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Diversity Coordinator Training

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Abstract

The Restorative Justice Program in The Schools is an agency that helps students, facilities and family members resolve conflict in a restorative method and helps them understand the result of their actions. Historically, students of color continue to have a higher suspension rate than white students. Providing coordinators with answers to help students with their questions about race and ethnicity in the schools can help eliminate students' own misunderstandings that contribute to disputes that result in suspensions. The contributing factors are minimal parental engagement and implicit bias and discriminatory practices. The consequences include academic achievement gap and increased drop out risk. The project's purpose is to provide a comprehensive workshop training for RJP school coordinators to have conversations with students about race and ethnicity so students will be able to engage in the conversation. The most important findings were that the school coordinators needed guidance on the topic of race and ethnicity and were more comfortable speaking about ethnicity rather than race. After the workshop training their confidence increased about the topic. It is recommended that the workshop training continues to be implemented and be updated every academic year.

Keywords: Restorative, Schools, Suspensions, Race, Ethnicity

Agency & Communities Served

Agency

The Restorative Justice Partners agency in Marina, particularly works with the schools in the Salinas Unified School District. Restorative Justice Partners (RJP) is an organization that brings people who have been a victim and those who have committed a conflict with families or community members together in a more restorative justice practices to create resolutions that can demonstrate empathy, accountability and fairness (Restorative Justice Partners, 2024-b). The Restorative Justice (RJ) in Schools program, “was started in 2010, partnering with one elementary school district, and now it has grown to actively serve nearly 25 schools spanning five districts and grades K-12” (Restorative Justice Partners, Inc., 2024-a, para 10). “RJ in Schools offers professional development training for staff, peer-mediation training for students, and practical tools for community building and finding solutions with one another” (Restorative Justice Partners, Inc, 2024-a, para 10). The mission is “RJP, Inc. works with those affected by conflict, providing support and education to encourage accountability, empathy, and reparation” (Restorative Justice Partners, Inc., 2024-b, para 2). “Restorative Justice in the Schools...vision is school communities committed to building and repairing relationships which create and sustain safe learning environments” (Restorative Justice Partners, Inc., 2024-c, p. 2). The programs that Restorative Justice Partners offers to the community are VORP (Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs), Restorative Justice in the Schools, MAP (Merchant Accountability Panel), Circles of Hope reintegration community building and solution finding and lastly VIP (Victim Impact Program). Along with the programs some of the services that are

included within the respective programs are providing support in circles, peer mediation and workshop training for teachers, administrators and parents.

Community Served

RJ in the Schools serves communities of Soledad Main Street Middle, Gabilan Elementary, Vista Verde Middle, Natividad Elementary, Laurel Wood Elementary, Mission Park Elementary, Monterey Park Elementary, Los Padres and Monte Bella. According to the California State Department of Education enrollment for grades K through 12 of Monterey County from 2021-2022 the demographics RJ serves in schools are African American 894, American Indian or Alaska Native 210, Asian 1,218, Filipino 1,144, Hispanic or Latino 63,363, Pacific Islander 316, White 8,434, two or more races 1,366 and not reported 443 (California State Department of Education, 2022, page 1).

Problem Model Background and Literature Review

Problem Statement

Too many children of color are experiencing expulsion and suspension in middle schools in California. Each school district differs in how they discipline students. For most public schools they believe that suspension and expulsions are the solution to discipline students for their actions. Reasons for suspensions and expulsions may vary between each school district in Salinas some examples may be violence, property damage, miss class time and interruption of class time. According to the Learning Policy Institute “suspensions do not address any of the underlying reasons that may be leading to behavioral incidents, nor do they create opportunities for students to learn new approaches to communicating or resolving conflicts” (Leung-Gagne et al., 2023, para. 2). Students are not learning how to resolve conflict instead they are only aware

