Implicit Bias in School Discipline Decisions: Strategies to Enhance Equity

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Thank you…

For being educators, advocates for our students, and devoting time to improving our society

Acknowledgements

Getting going…

Turn to a neighbor

What do you want to get out of this session?
Starting Questions:
How much do you agree?

1. I am **aware** of my personal biases.
2. I am **concerned** about the consequences of bias in education.
3. I have **effective strategies** for reducing bias in educational decisions.

(Devine et al., 2012)

Overview for this Session

1. Complete some **activities** to explore disproportionality in school discipline
2. Share an **intervention approach** for enhancing equity in school discipline
3. Guide you through a **data** driven process for:
   1. Identify **causes and solutions**
   2. **Change environments** to prevent challenges
   3. **Build skills** in responding to challenges

Handouts: [http://www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)

Ground Rules

- Ask questions throughout
- Speak your truth
- Get comfortable with discomfort

(Warm Up Activity: Implicit Association Test)

- [https://implicit.harvard.edu/](https://implicit.harvard.edu/)
- Uses beliefs (stereotypes) and evaluations (attitudes) associated with social groups
- Example: Gender-Career IAT
  - Tests automatic association of MEN more with CAREERS (work outside the home) and WOMEN more with FAMILY

(Adapted from Singleton, 2015)
Think Pair Share

- What did you notice about completing the activity?
- How might patterns of responses on this activity relate to real world interactions?

What is implicit bias?

- Unconscious, automatic
- Generally not an indication of our beliefs and values
- We all have it (even those affected by it)
- Based on stereotypes
- More likely to influence:
  - Snap decisions
  - Decisions that are ambiguous

Implicit Attractiveness Bias
(Salter, Mixon, & King, 2012)

Implicit Height Bias
(Judge & Cable, 2004)

One inch of height is worth $789 per year in salary
Implicit Bias and Race

“the challenge is not a small number of twisted white supremacists but something infinitely more subtle and complex: People who believe in equality but who act in ways that perpetuate bias and inequality.”

-Nicholas Kristof, *The New York Times*
Implicit Bias predicts the extent to which...

- Arbitrators decide labor grievances in favor of women over men (Girvan, Deason, & Borgida, 2015)

- Teachers of students with ASD experience anxiety, depression, and professional burnout (Kelly & Barnes-Holmes, 2013)
Police Officers use force when arresting Black children as opposed to White children (Goff et al., 2014)

Pediatricians recommend less pain medication for Black children than White children with identical symptoms (Cooper et al., 2012; Sabin & Greenwald, 2012)

Implicit Bias Research: 
Racism is Real (Brave New Films)

Disproportionality in School Discipline

Out of School Suspension Risk Index 
2013-14 US Schools (n = 95,507)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTcSVQJ2h8g
Addressing Common Questions

“Isn’t it all really about poverty?”

- Poverty plays a role, but racial disproportionality remains, even when controlling for poverty
  - Anyon et al., 2014
  - Skiba et al., 2002; 2005
  - Wallace et al., 2008

Addressing Common Questions

“Aren’t Black boys just more violent?”

- No evidence of different base rates of behavior for any subgroups
  - Bradshaw et al., 2010
  - Losen & Skiba, 2010
  - Skiba et al., 2014

Addressing Common Questions

“Are you just blaming teachers for a societal problem?”

- Disproportionality comes from unconscious bias – that we all have and aren’t even even aware of.
  - Girvan et al., in press
  - Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014
  - van den Bergh et al., 2010

If you’re aware...

