CHANGING THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TO REDUCE DROPOUT PREDICTORS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

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Abstract

Dropping out of school is a serious problem in the United States, especially for African American students. School systems have implemented various prevention and intervention programs to reduce the dropout rate of African American students with only limited success. These programs have generally not included a focus on social climate. Research clearly indicates social climate is directly related to specific behavior and academic predictors of dropout especially for African American students. This study is an examination of an unintentional racism workshop for teachers in a public elementary school, designed to reduce dropout predictors in African American students. The unintentional racism workshop was designed to assist teachers in creating a less threatening environment for African American students while reducing dropout predictors such as low grades, high absences, and discipline problems. This research did not demonstrate significant improvements in student variables such as grades, number of absences, and number of discipline referrals, after one year of implementation, but it did provide important implications and recommendations about future research into dropout prevention programs for African American students.

Introduction

The fact that some students do not graduate from high school has become an increasingly large problem in the United States, where the national dropout rate is higher than in any other industrialized nation. Students at-risk for dropping out tend to display poor academic performance, low academic motivation, and high levels of disciplinary referrals (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008; Roderick, 1993; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Researching specific risk factors and racial differences related to dropouts can be difficult since states do not have a uniform method of calculating the graduation rate (Orfield, 2004). The different reporting of graduation rates leaves the public unaware of the dropout crisis and the racial disparities that exist in graduation rates (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004).

African American students are disproportionally represented among the students who drop out (Dei, 2008; Laird, Kienzl, DeBell, Chapman, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). They struggle with student factors such as underachievement, low grades, disengagement from school, and disciplinary problems. While in school, African American students also contend with social and environmental factors such as stereotype threat and unintentional racism. Dropout prevention programs and the research conducted on dropout prevention have focused on the student factors related to dropping out of school, rather than environmental factors such as stereotype threat and unintentional racism (Orfield, 2004). Attempts to improve educational outcomes that focus on changing student factors have generally not been successful for African American students (Dynarski & Gleason 2002; West, 1991). Research clearly indicates social climate directly relates to specific behavioral and academic predictors of dropout

among students of minority status (McNeal, 1997; Donaldson, 2001). Dropout prevention

programs should focus on changing the widespread culture of schools through

interventions that directly target the knowledge, dispositions and behaviors of educators

rather than the behavior of a particular group or groups of students (Dynarski & Gleason,

2002; Orfield, 2004; Norguea, 2008).

Literature Review

The graduation rate has become an increasingly large problem in the United States, especially for African American students, who represent a large number of dropouts. This literature review discusses dropout rates in the United States, reasons why African American students dropout of school, and what school systems have done to reduce dropout rates of African American students. In general, research shows the common reasons for dropping out include low grades, difficult life events, lack of academic and personal motivation, lack of external sources of motivation, and lack of guidance. In addition, social and environmental factors can be identified within the school setting as relating to students dropping out of school. (Bridgeland, Dilulia, & Morison, 2006). School systems have implemented a variety of different prevention and intervention programs aimed at reducing the number of students dropping out of school. Unfortunately, many of these programs have not been able to reduce dropout numbers and have not been able to improve important educational outcomes such as attendance and academic performance for at-risk students (Dynarski & Gleason 2002). In order to be more effective, dropout prevention programs should address the social environment of the student (Dynarski & Gleason 2002; West, 1991).

Dropout Rate and Implications for African American Students

Education is essential to increase opportunities for economic upward mobility. Dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, impoverished, in prison, unhealthy, and to receive public assistance (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). A higher number of high school graduates are employed compared to those who did not earn a high school diploma or an equivalent (Dalton, Glennie, Ingels, & National Center for Education

Statistics, 2009). If a high school dropout is employed, his or her income is significantly lower; earning approximately $9,200 less per year than a high school graduate (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). As a result of unemployment and low wages, high school dropouts will most likely be tax consumers instead of tax contributors (De Sousa, Semoa, & Gebremedhin, 1999). Each dropout will cost the government an average of $209,000 over a lifetime ("Every 9 Seconds", 2007).

