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Using Virtual Learning Labs to (Re)Mediate Exclusionary Discipline Practices for Young Children of Color with Disabilities

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Article abstract

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Abstract

Disabled children of color (ages 3-8) face multiple, intersecting oppressions in schools and are more likely to be excluded and/or harshly punished for minor behavioral issues compared to white and/or non-disabled peers. Approaches that center multiple stakeholders (families, teachers, and administrators) using a formative intervention called a Learning Lab (LL) have worked to reduce discipline disparities among secondary and upper primary students of color with disabilities (Bal, 2016). Knowing that discipline disparities can start as early as preschool (Kulkarni et al., 2021), however, we examined how LL (re)mediates exclusionary and harsh discipline practices for young children of color with disabilities. We present qualitative case studies of six California-based stakeholders (four teachers, a parent, and an administrator) who participated in LL sessions virtually from 2021-2022. We share findings and lessons learned from constructing virtual LL spaces to reduce exclusionary and harsh discipline for young children of color with disabilities.

> "I repeatedly told him to let my son go. I was scared thinking, 'Will I also be shot dead trying to save my son?' But I said it's worth it because I'm not gonna be here and let my son die or pass out in front of me." - Pamela Ononiwu

In 2022, Pamela Ononiwu, a Black mother of a 5-year-old Black boy with ADHD, arrived at school to see her son being placed in a chokehold by a resource officer (Adams, 2021). She listened to his cries of distress as the officer tightened his grip around the boy. Ultimately, after her pleas for the officer to release his grip, her son was released. Ononiwu is one of three families suing the Fairfax Station School District in Virginia for restraint and seclusion policies for students with disabilities. The psychological trauma of disproportionate harsh and exclusionary disciplinary actions for Black, Indigenous Children of Color (BICOC) with disabilities is felt deeply by students, their families, and communities, yet these perspectives are often not addressed meaningfully in educational research (Powell, 2020).

Love and Beneke (2021) note that early childhood education as a setting and field has continued to view disability as a source of remediation and intervention. Any requirements for additional support and/or challenges are viewed as inherent to the child and/or their family. This is further exacerbated by the intersections of racism and ableism to police the bodies of young children of color with disabilities as noted in Pamela Ononiwu's story. Additionally, it's important to note how ableism's "entrenched pervasiveness in education systems can be a significant barrier in… preparing critical educators who can work towards radical forms of dis/ability justice" (Siuty & Beneke, 2020, p. 26). Educators lack of preparation around recognizing the intersections of racism and ableism can lead to young children of color with disabilities being viewed as less smart and good (Broderick & Leonardo, 2015; Hatt, 2012) and becoming subjects of harsher or more exclusionary forms of discipline than their white peers.

Discipline Disparities and Young Children of Color with Disabilities

Children of color with disabilities are often subject to hyper-surveillance and exclusionary practices (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Black children with disabilities continue to be the subjects of disciplinary removal compared with other students with disabilities (OSEP, 2021). Zeng et al. (2019) noted that over 250 young children are excluded from early education daily due to behavioral or emotional control challenges. While many states, including California, have banned the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of preschool and early elementary school children, many of the laws were passed quickly without much grounding in research and oversight of implementation (Zinsser et al., 2022).

Although disparities for young children exist in general, we note that BICOC with disabilities are especially vulnerable to school suspensions. For example, the U.S. Department of Education (2016) noted that while Black children made up approximately 19% of the preschool population, they represented 47% of school suspensions. Behavior is indeed racialized and when BICOC with disabilities engage in forms of resistance, they are often perceived as disobedient (Gilliam et al., 2016), less smart or good (Broderick & Leonardo, 2015), and subject to harsher punishments (Bryan, 2020).

Garro and colleagues (2021) suggest three important approaches to begin to remediate the problems of racial disparities for BICOC: (1) a collaborative approach with preschool programs that promotes equity; (2) data-based decision-making to learn about the types of practices being implemented in schools and strategies to remediate; and (3) interventions that emphasize

prevention and culturally sustaining approaches. In our previous work (Kulkarni et al., 2021), we highlighted how each of these approaches is critical in remediating exclusionary discipline disparities. Unfortunately, few studies have considered the importance of the compounding impacts of these disparities on BICOC with disabilities, their families, and communities (Love & Beneke, 2021; Beneke & Love, 2022; O'Grady et al., 2023).

California's Discipline Policies

In this study, we focused on California education contexts and studied an effective approach to remediate the issue of racial disparities for young BICOC. In the example of the San José Unified School District in California in 2021, they were the feature of an Op-Ed essay that called for more restorative approaches for middle and high school students of color (D'Souza, 2021). Black and Latinx secondary students in the district were being overrepresented for harsh and exclusionary discipline practices in over 25% of schools. Assemblywoman Blanca Rubio worked to get California to pass Assembly Bill 1361, which prohibits suspensions and expulsions for preschool and early childhood care students including those with disabilities (A.B. 1361, 2022). Additionally, Education Code 49005 indicates that restraint and seclusion be made available only as a last resort when students present a danger to themselves or others (EDC § 49005, 2019). Both pieces of legislation signal excellent progress towards eradicating discipline disparities for BICOC with disabilities. To actualize these policies, however, teachers and administrators require training and support and must build strong relationships with families.

In the two districts of interest (San Jose Unified and Los Angeles Unified) we note that recent discipline data for children ages 4-8 show that Black, Indigenous and Latinx children make up the majority of those suspended (CDE Dataquest, 2023). In this study, we gather educational stakeholders including families, teachers, and administrators from across the state of California to collectively reimagine discipline disparities for young children of color with disabilities. While we note that disparities such as those experienced by Pamela Ononiwu may not be happening every day in classrooms across California, we simultaneously recognize how common behavioral interventions and practices that are written into children's individualized goals may promote instantiations of social control and promote deficit orientations of children of color with disabilities as requiring cultural remediation (Bornstein et al., 2023). Instead, we focused on working alongside educational restorative justice (RJ) practices emphasize repairing harm and building deep connections through classroom community. RJ practices retroactively address wrongdoing and harm (Zehr, 2015) and can support educational stakeholders in "reimagining what equity can look like in the classroom" (Kulkarni et al., 2021, p. 380). Winn (2018) explains how there is a need in teacher education to incorporate frameworks such as RJ to support educational transformation. Most research on RJ to date, however, has focused on this transformation with secondary students (Anyon et al., 2016; Vincent et al., 2011). Thus, the current study expands the literature on integrating RJ practices with young children, children of color and children with disabilities (Kulkarni et al, 2021) by enacting a formative learning intervention through a Learning Lab (LL).