...you’re halfway there.
A Unidimensional View of Bias

Racial Bias → Disproportionate Discipline

A Multidimensional View of Bias

Racial Bias → Situation → Disproportionate Discipline

Two Systems for Decision Making (Kahneman, 2011)

- System 1: **Fast Decisions**
  - Automatic, snap judgments
  - Intuitive, unconscious
- System 2: **Slow Decisions**
  - Deliberate decisions
  - Allows for conscious attention

Discussion

- Which decisions in schools are more likely to be snap judgments?
  - Correcting a student’s behavior
  - Sending a student to the office
  - Picking which student to call on
  - Deciding whether to call a student’s parent
  - Suspending a student from school
  - Grading students’ work
Assumptions

- We all believe that a student’s color should not fate him or her to negative outcomes
- Discussing equity and race is uncomfortable
- Creating discomfort without providing effective strategies for equity is not productive
- In discussing equity and taking steps, we will make mistakes

A 5-point Intervention Approach to Enhance Equity in School Discipline

- Collect, use, and report disaggregated discipline data
- Implement a behavior framework that is preventive, multi-tiered, and culturally responsive
- Use engaging academic instruction to reduce the opportunity (achievement) gap
- Develop policies with accountability for disciplinary equity
- Teach strategies to neutralize implicit bias

5. How can we reduce implicit bias in our decision making?
What is a Vulnerable Decision Point (VDP)?

- A specific decision that is more vulnerable to effects of implicit bias
- Two parts:
  - Elements of the situation
  - The person's decision state (internal state)

What is an Equitable Decision Point (EDP)?

- A specific decision that school/district data shows little to no disproportionality

Situations: Options for Identifying VDPs

1. All ODR/suspension decisions (general self-instruction routine)
2. Identify specific VDPs
   a) Through national data
   b) Your own school or district data
   c) Your own personal VDPs
SWIS Drill Down (www.swis.org)

Add demographic group of interest as a filter (click to “Include in Dataset”).

Click each graph and compare to overall patterns.

National SWIS Data (2011-12)
3,026,367 ODRs
6,269 schools
47 states, plus DC
VDPs from national ODR data

- Subjective problem behavior
  - defiance, disrespect, disruption
  - Major vs. minor
- Non-classroom areas
  - Hallways
- Classrooms
- Afternoons

Multidimensional View of Bias

![Diagram showing Racial Bias leading to Disproportionate Discipline through Situation.]

Situations:
Responses to culturally-situated behaviors

- May be desirable/adaptive outside of school
  - may work/be reinforced in other settings
  - Not necessarily “wrong” – just not for school

Solutions
1. Reframe to student as a strength (acknowledge the positive intent)
2. Be explicit in teaching situational specificity (“code-switching”)
3. Provide extensive practice (ex. + / - signs)

Decision States:
Setting Events

- An event occurring before or with an antecedent that increases likelihood of a behavior
- Sets it up (slow trigger)
- Sometimes is present and sometimes is not
- Does not require one’s awareness
- Examples from students:
As we become fatigued, our filters for appropriate behavior can be affected.

- Effects of hunger (Gailliot et al., 2009)
- Decreases in willpower later in day
  - "The Morning Morality Effect" (Kouchaki & Smith, 2014)
  - Examples…

Handwashing compliance drops 8.7% over the course of a 12-hr shift.

Decision States: Activity - Identify VDPs worksheet

1. What are some common VDP decision states for many adults in schools?

2. What do you think might be possible VDP decision states for you?
When little people are overwhelmed by **BIG EMOTIONS**, it's our job to share **OUR CALM**, not to join their chaos.  
- L.R. Knost.

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**Two-step Neutralizing Routine for Staff:**

- When you see unwanted behavior, stop and ask yourself:
  1. Is this a VDP?
     - Situation
     - Decision state
  2. If so, use an agreed-upon alternative response

**Neutralizing Routines for Reducing Effects of Implicit Bias**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting event</th>
<th>Antecedent</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of positive interactions with student</td>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>Loud complaints about work (subjective behavior)</td>
<td>Send student to office (ODR)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-assessment**: “Is this a vulnerable decision point?”

