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Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a Tool to Reduce Discipline

Alyssa Grainger
California State University, Monterey Bay

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Running Head: CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a Tool to Reduce Discipline

Alyssa Grainger

Action Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in
Education

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Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a Tool to Reduce Discipline

By: Alyssa Grainger

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Jaye Luke, Ph.D., Advisor, Master of Arts in Education

Kerrie Chitwood, Ph.D., Advisor and Coordinator, Master of Arts in Education

Kris Roney, Ph.D. Associate Vice President

Academic Programs and Dean of Undergraduate & Graduate Studies

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Abstract

Discipline in schools is designed to ensure learning for all students, reinforce expected school norms and deter students from future misbehavior. Lunch detentions are a common consequence of misbehavior, especially at the secondary level. Using a multiple probe multiple baseline, this study examined how a training that highlighted culturally relevant pedagogy impacted the reporting of lunch detentions. The participants included 27 middle school teachers who taught grades sixth, seventh, and eighth. Results indicated that the workshop may have had an impact on reported lunch detentions in the weeks immediately following the training. There was a demonstration and a replication of a functional relation between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

Keywords: culturally relevant pedagogy, discipline, professional development

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a Tool to Reduce Discipline

Literature Review

Educational institutions use discipline for three main reasons including to: (a) help students learn better, free from distractions; (b) suggest there is an expected behavior norm; and (c) deter other students from misbehaving (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). These reasons are not limited to the educational system, but also exist in the civic system. That is, there are expected behaviors for society. When all participants operate within those behavior norms, society functions and progresses. However, if individuals operate outside of those norms, discipline is used to adjust these behaviors and to deter others from also engaging in those same behaviors, as they are outside the expected.

Researchers have examined discipline from various view points and have discovered that there is a discrepancy in the connection between race, discipline, and achievement levels (Eberhardt et al., 2004; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba et al., 2002). Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) determined that despite similar behaviors of black and white students, teachers were more likely to administer a more severe consequence to a student of color than a white student for a similar infraction. Similarly, Skiba et al. (2002) found that students of color were disciplined at higher rates than white students. Skiba (2000) also noted that the behaviors that received consequences from students of color were more subjective, while white students received consequences based on objective behavior. These studies indicate that despite teacher's good intentions to remain objective in their teaching and discipline, disparities continue to exist as a result of implicit bias.

Teachers have indicated that disruptive and defiant behaviors are the most difficult issue they face (Krajewski et al., 1998; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). Associated research

indicates that the most prevalent exclusionary practices at the middle school level are disrespect, disobedience, and disruption (Ward, 2007). Disruptive behaviors have been classified in various ways. One study characterizes *disruption* as intentional, inappropriate, and deliberate. It goes on to clarify that disruptive behavior includes talking without permission, yelling, making inappropriate sounds, throwing items, and other generally disruptive behavior (Charles, 1996). Wallis (1998) described the implications of disruptive behaviors by noting that the results of such behavior are indicative of a lack of student respect for school culture. A final study indicates that defiant students generally confront teachers, disregard school rules, and, as a result, end up suspended and/or receive detention (Volenski & Rockwood, 1996).

There are a variety of reactionary consequences that currently exist in school settings. Exclusionary practices, such as suspension and expulsion, can vary in type and length, ranging from single class suspension, to in-school suspension, to out-of-school suspension (Ward, 2007). One study found that exclusionary practices promote a hostile school climate and encouraged student resentment rather than student accountability (Elias & Tobias, 1996). Another reactionary consequence, zero-tolerance, dictates that all behaviors, whether minor or major, receive severe consequences with the intention of deterring further misbehavior from other students (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). A more subtle, yet psychological, reactionary consequence is that of predictive consequences. These consequences involve negative comments from teachers to students that degrade students' self-esteem and potentially lead to negative self-fulfilling prophecies (Valentine, 1987). Despite intentions to make schools a safer and more academically rigorous environment, studies have shown that reactionary consequences do not improve school climate and can have an adverse effect on improving misbehavior (Skiba, 2014; Sprague, 2014).

In issuing consequences for misbehavior, it is critical to maintain equity in discipline. Teachers who include fairness as a component of their classroom cultural context are better prepared to engage with students. Manipulating classroom context can be a very effective tool in improving relationships between teachers and students, thereby encouraging student academic success (Cartledge, Singh, & Gibson, 2008; Green, 2005; Monroe, 2005a; Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997; Utley, Kozleski, Smith, & Draper, 2002). Manipulations of classroom context include interventions such as increasing positive interactions with students (Cartledge et al., 2008), decreasing negative interactions with students (Utley et al., 2002), engaging in equitable interactions (Brown, 2004), setting high expectations (Rivera & Rodgers-Adkinson, 1997), teaching social skills (Utley et al., 2002), including students' culture and language (Brown, 2004), and increasing effective instruction (Cartledge et al., 2008).

Maximizing instructional time with academic content remains a central goal for educational institutions. School discipline affects both the amount of instructional time as well as intended student learning. In relation to the amount of instructional time, Losen et al. (2015) estimated that during the 2011-2012 school year, public school students across the country lost almost 18 million days of instructional time (this was based on the average suspension lasting 3.5 days). Putnam et al. (2010) had similar findings in the impact of lost instructional time and reported that for every referral written, 20 minutes of instructional time was lost. When teachers are forced to spend time intervening with student misbehavior, not only does this action detract from teachers implementing effective lessons, it also takes away from student learning in class.

