

Cross-Racial Understanding and Reduction of Racial Prejudice

A considerable number of studies since Brown have shown how the social environment of schools affects the attitudes of students from one racial group toward students of other racial groups.⁴ Over the past 15 years, research in developmental psychology has documented the

⁴ See Thomas Pettigrew, "Attitudes on Race and Housing: A Social-Psychological View," in *Segregation in Residential Areas*, ed. Amos H. Hawley and Vincent P. Rock (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1973): 21-84; Thomas Pettigrew, "Justice Deferred: A Half Century after Brown v. Board of Education," *American Psychologist* 59, no. 66 (2004): 521-29; Nancy St. John, *School Desegregation: Outcomes for Children* (New York: Wiley, 1975); Elizabeth G. Cohen, "Design and Redesign of the Desegregated School: Problems of Status, Power, and Conflict," in *School Desegregation: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Walter G. Stephan and Joe R. Feagin (New York: Plenum, 1980): 251-78; Sandra B. Damico, Afesa Bell-Nathaniel, and Charles Green, "Effects of School Organizational Structure on Interracial Friendships in Middle Schools," *Journal of Education Research* 74, no. 6 (1981): 388-93; Vladimir T. Khmelkov and Maureen T. Hallinan, "Organizational Effects on Race Relations in Schools," *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 4 (1999): 627-45; Melanie Killen, Nancy G. Margie, and Stefanie Sinno, "Morality in the Context of Intergroup Relationships," in *Handbook of Moral Development*, ed. Melanie Killen and Judith Smetana (Mahwah, N. J.: LEA, 2006): 155-83.

social and developmental benefits of intergroup contact that results from school integration and examined stereotyping, prejudice, and exclusion attitudes in childhood.⁵

These comprehensive educational studies conclude that a racially integrated student body is necessary to obtain cross-racial understanding, which may lead to a reduction of harmful stereotypes and bias. Racially segregated schools deprive students of these learning opportunities and the available evidence indicates that indirect programs that merely emphasize the transmission of information about other groups but are not able to utilize intergroup contact have little impact on actually changing the behavior of students.⁶ Like learning new communication skills, the skills needed to relate to students of other racial and ethnic groups require practice.⁷ Knowledge

⁵ Melanie Killen and Clark McKown, "How Integrative Approaches to Intergroup Attitudes Advance the Field," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 26 (2005): 612-22.

⁶ Willis D. Hawley, "Designing Schools that Use Student Diversity to Enhance Learning of All Students," in *Lessons in Integration: Realizing the Promise of Racial Diversity in America's Schools*, ed. Erica Frankenberg and Gary Orfield (Charlottesville, Va.: Univ. of Virginia Press, in press); Frances E. Aboud and Maria Amato, "Developmental and Socialization Influences on Intergroup Bias," in *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Intergroup Relations*, ed. Rupert Brown and Samuel L. Gaertner (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, 2001): 65-85; Janet Ward Schofield and H. Andrew Sagar, "Peer Interaction Patterns in an Integrated Middle School," *Sociometry* 40, no. 2 (1977): 130-38.

⁷ Janet Ward Schofield, *Black and White in School: Trust, Tension or Tolerance?* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1989) (showing that behavior changed over time as kids became more comfortable with members of other racial groups and were less likely to avoid them).

about and empathy for other groups are not as easily learned or long-lasting if learned in homogeneous schools.⁸

In a nation in which the proportion of whites among the school-aged population has declined to less than 60% and is declining by the year, there is growing value to cross-racial understanding and cooperation among individuals of all races. For white students, who, on average, grow up in the most racially separate neighborhoods and remain highly segregated in K-12 and higher education classrooms,⁹ racially integrated schools provide benefits that many students may not be able to obtain in other ways.¹⁰ Recent findings from a survey of high school juniors and seniors in seven major school districts across the nation, including Seattle and Jefferson County, show that white students value interracial experiences and report that their racially integrated schools better prepared them to work and participate in public life in

⁸ Peter B. Wood and Nancy Sonleitner, "The Effect of Childhood Interracial Contact on Adult Antiracist Prejudice," *Journal of Intercultural Relations* 20, no. 1 (1996): 1-17.

