies, and numerous other studies show how these policies disproportionately impact students of color, especially boys. We also know that the perspective of the principal has a significant influence on decisions to use exclusionary discipline. As principal preparation programs adopt non-traditional leadership frames, such as social justice and anti-racist leadership, to respond to diversifying student populations and problems like the discipline gap, we are beginning to understand the impact of these programs, but there is a great more to know. The primary aim of this study is to add to the growing scholarship of how students trained in an anti-racist principal preparation program transfer this learning to their work.

In this chapter, I present a summary of the major findings from the three research questions. I then offer implications for anti-racist principal preparation programs and discipline policy. Finally, I provide suggestions for future research and then conclude the chapter.

### **ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

This research used an interpretive case study design to provide an understanding of how new school leaders trained in anti-racist leadership pedagogy – called aspiring anti-racist leaders- make sense of and frame, the discipline gap. The study also explored how they, in turn, enact this sensemaking and problem-framing to disrupt racially discriminatory discipline policies and practices at their schools. I have used a three-framed conceptual flow to guide this study. The main findings are presented according to the three research questions.

#### **Aspiring Anti-Racist Leaders doing Anti-Racist Work**

The first research question seeks to understand how new school leaders trained in anti-racist leadership – aspiring anti-racist leaders- conceptualize what it means to be an anti-racist leader. For the participants in this study, the journey toward becoming an anti-racist leader appears to be a developmental process impacted greatly by the principal preparation program. The use of “aspiring anti-racist leader,” purposefully frames their journey toward a more disruptive type of anti-racist leadership. Indeed, while the aspiring anti-racist leaders show signs of interrupting the discipline gap, there is no evidence of disruption. The aspiring anti-racist leaders connected their sensemaking about anti-racist leadership to anti-racist leadership through their abandonment of colorblindness, a

growing confidence to talk about race, and an “aspiring anti-racist” identity. Perhaps Ursula’s conception about her work toward anti-racist leadership captures it best. Aspiring anti-racist leadership is not an admittance to bias-free leadership practice, rather it is the acknowledgement of the ever-present role of race in our lives and the equal acknowledgement that this understanding makes doing the work of anti-racist leadership possible (Khalifa, Jennings, Briscoe, Oleszweski, & Abdi, 2014).

Theoharis (2008) writes about arrogant humility according to leaders who have a head-strong belief that they are right, yet have self-doubt in their abilities and knowledge - they admit their mistakes openly and in sometimes self-deprecating ways (p. 13). These aspiring anti-racist leaders tend to be more aligned with practices of “passionate humility,” described as thinking in ways that are noticeably different than the status quo, yet taking the time to develop relationships while working with staff to bring them along in the journey to social and racial justice. Perhaps the distinguishing factor is that the participants in this study are new to school leadership and have yet to enter into a stage of arrogant humility because they don’t yet have the same levels of expertise in anti-racist leadership as of yet. Passionate humility can be seen as a developmental step toward arrogant humility.

The use of equity audits is a critical aspect of anti-racist leadership (Gooden, 2012; Skrla et al, 2004; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011) and while participants talked about the use of equity audits to detect racial factors in discipline, only Jimmy and Terry offered substantive examples of action toward this purpose toward discipline trends specifically. They all talked observation data and some gave examples of using this data

to detect racial inequities. However, when asked to submit any school-level documents related to discipline, there was a dearth of evidence to support formal collection of discipline data as it relates to race. More formal and purposeful data collection practices would assist these aspiring anti-racist leaders in doing their work.

The work of anti-racist leadership has also been described in the literature according to providing professional learning opportunities to develop cultural competency (Milner, 2011) and to encourage the anti-racist identity of staff members (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Two of the five participants gave actual examples of actions related to developing a focus on cultural (and racial) competency through professional development offerings. However, one example was in relating back to the Participatory Action Research (PAR) activity from the preparation program.

Capper (2015) in a synthesis of anti-racist leadership studies using critical race theory highlights a particularly useful anti-racist trait described in a study by Brantlinger, Majd-Jabbari, and Guskin (1996). This study describes the importance of anticipating and responding to the “fierce backlash” from White upper-middle class families (Capper, 2015, p. 807) who claim to believe in integrated and inclusive classrooms, yet still support segregated and stratified school structures that mainly benefit middle class students (Brantlinger et al., 1996). All participants are in the early development stage of anti-racist leadership in this regard. Participants talked about times then they noticed things going in a certain direction in terms of deficit perspectives and how they stepped in to disrupt this mindset, but few examples shed light on disrupting the status quo in bold ways. They all lamented the missed opportunities they had to talk about race or to

inject a counter position to the status quo. Their status as new school leaders may contribute to their development in this area.