This loss of instructional time is a concern and can be addressed at the institutional level and by educators. To address this at the educator level is to account for teacher preparation and continuous training and reflection. There is little explicit training in the area of multicultural

education or behavior analysis (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The typical response of preservice teacher training programs to the growing trend of diversity among students has been to add a class or two on multicultural education to their preparation training program (Goodwin, 1997). These classes provide an opportunity for preservice teachers to learn about diversity, theoretical models, and effective teaching practices, but studies also contend that this training does not go far enough to prepare teachers for teaching diverse student populations (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

For current teachers, continuing to be academically informed about effective teaching practices is essential to creating and maintaining relationships with students, especially those with culturally diverse backgrounds. One way of approaching the increasing number of diverse students is by understanding and implementing culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy uses student history, background, and experiences to make learning more relevant and effective for diverse student populations. It also aims to increase academic achievement for culturally diverse students (Gay, 2000). It is understood that effective teaching practices include building a relationship with students (Ward, 2007). Howard (2003) and Irvine (2010) assert that the teacher bears responsibility to create a healthy learning environment for students to succeed. Since teachers are the facilitators of the classroom, it is thereby their responsibility to make sure students are learning and being treated fairly. To help teachers do this effectively, continuous training should be provided (Joyce & Showers, 1995).

In addition to appropriately preparing teachers to understand diverse populations, it is vital that administrators also share similar visions of a positive school climate and model their expectations to other members of the school team. Several studies highlighted the significance of leaders at school sites and how an administrator's beliefs about discipline can have a lasting

impact of the culture and climate of a school (Anderson-Loy, 2015; Ashley, 2015; Skiba et al., 2015). For example, Ashley (2015) noted that to change the culture of a school surrounding the topic of discipline, administration not only needed to be explicitly trained, but also needed to actively accept the given program themselves. Similarly, Anderson-Loy (2015) found that invested and supportive principals have a significant impact on school climate. Finally, Gottfredson (1989) noted that discipline problems occurred most frequently when administrators did not agree with previously established rules and when teacher/administration cooperation was low. These studies demonstrate how school leaders have an enormous impact and play a pivotal role in the process in promoting a positive school climate.

School climate, with the support of teachers and administrators, can also be addressed with programs geared toward a holistic school wide approach. A school wide positive behavior intervention and support (SWPBIS) program can be implemented to help address an expected behavioral norm at the institutional level. This program is implemented with the intention of cultivating sensitivity of teachers by training them to recognize and acknowledge the realities of differing student populations (Sugai, 1998; Sugai & Horner, 1999). The purpose of SWPBIS programs is to teach student expected behaviors by using positive strategies of school discipline. In this process, initial behavior infractions receive less severe consequences; but as the frequency and/or type of behavior increases, so does the severity of the consequence.

Research studies have shown that when schools effectively implement SWPBIS programs, there is a decrease in student office disciplinary referrals (ODR) and the campus is perceived to have a more positive school climate (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Horner et al., 2009). To help achieve this positive school climate, students must be explicitly taught desired behaviors. In turn, teachers who are intent on contributing to positive school

climates must be aware of student behaviors that may differ due to cultural norms (Sprague, 2014). Lack of cultural understanding leads to misinterpretations of body language, tone, and cultural differences, contributing to classroom environments where students and teachers are equally uncomfortable with each other. For example, in Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern societies, making direct eye contact with an authority figure is viewed as disrespectful or aggressive, whereas in American culture, eye contact is much the opposite: it is a sign of respect and attention (Edwards, 2014).

Helping teachers familiarize themselves with cultural differences and connecting with students can be part of their pedagogical plans. Teacher attitudes about students have a profound impact on student success and also students' perception of their own efforts (Villages & Lucas, 2002; Wentzel, 1998). Studies on middle school students and teachers found that when teachers were perceived to provide support, students reported prosocial behavior, responsibility for academic work and behavior, and enhanced their self-image in relation to achievements and aspirations (Harter, 1996; Wentzel, 1994). This evidence suggests that when teachers have positive understanding of their students, students are more successful.

Culturally relevant pedagogy demands that teachers take the initiative to learn about their students and understand the differences in the cultures of their student populations. It also encourages teachers to actively and objectively observe their own teaching practices, including discipline, and make adjustments in their approach, preparation, and implementation. The preferred outcome of culturally relevant pedagogy is that teachers understand their students and are able to facilitate high achieving academic outcomes. When teachers understand how different cultures behave in different situations, teachers are capable of recognizing the origin of the behavior and are then able to work to address student needs.

A critical component of culturally relevant pedagogy is the notion that deficit-based thinking should be eliminated (Howard, 2003). Deficit-based thinking refers to any negative thoughts teachers may have regarding the abilities of students, especially students of color or students with disabilities; students should aim to achieve high academic standards and these standards should have nothing to do with the race of the student (Howard, 2003). Ladson-Billings (1994) agrees and adds that regardless of being culturally diverse or from a low-income background, students should be viewed as capable learners.

The studies outlined here suggest that ensuring fair disciplinary practices can have a positive and lasting success on school climate, student accountability, and teacher effectiveness. Administrators who support their faculty and include relevant trainings for teachers are helping students succeed (Anderson-Loy, 2015; Ashley, 2015; Skiba et al., 2015). Teachers who are trained and use culturally relevant pedagogy in their teachings help students succeed and create a fair and positive classroom context (Howard, 2003). The purpose of the current study is to examine how a culturally relevant pedagogy workshop impacts the number of daily lunch detentions reported by middle school teachers.