Learning Lab (LL) and Exclusionary Discipline

LL (Bal, 2011) is a culturally responsive intervention structure to collectively respond to local educational issues and needs. Bal (2018) utilized a Learning Lab from 2012-2015 as a multi-

site, mixed methods process involving two phases: a cross-sectional and longitudinal view of racial disproportionality across the state of Wisconsin and an inclusive, problem-solving process with educational stakeholders at three local schools. These processes led to further replication of the Learning Lab at other sites in the area. Thus, prior research has documented the utilities of LL, a formative intervention, to facilitate an inclusive problem-solving process and help "educators transform their practices with the help of families, community members, and researchers" (Bal et al., 2014, p. 8). Bal et al. (2014) found that stakeholders moved from a deficit to expansive understanding of disciplinary practices through ongoing LL discussions. In other words, the team decided to work towards eradicating harsh and punitive practices for students of color with disabilities. Ultimately, in Bal et al. (2014) and other studies at high schools (Bal et al., 2016), the authors concluded that "organizational change is messy" (p. 127), yet schools continue to work toward professional development and continued engagement in interdisciplinary discussions to (re)mediate disciplinary practices. Using the concept of cultural mediation, Bal (2018) notes how it "mediates all learning and development activities through cultural artifacts (tools and signs) ...and break[s] away from constraints of their immediate environments…. Cultural mediation implies that the entire social and organizational structure of the activity produce behaviors" (p.11).

The structure for a virtual LL parallels the six-step process of LL in which all participant stakeholders receive an equal opportunity to contribute generating new discipline solutions for young children of color with disabilities. Participants go through a cycle of (1) questioning, (2) analysis (3) modeling, (4) examining, (5) planning, and (6) reflection. Eight virtual LL sessions with participants included a pre-writing and post-writing exercise to see how they reflected on the topics of inquiry and (re)mediation of beliefs and practices (see Table 1).

While the LL have been utilized to understand and reduce disproportionate disciplinary practices with K-12 special education stakeholders (Bal, 2016; Bal et al., 2014), to date, there have not been similar investigations with families and teachers who support younger learners with disabilities (ages 3-8) (see Kulkarni et al., 2021). Further, the field of early childhood special education is often defined around student progress towards normal developmental milestones (Beneke & Love, 2022) and often uses a medicalized approach of disability (Lalvani & Bacon, 2019). BICOC with a variety of disabilities are also often excluded from general education settings, including those with low-incidence disabilities (Bruder & Dunst, 2009), while most literature in special education has exclusively focused on high incidence disabilities (Artiles, 2011; Bal et al., 2014; Bal et al., 2016; Bal & Sullivan, 2014).

Framework

The LL intervention process was developed using Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Built on Vygotsky's (1978) original theory of mediated learning, CHAT takes collective activity systems as the unit of analysis to (re)mediate educational contexts with local stakeholders (Bal, 2015). Particularly, formative intervention's reliance on a collective agency, critical dialogue, and (re)mediation of practices (Engström, 2008) situates the objectives and intended outcomes of this project. Additional research on the use of CHAT indicated that it is useful in recognizing the socio-cultural constructions of race and disability and larger historical, political, and cultural implications of educational practices (Fergus, 2016). As a framework for this study, CHAT informed the structuring of LL, data analysis, and findings. By using the activity, a goal-oriented system that consists of subjects, objects, artifacts, rules, labor division, and community interactions (Engström, 2008), we drew from the beliefs and actions produced by

stakeholders invested in supporting BICOC with disabilities who have various interactions with the systems that inform exclusionary disciplinary practices (school, community). Therefore, the goal of the study was to build capacity for sustained family-school partnerships while (re)mediating procedures and actions related to discipline.

Additionally, in drawing upon the intersections of racism and ableism in schools, we utilize Disability Studies Critical Race Theory (DisCrit; Annamma et al., 2013) to understand how exclusionary and harsh disciplinary practices for BICOC with disabilities occur and to reframe these pervasive issues. DisCrit's seven tenets specifically serve to highlight how racism and ableism are interdependent in invisible ways to uphold notions of normalcy (see Connor et al., 2015, p. 19). DisCrit provides a framework for identifying exclusionary discipline practices and how to begin a deeper conversation of how educational stakeholders and districts can move toward eradicating negative outcomes for BICOC with disabilities (Kulkarni et al., 2021). In conversation with CHAT, we use Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory (DisCrit; Annamma et al., 2013) as a tool of collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings from this project.

The current article builds on the earlier work of LL to facilitate family-school-community collaboration and school transformation (Bal et al., 2016) for BICOC with disabilities. We specifically engaged stakeholders who are invested in supporting BICOC with disabilities, as this population has been relatively ignored when describing exclusionary discipline practices (Kulkarni et al., 2021). We present findings using a virtual LL as a method for education stakeholders in California toward reimagining discipline practices for young children of color with disabilities. We specifically reflected upon the benefits and challenges of structuring LL virtually and asked: How do the LL (re)mediates the beliefs and practices of teachers, administrators, and families toward discipline approaches for BICOC with disabilities?

Methods

We used a qualitative, multiple case studies approach to understand how four educators, an administrator, and a parent of children of color with disabilities from ages 3 to 8 worked to (re)mediate disciplinary practices in their contexts. We specifically drew from case studies to learn about what cases provided individually and collectively to inform the shifting and (re)mediation of exclusionary and harsh practices for BICOC with disabilities. Using multiple case studies moves away from a single story of issues involving race and disability (Winn, 2011). We specifically used each case's individual experiences with discipline as a starting point in understanding how they approach discipline in the classroom and moved from these individual experiences to collective understandings (Bhattacharya, 2017) of discipline through the LL process.

