

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL LEADERS' VIEWS ON PRESCHOOL  
DISCIPLINE USING Q-METHODOLOGY**

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of  
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Doctor of Education  
In  
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by

**Samyalisa Anne Enright**

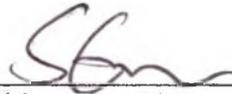
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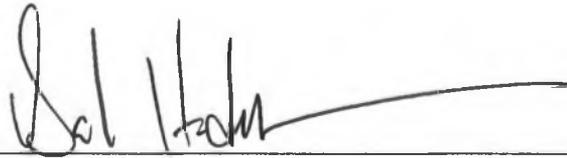
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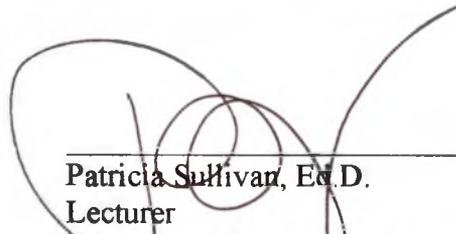
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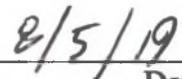
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DISCIPLINE USING Q-METHODOLOGY

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Early childhood educational (ECE) leaders are faced with real and persistent challenges around the equity and inclusiveness of preschool disciplinary practices. During early development, the implications of decisions to include or exclude early learners from preschool are compounded by how disciplinary practices can interrupt or reinforce racialized biases. More understanding is needed about the beliefs, attitudes, and dynamics that lead to preschool expulsion in the first place. This study examined how ECE leaders view preschool discipline and address it in their programs by using a mixed-methods approach, combining Q-methodology, interview data, and document analysis. Participants included 25 ECE leaders of private and publicly funded programs from six counties and 10 cities or towns in northern California. Q-methodology uses a Q-sort, or forced rank method, to measure views on a particular subject, in this case preschool discipline approaches. A novel instrument on ECE leaders views on preschool discipline was constructed based on the literature on discipline practices in this study. The literature was organized according to whether disciplinary approaches placed the onus of responsibility on the child and their parents, or on preschool staff; and whether approaches emphasized individual development or the preschool environment and safety. Data analysis yielded three viewpoints on preschool discipline: *Self-reflective, Engaging, and Accountable*; *Exclusionary, Behaviors go Back to the Home*; and *Relational, Individualized, and Trauma-Informed*. Implications for this study included recommendations for educational leadership, equity, policy, methodology, and future research.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this dissertation.

  
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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Early childhood educational (ECE) leaders are faced with real and persistent challenges around the equity and inclusiveness of preschool disciplinary practices. Educational leaders' attitudes are pivotal in decisions related to discipline, such as whether to expel a student or not (Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya, & Hughes, 2014). Educational leaders also have influence over what school-level supports, training, or mentoring to provide around school discipline practices (Zinsser, Denham, Curby & Chazan-Cohen, 2016). Educational leaders' views on discipline impact the choices they make in practice. Views that range from pro-exclusion (e.g. some students need to be removed from school to keep other children safe) to anti-exclusion (e.g. all students can stay and succeed in school given the right supports) influence the extent to which expulsion and suspension are chosen (Skiba, Edl & Rausch, 2007).

School discipline has long been a complex problem of practice for educators. Despite years of evidence about negative outcomes, norms of disciplinary practices and policies in schools and classrooms have remained persistently exclusionary (Skiba, Arredondo & Williams, 2014). Exclusionary discipline is a school related punishment or consequence which causes a student to lose classroom instructional time. Lower rates of educational attainment are linked to exclusionary discipline policies and practices in schools, especially for a disproportionate number of students of color (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010).

Adverse outcomes of out-of-school suspension and expulsion include reduced access to instructional time, up to ten times the likelihood to drop out of school, and increased incarceration rates (Lamont, Devore, Allison, Ancona, Barnett, Gunther, et al., 2013; Skiba, Arredondo, et al., 2014). A student who drops out of high school is five to eight times more likely to become incarcerated than to become a college student (McKinsey & Company, 2009).

Early childhood settings have particular equity challenges with suspension and expulsion. Research has shown prekindergarten and child care center expulsion rates to be three- and thirteen-times higher than in K -12, respectively (Gilliam, 2005, 2016; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). The leading expert and educational researcher on preschool expulsion, Gilliam wrote, “Based on estimated rates of expulsion and recent census data on the numbers of young children enrolled in various types of early care and education settings (Laughlin, 2013), the annual number of preschool expulsions across the nation may well exceed 300,000.” (Gilliam, 2016, p. 4).

Early childhood education plays a critical role in social equity conversations because the imperatives of this developmental period include the social and cognitive foundations of students’ relationships to schooling, peers, teachers, and themselves (Flores-Lázaro, Castillo-Preciado & Jiménez-Miramonte, 2014; Sastre-Riba, Fonseca-Pedrero, & Poch-Olivé, 2015). Thus, in this critical window of human development, the ramifications of exclusionary discipline cannot be overstated.

The neural architecture of the brain is shaped during early childhood and is foundational to lifelong trajectories of learning, behavior, and health. Therefore, as stated by the authors of the World Health Organization's Commission on early child development, "what children experience during the early years sets a critical foundation for their entire life-course." (Irwin, Siddiqi, & Hertzman, 2007). Likewise, the disciplinary encounters students experience during the early years are wired into their neurology and social emotional development. In this critical stage of development, the consequences of students losing access to high quality preschool learning experiences due to exclusionary discipline are heightened (Gilliam, 2016). It follows that the views and attitudes ECE leaders hold and enact through policies and practices related to discipline can have lifelong impacts on students.

The impacts of discipline on early learners during this imperative developmental window are further compounded by racialized disproportionalities in disciplinary outcomes. Gilliam (2016) emphasized the disproportionality within exclusionary practices in preschools, noting that the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights had found Black preschoolers were 3.6 times more likely to be suspended than White preschoolers (ED, 2016). African American boys are the most likely to lose access to preschools and class time due to repeated suspension and expulsion (Gilliam 2005; Gilliam 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2014, 2016). Disproportionate apportioning of preschool expulsions and suspensions have serious and persistent repercussions for students, families, and society. Being punished more often and more severely than their

peers also exposes these preschoolers to an effect of discrimination known as race-based stress (Levy, Heissel, Richeson & Adam, 2016).

Researchers have concluded that race-based stress is a contributing factor to inequities in education outcomes between students of color and White students (Levy, et al., 2016). Stress responses to race-based stress, such as stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) and discrimination, increase the load of stress hormones that are known to impair student academic and social learning. Therefore, during the years spanned by the ECE period, teachers' and administrators' views and choices around discipline practices can seriously impact students' physiological, psychological, and behavioral wellness and early development.

### **ECE Licensing and Policy Regarding Discipline**

A basic level of child safety and rights is guaranteed to all students by licensing regulations. All preschools in California are legally bound to adhere to Title 22 Community Care Licensing regulations. These regulations pertain to: teacher-child ratio, staff qualifications, discipline, transportation, food service, health-related, emergency preparedness, parent transparency, teacher background checks/safety training, napping requirements, other (e.g. variety of daily activities), buildings and grounds, outdoor activity space, indoor activity space, storage space, fixtures/furniture/equipment, financial audit schedule, and physical evaluation scale. Essentially, they outline the minimum threshold for physical safety and access to learning opportunities.

Programs that receive state funding additionally fall under Title 5 regulations. The Title 5 regulations include all of the Title 22 regulations and go further with another layer of operational and procedural quality standards for each section of requirements. Table 1 compares how discipline is regulated by Title 22 and Title 5.

Table 1. *Comparison of Title 22 and Title 5 Regulations on Discipline*

	<b>Title 22</b>	<b>Title 5/Education Code/ECERS</b>
<b>Discipline</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discipline must be free of corporal punishment, pain, humiliation, or intimidation <i>22 CCR 101216.3</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discipline must not be physical or severe</li> <li>Program must be designed to avoid conflict and promote positive interactions</li> <li>Staff must react consistently to children's behavior, have appropriate expectations for age level, and usually maintain control <i>EC 49001, ECERS</i></li> </ul>

*Note:* Adapted from *State Preschool Facilities Reference Guide Requirements & Regulations*, by the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network. Retrieved from <http://rrnetwork.org> on 7/29/19.

Assembly Bill 752 goes even further to define the California State Preschool Program's (CSSP) approach to addressing discipline for persistent challenging behavior by setting specific parameters around the process of expulsion. The background and purpose of this policy will be described in the following paragraphs.

Increasing recognition of inequities in ECE discipline over the past several years have begun to be addressed on a systemic level. A rare policy statement prompted by high numbers of preschool suspensions and expulsions was made when in 2014, the U.S. Department of Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education together called for the elimination of preschool suspensions and expulsions (Gilliam, 2016). The stated aims

of the “Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension in Early Childhood Settings” were to:

- Raise awareness about expulsion, suspension, and other exclusionary discipline practices in early childhood settings, including issues of racial/national origin/ethnic and sex disparities and negative outcomes for children associated with expulsion and suspension in the early years;
- Provide recommendations to early childhood programs and States on establishing preventive, disciplinary, suspension, and expulsion policies and administering those policies free of bias and discrimination;
- Provide recommendations on setting goals and using data to monitor progress in preventing, severely limiting, and ultimately eliminating expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings;
- Highlight early childhood workforce competencies and evidence-based interventions and approaches that prevent expulsion, suspension, and other exclusionary discipline practices, including early childhood mental health consultation and positive behavior intervention and support strategies;
- Identify free resources to support States, programs, teachers, and providers in addressing children’s social-emotional and behavioral health, strengthening family-program relationships, increasing developmental and behavioral screening and follow-up, and eliminating racial/ national origin/ethnic, sex, or disability biases and discrimination in early learning settings; and
- Identify free resources to support families in fostering young children’s development, social-emotional and behavioral health, and relationships. (HHS & DoED, 2014).

Essentially, this policy was intended to raise awareness about issues with exclusionary discipline in preschool settings, to set parameters around disciplinary protocols preceding consideration of expulsion, and identifying free resources preschools have access to for supporting children and preventing expulsion. Around the same time, a report from the National Bureau of Economic Research reiterated the potential long-term impacts of having access to early childhood education. The report emphasized how early foundations of socioemotional and academic development established during early

childhood have lasting school and life-cycle impacts (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2016).

In response to the emerging data and governmental response to exclusionary discipline in ECE settings, in October 2017 California passed Assembly Bill 752 (AB 752) which went into effect on January 1, 2018. This bill attempts to greatly reduce preschool expulsions by creating legal protections against expulsion or disenrollment from any California State Preschool Program (CSPP) site. In 2008, the CSPP was created by California Assembly Bill 2759 to fund preschool services for eligible 3- and 4-year olds and is administered through local educational agencies, private nonprofit agencies, colleges, and community-action agencies (California Department of Education).

Assembly Bill 752 was written to address high expulsion rates by banning expulsion due exclusively to challenging behaviors in CSPP sites. The essence of AB 752, as written into law, reads:

This bill would prohibit a contracting agency from expelling or unenrolling a child from a state preschool program because of a child's behavior unless the contracting agency has expeditiously pursued and documented reasonable steps to maintain the child's safe participation in the program and determines, in consultation with specified parties, that the child's continued enrollment would present a continued serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children, and has referred the parents or legal guardians to other potentially appropriate placements, the local child care resource and referral agency, or any other referral service available in the local community (AB 752, 2017).

Assembly Bill 752 recognizes that expulsion is a major equity issue and that it is generally over-utilized.

However, attempting to restrict expulsion does not directly address the underlying attitudes, beliefs, and practices that drive the continued reliance on exclusionary discipline. The established record of detrimental outcomes from exclusionary school discipline is at odds with its continued utilization. While AB 752 puts a process in place aimed at reducing preschool expulsion, it does not directly address or resolve the role of educators' attitudes and views inherent to their approaches and choices related to student discipline.

Preschool leaders' views on discipline approaches are important because they ultimately impact who is suspended or expelled, and whether or not supports (e.g., training, coaching, social-emotional supports for students and teachers) are in place to prevent such occurrences. How early childhood educators view and approach discipline needs investigation due to the far-reaching implications of disciplinary actions on the part of educators and the paucity of research on ECE leaders' views on this subject.

The majority of the research on school discipline is from the K-12 arena, but is relevant to preschool in major ways, such as the importance of student-teacher relationships, leaders' views on discipline, and the risks of individual bias impacting equitable discipline decisions. However, preschool is a different context, and so the conclusions derived from the K-12 literature may not fully pertain to preschool settings.

Not only are the institutional dynamics different, but so are the stakes of access to quality education for students in the early years (Gilliam, 2106; HHS & ED, 2014; OCR, 2014). There is greater emphasis on socio-emotional maturation in the preschool years.

The period of development represented by the preschool years is recognized as a highly critical stage of socio-emotional and cognitive growth, during which relationships and learning opportunities deeply and profoundly define brain development (McCain & Mustard, 1999; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007).

The proposed study seeks to understand the views of Early Childhood Educational leaders on general preschool disciplinary approaches and specific approaches aimed at increasing equity and reducing exclusion in student discipline. The research questions are, what are Early Childhood Educational leaders' views and attitudes toward approaches to preschool discipline? And, what approaches do ECE leaders utilize to reduce and prevent preschool expulsion and increase equitable outcomes? A mixed-method design will be employed and combine Q-methodology, interview data, and document analysis to answer these questions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

*It is one kind of problem to have a behavioral range different from social expectations; it is another kind of problem to be in a culture in which that difference is used by others for degradation. The second problem is by far the worse.*

-McDermott & Varenne, 1995

The messages sent by disciplinary practices influence whether early learners feel seen and accepted, or invisible, targeted, and rejected at school, and they have major implications on emotional, cognitive, and social early learning. This messaging reflects how the disciplinary environment is constructed, whether it be more inclusive and relationship-based, or exclusionary and punitive.

### **Foucauldian View on Disciplinary Power**

According to the theoretical tradition of Michel Foucault, disciplinary power is established and enforced by way of power relationships (i.e., student-teacher), structures (i.e., disciplinary policies), and mechanisms (e.g., office referral, out-of-school suspension, expulsion) (Foucault, 1977). In the school context, teachers and administrators get to decide what behavior is considered normal and acceptable, as well as when and how to punish perceived misbehaviors (Foucault, 1977).

Disciplinary practices and policies in preschools are not neutral but reflect particular societal norms and expectations (Giroux & Penna, 1979) and can be understood as mechanisms of control that exist within a system of power that privileges the behavioral norms and expectations of certain groups (Hemphill & Blakely, 2014). Understood in this way, one can see how school norms and disciplinary policies act as mechanisms by which particular students begin to stand out and be labeled as difficult, disrespectful, or defiant (Foucault, 1977) while others get a pass. Students are pressured to conform to these norms of acceptable behavior and are consequenced for nonconformity through the system of inclusion and exclusion that is school discipline (Foucault, 1977; Hemphill & Blakely, 2014).

While a Foucauldian framework helps to make sense of schools as institutions in which structures of power are normalized and reinforced, it does not account for the racially disproportionate enforcement and application of disciplinary power mechanisms. In increasingly diverse school environments (Allen & White-Smith 2015; Ball & Tyson,

2011), the problem of using school discipline to enforce Euro-normative and socially constructed definitions of appropriate and unacceptable behavior is exacerbated.

### **Critical Race Theory on Systemic Racism**

In order to understand the disproportionality of disciplinary rates that run along racial lines, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is best employed (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theory is a critical framework that centers race and racism as social factors around which social systems, including law and education, are organized (Bell, 1973; Solorzano, 1997). The CRT lens also aligns with the background history of AB 752, which included the following language about the need for this bill (in the version initially introduced to the California Assembly on Human Services):

Pre-K expulsion disproportionately affects children of color. Recent studies show that African American children are twice as likely to be expelled as Latino and White children, and five times more likely to be expelled than their Asian American peers. The disparity is severe for African American four-year-old boys. This demographic is more likely to be ‘pushed out’ of Pre-K at a time when their need for support is crucial.

Based on this historical context, it can be inferred that without explicit recognition by ECE leaders of race equity goals, racialized patterns of inequity in school discipline outcomes are more likely to continue.

In a society with persistent racialized inequities, educators who claim they “don’t see race” run the risk of reinforcing racialized stereotypes (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Boutte, 2008; Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011; Castro-Atwater, 2016; Farago, Sanders & Gaias, 2015; MacNaughton & Davis, 2009; Watson, 2017).

Considering the centrality of racism in social systems in the U.S., a core problem of

practice for early childhood educational leaders is a systemically biased and racist system of disciplinary power. Through the combined lenses of Foucauldian theory and CRT, it becomes clear that the problem is not that certain children are less educable than their peers, but that they are being monitored, judged, and consequence by a system that was founded upon and continues to operate within a racist discourse. As such, it is essential to understand ECE leaders' views not only on discipline, but also their views on race equity, and to increase understanding in the field of approaches to improve rates of inclusion and equity in preschool disciplinary practices.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*Discipline* is a word with widely varied connotations. The modern-day meanings of discipline evolved out of the Latin root words *discipulus*, which meant *pupil*, and *disciplina*, or *teaching*. The common roots both refer to education, and are used to describe a field of study, the act of having self-control, as well as a range of behaviors referring to disciplining children in home and school settings. In the context of schools and student behavior, discipline is often associated with punishment, both in its common usage and in various dictionary definitions. Definitions include “control gained by enforcing obedience or order”, “orderly or prescribed conduct or pattern of behavior”, and “training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character” (Merriam-Webster, 2018). For the purpose of this study, the meaning of discipline was used in a neutral way, recognizing the original root meanings, yet embracing the various contexts for the word. The use of the word discipline here was based more on practices

and perspectives of educators about approaches to student discipline and institutional approaches to preventing and reducing exclusionary discipline outcomes.

Early childhood education (ECE) includes ages from birth through eight according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and this definition was adopted for the purposes of this study. This research concentrated on leaders of sites who serve students in the 3- to 5-year age range. The identified age range for this study signifies a developmental period when student autonomy, social and cognitive functioning (Prencipe, Kesek, Cohen, Lamm, Lewis & Zelazo, 2011), and behavioral problems increase (Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, Merikangas & Walters, 2005), therefore increasing the likelihood of suspension and expulsion.

For the purpose of this study the word leader refers to having a professional role in ECE that entails oversight of discipline practices, policy, and training in a preschool or TK program. Leader also refers to being in a position of influence over decisions related to efforts to engage a process to avoid expulsion, and ultimately whether to expel or not.

### **Researcher Positionality**

In this section I will break from the usual tone of formal academic writing using the third-person, and share from a first-person perspective.

#### **Why me? Why this study?**

Since I was a preschool age child, I've been interested in learning everything I could about how to avoid the preventable shortcomings of my upbringing and how to interrupt any potentially destructive or harmful intergenerational belief patterns before

having children of my own (which I have still yet to do). Over the years I deepened my knowledge and commitment to healing and preventing trauma using holistic approaches. Thanks to happenstance, I ended up in a Master's in Education at SF State and my deep indignation about the mistreatment of children dovetailed with a new vocabulary, by way of Paulo Freire's (1968) social justice orientation, and Foucault's (1977) writings on discourse and power. With that as my background, I arrived in my doctoral program hoping to focus on trauma-informed practices in education.

As I dug into the educational literature on disproportionate school discipline, my thinking around trauma-informed approaches expanded in consideration of systematic institutional inclusion and exclusion. I began to ponder how the school system enacted traumatizing practices in the form of exclusionary discipline. I also came to more deeply understand how the school system is part of a racialized system. Pierce (2017), explains how from its inception, the school system played a "central role in realizing the political and social goals of racial capitalist society" (p. 23S) and perpetuated the institutionalized hierarchy of racialized social classes through a caste education framework (Du Bois, 1973/2001).

During this same time, the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States came into office and brought a wave of violent and racist acts of hatred with him. Watching the public unfolding of socially sanctioned racism and hatred, I thought more and more about the role education plays and could play in mis-educating and/or reeducating White people, in

deconstructing the cultural remnants of colonization, and dismantling and rejecting the structures and belief systems that perpetuate White supremacy.

I have wondered, what is my role in this work as a highly educated middle class White woman? I am strongly driven to be an advocate for the health, wellness, and development of all babies and children. But what is my role? As I've grappled with this I've decided that I can contribute to the professional development of White professionals who work with preschool age children. Furthermore, that I have a responsibility to contribute to the dismantling of White supremacy through the vehicle of education as a means of increasing awareness, consciousness, and equity. But a necessary first step is to gain more understanding about what the specific dynamics are behind racially disproportional exclusionary practices in preschool discipline, to be able to identify specifically what types of professional development are needed. At the very least, I can channel my passion for protecting children from harm into an exploration of how harmful practices continue to occur in preschool discipline, and what approaches are being utilized by educational leaders to reduce harm, and increase racial equity.

### **Organization of this Study**

The background context, framework, and significance of this study are outlined in Chapter One. Chapter Two provides a review of relevant literature on school and preschool discipline practices, especially those intended to reduce disproportionality and utilization of suspension and expulsion, and school leaders' views on discipline practices. The research design, population, sample, and instrument development are detailed in

Chapter Three. Findings are discussed in Chapter Four, including interpretation of the statistical analyses, interview data, and the equity orientation of participant responses. Chapter Five highlights major findings, related implications, and subsequent recommendations for further research.

### **Justification and Significance for Study**

Currently a gap exists in the literature about how early childhood educational leaders view preschool disciplinary practices and approaches. This research proposed to contribute to the knowledge of the field by: 1) adding an increased understanding to the literature about the ways ECE leaders view and approach preschool discipline; 2) adding to the literature increased understanding about ways ECE leaders experience the reasons behind expulsion; 3) adding to the literature increased understanding of the ways ECE leaders work to reduce and prevent suspension and expulsion; and, 4) adding to the literature an increased understanding of how ECE leaders consider equity and especially racial equity in their disciplinary approaches.

### **Summary**

Early childhood educational leaders are faced with real and persistent challenges around the equity and inclusiveness of preschool disciplinary practices. During early development, decisions to include or exclude early learners from preschool have added weight and are compounded by how disciplinary practices can interrupt or reinforce racialized biases. As the state government seeks to reduce preschool expulsion and disproportionality, more understanding is needed about the beliefs, attitudes, and

dynamics that lead to preschool expulsion in the first place. This study will examine how ECE leaders view preschool discipline and address it in their programs.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

This literature review consists of a range of topics identified as influential to disciplinary practices and outcomes. Inclusion of research was based on the result of article searches in which the findings added to the discourse on increasing understanding about the dynamics of school discipline and exclusionary discipline outcomes. Literature was also included that focused on ways to reduce use of exclusionary approaches, increase equity in discipline practices, and the role of school leaders in discipline outcomes. Much of the literature in this review is drawn from K-12 research due to the dearth of research seeking to better understand ECE leaders' views, approaches, and dynamics related to suspension and expulsion at the preschool level.

Research on discipline has looked from various angles at factors that influence disciplinary practices and outcomes, including: views and attitudes of principals on discipline; the connection of social emotional supports for students in early childhood to reducing teacher depression and stress; coaching interventions and their connection to lowered expulsion rates. Recent research on discipline is emerging about the efficacy of educators choosing alternative methods to exclusionary discipline, especially in K-12, such as restorative, trauma-informed, and culturally-relevant approaches.

While emerging research emphasizes adult responsibility around disciplinary practices even for students as old as high school, preschool policies often frame student discipline as the outcome of students' behaviors and levels of self-regulation and self-control (Family YMCA of the Desert, 2015; Head Start Parent Handbook, 2016). The

ultimate outcome of any disciplinary process is to support desirable student behaviors and reduce or eliminate undesirable behaviors, yet the onus of responsibility and purpose of particular practices and approaches vary. Some approaches focus mainly on changing student behaviors, while others emphasize the behaviors, practices, and choices demonstrated by educational professionals.

### **School Leaders' Views on Discipline Set the Tone**

School leaders' attitudes about exclusionary discipline impact the extent to which schools suspend and expel students (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Mukuria, 2002). Seeking to better understand major contributors to disproportionate exclusionary discipline rates, Skiba, Chung, et al., (2014) measured types of infractions, student characteristics, and school characteristics in records and demographic data from all public schools in one Midwestern state. The final sample included results from the Department of Education for 730 schools, 43,320 students, and 104,445 suspension and expulsion incidents. They also used the Disciplinary Practices Survey (Skiba, et al., 2007) to measure 1,068 principals' attitudes regarding the purpose, process, and outcomes of school discipline. They found that school-level variables, especially principals' views on discipline and whether they expressed attitudes more or less favorable to school exclusion, appeared to be among the strongest predictors of disproportional rates of school exclusion.

