Implicit Bias in School Discipline Decisions: Strategies for Enhancing Equity

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Overview for this Session

1. Complete some activities to explore disproportionality in school discipline
2. Share an intervention approach for enhancing equity in:
   - academic achievement
   - school discipline

Handouts: http://www.pbis.org

Warm Up Activity #2: Stroop Task

- Words are displayed in different colors to test “snap decision” making
- Easier to identify the color of this word: GREEN (i.e., green) than this word: GREEN (i.e., red)
Stroop Task:
A test of automatic associations

- Our brains are wired to look for patterns
- When we are forced to make quick decisions, we use our automatic associations to respond

Warm Up Activity #3:
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

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 Gender Bias
(Reuben et al., 2014)

Men were significantly more likely to choose men

Women were significantly more likely to choose men
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...

- **Police Officers** use force when arresting Black children as opposed to White children (Goff et al., 2014)

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

- **Pediatricians** recommend less pain medication for Black children than White children with identical symptoms (Cooper et al., 2012; Sabin & Greenwald, 2012)
Disproportionality in School Discipline (Losen et al., 2015)

http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/are-we-closing-the-school-discipline-gap

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 saying that all teachers are racist?”

- No! Our research indicates that disproportionality comes from implicit bias – that we’re not even aware of.
  - Banaji & Greenwald, 2013
  - Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014
  - van den Bergh et al., 2010
If you’re aware…

…you’re halfway there.

A Multidimensional View of Bias

- Racial Bias
- Disproportionate Discipline
- Situation

A Unidimensional View of Bias

Racial Bias → 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

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.

Assumptions

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

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

Recommendations for Addressing Discipline Disproportionality in Education

August 7, 2014

http://www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis

http://www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis
1. What do we mean by engaging academic instruction?

- Use explicit instruction
- Build and prime background knowledge
- Increase opportunities to respond
- Provide performance feedback

(Chaparro et al., 2015; Hattie, 2009)

2. Why start with a foundation of SWPBIS?

1. Proactive, instructional approach may prevent unwanted behavior and exposure to biased responses to unwanted behavior
2. Increasing positive student-teacher interactions may enhance relationships to prevent challenges
3. More objective referral and discipline procedures may reduce subjectivity and influence of cultural bias
4. Professional development may provide teachers with more instructional responses

(Greiflund et al., 2014)

Effects of Engaging Instruction on the Opportunity Gap

Tigard-Tualatin School District (Chaparro, Helton, & Sadler, 2016)

Effects of PBIS on Discipline Disproportionality

- Vincent et al., 2011
  - Statistically significantly lower Black-White ODR disproportionality in 72 schools implementing SWPBIS than in 81 schools not implementing SWPBIS
- Vincent et al., 2009
  - Decreases in ODRs seen across racial/ethnic groups in 69 schools implementing SWPBIS
- Scott, 2001
  - Larger decreases in suspensions for Black students when SWPBIS implemented
- McIntosh et al., 2014
  - Sustained decrease in suspensions over eight years of SWPBIS implementation in an Indigenous school
Culturally Responsive SWPBIS Implementation

- Ensure equitable access to praise and acknowledgment systems
- Develop and revise school-wide systems with active involvement of families, students, and the community
- Use regular student and family surveys to assess acceptability and fit

3. Using disaggregated data to assess and address equity

- Disproportionality Data Guide

4. Implement policies with accountability for equity

- Equity Policy Guide

http://www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis

http://www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis
5. How can we reduce implicit bias in our decision making?

A Multidimensional View of Bias

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)

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
Using Discipline Data within SWPBIS to Identify and Address Disproportionality: A Guide for School Teams

This practice guide is one of a series of publications by PBIS focused on enhancing equity in school discipline. The guides are based on a 5-point multi-component intervention described by McInerney, Chen, Thomas, Steeber, and Bybee (2004). The topics include effective instruction, schoolwide PBIS as a foundation for naturally occurring behavior support, fair and equitable disciplinary practices, and reducing bias in discipline decisions. This guide addresses one of these.

The recommendations and guides are available at [http://www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis](http://www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis)

**Introduction**

The purpose of this guide is to provide a framework for PBIS schools to identify and address disproportionality in school discipline. The guide will outline a process and steps for identifying and addressing disproportionality, as well as strategies to reduce the impact of bias in discipline decisions. Specific practices to address disproportionality are described in the guide.

**Audience**

This guide is designed for use by school or district teams working to reduce social and emotional disproportionality in school discipline, regardless of whether they are implementing PBIS.

[http://www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis](http://www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis)

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**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.

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**Office Referrals by Problem Behavior**

**National SWIS Data (2011-12)**

3,026,367 ODRs
6,269 schools
47 states, plus DC

**Office Referrals by Problem Behavior**

White

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<th>Disobedience</th>
<th>Fighting</th>
<th>Inappropriate Language</th>
<th>Inappropriately Dress</th>
<th>Disruption</th>
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Black

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Office Referrals by Location

Office Referrals by Time of Day

VDPs from national ODR data

- Subjective problem behavior
  - Defiance, Disrespect, Disruption
  - Major vs. minor
- Non-classroom areas
  - Hallways
  - Classrooms
  - Afternoons

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 the day.

“The Morning Morality Effect” (Kouchaki & Smith, 2014). Examples...

Decision States: Resource Depletion
(Girvan et al., 2014)

Resource Depletion in Action

Outcomes of parole hearings (Danziger et al., 2011)

Multidimensional View of Bias

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

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…,
  - “See me after class/at the next break”
  - am I acting in line with my values?
  - delay decision until I can think clearly
  - ask the student to reflect on their feelings/behavior
  - take two deep breaths
  - recognize my upset feelings and let them go
  - “I love you, but that behavior is not ok”
  - picture this student as a future doctor/lawyer
  - assume student’s best effort at getting needs met
  - model cool-down strategy
  - know that’s Rock Brain talking to me

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 emotions
  - You got this!

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

Promising Neutralizing Routines

- Delay
  - “See me after class.”

- Classroom cooldown strategy
  - “I’m taking my 3 deep breaths now.”

- Codeswitch cue
  - “That’s what you think, and at school you would say…”

- Praise around and circle back

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)

The School PBIS Team’s Intervention

- 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 RRss

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
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!

Contact Information

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Handouts: http://www.pbis.org