Researcher Positionalities

The research team consisted of two academic scholars, a family advocate, and two graduate students who are practicing teachers. All team members on the project identify as cis-gendered, women of color. The first and second authors, who led the project, identify as South Asian and East Asian women, respectively. The primary author also identifies as an individual with invisible disabilities. Their experiences navigating language, culture, race and disability and former teaching experiences working with BICOC with disabilities informs their dedication to this work. The family advocate, who helped with the recruitment process, identifies as a Black woman who had her Black son expelled from kindergarten. This solidified her commitment to supporting the

project. One graduate student, who identifies as a Latina woman and works as an early elementary school teacher, left the project at the conclusion of LL sessions due to her teaching workload. The other graduate student, who identities as a Black woman, works as an early childhood special educator and is the third author of this paper. Her direct knowledge of practice working with BICOC with disabilities informed our research design and analysis.

Participants

We brought together special education and general education teachers (preschool through third grade), families, and educational leaders via Zoom. We connected with individuals across California using online networks such as Facebook Groups, community-based organizations, afterschool programs, and individual school networks. Participants in our LL sessions included four teachers (grades preschool-2nd grade), one administrator of a K-5 school, and a parent of a 1st grade student with extensive support needs. Our six participants were located across two large districts in Northern and Southern California. Table 2 depicts participant characteristics. Although only six participants were successfully recruited for the study, participants represented affiliation with a broad range of grades (ages of children of color with disabilities), individual age ranges, and races/ethnicities across the two districts. All of the teachers had at least two students in their classrooms with identified disabilities across the thirteen categories of disability (IDEA, 2004). We also note the benefits of working with a small group of participants for developing strong connections and intentions to (re)mediate discipline.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

Participant Pseudonym	Participant Type	Grade(s) Taught/Assigned (Educators) or Grade of Child (Parent)	Age Range	Race/Ethnicity	District Affiliation
Kaz	Teacher	Preschool Sp.Ed.	50-60	White	SJUSD
Vee	Teacher	Preschool Sp.Ed.	30-40	Black	LAUSD
Mei	Teacher	2nd grade Gen. Ed.	40-50	Asian/Chinese	SJSUD
Jay	Teacher	Kindergarten Gen. Ed.	20-30	White	SJSUD
Marie	Admin	K-5 School	50-60	Latina	SJUSD
Ellie	Parent	1st grade Sp.Ed.	30-40	Latina	LAUSD

Note. SJUSD = San José Unified School Districts, LAUSD = Los Angeles Unified School Districts, All names are pseudonyms.

School districts were purposefully chosen by the size and large numbers of students from culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Both San José Unified and Los Angeles Unified School Districts have also shown discipline disparities and disproportionate representation of students of color with disabilities across multiple schools in the district (CDE, n.d).

Data Collection

The data collection process (see Figure 1) included a series of pre/post-LL session semi-structured interviews and LL focus groups. Pre-session interviews incorporated the initial beliefs of education professionals and families regarding discipline approaches. We introduced LL and asked participants to comment on their discipline approaches to BICOC with disabilities. For the parent participant, this meant sharing information about home discipline approaches with her child. For education professionals, it meant school-based approaches. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were audio/video recorded and transcribed.

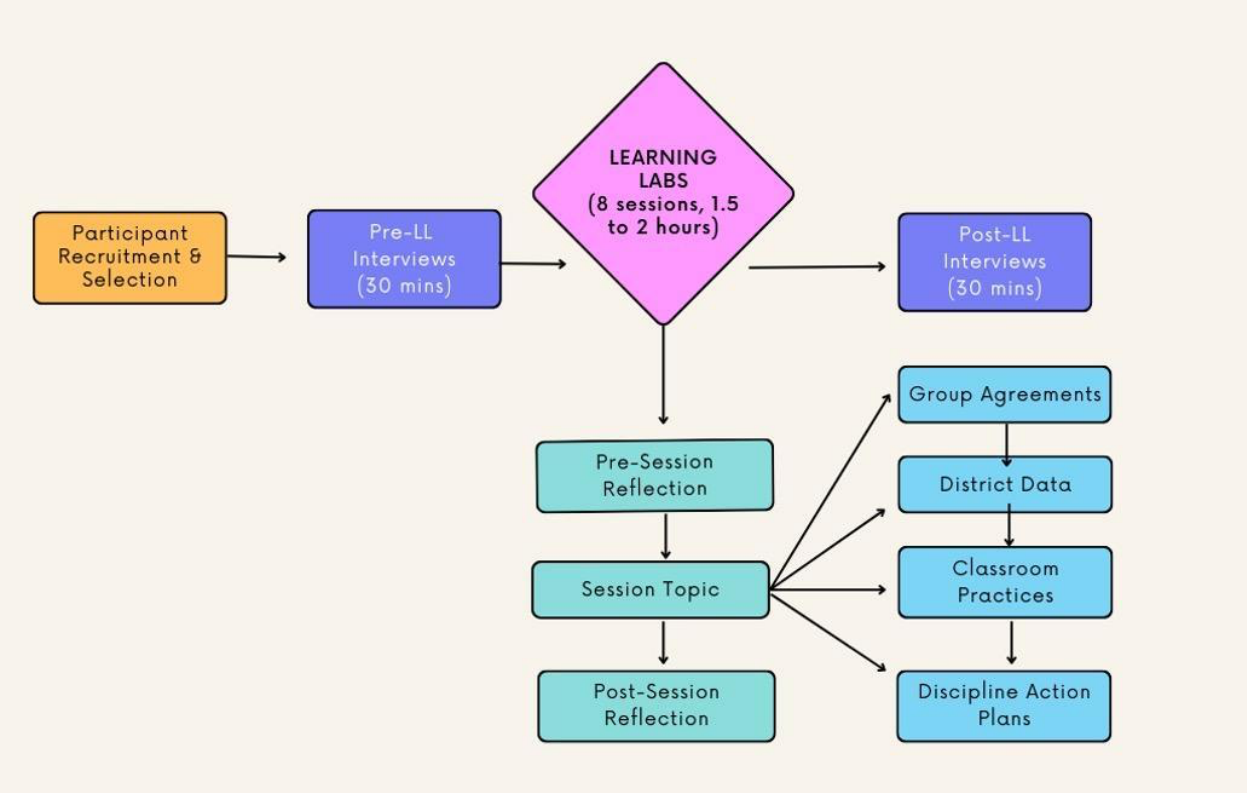

Figure 1. *Data Collection Process*

Following initial interviews, we proceeded with eight LL focus group sessions. Each session was audio/video recorded and transcribed and lasted about one and a half to two hours. Sessions included a pre-and-post written reflection to give participants an opportunity to write down their thoughts. Reflections were part of a shared Google Document that participants could refer to during the project.

