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## Discipline or Punish? Some Suggestions for School Policy and Teacher Practice

**D**iscipline, according to Freire (1998, p. 86), is a necessary condition for effective action in the social world. “True discipline does not exist in the muteness of those who have been silenced but in the stirrings of those who have been challenged, in the doubt of those who have been prodded, and in the hopes of those who have been awakened” (Freire, 1998, p. 86). According to Foucault (1977/1995), discipline is a repressive operation by which individuals are seasoned into productive labor, i.e., bodies for capitalism. It is “a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior . . . . Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” (Foucault, 1995, p. 138). Somewhere between Freire and Foucault lies the work of those of us who dare to teach. This article seeks to restore a counter-narrative of discipline as distinct from punishment. Punishment is retribution for an offense, an exclusionary act by which students are removed from the opportunity to learn; it is harm inflicted by an external agent as a mechanism through which outside regulation becomes internalized subjectivity. Too often, this is the rubric from which we speak of classroom management and school policies that include detentions, suspensions, and expulsions.

By contrast, discipline is an act of rigorous physical or mental training, a practice of will that can lead paradoxically to docile compliance or emancipatory possibilities. If we think of any challenging endeavor in athleticism, art, performance, or work, then we know that there is a fine line between authoritarianism and rigorous creativity. This article is concerned with discipline as praxis—its transformative possibility—and by what methodology it may be found, studied, and nurtured in classrooms and schools.

### PART 1: PUNISHMENT

I received an attendance book and a small stack of pink referrals at my first teaching assignment

in Oakland, California, over 16 years ago. I had no classroom, no textbooks, and otherwise no materials besides a box of copy paper. I wrote my first referral sometime in the middle of fall, after an incident that has long passed from my memory. I remember students telling me, “Send her to the office.” It seemed reasonable that the school administration might have something useful to say to the student, so I filled out the pink form, tearing off a carbonless copy for myself. I quickly learned that this was the poorest advice you can give to a new teacher struggling with classroom culture and her/his own authority within it. Students typically return from referrals or other institutionalized, depersonalized forms of retribution with the conviction that they were wrongfully punished and that the teacher is going to fail them. Aside from returning to the classroom resentful and unmotivated, they are, at best, momentarily threatened into submission or, at worst, destined to become push-outs, not drop-outs (Fine, 1991); such an incident forces their peers to live with the violence of their erasure from the school community, perhaps affecting their attitude toward school permanently.

Our referral slips were pink, triplicate, 3" × 5" forms with one space for teachers to write up student misbehavior and another space for the administrator; that space had one word: “disposition.” At first, I thought this would be where the dean described the student’s “mood or temperament” (dictionary definition #1) after a thoughtful counseling session, or perhaps her “inclination” (dictionary definition #2) to return to class. What disposition *actually* meant in the school context was the “arranging or placing of things in their proper place” (dictionary definition # 3), i.e., placing the student in detention, in a parent conference, in suspension, in expulsion hearings, or in police custody.

What I learned from this experience is that disposition as “disposal” is simply a record of the

student's removal from class, with no consideration for her mood or her inclination to learn. It represents an institutional concern for managing and controlling bodies, usually in the name of saving the rest from the worst. One commonsense justification for removals is that these students are bad influences, vectors of malignant behavior that spread like contagion through the classroom—in other words, bad students are pathogens to be excised from the corpus of the benignant student body. There is little analysis to the harm caused to the individual student, and even less to the harm to the collective culture of the classroom.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1995) outlines the exhaustive systems of monitoring and policing that constitute the “science” of prisons that arrange bodies in their proper place. This science also produces subjectivity: that is, one's outlook, mood, inclination in the world is an effect of relations of power over naming and being named, a taxonomy that names some individuals as “normal” and others as “deviant.” Thus, subjects are subjugated to the “power-knowledge” (pp. 27–28) asserted by these panoptic or “all-seeing” systems of constant measuring. Individual subjectivities become “disciplined” (dictionary definition #1) or molded into “docile bodies” (p. 138) that serve the economic interests of the state. In other words, we subject ourselves to the disciplinary gaze, and thus internalize its taxonomies, without any direct physical coercion.

This analysis, according to Foucault, can be applied to “factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons” (p. 228, emphasis added). Foucault's analysis is most obvious in the current regime of high-stakes accountability, where students are disciplined to become test-takers and teachers to docilely administer them. However, we can also see how teachers are disciplined to discipline students. Foucault's theory is at least partially fulfilled by the disproportionate punishment and pathologization of darker males in schools—punishment in the form of removals of the darker, male presence from classrooms (i.e., and e.g., African American boys), and

pathologization in their overrepresentation in special education (Blanchett, 2006).

I have examined these patterns of removals (i.e., referrals, suspensions, expulsions) in collaboration with students, student support staff, teachers, principals, central administrators, and family services across three cities: Austin, Oakland, and San Francisco. We found dramatically disproportionate rates of removal across race and gender. Across all three cities, African American boys were most likely to be suspended from school. At the middle school level, these rates of punishment were 1 suspension for every 4 enrolled African American students in San Francisco in 2006–07, 1 for 3 in Oakland in 2005–06, and nearly 1 for 2 in Austin in 2003–04. But it wasn't just black and white—each city had a clear, racialized pattern: an ordering of groups most preferred for punishment. Researchers have termed this the “discipline gap” (Gregory & Mosely, 2004), which I argue is more appropriately called the “punishment gap.” These removals, or disposals, of students are exclusionary acts from opportunities to learn, and thus punishments.<sup>1</sup>

In the interest of space, Figure 1 includes only statistics from Oakland. My purpose with this graph is to draw attention to this pattern of exclusion from the opportunity to learn, rather than the specific numbers. I am using suspensions as a window into inclusion and exclusion, and thus the difference between discipline and punishment.

