Disciplinary Third Spaces in a Social Justice High School

Darrick Smith

CONTACT: *Darrick Smith, Ed. D., University of San Francisco, School of Education, 2130 Fulton St., San Francisco, CA 94117, USA, E-mail:* dsmith13@usfca.edu

Abstract:

Background: As schools work to integrate and identify with social justice values, they confront the challenging arena of school discipline and addressing student behavior.

Purpose and Research Objectives: This case study on a small social justice high school in the western United States explores the ways in which a school's efforts to implement non-punitive approaches manifests in institutional practices that mirror those of less progressive and more conventional schooling structures.

Sample and Research Design: The current research presents an in-depth case study of a school with a social justice emphasis. The emphasis on the creation of Disciplinary Third Spaces is extracted from a larger study on Social Justice Schooling and educational enablers. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight school staff, teachers, and a student. In addition, observational data and institutional documents are analyzed and presented.

Results: *Disciplinary Third Spaces.* The study reveals practices that lead to the institutionalization of out-of-class, in-school spaces to send students when conflict arises. The author categorizes them into the following four : (1) *Advisory Referrals*, (2) *Non-Suspensions*, (3) *The "icebox"*, and (4) *Tokenizing Staff of Color*. The existence and frequent utilization of such spaces mirror that of zero-tolerance schools that philosophically sit in contradiction to social justice schools.

Recommendations: The findings underscore the need to integrate and reinforce humanizing approaches to school discipline that reinforce social justice values and student accountability.

1. Disciplinary Third Spaces in a Social Justice High School

The emergence of small schools as a blooming phenomenon in the U.S. resulted from a convergence of policy initiatives that quickly gained momentum from backing by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and their efforts to create what they called "miracle schools". While the idea of "miracle" schools purposed for the empowerment of particular communities is not new or unique to the U.S., the explosion of charter schools and small alternative schools brought back the discussion of overtly themed instruction and educational context to the national discourse. The current project is part of a larger study on an alternative social justice school in the U.S. and the creation and evolution of dynamics that contributed to an educational enabler ethic at the school.

The Small Equity School (SES) was developed during a time when increased attention was being given to small alternative equity-oriented schools. Over the past 15 years, the school has operated with a clear intent to address the needs of historically marginalized communities located in the San Francisco Bay Area. Located in a city of just under one million inhabitants, the school district in which SES is situated serves roughly 40,000 students. Many of the city's more privileged families send their children to private schools, leaving the public school system disproportionately populated with students of color and immigrant families. The city itself is in close proximity to the state of California's "Silicon Valley" which is an internationally acknowledged hub for technological innovation, venture capitalism, and economic development. In the presence of such opportunity

however, inequities exist. The city's school district reflects the growing gap between rich and poor that permeates areas that are experiencing massive development and gentrification. For example, when considering the 13 school districts in the state with populations of African-American students that exceed the state percentage of 7%, San Francisco was tied for the lowest performance rates for African-American students in the state while ranking third highest in the state for test scores overall at the time of this study (EdSource, 2008). The conditions that sustain such a paradox (poverty, district dysfunction, institutional racism, etc.) and the political and educational opportunities for innovations in alternative schooling set the context for the founding and evolution of SES.

SES serves roughly 300 students a year, which is much smaller than the conventional urban public high school in the U.S., but while it is small and has the autonomy similar to that of a charter school, it operates within the city's school district as a public school. What distinguishes SES from a charter school is that the supervising school district has transfer power, the students receive resources directly from the district, the school is accountable to district supervision structures, and the students' athletic teams participate in the district wide athletic league along with the schools that have been part of the district for well over half a century.

Social Justice Education

The current project focuses on a disciplinary and cultural dynamic that emerged as a result of the school's espoused social justice ethic. Murrell (2006) frames the concept as a practice in which social justice educators seek to develop in themselves and their students "a disposition toward recognizing and eradicating all forms of oppression and differential treatment extant in the practices and policies of institutions, as well as a fealty to participatory democracy as the means of this action (p.81)." Researchers situate the concept within a larger context of a social political condition of the negation of human rights and the reification of structures of political, economic, and social repression (Hill & Boxley, 2007; Stovall, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Giroux, 2003; Howard, 2003;). In education, the ethic of social justice has been utilized as a galvanizing theme under which educators can develop critical approaches to their work and locate their practice within social, historical, and global struggles for humanization, equity, and access to educational resources (Salmani Nodoushan & Daftarifard, 2011; Hill, 2007; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995)

While there are many elements of the school that are impacted by the way in which the administration and faculty conceptualize social justice, what is discussed here are dynamics of the disciplinary process and the way in which normalized disciplinary practices reflected and simultaneously perpetuated a culture that mirrors that of a conventional school that might be guided only through state compliance and not necessarily a social justice ethic.

School Discipline in the United States

It is important to understand the policy landscape and current educational discourse regarding school discipline in the U.S.. There are several issues at play as educators struggle to find a healthy balance and an equitable habitus for school-based disciplinary practices that don't just replicate the social stratification by race and class that has proven to be a consistent figment of social order in the U.S.. Studies have shown that the frequency and likelihood of student suspensions and explosions from school can be predicted based on their ethnic background and their socioeconomic status (Gregory et. al, 2010; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba et. al., 2002). This information is not new as it has been historically documented over 30 years ago in a national study (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). This ongoing discussion reveals a series of policy trends in U.S. education that are linked to larger social concerns throughout the country.