The findings from Skiba, et al., 2014 corroborated an earlier study by Booth, Marchbanks, Carmichael, and Fabelo (2012) who found differences in administrators' discipline strategies and attitudes on discipline to be reasons for disproportional

discipline among student groups. Based on these studies, there is evidence to indicate that school leaders set the tone for what kind of discipline is most acceptable in their schools and classrooms and more generally, that school leadership is fundamental to schoolwide disciplinary outcomes.

### **Leaders' Roles in Providing Access to Schoolwide Supports**

Educational leaders have institutional oversight of disciplinary approaches at preschool sites. Thus, early childhood educational leaders directly and indirectly influence school-wide factors that impact disciplinary outcomes. Early childhood educational leaders can put policies and supports in place to prevent exclusionary methods and monitor for equity, including providing organizational supports for teacher and student wellness, training and coaching, and evaluation activities to assess outcomes with data evidence.

School leaders' systematic supports for a given disciplinary approach have been positively correlated with teachers' implementation in classroom practice (Hansen, 2014; Payne, Gottfredson, D., & Gottfredson, G., 2006). Administrator support is also essential to sustainability of school-wide behavioral supports (Andreou, et al., 2015). Strong administrator involvement in sustaining a school-wide approach to behavioral support was rated by school staff as the most important factor in sustaining the practice (McIntosh, Predy, Upreti, Hume, Turri & Matthews, 2014).

Early educational leaders are pivotal to modeling, encouraging, training, and supporting positive social emotional learning climates for both students and teachers

(Zinsser, Denham, et al., 2016). When teachers have more supports they are less likely to seek expulsion for students. The likelihood of student expulsion relates to teacher mental wellness and how well teachers cope with classroom chaos, classroom management, and providing social emotional supports for their students (Jeon, Hur & Buettner, 2016; Zinsser, Zulauf, Das & Silver, 2019).

Early childhood teachers who reported reliable access to mental health consultants were half as likely to expel students than teachers who were not provided these supports (Gilliam, 2008; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). However, early childhood teachers' access to mental health consultants is the exception, with around one in five reporting regular access (Gilliam, 2005). Similarly, in centers where more supports are provided for children's social emotional development, such as training for teachers, student access to mental health consultants, and curricular support, teachers view the workplace climate more positively and have higher levels of job satisfaction and mental wellness (Zinsser, Christensen & Torres, 2016), which correlate to a lower likelihood of student expulsion.

### **Individual & Classroom ECE Assessments**

Educational leaders can utilize school-wide assessments for equity, accountability and educational purposes. In one such study, educators used student, teacher, and schoolwide assessments to strengthen their awareness and practice of social emotional learning (Stillman, S., Stillman, P., Martinez, Freedman, Jensen & Leet, 2018).

Assessments most commonly used in ECE to assess classroom-level dynamics are the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008)

and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) (Harms & Clifford, 1980).

The CLASS assessment measures interactions between teachers and students and the quality of classroom interaction processes. This instrument is organized into three domains of classroom quality, which are: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Each of the domains are broken down into a number of dimensions, such as Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, and Regard for Student Perspectives, under the Emotional Support domain.

The ECERS-R instrument is used to evaluate the classroom environment overall, as well as program-wide practices, such as parent engagement. The subscales of this 43-item instrument are: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure, and Parents and Staff.

These assessments are valuable tools for teachers and ECE leaders to systematically evaluate research-based practices in ECE classrooms. Their very utilization may indicate a higher level of intentionality of ECE leaders', and thus on their values regarding continuous quality improvement for their programs. However, these instruments are outside the scope of the current study as sources of item measures, because they do not directly measure the views of ECE leaders on preschool discipline.

### **Discipline Tracking Practices**

School leaders can also work with their staff to look at their discipline data and use it to inform policies and practices aimed at increasing equity and student achievement

(Boneshefski & Runge, 2014). To address equity in school discipline outcomes data will require explicit acknowledgment of the significance of race in both policy and practice (Carter, Skiba, Arrendondo & Pollock, 2017). Determining whether equity informed institutional assessments are among ECE leaders' priority approaches to preschool discipline will contribute to knowledge in this area, and was therefore examined in this study.

### **Conceptual Organization of the Literature on Discipline Approaches**

Due to the various definitions, perspectives, and approaches to addressing student discipline, the literature review below has been organized into a conceptual grid with four quadrants (Figure 1). The y-axis of the grid represents a spectrum of disciplinary responsibility, ranging between the onus on students and their families and the onus on educational professionals. The x-axis represents a spectrum that spans between approaches and viewpoints that emphasize individual development on one end, and emphasize school safety and environment on the other end.

Another layer of meaning to the conceptual grid is color coding with red and purple. Words in red signify a result or outcome (whether desirable or not), such as self-regulation and expulsion. The purple words represent services, such as practices and approaches schools use to promote individual development and school safety.

The connections within and between these four quadrants are not linear nor are these approaches mutually exclusive. School discipline is dynamic and complex, and the

<p>Self-regulation</p> <p>Self-control</p> <p>Meditation / mindfulness</p> <p><b>Emphasis on Individual Development</b></p>	<p>Self-discipline</p> <p>Positive behavioral supports</p> <p>Social-emotional supports (i.e. therapy, early intervention, social work)</p> <p><b>Emphasis on School Safety &amp; Environment</b></p>
<p>Family’s responsibility to seek professional help if recommended by preschool</p> <p>Provide child development services thru home visits</p> <p>Program will not withdraw services from a child with persistent aggressive behaviors</p> <p>Critical self-reflection</p>	<p>Humanizing; Relationship-based approaches</p> <p>Co-regulation</p> <p>Increase teacher empathy and attention to deeper reasons for behaviors</p> <p>Recognition of the personal, cultural, and linguistic identities of students</p> <p>Individual data collected to learn the motivation of behavior(s)</p> <p><b>Onus on Students &amp; Families</b></p> <p><b>Onus on Education Professionals</b></p>
<p>Children independently make appropriate choices</p> <p>Positive social skills</p> <p>Incident report</p>	<p>When a child endangers safety for others = Expulsion</p> <p>Suspension</p> <p>Safety of all children is the highest priority for the discipline policy</p>
<p>Teachers set example of respectful behavior</p> <p>Self-regulation of adults to increase levels of co-regulation with students and in classroom environment</p> <p>Staff and parents collaborate to decide whether to screen for delays or issues</p> <p>School data collected to monitor for equity in discipline outcomes</p>	<p>Preschool team supports child to find replacement behaviors that are socially acceptable</p> <p>Teachers call parents for serious concern of child behavior</p> <p>Teachers set fair limits based on safety, responsibility, and respect</p> <p>Provision of a well -managed classroom</p>

Figure 1. Conceptual Grid of Concepts from the Literature

outcome of expulsion is usually the end result of a process that involves multiple disciplinary practices and interactions (Martin, Bosk & Bailey, 2018).

Educators making disciplinary choices are under immense pressure to maintain a safe school environment for both students and adults. It is due to this high level of complexity that it is essential to better understand how ECE leaders view preschool discipline practices and approaches, and how they work to increase equity and decrease expulsion in preschool discipline.

### **Emphasis on Individual Development & Onus on Students and Families**

**Self-regulation.** The written preschool discipline policies in this review tend to emphasize student self-control and self-discipline as desired outcomes, both of which are outgrowths of self-regulation. Preschool handbooks from a Head Start Program and a YMCA California State Preschool Program both highlight the goal of promoting self-control (Family YMCA of the Desert, 2015; Head Start Parent Handbook, 2016). However, Head Start emphasizes individual development more, and outlines a comprehensive approach to supporting individual early development for every student, even those with persistently aggressive behaviors. The approaches include extensive access to social emotional supports for students, such as observations in classrooms from mental health providers and the option to provide child development services during home-visits. These individualized approaches are aimed at supporting early development through and within the avenues available to the preschool site (Head Start Parent Handbook, 2016). In contrast to the extensive supports in place to maintain students in

Head Start, the YMCA site's policy outlines a disciplinary process with a trajectory toward expulsion in which supports to avoid expulsion may be offered but are not guaranteed.

**Reasons behind behaviors.** Both the Head Start and YMCA sites utilize a version of positive behavioral supports. Positive behavioral support is a behavior management system used to understand the reasons behind behaviors and the functional benefit of behaviors. Hypotheses are drawn (e.g., the student is throwing toys because it gets him more attention) and then steps are taken to shift the behavior. These could include redirection to an alternative activity, strategic ignoring, reminders about expectations, and positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviors. This quadrant of the conceptual grid (upper left) represents many of the most common practice elements in early childhood classrooms (McLeod, Sutherland, Martinez, Conroy, Snyder, & Southam-Gerow, 2017).

**Emphasis on School Safety/Environment & Onus on Students and Families.**

Outcomes differ when the emphasis is on school safety and the onus of responsibility is on students and their families to conform to school rules and expectations. It is in this quadrant of the conceptual grid (upper right) that most exclusionary discipline is situated.

**Safety threat.** More of the YMCA Behavior/Discipline Policy guidelines in their handbook emphasize safety and safety threats (e.g., hitting, kicking, biting, running away, and abuse). However, they go beyond safety to others, and include damaging property,

"foul or on-going unacceptable behavior" and "defiant, and/or disruptive and/or out-of-control behavior" in their list of reasons for Incident Reports (Family YMCA of the Desert, 2015, p. 24). Going beyond true safety threats to more subjective measures of behavior opens up the increased risk for personal bias to factor into disciplinary decisions and outcomes, and students of color are disproportionately suspended and expelled for more subjective reasons like these (La Vonne, McCray, Webb-Johnson & Bridgest, 2003).

**Racial bias.** Racial bias is not unique to this quadrant of the conceptual grid, since bias impacts all aspects of social systems in the United States, and potentially all aspects of policies and practices related to student discipline. However, racial bias is positioned in this section of the conceptual grid because of how it especially impacts racially disproportionate exclusionary discipline outcomes. Themes related to racialized discipline practices, such as perceived safety threats; and whether students are suspended or expelled for more subjective behavioral reasons based on educators finding fault with certain students, therefore aligns racial bias most with this area of the conceptual grid.

There is growing awareness in the K-12 literature about the connection between racial bias and disproportional disciplinary outcomes for students of color. Although research has shown that behaviors are proportionally similar between Black and White students in upper grades, Black students face greater odds of being suspended and expelled for more subjective misbehaviors, such as disrespect, excessive noise, loitering, and threat (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan & Leaf, 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo &

Peterson, 2002). Race has been shown to influence teachers' likelihood and frequency of finding fault with students' behaviors in high school settings (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Research has also shown Black youth are punished for reasons related to teachers' perceptions of their body language and demeanors more than for their objective behaviors (La Vonne, et al., 2003). In other words, teacher perception rather than student behavior is often at the heart of disciplinary issues.

While similar dynamics show up in the research on ECE and K-12, the extent to which ECE leaders views on preschool discipline convey awareness of racialized disciplinary outcomes and impacts on students of color has yet to be studied. This study sought to address this gap in the literature.

#### **Parent responsibility.**

In the preschool context, it is challenging to justify placing the onus of behavioral issues on the preschoolers themselves due to the emotional and intellectual immaturity of their age group. In this context, the parents are more likely to be viewed critically, or at least as critical in their influence over their children's behaviors. In a qualitative study, Martin, et al. (2018) interviewed 30 childcare providers and examined the chain of events in which children with similar challenges were asked or not asked to leave. They identified a similar series of events in the cases that ended in expulsion, where teachers would search for understanding about what was causing a challenging behavior and make adjustments. If challenges continued, teachers would involve parents, with the expectation that parents would express concern and be collaborative in seeking solutions.

This is where trajectories toward or away from expulsion diverged. Parents perceived as collaborative decreased the likelihood of expulsion, whereas parents of expelled students were described by study participants in negative terms, such as “uncooperative”, “resistant”, and “dismissive” (Martin, et al., 2018, p.91). The researchers concluded that when other interventions failed, when teachers constructed parents as “bad families” who were not cooperative, expulsion was imminent (Martin, et al., 2018, p. 87). This finding validated a similar finding from the high school literature on family-school partnerships, which also found parent-teacher conflicts in situations where the teachers and parents did not see eye-to-eye on student abilities and/or behavior (Lasater, 2016).

### **Emphasis on Individual Development & Onus on Education Professionals.**

**Relationships and co-regulation.** Early childhood represents a critical developmental window for the nervous system, self-regulatory capacity, and emotional competence on which the early foundations for lifelong achieving rely (Housman, 2017). This complex process of development emerges from the co-regulation of reciprocal and empathic relationships. Co-regulation describes the supportive, attentive, warm, caring, and attuned interactions teachers experience with their students.

When educators ensure students feel safe and supported, they are able to learn (Gillespie, 2015). Social-affective neuroscience researchers have introduced a conceptual model of how brain function and emotional experience inform and are informed by cultural meaning making, which happens in relationships (Immordino-Yang & Gotlieb, 2017). Knowing this, educators can cultivate student-centered approaches that are

culturally responsive, trauma informed, and restorative. These culturally and relationally attuned approaches have shown to positively impact student learning and student-teacher relationships in elementary schools (Blitz, Anderson & Sasstamoinen, 2016).

Student-teacher relationships are the crux of disciplinary interactions and an emphasis on positive relationship building is fundamental to a culture of inclusive and caring discipline practices. Research shows that students with closer relationships with teachers experience lower incidences of exclusionary discipline (Decker, Dona & Christenson, 2007). Using the *Student-Teacher Relationship Scale* (2001) to measure 44 elementary school students' and 25 teachers' perspectives on engagement and academic performance, Decker, Dona, and Christenson (2006) showed that teachers' measures of positive student-teacher relationships were associated with a decrease in the number of suspensions for those students. These findings point to the student-teacher relationship as an important mediating factor in prevention of exclusionary discipline.

**Teachers seek to understand individual needs.** Although qualities of student-teacher relationships are bound to vary, when teachers are guided to consider the deeper reasons behind their students' behaviors when making disciplinary decisions, exclusionary discipline rates decrease significantly (Okonofua, Paunesku & Walton, 2016). In a study hypothesizing that the 39 participant teachers could be encouraged to shift their disciplinary practices to a more empathic, student-centered, and relationship-based style, and that the 302 participant students would respond to this shift by sustaining respect and motivation in class Okonofua, et al (2016) found their hypotheses confirmed.

The study further examined a brief online intervention (reaching 31 teachers and 1,682 students at five middle schools in three districts) designed to encourage more empathic discipline practices and found that the intervention halved year-long suspension rates. These findings indicate the important roles of perception and perspective on the part of educators toward students.

Teacher closeness with their students is influenced by teachers' attributions of the extent to which students have control over their misbehaviors. Evaluating data from 81 kindergarten teachers' questionnaires about 237 children, Thijs and Koomen (2009) found that teachers reported less close relationships with their hyperactive and inhibited students, and more conflictual relationships with their hyperactive students (versus average students).

The researchers used a modified version of the Behavior Questionnaire (BQTSYO-M; Thijs, et al., 2004) to select students for the study according to their measured levels of social inhibition, hyperactivity, internalizing behaviors, and externalizing behaviors. Teachers' behavioral appraisals were measured with an instrument based on Rutter's (1975) criteria for assessing the seriousness of problem behaviors (e.g., suffering, impediments to socioemotional functioning and development, and negative effects on others). An adaptation of the Student-Teacher Relationship scale was used to measure teachers' evaluations of closeness, dependency, and conflict with their students.

Thijs and Koomen (2009) carefully described how they inspected inter-correlations of variables, examined systematic differences between teachers, and were careful to limit the applicability of their findings to the sample they presented. Their findings showed that teachers reported less close relationships with their hyperactive and inhibited students, and more conflictual relationships with the hyperactive students (versus average students).

They also found a higher level of student problem behavior did not automatically equate with increased conflict between teachers and students, as might be assumed, and was mitigated by teachers' subjective appraisals of students' behaviors, such as whether a teacher appraised students to have personal problems or social problems that were beyond their control. Reflecting on their findings of the impacts of teachers' appraisals of student behaviors on their relationships with their students, Thijs and Koomen (2009) indicated the importance of teachers taking steps to make improvements due to the asymmetry of student-teacher relationships. Meaning, their findings pointed to the importance of teachers taking the onus of relationship building, and understanding their students better, upon themselves.

In a follow-up study, the researchers confirmed educator bias can negatively affect their closeness with students. They found that lack of cultural affinity, or ethnic incongruence, between teachers and students could be harmful to student-teacher closeness when teachers did not view different cultures as equally valuable (Thijs, Westhof & Koomen, 2012).

### **Emphasis on School Safety/Environment & Onus on Education Professionals**

**Professional development and coaching.** Professional development can be used to broaden educators' perspectives, and disseminate knowledge to influence norms of school climate and culture, such as critical self-reflection, culturally-responsive, trauma-informed, and restorative practices. Training and coaching have been employed to support teachers' awareness of factors underlying student behaviors, which has been shown to improve relationships and reduce conflict with students, and lead to reduced suspensions and expulsions (Gregory, Clawson, Davis and Gerewitz, 2016; Okonofua, et al., 2016).

Coaching interventions have been used to implement restorative practices in high schools, resulting in lower levels of disproportional and exclusionary discipline. This was shown by Gregory, Clawson, et al. (2016) in their study on first-year outcomes of a restorative practices (RP) disciplinary program in two large and diverse high schools in a small northeastern city in 2011. The researchers surveyed 29 high school teachers and 412 of their students and showed that teachers who implemented restorative practices had more positive student-teacher relationships with their diverse students (Gregory, Clawson, et al., 2016).

In a follow-up study to the Gregory, Clawson, et al., 2016 article, researchers looked at the second year of a coaching intervention and replicated results from the first year of the intervention, finding a sustained decreased in exclusionary discipline and no

significant racial disparities in discipline referrals (Gregory, Hafen, Ruzek, Mikami, Allen & Pianta, 2016).

The above studies demonstrate the role schoolwide interventions and approaches, such as supporting teachers with practical tools to improve their services, can play in improving school discipline practices, outcomes, and equity. Educational leaders are pivotal in selecting and providing these professional development opportunities for their sites. Additionally, educational leaders may have the capacity to allocate resources and energy to other supports that influence disciplinary outcomes.

The above studies have demonstrated approaches that were beneficial for reducing suspension and expulsion at the K-12 level, but the same approaches may not be recognized, utilized, or appropriate in ECE settings. For this reason, this study seeks to understand the approaches ECE leaders identify and utilize to prevent suspension and expulsion in preschool settings.

### **Q-Methodology in Preschool and Elementary Education**

Beliefs about teachers' views of students/children, discipline, and classroom practices have previously been measured with Q-methodology. In a study examining 38 teachers' and 28 assistant teachers' views on preschool classroom practices, the Preschool Classroom Practices Q-Sort (PCPQ) was designed and implemented (Bracken & Fischel, 2006). The teachers and assistant teachers collectively worked in 38 4-year-old Head Start classrooms. The PCPQ's conceptual categories were comprised of Cognitive Development Activities (CDA) and Socioemotional Development Activities

(SDA), and the findings indicated teachers rated the SDAs significantly more highly than the CDAs (Bracken & Fischel, 2006). While the Socioemotional Development Activities have a relationship to approaches ECE teachers employ to improve student behaviors, this instrument was not designed to assess views on discipline.

Q-methodology has been used to assess teachers' views on discipline, as well as children, and classroom practices, by way of the Teacher Belief Q-Sort (TBQ). The construct validity of this Q-methodology instrument was tested in a study that also had the goal of demonstrating how teachers' and pre-service teachers' views are sensitive to specialized training and teaching experience (Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, & La Paro, 2006). There were four groups of participants in this study: 1) 30 experienced teachers trained in Responsive Classroom (RC); 2) 32 experienced teachers without training in RC; 3) 61 pre-service teachers planning to teach elementary school; and, 4) 74 pre-service teachers planning to teach middle/high school. All participants completed the Teacher Belief Q-Sort, which has three sets of 20 statements of opinion on each of the three conceptual areas (beliefs about children, discipline, and classroom practices). The researchers found the TBQ to be a reliable and valid tool, that RC trained teachers hold distinct views compared to the other three groups, and that preservice and in-service teachers held different beliefs, especially towards classroom practices. This study introduced a valid and reliable Q-Sort instrument for measuring teachers' beliefs about classroom practices related to discipline, and showed this methodology to be useful for comparing views of groups of teachers who had or had not gone through specialized

training, as well as comparing experienced teachers to pre-service teachers (Rimm-Kaufman, et al., 2006). However, the Teacher Belief Q-Sort was not designed to measure school leaders' perspectives and did not directly address views and attitudes specific to suspension and expulsion.

The Teacher Belief Q-Sort has also been utilized to assess change in pre-service teachers' beliefs over time as they progressed through a 4-year teacher preparation program and completed their student teaching experience. This study added a criterion comparison element, assessing both pre-service teachers' (students) and college faculty's views on the concepts measured by the TBQ (La Paro, Siepak & Scott-Little, 2009). Data were collected over one academic year, with 35 students participating at the beginning of their coursework and 28 students participating at the end of the academic year. The eight faculty in the program participated to establish the criterion comparison. At the end of the year, students reported beliefs more similar to faculty at the beginning of the year. Additionally, 16-weeks of student teaching experience did not appear to significantly alter students' beliefs in any of the three conceptual measures. This study did show that there was a transfer of beliefs from faculty to students over the academic year, but 16-weeks may have been too short of a period for beliefs to shift due to teaching experience (La Paro, et al., 2009). These findings show both the malleability and persistence of personal beliefs.

Both of the aforementioned instruments were designed to measure teachers' views and beliefs. Neither of them explicitly looked at educational leaders' views, institutional-

level approaches to discipline, or employed an equity lens in relationship to the practices or beliefs they target, as is the purpose of this research. The instrument introduced in this study differs from the PCPQ and TBQ in three main ways: 1) It was designed to focus on views and attitudes of ECE educators in leadership positions; 2) The views are not focused on classroom-level practices, but more broadly on schoolwide approaches and associated beliefs and attitudes that have been shown to drive decisions that impact disciplinary outcomes, especially expulsion; and, 3) Beliefs about critical self-reflection, impacts of bias, and racial equity are explicitly addressed.

### **Summary**

The previous literature discussed various ways school leaders and educational researchers have attempted to intervene in exclusionary and disproportional discipline outcomes. However, previous studies have not explored the views of ECE leaders on these competing discourses and various approaches to school discipline. Previous research has established the relationship between K-12 school leaders' views on discipline and exclusionary outcomes. However, despite recognition of high expulsion rates in preschool settings, there is a gap in the literature on ECE leaders' views on approaches to preschool discipline and their views on how to reduce and prevent expulsion. Previous Q-methodology instruments utilized in preschool and elementary school settings were not designed to assess either the views of ECE leaders or their attitudes toward expulsion. This research was designed to address these gaps.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter will describe the methods used to implement this study. The purpose of this research was to investigate the views of ECE leaders on preschool discipline practices, especially those aimed at increasing equity and reducing suspension and expulsion. A mixed-methods approach was selected and will be described in detail, including sampling, instrumentation, study recruitment, data collection and triangulation, and plan for analysis.

#### **Chronology of Current Study**

- A. Literature review focusing on school and preschool discipline practices, interventions to reduce and prevent suspension and expulsion, and educator's views on discipline practices (September 2018)
- B. Institutional Review Board application for exempt status (October 2018)
- C. Proposal to doctoral committee (November 2018)
- D. Institutional Review Board approval (November 2018) (see Appendix E)
- E. Development of Q-set (November 2018)
- F. Expert review of Q-set (December 2018)
- G. Beta-test for development of final Q-set (December 2018)
- H. Data collection (January – April 2019)
- I. Analysis (January – June 2019)

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining Q-methodology (Stephenson, 1935), interview data, and document analysis. The triangulation of these data sources enabled a comprehensive look at ECE leaders' views and approaches to discipline and preventing suspension and expulsion.

The population of this study was California ECE leaders of preschool and TK programs. The sampling frame was 2019 ECE leaders in San Francisco Bay Area (heretofore referred to as the Bay Area) preschools. The sampling was purposive, based primarily on specific characteristics of participants and secondarily on preschool sites. **Error! Reference source not found.** describes the demographics of the participant sample, which was composed of 25 ECE leaders from 6 counties and 10 cities or towns located within the Bay Area. The number of program sites each participant was associated with varied and is described in more depth in Table 2 and throughout this section.