However, there were a few examples where the aspiring anti-racist leaders demonstrate sensemaking about responding to the status quo mindsets from other adults. Jimmy shared an example of questions he poses to parents when they talk to him about pulling their kids out after elementary school, just before middle school because of the reputation of the school. He said that when opportunities present themselves, he directs parents to consider visiting the school to learn about it outside of what others say. Karen's example of addressing the teacher who called a student a thug is another example of responding to backlash from adults who hold status quo beliefs.

All participants are in the early development stage of anti-racist leadership in this regard. Participants talked about times then they noticed things going in a certain direction in terms of deficit perspectives and how they stepped in to disrupt this mindset. They also lamented the missed opportunities they had to talk about race or to inject a counter position to the status quo. Their status as new school leaders may contribute to their development in this area.

### **Sensemaking and Problem Framing about the Racial Discipline Gap**

Perhaps the two most salient factors in Weick's (1995) theory for this study include identity and the "fallacy of centrality." Weick's (1995) notion of the "fallacy of centrality," is particularly salient when juxtaposed against colorblind racism. Recall that the fallacy of centrality is the belief that something is not going on, or does not exist, but one does not know about it. Colorblindness falls prey to the fallacy of centrality because

persons with White privilege don't expose themselves to facts that allow them so see truth about race and police, or race and school discipline.

Indeed, participants in this study do not fall prey to the fallacy of centrality in terms of framing the problem outside the status quo. The participants were able to reflect on the problem of the racial discipline gap because they were able to *see* the manifestation of racial bias, deficit perspectives, and punitive mindsets as contributors to a largely *invisible* phenomenon to others. In many ways, the movement from colorblindness to racial awareness liberates leaders from the fallacy of centrality, while simultaneously, ushering them into a new stage of their racial identity development. The participants see themselves as aspiring anti-racist leaders and want their environment to reflect that.

Where the participants are in danger of this fallacy of centrality is in the area of using sophisticated data tools to conduct equity audits. While they see the problem through racial awareness, they could be missing critical data about ways race may intersect with classroom management practices since they are not formally constructing, or using, equity audits in discipline. Jimmy did use existing data prior to his arrival to understand the discipline landscape, however he did not give examples of currently tracking data related to office referrals for the current school year. Recall that Ursula conducted an equity audit several months after the interview process and realized how she may have been missed *seeing* things as they really were, which was reflected in her being surprised by what she noticed in the data.

When making sense of the discipline gap, there was a disconnect between federal

initiatives such as the School Discipline Guidance Package and the sensemaking done by the aspiring anti-racist leaders. Federal policy had little impact on their sensemaking of the problem, but several aspiring anti-racist leaders expressed that knowledge about it could lead to meaningful conversations. Specifically, Terry talked about the conversations about race and punishment tend to be about police and race. Terry said, “I don’t think people are making that connection between schools and race. Without initiating the conversation, there are very few educators that bring it up or really know about it.”

The aspiring anti-racist leaders in this study lean toward non-punitive approaches to discipline and embrace disciplinary approaches that privilege learning and rehabilitative approaches over punishment. This is solidly supported by research as best practice (Losen, 2015; Skiba et al., 2015). This finding supports the work of Skiba and Edl (2004) that found that principals who have a greater orientation toward preventive measures appear to use conflict resolution and rehabilitative-type approaches. One interesting finding was how Ursula qualified her belief about the use of exclusion, through suspension, when considering the age of the student as a factor. When asked to explain, she was unable to provide a rationale for why she made the distinction except that older students have advanced abilities to make good choices.

In terms of cultivating relationships these aspiring anti-racist leaders appear to have an intuitive sense about how their work as leaders must model this philosophy when doing anti-racist work. As such, these aspiring anti-racist leaders model relationship-building in order to set expectations for teachers to do the same with students. Terry’s

example of challenging teachers to be students' heroes, Victor's greeting students every single day, Victor and Jimmy's meeting with every staff member individually for 30-45 minutes upon taking the job, and Holt's process of giving students a voice in their discipline referrals are examples of cultivating relationships around trust.

In terms of problem-framing, the aspiring anti-racist leaders adopted change initiatives that were grounded in both first and second-order change. This too is reflective of their own journeys toward anti-racist leadership identities. Perhaps Terry shows the most development toward an anti-racist leader identity. Terry offered several examples of purposeful learning activities that he planned and implemented with his staff. Indeed, he planned them according to what he noticed in his environment. Participants framed the problem outside the framework of the status quo, however the movement toward second-order anti-racist actions did not always reflect their framing. This has implications for preparation programs, which will be discussed in that section.