Methods

Participants

Participants included in this study were middle school teachers. In the seventh grade group there were 14 teachers including the researcher and the academic coach. Of this group, one was Asian, one was African American, and 12 were White. In the eighth grade group there were six teachers including the researcher and the academic coach. Of this group, all six teachers were White. In the sixth grade group, there were 11 teachers. Of this group, 10 were White and one was African American. In total there were 27 teachers who participated in the

workshop. Of the participating teachers, one was a first year teacher, five were second year teachers, and 21 had three or more years of teaching experience. In addition, 13 of the participants were men and 14 were women. Finally, ten teachers taught only one grade level and 17 teachers taught two or more grade levels. Six teachers were not able to participate in the workshop.

Setting

The setting of this study was a middle school in Monterey, California. The middle school had grades six through eight. There were six class periods each day. Students had one 30 minute lunch period. Teachers taught five periods and had one prep period. Teachers also had one 30 minute lunch period.

During the 2014-2015 school year, the middle school had 724 enrolled students. Students' ages ranged from 11 – 14 years old. Of these students, 58% self-identified as Hispanic/Latino, 24% as White/Caucasian, 6% as Asian (not Hispanic), 5% as African American (not Hispanic), 4% as Multiracial (not Hispanic), and 2% Filipino (CALPADS, 2015). There were a total of 157 English Learners (22% of the total population) and 451 students identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged (62%) (California Department of Education, 2015).

Research Design

The research design of this study was a multiple-probe multiple baseline design across participants. The participant were groups of grade level teachers. There were three grade levels at the site: sixth, seventh, and eighth.

Dependent Variable and Data Collection

The dependent variable was the number of daily assigned lunch detentions in which a student displayed any one of the following behaviors: defiance, disruption, and disrespect. That is, all three of the behaviors were monitored and recorded. For the purpose of this study, defiance, disruption, and disrespect are defined as behaviors of general non-compliance and actively interrupting the classroom learning environment.

The data collection tool was a spreadsheet that allowed teachers and administrators to collect and report behavior that resulted in lunch detentions. Each teacher would input the class period, the date, the general reason for the detention, a description of the specific behavior, the student's third period teacher (to deliver a reminder slip), and whether or not the teacher contacted the student's parent.

All grade levels entered baseline simultaneously. Once the seventh grade data was stable and not moving in a therapeutic direction, they entered intervention and received the culturally relevant pedagogy workshop. Subsequent tiers entered intervention once the previous tier had a reduction in reported lunch detentions similar to baseline levels.

Independent Variable

The independent variable for this study was the culturally relevant pedagogy workshop that targeted teacher preparation; specifically, the researcher focused on the areas of self-assessment of bias and culture, and using data to evaluate outcomes (Fallon et al., 2012). The culturally relevant pedagogy workshop targeted the behaviors labeled as defiance, disruption, and disrespect.

The workshop lasted for an hour and fifteen minutes and took place after school on selected school days. To begin the workshop, participants received a roster and common beliefs survey (see Appendix A). On the roster, teachers wrote at least one thing they knew about as many students as possible. The purpose of the roster activity was to give teachers an opportunity to think specifically and critically about how well they knew each of the students in the selected class. Participants completed the survey, measured by a Likert scale, which consisted of nine statements from the organization, Teaching Tolerance. The survey was used as a tool to facilitate conversation during the workshop and also so that teachers would be gain an understanding of their own beliefs and potential biases. Results from the survey were not analyzed as part of the current study.

The researcher led a short discussion about previous occurrences regarding discipline data that came from the school district. The main topic was a beginning-of-the-year seminar from the school year 2013-2014 in which two educational experts discussed the need for observing race in school discipline and how the district as a whole was disciplining students of color more than white students. Teachers did not have the specific training or understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy at this time and left the seminar in a state of frustration, anger, and guilt. During the workshop that the researcher led, the researcher acknowledged that this seminar from years ago did not aide teachers in accepting the concepts of culturally relevant pedagogy. This discussion during the workshop was of the utmost importance to attain teacher buy-in to the workshop and allowed teachers to be in a place with a facilitator who understood the background and experiences of the teachers.

Next, the researcher divided the group into pairs. Teachers were instructed to read through their selected common beliefs statement, review the “Questions to Consider,” and create

a poster that summarized the key components of the statement (see Appendix A). Groups shared the information on their poster and a brief discussion followed each presentation.

Participants then examined grade level behavior data that the researcher collected from previous academic quarters and discussed noticeable trends. As closure for the workshop, teachers individually created a plan of action for the rest of the quarter (see Appendix B). The purpose of the plan of action was to encourage teachers to identify areas of their practice they could adjust in the immediate future. If a teacher could not attend the selected workshop, they attended the next scheduled workshop.

Procedural Fidelity

To maintain procedural fidelity, the researcher ensured the attendance of the same academic coach at each of the three intervention workshops. The researcher created and submitted a plan to the academic coach that was the same procedure for each workshop and included a checklist. Treatment integrity for the workshop and plan was 100% (see Appendix C).

IOA

The researcher collected data from the Behavior Discipline Program spreadsheets for each grade level and collected data from each session. This data was double checked for 100% of every session by another member of the PBIS team who helped design the Behavior Discipline Program. 100% agreement was found for the discipline data.

Results

This study measured the impact of professional development on the disciplinary process in a middle school setting by comparing the number of lunch detentions for disruption, defiance, and disrespect over a time period of 12 weeks. Figure 1 shows the number of sessions measured by weeks on the X axis and the number of lunch detentions assigned on the Y axis.