The national educational discourse has returned to this issue largely as a result of a series of policy trends in American education that were linked to larger social concerns throughout the country. Early on in the new millennium the United States experienced a series of school shootings. School shootings are very particular phenomena that involve one or more armed assailants executing an attack on a school campus. A rash of these incidents garnered media attention form 1997-2001 moving what might have previously been considered local tragedies to issues of national concern (Muschert, 2007). These campuses with children present, even though studies show that these incidents represent a very low number of children that fall victim to homicide do so on a school campus or while attending a school activity (Robers, et. al., 2013; Borum et. al., 2010).

Moreover, these school shootings often occurred in schools that were predominantly Caucasian and in communities that were not accustomed to high levels of homicide and aggravated assault. These incidents, while few in number comparative to the overall scope of school violence in America, were incredibly news-worthy and garnered a lot of media attention (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Lickel et. al., 2003; Verlinden et. al., 2000). With each passing school shooting, information was revealed that the assailants of these mass shoot-ings were often the victims of persistent harassment, alienation, and bullying at school. Out of this framework of student violence and suffering emerged two national responses to these issues: (1) an increase in school-based security discussions that extended outside of high violence and historically targeted communities; and (2) a set of disciplinary approaches that essentially amounted to what would be called *zero tolerance* (Mar-tinez, 2009; Insley, 2001; Hanson, 2005; Tebo, 2000)

While enhanced security measures in suburban and privileged communities was a very important shift in the dialogue regarding American education, the idea of *zero tolerance* was a suitable ideological framework for such security measures. What's important to note about the ideological framework of *zero tolerance* is that it transforms what has historically been a set of behavioral expectations and standards for the shaping of chil-dren's ethics and justified and highlighted disciplinary behavioral codes as a tool for the hyper control of youth and an induction of law enforcement into the school disciplinary process. What manifested was a broad-based utility of hardline exclusionary practices for even the most minor of non threatening non aggressive trans-gressions and the demonization and pushing out of students to be labeled as criminals and arrested by local law enforcement (Heitzeg, 2009; Hirschfield, 2008; Stinchcomb et. al., 2006). Predictably, what manifested was a maintaining at best, and exacerbation at worst, of the discriminatory trends of exclusion and alienation that were reflected in the original 1975 report produced by the Children's Defense Fund. Zero tolerance, as an approach clearly became an anti-dialogic, punitive, discriminatory process that disproportionately targeted and negatively impacted students of color and those from low-income backgrounds (Gregory et. al., 2010; Fletcher-Bates, 2009; Gregory & Mosely 2004; Sugai & Horner, 2002).

It is important to note that the renewed national concern for school discipline practices was happening alongside the persistent and continuous achievement gap that locates U.S. students of color, and those from low-income backgrounds, at lower graduation and performance rates then their white and Asian-Ameri-can counterparts. This was occurring within a context of philanthropic funding and policy shifts (i.e. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the federal No Child Left Behind legislation) setting agendas and resource parameters for communities and educators reform existing structures and create small schools. As educators concerned with the place of historically targeted communities, the team that developed SES developed it with a clear intentionality to contradict the existing trends of the repressive, hyper-controlling, pushing-out, and underserving of historically targeted students.

2. Research Question and Design

Multiple data sources were used to understand the development and evolution of SES as the school integrated a social justice focus over a three-year period. The current study uses an explanatory case study (Berg, Lune & Lune, 2004) and a retrospective qualitative research approach (Flick, 2009) to examine a culture of discipline and related practices, attitudes, and behaviors that permeate the school culture at SES. This study specifically explores a particular dynamic of "cool" disciplinary practice and a culture that contradicts the school's interest and ethic in student equity and critiques practices and structures that situate the school as indistinguishable from conventional American high schools that are void of any espoused principles of social justice.

Since I was focused on understanding relationship dynamics, communication, and meaning, a phenom-enological approach (Seidman, 2012) was utilized in order to extract the experience of the participants (school staff and a student) interviewed for the study. I used an inductive analysis of the data to allow participants' stories to underscore underlying themes embedded in the cultural ethic at SES.

Development of SES

Theories concerning equity social justice and critical pedagogy helped to frame the development of SES in a social and political landscape that focused on countering the oppressive practices and school cultures of

their counterparts. SES was envisioned as a small school serving grades 9 through 12. It would focus primarily on serving African American and Latin@ students. The school was very selective about the teachers that hired and it partnered with district-wide programs to provide health and counseling services in the school. SES also developed partnerships with non-profit organizations to provide extra resources such as social groups, youth activism opportunities, and housing assistance. Moreover, internships for students and their families assisted with issues of gang prevention and parent support. In addition, teachers were asked to work collaboratively in predetermined "collectives" that were based on the grade level. Families and students would spend their first two years in a collective called the "Junior Institute Family for 9th and 10th grader and would finish their high school career in what was referred to as the "Senior Institute Family". The development of these institutes would enable teachers to collaborate together and share information and support students for two years as a collective of educators.

SES also employed the structure of having advisory courses, which occur everyday and are focused on student well-being and community building. Teachers taught advisory courses and were also assigned as student advisors. Many of the schoolwide gatherings were arranged around issues of ethnic culture, cross-cultural unity, artistic expression, and student voice and performance.