⁹ Sean F. Reardon and John T. Yun, "Integrating Neighborhoods, Segregating Schools: The Retreat from School Desegregation in the South, 1990-2000," in *School Resegregation: Must the South Turn Back?*, ed. John C. Boger and Gary Orfield (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005): 51-69.

¹⁰ Michal Kurlaender and John T. Yun, "Is Diversity a Compelling Educational Interest? Evidence from Louisville," in *Diversity Challenged: Evidence on the Impact of Affirmative Action*, ed. Gary Orfield with Michal Kurlaender (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Education Publishing Group, 2001): 111-41; Pamela Perry, *Shades of White: White Kids and Racial Identities in High School* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2002).

in their multiracial communities.¹¹ Additionally, students of all racial groups in integrated schools felt higher comfort levels with members of racial groups different than their own when compared with students in segregated schools.¹² For example, white students in integrated settings have been found to exhibit more racial tolerance and less fear of their black peers over time than their segregated peers.¹³

Teachers believe that building respect for people of other races and cultures is one of the most important goals of education.¹⁴ Many teachers with everyday experience in racially diverse schools believe in the benefits of racial diversity for student learning and as an experience that fosters productive, economic, and civic participation in

11 John T. Yun and Michal Kurlaender, "School Racial Composition and Student Educational Aspirations: A Question of Equity in a Multiracial Society," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 9, no. 2 (2004): 143-68.

12 Michal Kurlaender and John T. Yun, "Measuring School Racial Composition and Student Outcomes in a Multiracial Society," *American Journal of Education* (forthcoming).

13 Janet Ward Schofield, "Review of Research on School Desegregation's Impact on Elementary and Secondary School Students," in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, ed. James A. Banks and Cherry M. Banks (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1995): 597-616; Amy J. Strefling, "The Influence of Integrated and De Facto Segregated Schools on Racial Attitudes of White Students toward African Americans" (paper presented at Council for Administration Convention, St. Louis, 1998); Jomills Henry Braddock, Marvin P. Dawkins, and William T. Trent, "Why Desegregate? The Effect of School Desegregation on Adult Occupational Segregation of African Americans, Whites, and Hispanics," *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology* 31, no. 2 (1994): 271-83.

14 Alec Gallup, *The Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Public Schools* (Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa, 1985).

U.S. society. They also state that these benefits are difficult to attain in single-race classrooms.¹⁵ Virtually all teachers (and about 90% of students) in a recent survey stated that it was important for students of different races and ethnicities to interact, although far fewer believed that this was currently happening in their schools.¹⁶

The harms to students who are the targets of negative stereotypes and to students who become the unwitting inheritors of such views are well known.¹⁷ Children become aware of racial and ethnic group differences from very young ages,¹⁸ and their developing views of different groups are affected and shaped by others within their social worlds.¹⁹ Because stereotypes can become deeply

15 Ellen Goldring and Claire Smrekar, "Magnet Schools and the Pursuit of Racial Balance," *Education and Urban Society* 33, no. 1 (November 2000): 17-35; *Teacher Opinions on Racial and Ethnic Diversity: Clark County School District, Nevada* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Civil Rights Project, 2002).

16 Kelly Bagnashi and Marc R. Scheer, "Brown v. Board of Education: Fifty Years Later," in *Trends and Tudes Newsletter of Harris Interactive Youth Research* 3, no. 6 (June 2004) (summarizing the findings of a Harris Interactive/Education Week poll).

17 Claude M. Steele, Steven J. Spencer, and Joshua Aronson, "Contending with Group Image: The Psychology of Stereotype and Social Identity Threat," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. Mark Zanna (New York: Academic Press, 2002): 379-440.