In the seventh grade group, baseline data showed an increase in the number of lunch detentions every week. During the five week baseline period, the number of seventh grade lunch detentions were 10, 12, 20, 22, and 22 respectively. This was a range of 10 to 22 and an average of 17.2 lunch detentions per week. After intervention was implemented with seventh grade teachers, the number of seventh grade lunch detentions were 12, 14, 22, 26, 30, and 13 respectfully. This was a range of 12 to 30 and an average of 19.5 lunch detentions per week (see Figure 1).

In eighth grade, baseline data also showed an increase in the number of lunch detentions. During the eight week baseline period, the number of eighth grade lunch detentions were 1, 3, 7, 5, 7, 8, 5, and 18 respectfully. This was a range of 1 to 18 and an average of 6.75 lunch detentions per week. After intervention was implemented with eighth grade teachers, the number of eighth grade lunch detentions assigned were 6, 9, and 4 respectfully. This was a range of 4 to 9 and an average of 6.3 lunch detentions per week (see Figure 1).

In the sixth grade group, baseline data showed a fluctuation in the number of lunch detentions. During baseline, the number of lunch detentions were 9, 11, 6, 9, 5, 16, 7, 9, and 6 respectfully. After intervention was implemented, the number of assigned lunch detentions were 18, 22, and 15 respectfully. This was a range of 15 to 22 and an average of 18.3 lunch detentions per week (see Figure 1).

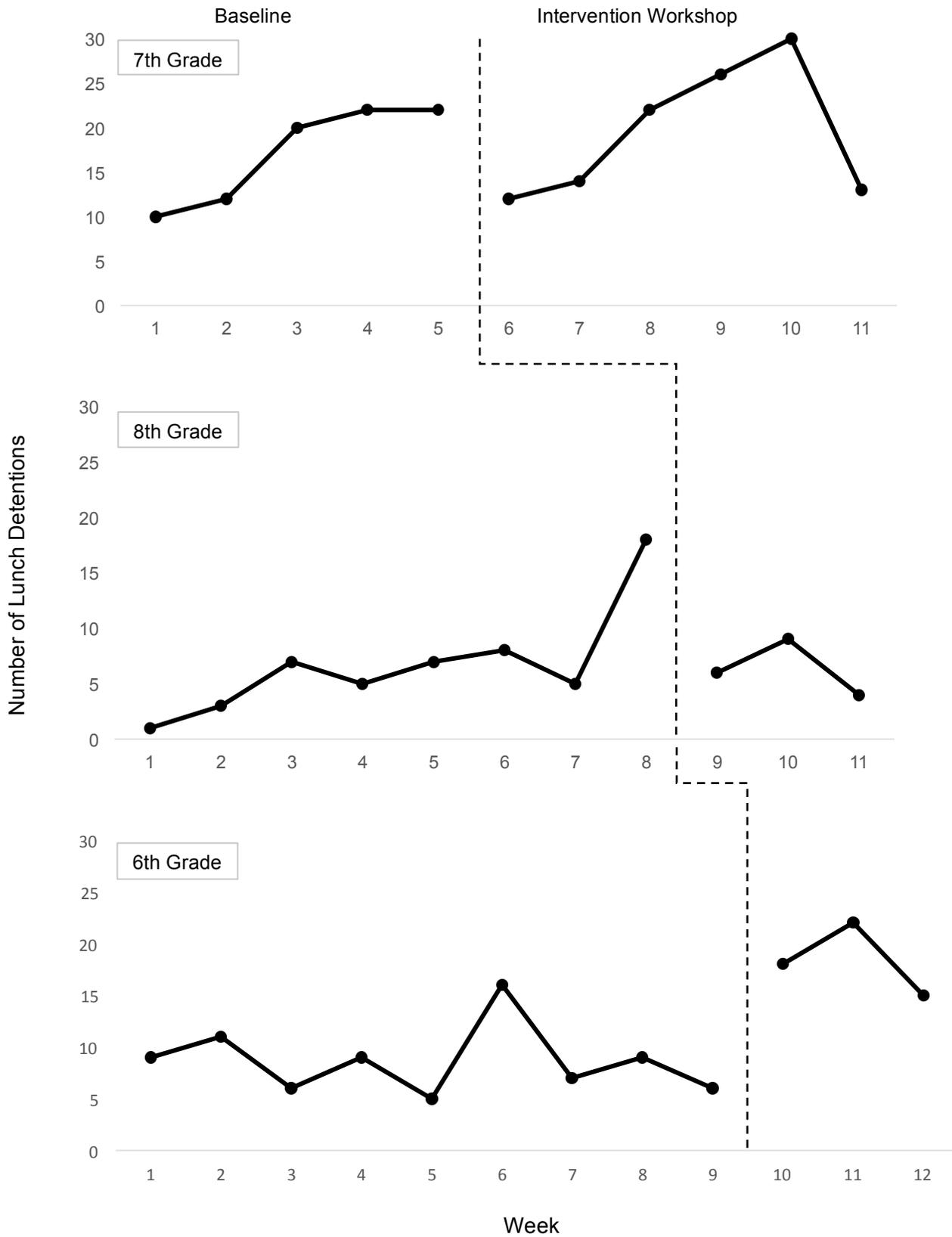


Fig. 1 The number of lunch detentions assigned for the categories of defiance, disrespect, and disruption collected by week.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how a culturally relevant pedagogy workshop impacted the number of daily lunch detentions reported by middle school teachers. Initial results from this study suggest a possible immediate impact on the number of lunch detentions, but also indicate that more research is necessary. For the seventh grade and eighth grade groups, findings show that in the week directly following the intervention workshop, the number of lunch detentions noticeably decreased. For the sixth grade group, results indicate that the workshop did not have an immediate impact in reducing the number of lunch detentions.