Because of the policies that allowed the small school to be constructed, the school had a significant amount of autonomy in terms of how much professional development teachers would have as well. Much of the professional development time was spent on teachers working together to improve their practice and stay abreast of their students' performance by advisory and advisor. It is also important to note that at its founding, the school was initially located on a university campus to which students traveled and attended classes with in university buildings while being taught by their high school instructors. Roughly 45 years into the school's founding, they move to their own school site. While the initial year of the school's beginning produced incredibly high test scores and academic performance, the test scores dropped each year of the school's existence until 2008 where it had occupied by that time the lowest test scores in the district for all public high schools.

3. Participants

The sample included eight individuals from SES including three staff members (College Readiness Counselor, Co-Director, Wellness Center Director), and four Teachers/Advisors and a graduating senior. In terms of gender, two were male and six were female. The mean age of the sample was 30 years (range 18-41 years). All of the participants lived in urban neighborhoods in the San Francisco Bay Area. Three participants identified as Asian American (Japanese/Chinese American, biracial South Asian American, South Asian), two as African American, and two as White European American, and one as Latina. In terms of educational background, six of the school personnel had a Master's Degree, and two were enrolled in Doctoral Programs in education fields, and one was a high school student.

4. Researcher

As a consultant to schools and school districts and the former Co-Director and researcher of SES, the author (an African American man) realized that there are power dynamics he had with the participants that influenced his perceptions and analysis (Polkinghorne, 2005). However, the structure of the school and the cultural de-emphasis of authoritative power reduced the severity of the impact these dynamics had on staff and participant voices (Fine, 1992). The authors' own self-awareness was critical in understanding conceptual assumptions and unpacking how youth may or may not be colonized through the research process.

5. Data Collection

Multiple data sources were used to provide a range of perspectives on *disciplinary third spaces* and to triangulate the data. These included: (1) interviews with staff, teachers, and one students; (2) documents (e.g., professional development materials, meeting notes, and disciplinary forms describing student transgressions); and (3) school observations.

Vol. 2, No. 2, 2015, pp. 10-22

6. Observational and Testimonial Data

The first author conducted year long observations in classrooms, hallways, the cafteria, the gym, staff offices, as well as the exterior spaces of the school. During and following these observations, he took notes and wrote reflections about his impressions and emerging themes. He also had numerous informal conversations with staff and teachers that provided information and testimonials about the school context, challenges and problems and the emerging school approach to discipline and student behavior and accountability.

7. Interview Protocol

The semi-structured interviews spanned across one to three sessions for a total of two to three hours for each participant. Specifically, participants were asked about their experiences with structural and institutional level changes that have had an impact on how they experienced SES over time. For all of the questions, follow-up probing questions were implemented for participants to expand on their story and their perspective.

8. Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a combination of grounded theory and an iterative coding process. Beginning with a few generative questions derived from our research questions, core theoretical concepts were developed to shed light on emerging themes (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). These linked concepts were then compared to the theories presented in the literature pertaining to social justice education, teachers as caring, and school discipline.

9. Results

Based on an analysis of the observational, document, and interview data, four main themes emerged that highlight the disciplinary third spaces in the school's culture: (1) *Advisory Referrals*, (2) *Non-Suspensions*, (3) *The "icebox"*, and (4) *Tokenizing Staff of Color.* These themes in fact undergird many of the dynamics and processes that influence the creation of disciplinary third spaces at SES. We discuss each theme and provide quotes from the staff at SES to further describe the manifestation of third spaces.

Disciplinary "Third Spaces". The "third space" is presented in the context of post-colonial acts of resistance to normative discourses of power and dominance (Mitchell, 1995) and has important implications for how we conceptualize the discipline structure at SES. These notions of how marginalized people create alternative spaces for affective constructs of agency are popular among educators. The reason for this popularity is rooted in the critique of public education as "do or don't do", or an "in or out" structure that creates spaces for the historically privileged or those who choose to acquiesce to it's shortcomings. In education, "third spaces" have been used to describe locations that lie "in-between" the spaces of the expected, academic "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992) and the language, beliefs, and perspective of a student's home life. Hence, the "third space" becomes the intersection of the capital of academics and the capital of one's life experience and worldview to create a new and unique space that is informed by both (Franken-stein, 2001).

At SES, the "third space" could be conceptualized as a bridge between the cultural and academic identities and lives of students as embodied through the development of a community-based school. In fact, the initial student body of SES was mostly children of the parents that advocated for the establishment of the school. Parents also regularly participated in school activities and served on the appropriate governance committees. A couple of parents worked so closely with the school that they became staff in the initial years in the role of the parent liaison and one of these parents transitioned into the Dean position for several years. In this scenario, SES had a staff that wanted to create a school, a set of parents that wanted the school created, and students, who, for the most part, had chosen to attend the school. The staff worked tirelessly to construct an environment that fit their idea on what an alternative "third space" for success would look like. As May (Teacher and Advisor) comments:

In the first few years, I remember being blown away by the commitment and the amount of love and dedication that the staff had for doing their job. We were building a school, and our staff was all about systems so there would be endless meetings flushing out and proposing different systems programs and projects and elements for our school. We met for 2-3 weeks before the school year started. Staff would stay until 7 o'clock! When I would have to leave at 5:50 to get my kid … I would feel really guilty. My work wasn't done and they were just working away. The whole staff was in one big room so you would see people just working so I would feel really guilty and I would race to pick up my kid and get back. It was hard but I think we pushed each other to overcome.