### **Institutional Contexts Shape Sensemaking**

Specific ways that their institutional contexts shaped their sensemaking and problem framing happened through their preparation program environments and their previous and current school environments. Perhaps most salient to this study is the impact that the anti-racist preparation program had on each participant toward their development of an anti-racist identity. They think through the lens of "aspiring anti-racist leaders," and in turn, do things differently than persons stuck in the status quo. This identity directly shaped their problem-framing of why the discipline gap exists and all gave three research-based approaches they use to disrupt it – non-punitive approaches, keeping



students in class to learn, and cultivating relationships across the school.

The school contexts where the aspiring anti-racist leaders work both influence their sensemaking and problem framing and are influenced by the anti-racist identities each brings to their work. The SEL school contexts shaped the sensemaking and problem-framing about the discipline gap for Holt, Victor, and Terry. They all use the SEL environment that was already present in their school to build on their conceptions of racially-just discipline. They build on the structure of non-punitive discipline approaches that reflect the SEL model. Holt has a particular interest in restorative discipline practices and sees the SEL environment as a fertile place to incorporate some restorative-type initiatives.

Jimmy and Ursula were very purposeful about their placement at their current schools because they both knew that the environments would be a fit for their work as anti-racist leaders. So, in many ways, their sensemaking about anti-racist leadership shaped their contextual environment. Jimmy had been at central office before becoming the principal at HP elementary. He only took the job at HP because it is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse campuses in the Urban district.

### **Enactment of Sensemaking and Problem-Framing to Disrupt**

Recall that the aspiring anti-racist leaders shared examples of first and second-order change initiatives when problem-framing the discipline gap in their schools. They exercise a type of “passionate humility” in doing their work , that is reflective of their early development as anti-racist leaders. They are on a journey toward second-order leadership approaches that is anchored in what they know and have learned in their

preparation program, yet sometimes are stymied by lack of experience, boldness, and fear. They talk cogently about where they want to take their staff, in accordance with what they know to be true about anti-racist leadership, but don't always act in accordance with their passionate humility. However, their practice of self-reflection, their developed sense of racial awareness, their emerging confidence to talk about race, and their evolving identities as anti-racist leaders keeps them on course.

When connecting the group-proclaimed "causes" of the racial discipline gap, as made sense of at the macro level, it is interesting that the beliefs tied to the causes at the macro level are congruent with the proposed remedies at the micro, or local level (punitive nature of schools as a cause of discipline gap coupled with non-punitive approach to respond; discipline used as a tool for learning tied to their belief regarding avoiding loss of instructional time). This is true for all participants except in the area of deficit perspectives and cultural misunderstandings.

All participants talked about the importance of cultural competency and the interrogation of deficit perspectives within their school climates. They all demonstrated the knowledge and skills to create second-order changes related to deficit perspectives and cultural competency, however only Terry offered actual examples of making substantive changes toward a more culturally competent school climate. In fact, he gave two to three examples of times that he has already sat down with staffs with articles and other materials to have difficult conversations about racial stereotypes, implicit bias, and cultural misunderstandings.

## **Navigating Institutional Barriers**

I found it interesting that the barriers were categorized through the lens of opportunity. Perhaps this is important to the work of anti-racist leadership. Barriers allow us to make excuses. Opportunities give us hope in our efforts. I dug deeply in my questioning around barriers, because I wanted to extract from them the deep levels of frustration that tend to accompany school leadership. However, the only passionate response that I could draw from them regarding barriers was related to working with adults who carry deficit perspectives and racial biases.

The “lagging” development of the racial identities of other adults serves as a frustrating barrier to doing anti-racist leadership. To navigate this barrier, they do something to help them personally and something to help the institution. To help them personally, they all purposefully seek out and form anti-racist networks for the purpose of having people to talk to. To navigate this barrier within their school, the aspiring anti-racist leaders pursue ways to break down the racial factors that intersect with discipline. Regardless of their abilities and developmental readiness to move their anti-racist thoughts toward action, they all actively and purposefully interrupt. They navigate barriers through reflection and by disallowing factors of race from becoming patterns of race. They all have sensitive race radars that interrogate, question, and notice things in their environment, even if not through formal data collection practices. When they notice racial or other types of inequities, they respond. This response is not always through the most sophisticated of second-order type responses, but nonetheless, they respond. While they miss opportunities and experience fear at times, their identities as aspiring anti-racist

leaders enables them to use the tool of self-reflection to analyze their own behavior to do better in the future.

