Exploring Educators' Commitment to Racial Equity in School Discipline Practice: A Qualitative Study of Critical Incidents

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Abstract

As interventions show promise for reducing school discipline disparities, it is important to understand what variables increase educators' commitment toward addressing racial equity in schools. In-depth interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of 15 educators asked to describe pivotal events that shifted their own or others' active commitment toward racial equity in school discipline practice. Analysis of interviews, using an established qualitative methodology, produced 210 observable incidents that were grouped into 22 representative categories. Findings included 14 helping categories, 4 hindering categories, as well as 4 categories describing what could have increased educators' commitment sooner. Implications for practice are discussed in relation to current research, theory, and consultation models.

Keywords: Racial equity, school discipline, enhanced critical incident technique, teacher professional development.

Exploring Educators' Commitment to Racial Equity in School Discipline Practice: A Qualitative Study of Critical Incidents

Over 45 years of national, state, and school data have documented racial disparities associated with U.S. school disciplinary practices (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). Students of color, particularly Black (i.e., African American), Latinx, and Indigenous students, continue to be disproportionately excluded and disciplined in classrooms and schools (Losen, 2020). Educators assign office discipline referrals (ODRs), suspensions, and expulsions, at rates two to three times higher than White students (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Nowicki, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2016)

School-based approaches are showing promise for narrowing school discipline disparities and increasing racial equity (Augustine et al., 2018; Bradshaw et al., 2018; Gion, McIntosh, & Falcon, 2020). Pre-service interventions have reduced educators' negative attributions about the innate abilities or performance of students of color (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015). Educators' use of constructive feedback (Yeager et al., 2014) and greeting students at the door (Cook et al., 2018) have helped to close opportunity gaps. Additionally, the use of school-wide frameworks like restorative practices (Augustine et al., 2018; Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016) and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) has been associated with lower levels of discipline disproportionality (McIntosh, Gion, & Bastable, 2018; Swain-Bradway, Gulbrandson, Galston, & McIntosh, 2019). Motivational Interviewing techniques have also been demonstrated to increase teachers' willingness to implement equity-focused classroom strategies (Bradshaw et al., 2018; Gion et al., 2020).

As schools seek to address racial disproportionality, many individuals in U.S. society, including educators, remain reluctant to acknowledge how race or ethnicity may influence

disciplinary decisions (DiAngelo, 2011; Goff, Jackson, Nichols, & Di Leone, 2013). Scholars have raised concerns about the reticence of school personnel to abandon policies or practices that could perpetuate disparities (Gregory & Evans, 2020; Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014; Skiba, Edl, & Rausch, 2007). Even presenting school administrators with data showing discipline disparities in their schools does not appear to shift their practices (McIntosh et al., 2020). Lacking understanding of what types of experiences increase educators' commitment to racial equity in school discipline, promising approaches may be rendered ineffective or abandoned.

Commitment to Racial Equity in School Discipline Practice

To explore educators' commitment to racial equity in school discipline practice, an operational definition was developed. This definition includes: (a) taking clear steps to increase visibility or focus of racial equity in school disciplinary practice (e.g., stating racial equity as a top priority for your school, district, or among your colleagues); (b) dedicating resources at your disposal (e.g., time, money, contacts) toward racial equity work, or actively applying strategies to enhance racial equity in school disciplinary outcomes; or (c) training, coaching, leading or talking to other educators with the intent to motivate them to improve racial equity in school disciplinary outcomes.

Barriers to Increasing Educators' Commitment to Racial Equity in School Discipline

Equity-focused initiatives introduced into schools can be abandoned, mis-implemented, or championed by too few educators to significantly improve school-wide outcomes (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Theories have described barriers that could hinder educators' commitment: Deficit Thinking (i.e., notion that students, particularly students of color, struggle in school because the students or their families lack motivation, limited intelligence, access to resources; Valencia, 2012), racial stereotyping (i.e., subjective measure of a students' ability based on race or

ethnicity; Burgess & Greaves, 2013), White Fragility (i.e., defensiveness experienced by White people that evokes avoidance of discussing race or racial inequality; DiAngelo, 2018), and cultural mismatch (i.e., misalignment of student and teacher expectations for behavior; Delpit, 2014). Tropp and Barlow (2018) theorized advantaged groups in U.S. society (e.g., White, educated professionals) may be motivated to deny or minimize inequality due to a lack of direct experience and familiarity with students from racially or ethnically diverse backgrounds. These theories may suggest why it remains challenging to garner wider support from educators to address racial equity in school discipline practice.

Equipping Educators with Strategies to Address Racial Equity in Discipline

There is a need to equip educators with effective training and consultation approaches to enhance equity through school practices (Schumacher-Martinez & Proctor, 2020; Skiba & Losen, 2016). Sanders and Bibbs (2020) described elements of school consultation models that included: recruiting diverse stakeholders into school decision-making, developing acceptable interventions that match the needs of school stakeholders, and addressing a specific-shared priority related to equity (e.g., goal setting). Sabnis (2020) and Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, and Pollock (2017) have discussed a need for school consultants to facilitate more explicit conversations in schools about the root causes of discipline disparities. Other scholars have developed strategies to reduce the effects of implicit bias on educators' disciplinary decisions (see Neutralizing Routines; Smolkowski, Girvan, McIntosh, Nese, & Horner, 2016) or use of discipline data to identify "hot spots" (e.g., hallways, playground) where disproportionality is more likely to occur (McIntosh, Ellwood, McCall, & Girvan, 2018; Scott, Hirn, & Barber, 2012). Motivational Interviewing has also been found to help increase educators' willingness to use culturally responsive classroom practices (Bradshaw et al., 2018).

Need to Understand How to Increase Educators' Commitment to Racial Equity

Despite the emergence of promising strategies and frameworks, it remains unclear whether such approaches will increase individual educators' motivation to adopt equity-focused interventions (Gregory & Evans, 2020; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Devine and colleagues (2012) have theorized that commitment to reduce prejudiced behaviors may be dependent on two processes. First, individuals must be *aware* of their biases and, second, they must be *concerned* about the consequences of their biases before they will be motivated to act differently. Although sharing disaggregated data is often assumed to raise educators' awareness of racial discipline disparities, this practice may help to reinforce racial stereotypes about students of color, diminishing their commitment (Hetey & Eberhardt, 2018). Further, scholars have questioned whether efforts aimed at shifting educators' beliefs and attitudes toward racial equity (i.e., increasing concern) could inhibit wider school or district-wide reforms unless teachers are equipped with skills and resources to undertake this work (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). It may be that educators need to gain experiences trying out equity-focused strategies that produce visible results before commitment to deeper institutional changes are likely to occur (Guskey, 2002).

In sum, there is a need to study educators who have undergone a shift from less to more committed to racial equity. By examining their experiences, it may be possible to identify strategies that educational consultants, school leaders, or educators themselves can apply to support and sustain the use of equity-focused approaches introduced into a school or district.