In October 2005, it was estimated that 3.5 million 16 to 24-year-olds were not enrolled in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or GED (Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007). The graduate rate is significantly lower for African American students compared to White students. For Whites, 74.9% of all students receive a high school diploma while only 50.2% of all African American students graduated (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). The dropout rate in 2006 for African Americans was 10.7% compared to a dropout rate of 5.8% for White students (Laird, Kienzl, DeBell, Chapman, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). The overall high school dropout rate was lower in 2004 at 6.6% compared to 1982 at 11.4%. The dropout rate for African American students was 14% in 1982 and 10% in 2004, while White students dropped out at a rate of 10% in 1982 and 4.8% in 2004 (Dalton, Glennie, & Ingels, 2009).

The southern region of the United States has an annual dropout rate of 11.7 percent; accounting for 38.2 percent of all dropouts (Laird, Cataldi, KewalRamani, & Chapman, 2008). In addition, the graduation rate for African American males in the southern region is about 55.3% ("Confronting the graduation", 2005). North Carolina high schools reported 23,550 dropout events in 2006-2007; a 6.2% increase from the 2005-2006 report. The four-year cohort graduation rate for all students who entered 9th

grade in 2004-2005 and graduated in 2007-2008 or earlier was 68.7% ("Report to the Joint", n.d). In North Carolina, the four-year cohort graduation rate for African American students who entered the 9th grade in 2004-2005, and graduated in 2007-2008, or earlier, were 57.3%. The four-year cohort graduation rate for those students categorized as "Economically Disadvantaged" was 62.1% ("Report to the Joint", n.d).

Dropout Predictors: Student Factors

Identifying factors related to the high dropout rate make it difficult to develop successful dropout prevention programs for African American students. There is no single reason why African American students dropout of high school at higher rates than White students. In general, research shows the common reasons for dropping out include low grades, difficult life events, lack of academic and personal motivation, a lack of external sources of motivation, and a lack of guidance (Bridgeland, Dilulia, & Morison, 2006). Often, dropouts experience multiple risk factors, and are less likely to be motivated to excel in school (Suh & Suh, 2007). As a result, for African American students, dropping out results from a gradual disengagement from school related to academic factors and disciplinary problems.

Minority status and low socioeconomic status. Students who dropout of school are more likely to come from a low socioeconomic background compared to students who do not come from a low socioeconomic background. In 2005, the dropout rate for students living in low-income families was approximately six times greater than the rate of their peers from high-income families (Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007). Nearly all research with at-risk students focuses on low-income African American students; however most African American students live in areas not labeled as low

income (Hill, 1997; McCoy, 1999). There is an assumption that an African American student from a middle class family does not experience the disadvantages of race in education because he or she does not have to overcome economic disadvantages such as limited access to early educational enrichment programs and tools for learning like books or computers. However, research has shown that underachievement, low grades, and low test scores, are still problems for middle class African American students (Steele, 1999). According to Ogbu and Davis (2003), poverty alone does not explain differences in academic achievement among African American and White students. When poverty is taken out of the equation, academic low achievement persists for African American students. This suggests socioeconomic status is just one factor related to the rate of African American students who drop out of school (Steele, 1999).

Academic achievement. The chance of a student dropping out of school increases if that student has experienced difficulties and/or frustrations with academic performance (Roderick, 1993). Those students who have poor academic success in school are less likely to reach graduation. Students who dropout of high school have lower grades, lower tests scores, and complete less homework (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock 1986). Poor academic success is a direct result of a student's aspirations and past successes in education (Rumberger, 2004). If low achieving students make no improvements in academic performance, they will avoid constant failure and frustration by dropping out (Kronick & Hargis, 1998). Poor school performance leads to a low self-concept from constant frustration and embarrassment because of an inadequate ability to perform well. Unsuccessful school outcomes lead to reduced self-esteem, which leads to increased instances of dropout predictors such as absenteeism, discipline problems, and

poor grades (Finn, 1989). According to Finn (1989), positive experiences associated with the school environment increase participation and promote a student's sense of belonging.