This study adds to the growing base of knowledge surrounding the impact of principal preparation programs on the work of anti-racist leaders. The ways in which these aspiring anti-racist leaders make sense of and disrupt a specific injustice, the racial discipline gap, has implications for principal preparation programs, emerging theory related to anti-racist leadership, and future research.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRINCIPAL PREPARATION PROGRAMS**

Understanding the ways aspiring anti-racist leaders enact learning from their principal preparation program to disrupt the racial discipline gap provides an important perspective to the growing body of literature about the value of explicit social justice approaches in universities. The findings from the study contribute to the consideration of how principal preparation programs can better design (Capper, et al., 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008) and prepare (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015) leaders for the work of racial equity. Every participant directly attributed their her/his confidence in leading for social justice and anti-racism to the principal preparation program. In fact, the explicit focus on anti-racism within the program was credited for both raising their awareness of race and their ability to talk about race with their staff.

A particular area that aspiring anti-racist leaders need support in their development within a preparation program is in their transferring their knowledge about colorblindness, racial stereotypes, and other type of racial and social inequities to their staff. The preparation program did a particularly good job at giving them the knowledge,

however the transference of this knowledge to others remains a challenge. Specific and tactical strategies to tackle difficult topics with staff would be an extremely beneficial takeaway for aspiring anti-racist leaders. Targeted conversations around things like, “What to say if.,” or “What would be a counter-narrative for that?” would equip aspiring anti-racist leaders with tools to do the work they know is important.

This study found that aspiring anti-racist leaders seek out like-minded individuals by forming informal networks to discuss racial and equity issues. This is a critical finding that has implications for preparation program delivery and post-graduation initiatives. While cohort designs assist with the development of network alliances while in the program, the consideration for post-graduation relationship-building may benefit leaders who continually look for equity-minded individuals and support groups while on the job.

Preparation programs may learn from this study that the use of data collection and analysis while in the program is helpful in developing students’ criticality, however more practical ways of helping them take these skills from their program into their first years of practice would be beneficial. For example, the construction of discipline forms as a collective activity among members of a cohort might give them something to walk away with, and actually use, in their first years on the job.

The findings demonstrate the need for extensive and continued discussions about what it means to be an anti-racist leader in today’s context. Preparation programs should certainly begin this discussion with our future leaders, but continued support from districts will be particularly helpful in helping these leaders continue their

work. University-district partnerships are essential for the continuation of developing anti-racist identities and leadership capacity within these leaders.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORIES OF ANTI-RACIST LEADERSHIP**

One aim of this study to expand conceptions of anti-racist leadership as it pertains to new school administrators. A particularly salient finding from this study is the various ways participants move from thinking about anti-racist leadership toward action.

Capper's (2015) synthesis of anti-racist leadership studies using critical race theory is a useful a framework for metacognitively connecting anti-racist leadership to action toward second-order change (Young, O'Doherty, Gooden and Goodnow, 2011) according to one's developing anti-racist identity. The five aspiring anti-racist leaders demonstrated that they think like anti-racist leaders, however their actions toward that work sometimes reflected first-order type change actions. Metacognition is a valuable tool for thinking about the thinking we do about difficult topics. A framework that connects an identity of anti-racism with the *actions* of anti-racism considered through the lens of first and second-order change might be a useful tool for emerging leaders.

Based on the findings from this study, I believe that this type of "anti-racist identity model" would include a continuum between what I describe as passionate humility and a developed sense of "arrogant humility," as described by Theoharis (2008). The aspiring to be anti-racist is passionate, but not quite arrogant. These participants know what it means to be anti-racist and put this knowledge toward action some of the time, but are not quite developmentally at the stage of acting in accordance with their beliefs in a consistent manner. This is reflective in their navigation between first and

second-order change initiatives. I conceptualize this model to comprise the continuum of Young and colleagues (2011), to account for anti-racist leadership actions that progressively become more sophisticated toward second-order change.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study provides consideration for the need of future research in the area of connecting anti-racist identities toward anti-racist leadership with formal theory. Consideration for the role of racial identity development (Helms, 1994; Tatum, 1992) might help broaden the conversation about anti-racist leadership actions and how and why they may lag behind beliefs about anti-racism.

The nature of being “aspiring” anti-racist leaders implies that each school leader in this study is fairly new to school administration. No participant has more than four years of administrative experience. While this was a purposeful decision in the study design, it also provides opportunities for additional research toward understanding the nature of anti-racist leadership over time. As these leaders become more developed, clarity around their role in leading for anti-racist discipline practices will continue to crystallize as they gain experience.

Future research should also consider ways that culturally relevant disciplinary practices might be incorporated into principal preparation programs. All five aspiring anti-racist leaders talked about the need for culturally relevant staff development opportunities, but few gave substantive examples of how to do it. This might reflect the lack of knowledge and tools to promote this type of learning in their school cultures.