This type of work ethic became the standard for the school and became an integral part of how teachers at the school defined what it meant to be committed and dedicated to both the students and the idea of social justice. These ideas helped to create a "third space" where visions for education were reimagined through community notions of resistance and culture. Further, most of the teachers that founded the school considered themselves to be educators and activists to some extent. Many of the staff and teachers had also worked in previous areas of non-profit organizing and have been trained or at the least, experienced in the type of work ethics exemplified in political activism.

In regards to the early structuring of a "social justice" school, this idea of what the school *was not* and what it wanted to emphasize was critical in shaping the groundwork for what each staff person would be valued for. This framework also guided what practices, beliefs, and behaviors others would be alienated for at SES. The staff became a community that had some form of reference point to explain the basis for their community. As new people joined the staff, the hard working, educator/activist community was evident upon their arrival. As Ashley shared:

The community that exists at SES, the model of how the staff operates and works together is very communal, right? It's based on group processes and is not as compartmentalized and segmented in the way that you see a lot of other schools. So I think that and I feel like, you know, identity politics were really prevalent and I think that there is a number of things that you have to spend time and effort forming with the group, building relationship with the group to be successful in working with the group. The group has to give you permission to do your work in some kind of way and if you don't earn the respect or trust in the space you can't show up and do some stuff.

John (SES Co-Director) shared, "We thought that we could build relationships with students and leverage those relationships to get students to do what we needed them to do." Such an approach could potentially work if students, parents, and teachers were all in agreement about a clear set of expectations, rules, and consequences for students. However, there were problems creating a "third space" when students, parents, and teachers had differing perspectives. As John further stated:

I felt that certain things were not right, but I didn't know how to bring it up. And if I did, I didn't know what to do about it. There seemed to be an emotional investment in framing the students as victims that we must heal and the healing had to look a certain way and sound a certain way.

"The way" that John is referring to is a way that must be culturally responsive to the students and the community from which they come. When the culture of the staff is so distinctly different from that of the students, the likelihood of miscommunication and frustration increases until there is clarity (Patterson et al., 2008). In order to create this "third space", the staff must adjust their style of engagement and paradigm as an educator to build the appropriate bridges toward mutual trust. According to Patterson et al. (2008) a major problem emerges when the culture of the school contrasts the culture of the students. Hence, these contradicting cultures cannot inspire trust or collaboration in family members or the students. What is especially incongruous is that the teachers are committed to education, but not necessarily able to believe in the capabilities or conviction of their students and families.

Discussions with SES staff as well as observations of SES policies, practices, and spaces revealed four disciplinary "third spaces" in the school's culture: (1) *Advisory Referrals*, (2) *Non-Suspensions*, (3) *The "icebox"*, and (4) *Tokenizing Staff of Color*.

Advisory Referrals. From its inception, SES chose to use an advisory model for the school that sought to facilitate closer teacher-student relationships, effective learning, and an appreciation for historical communities of resistance. An advisory structure involves having a class during the school day that all students must

take that is supervised and facilitated by a teacher. Fauci et. al. (2006) discuss a typical advisory program as including: academic support; interpersonal activities; activities that engender higher level thinking and communication skills; and social activities. Given the emphasis this model has on building community and strong relationships with staff to improve student performance, it was fitting that SES chose to make advisory part of the school structure. As with all programs, however, there are both benefits and deficits to deal with as each school manifests its "necessary peculiarities" (Freire, 1970).

In spite of all of the responsibilities the advisor role contains, SES had a school policy that gave teachers permission to send students that were disruptive to another classroom- their advisor's classroom-for corrective action. Advisory classes are designed to occur at the same time throughout the school day for SES. So when a student is in Ms. Brown's advisory, all the other teachers are conducting advisory as well. What this means is that when a student is disruptive in science class, all the other teachers are teaching their subjects as well. This inevitably leads to a system in place that promotes the sending of agitated students from their assigned courses into classes in which they are not enrolled to wait for the teacher to help them resolve their issue.

What started as a structure designed to connect disruptive students with the staff person with whom they have the closest relationship- ended up, in reality, sending disruptive students to a second classroom- to which they would arrive angry. As a result, teachers would have to worry about the class they were responsible for, as well as serve as a counselor as soon as their advisee entered their classroom. This structure was intended to have students avoid having to face authoritative figures who may not have connection with the student.

These dynamics also helped contribute to an environment in which students felt entitled to travel during class time without intervention from staff. The dynamic made it difficult to discern who was roaming the hallway and who was on their way to see their advisor for disciplinary purposes. This became a convenient way in which students could be removed from a classroom but not experience a consequence for their behavior that competed with the staff's collective idea of themselves as caregivers and the students as victims. Due to this course of action, some students when feeling upset or bored would request to go see their advisor in the middle of class or come late to class with the excuse that they went to see their advisor. What is key here is that this opportunity provided students with a way to miss instruction while remaining on campus. In most cases, parents would be notified and thus, had the opportunity to give their children consequences. It is important to note, however, that this part of the process still relieves the school from having to take a clear stand on student disruption. Fred commented on this problem:

> I felt like asking for a hall-pass policy scenario at our school. That was looked down upon because, like "no, that's too authoritative" and we should be able to trust the kids to go where they need to go.
> I think part of it was really just this element where the staff didn't want to be seen as the same traditional educational place where so many kids and so many families have not found success and not found acceptance so that they would be different.
> I just kind of felt like culturally, at that point, the school wanted to be so renegade that they were unwilling to adopt even simple structures for the institution.