of a punitive method. Vista Verde Middle school has shared their concerns Two teachers mentioned “they don't agree with the Restorative Justice Methods and they believe in the putative method and students should be punished for their actions,” and it is really unfortunate that one of the teachers believes her school has extremely dangerous students (Vista Verde, Professional Communication March 15, 2023). The Equal Justice Society (2016) reports that “The school-to-prison pipeline ensnares a disproportionate percentage of students of color, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ youth. Black students are suspended and expelled 3 times more often than White students” (Equal Justice Society, 2016, para. 4). The development of racial inclusivity between school staff and students is very crucial as students are learning who they are as individuals. Liu (2023) stated, “...Black students are more than twice as likely to have received at least one disciplinary referral as their white peers in the same school” (para. 8).

The Soledad MainStreet Middle School has also shared their overwhelming suspensions due to racist interaction and communication within the students (Mr. Zepeda, Professional Communication, October 2, 2023). Many schools are facing inappropriate language with the way students communicate with each other. Figure 1 in Appendix A demonstrates the racial inequalities with suspensions. The California State Department of Education reported that in the 2021-2022 academic year the highest suspension was for Hispanic or Latino at 3.2%, American Indian or Alaskan Native 2.4%, African American are 1.8%, followed by White 1.9% (California State Department of Education, 2022, page 1).

Figure 1 in Appendix A demonstrates the Enrollment Multi-Year Summary by Ethnicity in the Salinas Union School District. Figure 2 below demonstrates the problem model explaining the contributing factors and consequences of students of color experiencing expulsions and suspensions.

Figure 2: Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Minimal parental engagement	Too many children of color are experiencing expulsion and suspension in middle schools in California.	Academic Achievement Gap
Implicit Bias and Discriminatory Practices		Increased Dropout Risk

Contributing Factors

Minimal parental engagement

There are still ongoing differences of opinions between teachers in which some continue to believe in a more punitive punishment rather than a restorative approach. The teachers can also perceive these students to be dangerous or lacking intellect because of their family disengagement or skin color. The Institute for Family indicated that “family structure accounts for a larger share of the racial gap in school suspensions” (Zills & Wilcox, 2019, para. 7). Families also contribute to suspension. Parents who are more involved in their child's education tend to have less suspensions than those who aren't. Most of the students in the county come from large families. If parents aren't engaged in their child's lives they tend to fall into rebellious behavior. Students will violate school property and engage in disruptive behavior in the class and with peers causing them to get suspended. Research shows that “looking at children’s academic and social development across first, third and fifth grade found that improvements in parental involvement are associated with fewer ‘problem behaviors’ in students” (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022, para. 30). There are little resources provided for bilingual parents from many schools. For most parents English is not their first language, and they are not familiar with navigating technology which makes it more difficult for parents to be involved in their child's academics.

Implicit Bias and Discriminatory Practices

Implicit biases can affect a person's judgment towards others. According to the American Bar Association, “Implicit bias affects various aspects of education, including discipline, disabilities, and access to gifted programs, leading to disproportionate negative impacts on Black school children” (Scialabba, 2017, para. 4). Unfortunately, this can lead to students of color feeling overlooked and not interested in participating or their educational advancement. Students coming from lower socioeconomic families are more likely to be suspended for multiple reasons according to Bradley (2023), “Poverty affects a child’s brain development, inhibiting their ability to learn and understand. In addition, lower-income students go to schools with insufficient funding and resources: quality teachers or the lack thereof increase the inability to provide for these students adequately” (Bradley, 2023, para.1). These factors can eventually lead to students to be at higher risk of conflict in the classroom or with their peers leading to suspensions.

The American Bar Association states, “Black schoolchildren are disproportionately affected as they are three times as likely as their white counterparts to be suspended or expelled from school for the same infractions” (Scialabba, 2017, para. 21). Restorative Justice in the schools practices inclusivity among the community and aims to reduce discriminatory practice and is a preventive measure before suspensions and expulsions. As stated by Disciplinary referrals, teachers, and the sources of racial disciplinary disproportionalities, “Specifically, Black students were about two percentage points more likely to be suspended than white students involved in the exact same incident (nearly doubling the base rate of 2.6% for white students)” (Liu, 2023, para. 9).