A particularly interesting finding was that the aspiring anti-racist leaders framed

barriers to doing anti-racist work at the individual level of the teachers. They did not consider the institutional barriers that may stymie their work toward equity. This is noteworthy because the problem of the discipline gap was made sense of as an institutional-level problem where the punitive nature of discipline was seen as a major contributor. A study that more deeply explores how aspiring anti-racist leaders view barriers of specific educational problems according to institutional and individual factors might shed light on why the participants in this study did not mention policies like zero tolerance or other school-level bureaucratic structures as barriers.

There are limitations to consider when reading this study. The participants in this study mostly work in elementary settings, with the exception of Holt, who is a middle school assistant principal. The consideration of secondary disciplinary issues is highly important when framing the problem of the racial discipline gap. Therefore, as mentioned previously, this study must be extended to include more aspiring anti-racist leaders who work directly in middle and high school settings.

There was a limited focus in this study to the contrasting nature of charter organizations in relationship to traditional public school environments. Considering that two of the five participants lead charter schools, this factor would have enhanced the analysis. Supporting documentation related to the discipline codes of conduct and discipline data at the school level (especially related to the discipline gap) are incorporated into this paper, but not to the desired level. While the limited data supports their claims regarding the absence of a discipline gap, numbers do not like, so I regret that I was unable to collect more data in this area.



Finally, we know from emerging research that the role of stress trauma plays a critical role in student behavior responses. A broader conception of the socio-emotional factors of stress that some students bring to school from life experiences has the potential to offer a more holistic and ecological consideration for more intersecting factors that contribute to the racial discipline gap.

### CONCLUSION

*My identity as an anti-racist leader confers the capacity to see race, which creates the opportunity to understand. This capacity to understand unleashes the power to disrupt.*

Aspiring anti-racist leaders showed an awareness of the institutional factor of the punitive nature of U.S. public schools, and the individual-level factors of deficit perspectives and cultural misunderstandings, that perpetuate the racial discipline gap. They have emerging levels of confidence to explicitly talk about racial factors in discipline with staff members and some demonstrated action toward that purpose. The nature of their anti-racist work is situated in both first and second-order change initiatives toward interruption of factors of race, but their lack of data collection serves as a blind spot for them. Aspiring anti-racist leaders have begun to use data to inform their sensemaking and problem-framing, but gaps in data collection tend to stymie their progress toward second-order change initiatives.

The aspiring anti-racist leaders used retrospection to look back on events to make sense of cues in their environment and drew on their identity to shape their sensemaking about the discipline gap. Indeed, the aspiring anti-racist leaders in this study attributed their lens of racial awareness to their experiences in the preparation program. Aspiring anti-racist leaders in this study made sense of the discipline gap according to their racial identities and were supported in their roles as new school leaders by what they learned in

their previous and current institutional contexts, especially the principal preparation program. Their sensemaking actions directly related to how they framed the discipline gap and to their corresponding actions that interrupted racial factors in discipline from becoming racial patterns in discipline. Anti-racist leadership is not an admission to bias-free leadership, but rather it embodies a passionate humility for doing what is equitable and right for all students by detecting ways that students of color may be marginalized.

## **Appendices**

### **APPENDIX A**

#### **Cover Letter**

As a recent graduate of a principal preparation program, you are being asked to participate in a study that explores how current school leaders, defined as principals or assistant principals, who are graduates of a program with a focus on anti-racist leadership make sense of the racial discipline gap. Specifically, you will be asked to provide information regarding (a) how you make sense of the racial discipline gap; (b) the way race and racism impact the discipline gap at your local school; and (d) how you enact your leadership skills related to the racial discipline gap.

This study and the overall findings are important because they will add to empirical literature regarding the importance of race as an explicit teaching topic in the preparation of school leaders. Second, the findings will illuminate how school leaders negotiate the complexity of their new roles and responsibilities as leaders for anti-racism, and how they make sense of the factor of race in discipline in their local school contexts. Finally, findings from this study may assist and further inform educational administration departments and researchers when evaluating the effectiveness of their graduate-level leadership preparation programs for the preparing students to enact anti-racist leadership skills in schools.

A description of the study is provided below. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether to participate or not. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time and your refusal will not impact current or future relationships with the University. To terminate participation, simply tell the research that you wish to stop. Any information provided for this study will be coded so that no personally identifiable information is recognizable to the consumers of this study.

**Total Estimated Time Expected to Participate:** 90 to 120 minutes.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine how aspiring anti-racist leaders, who are recent graduates from a principal preparation program focused on anti-racist leadership, make sense of and frame racial disparity in discretionary school disciplinary outcomes according to their identities as aspiring anti-racist leaders. Specifically, this study will explore how aspiring anti-racist leaders frame the problem according to first and second-order change, and enact their learning from the preparation program to disrupt the problem in an effort to reduce the discipline gap in their schools.

