

Cover page

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Personal Research Agenda

Broad overview of research interests. I have pursued systematic inquiry related to the over-representation of African American students in suspension and expulsion rates in high schools. My focus has been the identification of teacher practices and school policies that are linked to a reduced racial discipline gap. Since arriving at the University of Virginia, my research has expanded to include a greater emphasis on school-level protective factors and promising teacher interventions to reduce the referral of African American students for both disciplinary sanction and special education services.

Previous scholarly efforts. I recently published two articles examining how the quality of relationships in classrooms is central to understanding student achievement and behavior. With a sample of African American teens, I compared the styles of a “discipline referring” teacher and a “safe haven” teacher, with whom students reported “getting along.” Using hierarchical linear modeling, I found that an authoritative teaching style predicted student trust in teacher authority (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). In a mixed methods study, I found that teachers who used a preventative, relational discipline approach elicited positive behavior (Gregory & Ripski, 2008).

Recognizing that classrooms and teacher-student relationships are embedded in the ecology of the school, I have expanded my conceptualization of risky and protective classrooms to the larger school context. I ask, “What are the protective characteristics of schoolwide discipline policies and practices?” and “On a school-wide level, what might disrupt the racial trend in disciplinary sanctions?” I am examining what I call, “Authoritative Discipline Theory,” which proposes discipline policies and practices in high schools that are *both* structured and supportive are conducive to high achievement and low suspension/expulsion rates. With a

sample of over 7,000 students and 3,000 teachers across the state, I found support for Authoritative Discipline Theory and recently submitted a manuscript describing these findings.

Proposed research agenda during the next three to five years. To date, my research has identified the importance of high structure and high support (authoritative discipline) both in the classroom setting and in the school climate. Now, I plan to move from basic research to intervention research, evaluating promising interventions that promote authoritative discipline. Such a promising intervention is called, “restorative practices,” which is derived from the restorative justice movement. In restorative justice, those affected by an infraction or crime come together to identify how people were affected by the incident. Together, they decide how to repair the harm. Ted Wachtel (1997) has adapted restorative justice in the schools. With a preventative orientation, their approach to classroom management emphasizes student participatory learning and decision-making. In their model, teachers use structured group discussion to help students express their opinions, build relationships and problem-solve. When a rule has been broken, students come together to play an active role in addressing the wrong and restoring the sense of community. While several single-school intervention studies have shown a reduction in school office referrals and suspensions, there is a dearth of research on the processes associated with change and no research has convincingly established the effectiveness of the intervention. In the next three to five years, I plan to ask a series of interrelated questions, which relate to my research program: 1) Are classrooms with restorative practices highly structured and supportive, compared to control classrooms? 2) Compared to control classrooms, do classrooms with restorative practices have lower disciplinary referrals, which results in a reduced racial discipline gap? 3) Do classrooms with restorative practices have greater student engagement and sense of community compared to control classrooms?

Vision of a Collaborative Multi-site Research Program

Working title:

A multisite study: Improving classroom discipline climate through restorative practices

Research Questions

- 1) Are classrooms with restorative practices highly structured and supportive, compared to control classrooms?
- 2) Do classrooms with restorative practices have lower disciplinary referrals compared to control classrooms? Do lowered disciplinary referrals, in turn, reduce the racial discipline gap (e.g., the over-representation of African American students)?
- 3) Do classrooms with restorative practices have greater student engagement and student-reported sense of community compared to control classrooms?

Setting and Participants

Four high schools from two urban communities will be recruited for the study. The schools will be matched for racial and ethnic diversity and the percentage of students who qualify for free/reduced lunch, which is typically used to measure poverty. Interested teachers will be consented for the project, with the understanding that they may be randomly assigned to the control condition. Half of the teachers will receive the intervention and half of the teachers will continue their classroom management practices as usual. The aim will be to engage 30 classrooms in the intervention and 30 control classrooms.

Student assent and parent/guardian consent will be sought for the project. We will aim to consent 80% of the students in each classroom. The goal will be to recruit a total of 1,000 students.

Teacher Training

Intervention teachers will receive an initial day-long training in restorative practices. The training will be followed by three sessions of in-classroom teacher consultation in the first two months of school. Four months later, teachers will participate in a booster session training for one afternoon. The training has been conducted nationally and internationally by a highly skilled cadre of trainers from the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP: <http://www.iirp.org>). Teachers will be trained to videotape their lessons and will be asked to mail in samples of their lessons.

Fidelity of Implementation

Throughout the year, teachers will complete a checklist of the types and occurrences of restorative practices in their classrooms. A random sample of students will be interviewed to corroborate teacher reports of their restorative practices.

Measures of Change

In the first month of school, observers will rate the teachers on three dimensions found in the empirically-supported measure CLASS-Secondary (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) – Emotional Climate, Instructional Support, and Classroom Organization (Pianta, Hamre, Haynes, Mintz, & La Paro, 2006). The observational system has shown reliability and predictive validity in pre-K and early elementary grades (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). I am currently a co-investigator on a project which is testing its reliability and validity in middle and high school classrooms (Pianta & Allen, 2008). These dimensions are made up of a series of ratings that measure the structure and support in the classroom (e.g., positive climate, teacher sensitivity, regard for adolescent perspective, behavior management, productivity). Observers will be trained for two days on the rating system and will reach reliability before coding the video tapes.

Multiple coders will rate each videotaped segment. Students will complete surveys at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year on their perceptions of the classroom climate including teacher care (support), teacher skills in behavioral management (structure) and teachers' academic expectations (structure). Teacher will complete surveys about student cooperation and defiance. Number of office referrals will be collected from each classroom.

Estimated Budget

Budget Summary. \$400,000 (\$200,000 per year). Personnel: Two co-principal investigators, four research assistants (two at each site with coverage of stipend, tuition, and health insurance), one statistical consultant. Equipment: video (cameras, tapes, tripods), two laptops, internet survey services. Travel: Two to three national conferences, travel for meetings from site to site.

Advantages and Challenges of a Collaborative Multi-site Research Program

The strengths of multi-site research programs are numerous. Namely, with geographic diversity and increased sample size, study results may be more generalizable. Promoting good science, ideas will be cross-fertilized and the study's conceptualization will be strengthened. As a junior scholar, my capacity will be increased from collaboration and consultation with senior colleagues. Challenges of multi-site research mostly relate to the long-distance nature of collaboration. Quick decisions may need to be made, which can take extra effort when bridging geographic distance. My experience has been that systems need to be in place (e.g., weekly conference calls, monthly visits) to tackle the challenges. Also, across different sites, researchers may drift from reliable coding of the classroom video-tapes. Again, this takes advanced planning with booster training.

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