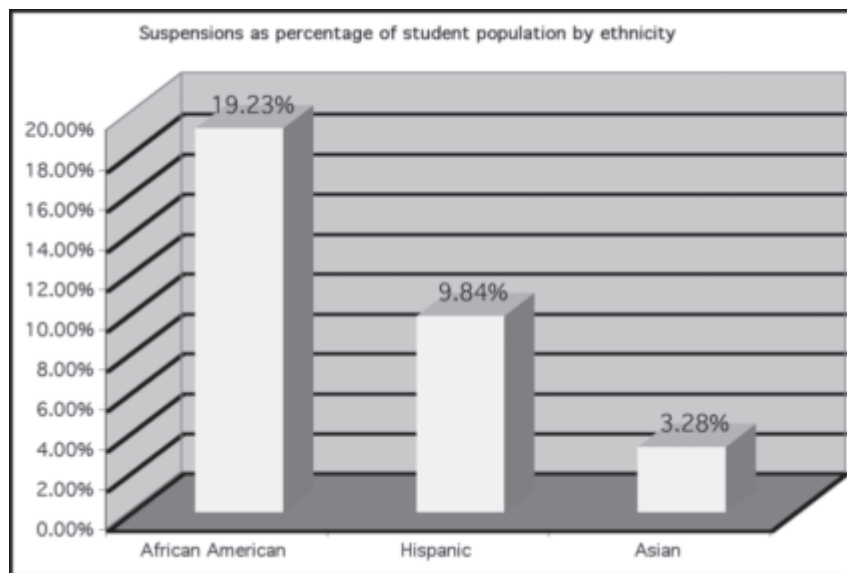


Figure 1. Exclusion rate or “punishment gap” in Oakland<sup>2</sup>

I am not ideologically opposed to suspensions; rather, I ask educators to prove that their discipline system is inclusionary. Crudely speaking, more discipline should result in more achievement. Certainly, we all have anecdotal evidence of the student who “turns around” after a day of internal suspension, a visit to the office, or a “time out” in the hallway. Like coaches who might bench a star athlete from playing in a game, educators could use removals to refine their star students. In these hypothetical cases, removals ought to lead to academic excellence, rather than academic marginalization. I have observed some rare schoolwide systems where suspended students are then enrolled into programs of increased academic and social support to transition them back into the classroom. Obviously, these programs are resource intensive, and usually work around rather than with the classroom from which the student was removed. In any case, these claims of inclusion should be corroborated with evidence. But broad patterns and ethnographic data show us that the more times students are sent to the office, the more likely they are to become “pushouts.” It follows, then, that if African American males are the most frequently removed from class, they are bound to be the group least likely to stay in school.

If we look at patterns of student persistence in completing high school and fulfilling college requirements (see Fig. 2), we see another racialized and gendered pattern where black and brown students (and boys) are underrepresented in matriculation into higher education.

The achievement gap is a *mirror image* to the punishment gap. For example, based on Figures 1 and 2, African American students are 6 times more likely to get a ticket out of class (a suspension) than to receive a ticket into college (a diploma that meets minimum college requirements).<sup>4</sup> In other words, more punishment corresponds to less achievement. This inverse correlation was true across cities at every grade level: elementary, middle, high school.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons, the two graphs are more aptly described as the *exclusion rate*—the rate by which students are removed from the classroom—and the *inclusion*

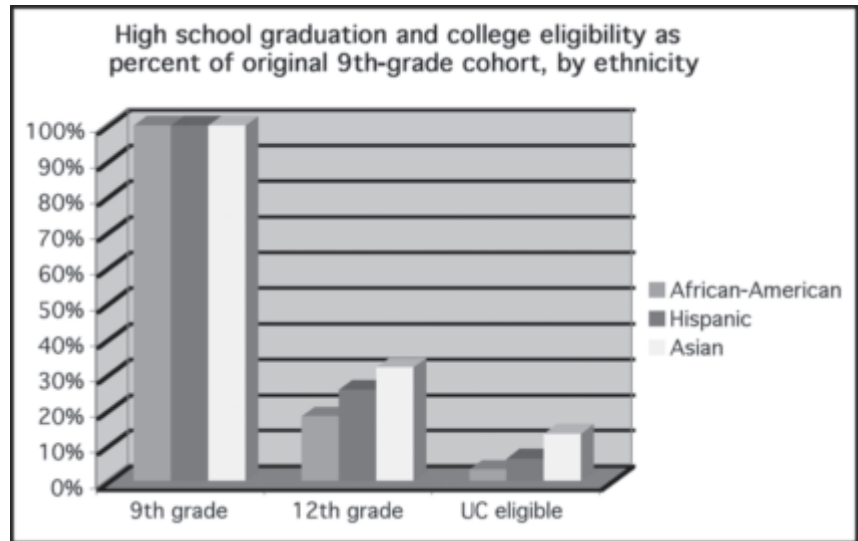


Figure 2. Inclusion rate or “achievement gap”<sup>3</sup>

rate—the rate by which students matriculate to higher education. These should be key indicators in the assessment of overall school climate. Otherwise, in the current high stakes testing regime, these inequalities are hidden by such indicators as average test scores, which may actually increase with greater rates of removal. The so-called “Texas Miracle” of high test-score increases that served as the basis for No Child Left Behind was predicated on underreporting dropout rates (Kimball, 2004; Leung, 2004). Policies of punishment, however disguised as mechanisms of reform, reveal themselves in their intimacy with racial (and gendered, and classed) exclusions.