18 Frances E. Aboud, *Children and Prejudice* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1988); Lawrence A. Hirschfeld, "The Inheritability of Identity: Children's Understanding of the Cultural Biology of Race," *Child Development* 66, no. 5 (1995): 1418-37.

19 See Frances E. Aboud, Morton J. Mendelson, and Kelly T. Purdy, "Cross-Race Peer Relations and Friendship Quality," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 27, no. 2 (2003): 165-73; Killen, Margie, and Sinno, "Morality in the Context of Intergroup Relationships," 155-83; Christopher G. Ellison and Daniel A. Powers, "The Contact Hypothesis and Racial Attitudes among Black Americans," *Social Science Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (1994): 385-400. See also Rebecca Bigler and Lynn S. Liben, "A Developmental Intergroup Theory of Social Stereotypes and Prejudice," in *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*, vol. 34, ed. Robert V. Kail (San Diego: Elsevier, 2006): 39-89 (positing that segregation is a causal factor in stereotyping because merely seeing people sorted by some human attribute leads children to believe that the groups differ).

entrenched as children become adults, early social interactions are important to promote tolerance and reduce prejudice.²⁰ In addition, the effectiveness of constructive, integrated school settings in reducing the transmission of such stereotypes has been well established.²¹ It has been

²⁰ Research focusing on children's implicit attitudes – attitudes that reflect a racial bias, unbeknownst to the individual expressing the attitudes – has shown that white children attending racially homogeneous elementary schools were more likely to attribute negative intentions to peers based on race when evaluating ambiguous situations in school contexts than were white children attending racially heterogeneous schools. See Heidi McGlothlin, Melanie Killen, and Christina Edmonds, "European-American Children's Intergroup Attitudes About Peer Relationships," *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 23, no. 2 (2005): 227-49.

²¹ See Frances E. Aboud and Sheri Levy, "Intervention to Reduce Prejudice and Discrimination in Children and Adolescents," in *Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination*, ed. Stuart Oskamp (Hillsdale, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000): 269-93; Killen, Margie, and Sinno, "Morality in the Context of Intergroup Relationships," 155-83; Martin Patchen, *Black-White Contact in Schools: Its Social and Academic Effects* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue Univ. Press, 1982); Janet Ward Schofield, "The Impact of Positively Structured Contact on Intergroup Behavior: Does It Last under Adverse Conditions?" *Social Psychology Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (Sept. 1979): 280-84; Walter G. Stephan and Cookie W. Stephan, *Improving Intergroup Relations* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2001); Hawley, "Designing Schools;" Linda Tropp and Mary Prenovost, "The Role of Intergroup Contact in Predicting Children's Inter-Ethnic Attitudes: Evidence from Meta-Analytic and Field Studies," in *Intergroup Relations: An Integrative Developmental and Social Psychological Perspective*, ed. Sheri Levy and Melanie Killen (Oxford, England: Oxford Univ. Press, in press).

found that the reduction of stereotyping and the increased understanding that racial exclusion is harmful are products of children's social cognition, perspective taking, empathetic responses, and moral judgments,²² all of which are enhanced in integrated environments.²³ These outcomes are especially important in the education context, where stereotypes may inhibit academic interaction and learning by all students.

A recent meta-analysis²⁴ of over 500 prior studies that collectively involved 250,000 participants shows that greater levels of contact among different groups are typically associated with lower levels of intergroup prejudice, and that these effects are consistent and significant for samples of children, adolescents, and adults.²⁵ Although optimal intergroup conditions – such as

22 Killen, Margie, and Sinno, "Morality in the Context of Intergroup Relationships," 155-83. Research suggests the critical importance of being aligned in collective teamwork to consistently attain positive benefits of intergroup contact. Schofield, "Review of Research," 597-616.