The data collected suggest that the professional development training in the area of culturally relevant pedagogy may have an immediate impact on the number of lunch detentions reported by middle school teachers. The seventh grade group showed an immediate decrease in the number of assigned lunch detentions in the two weeks following the intervention workshop. The number of lunch detentions steadily increased back to previous levels in the third to fifth weeks after the intervention. In the sixth week after intervention for this group, the number of lunch detentions dropped to post-intervention levels.

The eighth grade groups also showed a decrease in the number of assigned lunch detentions in the two weeks immediately following the intervention workshop. The third week after intervention saw an additional decrease in the number of lunch detentions. The significance of the drop in lunch detentions in the eleventh week of the study may be related to the school calendar; this was the last week of the third academic quarter and the last week before a two week spring break period.

The third participant group (sixth grade teachers) showed an increase in the number of lunch detentions immediately after intervention. These findings were inconsistent with the

results of the seventh and eighth grade groups. Data points during baseline did not follow a continuous rising, falling, or consistent trend, but rather fluctuated sporadically. The time frame of the current study may have impacted the results of the sixth grade participant group. The study took place over twelve weeks, but the sixth grade intervention took place during week nine. Three data points after the intervention were collected for this participant group; two were collected during the last two weeks of the lengthiest academic quarter of the year (eleven weeks compared to nine weeks for the other quarters) and the third data point was collected after a two week spring break. The number of student behaviors for the first two post-intervention sessions showed an increase in the number of lunch detentions assigned. In reviewing the data further, the researcher determined that one teacher (not a substitute and did attend the workshop for sixth grade teachers) accounted for 20 lunch detentions during the first two post-intervention sessions, and that 19 of these incidents were categorized as disruption for talking in class. 20 lunch detentions was 50% of the lunch detentions reported in the two post-intervention weeks. These results indicate that this particular teacher may need more training in the areas of classroom management, culturally relevant pedagogy, and possibly designing effective lessons.

The researcher followed the same workshop plan for each of the three workshops. The same academic coach was in attendance of each workshop and confirmed that all steps were followed. That said, however, the content of some discussions during the workshop were different, especially while discussing each Common Belief (see Appendix A). These conversations may have impacted the results for several reasons. For example, the number of teachers in each workshop session was different. The smallest group (eighth grade teachers) had longer whole group conversations instead of just talking with one partner. Participation in larger group conversations can be more intimidating, leading some teachers to not speak out as they

might with just one person. This could potentially lead to teachers not engaging in the conversation and not having a concrete attachment to the content.

During the intervention workshop, teachers observed discipline data of their grade level and identified behavioral trends. The result of these observations during the workshop may have been a contributing factor in the immediate decrease in number of lunch detentions for two of the three groups. Using data to inform teaching practices has been shown to positively impact school learning environments (Sugai, 1998). This was evident in the immediate results of the current study. It is reasonable to assume that if teachers were frequently informed about their discipline habits, they may be aware of their own attitude toward students and potentially make changes based on patterns they see in the data they report.

Results from the current study are consistent with studies that report that teacher preparation and training are ineffective if teachers are not given feedback or follow-up after the initial training sessions (Gusky, 1986). Peters and March (1999) contend that short training periods (one day, one week, etc.) do not have a lasting impact on school culture. This is evident with the results of the current study which found that lunch detentions mostly decreased for a two week period following intervention, but then steadily increased to previous levels.

In collecting data, the researcher was required to assemble and confirm accurate data from the Behavior Discipline Program. This information was checked by a member of the school's SWPBIS team who confirmed that the data both inputted and reported with 100% accuracy and that there were no repeated submissions.

Research studies have shown that when schools implement SWPBIS programs at their sites with fidelity, referrals and suspensions are lowered and the campus is perceived to have a more positive school climate (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Horner et al., 2009). In

addition, several studies have noted successes in reducing discipline rates using SWPBIS strategies (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012; Horner et al., 2010; Sprague, 2014; Bohanon et al., 2006; McCurdy et al., 2013). A goal of the school and also the district in the current study is to reduce disciplinary inconsistencies, but that can only be achieved by taking the proper steps to ensure that discipline is administered with fidelity and honesty.

There were several limitations to the current study. First, the selected middle school site has had a recent history of leadership changes. During the 2014-2015 school year, the site had six principals. With the importance of leadership being an enormous factor in school discipline and climate, these changes in leadership may have had an impact on the current school year and possibly provide an explanation for the elevated numbers of behavior issues in the seventh grade class (Anderson-Loy, 2015; Gottfredson, 1989). During the 2015-2016 school year, the site acquired two new assistant principals. These new leaders to the community and campus may have also had an impact on school discipline and climate due to their lack of experience in leadership roles.

Another significant limitation was the number of substitutes utilized by the site during the current school year. While the current study was taking place, three long-term substitutes occupied seventh and eighth grade classrooms. One of the long term substitutes attended a workshop presented by the researcher, the rest did not. However, this long term substitute, despite attending the workshop, still accounted for the majority of assigned lunch detentions in the seventh grade. In terms of daily substitutes, of which the district utilizes so full time teachers can be trained in various areas, the current school uses these personnel on a daily basis. Substitute teachers can have a substantial negative impact on learning in classrooms when the regular teacher is frequently absent (Glatfelter, 2006). In addition, substitute teachers are not

necessarily adequately trained in classroom management (Damle, 2009; Glatfelter, 2006). In the current study, substitute teachers may have accounted for larger numbers of students attending lunch detentions for misbehavior during this time.