### **Recruitment**

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, through both criterion and snowball sampling methods. The central criterion used for selection was a leadership role at a preschool with a 3- to 5-year old population in the Bay Area. Additional criteria were strategically aimed to recruit a racially/ethnically diverse group of ECE leaders from both publicly funded and privately funded preschool sites. Strategic sampling was used to recruit participants who the researcher would expect to have a range of differing opinions

on the topic, with the aim of ensuring meaningful variability between factors (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

The socioeconomic status of program site populations was considered. Program funding sources served as a proxy for the socio-economic status of the preschooler population, since government funded and subsidized programs have income-based qualifying criteria. These criteria informed the recruitment process, as the researcher sought balance between government subsidized and fee-based programs in the sample. Criterion sampling was initiated through internet searches for local preschools and child development programs. Search criteria included “bay area head start” and “bay area preschools”. The researcher also reached out to directors of local lab school programs at community colleges in the Bay Area. Potential study participants who met criteria for inclusion were contacted directly by the researcher, either by phone or by email. A recruitment script was used for both criterion and snowball sampling (see Appendix A). Overall, ten participants were recruited through criterion sampling and strategic outreach.

Snowball sampling was also significant in the recruiting process. Five participants were personal contacts from the researcher’s professional and personal life. Each of those participants were asked to share the recruitment letter with other potential candidates for participation; and, six additional participants, five from one multi-site program were recruited through personal contacts. The researcher spoke to one local ECE educator who shared the researcher’s recruitment letter with a list-serve of ECE directors, and several people reached out by email to express interest in participating in the study; four

participants resulted from those communications. Personal contacts and snowball sampling resulted in recruitment of fifteen participants in this study. The total sample consisted of 25 ECE leaders who will be described in more detail below.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher-participant relationship was established through outreach and recruitment that included an explanation of the research, the study design, its goals, and possible benefits for participation. Those who opted into the research met with the researcher for a 20- to 60-minute rapport building and information gathering interview. Informed consent was covered verbally during initiation of each participant interview (see Appendix B).

The interviews allowed time for the participants to share about their background experiences, education, and site-based practices around disciplinary policies, practices, and issues. Initial rapport building interviews were followed by a 20-minute statement sorting activity and debrief with the researcher.

### **Participants**

The participant sample consisted of 25 ECE leaders who worked in preschool programs serving children between three and five years old. The sample consisted of 24 females and one male. All participants identified their own race/ethnicity during interviews. The majority of study participants identified as White, Caucasian, or European American (n=16, 64%), three identified as Black or African American (12%), four identified as Latina, or Hispanic, or of Mexican decent (n=4, 16%), one identified as Chinese-Filipino,

and one identified as American Chinese, both of whom were identified as Asian in the findings by race/ethnicity in Chapter 4 (n=2, 1%). Descriptions of participants' program types, years of experience in ECE, and number of preschool sites they work with are detailed in Table 2. All names are pseudonyms.

Eleven participants worked on-site at fee-based programs, three of those were faith-based programs. The fee-based program leaders were mostly Directors and Site Directors, while one was a Head Teacher, one was an Assistant Director, and one was an Executive Director who was site-based at one site and had oversight of two additional sites. Two participants were on-site Directors of fee-based parent cooperatives. Five participants worked at programs that were both fee-based and also received government funding, of whom three were on-site Directors, and two held off-site leadership positions in an 8-site program. Seven participants worked at government and non-profit funded programs, 1 was the off-site Director overseeing 12 sites, one was an off-site based Coach who provided services to four sites, two were on-site program Supervisors, two were on-site Directors, and one was an on-site Principal of a TK program.

Six study participants worked for one multi-site program. The participants represented 4 levels of the organization, including two executive leaders, three site directors, and one lead teacher. Two of the site directors and the lead teacher worked at fee-based sites. One site director was at a CSPP site. Both off-site executive leaders had influence regarding discipline policy and training at both the fee-based and CSPP sites, while one of the off-site leaders worked more closely with the CSPP sites.

Table 2. Study Participant Demographics

Name	Self-identified Ethnicity/Race	Position	Years working in ECE	Program Type	# of sites associated with participant	Site-based position
Nora	African American	Director	15 yrs.	Fee-based	1	Yes
Stacy	Caucasian	Site Director	13 yrs.	Fee-based*	1	Yes
Mike	Caucasian	Site Director	24 yrs.	Fee-based* & CSPP	1	Yes
Leighann	White	Executive Director	42 yrs.	Fee-based	3	Yes/No
Kathy	White	Director	41 yrs.	Fee-based & Faith-based	1	Yes
Susie	White	Director	46 yrs.	Fee-based & Faith-based	1	Yes
Alice	American Chinese	Public Preschool Manager	33 yrs.	Fee-based CSPP	8	No
Robin	White	Director	28 yrs.	Fee-based & subsidized	1	Yes
Amber	Caucasian	Site Director	38 yrs.	Fee-based	1	Yes
Mary	Caucasian	Director	36 yrs.	Fee-based & Faith-based	1	Yes
Anne	African American	Site Supervisor	12 yrs.	Government funded	1	Yes
Selena	Mexican-Italian; Hispanic	Site Director	19 yrs.	Fee-based*	1	Yes
Maria	Hispanic; Mexican	Program Supervisor	28 yrs.	Government funded and non-profit	1	Yes
Marisa	Latina	Director	30 yrs.	Parent Co-op	1	Yes
Eva	Chinese-Filipino	Director	32 yrs.	Fee-based & Subsidized	1	Yes
Marcela	Family is from Mexico	Director	30 yrs.	Government funded	1	Yes
Cee	White; Italian-Argentinian	Director	27 yrs.	Government funded and non-profit	1	Yes

Betty	Caucasian	Head Teacher	20 yrs.	Fee-based*	1	Yes
Rosalind	Black	Principal	12 yrs.	Government funded	1	Yes
Debra	American of European descent	Deputy Director	42 yrs.	Fee-based & CSPP	8	No
Shannon	White	Director	16 yrs.	Fee-based	1	Yes
Misty	Caucasian	Director	29 yrs.	Parent Co- op	1	Yes
Lucia	White; Italian	Coach/ment or/PD dev	10 yrs.	Government Funded	4	No
Sarah	White	Director of Center Programs	40 yrs.	Government funded	12	No
Ruth	White	Assistant Director	10 yrs.	Fee-based	1	Yes

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*Note:* \* = Part of a multi-site program that included fee-based and CSPP sites

In total, 18 preschool programs were represented in this study, with three instances of multiple participants from the same programs; six participants from one multi-site program, two participants from one single-site program, and two participants from a different multi-site program. The total participant sample consisted of 20 site-based ECE leaders (80%), four off-site leaders (16%), and one participant who was both Site Director at one site and Executive Director over two additional sites. Participants' years of experience in the ECE field ranged from 10 to 46 years, with a combined total of 674 years of experience (mean=29.96 years, median=28 years).

## Methods and Data Collection Procedures

### Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study were a Q-sort on ECE leaders views on preschool discipline and a semi-structured interview. The interview instrument had three subsections, first were demographic questions about the participants' ethnic/racial identity and background in ECE, second were questions about preschool discipline approaches, both were implemented before the Q-sort activity with each participant. Following the Q-sort activity, the third section of questions was a set of debrief questions designed to add insights and meaning to the results of the Q-sort findings.

**Q-sort.** Q-methodology's primary purpose is to identify participants' subjective perceptions and viewpoints (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). It is an analytically rigorous method that uses quantitative methods to measure subjectivity. It provides a methodological advantage over other measures of beliefs in that it measures the prioritization of beliefs on a single topic of interest through a forced-rank structure (Block, 1961). The instrumentation involved with the Q-sort is known as the Q-set which consists of statements that encapsulate a comprehensive array of viewpoints (concourse) on a given subject, in this case preschool discipline. The Q-set in this study was finalized at 28 statements. The development of the Q-set is described in more detail below.

***Development of the Q-set.*** The Q-set was comprised of representative statements from the literature review in this study, which included empirical research, opinion papers from professional journals, and publicly documented preschool discipline policies.

The process of creating the Q-set was an iterative and analytical process that created a set of statements through both naturalistic and ready-made methods (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). Eight naturalistically derived statements were created by the researcher from concepts in the literature review. Twenty ready-made statements resulted from pre-existing survey instruments (see Appendix D).

The process of choosing and constructing statements began with an examination of the field of study on disciplinary approaches and interventions from preschool through grade-12, as well as attitudes and perspectives of educators on discipline practices. Survey questions were excerpted from pre-existing instruments designed to measure attitudes about school discipline, and included: *Disciplinary Practices Survey* questions (Skiba, Edl & Rausch, 2007) and Suggested Culturally and Contextually Relevant SWPBS Practice (Fallon, O’Keeffe, Gage & Sugai, 2015). Survey items were compiled into a variables table and considered for inclusion in the Q-set during the development process.

The excerpted questions that seemed relevant to the current study were organized into conceptual measures in the variables table. Then the statements were mapped to the conceptual grid, used to organize the literature. This was the first pass in a repetitive process of mapping statements between the variables table and the conceptual grid. Mapping the statements to the conceptual measures and cross referencing those with the organization of the literature topics served as a gap analysis. The gap analysis revealed certain concepts from the conceptual grid of the literature were not present in the pre-

existing survey items. New statements were then created based on the concepts not covered by items from previous instruments in order to create a comprehensive concourse on the subject of ECE leaders' views on preschool discipline.

Naturalistically derived statements were drafted to close the gap between the list of ready-made statements in the variables table and the conceptual grid of the literature. Based on the literature review and key concepts in the conceptual grid, it was determined that statements needed to be created to cover a number of concepts. These concepts were: student safety from threats, the impacts of exclusionary practices on identity development, critical reflection of personnel, how disciplinary practices impact racial bias and stereotypes, considering deeper reasons behind behaviors, and self-regulation. New statements were written based on these concepts to address the conceptual gaps and create an instrument that comprehensively represented the reference literature.

The combination of ready-made and naturalistic statements made 81 total statements, which were too many for the purpose of a single Q-set (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2005). At that point, most of the statements that used language inappropriate to the preschool context were omitted from the list (i.e. "Repeat offenders should receive more severe disciplinary consequences than first-time offenders." (Skiba, et al., 2007). Repetitive concepts were eliminated or combined. The total number of statements was reduced to 53. These statements were mapped back to the conceptual grid of the literature again and assessed for fit to the conceptual grid, and the number of statements was reduced to 42.

This iteration of 42 statements, along with the interview script, were reviewed by the committee chair of this dissertation for feedback. Based on his feedback, to reduce the number of statements to around 30, similar statements were combined and eliminated so as to maintain only one or two statements on each concept. To reduce the number of statements down further, the statements on tracking disciplinary data were eliminated and this variable was added to the interview instrument.

Throughout the process of reducing and combining statements, a central aim was to maintain balance between the number of statements in each conceptual quadrant. Table 3 shows the final set of 28 statements used in this study after beta-testing, with 7 statements in each quadrant of the conceptual grid. The beta-testing process will be described below.

*Beta-testing the Q-set.* Before initiating this study with participants, the 28 statements were shared with 2 ECE subject matter experts for review and feedback. The feedback was the use of school-based language seemed inappropriate for the ECE context. As a result, most instances of “student/s” were changed to “preschooler/s” or “child” and most instances of “school” were changed to “preschool”.

Subsequently, the first participant to complete the statement sorting activity in the study was invited to participate in beta-testing the q-statements, interview questions, and directions for the Q-sort process. Per her reflections, statement number-14 was revised, changing “academic identity development” to “identity development”. Demographic interview questions (#1 and #2) were added to the interview instrument, and some

Table 3. *Final Q-set Organized on Conceptual Grid*

		Onus on student/family			
Emphasis on Individual Development		No.	Statement	No.	Statement
		Emphasis on school safety & environment		13	I believe suspension allows children time away from preschool that encourages their parents to address their behavior.
14*	Suspension and expulsion hurt preschool students by impacting their identity development.			7	There is really nothing a preschool can do if students' parents are not willing to work together with preschool personnel regarding their child's behavior.
16	Preschool students with special needs who engage in disruptive behavior need a different approach to discipline than their peers.			10	Certain preschoolers are not gaining anything from preschool and disrupt the learning environment for others. In such a case, the use of suspension and expulsion is justified to preserve the learning environment for students to learn.
17	Trauma exposed preschoolers require a different approach to discipline than other preschoolers.			11	Preschools cannot afford to tolerate children who disrupt the learning environment.
18	Preschoolers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different disciplinary needs.			12*	Preschools cannot afford to retain children who threaten the safety of other students.
26*	Sometimes preschoolers' problem behaviors are a sign of a deeper developmental issue that requires support beyond what our program can offer.			15	Suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems.
27*	Preschoolers need to learn to self-regulate so they are able to socialize appropriately.			20	Suspension and expulsion are unfair to children of color.

No.	Statement	No.	Statement
1	I feel that getting to know preschool students individually is an important part of discipline.	3	Teachers ought to be able to manage the majority of preschoolers' misbehavior in their classroom.
2	Although it would be nice to get to know preschool students and their families on a personal basis, my duties simply don't allow me the time.	4	Preschools must take some responsibility for teaching students how to get along and behave appropriately.
6	I feel it is critical to work together with parents to address behavioral issues before considering suspending or expelling a preschooler from school.	9	I believe suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive preschool climate and an engaging environment.
8	Regardless of the severity of a student's behavior, my objective is to keep all students in preschool.	19	Teachers at this site were for the most part adequately trained to handle problems of misbehavior and discipline.
22*	Preschool personnel who consider the reasons behind children's behaviors are less likely to respond harshly or punitively.	21*	Preschool personnel should consider how their discipline practices may perpetuate or interrupt racial stereotypes and biases.
24	Teachers should learn, include, and use students' culture and language in instruction and interactions.	23	All preschool personnel should establish preschool environments that are familiar, predictable, and consistent with local expectations for behavior.
25*	Critical self-reflection by preschool personnel is imperative to reduce bias in discipline practices.	28*	Self-regulation on the part of preschool personnel is the foundation of any successful preschool environment.
<b>Onus on preschool/personnel</b>			

Note: \* = Naturalistically derived statements

wording of the interview script, and questions #5, #6, and #7 were revised for clarity and flow (see instrument in Appendix B). This participant repeated the Q-sort activity on a

later date after the revision of statements, so as to ensure consistency with the instrument used in the remainder of the study, and to maintain her perspective in the study.

***Q-sort Activity.*** During the Q-sort, or statement sorting activity, participants were guided by the researcher to sort the Q-set statements into a quasi-normal distribution ranging from -4 (least agree) to +4 (most agree). The benefits of the quasi-normal distribution are for the structure it provides to participants, as well as allowing for clarity regarding extremes of belief during data analysis. The script for the instructions provided to each participant for how to sort the cards is included in Appendix B. The placement of statements was recorded at the end of each sorting activity for future analysis (see Appendix C).

***Q-sort Analysis.*** The data resulting from the Q-sort activities were statistically analyzed with PQMethod software, a free online software package specifically designed to process Q-sort data (Schmolk, 2002). The software was used to extract factors, meaning distinct viewpoints on school discipline practices and approaches. Those results were then interpreted using a holistic, strategic, and consistent analytical method (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The extracted factors and their interpretations were then analyzed in convergence with the interview, activity debrief, and policy document data. Further description of the data analyses are included in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

**Interviews and debrief.** A 20- to 60-minute interview occurred with each participant before the Q-sort, with the exception of one participant, with whom the interview was realized on a different day due to time constraints. During the initial

interview, questions pertained to participant and preschool site demographics (e.g., population of site; educational and professional experience), general approaches to discipline at school sites, and specific approaches aimed at inclusion and prevention of expulsion. Additionally, during this interview the researcher inquired about written discipline policies and requested copies for inclusion in the data set.

Each Q-sort activity was followed by 5-10 minutes of debrief on participants' thinking about the statements and their decision-making process for what they ranked the highest and lowest. Debrief questions were used to support a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the meaning behind the participants' choices and viewpoints informed the analysis of the findings.

The researcher considered the possibility that interviewing participants about their experiences around preschool discipline could have invoked attitudinal threat during the Q-sort. The researcher attempted to avoid such an effect by focusing the interview more on a broad and contextualizing discussion on discipline at their preschool sites, while avoiding probing questions about participants' personal views on approaches to discipline. The intent of the interview questions was to acclimate participants to thinking generally about discipline so they were ready to engage the subject more deeply and specifically during the Q-sort.

***Interview Analysis.*** The corpus of interview data was analyzed using data memos, coding, researcher reflections, and in reference to the factors extracted from the Q-sort analysis (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Further analysis was conducted through a second

round of more detailed coding to identify topics and themes to assess how responses pertained to, or did not acknowledge, equity oriented views and approaches (Charmaz, 2014). Emotion, value, attitude, and belief coding (Saldaña, 2013) was used to help the researcher to better understand meaning of various tones and language in the data.

**Policy documents.** The documentation data provided descriptions of disciplinary practices and procedures at participant sites and were analyzed to enhance understanding of preschool approaches to discipline. Documents included school and/or parent handbooks, discipline policies, and school rules.

***Policy document analysis.*** Policy documents were analyzed for language related to disciplinary discourse, such as reasons for disciplinary actions, expectations around classroom management, onus of responsibility, preventative, restorative, or punitive language; and, equity language represented by deficit- versus strengths-based language, attention to cultural expectations, anti-bias and anti-racist language. The reason for analyzing these data was also to look for concordance and discordance between educators' views and the practices and policies they utilized, as well as to triangulate and strengthen the trustworthiness of the data analysis process.

### **Summary**

This study used mixed-methods, including interview, written policy, and Q-sort data to examine the views of 25 ECE leaders on preschool discipline in a variety of preschool settings. Q-method was utilized because it is well suited to intensive analysis of the viewpoints of small groups of respondents by utilizing a forced-ranking method. The

Q-set was created from pre-existing instruments plus original statements derived from concepts in the literature on school and preschool discipline. Participants from various ethnic/racial backgrounds and preschool programs were recruited from throughout 6 Bay Area Counties. The composite Q-sort data were run through PQMethod software to extract factors representing unique viewpoints on preschool discipline. Those statistical results were then interpreted using a holistic analytical process (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Interviews were utilized to help analyze the meaning of the results of the Q-sorts, and also to add texture and richness to the findings. Document analysis was conducted with discipline-related documents provided by participants in the study. Taken together, these data informed a comprehensive inquiry into ECE leaders' views on preschool discipline practices in general, and suspension and expulsion in particular.

## Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter describes analyses of the data collected in this study. The analyses of the Q-sort data performed after data collection were factor analyses, correlational analyses, and abductive interpretation (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Additional analyses incorporated interview and policy data. Focused analyses were performed on data related to equity oriented discourse and approaches to prevent expulsion.

Repeating a standard multi-step process, first data were run through a centroid analysis, followed by Varimax factor rotation, hand-flagging significant sorts, and analysis of the rotated and flagged sorts. This process was repeated so as to compare the various results of each extraction, dependent on choosing different numbers of factors according to various significance criteria (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Factor analysis was conducted on three, four, five, and six factors and was completed with PQMethod software (Schmolck, 2002). Each of the factor extractions were compared based on the number of participants loading onto each factor, the variances they explained, the number of confounding and insignificant sorts (i.e. loading significantly onto more than one factor or not loading significantly onto any factor), and the correlations among factors (i.e. the statistical similarity or difference between the factor arrays). Table 4 summarizes the comparison of factor extractions described above.

The six-factor extraction with .48 loading criteria was chosen as the most efficient because it explained 65% of factor variance and had the most significantly loading sorts, while also having a low number of confounded and insignificant sorts, accounting for all

*Table 4. Comparison of Factor Loadings*

Factor Number	Loading criteria	Significant loadings	Confounded loadings	Insignificant loadings	% variance explained
3	.42	19	5	1	55%
3	.53	20	0	5	55%
4	.42	15	8	2	59%
5	.42	16	6	3	60%
5	.53	18	1	6	60%
6	.41	14	11	0	65%
6	.48	21	3	1	65%

but one participant. Table 5 summarizes the participants significantly loading onto each factor, with significance criteria at .48 and above. The meaning of a positive factor loading is a participant relates positively to a factor and significantly agrees with the viewpoint represented by the factor they load onto. Contrarily, a negative factor loading signifies disagreement between a participant and the viewpoint represented by the factor. The closer a loading is to 1.0000, the stronger the relationship is between a participant and a factor. There were no significant negative factor loadings in this study. Thus, all participants related positively to the factor onto which they loaded.

A close examination of Table 5 reveals that five loadings are greater than .7 and only two reach .8. This indicates that no participant's viewpoint is perfectly aligned with any of the factors and most participants relate positively to more than one factor. Meaning, the factors represent statistical commonalities between viewpoints, while accommodating that views on preschool discipline are complex. Thus, each participant may agree robustly with one viewpoint and still agree less strongly with other viewpoints.

Table 5. *Factor Matrix with an X Indicating a Defining Sort*

QSORT Number	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
1	0.6003 X	-0.1674	-0.1462	0.4293	0.0100	0.2635
2	0.4258	-0.1610	-0.1425	0.2301	0.1288	0.6784 X
3	0.2958	0.0414	-0.0309	-0.0293	0.0160	0.5799 X
4	0.0032	0.0138	0.0089	0.4129	-0.0062	0.0406
5	0.1670	0.5239 X	-0.0146	0.1281	-0.1177	0.6071 X
6	0.3586	0.3137	0.1083	0.2423	-0.0697	0.5327 X
7	0.6625 X	0.0950	0.0736	0.0451	0.0002	0.4266
8	0.3801	0.0855	-0.0001	0.4494	0.0529	0.6054 X
9	0.2434	0.3074	-0.0045	-0.3391	0.0973	0.4871 X
10	0.0665	0.7314 X	-0.0004	-0.2463	0.2240	0.1453
11	-0.1470	0.6774 X	0.0309	0.1412	-0.1355	0.0457
12	0.3400	0.1558	0.0615	0.2094	-0.0334	0.4794 X
13	0.6096 X	0.2062	0.1234	0.0250	0.0063	0.4506
14	0.8037 X	-0.2090	-0.2285	0.1532	-0.0277	0.3294
15	0.7272 X	0.0288	0.0078	-0.1084	0.0576	0.3533
16	0.3658	0.1403	0.0165	0.0634	-0.0106	0.6378 X
17	0.6546 X	0.2511	0.1670	0.2332	-0.0536	0.4971 X
18	0.8023 X	-0.0576	-0.0846	0.0141	-0.0031	0.2287
19	0.7716 X	0.2440	0.1778	0.2022	-0.0300	0.3133
20	0.6893 X	-0.1202	-0.0823	-0.0937	0.0328	0.4845 X
21	0.6941 X	-0.0096	-0.0287	-0.2700	0.1073	0.4833 X
22	0.3825	0.3518	0.1166	0.1228	-0.0570	0.5285 X
23	0.4599	0.0452	-0.0301	0.0299	0.0236	0.7818 X
24	0.4497	0.3421	0.0928	-0.0620	-0.0019	0.6048 X
25	0.6715 X	0.1697	0.1213	0.0787	0.0069	0.2566
Explained variance (65% total)	28%	8%	1%	5%	1%	22%

Due to the intricacy of understanding participants' views on preschool discipline, interview data were utilized to further explain the aspects of factor characteristics, as described in the words of the participants.

After factor loading, three of the six factors, Factor-3, -4, and -5, did not maintain significance because no participants loaded onto these three factors at .48 threshold or

higher. The remaining three out of six factors were considered for further interpretation. Henceforth, Factor 6 will be referred to as Factor 3, since it was the third factor with significant loadings. *Table 6* summarizes the factor arrays results for the remaining three factors. Each array exemplifies how the 28 Q-set statements are sorted in each factor, on the scale of -4 to +4.