Purpose of the Study

An established qualitative research method called the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) was used to understand what led educators who reported as previously

ambivalent to address racial equity in school discipline practice to become more committed over time (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009). ECIT was used to identify and categorize critical incidents describing what helped and hindered educators' commitment and the commitment of others. A Critical Incident (CI) is defined as "any reported occurrence that could be translated into specific, observable, and behavioral terms" (Bedi, Davis, & Williams, 2005, p. 314). For this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What Critical Incidents (CIs) helped educators' active commitment to racial equity in school discipline?

2. What CIs have educators observed that helped the active commitment of others to racial equity in school discipline?

3. What CIs hindered educators' active commitment to racial equity in school discipline?

4. What CIs have educators observed that hindered the active commitment of others to racial equity in school discipline?

5. What incidents might have made it easier for educators to commit to racial equity in school discipline from the outset (i.e., sooner)?

6. What incidents might have made it easier for others to commit to racial equity in school discipline from the outset (i.e., sooner)?

Method

Participants

A purposeful sample of 15 educators (seven school administrators, three teachers, three Technical Assistance Providers, one Speech and Language Pathologist, and one professor of Special Education) participated in the study (see Table 1). Participants identified as White (n = 13), African American (n = 1), multiracial (n = 1), and one participant identifying as White was a member of a recognized Native American tribe (n = 1). A total of 11 (73%) were female. Educators worked in or

with schools or districts located in 10 U.S. states, representing the West (n = 10), Midwest (n = 4), and South (n = 1). Participants reported working in the field of education for an average of 14 years (between 4 and 27 years). There were eleven participants (73%) who described their roles as directly or indirectly responsible for disciplining students in schools or overseeing school discipline policies.

To be eligible for the study, participants needed to be able to recall a time when they were non-committal or ambivalent toward addressing racial equity in school discipline practice. Participants' current level of commitment was also assessed using a validated self-report measure, the *Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice Scale* (Cronbach's alpha = .76 -.85; Plant & Devine, 1998). The ten items on this scaled measure ask about an individual's intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for responding in nonprejudiced ways toward Black people (e.g., internal motivation item: "*I attempt to act in nonprejudiced ways toward Black people because it is personally important to me";* external motivation item*:* "*I try to act nonprejudiced toward Black people because of pressure from others.")*

All participants were asked to complete the questionnaire before their interviews. Participants' scores on this measure were not used to determine eligibility for the study. Rather, this measure provided additional descriptive information as a proxy for assessing personal commitment. All eligible participants reported higher scores (M = 6.6 on a scale of 1 to 7) for internal motivation and lower to moderate scores (M = 4.2) for external motivation to respond to prejudice. High scores for internal motivation indicated eligible participants were currently motivated more by internal reasons to respond to prejudice.

Methodological Approach

A qualitative method called the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT; Butterfield et al., 2009; Flanagan, 1954) was used for this study. ECIT has proven useful for interpreting

how incidents or experiences described by practitioners inform the use of current organizational practices or policies. ECIT integrates both qualitative and quantitative aspects to analyze participant data (Creswell, 1998). The method relies primarily on subjective, perceptual, or retrospective data collected from participants, but also includes quantitative procedures to establish the credibility of findings reported. ECIT studies have included reliability and validity checks more common in quantitative analyses (Maxwell, 1992). Andersson and Nilsson (1964) have provided empirical support validating the method's capacity to reliably generate comprehensive descriptions for a variety of psychological processes.

ECIT was used in prior educational studies to elicit self-reflection from teachers related to specific processes or problems of practice experienced in schools (e.g., ethical dilemmas in teachers' practice; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). For example, the approach was used to examine school principals' decision-making process (Carr, Gilbride, & James, 2017; McIntosh, Kelm, & Canizal Delabra, 2016).

Use of Qualitative Methods to Explore Educators' Use of School Discipline

Qualitative methods can be a useful approach for understanding educators' perspectives and experiences with school practices (Kozleski, 2017; Monroe, 2006). For example, a qualitative technique like structured interviewing can help to elicit insights from educators as "insiders" who have direct experiences with school discipline practice (Butler, Joubert, & Lewis, 2009; Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Additionally, qualitative methods often incorporate purposive sampling (i.e., non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study) to make it possible to study a specific educational phenomenon of interest.

Measure

The interview protocol used for this study was adapted from Butterfield and colleagues (2009). To ensure participants shared the same frame of reference, an operational definition of active commitment to racial equity in school discipline practice was shared before conducting all interviews (see operational definition on p. 3).

During interviews, participants were asked to provide detailed descriptions of experiences that "helped promote or detract from effective performance of an activity, or the experience of a specific situation or event" (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005, p. 483). Specifically, interviewees were asked to recall critical incidents that helped or hindered their own or observed others' active commitment toward racial equity in school discipline practice.

A Critical Incident (CI) is defined as "any reported occurrence that could be translated into specific, observable, and behavioral terms" (Bedi et al., 2005, p. 314). Interviewees were also asked to identify wishlist items. Wishlist items are events, people, supports, information, or programs that were not present at the time of the participant's experience but that participants believed--in retrospect--would have been helpful to them or other educators (Bedi et al., 2005).

Interviews were conducted by phone and lasted between 70 and 122 minutes. As recommended by Butterfield et al. (2009), rapport with participants was cultivated using basic empathy and active listening to collect richer data about their experiences. Follow-up questions and additional probing were used to elicit data not likely obtained through other methods.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed to facilitate a thorough and reliable discourse analysis (Flanagan, 1954). Interview questions were sent in advance to allow time for participants to reflect upon the questions and to reduce possible presentation or response bias. A

reviewer familiar with ECIT (second author) listened to every fourth interview to verify the study protocol was followed and to verify all essential information was provided to participants.

Procedure

A purposeful sampling procedure was used to identify a geographically diverse and broad cross-section of educators (e.g., teachers, behavior coaches, technical assistance providers, administrators) directly or indirectly providing supports to students or school personnel in K-12 settings (i.e., qualified observers; Flanagan, 1954). Participants were recruited using two methods: (a) by personal invitation and (b) recruitment through educational conferences and social media platforms. For the first method, a recruitment letter was distributed outlining the purpose of the study, eligibility requirements, the time required for participation, and compensation provided for agreeing to be part of the study (a $50 gift certificate). Part of the recruitment strategy was to identify individuals who were willing to share detailed accounts of how they had experienced a shift in commitment toward racial equity in school discipline practice. As a result, 3 of 15 of the final participants were professionally associated with the second author through attending training he had delivered or through other professional networks they shared.