This pattern also led to a total skewing of the referral count. Commonly, by the middle of the year, a number of teachers stopped writing referrals and would just send students to their advisor. This would then leave the school or the child with no record of when or why the student was out of class

Non-Suspensions. The lack of suspensions at SES contributed to a non-suspension "third space". In this regard, students who were defiant were often sent home without formally being suspended. Hence, they were sent home with no paperwork and no parental request to come home. In this non-suspension space, students were not considered truant or at home but in a "third space" that removed the guilt of suspension from the teachers and staff while also conforming to an equity-oriented policy of responding to students' defiant acts on a case by case basis.

In addition to the absence of a tardy policy, the suspension process and guidelines were unclear at the school for a large part of its history. In SES's school district, there over 20 reasons a student could be suspended. These reasons include excessive profanity, assault, threats, possession of an illegal substance, and defiance of authority. The maximum amount of days a student can be suspended in the district is 5 days at a time. According to district policy, all students are afforded "due process" when they are to be suspended and

parents are to be notified. All cases of weapons and drug possession are to include notification of the local police department.

In order to have accurate suspension data, a district suspension form must be filled out and signed by the student to indicate that they have been provided due process and understand the terms and justification for their suspension. As the school community increasingly opposed suspensions, very few suspension days were given out in the 2007-08. In fact, according to school data, fewer than 100 suspension days were given out according to school data and over 90% were African-American students. This number was highly disproportionate given that fewer than 40% of the school was African-American. Again, these numbers were speculated to be inaccurate, but given the lack of a clear structure or process for suspension, the extent to the inaccuracies was unclear.

The resistance of staff to officially suspend students led to a cultural practice of "non-suspensions" or sending students home for the day. Teachers would often call parents to alert them that their child was being sent home but the process was not a clear or consistent one and the conversations about the dismissal were not based on an ethic that was collectively agreed upon by staff. Staffs' resistance to suspend also led to difficulties in understanding when it was time for a student to be removed from the school through expulsion as it left the severity of a students' disruptive patterns up to a subjective set of feelings and opinions by staff that may not be directly recorded in school or district files. Expulsions are very difficult to achieve in this particular district without a sufficient paper trail documenting the school's attempt to remedy the situation through other means and a solid record of the student's problems while at the site.

Given these problems with maintaining consistency, clear consequences, recording of events, and clear vision, another "third space" that affirms the paradigm of students as victims and the teachers and staff as caregivers was established. This dynamic endured, in part, because it did not force staff to face the issue of student conduct in a way that challenged their philosophy and need to feel non-authoritative and non-oppressive.

The reluctance to suspend students, or hold a general standard for accountability made it difficult for students and staff to get a clear understanding of behavioral boundaries. This dynamic only further pushed the school's culture towards a reliance on case-by-case relationships between students and their teachers. This dynamic also centered teacher perception of students over the impact of student behavior on the school as a whole. This dynamic also played into the problem of what was perceived to be favoritism in the eyes of students and overall blurring of the school's identity and purpose to the staff.

The "Icebox". Perhaps the most intentional and clearly constructed space designed specifically as a holding space for students was a place known as the "icebox". Named for both its lack of heat and its use as a "cooling out" space for students who were upset or angry, the "icebox" was an integral part of the disciplinary "system" at SES. (Teacher and Advisor) commented, "It was a place for angry students and parents that would wild out in the hallway and [Leadership] couldn't deal with it." It was a room located on the opposite side of the building, far away from both the Main and Administrative offices at SES.

Due to the lack of clear disciplinary processes and structures, SES students and parents felt like violence or threats to student safety went insufficiently punished. This contributed to fears in the community that students who were a threat to other students could stay at school when they shouldn't and thus be allowed to act upon threats or continue to engage in an already established dispute. This lack of clear and consistent discipline policy at SES led to a range of relatives, friends, and significant others (i.e. parents, cousins, boyfriends, peers, etc.,) from other schools coming on campus looking to enact revenge or take pre-emptive action against students. Since SES was critical of police involvement and already had a lax level of security assigned by the district, the creation of the "icebox" seemed like a logical idea given the aforementioned rationale from which the staff had operated.

The loose advisory referral system, resistance to suspensions, and the conventionally disproportionate rate of African-American disciplinary problems made the "icebox" a receptacle for the wandering or upset students who did not go home or could not resolve discipline issues through discussion with their advisor. The "icebox" was a space where students could talk about what was going on in their lives and why they had acted the way they did. Depending on the reasons for coming to the "icebox", they could even grab food or just delay their return to the classroom by prolonging the narrative of why they were in trouble. With the creation and the social construction of the "icebox", students and parents were further exposed to the nurturing and open approach of the school in matters of discipline and school safety. In this context, it also serves as yet another

space where teachers can feel good as caregivers and construct a one-dimensional idea of their students as victims.