*Table 6. Extracted Factor Arrays for 28 Preschool Approaches to Discipline Statements*

No	Statement	Factor Arrays		
		1	2	3
1	I feel that getting to know preschool students individually is an important part of discipline.	4	2	4
2	Although it would be nice to get to know preschool students and their families on a personal basis, my duties simply don't allow me the time.	-1	-1	-3
3	Teachers ought to be able to manage the majority of preschoolers' misbehavior in their classroom.	0	1	-1
4	Preschools must take some responsibility for teaching students how to get along and behave appropriately.	1	1	1
5	The primary responsibility for teaching preschoolers how to behave appropriately in preschool belongs to the parents.	-2	0	-2
6	I feel it is critical to work together with parents to address behavioral issues before considering suspending or expelling a preschooler from school.	1	4	3
7	There is really nothing a preschool can do if students' parents are not willing to work together with preschool personnel regarding their child's behavior.	-3	0	-1
8	Regardless of the severity of a student's behavior, my objective is to keep all students in preschool.	0	-4	0
9	I believe suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive preschool climate and an engaging environment.	1	-2	2
10	Certain preschoolers are not gaining anything from preschool and disrupt the learning environment for others. In such a case, the use of suspension and expulsion is justified to preserve the learning environment for students to learn.	-4	-1	-2
11	Preschools cannot afford to tolerate children who disrupt the learning environment.	-2	-1	-3
12	Preschools cannot afford to retain children who threaten the safety of other students.	-1	1	-2

13	I believe suspension allows children time away from preschool that encourages their parents to address their behavior.	-3	-1	-4
14	Suspension and expulsion hurt preschool students by impacting their identity development.	2	-3	0
15	Suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems.	2	1	1
16	Preschool students with special needs who engage in disruptive behavior need a different approach to discipline than their peers.	0	2	0
17	Trauma exposed preschoolers require a different approach to discipline than other preschoolers.	-1	1	2
18	Preschoolers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different disciplinary needs.	-2	-2	-1
19	Teachers at this site were for the most part adequately trained to handle problems of misbehavior and discipline.	-1	2	0
20	Suspension and expulsion are unfair to children of color.	0	-2	-1
21	Preschool personnel should consider how their discipline practices may perpetuate or interrupt racial stereotypes and biases.	2	0	-1
22	Preschool personnel who consider the reasons behind children's behaviors are less likely to respond harshly or punitively.	0	-1	2
23	All preschool personnel should establish preschool environments that are familiar, predictable, and consistent with local expectations for behavior.	3	0	3
24	Teachers should learn, include, and use students' culture and language in instruction and interactions.	1	-3	1
25	Critical self-reflection by preschool personnel is imperative to reduce bias in discipline practices.	1	0	1
26	Sometimes preschoolers' problem behaviors are a sign of a deeper developmental issue that requires support beyond what our program can offer.	0	3	0
27	Preschoolers need to learn to self-regulate so they are able to socialize appropriately.	-1	3	1
28	Self-regulation on the part of preschool personnel is the foundation of any successful preschool environment.	3	0	0

*Note:* Colors relate to conceptual grid.

Green = Onus on preschool staff; Emphasis on individual development

Yellow = Onus on preschool staff; Emphasis on preschool safety & environment

Orange = Onus on student/parents; Emphasis on individual development

Blue = Onus on student/parents; Emphasis on preschool safety & environment

*Key:*


Factor interpretation was completed in keeping with the “crib sheet” method as recommended by Watts and Stenner (2012). In this analytical method, according to Watts and Stenner (2012):

The creation of factor arrays for interpretation – which is unnecessary in principle – is nonetheless carried out as an acknowledgement of this thoroughgoing holism. It re-establishes the gestalt nature of the data and shouts loudly that the *whole viewpoint* [original emphasis] is, and always has been, our primary concern. (p. 149).

Applying this systematic and strategic approach, both the highs and lows, as well as the relative highs and lows, of each factor array are considered together. This allows for the generation of a holistic, in other words comprehensive, understanding of the meaning of each factor.

The remainder of this chapter presents the findings, including correlations among factors, visual representations of the normalized factor arrays, the interpretation of factor arrays, relevant interview data, and deeper analysis of equity orientation and efforts to reduce and prevent expulsion. The three factors are presented in order of the percent significance they explain. Each factor interpretation includes a description of relevant participant characteristics, followed by a narrative of the viewpoints of ECE leaders on preschool discipline, based on the statement ratings. In each description, the narrative is punctuated with parenthetical references to statement rankings (e.g. 2:-3 means statement number 2 has a rating of -3 in the factor array).

### **Correlations Among Factor Scores**

A characteristic of these data is how closely correlated each of the factors are, as seen in Table 7. Correlation between factors indicates their level of relatedness, or how unique each of the viewpoints are from one another.

*Table 7. Correlations Among Factor Scores*

	1	2	3
1	-----	0.1465	0.8293
2	0.1465	-----	0.3887
3	0.8293	0.3887	-----

In this case, there are significant distinctions between Factor 2 and the other two factors, because the correlation scores are below .45, putting them within acceptable range to signal a unique viewpoint (Brown, 1980).

Conversely, the correlation score between Factors 1 and 3 is .8293, representing significant relatedness. Meaning, Factor 2 equates to a distinct viewpoint, while Factors 1 and 3 are more like two subgroups of one viewpoint, made distinct by nuanced differences, while fundamentally expressing very similar core viewpoints.

#### **Normalized Factor Scores for Each Factor**

There are two ways to score each factor, one is by the numerical placement of each statement within an idealized Q-sort, and the other is by Z-scores. Both scoring methods were referenced during factor interpretation and imbued meaning into the analysis process.

The normalized factor Z-scores reveal the distribution of statements for each factor from highest to lowest. In Table 8, Table 9, and Table 10, the statements with the highest positive scores and lowest negative scores represent the views in the q-sort participants most and least agreed with, thus giving a snapshot of each viewpoint.

Table 8. *Normalized Factor Scores – For Factor I*

No.	Statement	Z-score
1	I feel that getting to know preschool students individually is an important part of...	2.018
23	All preschool personnel should establish preschool environments that are familiar..	1.322
28	Self-regulation on the part of preschool personnel is the foundation of any...	1.138
15	Suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems.	0.975
21	Preschool personnel should consider how their discipline practices may...	0.765
14	Suspension and expulsion hurt preschool students by impacting their identity...	0.733
6	I feel it is critical to work together with parents to address behavioral issues...	0.675
24	Teachers should learn, include, and use students' culture and language in...	0.621
25	Critical self-reflection by preschool personnel is imperative to reduce bias in...	0.616
9	I believe suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive preschool climate...	0.605
4	Preschools must take some responsibility for teaching students how to get along...	0.506
20	Suspension and expulsion are unfair to children of color.	0.469
8	Regardless of the severity of a student's behavior, my objective is to keep all...	0.394
3	Teachers ought to be able to manage the majority of preschoolers' misbehavior...	0.306
22	Preschool personnel who consider the reasons behind children's behaviors are...	0.234
16	Preschool students with special needs who engage in disruptive behavior need...	0.223
26	Sometimes preschoolers' problem behaviors are a sign of a deeper develop- ....	0.149
17	Trauma exposed preschoolers require a different approach to discipline than...	-0.204
27	Preschoolers need to learn to self-regulate so they are able to socialize...	-0.330
19	Teachers at this site were for the most part adequately trained to handle problems...	-0.501
12	Preschools cannot afford to retain children who threaten the safety of other...	-0.703
2	Although it would be nice to get to know preschool students and their families...	-1.210
18	Preschoolers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different disciplinary...	-1.251

11	Preschools cannot afford to tolerate children who disrupt the learning environment.	-1.346
5	The primary responsibility for teaching preschoolers how to behave appro- ...	-1.492
7	There is really nothing a preschool can do if students' parents are not willing to...	-1.520
13	I believe suspension allows children time away from preschool that encourages...	-1.573
10	Certain preschoolers are not gaining anything from preschool and disrupt the...	-1.619

Table 9. *Normalized Factor Scores – For Factor II*

No.	Statement	Z-score
6	I feel it is critical to work together with parents to address behavioral issues...	2.484
27	Preschoolers need to learn to self-regulate so they are able to socialize appropriately.	2.096
26	Sometimes preschoolers' problem behaviors are a sign of a deeper developmental...	1.829
1	I feel that getting to know preschool students individually is an important part of...	1.078
19	Teachers at this site were for the most part adequately trained to handle problems...	0.580
16	Preschool students with special needs who engage in disruptive behavior need a...	0.521
12	Preschools cannot afford to retain children who threaten the safety of other students.	0.485
15	Suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems.	0.364
3	Teachers ought to be able to manage the majority of preschoolers' misbehavior in...	0.216
4	Preschools must take some responsibility for teaching students how to get along...	0.192
17	Trauma exposed preschoolers require a different approach to discipline than other...	0.148
5	The primary responsibility for teaching preschoolers how to behave appropriately...	0.133
25	Critical self-reflection by preschool personnel is imperative to reduce bias in...	0.074
28	Self-regulation on the part of preschool personnel is the foundation of any...	0.000
21	Preschool personnel should consider how their discipline practices may...	-0.059
23	All preschool personnel should establish preschool environments that are familiar...	-0.098

7	There is really nothing a preschool can do if students' parents are not willing to...	-0.133
13	I believe suspension allows children time away from preschool that encourages...	-0.228
11	Preschools cannot afford to tolerate children who disrupt the learning environment.	-0.305
22	Preschool personnel who consider the reasons behind children's behaviors are...	-0.585
10	Certain preschoolers are not gaining anything from preschool and disrupt the...	-0.631
2	Although it would be nice to get to know preschool students and their families on...	-0.823
9	I believe suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive preschool climate...	-0.900
18	Preschoolers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different disciplinary...	-1.160
20	Suspension and expulsion are unfair to children of color.	-1.175
24	Teachers should learn, include, and use students' culture and language in...	-1.234
14	Suspension and expulsion hurt preschool students by impacting their identity...	-1.273
8	Regardless of the severity of a student's behavior, my objective is to keep all...	-1.598

Table 10. *Normalized Factor Scores – For Factor III*

No.	Statement	Z-score
1	I feel that getting to know preschool students individually is an important part...	1.640
6	I feel it is critical to work together with parents to address behavioral issues...	1.608
23	All preschool personnel should establish preschool environments that are...	1.297
9	I believe suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive preschool climate...	0.748
22	Preschool personnel who consider the reasons behind children's behaviors are...	0.740
17	Trauma exposed preschoolers require a different approach to discipline than...	0.684
25	Critical self-reflection by preschool personnel is imperative to reduce bias in...	0.669
24	Teachers should learn, include, and use students' culture and language in...	0.634
27	Preschoolers need to learn to self-regulate so they are able to socialize...	0.607
4	Preschools must take some responsibility for teaching students how to get along...	0.588

15	Suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems.	0.540
26	Sometimes preschoolers' problem behaviors are a sign of a deeper developmental...	0.433
28	Self-regulation on the part of preschool personnel is the foundation of any...	0.369
16	Preschool students with special needs who engage in disruptive behavior need...	0.360
14	Suspension and expulsion hurt preschool students by impacting their identity...	0.190
8	Regardless of the severity of a student's behavior, my objective is to keep all...	0.078
19	Teachers at this site were for the most part adequately trained to handle problems...	0.073
3	Teachers ought to be able to manage the majority of preschoolers' misbehavior...	0.052
21	Preschool personnel should consider how their discipline practices may...	-0.003
18	Preschoolers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different disciplinary...	-0.390
7	There is really nothing a preschool can do if students' parents are not willing to...	-0.794
20	Suspension and expulsion are unfair to children of color.	-1.011
12	Preschools cannot afford to retain children who threaten the safety of other...	-1.039
5	The primary responsibility for teaching preschoolers how to behave approp-...	-1.314
10	Certain preschoolers are not gaining anything from preschool and disrupt the...	-1.571
11	Preschools cannot afford to tolerate children who disrupt the learning environment.	-1.593
2	Although it would be nice to get to know preschool students and their families on...	-1.655
13	I believe suspension allows children time away from preschool that encourages...	-1.938

### Interpretation of Factor Arrays

The next sections cover the interpretations of the idealized factor arrays for Factors 1, 2, and 3. The crib sheet method was utilized for all three factors independently, as recommended by Watts and Stenner (2012). Independent interpretation for each factor was important so that the differences between Factors 1 and 3 could be identified in

detail. However, since Factors 1 and 3 are essentially one main viewpoint with two subgroups of nuanced meaning, the interview data for these factors were analyzed concurrently, and described according to the commonalities and distinctions between the factor groups. Factor 2 was interpreted last, along with supporting interview data.

### **Factor 1 – Self-Reflective, Engaging, & Accountable**

Factor 1 explains 28% of the study variance. Eleven participants are significantly associated with this factor. They are all females with an average of 24.1 years working in the early childhood field, and a total combined 265 years working in ECE. Two identify as Black, two identify as Asian, two identify as Latina, and five identify as White. Five are program directors of single sites, two are executive leaders over eight sites, one is assistant director of a single site, one is site supervisor of a single site, one is lead teacher at a single site, and one is a coach at four sites. Three work at fee-based sites, one at a parent cooperative, four at a combination of fee-based and publicly funded, three connected to college campuses, and three at entirely publicly funded sites.

In this viewpoint, preschool staff are considered responsible for establishing a preschool environment that values staff self-regulation (28: +3), forming relationships with students and their families (1: +4; 6: +1), behavior expectations consistent with the local context (23: +3; 24: +1), and awareness of the potential impacts of disciplinary practices on identity development and racial socialization (21: +2; 14: +2). Suspension and expulsion are rejected as effective disciplinary approaches, and are viewed as almost

always preventable (10: -4; 13: -3; 15: +2; 9:+1); racialized unfairness in the use of these exclusionary practices is recognized (20: 0), (see Figure 2).

Parents are viewed as important partners to engage with (6: +1), but the onus of responsibility for guiding behaviors in the preschool environment rests first and foremost with preschool staff (5: -2). When behavioral issues are present, the search for solutions is situated squarely within the preschool environment and preschool staff practices (4: +1; 9: +1; 3: 0), in partnership with families when appropriate (6: +1), and parents are not blamed or punished with exclusion of their child. Inclusion for all students is a top priority (7: -3; 13: -3; 11: -2; 12:-1; 8: 0).

Consideration of moving a child to another program that may align better with their developmental and learning needs is seen as a last resort (10: -4; 26:0). When a child has persistent behavioral struggles, first the teacher's and site's practices and preschool environment are examined deeply and viewed with a critical lens (21: +2; 25: +1). Parents are engaged in the conversation early as partners (6: +1). If ongoing efforts to meet the needs of the child are not successful, then further evaluation of underlying and/or special needs may occur (16: 0, 26:0). This approach is considered the accepted norm to be utilized consistently with all children (18: -2; 17: -1; 16:0).

### **Factor 3 – Relational, Individualized, & Trauma-Informed**

Factor 3 explains 22% of the study variance. Thirteen participants are significantly associated with this factor. They are twelve females and one male with an average of 29.2 years working in the early childhood field, and a total combined 321

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	4
10. <u>Certain preschoolers are not gaining anything from preschool and disrupt the learning environment for others....</u>	7. There is really nothing a preschool can do if students' parents are not willing to work together with preschool personnel regarding their child's behavior.***	18. <u>Preschoolers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different disciplinary needs.</u>	2. Although it would be nice to get to know preschool students and their families on a personal basis, my duties simply don't allow me the time.	3. Teachers ought to be able to manage the majority of preschoolers' misbehavior in their classroom.	4. Preschools must take some responsibility for teaching students how to get along and behave appropriately.	21. <u>Preschool personnel should consider how their discipline practices may perpetuate or interrupt racial stereotypes and biases.**</u>	23. All preschool personnel should establish preschool environments that are familiar, predictable, and consistent with local expectations for behavior	1. I feel that getting to know preschool students individually is an important part of discipline.
	13. I believe suspension allows children time away from preschool that encourages their parents to address their behavior.	5. <u>The primary responsibility for teaching preschoolers how to behave appropriately in preschool belongs to the parents.</u>	17. Trauma imposed preschoolers require a different approach to discipline than other preschoolers.	8. Regardless of the severity of a student's behavior, my objective is to keep all students in preschool.	9. I believe suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive preschool climate and an engaging environment	14. <u>Suspension and expulsion hurt preschool students by impacting their identity development**</u>	28. <u>Self-regulation on the part of preschool personnel is the foundation of any successful preschool environment.*</u>	
		11. Preschools cannot afford to tolerate children who disrupt the learning environment.	12. Preschools cannot afford to retain children who threaten the safety of other students.	16. <u>Preschool students with special needs who engage in disruptive behavior need a different approach to discipline than their peers.</u>	6. <u>I feel it is critical to work together with parents to address behavioral issues before suspending or expelling a preschooler from school.***</u>	15. <u>Suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems.</u>		
			19. Teachers at this site were for the most part adequately trained to handle problems of misbehavior and discipline.***	20. <u>Suspension and expulsion are unfair in children of color.**</u>	24. Teachers should learn, include, and use students' culture and language in instruction and interactions.			
			27. <u>Preschoolers need to learn to self-regulate so they are able to socialize appropriately.*</u>	22. Preschool personnel who consider the reasons behind children's behaviors are less likely to respond harshly or punitively.*	25. Critical self-reflection by preschool personnel is imperative to reduce bias in discipline practices			
				24. <u>Sometimes preschoolers' problem behaviors are a sign of a deeper developmental issue that requires support beyond what our program can offer.</u>				

Note: **Bold Underlined** = placement higher than in ANY other sort; **Bold** = higher than in other sorts  
*Italics underlined* = placement lower than in ANY other sort; *Italics* = lower than in others sorts  
 \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

Key: Green = Onus on preschool staff; Emphasis on individual development; Yellow = Onus on preschool staff; Emphasis on preschool safety & environment; Orange = Onus on student/parents; Emphasis on individual development; Blue = Onus on student/parents; Emphasis on preschool safety & environment

Figure 2. Factor-1 Statement Array

years working in ECE. Two identify as Latina and eleven identify as White. Nine are directors of single sites, one is a director of eight sites, one is a director of 12 sites, and one is a coach for four sites. Four work at fee-based sites, one at a parent cooperative, five at a combination of fee-based and publicly funded, two connected to college campuses, and four at entirely publicly funded sites.

Figure 3 depicts how in this viewpoint engaging parents is a top priority and central to the role of preschool leadership (6: +3; 2: -3). Staff awareness of the students in the room, their background, and how they are used to behaving and interacting at home (1: +4; 6: +3; 23: +3; 24: +1), as well as self-reflection about personal biases this may bring up is crucial to creating a positive and fair preschool environment (9: +2; 25: +1). Understanding the underlying reasons for student behaviors, including the possibility of a trauma history, helps engender more positive staff responses to students, which is exactly what some students need if they have experienced (or are experiencing) trauma (17: +2; 22: +2).

Preschool personnel are responsible to work to prevent suspension and expulsion through positive approaches such as relationships with students, engagement with families, and providing positive preschool environments that align with local behavioral expectations (1: +4; 6: +3; 23: +3; 2:-3). Suspension and expulsion are viewed as largely avoidable and also not effective for supporting positive preschool environments, or

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	4
13. I believe suspension allows children time away from preschool that encourages their parents to address their behavior.	2. Although it would be nice to get to know preschool students and their families on a personal basis, my duties simply don't allow me the time.*	5. The primary responsibility for teaching preschoolers how to behave appropriately in preschool belongs to the parents.	20. Suspension and expulsion are unfair to children of color.	8. Regardless of the severity of a student's behavior, my objective is to keep all students in preschool.	24. Teachers should learn, include, and use students' culture and language in instruction and interactions.	22. Preschool personnel who consider the reasons behind children's behaviors are less likely to respond harshly or punitively.*	6. I feel it is critical to work together with parents to address behavioral issues before considering suspending or expelling a preschooler from school.**	1. I feel that getting to know preschool students individually is an important part of discipline.
	11. Preschools cannot afford to tolerate children who disrupt the learning environment.	10. Certain preschoolers are not gaining anything from preschool and disrupt the learning environment for others....	7. There is really nothing a preschool can do if students' parents are not willing to work together with preschool personnel regarding their child's behavior.*	19. Teachers at this site were for the most part adequately trained to handle problems of misbehavior and discipline.	25. Critical self-reflection by preschool personnel is imperative to reduce bias in discipline practices.	9. I believe suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive preschool climate and an engaging environment.	23. All preschool personnel should establish preschool environments that are familiar, predictable, and consistent with local expectations for behavior.	
		12. Preschools cannot afford to retain children who threaten the safety of other students.	3. Teachers ought to be able to manage the majority of preschoolers' misbehavior in their classroom.	28. Self-regulation on the part of preschool personnel is the foundation of any successful preschool environment.	15. Suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems.	17. Trauma exposed preschoolers require a different approach to discipline than other preschoolers.		
			21. Preschool personnel should consider how their discipline practices may perpetuate or interrupt racial stereotypes and biases.	14. Suspension and expulsion hurt preschool students by impacting their identity development. **	4. Preschools must take some responsibility for teaching students how to get along and behave appropriately.			
			18. Preschoolers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different disciplinary needs.*	16. Preschool students with special needs who engage in disruptive behavior need a different approach to discipline than their peers.	27. Preschoolers need to learn to self-regulate so they are able to socialize appropriately.**			
				26. Sometimes preschoolers' problem behaviors are a sign of a deeper developmental issue that requires support beyond what our program can offer.				

Note: **Bold Underlined** = placement higher than in ANY other sort; **Bold** = higher than in other sorts  
*Italics underlined* = placement lower than in ANY other sort; *Italics* = lower than in others sorts  
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Key: Green = Onus on preschool staff; Emphasis on individual development; Yellow = Onus on preschool staff; Emphasis on preschool safety & environment; Orange = Onus on student/parents; Emphasis on individual development; Blue = Onus on student/parents, Emphasis on preschool safety & environment

Figure 3. Factor-3 Statement Array

encouraging parents to engage preschool staff with supporting behavioral change (9: +2; 15:+1; 11: -3; 12: -2).

### **Commonalities between Factors 1 and 3**

The participants in this study who were significantly related to factors 1 and 3 shared viewpoints with emphasis on the crucial importance of preschool staff establishing and nurturing relationships with students, their parents, and center teams.

I feel like getting to know the children individually is really the core value of discipline to really understand where they're coming from, where we, how we can help them. (Ruth, study interview, March 5, 2019)

And it's all based on relationship we, the most important thing that we talked about is building those relationships with the children and with their parents, and with our team, with each other. (Sarah, study interview, March 25, 2019)

Stacy spoke about value of parent engagement in the context of how those relationships help with having open communication when behavioral challenges come up:

Building relationships with each person makes those things easier. Saying positive things about the child all the time, you know, having daily conversations or every other day. You know, emailing parents, talking, just really that, creating a bond with the families makes those, those kinds of things much easier to have the conversations when they do arise. (Stacy, study interview, February 20, 2019)

Relationship as a core component of discipline relates to another similar theme shared by Factors 1 and 3; accepting children as they are. This viewpoint understands behaviors as exactly what is meant to happen in the preschool environment as both part of learning and development. Study participants related to both factors described children's behaviors as meaningful communication that should be understood as such, not as a disruption or an issue.

But all of us I think have been here long enough to understand why children do the things they do... There's always a reason why. So, um, we try to work with the reason why and thankfully, um, it has been successful every time. (Maria, study interview, February 27, 2019)

Describing her view of preschool discipline, Nora clearly described her developmental view:

I've developed a strong sense of understanding children. So, what human development is. What stages and milestones children go through. So, I accept children's behavior as it is as it relates to their development... Especially zero to six, I'm speaking very specifically - in those phases of their development, they are being *exactly* who they are, right, whoever they're supposed to be. So, if you run into any challenges as a teacher, on looking at this child, it's because it was a *learned* behavior and you have to respect their learning. So, you have to either unlearn it, you know like un-teach them it; but you can't *penalize* them for it, they had nothing to do with it - it's, that's their development. (Nora, study interview, January 24, 2019)

Explaining why she placed a certain q-statement on the low end of the rating scale,

Ruth emphasized:

I just feel like we have to always make time and effort to getting to know why a child who's doing what. And it's, they're not disrupting the learning environment. They're just, they need something different and it's just, they're just communicating something else to us. And I think just, I think, I don't agree with the, even the word disrupt. I don't think that they were disrupting the learning environment. They just are speaking out and crying out for help or they need something different. And that's just the way I've always viewed children that had misbehavior in the classroom. They need something more. (Ruth, study interview, April 11, 2019)

Viewing children and families in a fundamentally positive and strength-based light was another connection between Factors 1 and 3. In both factor arrays, respecting and honoring children, their families, and behavioral expectations in the local community were rated highly. The related interview excerpts elucidate perspectives that clearly value children and families for who they are and where they come from.