During the first LL session, participants were asked to co-generate group expectations. Group expectations included (1) step up/step back: be aware of how much you share and any power

differences, (2) respect differences: we all come into this space from different places, (3) text the group if you are unable to make a session or will be late, and (4) be present for our time together. Session 2 was an information session that provided participants with a mixture of contemporary news sources, anecdotes, and peer-reviewed research. Third and fourth sessions were dedicated to analysis of existing district and school data. Participants had opportunities to comment and reflect on data presented from their district or school site. Sessions 5 and 6 focused on modeling solutions to existing disparities and engaging specific strategies to move from exclusionary discipline practices to inclusive, restorative practices. In these sessions, educator participants brought artifacts to document how their practices had changed, while the parent participant commented on these changes. Finally, the last two sessions were spent discussing how participants were able to try out solutions that were co-generated by the group. After the eight LL sessions, participants also provided a post-reflection interview to highlight individual areas of growth and change (See Table 2).

Table 2

Detailed LL Focus Group Topics

Session & Date	Session Theme and Purpose
Session 1 09/15	Questioning: Introductions, co-constructed norms and anecdotal experience sharing
Session 2 09/25	Questioning/Analysis: Shifting power differentials: sharing stories from BIPOC families
Session 3 10/15	Analysis: Review of district equity data (disproportionality, disciplinary)
Session 4 10/25	Modeling: Mapping out equity goals for BICOC with disabilities, trying out practices
Session 6 11/15	Modeling: Mapping out equity goals for young BICOC with disabilities, trying out practices
Session 7 12/05	Examining/Planning: Development of solutions to equity issues/modeling solutions
Session 8: 12/15	Planning/Reflection: Development of solutions to equity issues/modeling solutions/Finalizing practices for teachers/paraprofessionals and school leaders

Data Analysis

The team came together to analyze all data and any artifacts/action plans created by the participants. The first step involved reviewing all focus group Zoom videos and transcripts for accuracy. The team determined that during the first review, each person would look at overall impressions and any initial evidence of described discipline practices. This review of initial impressions lasted three to four weeks. The team then came together to review their initial impressions and notes and code transcripts and artifacts based on these discussions. The initial coding included looking for descriptions of how educators moved to (re)mediate practices. Then,

we used both theoretical and elaborative codes to provide specific examples from stakeholder practices and considerations using collective agency and critical dialogue to (re)mediate exclusionary and harsh discipline practices (CHAT; Engström, 2008) and how to move towards humanizing and restorative practices that center families, BICOC with disabilities and educators willing to disrupt existing harmful practices at the intersections of racism and ableism (DisCrit; Annamma et al., 2013).

Findings

We share the results of how participants (re)mediated discipline disparities faced by BICOC with disabilities and moved instead toward humanizing and restorative approaches. First, we begin by describing the discipline experiences of educational stakeholders in the LL and how these informed educators practice approaches. Next, we examined how LL contributed to educators' understandings and intentions to implement transformative educational practices in their classrooms and schools. Lastly, we incorporated a range of practices that educators included in their new approaches to restorative and humanizing education for BICOC with disabilities including wait time, sentence starters and community-based responses.

Discipline Experiences and Practice Approaches

By beginning with pre-LL session interviews and questions about participants personal

experiences with discipline, we learned about how educators and parents were connecting their current approaches to discipline with their own experiences. In some cases, there was clear alignment between their experiences and their approaches. In others, past trauma dictated new approaches.

For example, Mei, a second-grade teacher, shared how she grew up in Singapore which had a very strict school discipline policy.

> Singapore is very different from here with the discipline. If you listen, then you are okay. We had to listen and do what we were told. The teachers, the principals had the power to always be right. We were brought up to be afraid of the teachers. And then corporal punishment was okay. It was a horrible system, so different from the one here in the U.S.

She then goes on to share that her approach to discipline in her second-grade classroom follows the school's overall approach, which is based on "Majors" and "Minors."

> We have the Majors and the Minors. A Minor could be something like 'oh he shocked me' or tripped me. We record these on a discipline form and one copy stays in the class, and the other one goes home to the student's family. We also follow up with a text or phone call to confirm. If the same minor behavior happens a couple of times, we turn it into a major. If that happens, the copy of the incident goes to the principal's office. The principal then calls home, and the student may have a school consequence such as not being able to participate in recess or some fun activity.

Though certainly not the corporal punishment that Mei grew up with in Singapore, many of the underlying philosophical approaches to discipline mirror how the system works at her school site. There is an emphasis on behavioral control.

> We're taught to use this schoolwide system where if a kid acts up in the classroom they're automatically on track to move through the majors and minors' system. I feel like this might end up with more kids being sent to the principals' office, like there aren't other options or tools to support our students.

During our early LL sessions, Mei shared that because this system was schoolwide, she felt as though she wasn't given any real options as a teacher in this context. Students and teachers alike felt like they were being controlled by a rigid system.

Additionally, like the disciplinary challenges shared from previous literature, minor issues can turn into major consequences under her schoolwide system. Students' minor behaviors can turn into a loss of socialization opportunities or separation from peers. For students with disabilities, who are already segregated, this creates another layer of separation by encouraging removal from the physical classroom space.