Students who are at-risk of dropping out can develop academic problems as early as kindergarten (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004). Children entering school have very different experiences their first five years of life. Not all children enter elementary school on a level playing field academically (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008). Some students come from homes that prepare them for school, but some come to school behind their classmates because they lack the abilities that are needed for academic success. The pathway for high school graduates and high school dropouts begins to look different in the first few years of education. Students at-risk for dropping out can be identified as early as third grade by examining attendance patterns, grades, and behavior (Lher, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004). Patterns of low academic performance persist for low performing students from middle school to high school (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008). Actions must be taken early in a child's education to identify and intervene with academic deficits, or low performing students will enter a downward spiral that leads to dropping out (Lher, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004).

When compared to White students, African American students have lower rates of academic success, lower SAT scores, and lower graduation rates (Reini, 2004). Ferguson (2002) reported on the racial differences in academic achievement of 17,562 White students and 7,120 African American students. The students completed questionnaires concerning their academic achievement and contributing factors. The results showed

African American students reported having less understanding of academic material taught and lower grade point averages compared to White students. African American students also reported teacher expectations as being an important part of their academic effort. This research showed that poor academic success in African American students could be the result the school environment, such as teacher expectations and student experiences. In addition, teacher encouragement is an important factor in motivating African American students towards academic success (Ferguson, 2002).

Grade retention. Although research has clearly shown that retention is not an effective way to deal with low performing students (Hauser, Pager, & Simmons, 2000), educators frequently retain students, with the belief that retention corrects the child's deficits by repeating the grade. The research has shown that there is a strong association between grade retention and dropping out of high school (Roderick, 1993; Pagani, Tremblay, Vitaro, Boulerice, & McDuff, 2001; Hong & Raudenbush 2005). African American students disproportionally represent the number of students retained (Hauser, Pager, & Simmons, 2000). Early intervention programs could be provided as an alternative intervention for students who are failing academically, but there is little empirical research that focuses on early intervention services provided for children who are at risk of being retained. Students with risk factors associated with dropping out of school, can benefit from early intervention programs.

Engagement and motivation. Disengagement and a lack of academic motivation is another significant student factor impacting African American students. The experiences students have in the school environment are the most common reasons for dropping out (Mann, 1986). Many students who drop out of school lack a sense of

belonging in the classroom and school environment. They have negative attitudes associated with school and have difficulty identifying with academics. Therefore, they place little importance on academic achievement (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; Griffin, 2002). Frustration with academics can cause a student to disengage from academics in order to maintain a positive self-esteem, since students who experience academic failure on a day-to-day basis tend to have a lower self-esteem leading to frustration in school (Finn, 1989).. Disengagement occurs when students devalue academics in order to protect a positive self-image. As a result, poor academic outcomes have little to no impact on the formation of the self-perceptions of the students. In other words, when a student disengages from academics, poor test performance will not influence the student's self-worth and self-esteem (Griffin, 2002).

Research shows that African American students tend to exhibit higher levels of academic disengagement compared to White students (Obgu, 1994; Steele, 1992). When African American students begin school, they identify with school achievement as much as White students, primarily enjoy school, and are motivated to do well (Cokley, 2002). Doing well in school helps African American students feel good about their accomplishments. Nevertheless, when African American students come to school lacking the skills needed for academic success, they tend to have more negative experiences in school such as receiving low grades and performing well below their peers academically. Negative experiences in school cause African American students to disengage from school in order to protect their own self-image. Their self-esteem and self-worth are no longer dependent upon their performance in school (Cokley, 2002).