Consequences

Academic Achievement Gap

The academic achievement gap can have a large effect on a student's education and future. According to Seton Hall University “...research shows that suspension has a negative impact on both academic achievement and poor life outcomes” (Casazza, 2016, para. 1). Ultimately these students are brilliant with so much potential that is being left behind and it continues to occur. Students of color continue to be a target of suspensions which leads to them falling behind in school work and possibly losing interest in their academics. As mentioned by Education Week, “students who are suspended out of school are at higher risk of not only lower academic performance, but also disengagement” (Sparks, 2019, para, 12). If students continue to miss out on their education due to suspensions they will lose interest and will continue to be a target.

Increased Dropout Risk

Suspension and expulsions can disrupt a child's education that can lead to missed class time, falling behind in coursework and later affecting their future. Students who dropout of school and not earn a highschool diploma are at higher risk of employment opportunities. Research proves that suspensions are causing a negative impact in a students education. According to *Student and school factors associated with school suspension: A multilevel analysis of students in Victoria, Australia and Washington State, United States*, “School suspension has been associated with negative consequences for suspended students including a higher risk of academic failure and school dropout” (Hemphill, 2014, para.7). Targeting students of color by sending them out of classrooms and receiving a larger punishment by suspensions and expulsions creates a mistrust within the students and the school. A paper, published in the *American Journal of Education*, indicated that suspensions contribute to students passing fewer classes, increasing their risk of dropping out, and lowering the odds of graduating (Chu & Ready, 2018).

Project Description and Implementation Process

Project Description

The capstone project will be focusing on training RJ in School staff. I will provide workshop training to administrators and staff in the schools of a more inclusive approach rather than a racial approach to reduce racism in middle schools.

The components I'm responsible for introducing to RJP staff are the resources and tools needed to increase inclusivity. I have attended a Radical Transformational Leadership training which teaches how to create change as leaders that helps design system change (M. Joseph, personal communication, September 27, 2023). I continued to attend two course sessions from the National Coalition Building Institute and form a workshop training to introduce RJP to school staff. The workshop contains how to approach talking to students about race. When proceeding to make a conversation about race with students it's important to start with simple use of words to explain the concepts such as racism and racial justice (Deutsch & Giraud, 2024). Using simple words will allow children to feel like they can contribute to the conversation and stay engaged.

Project Justification & Benefits

The primary purpose of this project will be to advocate for anti-racism in the schools and to create inclusivity from staff towards the students. This project influenced teachers to have a more open mind towards students of color and avoid targeting students. It will get teachers to think about embracing race and being comfortable to have a more positive approach. For example the Soledad middle school principal has reached out and responded they would like to start implementing Restorative Justice services. "We are starting to implement Restorative

Justice Partners workshops training due to the high amount of suspensions they have been facing in this starting academic year” (Mr. Maturino, Professional Communication, October 10, 2023).

The agency expects as a result of this project for middle school students to prevent bullying and excluding each other because of their race and for teachers to stop targeting students of color by kicking students out of the classroom. The positive impact the project will provide is creating a learning environment in which students from diverse ethnic and racial groups believe that they are heard and are valued and will experience respect, belonging and encouragement. It will reduce prejudice by developing strategies to help students acquire positive racial attitudes.

Expected Outcomes & Assessment Plan

The total number of participants that were expected to participate was eight RJP school coordinators from both Salinas/South County school districts and Monterey Peninsula district. What was expected from the workshop was a training on how to communicate with children about race and ethnicity. The coordinators were expected to receive training on how to explain some racial terms to young children in a language in which they would understand (Russell, n.d.). The workshop was intended to have guidance on simple words so children feel like they can participate in the conversation. It included an activity that would allow each coordinator to do the mirror effect (Russell, n.d.). The mirror effect activity's purpose is in order to be comfortable speaking about race and ethnicity each individual must be comfortable with themselves. So they each draw what they see in the mirror and share their differences or similarities. The assessment plan for the project was to entail a pre-post survey. The school coordinators had five days to fill out the pre survey before the date of the Diversity Coordinator training. The survey held eight open-ended questions to have a better perspective on their opinions and sense of their comfortability with the subject of race and ethnicity around children.