## **Research Questions**

1. How do new school leaders trained in anti-racist leadership conceptualize what it means to be an anti-racist leader?
2. How do aspiring anti-racist school leaders make sense of and frame the racial discipline gap and in what ways do institutional contexts shape this sensemaking?
3. How do aspiring anti-racist leaders enact their sensemaking to disrupt the problem and how do they navigate institutional barriers that they face?

### **Potential Risks of Participation in the Study:**

The potential for loss of confidentiality is minimal and no greater than everyday life. To minimize the potential risk for loss of confidentiality, however, all data will be maintained on a computer that has a password-required code to gain access to the data. Codenames will be used to maintain the anonymity of the site and all participants. If you wish to discuss the information above, you may ask questions via reply to this email or call the Principal Investigator listed on the front page of this form.

### **Benefits of Participation in the Study:**

This study will explore your perceptions of your learning experiences and how you have used what you have learned while participating in a principal preparation program with a focus on anti-racist leadership throughout your sensemaking of the racial discipline gap. The results of this study will assist the researcher in understanding how your attitudes, perceptions, and thinking are influencing your current practice in regards to enacting your leadership capacities around school discipline issues and policies as they relate to the racial discipline gap. Although several studies have explored how school leaders make sense of aspects of educational policy, there is a lack of research on the process that school leaders go through to make sense of the racial discipline gap.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation provided for participation in the study nor are there any costs to participants for participation in the research.

### **Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:**

- The information resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.
- Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain

confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain the anonymity of your responses.

- A written report that summarizes the findings of the study will be presented at area, regional, state, and/or national conferences. Information obtained from this study may be given to the directors of the principal principalship program. Information provided, however, will be used solely for the future development and improvement of the program.
- Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with the University of Texas at Austin or the principalship program. If you decide to participate, you are free to decide to discontinue participation at any time.

The **records** of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from the University of Texas at Austin and members of the Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review the research records and will protect the **confidentiality** of those records to the extent permitted by law. Throughout the study, the researcher will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have any questions about the study, please ask now. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation, please call the researchers conducting the study. Their names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about the research, please contact Amy Lippa, principal investigator, at 703-568-6292 or [aplippa@yahoo.com](mailto:aplippa@yahoo.com). Also, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Office of Research Support at (blinded for confidentiality).

You may keep the copy of this consent form.

You are making a decision about participation in this study. You may discontinue participation at any time.

If you choose to participate in the study, please indicate with a verbal consent. Thank you for your time and participation.

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. Before we start, I'd like to remind you of the plan for this study. For the purpose of this study, I will be conducting at least one interview with you. In this first interview, I'd like to learn a little about your career thus far and this school, and then focus on your role as a leader as it relates to school discipline. The interview will be recorded, and afterwards, transcribed. I will share the transcriptions with you so that you can verify that your comments were recorded accurately.

After the first interview, I would like to have another conversation with you to explore more deeply into issues that were raised in this first conversation. Throughout this transcription, you will only be associated with a codename that I have given you. Your school will only be identified by an assigned codename as well. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time.

Do you have any questions about this study, or your role or rights as a participant?

#### Interview I - Part I. Career History

Tell me about your work as an educator.

1. How long have you been a principal or assistant principal or other type of school leader at your school?
2. Share your values and beliefs about education and how this affects your leadership to this campus.
3. What other schools have you worked at before this one and how did that/those experiences shape your leadership here?
4. Looking back on it, what would you say led you to become a principal?
5. Please tell me about your leadership preparation program.
  - a. How did those experiences throughout your leadership preparation influence how you approach issues of equity at your school?
  - b. Did your leadership preparation include coursework with a focus on race?
  - c. Has what you learned influenced your role as a leader on your campus in terms of your consideration of the role of race in student outcomes? How?
  - d. Can you give me an example?

#### Interview I – Part II. – Anti-Racist Leader

6. You have been nominated for this study because professors see you as an aspiring anti-racist leader.
  - a. What does it mean to be an anti-racist leader?
  - b. Can you give me some examples?