I think there's a lot of redirection that goes on but also feel that we have to respect, the parents like maybe there's a form of discipline that they use at home that works with their child, um, you know, I think there has to be a bridge absolutely between home and school. (Betty, study interview, February 20, 2019)

Looking at the child as not just a separate entity in themselves, but they come with a family, with them, a community with them, a background, a history. And um, I think acknowledging that they're all rich, the start, so a positive view of the child no matter where they come from, how long they've been here. And I think being a Director of color, I know because I migrated myself, and I know all the hurdles families have to go through when you're adopting a new country, you know, into your life. (Eva, study interview, February 25, 2019)

The commonalities of viewpoints between Factors 1 and 3 also included a distinct process for consideration of behavioral issues, beginning within the sphere of influence of preschool staff, especially elements of the classroom environment, before focusing on the child. In this process expulsion was considered a very last resort.

The core components, I think is comprehensive in a sense because we do look, look at the environment first, staff next, then child last... I guess that's my way. Comprehensive relationship. It involves partnerships. (Eva, study interview, February 25, 2019)

We look at everything else but the child first like *everything* else comes first and then at the *very* end we might look at the child. You know, how's the environment setup like how are you structuring interesting enough activities to keep the children engaged. What are *you* doing in this interaction? You know, what part are you playing? And then maybe then we get to look at the child and say, like what's going on with the child? [emphasis original] (Shannon, study interview, March 5, 2019)

Both reject exclusion as an approach to address children's behavior challenges, yet share a perspective about expulsion resulting from not being able to either establish or maintain a bond and a collaborative relationship with parents. However, participants described their own roles in parent engagement, and parent education, as central to their

approaches. These participants recognize suspension as a hindrance to partnering with parents, because it is seen as a practice that punishes parents:

It has always been something we've worked on to try to avoid suspensions and expulsions. Most of the times when something like that is happening. It's not because of the kids. It's because, I hate to say this it's because the parents. The parents won't work with us, the parents won't work with their kids. (Alice, study interview, February 20, 2019)

The [q-sort] statements about suspension being good for the child. How is that good for the child? To be pointed out, and excluded and everyone knows, you've been excluded. How's that good for them? My personal belief is when you suspend or expel a child, is you're not punishing the child, you're punishing the parent... It's no learning going on, except the parents getting resentful everything that's happening, and gets less likely to want to work with you. (Alice, study interview, February 20, 2019)

I have personally decided as a program director that it would take almost the moon falling out of the sky before I expelled a child from my program. It would take a whole lot for that be the case, I have had instances where I've considered removing the child from a program because the parents, the parents became so defensive around us, giving them messages around what their child is doing. So, the parent wasn't, so therefore they tried to flip it, to make it seem like, 'you all are abusing my child', like flip the conversation to protect themselves. So, the only circumstance that I would see a challenging child as a child that would need removal, is if I felt like the parents weren't working collaboratively to support that child. So, if the parent became a concern, then that will be the only condition that I would consider removing a child. But it would never be because of the child's behavior in and of itself. (Nora, study interview, January 24, 2019)

I don't think the suspending children and having time away from preschool encourages parents to do anything. I think it just makes them mad... I also think it's just really important to work with the parents the entire time. (Lucia, study interview, March 25, 2019)

I think our job is to find ways to keep children in the program... You know, where, where, where are the situations where it is not safe to have a child in the program and it really comes down to a lot of - I'd say most of the time, for me, it's really not being able to partner with the family. They just for whatever reason, we cannot get on the same page to work through it. Um, and that can be a variety of things. It can be the chaos in the family system. To just an adversarial refusal to even work with us around it. (Debra, study interview, March 11, 2019)

Factors 1 and 3 effectively share core values and also differ in nuanced ways, which will be explored further in the next section. What these factors share in common is an emphasis on preventing and avoiding expulsion through preventative approaches, including: forming relationships with children and families; interpreting children's behaviors as communication; taking strength-based perspectives of children and families; considering expulsion as a result of conflicts with parents; and, placing the onus of responsibility for being inclusive and finding solutions on preschool staff.

### **Distinctions between Factors 1 and 3**

There were nuanced differences between Factors 1 and 3, both in the q-sort arrays, and in the participant interviews. Self-regulation on the part of preschool staff was rated more highly in Factor 1. The participants related to Factor 1 expressed the value of having a self-reflective and growth oriented mindset, both individually and as a program, thus being able to shift and look at situations in fresh and flexible ways. Essentially, to fully own their responsibility for doing what it takes to serve all children inclusively.

“Because sometimes and I even tell the kids too sometimes, you know, ‘Teacher needs a little bit. I have to count to 10 and then I’ll talk to you guys.’” (Betty, study interview, February 20, 2019)

There's a State law for state funded programs about expulsions and suspensions. They have more clearly defined what those are now... So, I mean, there's, there's a shift in thought, and so we're having to shift our thoughts about it as well. So rather than sending a child to the Director's office, it's rethinking that and sending the Director to the child's classroom. (Alice, study interview, February 20, 2019)

I think that it's a mindset that we have to work on - overall, right - by creating a community of teachers who share mindset, who share a vision, who share understanding. (Nora, study interview, January 24, 2019)

Or even just taking the stance that says, Yeah, maybe it'll never happen for this child. That doesn't mean I don't need to prepare for the next one, right. So, it's like... the teachers need to develop the *mindset* of how to deal with a challenging child, not label *one child at a time* [emphasis original]. Right, so it's like yeah maybe none of these strategies work with this kid. Maybe it didn't. Doesn't mean you don't need to learn the strategies. And it doesn't mean that you're not going to get another child next time. Why get rid of this one? There's another one coming, you know in a couple of months. It makes no sense. Right. It's like you're trying to eliminate something that honestly will never go away because you're going to always have a child who has some behavior that you don't like. So, you have to change the way you think about it... (Nora, study interview, January 24, 2019)

Both the array and participant responses related to Factor 1 placed greater emphasis on the work of preschool staff, at all levels of the organization, to engage in critical self-reflection about the biases and assumptions they bring to their judgments and actions with children and families. A related nuance to the more self-reflective viewpoint expressed in Factor 1, was participants articulated how they think about accountability and address the potential impacts of their actions on children, including how their practices perpetuate or interrupt racialized inequities.

As administrators, we're having a conversation about how well Our teachers paying attention to the students and looking at them for their strengths. (Rosalind, study interview, January 27, 2019)

So, look at the environment first, then look at your own self, your own biases or um, you have implicit bias, overt or covert. And then you look at yourself, I am I everything you reflect, why, why do, do I end this child not get along. Why do we clash? So, looking at yourself next and then tried to piece out how could I have done this better, you know, and then asking your colleagues for assistance because we're a team. (Eva, study interview, February 25, 2019)

No one wants to just *own it*. Just, just *own it*. Just take responsibility for this challenging child and *figure out* what you need to do to serve them. *Stop* trying to, *dime them off* to the *next* program, to the *next* classroom, to the next, *whatever*. You're going to keep doing that, and that's probably why they're going to keep having challenging behaviors. Are you just going to wait until they grow out of it? I think that's like the, I don't know, I don't even know what the *theory* is behind it. It's very annoying. It's extremely annoying. And it's more annoying, obviously

for me, as an African American woman, because it's mostly brown, black and brown *boys*. I see it more with black and brown boys. It's almost like 'We just don't know what to do with this kid, let's just get rid of 'em.' It's like, *that's your job*, like your job is to *deal* with it, you know, like where are we sending this kid to? [all emphasis original] (Nora, study interview, January 24, 2019)

Alice described how her program used Program Observation Logs as a tool to mediate bias by having multiple teachers record their observations of the same behaviors, and to track patterns of both the children's behaviors and the teachers' perceptions of those behaviors by doing behavior logs:

On all the children, all the time... It's both positive and negative... We want to make sure that we're keeping track of all of the positives are happening, based on what we've been doing. If we don't have any positives, then it kind of tells us we need to change our focus a little bit so that we can see a change; do something to help promote change. (Alice, study interview, February 20, 2019)

On the other hand, the Factor 3 array rated statements highlighting the impacts of disciplinary actions with lower agreement, and interview data reinforced this orientation through limited descriptions of how bias might have demonstrable impacts on equitable outcomes.

"Suspension and expulsion are unfair to children of color. I agree with that. But it's unfair to any child not just a child of color." (Robin, study interview, February 14, 2019).

When it comes to the discipline piece. Um, we take a look at each child individually. And so, we will take a look at the child and we will be consistent. We will be consistent in our practices. So really, regardless of their race. It's, we have expectations of all the children, regardless of the race, regardless of where they come from. It's about what happens in the center... (Robin, study interview, February 14, 2019)

Whereas viewpoints related to Factor 1 put the onus more on preschool staff to take accountability to avoid suspension or expulsion, the factor array and interviews related to Factor 3 placed the onus more on supporting the individualized needs and

background of each child. While essentially inclusionary, Factor 3 related responses also expressed more exclusionary language than Factor 1, especially in regard to considering alternative placements if children's developmental needs exceeded what the given program could offer.

We try to really work with the family and get them outside help if they need it. Um, you know, help at our agency can't necessarily offer. Um, and then all the help that our agency can offer. (Lucia, study interview, March 25, 2019)

If a child is hurting another child and that doesn't stop, sometimes a child is brought in here just for a calm down kind of, and I'll read the child stories. Um, we'll take a walk around the school and see what everybody else is doing. Um, there isn't any kind of timeout and there's no yelling at a child, but it's understanding that there's something else going on and it may be a permanent kind of, well, sort of a, something that is frequent. It's like this child is having trouble adjusting in this environment or something's going on at home and we don't know where the child is tired and not feeling well. (Susie, study interview, February 25, 2019)

But if I think for me, actually, it's when the staff gets hurt I that's a harder line for me because you know you... don't tend to go into early childhood and think that you'll get, you know, if you go to Special Ed kind of know like 'I'm definitely going to get hit' right 'in my work - but I'm in early childhood.' (Shannon, study interview, March 5, 2019)

The following participant response also conveyed a close association between challenges originating from the home environment and consideration of expulsion, "So, what's going on? Is it environment? Is something happening at home? Is this, you know, and we have to explore whether or not this is the right place for our child." (Susie, study interview, February 25, 2019)

Another distinction evinced by participant interview data regarded engagement of parents. While both factors placed emphasis on building relationships with and engaging parents, participants related to Factor 1 spoke more about partnering with parents,

clarifying expectations, and being transparent up front as part of their disciplinary approach. This aspect of their approach was described within the context of providing an equally important service to both children and their parents.

We look at families with a compassionate view. We give them all the supports they need to be successful. So, the same thing you give the child in the classroom, all the supports you need to be successful and don't leave the parents in the dark. You're always very transparent. You bring the parents in, partner with you. (Eva, study interview, February 25, 2019)

Making sure that everybody's consistent on what the policy is. And is that something that is written down someplace that everyone has access to, or it's shared verbally. So, what I do, I orientation, I talked to the parents verbally about what are, what is our policy? (Maria, study interview, February 27, 2019)

So that's something that I was just asking my staff about how well we're sharing and messaging our expectations and behavior expectations to our families. Because I do family monthly check ins or council meetings and they were showing that they didn't necessarily have it written out, what the expectations are. And so, you know that disconnect is something that I'm working on right now just trying to make sure that families understand what the expectations are, and how we're modeling it and doing it in the classroom. (Rosalind, study interview, January 27, 2019)

The distinctions between Factors 1 and 3 were mostly found in the nuances of the q-sort factor arrays and interview data. Factor 1 data emphasized self-regulation, self-reflection, and accountability for checking personal biases and assumptions more than Factor 3. Relatedly, responses related to Factor 1 focused more on the impacts of exclusionary discipline, and participants articulated specific practices aimed at identifying and addressing patterns in practice that might have inequitable and racially biased affects. Contrarily, Factor 3 q-sort data rated the impacts of bias and racial stereotyping as less important, and related participants mostly articulated a racially-colorblind approach in their thinking about questions of equity.

Both factors expressed value for relationships with parents, but there were differences between their views, with participants related to Factor 1 speaking more about partnering, clarifying, and sharing expectations for behavior to parents proactively, transparently, and in writing. This perspective was not evident in the Factor 3 data.

**Leadership across one program.**

Six participants in this study were from one multi-site program. Their views about discipline had notable similarities, and all six loaded significantly onto Factors 1, 3, or both. Specifically, both executive leaders loaded significantly onto Factor 1, while one also loaded significantly onto Factor 3; the three site leaders loaded onto Factor 3; and one lead teacher loaded onto Factor 1.

The varying levels of leaders in this subset of participants provides anecdotal evidence for the role of leadership in establishing cultural norms and values in a program. This was borne out by all six participants relating significantly to Factors 1 and 3, which as stated earlier, are very similar perspectives. Furthermore, interview data reinforced the shared values between participants for redirection, social emotional, and relationship-based approaches to discipline.

Another notable similarity between this group was some variation of a common phrase stated by all site-based participants in their interviews, “Fair doesn’t always mean same” (Michael, study interview, February 20, 2019). The phrase seemed to represent how the concept of equity had been operationalized through messages from program leadership. Site leaders specifically mentioned that the executive leader always says this

phrase. They each mentioned this phrase in reference to how they addressed equity. This shared perspective was to work towards equity from the standpoint of meeting the individual needs of each child and each family.

### **Factor 2 – Behavior Goes Back to the Home**

Factor 2 explains 8% of the study variance. Three participants are significantly associated with this factor. They are all females with an average of 29.7 years working in the early childhood field, and total combined 89 years working in ECE. One identifies as African American and two identify as White. One is a site supervisor of a publicly funded site and two are directors of faith- and fee-based centers.

Figure 4 demonstrates how in this viewpoint also, relationships with students and working together with parents to address behavioral concerns are an important part of discipline. (6: +4; 1: +2). Preschools have some responsibility for student behavior (4: +1), but ultimately whether children behave appropriately depends on the children and their parents (5: 0; 27: +3; 26: +3).

Teachers at these sites have been adequately trained to handle discipline issues and ought to be able to manage behavioral challenges (19: +2; 3: +1), so if parents won't work together with preschool staff to address their child's behavior issues then there's nothing the preschool can do because other students need to be protected and kept safe (6: +4; 7: 0; 12: +1). Suspension and expulsion are necessary and unavoidable to maintain a safe preschool environment (12: +1; 8: -4; 9: -2).

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	4
8. <u>Regardless of the severity of a student's behavior, my objective is to keep all students in preschool.</u> **	24. <u>Teachers should learn, include, and use students' culture and language in instruction and interactions.</u> ***	20. <u>Suspension and expulsion are unfair to children of color.</u>	2. Although it would be nice to get to know preschool students and their families on a personal basis, my duties simply don't allow me the time.	25. <u>Critical self-reflection by preschool personnel is imperative to reduce bias in discipline practices.</u>	15. <u>Suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems.</u>	1. <u>I feel that getting to know preschool students individually is an important part of discipline.</u>	27. <u>Preschoolers need to learn to self-regulate so they are able to socialize appropriately.</u> *	6. <u>I feel it is critical to work together with parents to address behavioral issues before considering suspending or expelling a preschooler from school.</u> **
	14. <u>Suspension and expulsion hurt preschool students by impacting their identity development.</u> **	9. <u>I believe suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive preschool climate and an engaging environment.</u> ***	22. <u>Preschool personnel who consider the reasons behind children's behaviors are less likely to respond harshly or positively.</u> ***	7. <u>There is really nothing a preschool can do if students' parents are not willing to work together with preschool personnel regarding their child's behavior.</u> *	12. <u>Preschools cannot afford to retain children who threaten the safety of other students.</u> **	19. <u>Teachers at this site were for the most part adequately trained to handle problems of misbehavior and discipline.</u>	26. <u>Sometimes preschoolers' problem behaviors are a sign of a deeper developmental issue that requires support beyond what our program can offer.</u> **	
		18. <u>Preschoolers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different disciplinary needs.</u>	10. <u>Certain preschoolers are not gaining anything from preschool and disrupt the learning environment for others...</u> **	5. <u>The primary responsibility for teaching preschoolers how to behave appropriately in preschool belongs to the parents.</u> **	3. <u>Teachers ought to be able to manage the majority of preschoolers' misbehavior in their classroom.</u>	16. <u>Preschool students with special needs who engage in disruptive behavior need a different approach to discipline than their peers.</u>		
			11. <u>Preschools cannot afford to tolerate children who disrupt the learning environment.</u> **	21. <u>Preschool personnel should consider how their discipline practices may perpetuate or interrupt racial stereotypes and biases.</u>	4. <u>Preschools must take some responsibility for teaching students how to get along and behave appropriately.</u>			
			13. <u>I believe suspension allows children time away from preschool that encourages their parents to address their behavior.</u> **	23. <u>All preschool personnel should establish preschool environments that are familiar, predictable, and consistent with local expectations for behavior.</u> ***	17. <u>Trauma exposed preschoolers require a different approach to discipline than other preschoolers.</u>			
				28. <u>Self-regulation on the part of preschool personnel is the foundation of any successful preschool environment.</u>				

Note: **Bold Underlined** = placement higher than in ANY other sort; **Bold** = higher than in other sorts  
Italics underlined = placement lower than in ANY other sort; *Italics* = lower than in others sorts  
 \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

Key: Green = Onus on preschool staff; Emphasis on individual development; Yellow = Onus on preschool staff; Emphasis on preschool safety & environment; Orange = Onus on student/parents; Emphasis on individual development; Blue = Onus on student/parents; Emphasis on preschool safety & environment

Figure 4. Factor-2 Statement Array

No matter how prepared, preschool personnel only have so much they can do to influence behaviors in a preschool environment (3: +1; 19: +2; interview data), and when preschoolers are consistently disruptive to the learning environment they need to be removed from class, especially if they hurt or threaten other students (8: -4; 9: -2; 10: -1; 11: -1; 12: 1). Sending children home alerts their parents to the seriousness of their misbehaviors, and the necessity for parents to take the time to address their behaviors (13: -1). Children's disruptive behaviors should be dealt with at home since they result from how they're being raised in their home environments (23: 0; 24: -3; 5: 0).  
viewpoint.

The factor array and interview data for Factor 2 portrayed an exclusionary viewpoint. Interview data related to Factor expressed reasons for why exclusionary practices were favored as a consequence for challenging behaviors.

I believe suspension out children and time away from preschool. They encourage their parents to address their behavior because if you have to stay home from work because of your child's behavior, you may consider trying to do some corrections. (Anne, study interview, February 21, 2019)

And say that, you know, the child is, um, having a breakdown, an emotional breakdown, and won't calm down. So maybe it's best for that child to go home for the day. And then sometimes, um, when they don't listen to a teacher and, um, you've talked to em' over and over, and they're throwing a big, *big* fit [emphasis original], and they're not calming down, um, sometimes you have to call a parent, and the parent has to come. Because no matter what you're doing; and plus, you're distracting all the other children. You're wasting their, their time too, cause you're having to deal with that one child. And if it lasts for, you know, a long time, it's just - they just need to come and get him. (Mary, study interview, February 15, 2019)

Reflecting on the Q-set statement "Suspension and expulsion hurt preschool students by impacting their identity development", Anne described another perspective, expressing

how suspension could potentially have positive results if parents used it as a learning opportunity.

It can, you know, maybe hurt their identity, but it depends on, the parents. Say you suspend a child. It depends on how the parents treat that with their child, [as] opposed to hurtin' them, or it could help them, be become better people. So, this one was kind of on the fence because it's really back to their parents, who *are* their primary, and their first teacher. So, if my child got suspended and they came home and I talked bad on them and say, 'you net good for nothing, you can't do nothing right', then that can hurt. So, it's not so much the suspension or expulsion that would hurt their identity, I think is what happens, the result from it, from home. (pause) Or if the parent did some'n different, say 'See, son you wasn't doin' so well in school, now you get to spend more time with me, and we're gonna' talk about this behavior, because it can't continue. You can't go through life, doing what you're doing.' So, it could be a more positive effect. So, it really depends on what happened after this. (Anne, study interview, February 21, 2019)

Mary described how she utilized expulsion preemptively with a 10-day probation period to determine whether a child could stay in her program or not.

cause they're on a, um, a 10-day probation period in the beginning. Um, and it's just a, because some children need a play-based setting where they just play all day and not too much structure here. It's not a play-based, it's somewhat structured. So not all surroundings and preschools are suited for all children. (Mary, study interview, February 15, 2019)

Running a fee-based program was associated with increased pressure to prioritize safety over inclusion.

Cause they're paying for the education. And the reason why it's a little bit different, since you have parents who are paying for their education, um, they don't pay for their child to come here and be abused by another child. Um, so that's, you kind of look at it that way, that, um, as far as a child with a discipline problem, behavior problem, um, you can't have em' stay here and injure other children when you have parents paying for their child to be someplace *safe* [emphasis original]. (Mary, study interview, February 15, 2019)

Q-set statements that emphasized the importance of setting up a positive preschool environment in alignment with the local context, such as language, were rated low in Factor

2, and related participant interviews provide meaning for these low rankings. Reflecting on her low ranking of the statement, “I believe suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive preschool climate and an engaging environment”, Anne stated:

I disagree with that totally, because, I know the classrooms here and where I was before, they was really equipped, well planned out; um, engagement, teachers, really interacting with the children, and it didn't make it different. So, it's not the classroom environment; that's back to home. (Anne, study interview, February 21, 2019).

Explaining the reason for her disagreement with the statement “Teachers should learn, include, and use students’ culture and language in instruction and interactions”, Anne said:

They already have to learn enough, especially here in California because the culture is so diverse. It would be hard. It would be nice if they could, but so I was kind of on the fence with this one because it would be nice if they tried to like get certain words from different cultures and post them up and; but it's hard to do this one. (Anne, study interview, February 21, 2019)

### **Confounded Loadings on Factors 2 and 3 - Punitive and positive approach**

One viewpoint in particular denotes the complex nature of preschool discipline. Kathy’s perspective, as encapsulated in the q-sort, is significantly related to Factor 3 at .61 and to Factor 2 at .52. This means Kathy significantly shared a viewpoint with two very different, almost opposite ways of thinking about discipline. Both of these factors rate the relationships with children and parents highly, but diverge from there. On taking a relationship-based approach, Kathy stated:

“You have to take them where they’re at... Knowing their personalities helps a lot, and that takes time.” (Kathy, study interview, February 27, 2019)

“So, we try and talk to the kids first. That’s the first and foremost thing is as talking to them, explaining things.” (Kathy, study interview, February 27, 2019)

Some kids might need to just hold your hand and kind of walk away from the situation for a little while. Like I said, different personalities actually do require a different approach because you want to be respectful of them, but you also want to be able to relate to them and be able to communicate things with them. (Kathy, study interview, February 27, 2019)

Other views Kathy shared had a different tone, and were expressed in more deficit toned language about children, and which seemed to imply a more harsh and punitive view of discipline. One example was, “I think children should be taught, right, wrong and that there's a consequence for an action. I don't think you should just smooth over everything they do.” (Kathy, study interview, February 27, 2019)

I think that a lot of times people don't want to discipline their kids, they think it's mean or hurtful; it's not. I think if you don't teach them, when they get out in the real world, they think that things are owed to them. And that's not good because nothing's owed to anyone. Anyway, we should all contribute and help each other... I think that basics is still the basics. And that's that, they need to be shown right from wrong; and what's hurtful and what's not... Teach them how to talk to each other and how to work things out. They need to figure that out; they're not the center. (Kathy, study interview, February 27, 2019)

Paradoxically, having significant relatedness to the exclusionary views in Factor 2 was discordant with Kathy's view on the negative long-term impacts of expulsion.

I don't like to kick kids out; referring them out, I might do, but that's a way I can make sure they're in a better place than just hanging out here me going, ‘No!’, I don't like to do that to kids because that stays with them. So, I always just kind of put it in a way of let's find a better situation for them. They might do better one-on-one somewhere... And so, it's just a replacement. ‘Let's just move you here’, maybe this will work better for that child. And that seems to be the better way. Then children don't think that they've been kicked out or shunned there; because that's feelings that'll stay with you for the rest of your life; and we really don't want to produce that. (Kathy, study interview, February 27, 2019)

This viewpoint demonstrates how an ECE leader can simultaneously value communication and relationships with students, while also considering exclusionary

practices such as time out, removal from the classroom, and expulsion as adequate in certain instances. The intricacy of this somewhat paradoxical view, is compounded by this participant's pronouncement about the negative lifelong impacts of exclusionary discipline. Table 11 provides an overview of the factor names in this study.