Tokenizing Staff of Color. As the staff began to witness a number of problems stemming disproportionately from the African-American students at SES, it made them eager to find ways to support that particular population. In this context, staff of color at SES emerged as "mobile third spaces". Specifically, African-American as well as other staff of color became indispensable because they had worked with most of the African-American families or could understand the issues facing African-American students from their own personal experience. Their roles garnered a lot of respect and became prominent voices of permission on issues of leniency and discipline. In fact, the Dean of Students was one of the few African-American women on staff and the only African-American woman over the age of 35 on staff. As the former Parent Liaison, she was touted as having the relationship and rapport with African-American students and staff that made it easier for her to deescalate highly contentious situations. Her cultural identity and her comfort in dealing with upset students and parents served as both a convenient tool for the staff at SES and a key reason for her promotion from Parent Liaison to Dean of Students. The role of culture in addressing students' issues became part of the *educational enabler* ethic at SES. Ashley explains a dynamic in which violations of school boundaries were explained away as expressions of students' "culture":

> To say that you can do things, and we have no evidence that they're successful. I mean there's evidence actually that they are harmful. But I want to say it's okay because you're Black? And there is a lot of racism inherently involved in that…

When students would express anger in the form of threats or use language that was degrading or demeaning, some staff would respond by connecting the student to an ethnic minority staff member who was unofficially recognized as being able to "handle" or "understand" the student.

> I can see that in ways that we have followed other people's leadership, for example [staff member]. And I think that there are these really limited viewpoints of these things. 'This is a Black person so whatever they say is right and true for the whole community' and, I mean, you see that in mass media, you see how culture is so distorted and fought with and, you know, how it's presented and what people accept. Like, all these things I don't think in my perspective are part of black culture [can actually be] backwards and a big problem I think.

In this dynamic of tokenizing, staff are culturally constructed as "mobile third spaces" purposed as a similar outlet as the physical, structural, and procedural spaces in the school. These staff Color could even be viewed as more relevant than the physical "third spaces" as their cultural background situates them as a campus-based representatives of the "community". This association of ethnic similarity and staff positionality combined with a willingness to connect with students affirms the existing *educational enabler* culture.

11. Discussion

Co-Constructing the Ambiguity

The idea of "in-betweeness" (Thornton, 2006) may help to describe the creation of a "third space" as a "place" for the resolution of the uncomfortable and less mutable constraints of SES's staff culture. Specifically, SES's staff as a collective struggled with developing a space of nurturing to replace the punitive, presumably abusive school system that they diametrically opposed. Rather, SES staff created an alternative hybrid: they provided "caring" to students by sending them to staff in order to avoid the administration. Moreover, they simultaneously punished students by removing them from the classroom. These "third spaces" –where students were sent—reflected a process that served to relieve teachers of the remorse or guilt they experienced while upholding consistent disciplinary practices with students. These "third spaces" were created to conform to the "sentimentalist standard" and the teachers' and staffs' *perceptions of authority as oppressive*.

"Third spaces" are where a sense of comfort can be established for staff by *removing* any challenge to the "teacher-hero" archetype, and simultaneously affirming the archetype by lessening disciplinary consequences and the attendant guilt that emerges from them. However, the lack of clear boundaries and consistent

disciplinary policies at SES made it difficult to establish healthy relationships with students, and this dynamic filtered into the discipline structure of the school.

Empathy is a central element of teaching and distinguishes the field from others. At the core of the work is the relationship between the teacher and the student. This relationship can be strengthened or weakened as the two roles move in and out of the tensions associated with ideas about caring and of discipline. In particular, in K-12 education, the school is situated as an extension of the home environment, adding further complexity to the role that empathy may play in educational contexts and as it pertains to culturally relevant pedagogy. While empathy is a stated need within the parameters of the theory, the lack of teacher reflection and proper contextualization on how that empathy manifests in equity-oriented practice can lead to dire oversights in cross-cultural understanding (Dilworth, 1998; Spelman, 1995) and to *disciplinary third spaces*. Empathy, without a process of self-reflection, can lead to a "false sense of involvement" that can result in teachers' overestimation of how much they can actually relate to students' experiences (Rosenberg, 1997). Without this proper context, a deep desire to "help" or "save" students from more marginalized communities than that of the staff can lead to pathologizing students and weakening educators' relationships with students and the surrounding community (Furman & Shields, 2005; Ecclestone, 2004; Hayes, 2004).

Social stratification along lines of race, class, and gender can problematize the manifestation of *disciplinary practices* in a school setting as educators seek to provide varying forms of discpline to historically targeted students. Currently, a large majorirty of teachers who work with communities of color are white and female (Landsman &Lewis, 2006; Delpit, 1995). And while this alone may not be new as a dynamic in teaching, preparing them for the task of creating equitable spaces amidst a national climate of high stakes testing, modal schooling, and expedited teacher training models is proving to be very difficult. Specifically, the perceptions of need that are projected onto students may or may not accurately match the current, historical, extistential, and/or ideological realities that constitute "need" for the students being served.