One commonsense argument about suspensions is that somehow they “correct” the “deviant” behavior of the student (discipline definition #1, hereafter referred to simply as “discipline #1”), similar to coaches who might correct bad habits in their athletes. Or in even more optimistic statements, suspensions become the “turning point” where a deviant is scared straight and becomes a model student. If this were true, then more suspensions should lead to fewer pushouts and higher academic achievement—an outcome not reflected in the data at all. Individually, suspended students are more likely to be repeat visitors to the office. Collectively, high punishment schools also demonstrate overall abysmally low inclusion rates; Figure 2 shows that only 3% of African Americans, 6% of Hispanics, and 13% of Asians were eligible to *apply* to college from comprehensive East Oakland high schools in 2003.

Furthermore, this racially disproportionate punishment and preference is not invisible to our students. They are collectively impacted by the culture of removal—even if they themselves are not punished. Students develop a subjectivity of being always available for punishment, and this subjectivity tends to correspond to the race and gender of the student—i.e., black boys in East Oakland see themselves as eminently more subject to removal. Moreover, this sense of self-as-punishable becomes *shared across race and gender* in institutions where suspensions are common, even by students who don't fit the demographic profile for punishment. For example, Asian American girls in Oakland identify with the punished, not the punisher. This subjectivity is most pronounced in schools for poor and working class students of color with “Zero Tolerance” policies.

Zero Tolerance (ZT) essentially requires equal treatment for all violations of school policies, regardless of circumstances or context. In the prevailing research on discipline, there is wide consensus that Zero Tolerance makes zero sense (Skiba, 2000). Interventions based on robotic protocols, heavy use of suspensions and expulsions, and rule-bound approaches that prescribe same treatment for same offense do not improve school climate and do not reduce incidents of violence on school campuses (Opportunities suspended, 2000). George Washington University's Hamilton Fish Institute, which was established by Congress in 1997 to research and develop effective safe school strategies, does not support Zero Tolerance or what they call “cookie-cutter discipline” (Hamilton Fish Institute, 2000). Their findings further state that ZT is ineffective, even in eliminating the most threatening of behavior problems, such as guns on campus. In the framework of this article, ZT is punishment, not discipline.

In my own research, I compared two schools that shared the same campus, had similar missions related to youth empowerment, and nearly identical enrollments in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background. They resembled one another in almost every aspect except staff composition, institutional culture, and school policy. Each was struggling with school discipline. One adopted a Zero Tolerance policy, and the other formed a circle of “elders”—respected teachers who mentored suspended students academically and socially for 10 weeks and who also visited and gave feedback to the teachers of these returning

students. Despite removing nearly 25% of its total student body from the school permanently each year for 3 years in a row, the one with ZT actually demonstrated lower test scores and matriculation rates than its counterpart. The second showed the largest test score increase in the entire school district after 1 year. I am hesitant to recommend replicating specific school policies, as these situations were quite complex, but this contrast highlights the difference between policies that punish students, and approaches that look to address fundamental issues in the classroom.

Thankfully, the dominant trend in discipline research moves away from ZT and makes several recommendations for practitioners: to exercise judgment and personalize disciplinary action, to provide an engaging/challenging academic environment, to pursue counseling alternatives, to involve the family respectfully, to intervene early, and to provide opportunities for the student to invest in the school community (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Without engaging an extensive review of this literature, we can still safely describe these recommendations as a *holistic* approach to intervening in individually “problematic” student behavior. I have found that classroom teachers—from veterans, to those newly minted by credentialing programs, to those among us who are experienced but still struggle with classroom management—already espouse these recommendations. Although I certainly support a holistic approach to engaging youth and families, these broad sets of techniques do not, in my view, constitute a rigorous approach to discipline.

There are some obvious critiques of the research on the holistic approach. First, these recommendations need to be situated within social context; for instance, the urban or rural conditions of high poverty, where community trauma is high and resources are low, are rarely considered. The intervention model treats violations to school rules as outliers and assumes a civic capacity to provide therapy to a few exceptions. The techniques are often not culturally responsive, ignoring or minimizing the effects of different arrangements of family and community as they are constituted by race, class, language, citizenship status, housing, etc. For the most part, they infer a “universal student” who is raceless and gender-less. More important, they also imply a “universal teacher” who is culturally neutral and uniformly efficacious with all students.

These “new” solutions tend to be policy-oriented and specifically reactive against ZT (e.g., Boylan, 2002), but do not address the disproportionate punishment of poor, male, black and brown youth *before* ZT policies became popularized in the 1980s (Noguera, 1995). These critiques highlight the need for ethnographic studies of discipline that account for race, culture, and social context; they need to think beyond systems of rewards and punishments and avoid pathological models where students need to be “cured” of their deficits through therapy.

## PART 2: DISCIPLINE AS PRAXIS

Discipline is possibly the most overarching concern among new and preservice teachers, and a dominating cliché in the popular imagination of “ghetto schools” as portrayed by Hollywood. Yet despite the weight that classroom discipline commands in both the culture of schooling and the material allocation of school resources (e.g., security officers, hearing panels, deans, detention personnel, and so on), it remains a highly undertheorized subject, particularly in relationship to culturally relevant and critical pedagogy. Among social justice educators, discipline is sometimes a taboo subject associated with repression and authoritarianism and seemingly at odds with a priori assumptions of democratic, student-centered classrooms. This kind of discipline (definition #1) echoes Foucault’s critique of institutions and their repressive functions.

Interestingly enough, Foucault’s text *Discipline and Punish* as originally published in French did not include the term “discipline” in its title. *Surveiller et Punir* referred to surveillance by a “visible and unverifiable” gaze (p. 201); this slippage reminds us that Foucault’s discipline is not the source of repression but rather its mechanism, a “master’s tool” that may yet be reclaimed to dismantle the master’s house of surveillance (Lorde, 1984, pp. 110–114). Although Foucault leaves under-examined the resistance of children and teachers to the carceral system of education,<sup>6</sup> in his later work (Foucault, 1988), he hints at the possibilities for discipline (definition #2) as rigorous mental or physical training through which we may construct new subjectivities and emancipatory practices. Thus, he leaves us with a critique (discipline #1) and a question (discipline #2) that critical educators might be in the best position to answer.