Implementation Process

The implementation process of the project, detailed in Appendix B, started with researching different organizations that would help build and create the workshop. I started with the Radical Transformational Leadership organization (RTL) through Zoom meetings held by Megan Joseph. RTL helps design and change other organizations. It helps develop a blueprint to create change. RTL takes time to design “breakthrough changes, routine everyday activities, and task opportunities for transformational change” (M. Joseph, personal communication, September 27, 2023). I followed up by researching another organization called the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI). I attended an NCBI event with my mentor Jennie Burciaga that introduced their organization. During this NCBI event that was held by Steven Goings, they shared the purpose of the organization which includes “activities that bring people together from a diverse community including ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability and class” (S. Goings, personal communication, November 4, 2023). The event had a panel of different ethnicities in which each person had to answer or comment on different questions. Moving forward I started researching Embrace Race. With this organization, I have attended Zoom events introducing the organization in which they explain their mission. I continued to watch their videos on lectures and research on how to have conversations about race with children and got familiar with their action guide. According to Robin Deutsch and Melissa Giraud, their mission statement is “Since 2016, EmbraceRace has supported parents, guardians, educators, and other caregivers working to raise children who are thoughtful, informed and brave about race so that U.S. multiracial democracy can thrive” (Deutsch & Giraud, 2024, para. 2). I decided to continue to move forward with Embrace Race methods. The reason to move forward with Embrace Race was because their main focus is education for adults on how to have

conversation with children about race and ethnicity where a child will stay engaged in the conversation.

The next steps to develop the workshop were by Embrace Race and their action guide by Nicole Russell. It includes four steps for the coordinators to incorporate as they attend schools to teach them how to talk to students about race and ethnicity. The four steps state a clear direction by having examples and scenarios to have appropriate conversations about race and ethnicity with children. Examples from The Action Guide from Embrace Race included building or joining a community that wants to learn about race and ethnicity, using vocabulary terms that are appropriate for the coordinators to include in their language when having conversations with students so students feel like they can be a part of the conversation and stay engaged, and starting to talk about race and ethnicity and how to take these chances (Russell, n.d.). The workshop also includes the importance for each coordinator to face their own biases when dealing with difficult situations. Lastly the workshop will hold an activity called the mirror effect (Russell, n.d.). With this activity, each coordinator has a mirror and draws what they see of themselves. This helps assist them in getting to appreciate who they are as individuals, as well as acknowledge the beauty in our differences. The pre-questionnaires were sent out on March 4th with eight questions, with a five day time frame for each coordinator to respond. The workshop was an hour and half long on March 18th at 12pm. There was a follow up of eight post questions. It took place at the Marina office with food and beverages being provided. Attendance and results were analyzed on April 1st following the training.

Project Results

The two coinciding goals of this workshop training are to provide RJP school coordinators with answers to help students with their questions about race and ethnicity and to

reduce suspensions. The goal to reduce suspensions was for teachers to stop targeting students of color and to create inclusivity from staff towards students. The goal to reduce suspensions did not come to fruition because it was a different target audience that was less accessible to an intern. Separating these two goals into two different workshops would be more beneficial. However, the goal to provide RJP school coordinators with answers to help students with their questions about race and ethnicity did occur.