**Alternative Response**: “See me after class.”

**What makes for a good neutralizing routine?**

1. If-then statement
2. Brief
3. Clear steps
4. Doable
5. Interrupts the chain of events
Neutralizing Routine Examples

- If this is a VDP…,
  - Delay decision until I can think clearly
    - “See me after class/at the next break”
    - ask the student to reflect on their feelings/behavior
    - am I acting in line with my values?
  - Reframe the situation
    - “I love you, but that behavior is not ok”
    - “How do we do that at school?”
    - picture this student as a future doctor/lawyer
    - assume student’s best effort at getting needs met
    - respond as if the student was physically injured
  - Take care of yourself
    - take two deep breaths
    - recognize my upset feelings and let them go
    - model classwide cool-down strategy

Sample Neutralizing Routine

- TRY
  - Take a deep breath
  - Reflect on your emotions
  - Youth’s best interest
    - “Let’s TRY that again.”
    - “Let’s TRY it a different way.”
    - “Let’s TRY it how we do it at school.”

Classwide “Reset” Routine

- TRY for students
  - Take three deep breaths
  - Reflect on your feelings
  - You got this!

- Social-emotional Theme
  - Mistakes are part of the learning process
  - We won’t always do it right the first time
  - We can’t succeed unless we TRY

Question

- How many of you already have and use a neutralizing routine?
  - If so, what is it?
Two-step Neutralizing Routine for **Staff**:

- Can also be used as precorrection
- 1. Am I about to enter a VDP?
- 2. What are my values?
- 3. When I see unwanted behavior, I’ll use the alternative response

**Let’s Practice**

- Watch video
- Discussion Questions
  1. Label this student behavior – what is it?
  2. What do you think the teacher (i.e., you) is thinking right now?
  3. What do you think the student is thinking right now?

**Let’s Practice**

1. Brainstorm possible neutralizing routines
2. Check if each idea has all 5 critical features
   1. If-then statements
   2. Brief
   3. Clear steps
   4. Doable
   5. Add space/delay between behavior and response

**Let’s Practice**

- Watch the video again
- Practice using your neutralizing routine
  - Visualize
- Reflect:
  - Do you like it?
  - Do you think you will use it?
  - Do you think it will be effective? Why/not?
Let’s Practice

- What might you need to use your neutralizing routine more consistently?
  - What reminders would be useful?
  - What else might you need?

“If you inadvertently assist the student to escalate, do not be concerned; you will get another chance to do it right the next time around.”

- Geoff Colvin

School Example

Urban K-8 School

Risk Indices

Referral Risk Index
Major, 2013-14

- Black/White ODR Risk Ratio = 2.67
Drill Down: Phys. Aggression on Playground

Referral Risk Index (Ethnicity)

- Black/White ODR Risk Ratio = 4.5

ODRs and observations indicated differences in perceived basketball rules.
- Team clarified rules for staff and students
  - Aka “code-switching”
- Additional teaching, practice, and acknowledgement
- Monitor with ODRs and Black-White RR

The School PBIS Team’s Intervention

The School PBIS Team’s Intervention Outcomes

Black-White Risk Ratios
- Overall
  - 2013-14: 2.67
  - 2014-15 (Sept to Dec): 2.0
- Physical Aggression on Playground
  - 2013-14: 4.5
  - 2014-15 (Sept to Dec): can’t calculate (1 ODR)

Progress over Time

Office Discipline Referrals Per Day Per 100 Students

(McIntosh, Ellwood, McCall, & Girvan, 2018)
Big Ideas

- Thinking about and discussing solutions is the first step
- Pick a neutralizing routine and try it out
- Use your data to assess and monitor
  - If you don’t have the data you need at hand, advocate for it
- This is hard work – but you know how to do it!

Think Pair Share and Steps Forward

- Turn to partner and share:
  - One aha
  - One ah…huh?
  - One next step

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References


References


References


McIntosh, K., Ellwood, K., McCall, L., & Girvan, E. J. (2018). Using discipline data within a PBIS framework to enhance equity in school discipline. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 53,* 146-152.

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References