Disciplinary problems. Students who dropout of school, are more likely to skip class, have disciplinary problems, and be suspended (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986). Research shows that poor academic performance and discipline problems are closely related (Adams, 2008). There is a relationship between disruptive behavior and underachievement that cannot be ignored. This relationship has important implications when examining disciplinary problems in potential dropouts. African American students disproportionally represent the number of discipline referrals made in schools (Lo & Cartledge, 2007). In addition, Mann (1986) found that African American high school students are suspended three times more than Whites are. However there are no data to support the notion that African American students actually misbehave more than other students. The high number of discipline referrals for African American students could be the result of something besides constant misbehavior (Adams, 2008).

Lo and Cartledge (2007) conducted research on school discipline issues in an urban public school consisting of 202 students. Eighty-five percent of the school's student population was African American, and many of these students lived in low income housing a couple of miles from the school. They examined archived disciplinary referral data that included the frequency of referrals, the type of offenses referred, and the characteristics of students referred. Lo and Cartledge (2007) analyzed data for students who received more than two discipline referrals a year. When a student was caught misbehaving, the classroom teacher referred the student for a behavioral consequence. Behaviors such as cheating, cutting class, tardiness, disruptive behaviors and threatening violent behaviors were the most frequent reasons for a discipline referral. Their findings indicated that 40% of the enrolled student population received, at a minimum, one

discipline referral in two years. African American students comprised 90% of the total discipline referrals collected over the two-year period and were found to be suspended two times more frequently than White students were.

Fabelo et al. (2011) conducted a study on close to 1 million public school students in Texas, over a 6-year period. Juvenile justice records of these students were examined to determine which students were suspended from school, and how suspension affected student academics and school completion. There were several key findings associated with the study. African American students were more likely to be removed from the classroom because of disciplinary problems, and were more likely to have a high number of discipline violations and were more like to be suspended when compared to Hispanic and White students. African American students had a 31% higher likelihood of being suspended when compared to Hispanic and White students with similar disciplinary problems. Students who were repeatedly disciplined were more likely to be retained or dropout when compared to students with no discipline problems. Fifty-nine percent of students who were disciplined more than eleven times, did not graduate from high school during the study period (Fabelo et al., 2011). This study highlights the connection between disciplinary problems, school disciplinary practices, and dropout rates; reiterating the fact that students who have disciplinary problems are more likely to dropout of school.

Dropout Predictors: School Social Environmental Factors

In addition to many student factors related to students dropping out of school, many social and environmental factors can be identified within the school setting as relating to students dropping out of school. These social and environmental factors are

especially important to consider when examining the dropout rate of African American students. According to Roderick (1993), the motivation and support that a student receives in school shapes his or her school experiences, and greatly influences later educational outcomes (Roderick, 1993). Schools should work to create an environment that ensures an equitable education for a student of any race to achieve positive educational outcomes (Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2002). In addition, Bryk and Thum (1989) found that students at risk of dropping out are more likely to leave school if placed in a threatening uninviting school climate. Factors such as, intentional and unintentional racism create a threatening and uninviting school climate related to the underachievement of African American students. Understanding unintentional racism is important in creating an educational environment that supports the success of African American students (Denbo & Beaulieu, 2002).

Unintentional racism. Unintentional racism is the act of inadvertently exhibiting subtle racial biases that disadvantage members of minority groups (Dei, 2008; Donaldson, 2001). Unintentional racism is at least partially to blame for high dropout rates among students of minority status (Donaldson, 2001; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Minority students are acutely aware of how racism affects the social climate of schools (Dei, 2008). White educators can unintentionally exhibit subtle racial biases that disadvantage minority students (King, 1991). For example, low expectations are an insidious form of racism and a subtle racial bias. Hyland (2005) found through qualitative research that teachers describe themselves as helpers of minority students and their families, but unintentionally hold low expectations for these students and see the students' families as dysfunctional. Generally, White educators would not intentionally

disadvantage minority students, but unintentional racism is inserted into schools through such common teaching practices (Hyland, 2005).