Conclusion and Implications

In theorizing social justice leadership, the idea of challenging an oppressive structure is not lost on researchers as components of student voice, staff reflection, and empowerment of the community are consistently mentioned in a recent works in the field (Furman, 2012; Brooks et al, 2008; Jean-Marie, 2008; TheoHarris, 2007; Brown, 2004; Shields, 2004). Researchers have also continued to ask questions regarding assessments and practical implementations of social justice leadership at the pre-service and school site levels (Brown, 2006; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2006; Keeley, 1978). However, at the heart of this study is the question: How does one create an environment for social justice without first acknowledging that there is an unjust order and that the rules and norms of that order are internalized within the very educators and students that seek to change it? The school itself is part of that repressive construction, and hence the framing, funding, political support, and training materials for such a process are not and will not be conventionally or easily provided-either as part of a professional development process or pre-service training program. If the concepts of social justice education and social justice leadership are purposed to disrupt the existing unjust order, but rather, provide opportunities and avenues for assimilation into it, the agenda becomes one of upward mobility rather than social change. A lack of a critical framework that is reflective and establishes a nuanced habitus for liberation work will lead to the dynamics mentioned here. When observing the social and structural utility of these *disciplinary third spaces,* one could easily associate these practices with those of a zero tolerance school that might isolate students in "calm rooms" or inappropriately assign them to segregated special education classes.

At the heart of this question is the concern that while many educators seek to challenge oppressive structures, they are simultaneously under-informed, and thus underprepared regarding the necessary frameworks for executing such a social justice agenda. Very few practicing administrators or teachers are educated on historical efforts of social resistance or contexts for ongoing community organizing for social upheaval against oppressive structures. In fact, there are almost no requirements in most teacher education programs or administrative preparation programs in the United States for students to learn a domestic or global history of social movements or social activism. There is often little-to-no reference to movements that existed outside of the school setting that moved communities in unison and often cross-cultural collaboration against large, unjust institutions such as the national politic, health system, labor structure, or education. This oversight and gap

in both the ongoing discourse regarding social justice and the coinciding lack of exploration in preparation programs leads to the potential emergence of critical blind spots in the ongoing pursuit of providing authentic social justice education to communities. Without such context, it is very challenging for educators to reflect on their practices and compare them to successful methods of youth development and politicization that exist in the outside communities. In essence, we find educators looking to academia, philanthropic initiatives, and educational policy to execute a purpose that has exited primarily, and largely as a community-based process. Such disconnect can lead to the dynamics mentioned here- a situation in which teachers employ practices that place students in spaces with little purpose or framing when they are supposed to be in spaces that frame the issues of the world so that students may find their purpose.

REFERENCES

Berg, B. (n.d.). & Lune, H. (2012). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences.*

Berg, B. & Lune, H. (2012). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences.*

Borum, R., Cornell, D., Modzeleski, W., & Jimerson, S. (2010) "What Can Be Done about School Shootings? A Review of the Evidence." *Educational Researcher* 39, no. 1: 27–37.

Brooks, J. S., Jean-Marie, G., Normore, A. H., & Hodgins, D. W. (2008). Distributed leadership for social justice: Exploring how influence and equity are stretched over an urban high school. *Jsl Vol 17-N4, 17*, 378.

Brown, K. M. (2004). Leadership for social justice and equity: Weaving a transformative framework and pedagogy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *40*(1), 77–108.

Brown, K. M. (2006). Leadership for social justice and equity: Evaluating a transformative framework and andragogy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *42*(5), 700–745.

Cambron-McCabe, N., & McCarthy, M. M. (2005). Educating school leaders for social justice. *Educational Policy*, *19*(1), 201–222.

Casella, R. (2003). Zero Tolerance Policy in Schools: Rationale, Consequences, and Alternatives. *The Teachers College Record,* 105(5), 872–92.

Children's Defense Fund. (1975). *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?* Cambridge, Mass.

Chyi, H., & McCombs, M. (2004). Media Salience and the Process of Framing: Coverage of the Columbine School Shootings. *Journalism* & *Mass Communication Quarterly,* 81(1), 22–35.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other People's Children. Cultural Conflict in the classroom.* New York: The New Press.

Dilworth, M. (1998). *Being Responsive to Cultural Differences: How Teachers Learn.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Duncan-Andrade, JMR. (2005). Developing Social Justice Educators. *Educational Leadership,* 62(6), 70–73.

Ecclestone, K. (2004). Learning or therapy? The demoralisation of education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *52*(2), 112–137.

EdSource. (2008). *Raising African American Student Achievement: California Goals, Local Outcomes.* Mountain View, CA.

Fenning, P., & Rose, J. (2007). Overrepresentation of African American Students in Exclusionary Discipline the Role of School Policy. *Urban Education,* 42(6), 536–59.

Fine, M. (1992). *Disruptive voices: The possibilities of feminist research.* University of Michigan Press.

Fletcher-Bates, K. N. (2009). *The embedded context of the zero tolerance discipline policy and standardized high stakes testing: The interaction between national policies and local school practices.* The Ohio State University

Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research.* Sage.

Frankenstein, M. (2001). Reading the world with math: Goals for a critical mathematical literacy curriculum. *The Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers Inc.*, 53.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* 30th anniversary ed. New York: Continuum.

Furman, G. (2012). Social justice leadership as praxis developing capacities through preparation programs. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *48*(2), 191–229.

Furman, G. C., & Shields, C. M. (2005). How can educational leaders promote and support social justice and democratic community in schools. *A New Agenda for Research in Educational Leadership*, 119–137.

Giroux, H. (2003). Racial Injustice and Disposable Youth in the Age of Zero Tolerance. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education,* 16(4), 553–65.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.

Gregory, A. & Cornell, D. (2009). Tolerating' Adolescent Needs: Moving beyond Zero Tolerance Policies in High School. *Theory Into Practice,* 48(2), 106–13.

Gregory, A. & Weinstein, R. (2008). The Discipline Gap and African Americans: Defiance or Cooperation in the High School Classroom. *Journal of School Psychology,* 46(4), 455–75.