For example, Mei described how one of her students, a boy who receives speech and language supports, and how some of his frustrations with expressive language manifested in physical behaviors such as pushing other students. She explained that "if we use the majors and minors' system, he'd be likely to be sent out for his behavior." Drawing on Mei's personal experiences with discipline, there was a focus on controlling behavior that parallels her current school's discipline approach.

Teachers like Vee, however, who had similar instances of corporal punishment experiences in her religious preschool, wanted to shift these experiences with her own classroom.

> When I was in preschool everything was about staying in line. You couldn't act up or be too loud or do anything like that or you would get swatted by the nuns. I know I only got swatted one time, but I still remember that day like it was yesterday. But that incident made me realize I don't like any of those types of discipline things…timeouts, detention, and all that. That was done in the past and it makes children fearful.

Vee's past trauma with corporal punishment and control shifted her current belief system and discipline approach. Recognizing how her religious school had tried to control her behavior, Vee chose instead to provide students with more freedom and a safe environment for them to explore. This became especially important for her BICOC students with disabilities who were often rendered invisible within the broader school context. She shared how "often when we think about children within special education, we just stick to directed instruction" which can further limit expression and autonomy.

The parent participant, Ellie, also shared how she experienced discipline at home and the parallels and differences to her approach with her son.

> Back in the days when I used to go to school on school, you know, it was kind of like… pay attention, at school and at home. Whenever we wouldn't listen, my mom would not let us do things that we wanted to do, like, on a Friday, we were going to go to the movies, she would automatically say, 'No, you're not going.' Or if after

> school, if we wanted to go to like some friend's house. We couldn't do those things if we were in trouble.

With her son, however, Ellie used a different approach. She had to think about how to understand her son's needs because he is non-verbal and often it is trying to understand what his behavior is communicating.

> With [my son], since he is nonverbal, whenever I'm going to do something, I always talk to him, even though he doesn't talk back, he understands me. When he's doing something that he's not supposed to, like, if he's pulling on something I let him know that it's not okay for him to pull it. Or if he's just crying and I don't know what's wrong with him, I try to ask a bunch of things until I figure like, what it is. When he's like, crying, I also try to help him to relax, to stay calm. I also let him know it's okay to be like mad or sad or those types of things.

Ellie validates her son's opportunities to express his emotions, to communicate a meaning through his behavior and to allow him to also understand when something that he is doing is "not okay."

Each educator and parent participant incorporated some principles and concepts of positive behavioral support such as teaching communicative behaviors, arranging safe and positive environments. For some of them, this was aligned to their own personal experiences with discipline and for others it created a need to move toward different approaches as they recognized how supporting BICOC with disabilities may require shifts in thinking and moving away from traditionally rigid expectations. It was our aim to draw upon participants' experiences to use the LL focus group sessions to facilitate more restorative approaches, collective learning, and to help all participants center their work around supporting students of color with disabilities.

Transforming Educator Practices in Schools

Transforming practices to center more restorative approaches for children of color with disabilities required that the participating educators (re) mediate any exclusionary discipline practices used by the schools in which they worked. Even at schools like the ones where Jay, Kaz and Marie all worked, which had some foundations of positive behavioral intervention supports, it was necessary to engage in the Learning Lab focus group sessions to continue to expand these policies and practices.

For example, Kaz shared that she used lots of reinforcing words and positive language with her students. For BICOC with disabilities, this often took the form of prompting through a visual schedule or using visual cues to provide reminders. She would "thank" students for making the correct choices and used positive language to encourage what was deemed as "good behavior." Part of the LL sessions focused on helping Jay, Kaz, Vee and Marie build upon these practices by unpacking how "good behavior" is defined in schools and helping them to move from positive language and reinforcement to community-based discipline approaches and helping students learn why a particular behavior is deemed as desirable/helpful to that students' learning and development. For each of the educators, this required unlearning some more traditional approaches assigned to BICOC with disabilities such as directed instruction, in favor of integrating all students under the common goal of more restorative, humanizing supports.

For Vee and Mei, who both worked in schools with more restrictive policies, the LL helped them to shift these kinds of policies. The LL sessions were structured to help them learn from the

positive policies used by their colleagues and to begin to question why compliance-based policies might hurt or segregate their students. We also shared how both educators could engage in more humanizing and restorative approaches despite the school having more schoolwide restrictive policies.

For example, during Session 7 and 8, we spoke together at length about how participants could take the parts of a resource repository back to their school sites to share some examples and strategies with colleagues and administration. The resource repository was a Padlet created by educator and parent participants as a reference for RJ practices in the classroom, and schools. The Padlet was a conglomerate of (a) discipline action plans, (b) district civil rights data collection, (c) district suspension rates, (d) district profiles, (e) videos, (f) testimonies of guardians of children with disabilities, and (g) postings of educator participants classroom examples of RJ practices.

When we identified key issues that participants wanted to discuss, Ellie helped ground the team in thinking about all kinds of exclusionary or harmful practices. She shared how in one of her son's previous classrooms, the teacher would discipline students with complex communication needs such as those who used voice output communication by taking away their communication devices.

> For my son and the others in his classroom, if they were bad, the teacher, she would take away their communication devices. She would say how this was a privilege for them, but for me it was like she was literally taking away their voice!

This harmful practice of removing students' opportunities to communicate was dehumanizing to students with complex support needs and both literally and figuratively removed their voice and self-advocacy. Like earlier research on the need for cultural remediation of students of color with disabilities, Ellie's example indicates how social control was being used to exclude and silence these students. Understanding the various ways that exclusionary and harmful disciplinary practices show up in schools was necessary in grounding the team to (re)mediate these practices.

Supportive Strategies

To keep the workload simple for education professionals, we began by facilitating a few simple areas for focus during early Virtual LL sessions: (1) wait time; (2) sentence starters; (3) behavior as a classroom community response. These ideas were created through a combination of facilitators research and practice-based suggestions, LL participants' current experiences with BICOC with disabilities, and opportunities in the last few sessions for educator participants to try out strategies with their students and share. By using these three areas of focus, we were able to better structure our sessions and assist teachers in the (re)mediation of practices.