White educators are less likely to perceive racism in education (Donaldson, 2001). Donaldson (2001) recruited 512 teachers to participate in a race awareness survey. Sixty seven percent of the participants were White and all taught at the high school level. The survey was designed to evaluate "the teachers opinions in areas dealing with racism awareness in self and others, racial biases in curriculum and instruction, racist childhood experiences, and interest in reducing racism in schools" (Donaldson, 2001, p. 24). Donaldson (2001) discovered that teachers engaged in racist behaviors unintentionally. Hyland (2005) conducted similar research and concluded that "most teachers, regardless of race, would describe themselves as good and effective teachers for their predominantly working class African American students" (p. 2). How teachers understand their role as teachers of African American students affects how unintentional racism impacts the environment of their classroom.

There have been few strategies implemented to address the issues of unintentional racism in the schools. Jost, Whitfield, and Jost (2005) developed a workshop for educators to examine diversity issue in education. They administered the workshop to a group of African American and White educators in a large school district. Through their experiences and findings during the workshop, the researchers, identified a number of what they referred to as 'slick spots' for African American and White educators when it came to addressing racism in education. For example, African American and White teachers lacked the knowledge of the history of inequality in education and tended to be blind to issues of racial inequality in the classroom believing in a just society and equal

education for all children. However, African American teachers were more aware of racism in education, and more willing to address the issue of racism; while White educators, in contrast, were not very aware of racism within the classroom, and were fearful of race conversations and exploring race.

Stereotype threat. In addition to unintentional racism at school, students of minority status also must contend with the challenge of "stereotype threat", the threat of others "perceiving them through the lens of a negative stereotype or the fear of acting in ways that confirms that negative stereotype" (Steele, 1999, p. 50). Steele and Aronson (1995) assert that because of the mere existence of negative stereotypes alleging intellectual inferiority students of minority status must contend with the threatening possibility that should their school achievement falter, it could confirm the stereotype. They know there is a possibility that others (e.g., educators) view them through the lens of the stereotype related to academic inferiority. Consequently, stereotypes of academic inferiority create a threatening, intimidating social environment for students of minority status leading to academic disengagement (Griffin, 2002).

Griffin (2002) examined cross-sectional random data from a sample of high school students from 14 school districts in Florida to determine how GPA, school completion status, and race relate. He wanted to know if African American and Hispanic students showed higher rates of academic disengagement compared to White and Asian students when deciding to dropout of school. Research supported his hypothesis that GPA would be a better predictor for White and Asian students than for African American and Hispanic students. First, Griffin (2002) found the dropout rate was higher for African American students than Hispanic, White, or Asian students. In addition, Griffin

concluded GPA was not a good predictor of graduating for African American students, and that academic performance is less important in shaping school related behaviors and decisions for African American and Hispanic students. The dropout rate was higher in racial groups who contended with negative stereotype and academic disengagement (Griffin, 2002).

Steele and Aronson (1995) conducted a laboratory experiment to identify the extent to which stereotype threat affects minorities intellectual test performance. The experiment assumed that "whenever African American students perform an explicitly scholastic or intellectual task, they face the treat of confirming or being judged by a negative societal stereotype" (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797). The participants consisted of high achieving African American and White college students given a number of items from the verbal section of the GRE, under several different conditions. Participants were chosen based on similar SAT scores and were randomly assigned to three conditions; a diagnostic testing condition, a non-diagnostic testing condition, and a non-diagnostic challenge condition where participants were told to take the task more seriously than the non-diagnostic condition, even though their scores would not be evaluated.

In the stereotype-threat condition, participants were told the experiment was measuring personal factors involved in performance on verbal reasoning problems, and that the test they were taking would be measuring intellectual ability. When African American students were placed in this diagnostic testing condition, they performed worse than White students placed under the same testing conditions did. In the non-stereotype-threat condition, the same section of the GRE was given and described as a problem-

solving task that was not a measurement of intellectual ability, and that individual scores would not be evaluated. When placed in this testing condition, there were similar performances for African American and White students. The non-diagnostic challenge condition produced similar results compared to the non-diagnostic condition. In addition, Steele and Aronson (1995) found African American students performed worse compared to White students on the same sections of the GRE when asked to identity their race. Under the same testing conditions, African Americans produced similar scores compared to Whites when they were not asked to identify race. Results showed that when race was primed in the stereotype-threat condition, there were lower scores on the verbal tasks for African American students compared to White students, suggesting that the presence of a stereotype threat hampers minority students' intellectual performance (Steele, Aronson, 1995).