Table 11. *ECE Leaders' Views on Preschool Discipline Q-sort*

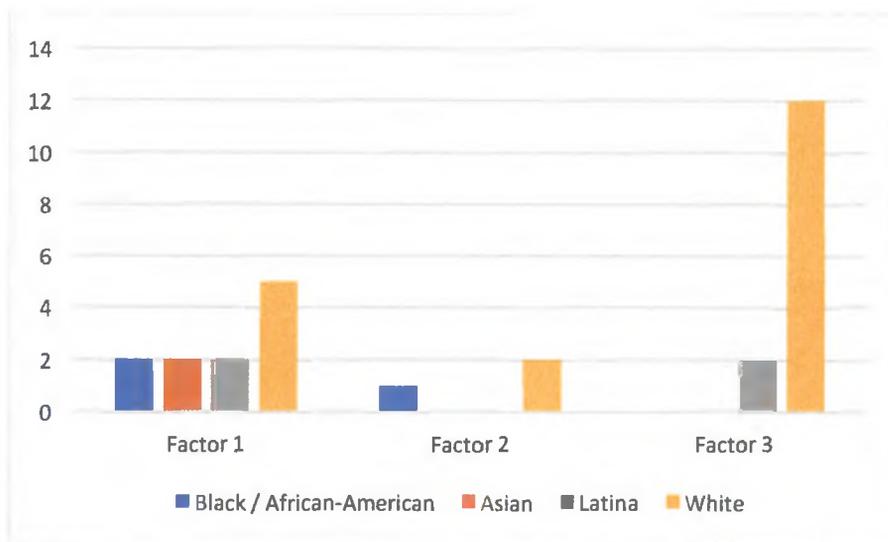
Factor 1	Self-Reflective, Engaging, & Accountable
Factor 2	Exclusionary, Behaviors go Back to the Home
Factor 3	Relational, Individualized, & Trauma-Informed

### **Ethnicity**

Table 12 summarized the factor loadings by race/ethnicity. A visual evaluation of the distribution of participants by race shows some trends. Figure 5 depicts the distribution of participants across factors by race/ethnicity. Both study participants who identified as Asian significantly related to Factor 1. Latina participants clustered equally on Factors 1 and 3. The majority of Black/African American participants related significantly to Factor 1. White participants were the only racial/ethnic group to cluster across all three factors, the majority of which were on Factor 3. Considered as a group, the majority of participants of color clustered on Factor 1. It is notable that the majority of participants of color related to Factor 1, the one factor that rated the impacts of racial bias as important. Inversely, the majority of White participants related to Factor 3, which differed from Factor 1 especially in how it rated statements related to racial equity and

**Table 12. *Ethnicity of Participants by Factor***

	Factor	Black / African-American		Asian		Latina		White / European American		Total
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
	1	2	67%	2	100%	2	50%	5	28%	11
	2	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	2	11%	3
	3	0	0%	0	0%	2	50%	12	67%	14
	<b>Total</b>		<b>3</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>4</b>		<b>19</b>	



**Figure 5. *Racial/Ethnic Distribution by Factor***

the impacts of racial bias as having low importance. These trends will be explored in the following section through further analysis of the equity orientation of each factor.

## **Equity Orientation**

### **Equity Operationalized by Q-Value Score.**

Two strategies were employed to analyze the equity orientation of factors, meaning the extent to which related participants valued disciplinary approaches that would enhance and address potential issues of equity. First, equity orientation was

operationalized by a select group of Q-set statements (see Table 13). Second, interview data were analyzed for participant acknowledgment of approaches they utilized to promote equitable disciplinary practices.

Table 13. *Equity Oriented Analysis by Factor*

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
	Q-value	Q-value	Q-value
08 Regardless of the severity of a student's behavior, my objective is to keep all students in preschool.	0	-4	0
20 Suspension and expulsion are unfair to children of color.	0	-2	-1
21 Preschool personnel should consider how their discipline practices may perpetuate or interrupt racial stereotypes and biases.	2	0	-1
23 All preschool personnel should establish preschool environments that are familiar, predictable, and consistent with local expectations for behavior.	3	0	3
24 Teachers should learn, include, and use students' culture and language in instruction and interactions.	1	-3	1
25 Critical self-reflection by preschool personnel is imperative to reduce bias in discipline practices.	1	0	1
Total Equity Statement Q-value	7	-9	3

The composite score of statements for each factor was calculated by adding the Q-values (how statements were ranked in a factor array) for a comparative analysis between factors. The results reveal Factor 1 had the highest and Factor 2 had the lowest equity orientation scores.

Factors 1 and 3 shared the majority of Q-values in common, meaning four equity oriented statements were ranked equally in both factor arrays. However, they differed on two statements in that Factor 3 ranked negatively "Suspension and expulsion are unfair to children of color" and "Preschool personnel should consider how their discipline

practices may perpetuate or interrupt racial stereotypes and biases.” Factor 1 ranked four statements positively and two statements neutrally.

It is also important to note, Factor 2 rated all equity oriented statements at or below zero. Additionally, the statement “Regardless of the severity of a student’s behavior, my objective is to keep all students in preschool” was rated as the single lowest in the entire Factor 2 array.

#### **Equity Orientation Interview Data.**

Interview data for participant responses to the interview question “How do you approach or promote equitable practices, and especially race equity, in student discipline at your site?” were analyzed and coded for themes. Four topics emerged in which three or more participants responded similarly. The topics that addressed equity were “awareness raising” and “relationship-based”; and the topics that did not address equity were “same/fair for everyone” and “not an issue” at their sites. Participant responses that did not cluster onto any of these topics, but did describe equity oriented approaches, included multi-cultural and multi-lingual approaches, and sensitivity to bias around socioeconomic status.

Considering the range of response topics, the topics were recoded into two themes: “No acknowledgment” and “Some acknowledgment” of approaches to promote equitable disciplinary practices. Responses coded as “No acknowledgment” included “It’s the same across the board” (Anne, study interview, February 21, 2019), “Everybody’s treated exactly the same” (Misty, study interview, 3/11/19), and:

What do you mean? Like, I don't, like I don't see the, like, my teachers are disciplining based on someone's *race*. Everybody... So, I mean, I guess that would be handled by not doing it... We don't have that problem. [emphasis original] (Marcela, study interview, February 27, 2019)

Topics coded as “Some acknowledgment” included three participants who responded about relationship building, such as “Well, I know that we, we respect all the families and all their needs and all their things, so I think that your approach to it is going to be different for every family. So, building relationships.” (Stacy, study interview, 2/20/19). Other participants talked about raising awareness and consciousness about assumptions and bias, as Marisa expressed in this way:

We're in the process of working on that because it's hard... So, we're at the very beginning stages of like just uncovering our unconscious bias and our beliefs around that... And my goal is within the year to move it towards where we can talk about equity and how this comes into our school on a different lens than we have in the past. Otherwise, we go back to a very typical *individualistic* lens of what's happening, without looking at it in a bigger context, which, can be *hugely* problematic. [emphasis original]. (Marisa, study interview, 12/27/19)

Table 14 shows how participant responses were coded, by the number of respondents and by ethnicity/race. Note, each respondent was counted only once on the factors they most significantly related to, in cases of confounded loadings. Overall, the split across participant responses was 55% “No acknowledgment” and 45% “Some acknowledgment” of equity oriented approaches.

A notable trend was respondents related to the “No acknowledgement” theme in their interview data were 77% White. Also of note, was the rate of “No acknowledgment” and “Some acknowledgement” responses were inverted between Factors 1 and 3. Similarly, the 67% rate of participants of color who acknowledged equity approaches in

**Table 14. *Response Themes to Equity Approach Interview Question by Factor and Race/Ethnicity***

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
No acknowledgment	1 Latina 2 White	1 African American 1 White	1 Latina 7 White
Total	3	2	8
Some acknowledgment	2 African American  2 Asian 1 Latina 3 White	N/A	1 Latina  2 White
Total	8	0	3

their responses was nearly the inverse of the 36% affirmative response rate of White participants.

Taken together, analyses of the data related to equity oriented approaches established Factor 1 as the most equity oriented factor, with the highest Q-value score, and with 73% of participants acknowledging how they approached equity in discipline. Factor 2 was by far the least equity oriented factor, with a negative Q-value score for equity related statements, and in the interview data participants did not acknowledge equity driven approaches at their sites. For Factor 3, equity oriented Q-statements were mostly ranked positively, however 73% of interview responses did not acknowledge equity informed approaches.

### **Proactive & Reactive Discipline Tracking**

Discipline tracking was discussed in the interview component of data collection and revealed a noteworthy trend between participant relationships to factors and the

dynamics of their use of behavior tracking. There was variation in participants descriptions of how discipline is tracked, at what point tracking begins, and what the information is used for.

Participants related to factors 1 and 3 described using tracking as a means to understand patterns of behaviors, to work as a team to identify triggers to prevent challenging behaviors from happening, and to reflect on what aspects of the classroom environment might be an issue. All participants related to Factor 1 spoke about using behavior tracking proactively and as a means to team around challenges, look at situations comprehensively, be self-reflective, and identify patterns in order to “catch the behavior before it happens” (Betty, study interview, February 20, 2019), as well as to intentionally prevent a trajectory towards expulsion. These three examples further demonstrate the trend:

And we're hoping that not just one person is doing that Behavior Observation Log. There's three teachers in the classroom - three to five teachers - hopefully you'll get different views. Because we all have implicit bias. So, having all those views really kind of helped us figure out: where that child was, where that child's going, a plan that we can do to try and help them understand this behavior, understand what's going on, and sort of guide towards change and learning. Janice

Currently they're logged by classroom teachers, and that information to share during our monthly team meetings. If it's a serious behavior. I'll follow up with a phone call home... But [the meetings are] when we all get together and have these conversations. And so, in those meetings, they're logged and noted about the different behaviors students are presenting, and how we are working to support the next steps, you know, with managing behavior. (Rosalind, study interview, January 27, 2019).

So, we use behavior logs, okay, number one, I think that helps a staff person, a) organize their thoughts, and also, to think about some questions about sort of the where what you know kind of thing. It also looks at patterns. It also gives them a place to talk to each other about what they're seeing. It also gives *me* a place to

kind of come in and kind of, okay let me, I'm not with this child every day, I know what you're telling me I need to actually kind of see it. [emphasis original] (Debra, study interview, March 11, 2019).

Some participants related to Factor 3 spoke about tracking proactively while others described a more reactive approach.

We'd like to track the positive and the negative behaviors and we want to track things all the time because we want to see what the trigger is... When I ask the teachers to fill it out, it's really like a storybook, where I'm writing it down, and I could give it to you, and you could picture exactly what was going on. That way you can kind of go through it too, and see; and the parent can really see what's going on... And it's not anything about a child's in trouble. It's just trying to track and see what we can do to change some things. (Stacy, study interview, February 20, 2019).

[A repeated behavior log] would just be kept in the child's file, but it would be used if we have a parent conference and, um, we see repeated behavior, or it's just happening really frequently and it's like, okay, so what's going on? Is it environment? Is something happening at home? Is this, you know, and we have to explore whether or not this is the right place for a child. (Susie, study interview, February 25, 2019).

In Amber's interview, she said tracking discipline would happen:

Only if we're having trouble with a child that has a discipline problem... and we're *really*, really struggling. Other children are getting hurt, other parents are unhappy. We are doing *everything* we can, and we just don't see improvements. One of the things we'll do is start tracking. Sometimes the tracking will help in that we'll see a pattern. [emphasis original] (Amber, study interview, March 14, 2019).

Notably, participants related to Factor 2 used tracking primarily as documentation to inform parents of incidents, to justify calling a meeting with parents, and to keep in the child's file as a record. Mary described her approach to discipline tracking in this way:

We, um, I have a form that goes home if it's something that's, um, *really* something that needed to be documented because of, um, tracking a behavior that's happening over and over. Um, we have a document, we document it. And then there's a, uh, discipline paper that goes home and the parents read what happened for that day, and then they sign it, and they send it back. And this is kept in the child's files.

Interviewer: So you said you, that document is used when there's already been repetitive behavior?

Right, because, when they first start, they're on a probation period. And, it's because of, if it's a behavior that we can't help that child with, um -- and that child has to be asked to leave -- then we have document of it. Um, say that the child is physically hurting another child, very badly. That would be grounds for that child to have to leave because, um, they would have to go get some kind of counseling, or something. (Mary, study interview, February 15, 2019).

One participant worked at an organization that had implemented a social emotional curricular approach to discipline, in which behavior logs were available for tracking patterns, however she had not observed their efficacy, and viewed them as having a different purpose:

We do behavioral reports, and they do an ABC sorta' thing, like what was happenin' before this child done this? But it still have no real significance to the child's behavior. Oh, what was his intent? He wanted somethin'? He couldn't express it?

Interviewer: So, you have those tracking sheets but they're not really in use?

They're in use to make a meeting. You get so many of these forms then we're gonna meet with your parent. (Anne, study interview, February 21, 2019).

Participants across all 3 factors shared that tracking was a means of keeping a record that could be shared with parents and utilized to justify referrals and additional supports, to consider placement in an alternative program, or to ask a family to leave. However, almost all participants who solely related to Factor 1 emphasized that they had not pursued expulsion in their leadership roles.

## Policy Data

### Written discipline policies.

The researcher asked each participant if they had a written discipline policy for their site or program and, if they did, requested a copy. Table 15 shows the results of the discipline policy collection from participants.

Table 15. *Written Discipline Policies by Factor*

Factor #	# of written policies	% with written policies
Factor 1	11	100%
Factor 2	1	33%
Factor 3	11	79%

The contents of the discipline policies followed a similar format, including descriptions of: (1) the programs' approach or philosophy around discipline; (2) the intended goal or outcome of the disciplinary approach; (3) types of strategies and consequences utilized for guiding behaviors; (4) response strategy for persistent challenges; and, (5) statement of the programs' rights to remove a child from the program if child poses a safety risk to other children or staff.

Approaches to discipline focused on respect, positive behavioral supports and positive guidance (Nelson, 1981) with the intended goal of supporting children to develop self-control, to internalize impulse control, develop cooperative problem-solving skills, and make sure all children feel safe. The written disciplinary strategies mainly included redirection, modeling acceptable behavior, using positive statements to communicate desired behaviors, and guiding children to take space to calm down when

needed. Each policy outlined the protocol in cases of persistent challenges, which would involve the parents to create an individual behavior/action plan, and seek outside consultation if needed. Each policy had a clause about the programs right to remove a child if the receding interventions were not successful and there was a safety threat to others in the program.

The written policies were analyzed for variance as it related to factors, but little variance was found within the content in the policies. However, there was a notable trend between which sites did or did not have written discipline policies and the participant factor loadings. One hundred percent of participants related to Factor 1 had a written discipline policy. The majority of Factor 3 related participants had written policies. In contrast, two out of three participants related to Factor 2 had no written discipline policies.

Further analysis of the policies by factor reveals that the programs on both Factors 2 and 3 without written discipline policies were all fee-based programs (see Table 16).

*Table 16. Percent of Programs/Sites with Written Discipline Policies by Site Type by Factor*

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Private	100%	0%	0%
Public	100%	100%	100%
Combo	100%	N/A	100%
Parent Co-op	100%	N/A	100%

This trend is logical because the parental engagement section on parent rights in Title 5 includes “information regarding school rules” (California Childcare Resource and Referral Network), while Title 22 does not include this language. The contrast between

programs with and without written discipline policies indicates a pattern that seems to relate to how programs are regulated.

### **Parent handbooks.**

The discipline policies shared by participants in this study were contained in parent handbooks. A review of the parent handbooks revealed common themes amongst all of the handbooks, and these were: mission and goals; discipline policy, family and parent engagement (communication); curriculum or preschool philosophy; holidays and celebrations; attendance; admission and/or fees; child and adult rights; transparency about positions and roles of program staff; health, safety, and nutrition. These themes aligned closely with Title 22 sections that outline requirements for licensing.

There was a range between more administrative language (essentially copied and pasted from Title 22 licensing language) and parent friendly language that reframed the same concepts in more friendly, accessible, and parent-centered language, such as these section headings “Who We Are & What We Provide; How We Serve You; and, How We Work With Your Child” (participant program policy, 2018).

Parent co-op programs also had sections detailing membership duties and additional expectations for participation. Their policies supported participant descriptions of their approaches of working closely, consistently, and transparently with parents. Each parent co-op also had a several-hour orientation at the beginning of the year, which was an educational event with parents. The orientation booklet from one of the co-ops

reflected this educational approach, providing information on child development, child guidance, appropriate expectations, and positive behavioral supports.

#### **Views on discipline policies.**

A few participants in this study spoke directly or indirectly about their views of their discipline policies, or lack thereof. One participant who did not have a written policy stated, “We don’t have one that’s written but it will be going into the next Parent Handbook because parents ask about that.” Her statement supports other data in this study that emphasized open and transparent communication as a crucial engagement strategy with parents.

Two participants held negative or dismissive views on the contents of their discipline policies, but for very different reasons. One participant who expressed highly exclusionary views on discipline, but worked for a program that leads inclusionary discipline approaches in the ECE field, said about the parent handbook “I don’t think [there’s] anything in here about discipline.” However, a review of this handbook revealed both a code of conduct and a well-developed discipline/child behavior policy. This is an important passage because it indicates that just having a written policy is not enough. Both ECE leaders and their staff need to be trained on the policy. This participant also offered a description of the discipline policy from her previous place of employment, which was an exclusion-oriented approach that had a resonance with three strikes, you’re-out language.

Conversely, another participant with a highly inclusive view of discipline referred to the discipline policy at her site in this way, “Basically, it’s a version of the three strikes, you’re out. I don’t use it. And I’ve tried for nine years to get rid of it; but it’s a board of directors’ decision. So, every year I try; one day I’ll be successful.” Considered together, these participants’ statements demonstrate how discipline policies may be viewed in a negative or dismissive way when policies diverge from leaders’ personal views on discipline. These data also seem to denote the presence of a written-policy versus an unwritten-policy approach to discipline.

### **Licensing Regulations**

Nearly half of all study participants spoke specifically about licensing regulations during interviews. General licensing related topics spanned several areas, including: compliance, the role of directors, student/teacher ratios, staff ECE training, and attendance tracking. Licensing topics related to discipline included: tracking child injuries, discipline policy reviews by licensing analysts, equity in discipline practices, and pressures to remove children who were harming other children, either for fear of losing their license (Title 22), or of being reported to licensing by parents who were upset about their child being harmed by another child. In one outstanding example of the tension between licensing requirements and student inclusion, Marisa described how she navigated pressures to exclude a child from her program:

I’ve had licensing called on me for keeping a child who was harming others and I had to convince licensing the reasons why I was doing it, and they came really, really close with *forcing* a suspension, which I didn’t know the state could do by the way, and they said they had the legal right. I said, ‘Well, if you’re going that

route, I need to talk to your supervisor and I'm going to bat for this, cuz' I don't think it's your place to tell me what to do'. And so, what they did instead was they interviewed 75% of my families at the school, privately, and came away -- I didn't know the families were going to do this, but they *stepped up* from *my* view; they're like, 'No, our director has taught us *all* these things about behavior. And yes, my child was bitten, and yes, I was upset, but in the end, we are all concerned about *this* child's wellbeing'. So, they all said all the things that I had taught them. And, the licensing lady then came back and said, 'okay, I will go to bat for *you* with my supervisor.' And she did. And then I was not made to expel him.

This director's experience demonstrates how clearly articulated views on development, behavioral expectations, and alternatives to exclusionary discipline, can effectively set the tone for approaches to discipline, not only with teachers, but also with parents. In this case, the preschool site was a parent co-op, so the parents had surely received much more hands-on education about guiding children through behavioral challenges than parents in other types of programs typically receive.

### **ECE Assessments**

Another trend in interview responses was whether participants mentioned use of ECE assessments. The majority of participants mentioned use of assessments in their programs, including CLASS (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008), ECERS-R (Harms & Clifford, 1980), Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDRP) (California Department of Education, 2015), and Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) (Squires & Bricker, 2009). The CLASS assessment was mentioned by a plurality of study participants; in regard to, role as director, personal training related to discipline, and training provided to their staff.

Participants related to all three factors spoke about the use of assessments in their programs. Notably, participants related to Factors 1 and 3 mentioned CLASS, DRDP, ECERS-R, and ASQ in relationship to monitoring compliance, being certified in CLASS, and as part of a comprehensive approach to assessing disciplinary practices. One participant related to Factor 2 specifically mentioned CLASS in regard to training around discipline, and another participant mentioned assessments generally regarding her role of ensuring teachers complete them on time.

All mentions of ECE assessments were volunteered information because there was not a question specific to this topic. Most of the participants who did not specifically mention assessments were employed by programs under the regulations of Title 5, meaning at least one of these instruments would be required annually. Including these participants in the ratio of those who work in programs that utilize ECE assessments, the total is at least 84% of participants in this study. It is clear that ECE assessments have become widely accepted and utilized as measures to guide and evaluate ECE practice.

### **Summary of Results**

A review of literature on approaches to school and preschool discipline, and approaches to prevent suspension and expulsion informed the generation of a set of opinion statements on preschool discipline that would be used as the Q-set. The statements were both ready-made and naturalistic, based on an iterative mapping process between the pre-existing items and the conceptual grid of the literature. A complementary

interview instrument was made to be delivered along with the Q-sorting activity. The data collection method was repeated with 25 ECE leaders.

After comparing the results of multiple factor extractions, the six-factor extraction was chosen for its efficiency, as it accounted for 61% of the variance of responses and has the most significantly loading participants. Factors 1 and 3 were subgroups of one viewpoint, based on their statistical correlation, and both were distinct from the unique viewpoint represented by Factor 2. The factors focused on the views of early childhood educational leaders on preschool discipline approaches, and each was titled to identify the most important aspects within each factor. These were: Factor 1-Self-Reflective, Engaging, & Accountability, Factor 3-Relational, Individualized, & Trauma-Informed, and Factor 2-Exclusionary, Behaviors go Back to the Home.

The meanings of factors were interpreted with the support of participants' interview data, which added richness and meaning to the quantitative findings. These data were also examined along with discipline policy documents from participants' programs, however these data points were not as notable as had been anticipated in the study design, with the exception of whether programs had a written discipline policy or not.

A group of statements was operationalized into an equity orientation measure, a Q-value score was calculated for each factor, and the scores of each factor were compared to understand their equity orientation. Interview data were coded for "some acknowledgment" or "no acknowledgment" of equity oriented approaches and interpreted in relationship to the Q-value scores. Factor 1 had the highest and Factor 2 had the lowest

equity orientations. A notable finding was how some participants proactively used behavior tracking to find patterns and monitor for equity, while other participants tracked behaviors as a reaction to escalating issues and to create a case for involving parents. Analysis of interview data revealed participants related to more equity oriented factors took a more proactive approach to tracking discipline, while participants related to the least equity oriented factor used discipline tracking more reactively and punitively.

Discipline policies and parent handbooks were analyzed and there were patterns in which participant programs had written policies, in that fee-based programs related to Factors 2 and 3 did not have written policies. All participant programs receiving state funding had written discipline policies. Anecdotal evidence suggested ECE leaders' own views on discipline can override the contents of the discipline policy, and it is not enough only to have a written policy, and training may be required to transfer policies into practice. Having a written discipline policy seems to be important for combating exclusion and bias, likely because it requires leadership's intentionality regarding a disciplinary approach, and it can also engender clear expectations between staff and parents.

## **Chapter Five: Implications and Recommendations**

Suspension and expulsion in early childhood education have received increasing attention in recent years, in light of the high and racially disproportionate rates of their use. Previously, teachers' views on the dynamics precipitating the use of expulsion in ECE have been examined, and high school principals' attitudes on suspension and expulsion have been surveyed; however, few if any studies have investigated the view of ECE leaders on the use of these practices. Neither have previous studies looked at the strategies ECE leaders identify as approaches to reduce and prevent preschool suspension and expulsion. As exclusionary practices are recognized as having long term impacts on students' social and academic outcomes, local and statewide policies have been enacted to systematically confront suspension and expulsion in ECE. As key figures in the implementation of policy and practice, it is important to have a better understanding of the views of leaders in early childhood education.

The intent of this study was to examine ECE leaders' views of preschool discipline practices, their efforts to reduce and prevent exclusionary practices, and how they navigate their work through a lens of equity, especially racial equity. This was accomplished by interpretation of data collected through in-person interviews, Q-sorts, and collection and analysis of representative discipline policy documents.

The research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) What are Early Childhood Educational leaders' views and attitudes toward approaches to preschool discipline? And,

- 2) What approaches do ECE leaders utilize to reduce and prevent preschool expulsion and increase equitable outcomes?

Three factors, or distinct viewpoints, resulted from analyses of the data, and they were: Factor 1- Self-reflective, Engaging, and Accountable; Factor 2 - Exclusionary, Behaviors go Back to the Home; and Factor 3 - Relational, Individualized, and Trauma-Informed. The following is a discussion summarizing the findings of this study, connecting the factor interpretations back to the conceptual grid, and an examination of the limitations of the study. This chapter will also consider possible implications for educational leadership, educational equity, ECE policy, methodology, and offer suggestions for future research.