Similarly, Pedro Noguera (1995) pushes us to nurture self-discipline in our students. Anyone who has ever been in a troupe preparing for opening night, or on a sports team preparing for the championship, or part of a difficult installation before an art exhibition, or in a music studio laboring to produce an album, knows something about this form of discipline. It is neither characterized by repressions nor by prodigal liberties. Rather, discipline (definition #2) is part of a rigorous craft that demands intensive work and painstaking creativity towards a common goal. Whereas punishment is exclusionary and discipline #1 is inclusionary but repressive, discipline #2 is transformative. Hereafter, I will only refer to discipline in its possibilities for new subjectivities.

This article is too short to present the practices of individual classrooms teachers in any degree of ethnographic detail.<sup>7</sup> However, it offers two contributions for classroom pedagogy and school policy: (1) a framework for differences in discipline across classrooms—one that puts forward some general ways to interrogate our practices in schools, but also insists that praxis will never be the same in all school communities; (2) a practitioner inquiry model through which we might develop discipline in the particulars of our different learning spaces. Therefore, I am proposing a general but not universalizing approach to discipline as praxis in pedagogy and school policy.

### Structured Engagement: A Framework for Discipline

“Edutainment” versus “education” is often the common-sense formulation of a binary for many educators whom I have interviewed. A popular belief is that lessons have to be entertaining to engage youth, and that classes with high standards and strict structures tend to be disliked by youth. This is a false binary. All classes, for better or worse, foster youth (dis)engagement and have ways to (un)structure student participation. From authoritarian to permissive classrooms, there is always an interplay between classroom activity structures (or lack thereof) and social engagement (or lack thereof). Figure 3 presents this dynamic as two interactive axes: engagement and structure.

*Engagement* is bilateral, and must be thought of in terms of action by youth and action by the teacher. This is not simply a question of what

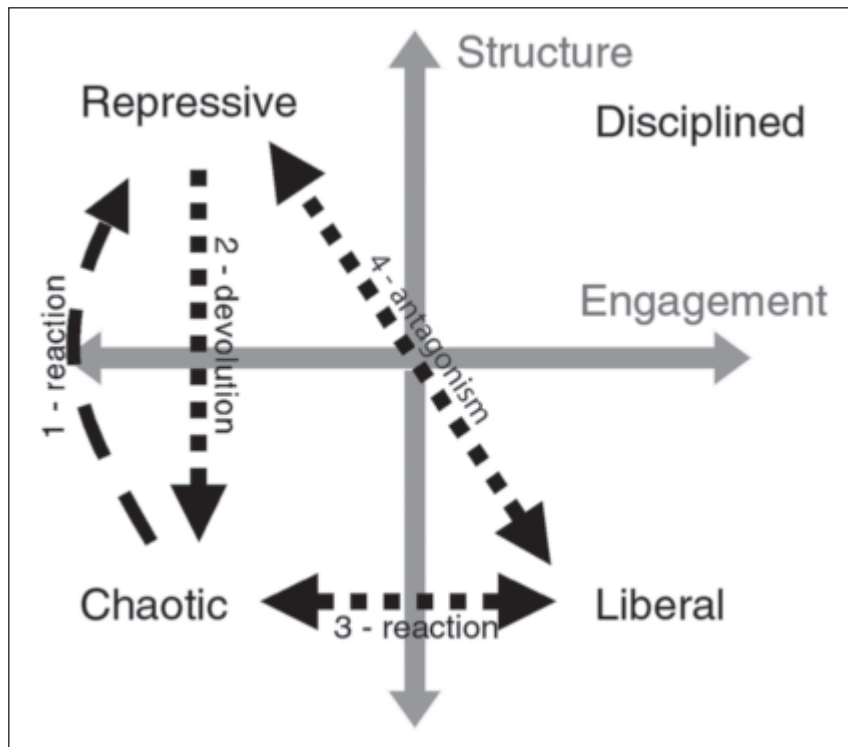


Figure 3. Structure and engagement as the interactive bases for classroom practice

students “like.” Engagement is enacted. On the one hand, students engage when they actively read, listen, discuss, and participate in classroom activities—in other words, when they involve themselves in the lesson at hand. On the other hand, teachers engage youth through lived experience, including popular culture, socioeconomic realities, cultural heritage, language, and the social context of the community. In the urban high school contexts with which I am most familiar, this also means an explicit, critical engagement of the structural patterns and perpetrators of persistent inequality as part of the regular curriculum.

Engagement is highly context-specific. What feels like very clear instructions in a white, middle-class speech register might be an ambiguous statement in a black, urban speech community (Delpit, 1988). Assessing engagement is not a matter of teacher opinion or self-reporting, but can be evidenced by a number of measures ranging from youth interviews, to linguistic analyses of interactions, to observations. Thus, engagement is not just a “feeling” or the use of popular media, but something that we can observe and describe methodologically.<sup>8</sup>

By *structure*, I mean that student time and activity are highly defined and enforced by the instructor (whether tacitly or overtly). Students are not only *expected* to do certain things but *will* do them (whether through coercion or voluntarily). The teacher places a heavy emphasis on routines, and students usually feel a constant gaze (i.e., someone is monitoring their actions). The teacher continually assesses student performance (whether via tests or other measures). Failure by the student to perform in any task results in fairly swift and clear intervention by the teacher (whether as punishment or not). I know that some forms of regulation are autocratic and other forms of socialization can foster greater self-reliance. What passes for training on the soccer field (e.g., running laps) might feel like punishment in the art studio. I deliberately

do not assign an ideological distinction a priori between structures for student activity.