Wait Time

Marie, who works as an elementary school administrator supporting a variety of students across K-5 settings, shared the importance of wait time when attempting to address behaviors at her school. While she and the rest of the LL group all agreed that there may be more significant instances where waiting is not an option (e.g., if a student is involved in self-harm or harms others), most instances that require some kind of discipline action could incorporate wait time on the part

of the instructor. This pause provides an opportunity for educators to check their "gut reactions" which are set up to automatically deliver a consequence for bad behaviors.

> Just not being so reactive with the kiddos. If I need to, like, give consequences, I try to make sure there are natural consequences that, you know, align with what the rule was that was broken, or the expectation that wasn't met. A lot of times, it's just kids being kids and emotional and reactive themselves with their peers. And then me just having to step back and say, 'Okay, I don't need to react as a disciplinary and I just need to be able to listen to them' and say, 'Okay, I hear what you're saying and this is how we this is, this is a better approach to solving the problem.'

Thus, Marie spoke about how she wanted to be less reactive when a behavioral conflict was presented to her and recognized that students involved in behavioral conflicts might benefit from being less reactive and practicing wait time as well.

Reframing Behaviors Using Sentence Starters

Using language as a tool to resolve conflict was a powerful strategy that also encourages students to provide healthy communicative expressions with each other. Kaz noted her interest in utilizing this with her preschool students. She shared how this process could be a great way for students to communicate and self-regulate their behavior. Encouraging early communication could also help students to resolve conflicts in the future. Facilitators gave participants an example from earlier research (Kulkarni & Chong, 2022) using the framework of "a bug and a wish." Students are encouraged to communicate what "bugs" them and what they would "wish" for instead. Kaz provided sentence strips for her preschool students that included both visuals and words to help them begin to frame peer communication. The different framings also supported students with disabilities in being able to communicate their needs.

> I gave them sentence starters to help them talk through a problem. I ask them things like 'why did you do that' and 'what can we do instead' to help them think through how they might solve the problem. I also help them by prompting them with this language, 'what might we say to our friend that we practiced before?'

Kaz also indicated an interest in using the "bug and a wish" format to help students articulate and advocate for their own needs. She appreciated how using sentence starters would help all learners, including students with disabilities, in actively communicating and problem-solving.

Shifting to Classroom Community Responses

For Mei, the Virtual LL sessions provided her with resources and visuals in a space that allowed her to reflect on her experiences and practices with discipline and BICOC with disabilities. This led to some transformative practices for her and a rethinking of how to approach discipline with her second-grade students, including all students of all abilities.

> I want to continue to build an inclusive classroom where everyone feels welcome, but they also feel a sense of belonging and ownership. Students will take turns with

> classroom routines and participate because our classroom is a community space not an individual one. I also decided to move away from giving consequences to having students understand why they should or shouldn't do something. It takes longer, but it's more rewarding.

LL sessions helped Mei to (re)mediate her practices and shift away from the school discipline policies that were focused on punishment and tokenized rewards rather than classroom community culture. Mei moved from giving students consequences to instead helping them to understand their behavior through listening sessions or conflict resolution meetings with students. Students in her class would instead meet to go over the importance of a particular behavior or action. Hearing from colleagues, a parent, and administrator in a collective group also helped shape how these changes could be reasonably made in practice.

Early on, Jay, a transitional kindergarten teacher, noted how his class was "students first experiences in school" and how he strived to "keep students in the classroom as much as possible." While he shared an interest in positive behavioral supports and rewarding/praising good behavior, Jay's practices shifted toward building community as an inherent reward. For example, he described how "cleaning the classroom shouldn't be rewarded" because it is "everyone's responsibility." This shifted his thinking about collective responsibility and support rather than individual reward or praise.

Other participants also shared detailed action plans for how they might negotiate discipline disparities post-LL sessions. For example, Kaz shared how she experienced challenges with adults who did not take a humanizing approach to discipline at her school site (Table 3). Using her action plan, the team discussed how she might work with staff and colleagues to help everyone to utilize a set of shared practices. The action plan allowed Kaz to think about potential solutions and barriers that might arise such as "hurt feelings" and "time" to implement plans. Moving away from traditional discipline approaches would likely be a challenge for educators, but Kaz shared that the eventual goal was to involve everyone in day-to-day collective, humanizing approaches to remediate discipline.

Table 3
Sample Discipline Action Plan: Kaz

Prompts	Descriptions
Description of issue(s) we want to work through	Some adults (staff and family) do not always follow through with the plan.
Key stakeholders	• **Staff involved** • **students** • **Family** • **Admin** • **All other adults who are implementing the plan or engaged with the student (PBIS, IAs, cafeteria staff, yard supervisors)**

Prompts	Descriptions
Resources Needed to Begin	• Time to meet (team and 1:1) • Set up a meeting (zoom/ in-person) • The plan • Possible mediator • Clear purpose of plan • Data for why the plan or strategies were created
Anticipating challenges	• Different opinions • Time • Buy-in • Hurt feelings
What does success look like?	• Behavior plan (RJ) is implemented consistently • Team works seamlessly together • Once a month meeting occurs to adjust as needed • Everyone involved in the day-to-day implementation and creation/ adjustments of the plan

Overall, the findings suggest that educator participants of the LL sessions were able to generate restorative and humanizing practices in their classrooms and schools that highlighted the community-centered approaches to supporting all students, especially BICOC with disabilities. Adaptations that involved moving from the approach of Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) to RJ approaches such as listening, dialogue, and wait time helped participants to connect with the needs of their diverse classroom spaces and shifted responsibility for behavioral concerns from individuals to whole class/school.

Discussion

Although the pandemic originally dictated our choice in using Zoom to run the LL, we quickly realized that there were direct benefits to collaboration and access that helped educator participants to create connections and meaningfully reflect on their practices. We first provide some of the benefits and limitations of this process and lessons learned to inform setting up a virtual LL and implications of findings from LL sessions.