A stereotype threat experienced in a classroom setting or testing situation can cause an emotional reaction that directly affects performance (Steele, 1997). For students to be successful in school they must identify with academics and establish a sense of belonging (Finn, 1989). As mentioned above frustrations in academics can cause a student to disengage from academics in order to maintain a positive self-perception (Griffin, 2002). Stereotype threats can be frustrating for students, and if experienced in a classroom setting, during an activity, or in a testing situation a stereotype threat can interfere with academic performance. If the threat is constant, it can create anxiety and low expectations in academic performance for threatened students, ultimately causing academic disengagement and avoidance (Steele, 1997).

Dropout Prevention and Intervention Programs

School systems have implemented a variety of different prevention and intervention programs aimed at reducing the number of students dropping out of school. Unfortunately, many of these programs have not been able to reduce dropout number and have not been able to improve important educational outcomes such as attendance and academic performance for at-risk students (Dynarski & Gleason 2002). This has been especially true for African American students who still disproportionately represent the number of dropouts that occur each year (Dei, 2008; Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007). In order to be more effective for African American students, dropout prevention programs should address the social environment of the student (Dynarski & Gleason 2002; West, 1991). In school, African American students contend with school social environmental factors such as unintentional racism and stereotype threat. Systematic changes, which address social environmental factors such as unintentional racism and stereotype threat, seem to be more promising than any other approach (Rumberger, 2004). However, research is lacking on the area of dropout prevention efforts that focus on social environmental factors for African American students, and changing their social environment. Many programs address student factors rather than environmental factors, and most have not been successful in reducing the dropout rate as a whole (Dynarski & Gleason 2002; West, 1991).

Changing the Environment for African American Students

Teachers are an important factor in dropout prevention programs and changing the school environment for African American students. Influencing what happens in the classroom can be very difficult (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Teachers can directly influence

the academic achievement, academic engagement, and disciplinary problems of African American students through the environment created in their classrooms. They can do this unconsciously through unintentional racism and stereotype threat. For example, educators can exhibit unintentional racism and stereotype threat by lowering standards for African American students and by giving more encouragement to some students and not to others (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Understanding and reducing racial stereotypes and unintentional racism can be difficult for teachers and administrators. If educators want to improve educational outcomes for African American students, they must be knowledgeable in the area of multicultural education and understand their roles as teacher to African American students.

There are things an educator can do to make the school climate conducive to the high achievement of African American students (Noguera, 2008). Educators should make sure students work together across racial lines. This will allow students to become more familiar with one another and reduce racial stereotypes, creating a sense of belonging in the classroom for African American students. Providing all students with experiences and information related to the history and culture of African American students can help in reducing racial stereotypes while giving African American students a sense of racial identity (Noguera, 2008). It is important that educators hold equal expectations for students of different racial backgrounds and encourage African American students to participate in activities that break racial norms (Hyland, 2005; Noguera, 2008). For example, an educator could encourage an African American student to enroll in advanced courses, increasing academic achievement. Student encouragement is also critical. African American students are more influenced by the support and encouragement they

receive from teachers than any other racial group. A teacher that encourages African American students "to overcome anti-academic tendencies" and set goals can help African Americans overcome racial stereotypes (Noguera, p. 15, 2008).