All teachers engage and structure youth experience to greater or lesser extent, and thus the axes in the figure represent a continuum, not boxes. Furthermore, if we study classrooms longitudinally, these characteristics often shift (sadly, sometimes they do not) or even fluctuate radically.

**The chaotic classroom** needs little explanation; it is the simplest case, with low structure and low youth engagement. It is a chaotic space, with little learning, little relevance, and little discipline, often even lacking protocols for punishment. Frequently punctuated by disruption, it is an incredibly difficult space for learning. It is dangerous for youth to counteract this culture, and students who do must resort to individualistic strategies. I choose not to delve into particular examples of this space. Suffice it to say, however, that many of us have helped create such a space at one point in our teaching or learning careers, and that fear of this situation drives many a school discipline policy.

**The repressive classroom** is often the reaction to real or imagined chaos, represented by arrow #1 in the diagram. The teacher creates a stringent

set of behavioral rules and enforces a set of consequences should these rules be violated. Participation structures focus on the management of student bodies, and often their mouths, as a prerequisite for the exercise of their minds. Thus, youth engagement is often stifled by the structure, as there are few opportunities to enact it. In most cases, these are “sink or swim” classrooms, with high rates of “sinking”; attrition takes the form of pushouts, never-mades (students who never made it into that class), or failures. Students are taught day-in-and-out that to be educated is to be docile—prompting Michael Apple (1990) to call this student subjectivity the “hidden curriculum” of schooling. This reformatory approach has been on the rise since the advent of high-stakes testing and scripted curriculum.

The problem with the repressive approach, besides reproducing the same patterns of persistent academic un-attainment as the chaotic classroom, is that it is a static system, stuck in the paralysis of crisis prevention. The repressive classroom is always a dam waiting to crack. In fact, this is often what happens: repression eventually devolves into chaos from a sheer lack of resources (arrow #2). Immense capital is needed to police a large resistance force, as evidenced by the cost of the U.S. war in Iraq and the U.S. prison industrial complex. Without deans, security officers, detention, counselors, school psychiatrists, campus police, and security cameras, the repressive environment is quite difficult to enforce. In most urban school realities, any effective structure requires the consent and faith of the student body.

*The liberal classroom* is a permissive environment where students receive privileges of many sorts, often in the name of creative exploration, or youth empowerment, or democratizing pedagogy, or some child-centered theory of learning. The hypocrisy of this mis-education in the name of such ideals is no stranger to my own history. I have been this teacher. Like the repressive classroom, this permissive approach is often a reaction to the threat of chaos (arrow #3). It allows the teacher to collude with the students in a kind of détente of mediocrity—you don’t disrupt my class, and I won’t sweat you for homework. Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) refers to this liberal phenomenon as the desire “to be liked,” and this kind of pedagogy as “low-risk, low-return.” Compared to chaos and repression, it

is a relatively pleasant space in which to operate as an educator.

Extending the “sink or swim” metaphor, this tends to be the “everybody floats” classroom. Often, students report these environments as very enjoyable and have a good relationship with the teacher. However, these spaces only give the illusion of safety. Whereas the repressive classroom is plainly violent, the liberal classroom takes a “killing me softly” toll on youth subjectivity.

In my research, the supporters of the repressive classroom and those of the liberal one detest each other. The liberal advocates will refer to their repressive counterparts as “authoritarian,” “out to fail students,” and “racist.” The repressive teachers criticize the liberals as “too easy,” “out to be liked,” and also “racist” in that they have low standards for black and brown students. In my analysis, both groups of teachers are right. Both set low standards of teaching for poor communities of color. Both teach defensively, in that neither wants to have a chaotic classroom, so they develop survival strategies and then tolerate a base level of failure in exchange for their relative success. This mutual antagonism (arrow #4) is mutually reinforcing: each becomes the Other—the standard of what “not to be”—that justifies by negation one’s own position, however flawed. Thus, teachers entrench themselves in this binary opposition: each against the Other, both avoiding chaos, and neither imagining an alternative possibility.

*Classroom X* operates as a highly structured apprenticeship, rather than a rule-bound reformatory, as a space for rigorous creativity rather than for free expression. Although safe, it is not a “safe” space, but rather a community of risk-taking, of setbacks, of difficulty. This classroom engages the learner in these risks, but also provides the structure to do so. Although collaborative, it is not equalitarian—the teacher exercises authority without becoming an authoritarian (Delpit, 1988). In this classroom, everybody swims.

Given that these classrooms vary tremendously, I will only discuss a few particulars about a subset of classrooms from my research. These were English, social studies, science, and mathematics classes with a social justice focus that I observed at comprehensive high schools in Oakland and Los Angeles. First, these educators



focused on skills as opposed to simply content standards (i.e., what their students could *do* as opposed to only what they could *know*). They developed students' new media literacy (e.g., video projects, Web design, digital art), traditional media literacy (e.g., academic writing, reading, and test taking), critical literacy (i.e., the vocabulary to analyze problems in society and their everyday lives), and critical code fluency (bridging the "codes of power" with informal youth vernaculars). In this respect, these teachers taught to and through multiple literacies reflective of youth popular culture (Morrell, 2004). These teachers saw youth resistance to schools as an asset, as a sane response to an insane world, and thus tended to teach against the grain (hooks, 1994). They had quick wits and were fluent enough in youth popular cultural codes to win any symbolic confrontation with students, and to detect and de-escalate most confrontations between students before they snowballed. They communicated a sense of rigor in their curriculum, as opposed to the remediation that I often saw in repressive classrooms, or the anti-intellectualism often apparent in the liberal classroom. These findings are nothing new and seem to support the literature on effective urban educators (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

However, three interesting points stand out across contexts and grade levels—and this includes learning environments from woodshop to mathematics, from basketball to graffiti arts to English, and throughout a scattering of elementary and middle school observations. First, these classes had "seasons" that alternated over a marking period and over the year, changing pace with the social and academic development of the students. In particular, there were seasons of training through repetition and drills, and seasons of performance—often in the form of culminating projects. The pressure of the final performances drove the everyday disciplinary routines that compelled student engagement. Early in the school year, these classes appeared very strict and superficially similar to the repressive classroom. However, by the middle of the unit, these classes seemed to be teacher-less, with students working with apparent independence on skilled activities. These classes inured specific academic and social skills early in the year in order for students to work in self-directed fashion later.