Virtual LL Methods

The benefits of Virtual LL sessions for our group of participants included opportunities to highlight their existing and aspirational discipline approaches across a supportive group of individuals working across the state. The goal was to create a collaborative discussion space for all participants. While statewide policies were shared among all participants, bringing together participants from different districts helped to showcase individual approaches that could be shared and adapted across context. For example, Elle, shared how she learned to communicate with her son, who was not able to verbally articulate his wants and needs, which incorporated elements of wait time and learning the root cause of why a student might choose to act out. Marie was also

able to use wait time when she saw students in her office rather than jumping to give a consequence.

Limitations of LL Virtual Methods included challenges with recruiting and maintaining consistency with participants. For example, we were only able to recruit one parent participant after extensive attempts for nearly three months. The limitations of having reliable technology and time available to participate on Zoom may have inhibited further participation. Elle, the parent participant, also sometimes referred to the sessions as "the class" which meant that it sometimes felt like an online course rather than a shared discussion space. In future sessions, we would recommend limiting the number of online sessions to six rather than eight, shortening the duration and providing open ended questions that can be scaffolded to encourage additional parental participation. We also suggest moving away from facilitator-initiated discussion to allow participants to talk to one another rather than feeling like they are being interviewed. We provide a detailed outline of our suggestions for virtual LL in Figure 2 below.

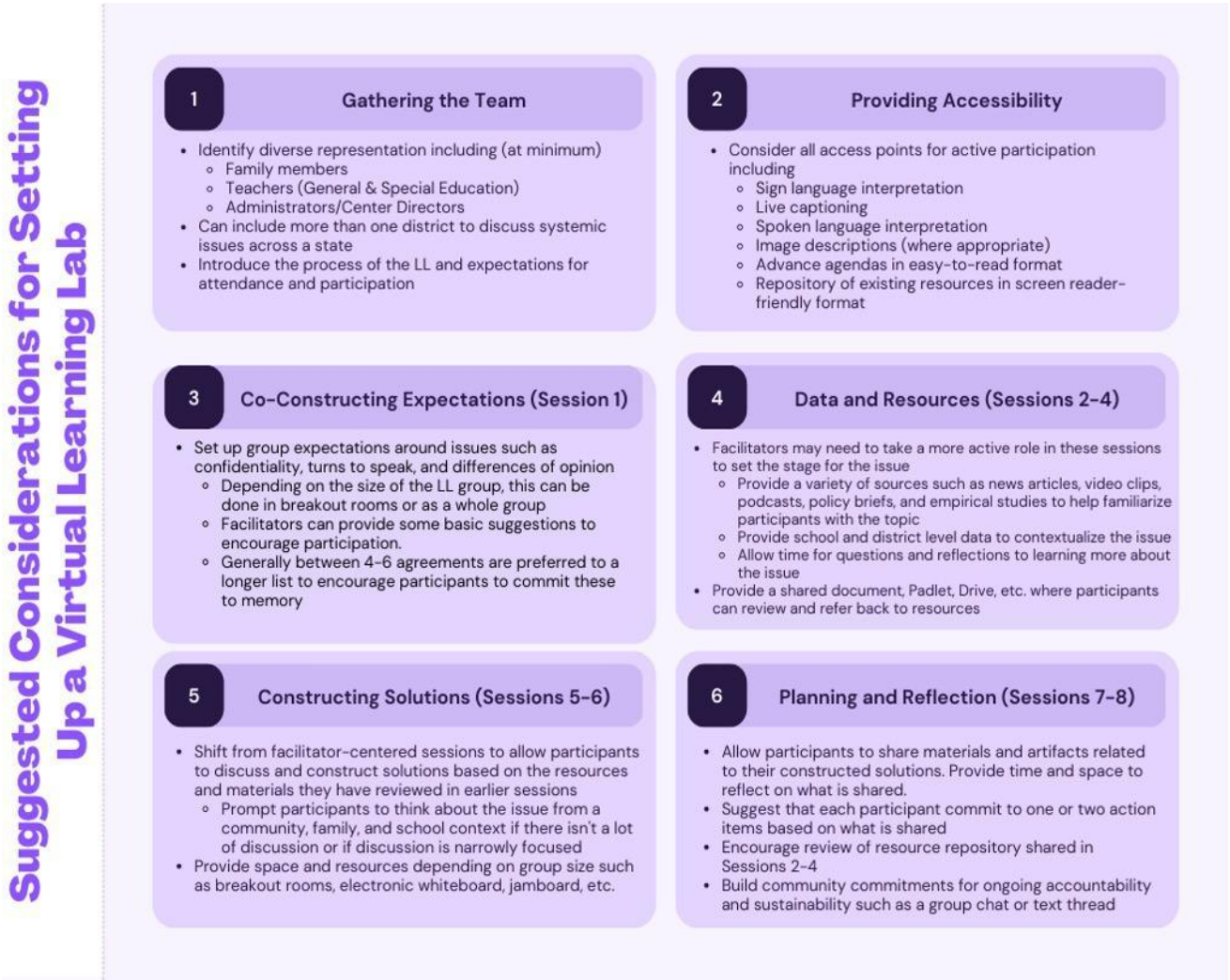

Figure 2. *Suggested Considerations for Setting Up a Virtual Learning Lab*

(Re)Mediating Exclusionary Discipline Practices

Racialization of school discipline has been linked to long-term negative impacts on all students' social and academic lives. Bal and colleagues (2018) addressed racialized disparities in discipline in a high school setting using LL and providing a democratic opportunity for families, educators, and leaders to work together. Building on prior work on LL, participants in this study were able to remediate some of the existing discipline practices they were engaged in with BICOC with disabilities.

While none of the educators were directly engaged in harsh or heavily exclusionary practices, some still relied on these practices for challenging behaviors. For example, Mei's discipline procedures that were set by the school relied on punishment and consequences for individual negative actions. The use of majors and minors pitted students against one another and relegated the responsibilities of the actions on the individual versus the group. She transformed these practices into a community-centered vision for her classroom where all children were responsible for their classroom and the community they built together.