Suggestions for further research would be beneficial for supporting teachers in their endeavors to improve their understanding of classroom context and culturally relevant pedagogy. Not only does the researcher recommend frequent trainings on self-reflection of biases, but also that in these trainings teachers are provided an opportunity to evaluate their personal behavioral trends specifically, not only a general view of the grade level. This process could be accomplished through the consistent analysis of accurately reported behavioral data. This information may help inform teachers of patterns of noticeable behavior as well as see which students they may be disciplining more often. Studies indicate that teachers are responsible for creating an equitable classroom environment, which in turn could help teachers to connect with more challenging students and ensure fair treatment in class (Howard, 2003; Irvine, 2010). Future research should also take into consideration having teachers not only look at their own disciplinary history, but also of the race of the students they are disciplining. This will further ensure that the teacher's classroom is an equitable environment for all culturally diverse students.

In summation, the data suggest that constant reflection on teacher practices, observation of behavioral data, and further training regarding behavior management strategies may decrease the number of disciplinary infractions. This study offered a sample of how teacher training and self-reflection can be an effective tool for implementing positive changes. In the case of the school site in the current study, the researcher hopes to continue working with staff, both in the classroom and at the administrative level, to understand student needs and interests, and to work toward improving school culture.

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Appendix ACommon Beliefs Survey

TEACHING TOLERANCE

A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER
TOLERANCE.ORG

Common Beliefs

COMMON BELIEF 1

I don't think of my students in terms of their race or ethnicity. I am color blind when it comes to my teaching.

Background

When teachers say they are color blind, they are usually saying that they do not discriminate and that they treat all their students equally. Of course, being fair and treating each student with respect are essential to effective teaching. However, race and ethnicity often play important roles on children's identities, and contribute to their culture, their behavior, and their beliefs. When race and ethnicity are ignored, teachers miss opportunities to help students connect with what is being taught. Recognizing that a student's race and ethnicity influences their learning allows teachers to be responsive to individual differences. In some cases, ignoring a student's race and ethnicity may undermine a teacher's ability to understand student behavior and student confidence in doing well in a school culture where expectations and communication are unfamiliar. An individual's race and ethnicity are central to her or his sense of self but they are not the whole of personal identity. Moreover, how important an individual's race and ethnicity is to their identity will vary and teachers need to take that into account as they seek to learn more about their students.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some ways for educators to acknowledge students' ethnic, cultural, racial, and linguistic identities?
2. Why is it important to incorporate their identities into the curriculum?
3. What happens when teachers don't validate their students' racial and ethnic identities?

COMMON BELIEF 2

The gap in the achievement among students of different races is about poverty, not race.

Background

Studies of the influences on student achievement invariably show that students' family income is a significant correlate of low achievement. However, even when students' socioeconomic status is taken into account, race often accounts for variance in student performance. The reasons for this

are complex and experts disagree about why this is so. Most experts dismiss explanations having to do with race-related “culture” (i.e., the culture of poverty thesis) or genetic differences among races. Some experts believe that the racial influence on achievement lies in the experiences students of color may have in school—such as low expectations, teaching that is insufficiently responsive to differences in student interests and needs, or differential access to learning opportunities. There is considerable agreement among researchers that “stereotype threat”—students’ belief that societal stereotypes about the limits of the academic abilities of African American, Latino and Native American students have merit—can discourage such students from seeking to achieve at high levels.

Questions to Consider

1. How does “stereotype threat” bring race to the surface in (a) understanding student achievement and (b) fostering productive student-teacher relationships?
2. How do school-based policies and practices reflect institutional racism?
3. What can be done to dismantle racial bias and misconceptions in the American educational system?

COMMON BELIEF 3

Teachers should adapt their instructional practice to the distinctive cultures of African American, Latino, Asian and Native American students.

Background

Teachers who are responsive to their students’ values, beliefs and experiences will be more effective than those who are not. Some generalizations can be made about the cultures of different racial and ethnic groups that can help teachers to begin to understand their students. However, these generalizations also can lead to stereotypes and a failure to recognize that within broad racial and ethnic groupings (e.g., Latino and Asian) there are very big average differences related to subgroups (e.g., Chinese Americans and Cambodian Americans) and social class differences within groups. Moreover, even within subgroups and students of similar socioeconomic status, there are often significant differences in the factors that influence student learning. There is no substitute for getting to know each student well and adapting instruction to these realities.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some ways in which teachers can view the cultures of their students without stereotyping them?
2. How might teachers learn about the cultural perspectives and practices of their students?
3. What is culturally relevant pedagogy?

COMMON BELIEF 4

In some cultures, students are embarrassed to speak in front of others so I take this into account and don’t call on these students in class.

Background

Some students learn lessons in their homes and communities about appropriate behavior that discourage them from participating actively in class discussions. Others prefer to work in small groups or on their own but not to speak out in class. For example, such dispositions are common among some Native American students and some students of Asian descent. Clearly teachers need to be sensitive to such concerns among their students. On the other hand, when students do not learn to express themselves in public settings and to feel confident about their verbal abilities, this may undermine the development of verbal skills, and of literacy more generally. This, in turn, limits

their willingness and capacity to take on certain potentially rewarding roles and responsibilities. Of course, the reluctance of some students to engage in class may not be an artifact of culture at all. Thus, generalizations about cultural characteristics should be treated as possible explanations rather than definitive diagnoses.

Questions to Consider

1. How does a culturally relevant curriculum validate the cultural identity of students?
2. What is the connection between students' cultural identities and knowledge of their history? To explore these and other questions, take a closer look at the resources below.

COMMON BELIEF 5

When students come from homes where educational achievement is not a high priority, they often don't do their homework and their parents don't come to school events. This lack of parental support undermines my efforts to teach these students.

