

Title of Study: Restorative Justice Prevailing Over Suspension

Dates of Study: 2018-2019

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Purpose of the Action Research: The purpose of this action research project is to see if the consistent schoolwide use of PBIS, primarily Restorative Justice practices, at my middle school, with additional targeted supports being provided for an African American and Latino subgroup, can reduce the referral and suspension events for this population.

Research Question/Hypothesis: The research questions for my action plan are:
How does the consistent use of restorative justice practices affect the rate of discipline referrals for seventh grade African American and Latino male students? How does the consistent use of restorative justice practices affect the rate of suspension events for seventh grade African American and Latino male students?

The Existing Need: Advocates have long sought to outlaw suspensions for behaviors that teachers and administrators deem “defiant” or “disruptive” because they are considered too subjective and disproportionately meted out to students of color. Between the 2011-12 and 2016-17 school years, suspensions of all types did in fact drop by 46 percent statewide, with willful defiance suspensions dropping by 79 percent for African American students, according to California state data released late in 2017 (Washburn, 2018). Despite the decrease, suspension rates for African Americans remained much higher than for other ethnic groups (Loveless, 2017).

Research Connection: Race disparities in school discipline have associated harms. Suspension from school can reduce instructional time and impede academic progress for students who may already be lagging in their achievement. Actions to reduce racial disparities in discipline are in a response to over a decade in findings on the ineffectiveness of exclusionary discipline in improving educational outcomes and their disparate impact on students based on their racial/ethnic group membership, thereby violating civil rights protections. Although discipline gaps are often readily identifiable at national and statewide levels, operationalizing significant disparity at classroom, school, and district levels for practical purposes of detection, intervention, and monitoring improvement is a far more complex task.

Participants: Approximately 175 Latino and African American seventh grade males will be participants in the intervention.

Intervention: The implementation of using consistent restorative justice practices will occur for the duration of six weeks. The intervention will take place on a daily basis in the classroom setting and in the “Restorative Room” (my office/classroom). The practice of intrinsically and extrinsically reinforcing/ rewarding students, student and teacher reflection, and relationship building, will be used as opposed to the traditional use of serving out punitive consequences.

Students will be taught explicitly how to use restorative language/questions, participate in whole class Restorative Justice Community Building Circles in two of their periods twice a week, and engage in restorative circles and conversations/conferences to replace punitive forms of discipline. Additionally, the researcher will conduct restorative conversations/conferences with targeted groups of at-risk students two periods a day.

Results: *The data analysis from the mixed-method research revealed that the quantitative data showed that there was a reduction in discipline referrals from the month prior to the month the interventions were implemented. Additionally, the data shows that there was no change in the rate of suspensions as the month prior to the intervention and the month after the intervention.. Both months had a count of one suspension for the sub- group in this research project pre and post the implementation of the interventions. The qualitative data shows that teachers overwhelmingly “somewhat agreed” and “strongly agreed” about statements that addressed the effectiveness of the restorative practices that were implemented in this action research project.*

Conclusions: *Some scholars have speculated that restorative approaches to discipline create opportunities for perspective taking and relationship building, which could help address distrust, cultural misunderstanding, implicit bias, or negative racial beliefs. Yet other theoretical models of the relationship between restorative interventions and discipline outcomes do not specify any mechanisms for reducing racial gaps (Gregory et al., 2018). My data collection and analysis reveal that 100% percent of all referrals and suspensions continued to be the marginalized sub-group of Latino males, which continued to show the disproportionality of their incidences as opposed to their other sub-group counterparts.*

Recommendations: *Future research that might be warranted is how the reduction rates of discipline referrals and suspensions would be affected for this sub-group if the interventions were implemented with fidelity for the students in sixth grade. In light of my results, questions and/or issues that should be explored in the future by other practitioners would be if starting the interventions the first year the students were in middle school reduced the discipline referrals and suspensions at a greater number. Additionally, repeating another cycle of this intervention for another substantial duration of time needs to be investigated to be to make my research action more complete. Collecting and analyzing data for the implementation of another six weeks or more would make this studies’ results more conclusive.*