By contrast, the repressive classroom tends toward longitudinal sameness—that is, the 100th

day of class looks suspiciously like the 10th day of class. What begins as a superficially strict space results in dramatic drops in youth engagement, and repetition, once a strength, becomes a kind of living death as class time freezes. In terms of discipline, the repressive classroom implements a static set of rules for every day of the year, while Classroom X implements an evolving set of skills through which student participation develops over time, allowing class structures to change dynamically during the year.

Second, these classrooms had structures for intensive student work. These might include "academic" training: daily writing prompts in class, thick-description film notes, math drills, repetitive art lettering. They also included "social" training: how to work in groups, speak publicly, take criticism, respond to questions—again, superficially resembling a repressive environment. However, in the season of production, these routines usually constituted the component skills needed for the final project. Furthermore, these teachers understood that in order to have a successful season of production, every student had to develop a base level of proficiency in these skills and might do so at different paces. Thus, these teachers would frequently provide extra support and flexibility in developmental timeframes to bring their students to proficiency; in this respect, their classrooms operated more as apprenticeships than as factories of learning. By contrast, in liberal classrooms, I witnessed students submitting a drawing in lieu of a written assignment, an unstructured reflection in lieu of an essay, a volume of science notes rather than a scientifically reasoned argument, a book summary instead of a book analysis, or a peer-evaluated assignment with little guidance on how or why grading was being done that way.

Third and most significant, the majority of youth in these classrooms described new subjectivities as sociologists, writers, mathematicians, or artists. That is, youth began to self-identify as trained artisans and could express in detail the particular expertise that constituted their craft. For poets, this might mean vocalizing a body of canonical and contemporary works, specific poetic forms and devices, and verses from their own poetry (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004); for sociologists, the language of social theory and firsthand research of their communities (Morrell & Collatos, 2003); for mathematicians, historical developments in the field, a political and phil-

osophical dimension to mathematics reasoning, and a set of problem-solving tools for contemporary issues (Yang, forthcoming). These changes in youth subjectivity demonstrate a different kind of transformative discipline at work—one that leads not to compliant citizens for a workforce, but to self-identified producers of knowledge.

Classroom X doesn't exist, according to most teachers whom I interview. These are mythical spaces, impossibilities, and exaggerations. In part, X refers to that "impossible" space of possibilities wherein we see high pedagogical engagement and vigorous structures for student work. I used to call this the "disciplined classroom," but that phrase seemed to imply authoritarianism, with its incumbent set of static characteristics. "Classroom X" became a moniker as we started looking for this in other school communities, and at once recognized its variable nature across grade levels, between schools, from teacher to teacher, and over time. X also evokes the radical potential of such a learning environment and its radical departure from historically entrenched patterns of failure and practices of mis-education. It implies a critical X-factor, a situational and unique ingredient, for developing a schoolwide praxis of discipline. By naming the classroom as X, rather than the teacher, I am suggesting that it is a learning environment that is temporally and spatially specific, a particular experience that may manifest for any pairing of teacher and students. Finally, X resists naming, closure, and discovery; it is a "problem-posing" rather than "problem-solving" (Freire, 1970) approach to discipline. We are supposed to keep looking for it.

### PART 3: METHODS FOR POLICY AND PEDAGOGY

#### Against the Universal Classroom: Finding Classroom X

The first step in nurturing discipline in the classroom or at the schoolwide level is to find Classroom X. If we consider praxis as theory and practice, studying Classroom X is where local theories of discipline emerge from grounded practice. What studies of discipline fail to acknowledge is that struggling with classroom management is not a universal experience for urban educators. There are many teachers without discipline issues, and a very small subset are also highly effective teachers of poor youth of

color in divested urban areas of the U.S. (i.e., "urban" schools). The overwhelming discourse of discipline in research and among practitioners neglects these highly effective urban educators. In my work with teachers, locating the X through posing a series of questions helps initiate practitioner research. I've organized the discussion below through a simplified version of these questions.

*Which classrooms have the highest test scores and GPAs?* No, just kidding. Unlike the trend in accountability "research," I never start with this question. In the absence of a critical analysis of the variables that impact these "hard numbers," test scores and other conventional measures of academic achievement more often reflect patterns in race, class, gender, and resources, than meaningful information about teacher practice. In other words, test scores are a better indicator of raced, classed, and circumstantial privilege than effective teaching and learning. This inquiry method starts from a different measure, one directly impacted by teacher decision making in the classroom: referrals.

*Which classrooms never send students to the office?* In almost any school, the number of ejections from teachers' classrooms varies tremendously: from many, to some, to few, to none at all. The multiple classes in high schools provide interesting cases: a student may be repeatedly removed from one class and never from another; the same teacher may write multiple referrals in one class and none in another. We proceed to the next question by examining these classrooms where there are no student removals.

