One of the areas I feel I have the most room to grow is how to discipline students properly. I don’t think I have an incorrect approach, but I do think I have a lot more to learn before I will be able to routinely apply discipline in a way that isn’t detrimental to the success of my students. In class we’ve discussed the question of how vs. when to discipline and which is more important. Discipline is one of the most important categories of classroom management because it has a huge impact on students’ motivation and their perceptions of themselves as learners. If a student is disciplined incorrectly, he or she may become less-likely to engage in content and want to contribute to the classroom dynamic. One potential incorrect use of discipline that occurs frequently in school setting today is the installment of zero-tolerance disciplinary policies that push students out of the classroom. A direct consequence of such policies that my partner and I have chosen to research is the idea of a school-to-prison pipeline in our education system. Rocio Rodriguez-Ruiz defines the school-to-prison pipeline as the idea that “that a school’s harsh punishments—which typically push students out of the classroom—lead to the criminalization of student misbehaviors and result in increasing these children’s probability of entering the prison systems (Rodriguez-Ruiz, 2017).” However, if poor use of discipline is a causation of this pipeline, then it can be combatted by reforming the way we approach exercising control over our classrooms. I believe one way to view discipline differently would be to consider the research of Marvin Marshall. I find his work on discipline very useful because it is practical, concise, and makes complete sense even to someone without any familiarity with disciplinary methods. Thus, my partner and I have decided to look into how Marvin Marshall’s disciplinary techniques may be used as an attempt to combat the school-to-prison pipeline.

I’m thoroughly enjoying my field experience this semester. My CT has built a very successful band program and encourages me to always have questions, which forces me to think about areas in which I have room to grow as a teacher. However, there are some things about his teaching style that I believe I would want to be conscious of and avoid if possible. Each time I have gone to field experience, my CT has had to discipline the same student at least a few times in one class period. I understand that the student is disrupting the class and that that behavior can’t be allowed to keep occurring, but I also personally believe that there is a lot of harm to be done when a single student is repeatedly singled-out. I believe there is danger in the potential to start looking for or expecting certain behaviors in children. Dr. Marshall talks about the same concern. After being a counselor, administrator, and supervisor for 24 years, Dr. Marshall chose to end his career as a teacher. He was surprised by the amount of inappropriate student behavior when he returned, and now discusses his experiences as an author and a speaker. He states, “I realized that I might as well have been wearing a blue suit with copper buttons to school every day — I had become a cop (Marshall, 2005).” Dr. Marshall was experiencing the same sort of negative behavioral expectations in his students as I think my CT may be guilty of in certain cases. He goes on to write, “if we agree that youngsters are not yet adults, then logic and experience dictate that we treat them in such a way that they will become more responsible. There are over two million people incarcerated in this country. Schools should be promoting responsible behavior, not just obedience, so that when young people become older, they will not join this increasing number.” Dr. Marshall is referring to the idea of the school-to-prison pipeline, which my partner and I have now found is directly linked with how teachers and school systems choose to take disciplinary action. In fact, Deborah Fowler states that “The single greatest predictor of future involvement in the juvenile system is a history of disciplinary referrals at school (Fowler, 2011).” Fowler goes on to mention the overrepresentation of African-American and special education students in disciplinary decisions. One disturbing statistic she found in her research is that the overrepresentation of African-Americans is not due to a higher rate of misbehavior. Instead, they are referred for misbehavior that is both less serious and more subjective in interpretation than white students. In other words, white students are not being disciplined consistently with black students for the same behaviors. This statistic are troubling because it illustrates a huge problem with not only when we choose to apply discipline, but with how we choose to apply it as well.

So how do the methods of Dr. Marshall present alternative approaches to discipline that could potentially reduce the likelihood of student incarceration? One thing that I believe should be remembered, which Dr. Marshall also implies, is that no system will work perfectly every time. Another thing to consider is no matter how important it is not to over-discipline students, it is equally important to maintain control over the classroom. If we allow disruptions to go completely unaddressed, we are doing our students a disservice and putting their learning in jeopardy. Dr. Marshall’s approach to this balance is to acknowledge the difference between rules and procedures. In a presentation he gave entitled “Not Relying on the Rules,” Dr. Marshall states that rules are important for playing a game, but that rules immediately create and adversarial role between people (Marshall, 2016). He explains that rules are meant to control, but not to inspire. I completely agree with this concept. If all we do is try to exercise control over our students, we are making ourselves their enemy rather than their ally or partner. Marshall goes on to explain the difference between rules and procedures or expectations. He states that rules do not inspire students, and that he was automatically enforcing his rules in his classroom. This reminded me of my CT and the idea of anticipating the need to take disciplinary action before the need actually arises. Dr. Marshall’s solution to this tendency was to evaluate his classroom rules and determine if they were negative or positive. He changed his mindset to differentiating between rules and procedures and deciding what course of action when a student violates each. When a student breaks a rule, the natural tendency is to enforce it. However, when a student breaks a procedure, the natural tendency is simply to teach the procedure. Marshall used this system to determine when he disciplinary action needed to be taken, but also where it could be avoided with proper classroom management. In another publication, Dr. Marshall stresses the importance of staying positive when enforcing a rule or teaching a procedure. He writes, “Effective teachers communicate in a way that promotes what is desired, rather than what is not desired. For example, “Stop talking” becomes “This is quiet time” and “No running” becomes “We walk in our hallways.” (Marshall, 2005).” I think that while this method can’t be considered a correct approach in every scenario, it is an effective strategy and there is plenty of evidence supporting the idea that this type of attitude is what should be considered when trying to fix disciplinary issues in schools

The school-to-prison pipeline is a clear and present issue that can’t be ignored,

and many researchers including Dr. Marshall have pointed out its correlation with ineffective use

of discipline in schools. Students who are not being disciplined in the correct way as a result of

teachers who do not know how to effectively and positively control the learning environment

will be pushed out of the classroom and will be more likely to be incarcerated. In order to

address this issue, we as teachers must address how we exercise control over the classroom. In

addition to the proposals of Dr. Marshall, I believe we must also address our implicit biases as

individuals. The overrepresentation of African-American and special education students in

prison systems is a clear indicator of an are we can improve upon. If we take into account the

difference between the positive and motivational enforcement of rules and procedures, we should

see a decrease in the number of events that lead to our failure to properly adhere to the needs of

our students and hopefully reverse the pipeline from schools to prison.

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