DisCrit Tenet One, which states how racism and ableism operate interdependently to uphold notions of normalcy. As Beneke and Love (2022) explain, early childhood education's focus on developmental milestones and bringing BICOC with disabilities toward a suggested normalcy steeped in whiteness and ableism contextualizes the systems in which these students attend school. We worked to help the four educators, a school leader and a parent come together through collective agency to reimagine discipline through a classroom community-centered lens, shifting the responsibility of behavior from internalized to the perceived deficits presented by an individual student to a deeper understanding of context. Building on early childhood research, such as Shalaby (2017), which examines how social control impedes socialization and children's expression, we note how shifts in teachers' beliefs and practices can bridge this divide. Mei moved to a community-centered approach that shifted to collective agency over rules and expectations as we modeled in LL Session One with our co-generated expectations. Giving students ownership over their learning and behavior was a lengthier but ultimately more meaningful process.

Although as an administrator, Marie prided herself in having nearly zero suspensions and expulsions at her elementary school, she wanted to also take a more mindful approach when students were sent to her office and out of the classroom. She noted the temptation to react to a discipline issue immediately and moved from this approach to using wait time. Using wait time as a teacher-directed rather than student-directed strategy allowed Marie to reflect on her own socialized reactions to student behavior and discipline approaches. Marie was thoughtful about the impact of taking a few extra seconds to attempt a more humanizing approach to discipline. DisCrit Tenet Seven encourages leaders such as Marie to disrupt existing systems of discipline that are harmful to BICOC with disabilities and to take actions that undo harm and restore student humanity.

Elle shared that her son was once in a classroom situation in which the teacher removed student dignity by taking away their communication devices. She noted how the LL sessions helped her to think about new approaches to advocate for her son and his peers with disabilities in the classroom. She indicated a desire to share the information with parent groups and with the classroom teachers of her son. While she already had a vast amount of knowledge and experience, the LL sessions gave her some additional tools and specific language with which to advocate in

new ways. DisCrit Tenet Seven highlights how Elle continues to be an advocate for her son and for other parents of BICOC with disabilities and how the LL sessions simply gave her additional tools to continue her advocacy, especially for students like her son who have more significant support needs and are often targets of exclusionary practices.

Overall, our study of LL with early childhood advanced prior work on LL that involved populations of older students (Bal et al., 2018; Bal, 2016). Additionally, the framework of DisCrit, which has been previously used to theorize early childhood education quality (Love & Beneke, 2023), but has not been used exclusively to (re)mediate discipline disparities using LLs and collective practices shared and developed by educators and families. We note how carceral logics, while quite visible and recognized in older children and young adults, often gets masked for young children such as "majors and minors" but still signals harmful exclusionary practice. We share future research and practice implications and limitations from this work to continue advancing the work focused on BICOC with disabilities and their discipline disparities in schools.

Advancing Future Research and Practices: Limitations and Implications

Though participants were able to benefit from LL sessions and the virtual structure of the LL, this work could be expanded. First, LL sessions could include more participating family members and parents. Having a balanced number of parents would have likely changed the dynamic of the sessions and allowed for more even distribution of the topics and ideas. Next, it would be helpful to incorporate LL sessions in conjunction with observed practices. Because our study occurred during the pandemic, we had limited access to classroom spaces. While participants indicated their intended practices through artifacts, action plans, and dialogue, the classroom environment is sometimes different and requires additional support. Observations with educators coupled with additional workshopping in LL sessions could yield some additional transformation of exclusionary and harsh practices and encourage schoolwide implementation. Building family advocates and advisors into the planning of LL sessions would also be helpful. While our sessions were planned by educators and former educators, it would be useful to include more family advocates on the team to help plan for family needs and considerations. It would be especially helpful to incorporate representation of disabled families, teachers, and leaders of color to lend their experiences to the design of these spaces. Where appropriate, it would also be helpful to include children in some of the planning processes or as presenters of their experiences with discipline in classrooms; perhaps those in first or second grade.

Further representation and integration of strategies through LL sessions would have also enhanced educator and parent confidence in continuing to sustain this work. While participants in our study maintained a text thread to provide support and encouragement, opportunities to try out strategies and some form of check in would be helpful to sustaining the humanizing and restorative approaches they adopted through the process. Frontloading resources with educators and families may also work well in structuring LL sessions rather than providing these at the end of the eight sessions. Opportunities to support professional development alongside educators and parents would also be a strong way to encourage participant ownership and leadership over content provided during LL sessions.

Lastly, it is critical to note how LL sessions with a small group of families and educators allowed us to target individual responses to discipline disparities for BICOC with disabilities, but that these are the beginning stages of creating systemic changes at school sites. Bornstein et al.

(2023), for example, note how much of the empirical research on RJ practices may reduce suspension and expulsion but can continue to maintain racialized and ableist disparities. Further work is needed to examine how critical RJ frameworks might support more systemwide changes at school sites, especially across race (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014) and ability. Similarly, overreliance on interventions and clinical models found in special education can focus heavily on individual changes to behavior without thinking about classroom and whole school contexts. There is a need to identify whether critical RJ frameworks can be applied to special education contexts, given so much of the field relies on behaviorism.

Conclusion

Although the pandemic made it difficult to host LL sessions with families and educators, we noted the utility of using a virtual-based approach to bring together diverse stakeholders across two districts in California. We also noted important accessibility and strategy sharing considerations that Zoom afforded us in employing restorative and humanizing educational practices for students of color with disabilities. We shared how LL helped educators, collectively working with administrators and families, were able to transform discipline approaches and practices to move away from exclusionary or harsh practices.

Although we noted the limitations of a virtual space, participants were still able to adopt new collective and restorative practices that they could integrate into classrooms with BIPOC with disabilities. By helping participants reframe their understandings of discipline, we utilized a ground-up approach to prevent horrific incidents such as those witnessed by Pamela Ononiwu with respect to her Black son with ADHD. We noted how individualized behavior interventions reinforce racialized discipline disparities (Bornstein, 2023) without family-educator collaborations. By integrating restorative and humanizing practices supporting educators to adopt more meaningful actions when faced with challenges or conflict, we hope that children can feel more ownership, self-advocacy and self-regulate their behaviors. By starting this process with children in early childhood settings, we hope that they can carry forward these meaningful practices as they move through school.

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