For the second method, participants were invited via an announcement shared in presentations delivered at educational conferences and using social media platforms that included LinkedIn and Twitter. Participants were determined to be eligible for the study based on their self-assessment of their prior and current commitment to actively address racial equity in school discipline practice. To be included in the study, participants needed to be able to describe a specific time in the past when they were less committed to addressing racial equity in school discipline. Of the total participants screened for eligibility (n = 30), 10 participants (33%) were

ineligible as they could not recall a time when they were less committed to racial equity (e.g., "*I cannot think back to and describe a time in which I was not committed to equity*.") and 5 participants (17 %) were eligible and interviewed for the study, but their responses were not needed for category formation (i.e., no new categories emerged from the incidents reported by participants 13, 14, & 15; see description of exhaustiveness p. 13)

Data Analysis

All interview transcripts were analyzed following procedures specified by Butterfield and colleagues (2009). The coding process started with extracting helping CIs from the first transcript. An Excel spreadsheet was used to link each participant's identification number with critical incidents extracted from their interview transcript.

For all remaining transcripts, CIs and wishlist items were extracted using the same procedure. Next, CIs and wishlist items were fitted into existing or new categories. Participants' interviews were analyzed in batches of three following a process used in prior ECIT studies (Butterfield et al., 2009). To form viable categories, Borgen and Amundson's (1984) recommendation of a 25% participation rate was followed (i.e., at least 4 of the 15 participants needed to report CIs to form a category). If the threshold participant rate of 25% was not met, smaller categories could be combined with existing categories.

Trustworthiness of Data and Interpretations

After data was collected and analyzed, nine credibility checks were conducted to increase the trustworthiness of the data as outlined by Butterfield et al. (2009). First, all interviews were digitally recorded to allow for verbatim transcription of participants' words, utterances, and complete descriptions of CIs (Maxwell, 1992).

Second, every fourth interview (i.e., P1, P5, P9, P13) recording was reviewed by the second author to ensure the interview protocol was followed. The second author provided constructive feedback that included: avoiding leading questions, asking more follow-up questions to elicit specific CIs, and asking participants clarifying questions to help fit CIs into existing categories.

Third, an independent reviewer was recruited and trained to identify CIs in four randomly-selected transcripts (25%), a minimum percentage established by prior studies evaluating the reliability and validity of CIT (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964). Intercoder agreement for extracting CIs was calculated at 81%, determined to be strong based on prior CIT studies (Butterfield et al., 2009). Fourth, CIs were extracted until a point of exhaustiveness was achieved. Per ECIT guidelines, exhaustiveness was reached after the 12th transcript was analyzed (i.e., CIs extracted from transcripts 13 to 15 were found to fit into existing categories). Fifth, participation rates for each category formed were calculated and reported in Table 1. Sixth, an independent reviewer was recruited to fit a randomly selected set of 53 CIs (25%) into the final categories.

Intercoder agreement (ICA) for category formation was initially 75%, below what is considered adequate. To address ICA, the first author reconciled disagreements and refined category definitions with the independent reviewer. Next, the reviewer was asked to sort a second randomly selected set of 53 CIs (25%). ICA was calculated at 88%.

Seventh, all participants were emailed follow-up questions (i.e., member check; Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005) to solicit feedback on final category titles and definitions (e.g., *Are the helping/hindering categories correct? Is there*

anything missing?). All 15 participants responded and reported the final categories formed were appropriate and fit based on their reported experiences.

Eighth, two content experts (i.e., published researchers in the field of school discipline and racial equity) were recruited to review the final categories (*Do you find the categories to be useful? Are you surprised by any of the categories? Do you think there is anything missing based on your experiences?*). After review, both experts reported all formed categories (20; 100%) to be useful and relevant (i.e., "*I thought the categories were well organized and easy to follow*"). One expert was surprised that the category "Avoiding Discussing Race" did not emerge as a hindrance observed for other educators. Finally, all categories were reviewed to evaluate theoretical agreement based on prior research or theory related to this topic area (Butterfield et al., 2009).

Positionality

Conducting qualitative research requires considering how a researcher's worldview or experiences influence the research process (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The topic of this study emerged from an interest in supporting educators to improve racial equity in school disciplinary practices. The research team consisted of a former school social worker (first author), an educational scholar with racial equity as a primary area of research (second author). The third fourth and fifth authors are Special Education researchers and former school practitioners knowledgeable in this topic area. The authors' prior experiences and current knowledge of this topic area may be viewed as a strength for understanding and eliciting more details from participants' responses. It is also possible the author's familiarity with the subject matter may have contributed to a loss of objectivity influencing which critical incidents were extracted and how final categories were formed (Butterfield et al., 2009; DeLyser, 2001).

Given this study's focus on racial equity, our research team was aware from the start of the project that our own racial and ethnic identities and lived experiences could influence all aspects of the research process. Therefore, it was important for us as researchers (4 White, 1 female) to reflect on how our cultural backgrounds and own racial biases could shape how we formulated research questions, interacted with participants during the interviews, and interpreted the data generated from the study (Milner, 2007).

Findings

Categories Formed

A total of 210 observable, critical incidents were extracted from 15 interview transcripts. Formed categories needed to be endorsed by at least four (27%) or more of the participants to be eligible for inclusion (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964). Table 1 displays categories by helping (self, others), hindering (self, others), and wishlist items (self, others). Table 2 also provides a summary of the total number of incidents extracted, the number of participants endorsing each category, and the total representation rate (ranging from 27% to 67% of respondents).

Helping Categories (Self)

A total of 63 helping incidents were reported as personally helpful. These incidents formed eight unique categories. The following section highlights representative quotations from these eight categories.

Disaggregating School Data by Race and Ethnicity. A total of 10 participants (67%) referred to viewing, analyzing, or sharing disaggregated school data by student racial and ethnic groups as helpful for commitment. Viewing disaggregated school data was reported to challenge current assumptions of how equitably school disciplinary practices were applied across racial or ethnic student subgroups. This category also included learning about school discipline disparities

from nationwide data, presenting data to school stakeholders for feedback, and attending conference presentations where discipline data was analyzed. One participant reported on the following incident from his school:

> I received all the disciplinary records and what I saw reflected in those disciplinary records was a lot of power struggles with certain adults, usually an assistant principal or a principal…I also noticed too was that the students coming through my program were typically young men of color. However, the sentences for the White students had been less extreme than they were for the students of color. So, I started to see that pattern of disproportionality in the school's discipline system. (Participant 11)

Learning About Racial Discrimination in Society. Half of the participants (n = 7) reported hearing, reading, and learning personal stories or historical accounts that raised their awareness of racially discriminatory behaviors, laws, or societal norms that harmed individuals or communities of color. Activities included listening to music produced by African American musicians, attending workshops focused on race and equity, and engaging in race-centered discussions with others through social media sites. One participant reported:

> I didn't quite realize, you know, why there are so many people of color in poverty, that it's not—I wasn't like, oh they're lazy, but I just didn't know. Like, oh no, it's because they never were property owners…and then it just snowballs in the wrong direction. So, access to housing and how that all began. Like, where the root was at. (Participant 2)

Witnessing Racial Prejudice in Schools. Several participants (7; 47%) observed hearing or observing racial epithets, actions, gestures they perceived as racially pejorative which increased their commitment. Incidents referred to students, teachers, and administrators using derogatory labels ("those kids") and witnessing White students receiving preferential treatment compared to African American students (e.g., less severe disciplinary consequences for the same infraction). One participant related this experience:

> Unfortunately, some of the other ways that I've been helped in my journey have been negative. For example, last year we had an interim principal while we were hiring a new principal and I watched as she disciplined the wrong Black male student. And this student was very, very visibly upset and kept saying that's not my name, that's not who I am, I

> don't know what you're talking about. And this interim principal just wouldn't let it go…So it was obviously very frustrating at the moment and so it made me consider okay, myself as an educator, what can I do to assist students in the future so that way it doesn't come to that? (Participant 2)

Discussing Race and Discipline with Peers. A total of 6 (40%) participants reported sharing ideas, receiving support, and learning through discussions with colleagues (as opposed to obtaining specific strategies) helped personal commitment. Activities included joining a community of practice (e.g., as part of a fellowship cohort) and networking with colleagues informally (e.g., in the school staff room, educational conference). The following quotation was representative of this category:

> So, I have this group of people with who I can speak this common language with, or I can say hey, I feel like, you know, I had this weird thing happen with…a mother of color. Can you help me like, you know, walk through this, give me feedback? So, I guess that's what I would say is that having like, a group of people to rely on. (Participant 2)

Acknowledging Racial Biases. Developing an understanding of how racial bias may influence school disciplinary decisions was viewed as helpful by a few participants (4; 27%). Activities in this category included learning about the concept of implicit bias in training and examining how racial stereotypes are perpetuated in society by popular media (e.g., magazine advertisements, television shows). One participant recalled a training activity he found particularly influential:

> The district brought Beyond Diversity trainers into our district…that was the first place where I started seeing some of those biases in the media…like really seeing it [racial bias] rather than just not noticing. And that played a pretty big role in the shift toward thinking about racial equity. (Participant 5)

Examining White Privilege and Identity. A couple of participants (4; 27%) referred to experiences that helped to raise their awareness of White Privilege and White identity. Activities in this category included attending training or having cross-cultural experiences which increased awareness of White Privilege or the power conferred to White people concerning other racial

groups. The category also includes participants learning more about internalized oppression (i.e., marginalized groups holding an oppressive view toward their own group). One participant reflected on how he became aware of White Privilege through working on a Native American reservation:

> I would identify myself as being from the Family Resource Center on the reservation and I would have calls, you know, that would drop, or people would hang up. However, when I went there in person and they would be able to see me as a white person, responses/reactions changed…I was able to kind of see, alright, so, my race plays a difference, but I didn't understand the structural pieces. I didn't understand the institutional racism that was in play until much later. (Participant 5)

Implementing PBIS as a Foundation for Equity. A few participants (4; 27%) found school or district use of the school-wide framework, positive behavioral supports (PBIS) and interventions, helped to prioritize racial equity in school discipline practice. Incidents included leveraging aspects of the PBIS framework to understand why students from different racial or ethnic groups were receiving consequences at higher rates than other groups. The following incident described how the implementation of PBIS was viewed as enhancing an educator's commitment.

> We had PBIS going officially, however, it helped cement it on the part of the teachers, their actual behaviors. It helped them create more of a commitment…It [PBIS] kind of propelled me, I would say into having difficult conversations with people when I was seeing something and also having difficult conversations with people about myself, you know, my own behaviors. (Participant 11)

Learning from a Trusted Leader. A few participants (4; 27%) described learning from trusted or knowledgeable leaders perceived as leaders in addressing racial equity (e.g., school district leader, pastor, principal, researcher, trainer). The compelling aspect of the incidents belonging to this category was not so much the content shared by these leaders, but rather, respect for the messenger and the way information was conveyed. A participant recalled an experience with a pastor at her church that she viewed as increasing her commitment:

> Our pastor in a predominantly White community, predominantly White church, I mean, I'm in rural [Midwestern state] so there aren't a lot of Black people, and he tackled the topic of racism just so eloquently and beautifully. (Participant 2)

Helping Categories (Observed Others)

Participants reported a total of 38 helping CIs forming six distinct categories. The categories described events observed to increase other educators' commitment to racial equity.

Sharing Equity-focused School Practices. Half of the participants (7; 47%) described the benefits of sharing, observing, or discussing school strategies to promote equity in classrooms or schools. Activities included conducting classroom walkthroughs to observe classroom instructional practices and student-teacher interactions, as illustrated in the following quotation:

> These [classroom] walkthroughs are about like, how are kids being seen and how are kids showing up, and how are you showing up for kids? And so, really specific feedback to people…I noticed these three kids, they shut down or these kids really perked up when you brought out that Native American piece of art. (Participant 2)

In this category, several participants referred to an indirect approach used to share equity-focused practices with others: "You don't teach them the equity work, they [educators] do it themselves, and that's the strangeness about this…it's nothing you can force on them" (Participant 13); "There were [culturally responsive] features that I would call out during my observations, you know, and say hey, I saw you did a great job" (Participant 11); "They get hooked [on restorative practices] and they go back and they start using it in their classrooms, and they started to help each other do it." (Participant 14)

Disaggregating School Data by Race and Ethnicity. A total of 7 (47%) of participants observed the use of disaggregated school data as influencing others' commitment. Disaggregated data were used as a tool to help other educators explore how their personal or professional values

(e.g., egalitarianism, inclusiveness) were aligned with school discipline outcomes. One participant described a school visioning activity she presented during a staff meeting:

> We ask people to state their school's mission and vision, draw it out on paper, right. That we want 100% of our students to be ready for post-school greatness… but then to have staff look at their data and draw on what that mission actually looks like in their school, what do they [staff] see in the patterns, who is achieving post-school greatness, who's left out of the picture? (Participant 3)

Providing a Voice to Students and Families. This category was reported by one-third of participants (5; 33%) as helpful to others. Helpful activities included soliciting and sharing the input of students and families to inform school disciplinary decisions and policies. One administrator described scheduling a regular forum for parents of color to come to her school and share their experiences of the school's disciplinary system with her staff:

> Having a parent panel helped because a lot of my educators thought that they weren't doing anything that would bother a parent of color, and I did have some parents [of color] who were brave enough to come to one of my racial equity training and talk about some of the things they had first-hand experienced…It was difficult for educators because they personalized it. Do you know what I mean? So, the initial reaction is defensiveness. It's very emotional for everybody. But it can lead to good work. (Participant 11)

Normalizing Discomfort in Addressing Race. A few participants (4; 27%) observed the benefits of acknowledging and manage negative feelings (e.g., guilt, shame, privilege) that arose when talking about race and discipline in their schools. One participant described the importance of modeling how to engage in a discussion focused on race with others:

> I think having people be able to model how to have those conversations is useful. I think helping people understand their own identity has been useful because I think when we talk about diversity and racial equity it's kind of like we've been conditioned to think about race and culture as something that other people have, but as a White person I have it too and it impacts how I operate. (Participant 3)

Incidents in this category also refer to purposefully taking others out of their "comfort zones" when exploring race and school discipline practices. Participant 13 described the importance of "staying engaged" during difficult conversations, especially when a colleague's

disciplinary approach may not align with his personal philosophy. One participant commented, "What really emboldened me in a [workshop] was a trainer that told me how he's never ever afraid to go down the path when a participant brings up race" (Participant 8).