Background

When families (not all students live with or are primarily cared for by one or more parents) do not get engaged in supporting their children's learning, the job of the teacher is more difficult. The reasons why families don't get involved are many. They may lack interest, but more often parents cannot get to the school, feel that they lack the knowledge of resources to help, or feel that they do not know what their role should be. This is especially true, of course, for families from some cultures, for those who do not feel comfortable with English and for single parents who may work more than one job and have responsibilities for caring for other children. Schools that support teachers in reaching out to families in several ways, and that see family engagement as a school-wide responsibility, can significantly increase the extent to which families help their children do well in school.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some explanations for why parents avoid coming to their children's school?
2. How can educators invite and encourage the involvement of families?

COMMON BELIEF 6

It is not fair to ask students who are struggling with English to take on challenging academic assignments.

Background

It is certainly true that English Language Learners (ELLs) who are struggling with English may, and probably will have, more trouble with tasks that require reading than students whose native language is English. However, when English language learners are asked to do less challenging work than other students, they can fall behind and, perhaps, stay behind. In some cases, difficulty with English is erroneously perceived by educators as limited academic ability. Teachers need to guard against having low expectations for English language learners and using biased assessments that reinforce those low expectations. The challenge is to engage all students in learning content at relatively high levels. This means that teachers need to seek or provide extra help for students whose English is limited to ensure that they have the same learning opportunities as their English speaking peers. Easier said than done, of course. But it is important to recognize that English language learners often need years to master academic language, which is more complex than the

social language they acquire more quickly. Therefore, English language learners need to begin to learn academic language immediately, to prevent them from falling behind.

Questions to Consider

1. How can teachers both view and utilize students' home language in a positive manner?
2. How can teachers facilitate the development of academic English for ELLs?

COMMON BELIEF 7

I believe that I should reward students who try hard, even if they are not doing well in school because building their self-esteem is important.

Background

It is certainly true that students who are confident in their ability to do well in school achieve at higher levels than do students with the same ability who lack this sense of efficacy. However, if students come to believe that they are achieving at high levels when they are not, this can lead to a belief that they need not work harder. If they realize that other, less-able students are receiving recognitions similar to theirs, this may lead students to believe that less is expected of them than their classmates. This, of course, is the case—less is being expected and students can take this as evidence that they do not have the ability to achieve at high levels. High self-esteem does not, in itself, translate to high academic performance. But, when high self-esteem is derived from solid performance in school, this contributes to student engagement and effort to improve further.

Question to Consider

1. What do teachers need to keep in mind as they raise the learning expectations for students who are not as confident in their capabilities as learners?

COMMON BELIEF 8

I try to keep in mind the limits of my students' abilities and give them assignments that I know they can do so that they do not become discouraged.

Background

Students do need to experience success in order to stay motivated. It makes sense, therefore, to give students work that they can accomplish. The potential downside here is that this will lead to lower expectations by both students and teachers. The challenge for teachers, then, is to be clear about the ultimate academic goal and ensure that students engage in increasingly demanding work in order to meet that goal. When that work is accompanied by teacher support and the expectation of success, students achieve at high levels.

Question to Consider

1. What are some ways that educators can simultaneously have high expectations of their students and acknowledge their individual needs?

COMMON BELIEF 9

Students of different races and ethnicities often have different learning styles and good teachers will match their instruction to these learning styles.

Background

Many teachers have learned that they should take into account the learning styles of their students. But the concept of learning styles has different meanings and much recent research on learning does not talk about learning styles. Among the reasons why many cognitive psychologists discount the importance of learning styles is that this intuitively sensible idea is easily abused. For example, we all prefer to learn in some ways more than others. But this does not mean that our brains function differently when we learn. And, if our preferences are reinforced, we may fail to learn how to learn in other ways. Since we cannot control the demands on us to learn, especially outside of school, being taught in terms of our preferred “learning style” can limit our success in solving problems. Some ways of describing learning styles—such as distinctions between “concrete operationalizing” and “abstract conceptualization” (or “logical-mathematical” and “bodily-kinesthetic”)—implicitly represent a hierarchy of academic learning capabilities. Thus, students not challenged to learn to conceptualize complex phenomena will be disadvantaged in taking on many tasks most highly valued by society and essential to complex problem solving.

Question to Consider

1. What are some ways that educators can have high expectations of their students, while acknowledging their individual needs?

COMMON BELIEF 10

Grouping students of different levels of achievement for instruction may benefit some students, but it can undermine the progress that could otherwise be made by higher-achieving students.

Background

The research suggests that most students can benefit from participating in learning groups comprised of students who have different levels of achievement and in which students of different races and ethnicities participate. But to say that this can be the case is not to say that it will. The success of heterogeneous groups depends a great deal on the extent to which teachers carefully structure group work and prepare all students to participate, taking into account the needs and dispositions of each student. There are also times when students need instruction targeted on particular skills and should be grouped with students who have similar needs. Educators should avoid tracking students by ability and should strive for grouping strategies that best enhances students' opportunities to learn.

Question to Consider

1. What are some strategic approaches to using group learning in the classroom?

COMMON BELIEF 11

Before students are asked to engage in complex learning tasks, they need to have a solid grasp of basic skills.