23 Recent research with adolescents in the Los Angeles area has shown that students who are enrolled in schools with high ethnic diversity are more likely to feel safe and experience less harassment in school than are students enrolled in schools with high racial isolation. Jaana Juvonen, Adrienne Nishina, and Sandra Graham, "Ethnic Diversity and Perceptions of Safety in Urban Middle Schools," *Psychological Science* 17, no. 5 (May 2006): 393-400.

24 When performing a meta-analysis, researchers attempt to find every study conducted on a particular topic; then, they statistically pool the results to examine the overall patterns of effects and to uncover additional variables that moderate those effects.

25 Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90 (2006): 751-83.

equal status between groups, support of institutional authorities, common goals and cooperation – are not necessary for prejudice reduction, larger reductions in prejudice occur when the conditions are established.²⁶ A related analysis of 198 independent samples from these studies showed that significant, positive effects of intergroup contact typically emerge for samples of children and adolescents in schools, and specifically when the contact involves youth from different racial and ethnic groups.²⁷ Additional studies show how cross-race friendships that develop through contact in schools encourage broader, positive changes in interracial attitudes.²⁸ These positive effects accrue regardless of whether participants voluntarily chose to engage in intergroup contact.²⁹ Collectively these findings suggest that contact among youth from different racial groups promotes positive intergroup attitudes, and such positive outcomes become stronger

26 Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1954) (discussing optimal conditions for intergroup contact).

27 Tropp and Prenovost, “The Role of Intergroup Contact in Predicting Children’s Inter-Ethnic Attitudes.”

28 Damico, Bell-Nathaniel, and Green, “Interracial Friendships in Middle Schools,” 388-93; Shana Levin, Colette van Laar and Jim Sidanius, “The Effects of Ingroup and Outgroup Friendships on Ethnic Attitudes in College: A Longitudinal Study,” *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 6, no. 1 (2003): 76-92.

29 This is noteworthy because critics of contact theory suggest that those seeking out intergroup contact might already have lower prejudice, but an analysis that coded whether participants had “full choice” to engage in contact or “no choice” found that the effects of contact were comparably strong for both groups. See Pettigrew and Tropp, “A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory,” 757-58.

when optimal intergroup conditions are established in the school environment.

Racially diverse schools can be structured in ways that make positive outcomes more likely to occur.³⁰ Tracking white and Asian students into more advanced classes and black and Latino students into lower-level classes – as studies have suggested disproportionately occurs, regardless of ability³¹ – will limit the intergroup contact that produces gains for all in addition to restricting the future success of minority students.³² Educators can benefit from the considerable research demonstrating how to implement desegregation successfully.³³

30 Cookie W. Stephan and Walter G. Stephan, "Cognition and Affect in Cross-Cultural Relations," in *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication*, 2nd ed., ed. William B. Gudykunst and Bella Mody (Thousand Oaks, Calif. Sage, 2002): 127-42; Pettigrew and Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," 751-83; Schofield and Sagar, "Peer Interaction Patterns," 130-38; Robert E. Slavin, "Effects of Biracial Learning Teams on Cross-Racial Friendships," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 71, no. 3 (1979): 381-87; Robert E. Slavin, *Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1995).

31 Roslyn A. Mickelson, "Subverting Swann: First- and Second-Generation Segregation in Charlotte, North Carolina," *American Educational Research Journal* 38, no. 2 (2001): 215-52.

32 See Carol Corbett Burris, Jay Heubert, and Henry Levin, "Math Acceleration for All," *Educational Leadership* 61, no. 5 (2004): 68-71; Jo Boaler and Megan Staples, "Transforming Students' Lives through an Equitable Mathematics Approach: The Case of Railside School" (paper presented at meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada, April 2005).

33 See Willis D. Hawley et al., *Strategies for Effective School Desegregation* (Lexington, Ma.: Lexington Books, 1983); Erica Frankenberg and Gary Orfield, ed., *Lessons in Integration: Realizing the Promise of Racial Diversity in America's Schools* (Charlottesville, Va: Univ. of Virginia Press, in press).