The purpose of the pre and post survey was to showcase if RJP coordinators were prepared to answer questions about race and ethnicity students may have during circles and peer mediation. There was a clear pattern for the pre questionnaire and post survey to showcase if RJP coordinators are prepared to answer questions about race and ethnicity students may have during circles and peer mediation. For the first question, RJP coordinators were asked how they identify with race and ethnicity. From the project results gathered from the pre and post survey, the outcome delivered that first generation coordinators identify with their country of origin. Second generation identify by their race (see figure three question one in Appendix C). The second question (see figure three) asked how comfortable coordinators feel answering a student's race and ethnicity question. From the pre questionnaire, the outcome was RJP coordinators required guidance. When asked, the common answer was "it depends on the question." After the workshop training, their post answer indicated they feel more comfortable but will require practice. For the third question (see figure three in Appendix C), when asked "do you feel prepared to talk about race and ethnicity with students," the answer was they feel comfortable to talk about ethnicity but not about race. The school coordinators' responses for the post questionnaire changed. They are eager to continue to learn more about the topic and feel better prepared than they did before.

The outcome fell short in terms of the number of respondents. For the pre questionnaire, there were a total of four respondents, and for the post questionnaire there were two. Despite the fact that there were some pre survey respondents who did not complete the post survey, the responses that were collected supported the goal of this project which was to prepare the school coordinators about race and ethnicity questions. There was a clear pattern for the pre questionnaire. They were unsure how to identify with race and ethnicity, required guidance, and did not feel prepared about this topic. After the four school coordinators attended the workshop training, the two who responded to the post questionnaire indicated that they felt prepared, confident and will need to implement the tools given to them by practicing. The delivery of the workshop was able to meet the goal. The RJP coordinators feel more prepared and confident to answer students' questions about race and ethnicity but will require some practice.

Conclusion & Recommendations

To conclude, although the project's direct impact on reducing school suspensions was not assessed, advocating for a more inclusive approach rather than a racial approach offers the potential to reduce suspensions. This is important because suspensions' effectiveness to increase student accountability is very limited and can create inequalities and educational gaps for students of color.

The goal of increasing students' access to answers about race and ethnicity was achieved by providing tools for school coordinators . Children may experience racism and they have questions that are not being answered. Race and ethnicity can be a very complex topic. The results indicated that people are more comfortable speaking of ethnicity rather than race. Creating an informative workshop training for RJ in schools coordinators has made them more

confident on both race and ethnicity. This workshop has provided them answers to students' questions.

The main recommendation arising from this experience is to continue advocating for a more inclusive diverse approach rather than a racial approach. Students see color, they notice racism and hear conversations about race and ethnicity. Students require guidance on this topic or they will create their own conclusion regarding race and ethnicity. As the agency continues to grow within more partnerships with schools and new staff, it is recommended that RJ consider making this workshop training a yearly semester training for the schools coordinators.

Race and ethnicity has become a political topic intended to divide people. Race and ethnicity is a topic that is always changing and evolving. Constantly updating the workshop with new material is beneficial to be better prepared and equipped. This is a topic everyone can always learn more about and is constantly changing. Having the workshop as a yearly semester requirement and adding new material will make each school coordinator more confident about race and ethnicity.

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Appendix A

Figure 1: SUSD Enrollment Multi-Year Summary by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Cumulative Enrollment	Total Suspension	Unduplicated Count of Students Suspended	Suspension Rate	Percent of Students Suspended with One Suspension	Percent of Students Suspended with Multiple Suspensions
African American	894	22	16	1.8%	68.8%	31.3%
American Indian or Alaska Native	210	7	5	2.4%	60.0%	40.0%
Asian	1,218	10	9	0.7%	88.9%	11.1%
Filipino	1,144	9	9	0.8%	100.0%	0.0%
Hispanic or Latino	63,363	2,916	2,034	3.2%	75.6%	24.4%
Pacific Islander	316	2	2	0.6%	100.0%	0.0%
White	8,434	250	163	1.9%	67.5%	32.5%
Two or More Races	1,366	36	25	1.8%	72.0%	28.0%
Not Reported	443	9	8	1.8%	87.5%	12.5%

(California State Department of Education, 2022, page 1)