### **Interview I - Part III. School Discipline General Issues**

7. Tell me about your school  
(mission/vision/demographics/staff/community/students/programs/etc.)
8. When you first became principal at SCHOOLCODE what were your priorities?  
[list on a piece of paper]
9. These days, what are the main things you would LIKE to focus on? [list...]
  - a. Why these things?
10. Regarding responsibilities surrounding school discipline, what things do you find you HAVE TO address these days? [list...]
  - a. Where do these demands come from?
11. Do you find you can manage all these things? If not, what is your process for sorting them out?
  - a. What goes through your mind?
  - b. With whom do you talk to about these things?
  - c. What steps do you take to figure things out?
    - d. Do you have a school resource officer on your campus? How is he or she a part of school discipline decisions at your school?
12. How would you describe your overall approach to school discipline?
13. In your opinion, how is school discipline connected to student learning?
  - a. How is school discipline connected to student achievement?
14. Please tell me about any significant teaching, professional development, or other learning experiences that you feel have influenced your disposition toward school discipline approaches.
  - a. Do you have any previous teaching experiences that you feel influenced your approach to school discipline?
  - b. How have your experiences and/or training shaped your leadership here?
  - c. Has your approach to school discipline changed over time or remained the same?

### **Interview II**

1. Tell me about the school discipline climate in your school.
  - a. Share an example of a disciplinary event you have recently been involved with.
  - b. Are there any other significant discipline events that you would like to share?
    - b. How do teachers tend to handle behavior problems in your school?
2. In your current position, how often do you deal with school discipline issues?
  - a. How do you see your role in supporting teachers in school discipline issues?
  - b. How do you see your role in supporting students in school discipline issues?
  - c. Where do you seek support when handling disciplinary issues at your school?
  - d. What type of resistance do you confront at your school related to

- disciplinary decisions? From teachers? From parents? From central office? From the community?
- e. Do you have a school resource officer in your building? If so, what role does he or she play in school discipline?
3. How do you use school and district policy when making disciplinary decisions?
    - a. How do you use the local code of conduct at your school? How do others use the local code of conduct at your school?
    - b. Does your school or district employ zero tolerance approaches to discipline? If so, how? Do you find it to be effective? Why or why not?
    - c. Do you have a school dress code policy? District dress code policy?
  4. Are there any new initiatives to address student discipline at your school or district?
    - a. If so, how would you describe them?
    - b. Where did these ideas come from?
    - c. How would you describe your role in identifying these initiatives?
    - d. How do you think training, school programs, and policy mandates have influenced the racial discipline gap at your school?
  4. Does data play a role in your approach to school discipline?
    - a. What data sources are available to you in your school related to discipline?
    - b. What data sources are available to you in your district related to discipline?
  5. Is race a factor in school discipline at your school?
    - a. How do you address related issues with your staff? With your community? With your students?
    - b. What barriers do you face in addressing these issues?
    - c. From whom do you seek help? How? Why? Do you collaborate with others in the community or from your cohort?
  6. What are your thoughts about the overrepresentation of students of color in school discipline events across our country?
    - a. Are you familiar with the School Discipline Guidance Package? What do you know about the Dear Colleague Letter issued in January, 2014?
    - b. Does this have any relevancy for your work as a school leader in your school context?



## APPENDIX C

### Final Coding Scheme

#### Theme #1 Sensemaking

##### *Macro Sensemaking (national or institutional level)*

Sensemaking around the nature of the racial discipline gap at the national or institutional level (MACRO LEVEL)

Sensemaking – MACRO level – related to PUNITIVE nature of discipline in schools

**SENSE-MACRO-PUN (SMACPUN)**

Sensemaking – MACRO level – related to the DEFICIT PERSPECTIVES held by adults

**SENSE-MACRO-DEFICIT (SMACDEF)**

Sensemaking-MACRO level- related to cultural awareness

**SENSE-MACRO-CUL (SMACCUL)**

##### *Micro Sensemaking (Local) Levels*

Sensemaking – MICRO level – tied to their identities as being RESPONSIBLE for students' education and the role of education in students' lives

**SENSE-MICRO-RESPONSIBLE (SMICRES)**

Sensemaking – MICRO level – tied to their belief in non-punitive approaches

**SENSE-MICRO-NONPUN (SMICNONPUN)**

Sensemaking – MICRO level – tied to their belief in avoiding loss of instruction

**SENSE – MICRO-AVOIDLOSSINST (SMICAVLOSINST)**

Sensemaking – MICRO level – tied to their belief in cultivating relationships with teachers AND students

**SENSE – MICRO-RELATIONS (SMICULREL)**

*Sensemaking according to Weick (1995)*

Identity - Pertaining to a personal sense of who one is in the situation, what threatens this sense of self or setting, and what is available to enhance self-efficacy. Making sense of the racial discipline gap is self-referential because what is sensed, and how it is seen, bears on the participant's identity.

**WEICK - IDENTITY**

Retrospect - Examples where participants look back to previous experiences to make sense of the discipline gap.