Background

The “basic skills first” approach to learning is intuitively sensible and is reinforced by some curricula. Of course, students must learn basic skills. However, when students are not given challenging problem solving tasks at early stages of their cognitive development, it is likely that they will not develop important skills and dispositions. This is particularly problematic for students who do not experience opportunities for problem solving (high cognitive demand) in their homes. So, when the curriculum turns to lessons that demand the ability to make judgments and

inferences, basic skills first students will be disadvantaged. Moreover, when students are struggling with so-called basic skills, but are not given more demanding work in school, these students may not learn how interesting and useful learning can be. Additionally, when basic skills are taught in isolation from authentic contexts—such as a worksheet rather than a short story—students do not learn to apply what they have been taught or recognize what they have learned in a variety of contexts. Teachers need to ensure that struggling students do not become struggling thinkers.

Question to Consider

1. What are some ways to incorporate complex problem solving in basic-skills assignments?

COMMON BELIEF 12

With all the pressures to raise student achievement, finding and using examples of the cultural, historic and everyday lived experiences of my students takes valuable away (or could take away) time from teaching and learning what matters most.

Background

In many schools throughout the country, high stakes accountability programs have pressured teachers to narrow the curriculum and focus on the short-run task of having students do well on the next standardized test. If this means that teachers do not have time or motivation to try to understand how their students' dispositions and experiences related to race and ethnicity can influence their learning, the likely result will be lower student achievement, especially for students who may be struggling the most. Good teaching requires that teachers build on their students' prior knowledge. Moreover, students learn best when they feel recognized and acknowledged for the aspects of their identity they deem important. When students feel that their identities are ignored or not respected, they often disengage from learning and adopt a stance of outsider among strangers. As most teachers recognize, achievement tests measure only part of what it is important for students to learn and "achievement" is not the same as learning.

Question to Consider

1. How might you make time to better understand your students, even in a climate that favors high-stakes test preparation over student-teacher relationships?

COMMON BELIEF 13

Talking about race with my colleagues could open up a can of worms — little good is likely to come from it.

Background

Talking about what appear to be racial issues with respect to student interactions, student-teacher interactions or interactions among members of the school staff is uncommon. Race is a "hot button" in our country and it may feel that discussing potential misunderstandings or conflicts will make things worse. Moreover, many worry about being seen as insensitive or preoccupied with race. No doubt some issues that could be race-related are not. But, this cannot be known without bringing up the issue. While the country has made great progress in reducing racial prejudice and discrimination, negative stereotypes, concerns about fairness, and the absence of comfort in interracial relationships persist, especially when the stakes of common action or the resolution of interpersonal conflict are high. In schools where racial issues are openly dealt with, school leaders

make clear that it is important to be candid and to trust one another while ensuring that action is taken when problems are surfaced.

Questions to Consider

1. Why is it important to openly discuss issues that are seen as having racial dimensions?
2. What do educators need to do to foster productive examination of issues that are seen by some—or all—as being influenced by the race or ethnicity? What are some examples of effective strategies for initiating and facilitating conversations about race?

Appendix BWorkshop Action Plan

Directions: Fill in the blanks with your goals for the immediate future.

One trend that stood out to me was...	One thing I will do to help target this trend is...
One thing I learned about my beliefs was...	One thing I will do to challenge myself in this area is...
One student that I want to get to know better is...	I will get to know the student better by...

Appendix C

Procedural Fidelity Checklist

Steps of Plan	Check for Completion
1) Teachers enter and are given a roster of their first or second period class.	
2) Teachers will be instructed to write down at least one thing they know about each student in the selected class. They will also fill out the “Common Beliefs Survey” printed on the back of their roster.	
3) Teachers will be asked to categorize each thing they wrote as Academic, Behavioral, or Not Related to School	
4) Facilitator will lead discussion about observations about what teachers knew about the students in that class	
5) Teachers will write what they think “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy” means on the back of the roster (Purpose #1)	
6) Facilitator will prompt teachers to share their response with a partner.	
7) Facilitator will show real definition (Purpose #1)	
8) Facilitator will lead discussion about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy a). Review purpose of workshop, importance of knowing students, review the content of information on roster b) Address school district kickoff in 2013 and unintended negative results	
9) Facilitator will present information about implicit bias. This will address several common questions regarding this topic. (Purpose #2)	
10) Facilitator will explain task for purpose number one. a) With one Common Belief Explanation, complete the following: i) Read through the statement, the background provided by Teaching Tolerance, and the Questions to Consider ii) Discuss agreement, indifference, or disagreement with statement iii) Create a poster and include the following (1) The statement (2) Bullet points with main ideas of the background	

(3) An answer to one of the Questions to Consider	
11) Groups take turns sharing responses and thoughts	
12) Facilitator will introduce topic of discipline data (Purpose #3 and #4) and lead brief discussion about data	
13) Facilitator will share grade level data with teachers	
14) Teachers will make observations about noticeable trends	
15) Teachers will make an action plan by filling in the following sentences a) One trend that stood out to me was _____. b) One thing I will do to help target this trend is _____. c) One thing I learned about my beliefs was _____. d) One thing I will do to challenge myself in this area is _____. e) One student that I want to get to know better is _____. f) I will get to know the student better by _____.	

Appendix DCulturally Relevant Pedagogy Lesson PlanMaterials Needed:

- PowerPoint
- Projector Screen
- Rosters for first or second period class of each participant
- Action plan papers

Objective:

Participants will use information about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy to recognize implicit bias in regards to classroom discipline by completing and discussing a survey about beliefs, looking at student behavior data, and creating a plan of action to address the subjective behaviors of defiance, disruption, and disrespect.

Purpose:

The purpose of this workshop is to learn about how Culturally Relevant Pedagogy can be beneficial to teachers and students. The workshop aims to bring awareness to participants regarding their implicit bias and how that impacts their methods of classroom discipline.

Participants will also use data about their grade level to note specific trends.