Gregory, A., & Mosely, P. M. (2004). The discipline gap: Teachers' views on the over-representation of African American students in the discipline system. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 37(1), 18–30.

Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J., & Noguera, P. A. (2010). The Achievement Gap and the Discipline Gap Two Sides of the Same Coin? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 59–68.

Hanson, A. L. (2005). Have Zero Tolerance School Discipline Policies Turned into a Nightmare-The American Dream's Promise of Equal Educational Opportunity Grounded in Brown v. Board of Education. *UC Davis J. Juv. L. & Pol'y*, 9, 289.

Hayes, D. (2004). The therapeutic turn in education. *Key Debates in Education. London: Routledge Falmer*, 180–185.

Heitzeg, N. A. (2009). Education or Incarceration: Zero Tolerance Policies and the School to Prison Pipeline. In *Forum on Public Policy Online* (Vol. 2009). ERIC. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ870076

Henault, C. (2001). Zero Tolerance in Schools. *JL & Educ.* 30, 547.

Hill, D. (2007). Critical Teacher Education, New Labour, and the Global Project of Neoliberal Capital. *Policy Futures in Education,* 5(2), 204–25.

Hill, D., & Boxley, S. (2007). Critical Teacher Education for Economic, Environmental and Social Justice: An Ecosocialist Manifesto. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 5(2) 1–16.

Hirschfield, P. J. (2008). Preparing for prison? The criminalization of school discipline in the USA. *Theoretical Criminology*, 12(1), 79–101.

Howard, T. (2003). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Ingredients for Critical Teacher Reflection. *Theory into Practice,* 42(3), 195–202.

Insley, A. C. (2001). Suspending and expelling children from educational opportunity: Time to reevaluate zero tolerance policies. *Am. UL Rev.*, *50*, 1039.

Jean-Marie, G. (2008). Leadership for social justice: An agenda for 21st century schools. In *The Educational Forum* (Vol. 72, pp. 340–354). Taylor & Francis. Retrieved from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00131720802362058

Keeley, M. (1978). A social-justice approach to organizational evaluation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 272–292.

Landsman, J., & Lewis, C. W. (Eds.) (2006). *White Teachers/Diverse Classrooms: A Guide to Building Inclusive Schools, Promoting High Expectations, and Eliminating Racism*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Lickel, B., Schmader, T., and Hamilton, D. (2003) "A Case of Collective Responsibility: Who Else Was to Blame for the Columbine High School Shootings?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 29(2), 194–204.

Martinez, S. (2009). A system gone berserk: How are zero-tolerance policies really affecting schools? *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 53(3), 153–158.

Mitchell, W. J. T. (1995). *Translator translated. Interview with cultural theorist Homi Bhabha. Artforum,* 33 (7), 80–84.

Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141.

Murrell Jr,, P. (2006). Toward Social Justice in Urban Education: A Model of Collaborative Cultural Inquiry in Urban Schools. *Equity & Excellence in Education,* 39(1), 81–90.

Muschert,, G. (2007). Research in School Shootings. *Sociology Compass*, 1(1), 60–80.

Patterson, J. A., Hale, D., & Stessman, M. (2008). Cultural Contradictions and School Leaving: A Case Study of an Urban High School. *The High School Journal*, 91, 1–15. doi:10.1353/hsj.2008.0001

Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *52*(2), 137.

Robers, S., Kemp, J. & Truman, J. (2013). Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2012. NCES 2013-036/NCJ 241446." *National Center for Education Statistics*, 2013. http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED543705

Salmani Nodoushan, M. A., & Daftarifard, P. (2011). Globalized classroom, emancipatory competence, and critical pedagogy: A paradigm shift. In R. V. Nata (Ed.), *Progress in Education*, (pp. 147–162). New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Seidman, S. (2012). *Contested knowledge: Social theory today*. John Wiley & Sons.

Shields, C. M. (2004). Dialogic leadership for social justice: Overcoming pathologies of silence. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(1), 109–132.

Skiba, R., & Reece P. (1999). The Dark Side of Zero Tolerance: Can Punishment Lead to Safe Schools? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(5), 372–82.

Skiba, R., Michael, R., Carroll, A., and Peterson, R. (2002). The Color of Discipline: Sources of Racial and Gender Disproportionality in School Punishment. *The Urban Review,* 34(4), 317–42.

Sleeter, C. & McLaren, P. (Eds.) (1995). *Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference*. Albany, NY:SUNY Press.

Spelman, E.V.. (1998). *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering*. Boston:Beacon Press.

Stinchcomb, J. B., Bazemore, G., & Riestenberg, N. (2006). Beyond Zero Tolerance Restoring Justice in Secondary Schools. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 4(2), 123–147.

Stovall, D. (2006). Forging Community in Race and Class: Critical Race Theory and the Quest for Social Justice in Education. *Race Ethnicity and Education,* 9(3), 243–59.

Sugai, G., & Horner, R. (2002). The evolution of discipline practices: School-wide positive behavior supports. *Child* & *Family Behavior Therapy*, 24(1-2), 23–50.

Tebo, M. G. (2000). Zero tolerance, zero sense. *ABAJ, 86*, 40.

Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(2), 221–258.

Thornton, B. (2006). A Study of Resiliency of American Indian High School Students. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 45(1), 13.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 20(1), 3–56.