**WEICK – RETRO**

Plausibility - “What’ the story here?” Examples where outcomes drive the story that produced it

**WEICK – PLAUS**

Environment - School culture, norms, belief systems of the local school environments

**WEICK – ENV**

Social - Sensemaking influenced by actual, implied, or imagined presence of others. Sensible meanings are congruent with those for which there is social support and shared relevance. Weick uses the following words to describe the social nature of sensemaking: talk, symbols, promises, lies, interest, attention, threats, agreements, expectations, memories, rumors, indicators, supporters, detractors, faith, suspicious, trust, appearances, loyalties and commitments

**WEICK – SOCIAL**

Ongoing - Sensemaking about the RDG as an ongoing process

**WEICK – ONGOING**

Cues - Noticing and extraction of certain cues based on participant's filter

**WEICK – CUES**

## **Theme # 2 Framing the Problem through Detection and Action**

DETECTING where race and discipline intersect in local context

**DETECTRACEDISCIPLINE (DETRACEDIS)**

ACTIONS participants take to disrupt (should later be linked to first/second-order change)

**ACTIONRACEDISCIPLINE (ACTRACEDIS)**

## **Theme #3 Problem Framing Linkages to First and Second-order Change**

First-Order Change – leadership practices and behaviors anchor problems and solutions in a bounded, focused, linear way.

First-order does not require cultural shifts. Problem framing of the racial discipline gap are described in the context of students, families, teachers, classrooms, administrator, campuses or districts.

**PROBLEM-FRAMING, FIRST-ORDER CHANGE (PF-1)**

Second-order Change – leadership practices and behaviors are anchored in nonlinear, complex ways that are neither problem-nor solution oriented

Second-order describes culture and capacity building types of approach to change. Second-order change categories describe new patterns of thinking and behavior, changes in organizational culture as well as increased capacity of members within the organizations and capacity building

**PROBLEM-FRAMING, SECOND-ORDER CHANGE (PF-2)**

## **Theme #4 School Leaders' Enactment of Learning from their PPP**

Racial Awareness heightened and attributed directly to PPP

**PPP RACIAL AWARENESS (PPPRA)**

Confidence to talk about race attributed directly to PPP or examples of how they actually do talk about race

**PPP CONFIDENCE TALK RACE (PPPCONTALK)**

**WAYSTALKABOUTRACE (WAYSTALKRACE)**

### **Theme #5 Institutional Barriers**

Institutional Barriers – participants name adults and their deficit perspectives  
**IB ADULTS (IBDEFADULT)**

Punitive nature of discipline as a systemwide approach  
**IB PUNITIVE (IBPUN)**

District ways of doing things or district culture  
**IBDIST**

### **Theme #6 Navigating Institutional Barriers (NIB)**

Form purposeful networks with others  
**NIB NETWORKS (NIBNET)**

Interpret of Discipline Policy  
**NIB LOOSE INT (NIBLOOSE)**  
**NIB STRICT INT (NIBSTRICT)**

Factors of Race and Patterns of Race  
**FOR/POR**

### **Theme #7 Knowledge of National Attention to RDG**

Knowledge of School Discipline Guidance Package  
**KNOWJAN2014**

## APPENDIX D

### 2011-12 Office For Civil Rights School-Level Discipline Data<sup>19</sup>

#### *Nolan Elementary*

|          | Student Population %<br>N=771 | Out-of-School Suspension %<br>N=2 | In-School Suspension %<br>N=11 | Expulsion %<br>N=0 |
|----------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Black    | 12.2%                         | 0%                                | 36.4%                          | n/a                |
| Hispanic | 57.7%                         | 100%                              | 45.5%                          | n/a                |
| White    | 20.0%                         | 0%                                | 0.0                            | n/a                |

#### *HP Elementary*

|          | Student Population %<br>N=676 | Out-of-School Suspension %<br>N=8 | In-School Suspension %<br>N=0 | Expulsion %<br>N=0 |
|----------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Black    | 16.6%                         | 75%                               | n/a                           | n/a                |
| Hispanic | 49.9%                         | 0%                                | n/a                           | n/a                |
| White    | 17.9%                         | 25%                               | n/a                           | n/a                |

#### *Munch Middle*

|          | Student Population %<br>N=1364 | Out-of-School Suspension %<br>N=130 | In-School Suspension %<br>N=95 | Expulsion %<br>N=6 |
|----------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Black    | 3.8%                           | 17.7%                               | 17.9%                          | n/a                |
| Hispanic | 27.6%                          | 37.7%                               | 36.8%                          | n/a                |
| White    | 56.2%                          | 30.8%                               | 36.8%                          | n/a                |

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<sup>19</sup> School names are masked according to pseudonym given within study.

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