Getting Cited for Disproportionality. A few participants (4; 27%) observed citations or mandates placed on schools or districts to address discipline disproportionality as helping to enhance the commitment of other educators. The following quotation illustrates why mandates or citations were viewed as helpful to increase others' commitment:

> They [the school district] were sued for racial disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions, and so one thing that really kind of helped get the point across and put a spotlight on an issue that was kind of being ignored was this lawsuit that was in the news and it's local and it's an ongoing theme that keeps coming up. (Participant 9)

External mandates requiring schools or districts to address discipline disproportionality were described as heightening others' awareness of the need to improve racial equity in school practices. Participant 5 reported, "it brings [race] to a level of consciousness. I mean, I know in my Special Education team meetings it's something we talk about regularly [now]."

Confronting Prejudicial Beliefs. A total of 4 (27%) participants reported incidents in this category. Activities included exploring or questioning personal or institutional values or norms influencing school disciplinary practices. Incidents included publicly denouncing actions by colleagues perceived as prejudiced in schools (e.g., during a staff meeting), championing the unmet needs of students of color, and intervening to address racial discrimination in a school's neighborhood. The following incident was representative of this category:

> …And so, they were talking about construction [of a new school building] and a [school staff] person raised their hand and started talking about the plasma donation center that's going up about 500-600 feet from our school grounds and she said, well you know the kind of people that go to the plasma banks, we don't want those kind of people in our school. And I looked at her and I was like, what do you mean by that?... afterward, I had people come up to me in the lounge or in the hallway and say, thank you for saying that. I'm really glad that someone said that. That was ridiculous. (Participant 12)

Hindering Categories (Self)

Participants reported a total of 46 CIs in this category. These incidents formed five categories viewed as hindering participants' personal commitment toward racial equity in school discipline practice.

Avoiding Discussing Race. Two-thirds of participants described incidents that increased reluctance to explore racial topics with colleagues, students, or acquaintances. Participants cited examples for why race and discipline were not discussed more with others: "A lot of the staff that I've worked with in the different schools are mostly White and don't have to deal with race a lot in the sense that they don't have to talk about it" (Participant 13); "I think it does boil down to the root cause of an inability to recognize and acknowledge a problem [with race], and the uncertainty about how to address that problem" (Participant 8). Incidents also referred to educators' observing "clumsy race talk" or "spotlighting" (i.e., asking staff or students of color to act as representative members of their racial/ethnic group). The following was a representative quotation:

> I think a lot of people are reluctant to say or just simply won't say that there's disproportionality in school discipline when all of the facts and data point to that…Even when people are faced with facts, the numbers, the data, the anecdotes, they often still do not want to come out and say we have this problem, what are we going to do about it? (Participant 14)

Experiencing Lack of Conviction from Leaders and Peers. A total of 7 (47%) of the participants encountered reluctance or resistance from leaders and colleagues to prioritize disciplinary equity as a focus for school improvement. Activities included unsuccessfully requesting resources (e.g., money, planning time, instructional materials) and failed attempts to convince leaders to take meaningful or sustained action. The following quotation described a representative incident:

> They [district leaders] hindered my ability to address racial equity at every opportunity they could come up with. I mean, they just put roadblock after roadblock. Oh, I'm gonna stay today and tutor my kids. No, you're not, you need to leave today [said a school leader]. It was like, why can't I stay? Because the [district leaders] are going to shut that area of the building down. I'm like, are you kidding me? It was ridiculous and difficult, and it re-established why I needed to get out of there, but they hindered my ability to find racial equity. (Participant 6)

Imposing Cultural Norms. A total of 6 (40%) of participants endorsed this category. Incidents referred to educators who imposed cultural norms (e.g., dominant, White) for behavior, dress or academic performance upon students of color. This category also includes students of color receiving more severe consequences based on their reactions to getting disciplined versus their actual behavior. A school administrator recalled the following representative experience:

> Yes. I've always hindered myself by escalating situations with specifically African American males, especially as they started to get a little older and more defiant and proud of what they wore and the way they talked. And it really started to bother me. And instead of de-escalating or giving them an out, you know, I was starting to get angry with them and with the situation. I could feel it. (Participant 8)

Lowering Expectations or Stereotyping. Several participants (4; 27%) described incidents in which they found themselves expecting less from students of color than their White peers based, in part, on racial or cultural stereotypes. Educators reported lowering standards for academic work based on their perceptions of a student's motivation or capacity to learn. Incidents referred to offering less feedback on assignments, steering students away from Advanced Placement classes, and excusing sub-par behaviors more often for students of color. The following quotation was representative of the category:

> My second-year teaching, I had a Hispanic student who would like, shut down, right? And I sort of attribute it to like, oh he, you know, his home life is hard or this or, it's not important to his parents, which is totally fine. You know, education isn't valued super highly in his home. (Participant 2)

Adhering to School Discipline Policies. Some participants (4; 27%) reported school district, or state discipline policies hindered their commitment to make disciplinary practices

more equitable. Activities in this category included having to assign suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary actions that disproportionately excluded students of color from school or school activities (e.g., recess) as mandated by school or district policies.

Responses in this category referred to teachers or administrators not having a meaningful role in disciplinary decision making: "The students are getting red-carded which is our version of an office discipline referral, and I wish I had more say in the [disciplinary] process, so that way I could help more students" (Participant 12). One participant described receiving disciplinary files (sent from another school) with limited time and information provided to understand the student's educational needs of history:

> We're given kids and so we usually have a one or two-line referral that says ed code 48-900 A1 assaults, or whatever. We don't know what happened. We don't know if the student was triggered. We don't have any antecedent to the behavior. All we know is what the staff is claiming happened. (Participant 9)

Hindering Categories (Observed Others)

Participants reported a total of 20 CIs. The incidents forming two categories were observed as hindering observed others' commitment to racial equity in school discipline practice.