Appendix B

Figure 2: Project Implementation Plan

Tasks	Timeline/ Deadlines	Parties Involved	Materials/ Services Needed	Deliverables
Radical Transformational Leadership	9/27/23	Megan Joseph	Zoom Link	Meeting
National Coalition Building Institute	11/4/23	Steven Goings, Jennie Burciaga	Office space	Training Workshop Development
Embrace Race	10/9/23	Robin Deutsch, Melissa Giraud	Laptop	Research Development
Create pre-post survey	11/1/2023	Ignacio Navarro	Laptop	Outcome results
Meeting with mentor for workshop development	02/19/2023 02/26/2023 03/4/2023 03/11/2023	Jennie Burciaga	Office Space	Feedback
Create Workshop	01/31/24 02/19/2023 02/26/2023 03/4/2023 03/11/2023	Robin Deutsch, Melisa Giraud, Jennie Burciaga	Office space, Laptop	Training
Present Workshop	March 18th	Jennie Burciaga, Jocelyn Mendoza, Citlali Galvan, Monica Pulido, Kyara Molina, Nadia Hernandez, Elaine Levario	Office space, Mirrors, Projector, Food and beverages	Training
Conduct evaluation	March 4th-March 18th	Jennie Burciaga, Jocelyn Mendoza, Citlali Galvan, Monica Pulido, Kyara Molina, Nadia Hernandez, Elaine Levario	Survey	Results and outcomes

Appendix C

Figure 3: Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey

1) How do you identify race/ethnicity?	white, caucasian	Ethnicity is defined. by one's cultural background. Race is more complex. I personally believe in one human race, but it is not that simple. Over time, race was identified based on physical characteristics. Personally, it is difficult to define race so that it makes sense to me. I believe I understand the text book definition, but it doesn't always feel like it is complete to me.	Mixed Race (Black, Samoan, & Argentinian)	The process of determining one's race or ethnicity is complex and involves factors such as self-identification, ancestry, cultural background, and physical attributes, all of which are considered within a particular social and historical framework. It's critical to recognize that race and ethnicity are multifaceted, socially created notions that are subject to change. Relying on an individual's self-identification is the most accurate and considerate method of determining their race or ethnicity, taking into account the diversity and fluidity that exist within racial and ethnic groups. Due consideration for historical, cultural, and personal aspects is necessary for this process, which highlights the value of polite and honest communication.
2) How comfortable do you feel answering a student's race and ethnicity questions?	I feel moderately comfortable answering a student's questions about race and ethnicity. I try to be honest about how I feel, what I think and that I realize there is still a lot I don't know and need to keep learning. I am also trying to get better about remembering to ask a child what they think first to gain their perspective and insight	It depends on the question they may ask. For the most part, I believe I can handle questions about ethnicity. The thought of answering questions about race makes me feel nervous.	Fairly comfortable but would love to learn more about best approaches to answering those questions	Depending on the question, I feel somewhat comfortable answering a student's race & ethnicity question. There are some questions where I can feel confident in answering, but other questions there may be challenges on answering questions.
3) Do you feel prepared to talk about race and ethnicity with students?	At times I feel prepared to talk about race and ethnicity with students, but most of the time I also wonder what might be better said, and how to make sure I am holding a respectful space for them to grow and learn together with me.	I feel more prepared talking about ethnicity with students than I do about race.	Not fully prepared not	Depending on which aspect of race & ethnicity, I would feel prepared to talk about race & ethnicity with students.

Post-Survey

1) How do you identify race/ethnicity?	White/European American	Race is based on physical characteristics and Ethnicity is based more on one's culture
2) After the workshop training, how comfortable do you feel answering a student's race and ethnicity questions?	I feel comfortable answering students' questions	I feel better. I just need to practice.
3) After the workshop training, do you feel prepared to talk about race and ethnicity with students?	I feel prepared to talk about race and ethnicity, and know that I will continue to be eager to learn more from them as well as how to best be in service with them	I feel more prepared than I did before