### **Summary & Interpretation of Findings**

This study utilized Q-methodology to identify the beliefs early childhood educational leaders held about approaches to preschool discipline and approaches to prevent expulsion and increase equity. Factor extraction and rotation yielded three categories of distinct approaches to preschool discipline that ECE leaders in this study most agreed upon. These categories included self-reflective, engaging, and staff accountability; pro-exclusion with responsibility for behaviors directed back to the home; and relational, individualized, and trauma-informed. When factor loadings on the three factors were compared to the sample demographics, analysis indicated notable trends according to participant race/ethnicity. Interview data were analyzed to provide added meaning to the factor interpretations, and notable trends emerged related to participant

factor loadings and equity orientation, proactive or reactive behavior tracking, and existence and articulation of discipline policies at the preschool sites.

### **ECE Leaders' Views on Preschool Discipline**

The preschool disciplinary approach favored by the majority of participants in this study was relationship-based, considerate of local expectations and culture, and followed a comprehensive sequence for addressing behavioral challenges. Participant responses related to both Factor 1 and Factor 3 reflected an inclusionary perspective in which expulsion was viewed as a very last resort, and yet nearly entirely avoidable. The Factor 1 viewpoint was unique in placing more importance on preschool staff self-reflection, and the negative impacts of bias on practice, on students, and on racial equity. The Factor 3 perspective places more importance on trauma-informed practice and on individualized student needs. The other major view on preschool discipline, represented by Factor 2, framed suspension and expulsion as unavoidable and useful as a means to urge parents to take responsibility for their children's behaviors, and disagreed about bias, or exclusionary discipline having any negative impacts on students. All three factors shared views on the value of relationships with students and the importance of working with parents to address behavioral challenges at home and school. Table 17 summarizes the results of the factor, interview, and policy analyses. The similarities and differences between these viewpoints will be described further in the next sections.

Table 17. *Summary of Findings from Factor, Interview, and Policy Analyses*

Factor	1 - Self-Reflective, Engaging, & Accountable	3 - Relational, Individualized, & Trauma-Informed			2 - Exclusionary, Behaviors go Back to the Home
Variance Explained	28%	22%			8%
Average years of experience in ECE	24.1	29.2			29.7
Significant loadings and confounded loadings	F1	F1 & F3	F3	F2 & F3	F2
	2 African American 2 Asian 2 Latina 2 White	3 White	2 Latina 8 White	1 White	1 African American 1 White
Commonalities among 3 factors	Relationship-based Important to work with parents				
Commonalities among Factors 1 & 3	Behaviors as expression of communication, learning, and development; Strength-based view of students and families; Established process around behavioral issues; Inclusionary, except in rare instances resulting from issues with parents; onus on preschool staff				N/A
Distinguishing characteristics of factors	Radically inclusionary; self-regulation of preschool staff; critical self-reflection; recognition of impacts of bias and inequity	Mostly Inclusionary; trauma-informed approach; acknowledge bias but not impact		Exclusionary; parents responsible for addressing behaviors; preschooler Self-regulation; teachers adequately trained	
Equity Orientation	Yes	Partial		No	
Discipline Tracking	Proactive	Proactive/Reactive		Reactive/Punitive	
Written Discipline Policy	100%	79%		33%	
ECE Assessments Mentioned	CLASS, DRDP, ECERS, ASQ	CLASS, DRDP, ECERS, ASQ		CLASS	

### Relationship of Factors to the Conceptual Organization of Literature

Table 18 shows the composite Q-value for each Factor on the conceptual grid of the literature. This score was obtained by adding (or subtracting) the factor scores from the normalized factor arrays for each of the seven statements related to each quadrant of the conceptual grid. Statements that represented a negative view of their placement on the grid were reverse scored (e.g. “Suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems.”). The composite Q-values for Factor 1 and 3 scored highly on the “Onus on preschool/personnel” quadrants of the grid, whereas Factor 2 Q-values were the highest on the “Onus on student/family” quadrants.

Table 18. *Composite Factor Q-Value Scores on Conceptual Grid of Literature*

Emphasis on individual development	Onus on student/family				Emphasis on school safety & environment
	Factor	Q-value	Factor	Q-value	
	1	-9	1	-14	
	2	9	2	0	
	3	-2	3	-10	
	Factor	Q-value	Factor	Q-value	
	1	8	1	8	
	2	-1	2	2	
	3	14	3	4	
	Onus on preschool/personnel				

These scores affirm that more exclusionary views place the onus of responsibility on children and families, while more inclusionary views place the onus on the preschool environment and staff. Thus, on the top section of the grid a larger negative score represents a stronger opinion against exclusionary practices, and on the bottom section a

higher positive score represents prioritizing approaches to inclusiveness and preventing exclusion. Factor 1 and 3 Q-Value scores differed in that Factor 1 scored higher on the side of the conceptual grid focused on the preschool environment and schoolwide approaches to discipline, while Factor 3 scored higher on emphasizing individual development. If the three factors were placed on a spectrum with exclusionary and inclusionary at the two extremes, Factors 1 and 2 would be at opposite ends of the spectrum, and Factor 3 would be slightly less than Factor 1, but still on the inclusionary end of the spectrum.

### **Characterization of Inclusionary Disciplinary Approach**

Participants in this study who firmly advocated for inclusion and opposed expulsion had some common characteristics: they viewed children and families positively, had implemented or were implementing a social emotional curriculum, interpreted behaviors as communication of needs, valued engaging parents with transparency and clear expectations, proactively utilized discipline tracking to look for patterns in their own practices as well as potential triggers for children, considered it the role of ECE professionals to do what needed to be done to retain and serve children and families, considered how their own biases may impact their thinking and decision making, understood their decisions and actions could have real impacts on equity and outcomes, saw exclusionary discipline as harmful to students' identity development, and supported their staff to shift their thinking towards these perspectives. These participants were associated with Factor 1 and had the most comprehensive approaches to supporting

children, families, and staff when behavioral challenges occurred. See Figure 6 for a side by side comparison of the inclusionary and exclusionary characteristics.

### **Characterization of Exclusionary Discipline Approach**

On the other end of the conceptual spectrum, the participants in this study who had exclusionary approaches to discipline spoke in deficit language about children and families, did not use or did not see the value in a social emotional curriculum, focused on children and families as problems rather than focusing on addressing specific challenging behaviors, experienced parents as adversarial, informed rather than engaged parents in addressing issues, utilized discipline tracking reactively as evidence for building a case about children's behaviors, considered the role of ECE educators to provide education only for well-behaved children and cooperative parents, considered the role of parents to take ultimate responsibility for children's behaviors at preschool, did not acknowledge the importance of self-reflection or the impacts of bias in practices or decision making, did not see any potential negative impacts of exclusionary discipline and instead saw them positively as a way to invoke parent involvement, expecting that parents would then change their own approaches, or seek out a different program for their children. These participants had the least comprehensive approaches to supporting children, families, and staff when behavioral challenges occurred and were associated with Factor 2.



<b><i>Inclusionary approach</i></b>	-----	<b><i>Exclusionary approach</i></b>
Positive language about children and families	-----	Deficit language about children and families
See parents as valuable partners	-----	See parents as the problem behind behavioral issues
Support for social emotional curriculum	-----	No support for social emotional curriculum
Engage parents transparently and articulate expectations up front	-----	Inform parents about behavior issues
Track behaviors proactively to look for patterns and make changes	-----	Track behaviors reactively and as evidence to make a case
All children are welcome	-----	Well behaved children are welcome
Will work with a child whether or not parents are cooperative	-----	Will work with a child only if parents are cooperative
Onus of responsibility on ECE professionals	-----	Onus of responsibility on parents
Emphasis on critical self-reflection and recognition of bias for preschool staff	-----	No recognition of importance of critical self-reflection for preschool staff
Acknowledgment of racialized inequities in preschool discipline outcomes	-----	Denial of racialized inequities in preschool discipline outcomes
Discipline policy is clearly articulated, documented, and disseminated by preschool leadership	-----	Discipline policy is not articulated by preschool leadership
Experts accessed to provide supports	-----	Experts accessed to justify expulsion
Exclusion viewed as harmful and preventable	-----	Exclusion viewed as helpful and necessary

Figure 6. *Characteristics of Inclusionary and Exclusionary Approaches to Preschool Discipline*

## **ECE Leaders Approaches to Reducing and Preventing Preschool Expulsion**

### **ECE Leaders Views on Addressing Behavioral Issues**

To understand ECE leaders views on suspension and expulsion, it is necessary to understand their strategies and approaches when faced with persistent behavioral challenges. Inclusionary approaches and exclusionary approaches to discipline corresponded in notable ways to how leaders addressed behavioral issues.

Figure 7 demonstrates the similarities and differences between the three factors, in both direction and breadth of focus in the process of addressing behavioral challenges. Factor 1, Self-reflective, Engaging, and Accountable, was the most comprehensive approach to addressing behavioral challenges, starting from self-reflection of preschool staff, then to the preschool environment, then individual needs and triggers for students, followed by partnering more intensively with parents than usual, and seeking their permission and participation with seeking an expert evaluation, if needed. Factor 3, Relational, Individualized, and Trauma-Informed, followed the same direction of problem solving as Factor 1, and had a similar process, but did not emphasize the self-reflective step of the process, and did not regularly initiate parent engagement until there was a consistent behavioral concern. The similarities and nuanced differences between these factors are logical since they were statistically the same core viewpoint, while having particular differences.

Factor 2, Exclusionary, Behaviors go Back to the Home, was a far less comprehensive approach to addressing behavioral challenges and directionally moved the

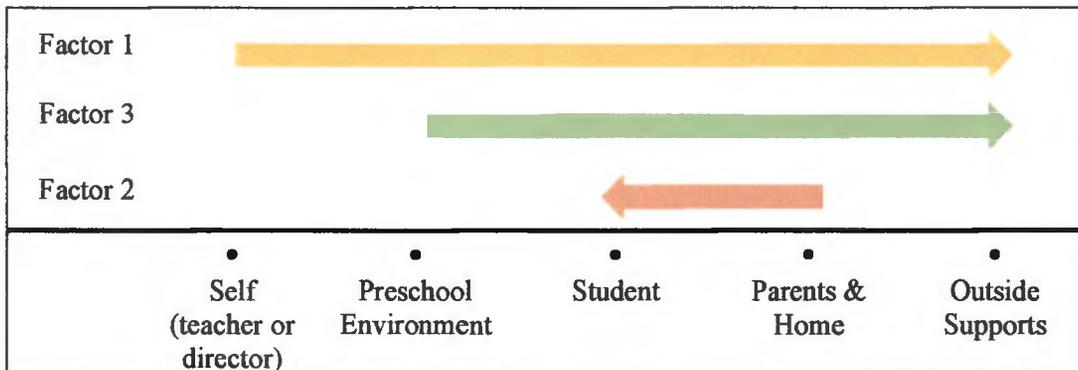


Figure 7. *Directionality and Comprehensives of Preschool Discipline Approaches by Factor*

opposite way compared to the other factors. The Factor 2 viewpoint focused first and foremost on the parents' role in addressing and solving challenging behaviors. Preschool staff working to address children's needs was seen as part of the process, but was considered less effective and less important than the role of the parents. Seeking expert opinions and supports was mentioned, but seen as either ineffective or beyond the scope of responsibility of the preschool. The Factor 2 viewpoint on addressing challenging behaviors did not extend responsibility or importance to the role of the preschool environment or preschool staff.

This study's finding of the systematic approaches demonstrated by Factors 1 and 3 validates earlier research on ECE teachers' perceptions of preschool expulsion (Martin, et al., 2018). Early childhood leaders' descriptions of initiating a regular process: from a trigger search, to involving parents and experts, to consideration of expulsion if parents were not cooperative during the process mirrors the accounts from teachers in the findings of Martin, et al. 2018. However, a difference from the previous study on teachers is that ECE leaders ultimately have oversight of decisions whether or not to expel.

Drawing a hard line against using expulsion was expressed by participants significantly related to Factor 1. These ECE leaders also emphasized critical self-reflection in their roles, and recognized and articulated the potential impacts of bias and racialized stereotypes in their approaches to discipline, while the other factors did not express this perspective.

### **The Parent Factor**

The participants in this study identified relationships with parents as the defining factor that leads to or interrupts the trajectory towards expulsion. Almost every participant ranked the importance of working together with parents highly in Q-sort activities, and also spoke about the dynamics of working with parents in their interviews. Breakdown of communication with parents was also mentioned by participants across factor loadings as a precursor to expulsion.

This common thread across widely divergent views on preschool discipline highlights the importance of supporting the ECE workforce to learn and practice parent engagement skills. Family engagement, partnering, and conflict resolution clearly should be top priorities as topics of study in ECE 2- and 4-year college programs and professional development for teachers and leadership.

Parental engagement literature usually focuses on engaging parents with the explicit goal of their involvement with their children's learning and development, especially academic learning (Gadsen, 2013). No doubt, this is important to understand and encourage. However, research on parent engagement has focused less on how

teachers and programs engage parents in reciprocal partnerships that emphasize shared decision making and prioritize the value in the perspectives parents bring with them. More research is needed on how ECE leaders create and promote preschool cultures in which parents are engaged and worked with as partners. Listening skills, responding, and conflict resolution between ECE educators and parents also requires further attention and study. Future research should examine how preschool teachers and leadership engage parents and especially how they work effectively with parents through conflicts and disagreements when they arise.

#### **Communication of discipline policies with parents.**

Two related findings in this study point back to the same section of Titles 22 and 5, parent engagement and written discipline policies. A comparison of Titles 22 and 5 shows the expectations around parent engagement are more detailed in Title 5 where they include the requirement to communicate school rules to parents. The programs that did not have written discipline policies and described less proactive and transparent approaches to working with parents were all fee-based programs. Whereas, all of the programs receiving public funding had written discipline policies in their parent handbooks.

The most inclusive leaders in this study went above and beyond regulatory guidelines to ensure inclusion for all of their students and families, in one case, even pushing back against state regulators in the process. This was an example of how extensive parent engagement and education created an outcome that protected the long-

term safety of a student who probably would have continued to bounce from preschool to preschool, and then school to school, had this director not intervened. This leader created a community culture through parent education and engagement in which parents rallied to protect the wellness and development of this child by insisting on working with him until his behaviors shifted. It could be argued that this approach would not work with other ECE leaders in other settings. However, it does demonstrate that this level of inclusive leadership and preschool culture is attainable. Further implications and recommendations related to these and other findings in this study will be discussed in the remainder of this paper.

### **Critique of the Study**

There were some limitations to this study although it adhered to standards of educational research. This section will critique this study by discussing the limitations of the sample and of the instruments.

#### **Limitations of the Sample**

The final sample in this study was less representative of diversity in race/ethnicity, SES, and program typed than originally intended. The majority of study participants were White and many participants worked at fee-based programs with mostly White populations. This limitation may have limited the generalizability of the viewpoints, especially in regard to racial equity, since participants shared they did not have enough racial diversity to have race equity issues.

Additionally, 24% of participants in this study were from one program. All six of these participants related significantly to either Factor 1 or 3, which may have skewed the findings toward these two factors. The one program with six study participants had both fee-based and CSPP sites, but participants indicated that all sites in their program had the same standards. Because CSPP programs are held to higher policy standards than fee-based programs, their results probably skewed towards the purely publicly funded programs in this study. It is possible that participant representation from several more programs or sites would have resulted in different factors, since participants who related significantly to Factor 2 were mostly from fee-based sites. Given these considerations, the study results were likely skewed toward Factors 1 and 3 because the sample had more participant representation from programs with publicly funded operational and procedural standards.

The previous limitation lends itself to further consideration of the balance between fee-based and publicly funded programs. While the study appears to have more fee-based sites, this does not hold true when the influence of state funding on fee-based sites in combination-funded programs is considered. The phenomena related to site types suggest it would have been preferable to have a participant pool from sites that were distinctly fee-based or publicly funded. Had there been an equal proportion of these two types of programs, with more purely fee-based programs, different factors may have resulted.

Another limitation of the sample was the variety of types of programs represented. Aside from the parent cooperatives, this study did not include a wider array of programs, such as forest preschools, therapeutic preschools, Montessori, Waldorf, or other specialized programs. More diversity in program types may have contributed to different viewpoints in the data and changed or added factors.

### **Limitations of Instruments**

#### **Limitations of the Q-set.**

The Q-set was developed for the sole purpose of this study. Some limitations were identified during the implementation of the study. First, the number of statements in the Q-set was limited to 28 so that the sorting activity would not be burdensome to participants. However, the decision to keep the Q-set smaller than 40 items, to be more manageable for participants, limited how broadly it could represent different opinions (Brown 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2005). The study design aimed to mitigate this limitation by focusing on a well-defined topic supported by a substantive amount of research (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

Second, certain concepts were eliminated from the Q-sort and maintained in the interview in order to reduce the number of Q-statements. Statements were eliminated that covered the concepts of training and professional development pertaining to discipline, and tracking behavioral and other disciplinary data. While these concepts were included in the interview instrument, the relative level of importance participants would have ranked them in the Q-sort process is unknown.

Third, participants struggled with single statements that covered two concepts, whereas each statement should only cover one question. For example, the statement “I feel it is critical to work together with parents to address behavioral issues before considering suspending or expelling a preschooler from school” covered working with parents and suspension/expulsion. Nearly all participants wanted to rank working with parents highly, but did not approve of the juxtaposition to considering suspension and expulsion highly alongside it. This conflating of concepts also made the correct placement of statements on the conceptual grid less clear. Considering the significance working with parents was given in both Q-sort and interview data, the Q-set instrument would have been stronger if there was a stand-alone statement on engaging and partnering with parents.

Fourth, there was no statement on teaming together as a teacher community, although this concept came up in the interview data. A statement on this concept would improve the instrument and allow the importance of teacher teams working together around discipline to be measured against other concepts.

#### **Limitations of the interview instrument.**

Since the interview was intended to both gather data and also to build rapport with participants, the researcher chose not to ask specifically for certain information. Wanting to avoid provoking fear of judgment or other triggers that might cause participants to be less honest or open with sharing their opinions, the researcher chose not to ask about hard numbers on race/ethnicity of the student population, or actual numbers/records of

suspension and expulsion. Therefore, the application of beliefs about discipline in practice cannot be measured by this study. However, the researcher elected to prioritize eliciting ECE leaders' views on discipline since this is the first known study with this focus.

Another limitation of the study instrument was that the question pertaining to the background education of each participant was not direct enough, so the exact degree and degree specialization of each participant was not gathered. Understanding how degree level and specialization relate to views on discipline would have strengthened this study.

Given how many study participants volunteered information about their use of various ECE assessments, it would have been meaningful to include a question specifically about what child, teacher, and environmental assessments were in use, and how they utilized that information to support curricular and disciplinary practices.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Systemic change within the early childhood educational system requires approaches led by educational leaders. Approaches to be discussed below begin with acknowledging and addressing the oppressive history of the education system, rejection of the ethos of colorblindness within education, and practices for inclusion, critical self-reflection, improving school-based relationships, and racial cognizance. Implications for ECE policy, ECE leader self-assessments, the *Preschool Leaders Views on Discipline Q-Sort*, and recommendations for future research will be discussed.

### **Educational Leadership**

This study showed how ECE leaders with more equity informed leadership approaches are more likely to value inclusionary approaches to discipline than their less equity minded peers. Educational leaders have a significant role in framing the norms at their sites by looking at their own views, beliefs, and practices, and by implementing policies and practices to support inclusionary approaches. Leaders should also guide their teaching staff toward more strength based, inclusive, and equity oriented discipline approaches. Educational leaders interested in shifting the ECE educational paradigm to one with more inclusiveness, more justice, less racism, and greater equity need to work to shift their organizational climates toward *racially cognizant inclusion*.

**Critical self-reflection and anti-bias approach.** Educational leadership preparation, professional development, and preservice credential programs are well situated to support teachers and leadership in creating change in discourse on preschool discipline (Bryan, 2017) and opportunities for critical reflection and preparation related to working with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Moloney & Saltmarsh, 2016).

Training can also be delivered informally, as was the case for many participants in the current study who provided training support to their staff during teacher meetings. So too, these meetings could be opportunities for facilitated self-reflection and group discussions. Such learning opportunities to discuss narratives regarding linguistically diverse students can give educational professionals practice at unpacking their orientations toward diverse students (Sugimoto, Carter & Stoehr, 2017).

### **Educational Equity**

At the institutional level, preschool program, site, and classroom leaders can commit to implementing anti-bias and counter-hegemonic policies, practices and pedagogies. A practical step in this direction would be to increase racial literacy, especially amongst White ECE educators. The findings in this study showed the majority of White participants did not acknowledge the presence of or the need for equity oriented discipline practices at their sites.

It is commonplace for ECE professionals to consider the individualized contexts of children's and families' home lives and trauma histories, but much less so for considering the impacts and implications of racialized societal influences on all aspects of life in this society. Trauma is indiscriminate, but racial trauma discriminates. Ignoring or not having awareness of how systemic racism might impact both the level of stress children and families are experiencing, as well as how their experiences with racism in society and education bare on the engagement process with the preschool staff and leadership can have harmful and lasting results. Furthermore, White children who witness unfairness and experience undue leniency due to racialized bias and stereotyping in ECE discipline practices are more likely to normalize and perpetuate racism in their futures (Bryan, 2017). Early childhood educational 2- and 4-year programs should do more to help students understand how individual development is situated within many broader and complex influences of racialized social contexts. Denying or ignoring the presence of

racial dynamics in a racialized society, including the preschool classroom, is a problematic phenomenon known as racial colorblindness.

### **Colorblind racial attitudes.**

Racial colorblindness is the cultural construct that race should not matter and that our society is post-racial (Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Watson, 2017). Neville, Worthington, and Spanierman (2001) describe colorblind ideology and attitudes as having three main dimensions: first, denial of the existence of White privilege; second, denial of the existence of institutional racism; and third, denial that discrimination against people of color continues to exist (Neville, et al., 2001). As a result of racially colorblind ideology, talking openly about race remains rare in schools (Berman, Daniel, Butler, MacNevin & Royer, 2017).

Teachers who claim they “don’t see race” and who do not engage students (and in this case, also teachers) in explicit conversations about race run the risk of reinforcing racialized stereotypes (Boutte, 2008; Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011; Castro-Atwater, 2016; Farago, Sanders & Gaias, 2015; MacNaughton & Davis, 2009; Watson, 2017). To make discipline practices more equitable will require explicit acknowledgment of the significance of race in addressing disciplinary policies, practices, and data (Carter, Skiba, Arrendondo & Pollock, 2017).

Early childhood educators with colorblind racial attitudes are more apt to minimize and negate racial incidents (Berman, et al., 2017). This issue is also present in policy and professional development materials, wherein non-specific language ignores

and minimizes racist incidents in early childhood education (MacNevin & Berman, 2016).

Early childhood educational leaders need to be aware that racial bias, and related linguistic bias, and variations in expectations of social emotional norms can interfere with positive student-teacher and preschool-parent relationships. Taken together, this research points to the need for ECE leaders to be able to engage conversations about race and equity, as well as to recognize how this shapes preschoolers' socioemotional and cognitive development, and be able to guide teachers to develop this understanding.

**Anti-racist training.**

To address racially colorblind attitudes and other issues related to systemic racism, training and coaching need to be employed to raise awareness about White supremacy and how to critically understand and deconstruct Whiteness (Matias & Grosland, 2016). Ullucci and Battey (2011) argue the critical role of developing color consciousness in educators based on their theoretical framing. The authors describe four approaches for educators to develop color consciousness and counter colorblindness:

- (1) Challenging neutrality on the part of White teachers by racializing Whiteness;
- (2) Validating the experiences and perspectives of people of color;
- (3) Naming racist educational practices and developing race-conscious repertoire;
- (4) Challenging neutrality in policy and seeing institutional racism

Based on the findings in this study, these approaches are recommended as required content for ECE preservice programs and professional development for teachers and leaders.

Anti-racist trainings have proven to be effective in shifting participants' colorblind attitudes, awareness and attitudes about institutional racism, as well as to increase the number of social justice activities they engage in within their workplaces in the child welfare field (Abramovitz & Blitz, 2015; Johnson, Antle & Barbee, 2009). It is likely similar results would occur in the field of ECE, since child welfare and ECE are similar in the systemic and organizational challenges they face to support leadership development and shift organizational culture and climate - all within the constraints of fast-paced and high-stakes environments. The role of preschool leadership in encouraging anti-racist practices is notable, as Abramovitz and Blitz (2015) found the main supports to participants engaging in racial equity activities in their workplaces included access to decision makers, support from leadership, and organizational support. These findings support the argument for ECE leaders to support preschool climates where racially cognizant inclusion and equity activities are modeled, encouraged, and normalized.