Lowering Expectations and Stereotyping. Half of the participants (7; 47%) observed others in schools perpetuating racial stereotypes about students and families of color. A participant shared the following description of interactions she observed between educators and students of color in her school:

> I think some teachers don't care and they don't see it as a problem at all… Something that I see from some colleagues is just this, I'm trying to think how to explain this. Um, almost like writing kids [of color] off because of who they are and just like, it's almost like the stereotypical perspective of a kid…and not even like, giving them a chance to like, to get to know the kid or get to know them individually, but almost like lumping them all together. (Participant 6)

Another participant shared the following quotation describing how educators cited reasons for disciplinary infractions perceived as stereotypical for students' racial or ethnic group:

> I have many instances of people [educators] saying like, oh man, it's always the Black kids that are fighting, when in actuality the two people that fought happen to be "gang-related" and then it's a "gang-related" issue they will generalize to the race of the people involved. (Participant 9)

Experiencing Lack of Conviction from Leaders and Peers. Several participants (6; 40%) observed apathy or reluctance from school leaders and colleagues to support changes or updates to existing disciplinary practices or policies. For example, one participant experienced ambivalence from district administrators that impeded her efforts to address racial equity in her school:

> Inconsistent district commitment hindered other folks from not having culturally responsive materials because what I found from my own equity team is they no longer wanted to plan training anymore because they didn't have any materials and they were tired of having to basically create a two-hour lesson plan each month. (Participant 9)

Wishlist Items (Self)

A total of 26 incidents emerged to form five wishlist items. Wishlist items are experiences or information participants would have liked to have had sooner to increase their commitment. Three wishlist items corresponded directly with helping categories: Acknowledging Racial Biases, Discussing Race and Discipline with Peers, and Normalizing Discomfort Addressing Race.

Training on Culturally Responsive Practices. A total of 5 (33%) of participants desired culturally responsive strategies and resources to support the learning needs of racially or ethnically diverse students (e.g., books, videos, tools, lesson plans). Wishlist items included learning sooner about the cultures and life experiences of students and families attending educators' schools. The following quotation was a representative wishlist item:

> If I had known what our Cambodian families had done to get away from Cambodia and the killing fields and…what our Latinx families were feeling leaving from Central America, South America, and Mexico, and, just more of that human, social justice piece. Like, what are peoples' real experiences? (Participant 10)

Experiencing Racially Diverse Students and Communities. A total of 4 (27%) of participants wished they could have resided or worked more in racially diverse schools or communities. Wishlist items included wanting to be exposed sooner to the perspectives of persons of color experiencing racism or discrimination and learning about racial counter-narratives (e.g., examples challenging common racial stereotypes). The following is a representative wishlist item from this category:

> I've got three African American women who in all separate times during the course of my careers with them have talked about having to have "The Talk" with their Black boys about what to do when the police stop you. When you start seeing a repeated experience, when you start seeing, you know, these stories told separately that are repeated, that are the same stories, it kind of gives you a sense of scale. That gives you an idea that systemically something is wrong, that systemically we need to be doing something different. When you have an example it gives you information, but it doesn't give you the same sense of urgency that multiples do." (Participant 3)

Wishlist Items (Observed Others). Participants reported a total of 17 incidents forming three wishlist categories. Wishlist items were experiences or information participants related that could have enhanced the commitment of observed others sooner.

Accessing Equity Mentors and Exemplars. A total of 6 (40%) participants wished other educators could have had exposure to equity mentors and demonstrations (e.g., classrooms) sooner to increase their commitment. As Participant 11 reported, "I'm trying to find mentors, culturally specific programming, anything I can get, you know, role models who look like my students in the school." Participant 3 expressed a desire for his colleagues to have had, "readily available models or examples, to see, prior to things getting significantly disproportionate."

Experiencing Conviction from Leaders and Peers. A few participants (4; 27%) wished for leaders and colleagues who could have prioritized racial equity by taking observable actions (e.g., presenting data during staff meetings, seeking internal/external funding for programs, enacting equity-focused policies, or initiatives). Items also referred to wishing for school leaders to align and integrate equity into district-wide initiatives, rather than addressing racial disproportionality as a separate issue. Participant 14 observed, "our district had a lot of other initiatives going on simultaneously, so often the time that you wanted for [equity-focused work] would get replaced by some new initiative." The following incident was representative of the category:

> I think some of that falls back on leadership and whether leadership is truly prioritizing this [equity] work or not. But some of it also is the reality of our schools right now and the time for professional development. I guess even acceptance by society [location redacted] of the fact that teachers need professional development and deserve time to learn more to do a better job (Participant 5).

Discussion

A qualitative approach was used to generate 22 representative categories (14 Helping, 4 Hindering, 4 Wishlist Items) to describe variables educators viewed as shaping their commitment to racial equity in school discipline practice. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 individuals who reported a shift from being non-committal or ambivalent toward racial equity to more committed. This exploratory study sought to understand what type of experiences influenced the commitment of educators themselves, as well as, observed others (e.g., their school colleagues) toward addressing racial equity in school disciplinary practice.

This project added to emerging research on school consultation by helping to describe potential approaches and variables perceived by educators to enhance their willingness to adopt equity-focused school practices. The study's unique contribution to existing literature in this area

was to explore and compare the pivotal events that contributed to the formation of personal and perceived others' commitment formation toward addressing racial equity in schools.

Helping and Hindering Categories

There were approximately twice as many helping CIs (n = 101) as hindering CIs (n = 66) reported by participants. This finding was consistent with prior ECIT studies conducted in school settings (Charlton et al., 2018; McIntosh, Kelm, & Canizal Delabra, 2016). It is likely educators eligible for this study were more knowledgeable and capable of recalling experiences that helped rather than hindered their commitment to racial equity because the outcome for them was higher levels of commitment.

Personal Commitment Formation

Participants characterized personal commitment formation as an effortful and incremental process as they gained insights into the effects and costs of racism, prejudice, or White Privilege within their schools and society. This finding aligns with Devine and colleagues' (2012) theory that motivation requires increased awareness of personal biases and elevated concern about the consequences of discriminating against others. Based on this theory, educators' commitment could have been strengthened through repeated exposure to incidents that help them perceive their actions towards students of color as preferential or discriminatory. It appeared that one-time exposure was insufficient to shift educators' awareness or concern. Instead, commitment increased through a combination of incidents, such as, listening to personal experiences shared by persons of color, viewing persistent patterns in discipline data, or by taking part in events in their communities (e.g., rallies, church service) where racial justice was the focus. Self-reflection also arose as a common process described by participants as contributing to commitment formation. Introspective activities, such as, reading academic articles on race, writing racial or

cultural autobiographies, and learning directly from the lived experiences of persons of color were viewed as influential activities.