*What are the relative demographics of the classroom?* What we usually find is that some classes are simply filled with highly compliant students, often called the "good" students by their teachers. They tend to be in the Gifted and Talented programs, honors classes, high-level math classes, or Advanced Placement courses where ethnic make-up is often racially skewed or, some would say, racially tracked. Other classrooms are populated with a disproportionate share of "resistant" students, often reported as "bad" students. Here, *resistance* and *compliance* are not meant to be attributes of individual students, but rather a taxonomy that is co-constructed by teachers, administrators, and peers alike. We confirm how this label is applied through interviews

and discussions and by looking at the construction of “trouble”—i.e., referrals and suspensions in other classrooms, hallways, and schoolyards. This is much more easily accomplished in the high school setting, where students might attend 6 or more different classes. We then proceed to the third question, using the zero-referral classrooms with resistant students.

*What is the tolerance for “inappropriate behavior”?* This, of course, opens the question of “appropriate” behavior as an ideological construct. We work with teachers and staff to establish that this is a context-specific value; every classroom has activities, tasks, or goals that students are expected to do and “be doing.” And then there are off-task activities that students engage in, often because the official tasks are unclear or easily accomplished. We can directly observe these classrooms for student time on-task, student time off-task, and for the classroom (teacher’s and students’) tolerance for off-task activities. Through this exercise, we certainly find that some classrooms are just permissive, with high tolerance for student vacation time. But there are rare classrooms that not only structure rigorous official tasks, but also engage students’ unofficial activities, such as informal “third-space” talk (Dyson, 1999; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejada, 1999). Just as in all classrooms, students deviate from these explicit goals, but in these classrooms, we find that other students or the teacher will respond. I am most interested in learning from these teachers with little tolerance for time off-task, who serve a high population of “resistant” students, yet rarely or never remove students from the classroom.

*What is the rate of academic progress of students in this class?* That is, we are less concerned with where students are located on an absolute scale of academic achievement than we are with how quickly they progress. Whether they are “A” or “F” students, we can assess their *change over time* across multiple areas, such as student writing, oral presentation, academic habits, discussion participation, teamwork, and test performance. We might predict that these classrooms will show high, low, or uneven rates of academic progress, but up to this point, the classrooms that I have studied all show unusually high rates of academic progress; these classes are often outliers relative to classes in the same school and, indeed, sometimes on the same absolute scales as well.

So we come to the last question: *how does this class foster self-discipline?* To answer this question, I study these classrooms over time through intensive ethnographic and participatory methods. Whenever possible, I look at class participation structures, teacher pedagogical methods, and student rate of academic progress. Just as important, I study the work of these teachers outside of class—after school and in evening or weekend community settings—wherever and whenever they engage their students.

My recommendation for teachers then is to find and study Classroom X as part of our praxis. This work must be done by practitioner-researchers, because effective learning environments differ across context. There are radical contextual changes even with a small shift in geography, time, school culture, and circumstances. Thus, locating Classroom X is an ongoing process of practitioner-based research that speaks to the dynamism and craft of teaching.

### Against the Universal Student: Becoming Classroom X

The search for Classroom X was never just an intellectual exercise for me, but always was and still is an ontological problem—one of becoming that teacher in that “impossible” classroom. I began this search as a new teacher, dissatisfied with my own practice. In a culture that celebrated mediocrity, however, I was already receiving the highest evaluations from my supervisors and plenty of affirmations from students and colleagues. This kind of flattery, although pleasant, can be a tranquilizing drug available to those of us whose work is viewed as charity in the mainstream. In interviews of students across classrooms (repressive, chaotic, or liberal), there are always some who insist that the teacher is doing a good job. “Every man has disciples,” (Jean, 1997). Often, a single student’s voice is deployed to justify the value of a mediocre educator, thus characterizing that voice as the “universal student.”

In our labors to become Classroom X, there is no universal strategy, but there can be a general methodology. As a teacher, I had my barometer of 3 to 5 students in the class who could give me truthful feedback about my teaching and who represented the baseline of academic discipline upon entry into the class. I then paid careful atten-

tion to not only what these students said, but what they could *do* over time. I shadowed these students in other classes and formal after-school settings in order to develop a comparative framework on how other “teachers” (parents, peers, coaches, mentors, artists, and classroom teachers) might apprentice them. I kept a journal of changes that I made and changes that I envisioned for my class, especially with respect to structure: How do I organize student activity, from structures of talk (e.g., pair-shares, small-group, whole-class, silent activities) to structures of movement (e.g., seated activities, bathroom breaks, group work) to interventions (e.g., preemptive lectures, socializing routines, and individual meetings with students)? When cameras became readily available, I began to videotape my own teaching and would review uncomfortable moments in my practice, sometimes with another teacher who would offer critiques. At the end of a unit, I would conduct “exit interviews” of these students. Through these exercises, and not through any professional development workshop, I acquired a repertoire of structures that developed students’ academic and social skills over time.

My current work with teachers is a modification and elaboration of these early techniques of self-critique and self-intervention, informed by relevant research. Currently, I define self-discipline not as what students can already do by themselves, but rather as what they will be able to do after rigorous training. We become Classroom X only through and with (not in spite of) the actions of our students.

### **Against the Universal Discipline Policy: Nurturing Classroom X**

In many schools, discipline policies are discussed with a degree of fatalism: we must have strong discipline policies, and we need to be great at them. Yet, in every school, there are effective teachers who never make use of the standard disciplinary processes laid out by school administrators. I have worked under, been privy to, and been complicit in implementing a range of policies—from Zero Tolerance, to very liberal systems, to what attempted to be an X-factor policy. None of them worked out of hand, and many required resources impossible for an urban public school to provide. Somewhere between Foucault and Freire, schools must take on their problematic role of managing bodies. The form that this

takes (that is, the exact discipline policy) is of little importance to me. What matters is whether the school commits to a politics of inclusion over a politics of punishment, and how this plays out in everyday practice. Schools should not invest in a great discipline *policy*, but rather in a genuine discipline *praxis*.