### **Early Childhood Education Policy**

There was anecdotal evidence in this study that policies do not have the power to override personal philosophies about discipline. However, more robust evidence seemed to show that the programs complied with at least the minimum requirements they were regulated by. The majority of participant programs were required by Title 5 to communicate school rules to parents and all of them had written discipline policies in their parent handbooks. Those without a written discipline policy were not regulated by Title 5 nor were they required by Title 22 licensing to share their school rules with

parents. Policies clearly do place parameters around programs to implement certain practices. In this study, the practices that related back to the language in Title 5 have been shown to contribute to more inclusive school environments, such as promoting positive interactions, and parent engagement and communication. As the Title 22 licensing regulations define the requirements for every childcare center and preschool, they should adopt language from Title 5 so that the basic foundations of preschool licensing would create more inclusive environments and practices.

**AB 752 analysis.**

The goal of AB 752 to reduce expulsion is an important one that can protect children from being removed from CSPP programs without a fair process. Yet, to an extent, it is responding to a symptom of a systems issue rather than a root cause. This policy requires programs to go through a specific process to address persistent behavioral challenges preceding expulsion. This approach has costs and benefits as outlined below.

In cases of behavioral challenges that are not responsive to preschool staff interventions, the staff are required to involve parents and a professional evaluator before expulsion can be considered justified. Some students who have a real need for early intervention supports will gain access to services and potentially receive the therapy needed for behavior improvement. This early intervention could potentially set a student on a new trajectory that supports their academic success for years to come. On the other hand, the process to expel a student under this bill may mean that children are unnecessarily referred for early intervention evaluations. Once students are assessed to

qualify for early intervention services they are given an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), which becomes part of the child's academic record. Diagnoses can come with stigma, and the risk of their child being diagnosed with special needs, alone, might drive families to disengage from the process and possibly withdraw from the preschool. Furthermore, racial bias is at play in diagnostic patterns and can perpetuate educational inequities (Grimmett, Dunbar, Williams, Clark, Prioleau, & Miller, 2016; Atkins-Loris, MacDonald & Mitterling, 2015). Lastly, if a professional evaluation is unwelcomed by parents or seems coerced, it is likely to dampen relations between the preschool and family, thus making it more difficult to work together towards solutions.

Another weakness of this legislation is it does not address suspensions, which could be used consistently enough so as to push a family out of a preschool, since family members usually have to miss work to stay home with a suspended child. Furthermore, suspensions are much more common than expulsions and they erode the very relationships, both between preschool staff and children and their parents, that are necessary to preventing expulsion.

The values, beliefs, and attitudes of ECE leaders underlie the policies and practices that interrupt or perpetuate exclusionary practices. When asked about whether AB 752 would lead to changes in their approaches, participants who expressed more inclusive views mostly said their practices were already in alignment with the requirements of the policy and nothing would change, except completing more paperwork. Their practices were based on a holistic approach of engagement, relationship

building, and clear expectations. They did not wait to react after behavioral challenges were persistent, but structured their programs with positive approaches to behavioral guidance and support.

On the other hand, the participant from a publicly funded (and officially very inclusive) program who held more exclusionary views shared how she relied heavily on suspensions by sending children home on a regular basis. Thus, although she was required by policy to avoid exclusionary practices, they were the norm at her site. These data underscore the importance of targeting the views and beliefs of ECE leaders as fundamental to the utilization of more inclusive approaches.

While there are probably many cases where AB 752 has decreased expulsion outcomes, the findings in this study indicate the system intervention should focus on preventing expulsion closer to the root cause. Leader beliefs and practices create the cultural norms for curriculum, discipline, and parent engagement in their programs. Therefore, any policy aimed at reducing preschool expulsion should be designed to support ECE leaders to use preventative and comprehensive disciplinary approaches, especially including a social emotional classroom curriculum and preschool-wide parent engagement practices, rather than only adding interventions further along the trajectory towards expulsion (Martin, et al., 2018).

Future research should look at how ECE leaders responded to and prepared for AB 752, and what changes in practice were most effective at reducing expulsion rates. Statewide data should also be analyzed to determine how AB 752 impacted expulsion

outcomes, referrals to early intervention services, and rates of behavioral and developmental diagnoses. Research should also examine how leadership preparation and professional development programs support changes of beliefs and attitudes, and how they support ECE leaders to adopt more inclusive and comprehensive approaches to preschool discipline.

**Use of assessments in ECE policy.**

Assessments for individual students, student-teacher interactions, and preschool environments were widely utilized by participants in this study. Most participants used ECE assessments, whether they were explicitly required to by their licensing requirements, or not (Title 5 and Title 22, respectively). This indicates the field of ECE has embraced assessments as part of program evaluation, training, and improving practice. Some participants even extended an evaluative approach to themselves through critical self-reflection on their own practice, while also encouraging the same in teacher practice. The self-reflective approach seemed to stem from their personal values and philosophies of self-accountability.

***ECE leader self-assessments.***

More self-reflective and -accountable approaches seemed to relate to participants' adoption of the most inclusive, comprehensive, and equity oriented approaches to discipline in this study. Just as state regulations have mandated annual environmental assessments, they could also mandate ECE leadership self-assessments.

Examples of how the values and beliefs of leadership impact disciplinary norms have been explored in this study and previously demonstrated at the high school level (Skiba, Chung, et al., 2014). Given the role of ECE leaders in setting the tone for preschool community norms in their programs, their leadership approaches should be supported by similar continuous quality improvement strategies as classroom practices. There are existing instruments designed for this purpose, such as the *Self-Assessment for Administrators of Childcare Programs* (North Carolina Institute, 2015). It has 76 items covering 11 competency areas, including educational programming, communication and managing relationships, and parental and family supports. Additionally, Colorado developed a rubric to measure competencies for early childhood educators and administrators which could be used by ECE leaders as a self-assessment. This instrument has eight domain areas and all domain areas include competencies related to socioemotional development and cultural competence. Therefore, it covers competency areas that relate to equity and inclusion more comprehensively, such as building reciprocal relationships with families, effective communication, respect for diversity, valuing families, and identifying observer bias in child assessments. However, the competencies in these two instruments do not include mention of racial equity, racial literacy, or tracking equity in disciplinary practices. Addition of these concepts would improve these and/or future instruments developed to support critical self-reflection in ECE leaders. Based on the current study, adding a regulatory requirement for ECE leaders to complete self-assessments annually is recommended. Further study is needed

on how leadership self-assessments impact leaders' personal views and practices, especially equity oriented leadership activities, as well as transfer to preschool-wide views and practices.

### **Educational Methodology**

#### **Assessing views of preschool discipline.**

This dissertation introduced a method for measuring views on preschool discipline practices. Future research may look at the transfer of ECE leaders' views on discipline to classroom-level practices. This study offers a tool that can be used and further developed for this purpose.

While the *Preschool Leaders Views on Discipline Q-Sort (PLVDQ)* instrument was designed for preschool leaders and has some statements that come from that specific positional perspective, it also has many statements that could easily be used with a wider audience, including parents, experienced teachers, pre-service teachers, or other stakeholders. Early childhood educational leaders and preschool communities could utilize this Q-set for a Q-sorting activity with staff and parents, to ascertain more knowledge about the views their communities hold on preschool discipline practices, and to initiate dialogues about the values and expectations within preschool communities.

The Q-sort and interview instrument in this study could also be used in a replication study, or a study with a different population, in other regions, and with various types of preschool programs. Another use of the instruments in this study would be to test transfer of ECE leaders' viewpoints to staff by conducting a study with multiple

participants from all levels of a preschool organization. If a preschool program wanted to test how views change as a result of implementing a new program or approach, the Q-set in this study could be used pre- and post-training, or pre- and post-program implementation. Given the potential usefulness for the *Preschool Leaders Views on Discipline Q-sort*, it is important that future research test the validity and reliability of this instrument.

### **Conclusion**

This study indicates there are notable trends in the relationship between preschool discipline practices and equity oriented approaches, including social emotional curriculum, parent engagement, proactive behavior tracking, clearly articulated discipline policies, and articulation of equity promoting practices. Participants who had the most positive and equity oriented view of preschool discipline had the strongest inclusionary views and approaches. These findings place the onus to work for equity and against exclusion on early childhood educational leaders. Specifically, there is a need for ECE leaders to learn, develop, acquire, practice, apply, implement, disseminate, and prioritize the skills they need to support their staff in providing caring, inclusive, and accountable preschool environments.

As preschoolers are first entering the system of formal education it is essential for preschool leaders to create environments of belonging and care for all students, and to go the extra mile when the bonding and rapport building process does not unfold as easily as others. In their work, preschool professionals carry the responsibility of nurturing

positive early educational experiences that impact children's social and academic development for the short and long term. The onus is on preschool teacher and leaders to prevent early entry into the school-to-prison pipeline by choosing to do everything in their power to retain and care for every single child who comes through their doors.

At the very least, early childhood educational discipline practices should not be causing children harm. Ideally, all ECE leaders, policies, and educational programs will choose to adopt and implement racially cognizant and inclusionary approaches. The onus is also on ECE leaders to learn how to model equity oriented practices and racially literate discourses in their roles. In this way, to create safe environments and safe cultures and climates for all students and families. Furthermore, the mindset about how safety is maintained can be reframed and expanded to describe the supports educators provide to ensure that each child is receiving a caring, relationship-based, inclusive, and equity oriented early education. This reframing will entail policy and practice initiatives lead by self-reflective, anti-biased, and anti-racist educators. To this end, pre-service and ongoing education for ECE leaders and teachers should provide thorough instruction on positive, strength based, and equitable approaches for working with preschoolers, as well as positive, engaging, and equitable approaches to empower partnerships with parents and families.

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## **Appendix**

### **Appendix A. Participant Recruitment Letter**

Hello! My name is Samyalisa Enright, and I am a doctoral student at San Francisco State University. I am beginning a new research project for my dissertation and am recruiting participants for the study. I'm interested in learning about what preschool site leaders think about approaches to preschool discipline practices and policies, especially those intended to prevent expulsion.

I am seeking participants who are leaders at early childhood education sites and who are willing to spend around 55-60 minutes with me for an interview and an interesting statement-sorting activity. These will help me learn about the beliefs that early childhood educational leaders have about preschool discipline practices and approaches. If you agree to participate you might find that you enjoy the opportunity to reflect on the way that you think about and approach discipline at your site.

If this sounds like something you are interested in participating in, please contact me and we can schedule a follow-up call or schedule our meeting.

I'm happy to answer questions you have about the process or to discuss my research and why I think it is worthwhile and interesting. I appreciate your time in reading my message.

Thank you,

Samyalisa Enright

Doctoral Candidate  
San Francisco State University  
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## Appendix B. Key Informant Interview Script and Instrument

ECE Leaders' Views on Student Discipline  
Fall 2018 – Spring 2019

### KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW SCRIPT AND INSTRUMENT

#### Informed consent

“Thank you for allowing me to interview you. My name is Samyalisa Enright, I am a graduate student in Educational Leadership at San Francisco State University. I am conducting this interview as part of the research for my culminating experience.”

“The **purpose of this research** is to understand the views and practices of early childhood education leaders regarding preschool disciplinary approaches.

You were solicited to participate because you are a site leader at an early childhood education program that is registered with the California Department of Social Services as a state licensed childcare center. The data from this interview will be used to develop academic and professional reports on early childhood education leaders.”

“**Your participation** is completely voluntary, and you may choose to end the interview at any time. The responses you share will not be attributed to you or your organization, but will be analyzed and reported in aggregate with the other participants who are interviewed for this research project. There is no direct benefit or compensation for your participation, nor are there any costs to participate.”

“**This interview** will take about one hour. It will be recorded to ensure the most accurate perception of your responses, and to shorten the interview time [*compared to taking notes by hand*]. The topics we will cover include your background in early childhood education; your preschool site’s discipline approach, policy, and tracking; race equity in discipline approach; activities to prevent expulsion; and current legislation on preschool expulsion.”

“**Are you willing to participate in this interview?**” [*Wait for verbal consent.*]

“Great! After today’s interview, if you have any follow-up questions or information you would like to add, please contact me [*distribute business cards*]. Do you have any immediate questions before we begin?”

“Let’s begin.”

## Interview

[Turn on digital recorder.]

“This is Samyalisa Enright, interviewing \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_  
in \_\_\_\_\_, CA on \_\_\_\_\_.”

### *Background in early childhood education (5 minutes)*

“First, I’d like to ask you a few background questions about this site, your role here, and your background pertaining to your work in ECE.”

1. “Please tell me about the population of students and staff at your site”  
Prompt: “How many students? Staff? SES of population? Ethnic/racial representation of population?”
2. “How do you identify your own race/ethnicity?”
3. “How many years have you been working in any capacity within the field of Early Childhood Education?”  
Prompt: “How many of those years were you teaching in an ECE classroom?”
4. “Tell me about your job and responsibilities in your current position.”  
Follow-up question: “How long have you been in this role? At this site?”
5. “How did you personally prepare for your work as an ECE leader?”  
Prompt: “What types of academic training did you receive? Job training? Previous employment? Mentors or other influences?”
6. “How did you learn and develop your personal views on preschool discipline?”

### *Discipline approach, policy, and tracking (10 minutes)*

“Let’s talk about the discipline approach, policy, and outcome tracking at your site”

7. “How would you characterize the overall approach to student discipline in your site?”  
a. Follow-up: “How do you provide training around discipline in you site?”
8. “How would you describe the core components of the discipline policy at your site?”

- a. Follow-up: Does your site have a documented discipline policy?  
Prompt: “in the parent handbook, a proprietary model, official classroom rules, etc.”
  - b. Follow-up [if site does have a documented discipline model, school rules, or policy]: “Would you mind sharing a copy(s) with me?”
9. “How do you track disciplinary incidents at your site and in the classroom”
- a. Follow-up:  
“In what ways do you use your discipline records?  
Prompt: “To inform development of policies and practices; to understand patterns in disciplinary outcomes; to determine themes and topics for professional development for personnel”
  - b. Do you have any discipline record related documents you’d be willing to share with me?  
Prompt: “Incident reports, referral, suspension, or expulsion forms”  
Follow up: Does your site have documented instructions on when and how staff should document incidents, inform parents of any behavioral concerns, and include parents in the solution process?

*Race equity in discipline approach (5 minutes)*

“Now, let’s talk about your site’s approach to equity in discipline practices.”

10. “How do you approach or promote equitable practices, and especially race equity, in student discipline at your site?  
Prompt: “Policies, training, coaching, hiring practices, self-assessments, etc.”

*Activities to prevent expulsion  
(5 minutes)*

“Now let’s talk about your site’s efforts to prevent and avoid student suspension and expulsion.”

11. “How do you work to reduce and/or prevent suspension and expulsion at your site?”  
Prompt: “Policies, positive behavioral supports, engage parents in finding solutions, training, coaching, etc.”

*Current legislation on preschool expulsion (5 minutes)*

“Now let’s talk about current legislation on preschool discipline.”

12. “Are you familiar with AB-752, the legislation aimed at reducing expulsion and disenrollment from California State Preschool Program (CSPP) sites?”
  - a. Follow-up: “In what ways has AB752 impacted the practices and policies at your site?”
  - b. Follow-up: “What coming changes do you foresee in the discipline policies and practices at your site?”

“Thank you very much for sharing your approaches to discipline with me.”

*[Turn off digital recorder, and save file.]*

*Q-sort (25 minutes)*

“Now, I’d like you to participate in an interesting exercise, called a Q-sort, to help me better understand your perspective on approaches to preschool discipline. Q-sort is a method used to assess how people think about a given topic; in this case, how Early Childhood Educational Leaders think about preschool discipline. I will be giving you one stack of cards with a statement of opinion on each card. Then you will sort the cards according to how much you agree with the statements.”

13. “There are 28 cards in the set that deal with various views on preschool discipline.”
 

*[Hand the stack of cards to the respondent.]*

  - a. “First, read through all the cards, to have an understanding of the scope of the statements.” *[While the respondent reads the cards, set up the blue Likert scale cards, facing the respondent: -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, +1, +2, +3, +4]*
  - b. “Now, I will guide you to sort these cards in order from those statements that most agree with your views on preschool discipline, to those that most disagree with your views on preschool discipline. As you sort the cards, the guiding question is, **“To what extent does the statement agree with your views on preschool discipline?”**

“Read each card again, but this time place each into one of two piles: a pile that you most agree with, and a pile that you most disagree with. The piles should be roughly equal in size. You might agree with all of them, or disagree with all of them, but sort the cards into groups that *most* agree and *most* disagree with your views on preschool discipline.”

“You can change the position of any card at any time, so you do not need to be firm in your rankings yet.”
  - c. “Now take the pile that most agrees with your views. Once again, read each card and separate them into two piles: those that most agree with your views on preschool discipline, and those that less agree.”
  - d. “Now you will rank these cards by placing them below this blue scale.”
    - i. “First, take the stack of cards that most agrees with your views. Pick **one** that is the most in agreement with your views on preschool discipline, and place it below the “+4” scale card.”

- ii. “Next, pick the next **two** cards that are most in agreement with your views, and place them below the “+3” scale card.”
- iii. “Of the cards that remain, pick the next **three** cards that are most in agreement with your views, and place them below the “+2” scale card.”
- iv. “Combine any remaining cards with the stack of cards that you agree with less. Of this stack, pick the next **five** cards that are most in agreement with your views. Place them below the “+1” scale card.”
- v. “Place the remaining cards from this stack below the “0” scale card.”

“Remember, you can change the position of any card at any time, so feel free to move them around however you choose so the rankings feel the truest to you.”

- e. “Now let’s work on the other side of the scale. Take the stack of cards that most disagrees with your views on preschool discipline. Once again, read each card and separate them into two piles: those that most disagree with your views on preschool discipline, and those that less disagree.”
- f. “Now you will rank these cards by placing them below this **blue** scale.”
  - i. “First, take the stack of cards that most disagrees with your views. Pick **one** that is the most in disagreement with your views on preschool discipline, and place it below the “-4” scale card.”
  - ii. “Next, pick the next **two** that are most in disagreement with your views, and place them below the “-3” scale card.”
  - iii. “Of the cards that remain, pick the next **three** that are most in disagreement with your views, and place them below the “-2” scale card.”
  - iv. “Combine any remaining cards with the last stack of cards. Of this stack, pick the next **five** cards that are most in disagreement with your views. Place them below the “-1” scale card.”
  - v. “Place the remaining cards from this stack below the “0” scale card.”
- g. “Look over the distribution of the cards. Are you satisfied with the rankings of these cards? Change any that are out of order, but keep the numbers of cards under each ranking as prescribed.”

*Debrief (5 minutes)*

“To wrap up, let’s talk about your ranking process.”

- 14. “Did you find there were any statements that were particularly difficult to place? Why?”
- 15. “What was your decision-making process for ranking the statements you most agreed with?”  
Prompt: “How did you make your choice?”

16. "What was your decision-making process for ranking the statements you least agreed with?"

Prompt: "How did you make your choice?"

"Thank you. Now I will take a moment to record your placement of the cards"  
[Record the distribution of the cards on the "Q-Sort: ECE Leaders' Views on Student Discipline" form. Be sure to record the card numbers under the correct sign of each ranking; e.g., -4 versus +4]

*Concluding statement*

"Thank you very much for your time. If you have any questions or comments about this research, please contact me."



**Appendix D. Q-Set Statement Source Table**

Statement Number	Operational measure	Source
1	I feel that getting to know students individually is an important part of discipline.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004).
2	Although it would be nice to get to know preschool students and their families on a personal basis, my duties simply don't allow me the time.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from "students" to "students and their families"
3	Teachers ought to be able to manage the majority of preschoolers' misbehavior in their classroom.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from "students" to "preschoolers"
4	Preschools must take some responsibility for teaching students how to get along and behave appropriately	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from "schools" to "preschools"; Deleted "in school"
5	The primary responsibility for teaching preschoolers how to behave appropriately in preschool belongs to the parents.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from "students" to "preschoolers"; adapted from "schools" to "preschools"
6	I feel it is critical to work together with parents to address behavioral issues before considering suspending or expelling a preschooler from school.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted; Added "together" before "with parents"; adapted from "before suspending a student from school" to "to address behavioral issues before considering suspending or expelling a preschooler from school"
7	There is really nothing a preschool can do if students' parents are not willing to work together with preschool personnel regarding their child's behavior.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from "school" to "preschool"; adapted from "to take responsibility for their child's behavior" to "willing to work together with preschool personnel regarding their child's behavior"

8	Regardless of the severity of a student's behavior, my objective is to keep all students in preschool.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from "school" to "preschool"
9	I believe suspension is unnecessary if we provide a positive preschool climate and an engaging environment.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from "school" to "preschool"; adapted from "and engaging instruction" to "and an engaging environment"
10	Certain preschoolers are not gaining anything from preschool and disrupt the learning environment for others. In such a case, the use of suspension and expulsion is justified to preserve the learning environment for students to learn.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from "students" to "preschoolers"; adapted from "schools" to "preschools"
11	Preschools cannot afford to tolerate children who disrupt the learning environment.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from "students" to "children"; adapted from "schools" to "preschools"
12	Preschools cannot afford to retain children who threaten the safety of other students.	Enright, 2019
13	I believe suspension allows children time away from preschool that encourages their parents to address their behavior.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted; deleted "and expulsion"; adapted from "students" to "children"; adapted from "school" to "preschool"; adapted from "them to think about" to "their parents to address"
14	Suspension and expulsion hurt preschool students by impacting their identity development.	Enright, 2019
15	Suspension and expulsion do not really solve discipline problems.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from "disabilities" to "special needs"
16	Preschool students with special needs who engage in disruptive behavior need a different approach to discipline than their peers.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted; added "Preschool"
17	Trauma exposed preschoolers require a different approach to discipline than other preschoolers.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from "Disadvantaged" to "Trauma exposed"; adapted

		from “students” to “preschoolers”
18	Preschoolers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different disciplinary needs.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from “students” to “preschoolers”; added “racial”; and changed “emotional and behavioral” to “disciplinary” needs
19	Teachers at this site were for the most part adequately trained to handle problems of misbehavior and discipline.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted from “school” to “site”; deleted “by their teacher-training program”
20	Suspension and expulsion are unfair to children of color.	(Skiba & Edl, 2004). Adapted, replaced “minority students” with “children of color”
21	Preschool personnel should consider how their discipline practices may perpetuate or interrupt racial stereotypes and biases.	Enright, 2019
22	Preschool personnel who consider the reasons behind children’s behaviors are less likely to respond harshly or punitively.	Enright, 2019
23	All preschool personnel should establish preschool environments that are familiar, predictable, and consistent with local expectations for behavior.	Suggested Culturally and Contextually Relevant SWPBS Practice (Survey Item) (Fallon, et al., 2015). Adapted from “school” to “preschool”
24	Teachers should learn, include, and use students’ culture and language in instruction and interactions.	Suggested Culturally and Contextually Relevant SWPBS Practice (Survey Item) (Fallon, et al., 2015). Adapted; deleted “Classroom”
25	Critical self-reflection by preschool personnel is imperative to reduce bias in discipline practices.	Enright, 2019
26	Sometimes preschoolers’ problem behaviors are a sign of a deeper developmental issue that requires support beyond what our program can offer.	Enright, 2019

27	Preschoolers need to learn to self-regulate so they are able to socialize appropriately.	Enright, 2019
28	Self-regulation on the part of preschool personnel is the foundation of any successful preschool environment.	Enright, 2019

**Appendix E. Letter of Exemption from Institutional Review Board Oversight**

Letter of Exemption from Institutional Review Board Oversight

Dear Lisa,

Your project, "*A mixed-methods study of early childhood educational leaders' views on approaches to preschool discipline and preventing expulsions*" is Exempt from IRB oversight and does not require further ORSP-HAP review. Your project is exempt under the following code:

45 CFR 46.101 (b)(2) because it is research involving the use of educational tests and interview procedures.

Please note that your exemption determination will not expire, but any future changes to your project may require review. Please contact us if you plan to make any changes in the future. Your project number is **E18-295**

If you change your project or have any questions, please contact us.

Regards,

  
ORSP-Human and Animal Protections  
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Email: [protocol@sfsu.edu](mailto:protocol@sfsu.edu)