Observed Others' Commitment Formation

Two types of experiences emerged to describe what increased the commitment of observed others to address racial equity in school discipline practice. The first set of experiences were summarized by the categories: Sharing Equity Focused School Practices, Providing a Voice to Students and Families, and Normalizing Discomfort in Addressing Race. These categories referred to the provision of supports, resources, or training activities viewed as benefitting other educators' commitment. The second set of experiences were encompassed by the categories, Getting Cited for Disproportionality, Confronting Prejudicial Beliefs, Disaggregating School Data by Race and Ethnicity. These categories described events or experiences in which educators were held accountable (e.g., fines, lawsuit, data review) or held others accountable (e.g., confronting others for actions perceived as prejudicial or discriminatory toward persons of color).

In general, the activities which emerged as helping observed others' commitment were characterized as collaborative, interactive, and experiential. This finding lends support to Guskey's theory (2002) of teacher change, suggesting educators' attitudes and beliefs toward racial equity were influenced by having opportunities to experience equity-focused strategies through practice as opposed to only talking about them in theory. Other educators' commitment to equity was enhanced by their participation in activities such as implementing culturally responsive practices, interpreting disaggregated data, and gathering feedback from parents and students of color in schools. In short, educators became more committed to racial equity through ongoing practice.

A second theme that emerged as helping observed others' commitment was encompassed by the categories Disaggregating School Data by Race and Ethnicity, Confronting Prejudicial Beliefs, and Getting Cited for Disproportionality. Though it was surprising that incidents that could evoke defensiveness or avoidance were viewed as helpful, research on motivational change has indicated helping individuals explore their ambivalence toward changing behaviors can help modify behaviors or habits (Miller & Rollnick, 2012). A counseling approach called Motivational Interviewing has been shown in school settings to help educators explore and resolve their reluctance to adopt evidence-based school practices (Lee, Frey, Herman, & Reinke, 2014; Pas, Larson, Reinke, Herman, & Bradshaw, 2016). Based on this research, it is possible incidents described in the findings as challenging educators' beliefs or perceptions about the fairness of school or individual disciplinary decisions (e.g., Getting Cited for Disproportionality, Viewing Disaggregated Discipline Data by Race and Ethnicity) may lead to bolstering personal motivation to examine equity in disciplinary practices. For example, one administrator described an incident in which she asked her staff to reflect on how a school's mission (e.g., inclusive, equitable) was consistent with how adults assigned disciplinary consequences to students. This activity was viewed by her as helping staff to examine how their values or beliefs as educators aligned with school disciplinary practices.

It was interesting to learn how educators' responses illustrated a need to balance support with accountability—or their combination when considering what approaches increased other educators' commitment to equity. Based on the findings, it appears consultants may need to be prepared to tailor their approach based on the readiness, motivation, and capacity of school leaders and educators to focus on racial equity in their roles in schools.

Limitations

The Enhanced Critical Incident Technique was used in this study to explore what incidents most shaped educators' commitment to racial equity in school discipline practice. The study was not designed to produce generalizable results beyond the 15 participants interviewed. Use of a purposeful sampling procedure (i.e., selecting informants from a known pool) enabled the recruitment of information-rich participants, knowledgeable about the topic of interest (Patton, 2002). Unlike probabilistic sampling procedures, purposeful sampling did not allow for control of potential sources of known or unknown biases (Palinkas et al., 2015). For example, three of the participants interviewed for the study had received training on the topic of school discipline and racial equity from the second author. Including these individuals in the study may have increased the likelihood of social desirability bias in responses (i.e., wanting to appear more committed after receiving training delivered by the second author). ECIT includes nine credibility checks (e.g., external review of incident and category formation) to increase the validity of the findings generated from participants.

A majority of the participants (n = 12) had no prior relationship with the authors. After weighing concerns about social desirability (due to three participants' relationship with the second author), we decided to include these participants in the study because they were viewed as informants who could provide important insights for an exploratory study. Additionally, all of the interviews were conducted by the first author, who had no prior relationship with the three participants.

The data collected for this study relied on retrospective recall of events or incidents that occurred in the past. Retrospective recall is subject to bias and cannot be tested for reliability or validity. The data, or incidents collected for the study, represent participants' recollection of events that may not accurately depict what occurred recently or decades ago. Further replication

of the study's findings (i.e., formed categories) needs to be replicated on a larger and more diverse sample to determine to what extent the findings are representative of a broader pool of educators.

Lastly, the study's eligibility criterion may explain why participants described approximately twice as many helping CIs as hindering CIs. Future studies should seek to address this limitation by allowing for a wider range of perspectives to develop a more robust and refined understanding of how commitment to racial equity forms. For example, including educators who describe their disciplinary approach as "color-blind" toward students of different races and ethnicities or including from more racial or ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Implications

As new approaches emerge to address discipline disproportionality, it is imperative to draw on the insights of educators needed to implement and scale-up interventions showing promise. For this study, we identified educators who had self-reported a positive shift in their commitment toward racial equity in school discipline practice. The data gathered from this study provides preliminary guidance for school consultants seeking to initiate or sustain equity-focused consultation with a consultee. The final categories point toward three areas for enhancing educators' commitment to racial equity in practice.

Re-framing How School Discipline Data is Shared and Contextualized

Participants' responses suggested the importance of sharing disaggregated data as a mechanism to raise educators' awareness and concern, particular related to the treatment of students of color. This finding aligns with components of emerging frameworks and federal guidance promoting the use of data-based inquiry (regularly reviewing and sharing disaggregated discipline reports) to identify and address patterns of discipline disproportionality (Gregory,

Skiba, & Mediratta, 2017; McIntosh, Ellwood, et al., 2018; Triplett et al., 2016). The findings also support the idea that reviewing school data may help educators examine school processes shaping adult interactions with students that could be contributing to disproportionate patterns (Carter et al., 2017)

Consultants may find framing school discipline data in a broader societal context could help consultees explore the cultural aspects of student behaviors and adults' responses to unwanted behaviors (Emdin, 2016). Several educators described having emotional reactions to viewing data showing discipline disparities. Furthermore, educators valued experiences or others (e.g., coaches, trainers) who helped them normalize and explore their responses to viewing inequitable patterns in school data or hearing stories from students or parents of color that called attention to discriminatory school practices or policies. Similarly, Carter et al (2017) discussed a need for consultants and school leaders to be able to facilitate discussions to address deficit thinking, racial stereotypes, or strong emotions that could derail commitment formation. Though no common approach to sharing disaggregated data emerged as influential across the incidents reported, it may be inferred that educators' commitment resulted more from a combination of variables (e.g., Learning About Racial Discrimination in Society, Providing a Voice to Students and Families) as well as supports offered by coaches or trainers capable of helping educators overcome ambivalence or reluctance toward address racial inequity in their schools.