My recommendations for schoolwide praxis are incomplete, partly because of a respect for different school contexts and partly because of a need for future investigation. However, at this point I make two recommendations. One is that discipline praxis should be geared toward developing our teachers, and not toward protecting them from our students. We must avoid the lure of “same treatment” in all classrooms, recognizing that some classrooms are chaotic, others repressive, others too liberal, and that each requires different supports and different interventions. Proactive administrative policing might be a necessary violence to stabilize a chaotic classroom. (I say this with great trepidation as it naturalizes the unnatural causes that create these classrooms.) In such cases, student removals must not lead to “pushouts.” In my collaborations, we have informally engaged such cases creatively, both by having students move to another teacher’s classroom to complete assignments and by counseling students on survival strategies for the chaotic classroom. These are stop-gap measures, however, as the fundamental change required still lies with the teacher. Rather than simply positioning the problem of discipline as an administrative one (the politics of removals), teachers should move toward effective discipline, demonstrating improvement (albeit incremental) in practice.

A second recommendation is that discipline praxis must involve sustained, serious self-critique and reflection. Most schools will leave unspoken what everyone knows: that some teachers expel children from their classrooms in huge numbers and others demand little to no effort from their students. This silence insulates teachers from improving their craft. I have worked with schools where teacher-inquiry groups investigate the data on removals from their classes, videotape their practices, interrogate their everyday classroom structures, and rethink their curriculum. It is not easy. As Malcolm X said, “[T]he examined life is painful”; this is arduous, painful, and honest work.

## CONCLUSION

After I wrote my first referral, the student returned before the end of class with another triplicate form. Under disposition, it read, “Called parent.” Two days later, I met with the student, her counselor, and her mother (for the first time). I learned from the mother that my math class was her daughter’s favorite period of the day (why, I wondered). In the meantime, the student was tearing up in frustration and anger. “We could have handled it in class,” she said, and this was the best advice ever given to me around classroom management.

As teachers, we are always still learning to teach. In this respect, teaching is an ontological problem—a becoming—not just a role that we fill. As teacher-learners, how can we proceed on that road of acting, thinking, and becoming? To develop discipline as praxis, and to move away from a false set of “expert” policies, what we really need is a body of practitioner research:

1. Longitudinal practitioner autoethnographies: We need to hear from mediocre teachers struggling to become great over time.
2. Design-based research on schoolwide praxis: Preferably a mix of Youth Participatory Action Research and practitioner co-research. This is the most dangerous kind of research, if it is done acritically, or without a critical theoretical framework. This is when theory will help with reflexivity and self-critique.
3. Comparative research in and out of classroom settings: We need to remember that the classroom is an unnatural setting for learning, and we need to look for models of organic education and apprenticeship in our local communities.

Schools can and should function as disciplined spaces that nonetheless reflect the realities of youths’ lived experience, as well as the aspirations of communities of color for freedom from racism, sexism, and classism. Disciplined, academically rigorous, and culturally relevant school environments are a critical condition for the effective education of urban youth of color. This approach makes no pretense at downplaying this challenge. This work requires a massive investment of time, energy, and commitment by educators.

Somewhere between Freire and Foucault, we hope, critique, question, and act. We must “insist on the practices of freedom” (Foucault, 1998), of disciplining our own emancipatory subjectivities in the face of institutional subjugation. To paraphrase Freire (2004), this work is a denouncing and an announcing. We must denounce the reformatory, the factories of education, the banking model of discipline. We must announce the apprenticeship, the artisanal path of learning, the problem-posing approach to discipline. It is no more and no less than the struggle over teaching as a craft versus schooling as an industry. This is a fine distinction but a critical one, and it lies precisely in that boundary between the humanization and mechanization of our work.

## End Notes

1. Discipline, even in Foucault’s repressive formulation, is an inclusionary act.
2. Graph is based on high school suspension data from Oakland Unified School District, 2005–2006. Source: OUSD website accessed February 11, 2008. Only the 3 largest ethnic categories used by OUSD were included: African-American, Hispanic, and Asian comprised 45%, 26%, and 23% of enrollment respectively.
3. Graph is based on California Department of Education data on class of 2003 from Castlemont & Fremont High Schools in East Oakland. “UC eligible” refers to high school graduating seniors who fulfilled minimum coursework required to apply to a California 4-year public university.
4. This is deliberately mis-stated, as often a single student may be suspended multiple times.
5. But let us not overgeneralize the data. Each city had unique demographic populations—“Asian” in East Oakland is not the same as “Asian” in San Francisco, for example; it is the inverse correlation of patterns that is similar, not the racial categories.
6. Youth resistance will not be addressed in this article, but for further investigation, the framework of Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) helps us rigorously differentiate between the repertoires of resistance to the carceral system of education, from self-defeating forms of resistance to those that transform the structures of inequity that foment dissent.
7. This article is based on research from 5 data sets. The first are 2-years of ethnographic fieldnotes, audiotapes, and interviews of 3 classrooms that disrupt the achievement and punishment gaps, (i.e., more discipline = more achievement). I also augment these with one-time interviews and observations of multiple classroom teachers in Los Angeles. The second are 3-years of data covering the evolution of school discipline at a social justice high school. The third is a case study of an intervention into school discipline involving parents, teachers, and students, i.e., a “design-based research project” that required us to systematically *design* and study new instructional strategies and tools (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). The fourth is youth participatory action research project, where students looked at discipline as part of an evaluation of their school. The fifth is practitioner research that I conducted in my own teaching. In addition, I have supplementary exami-

nations of discipline from the quantitative perspective of Austin, Oakland, SF, but these do not represent a longitudinal study nor extensive analysis of sub-patterns in these cities. I argue that these studies are all pilots, and would certainly offer fruitful directions for future, more extensive research projects.

8. For classroom self-study techniques by high school teachers, see Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008. For case studies of children's literacy, see Dyson & Genishi, 2005.

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