Integrating Educators' Personal Experiences with Race and Ethnicity

More than half of the incidents reported across helping categories occurred outside of school settings. Categories such as Learning About Racial Discrimination in Society, Discussing Race and Discipline with Peers and Examining White Privilege and Identity referred to experiences that occurred in educators' homes, churches, or on social media platforms. Singleton

(2015) has advocated for starting with educators' personal experiences with racial equity, "examining the impact of race in our lives serves as a precursor to examining the impact of race in the larger context of a school" (p. 88). These findings suggest school consultants should consider how to elicit the insights educators are gaining from personal experiences with race and equity from attending public rallies, listening to popular music, or talking with persons of color to enhance the use of equity-focused practices in schools. Consultants may find modeling their own experiences learning about race and equity could also help consultees further engage in applying equity-based work to themselves. For example, a consultant's use of self-disclosure (e.g., acknowledging the influence of racial bias on their own decisions by sharing examples) may be a viable strategy for helping to increase consultees' commitment by normalizing shame that can emerge when sharing about personal short-comings or blindspots.

Balancing Use of Discrete and School-wide Approaches

The hindering categories described how dimensions of school environments: norms, policies, and leadership practices could impede educators' commitment. It is less likely these hindrances can be addressed without longer-term organizational or cultural shifts occurring in a school or district. Although systemic changes may be needed, in the near term, consultants may consider equipping educators with practical strategies that are easier to implement in their roles in schools. Strategies such as greeting students at the door by name (Cook et al., 2018), learning to deliver more effective instructional feedback (Wise Feedback; Yeager et al., 2014), and use of restorative chats (Nese et al., 2020). It may be offering discrete strategies could help to engage more educators in equity-focused work initially to support longer-term, systemic change.

In some cases, equity-focused school approaches have been viewed by educators as overly complex, time-consuming, or not aligned with their existing disciplinary philosophy

(Bastable, McIntosh, & Meng, 2019; Gregory & Evans, 2020). Therefore, consultants may also need to consider how to align equitable practices or policies within an existing classroom or school-wide approach. For example, embedding equity-focused practices into a school-wide system (e.g., PBIS) rather than introducing a separate program or approach (Augustine et al., 2018; McIntosh et al., 2021).

Conclusion

There is much more to learn about what leads educators to prioritize racial equity in school discipline practice. The findings from this study raised useful questions about how to effectively share disaggregated data without reinforcing racial stereotypes, how to balance support with accountability, and how to address organizational or cultural hindrances to increasing equity experienced in many schools and districts (e.g., discipline policies, visibility of leadership). Further research is needed to examine these questions in school practice and their implications for consultation.

A surprising finding from this study was that incidents described as effortful or uncomfortable (e.g., confronting racial slurs, viewing disparities in school discipline data, responding to mandates to address discipline disproportionality) were viewed as increasing observed others' commitment. This may suggest consultants need to assess and explore consultees' ambivalence toward addressing racial equity in their workplace. It was also useful to discover educators interviewed for this study were just as likely to learn about racial bias, White Privilege, or systemic racism in their neighborhoods or communities, as they were in their schools. It is possible exploring educators' experiences in their homes and communities concerning race may be a fertile source for consultation. Lastly, the findings showed that personal commitment formation was often helped through self-reflective or introspective

activities that occurred over time. This suggests that consultants may need to weigh the perceived advantages and try out various consultative approaches such as self-reflection, experiential learning, and data-based inquiry to determine which supports most influence consultees' commitment.

This qualitative study allowed for a preliminary but rich exploration of a complex psychological process. Namely, describing how reluctant or ambivalent educators became more committed to address racial equity in school discipline practice. The 22 categories that emerged can offer guidance for consultants, educators, or school leaders seeking to improve racial equity in a school or district. Additional research is needed to understand how to integrate and operationalize aspects of the final categories into usable school-wide or classroom approaches that will be viewed as acceptable, feasible, and effective strategies. As consultation practice evolves to support educators to improve racial equity in school disciplinary practice, this study may help to inform approaches applied in schools today.

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Table 1.

Participants by Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Role in Education, and Years of Education and Experience

Participant	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Role in Education	Years of Experience
1	F	White	Professor of Special Education	15
2	F	White	School administrator	11
3	M	White	Technical assistance provider	21
4	F	White	School administrator	18
5	F	White	Technical assistance provider	14
6	F	White	High school teacher	17
7	M	White	Special education administrator	9
8	F	African American	Speech and language pathologist	28
9	M	White	School administrator	13
10	F	White	High school teacher	11
11	F	White	District administrator	27
12	F	White	Elementary school teacher	5
13	M	Latinx	School administrator	14
14	F	White	District administrator	10
15	F	White	Technical Assistance Provider	3

Table 2.

Number of Incidents and Total Percentage of Participants for Helping Categories, Hindering Categories and Wishlist Items

Incident type	Categories	Number of Incidents (% total respondents)
Helping Self	Disaggregating School Data by Race and Ethnicity (Helping Others)	12(67%)
	Learning About Racial Discrimination in Society	12(53%)
	Witnessing Racial Prejudice in Schools	11(47%)
	Discussing Race and Discipline with Peers (Wishlist Self)	7(40%)
	Acknowledging Racial Biases (Wishlist Self)	5(33%)
	Examining White Privilege and Identity	6(27%)
	Implementing PBIS as a Foundation for Equity	5(27%)
	Learning from Trusted Peer(s)	5(27%)
Helping Others	Sharing Equity Focused School Practices	12(47%)
	Disaggregating School Data by Race and Ethnicity (Helping Others)	7(47%)
	Providing a Voice to Students and Families	5(33%)
	Normalizing Discomfort in Addressing Race (Wishlist Self)	5(27%)
	Getting Cited for Disproportionality	5(27%)
	Confronting Prejudicial Beliefs	4(27%)
Hindering Self	Avoiding Discussing Race	14(67%)
	Experiencing Lack of Conviction from Leaders and Peers (Hindering Others)	10(47%)
	Imposing Cultural Norms	10(40%)
	Lowering Expectations and Stereotyping (Hindering Others)	7(27%)
	Adhering to School Discipline Policies	5(27%)
Hindering Others	Lowering Expectations and Stereotyping (Hindering Self)	12(47%)
	Experiencing Lack of Conviction from Leaders and Peers (Hindering Self, Wishlist Others)	8(40%)
Wishlist Self	Experiencing Racially Diverse Students and Communities	7(33%)
	Training on Culturally Responsive Practices (Wishlist Others)	6(33%)
	Normalizing Discomfort in Addressing Race (Helping Others)	5(27%)
	Acknowledging Racial Biases (Helping Self)	4(27%)
	Discussing Race and Discipline with Peers (Helping Self)	4(27%)
Wishlist Others	Accessing Equity Mentors and Exemplars	6(40%)
	Experiencing Conviction from Leaders and Peers	6(27%)
	Training on Culturally Responsive Practices (Wishlist Self)	5(27%)

Note: PBIS = positive behavioral interventions and supports.