Research by Sinclair (1998) suggests that dropout prevention efforts are most effective when introduced early in children's educational experience. Academic failure does not begin in high school; it begins early in a child's education. Students who have problems early in their educational experience will most likely experience academic failure throughout middle and high school (Lher, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004). Many dropout prevention programs have focused on providing services to a target group of students based on the risk factors such as minority status, academic achievement, disengagement, and disciplinary problems. These programs address individual issues and student factors such as low grades, high absences, and disciplinary problems rather than issues related to the school environment such as unintentional racism and stereotype threat (Orifiled, 2004). Although there is a growing amount of literature documenting the clear indication that social climate is the primary culprit underlying specific behavioral and academic predictors of dropout, especially among students of minority status, few studies have examined how to change the environment for African American students (McNeal, 1997; Donaldson, 2001). More research is needed to examine how changing the school environment can reduce dropout predictors for minority students.

Statement of the Problem

A high school dropout is a student who quits school before graduation. Unfortunately, many students meet this criteria, especially African American students (Dei, 2008; Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007; Orfield, 2004). Increasing drop out rates have economic implications for everyone, since dropouts are likely to be unemployed, impoverished, and in need of public assistance (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006; De Sousa, Semoa, & Gebremedhin, 1999). There is no single specific reason why students drop out, but there are common student factors. African Americans; drop out at disproportionately high rates. Much of the research with dropouts has been conducted with low-income African American students; but when poverty is taken out of the equation, low academic performance still persists for African American students (Hill, 1997; McCoy, 1999). This suggests that socioeconomic status is just one factor related to the high dropout rates associated with African American students (Ogbu & Davis, 2003; Steele, 1999). There also are strong associations between dropout rates and factors such as low academic achievement, grade retention, disengagement from school, and disciplinary problems (Adams, 2008; Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006; Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Griffin, 2002; Jacobson, 2008; Roderick, 1993; Pagani, Tremblay, Vitaro, Boulerice, & McDuff, 2001). When a student, specifically an African American student, is exposed to multiple risk factors, such as low grades and difficult life events, he or she will likely be less motivated to excel in school (Suh & Suh, 2007).

School systems have implemented prevention and intervention programs to address the student factors mentioned. Unfortunately, many programs have not been able

to reduce dropout rates and have not been able to improve important educational outcomes for African American students (Dynarski & Gleason 2002). In order to be more effective, dropout prevention programs should address the social environment of the student (Dynarski & Gleason 2002; West, 1991). Research clearly indicates social climate relates to specific behavioral and academic predictors of dropout such as poor academic achievement, low attendance rates, and disciplinary problems of African American students (McNeal, 1997; Donaldson, 2001). Schools continue to operate in ways that disadvantage African American students (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2002). For example, schools may not choose curricula that link African American students to their culture, teachers may unintentionally hold assumptions about African American students because of their ethnicity, and African American students may have to contend with stereotype threat.

Changes in the social environment for African American students could produce promising results (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; Rumberger, 2004). Dropout prevention research and prevention programs should address "at risk environments" rather than "at risk students." Programs should directly target the knowledge, dispositions and behaviors of educators rather than the behavior of a particular group or groups of students (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; Orfield, 2004). For example, an unintentional racism workshop for teachers can help in changing educator's beliefs about African American students. Helping educators understand the similarities and differences between cultures can potentially increase academic achievement of African American students. A greater trust between African American students and White educators could increase academic achievement and identification for African American students dramatically increasing

graduation rates. The link between school climate and student achievement is well documented but more research needs to be done regarding strategies to improve the school climate to reduce dropout predictors of African Americans.

Research Goals

The purpose of this research is to examine the effectiveness of an unintentional racism workshop for teachers designed to reduce dropout predictors in African American students. The workshop was one aspect of a North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) dropout prevention grant; which was implemented from January 2009 through August 2010. The unintentional racism workshop was designed to assist teachers in creating a less threatening environment for minority students, reduce dropout predictors, increase appreciation of students of minority status, increase understanding of unintentional racism and stereotype threat, and make classroom environments sensitive to experiences of minority students. The workshop is predicated on the assumption that teacher participation will have a positive impact on student variables. The following hypotheses were addressed:

Comparisons Across Groups

1. African American students in classes where the teachers have received the unintentional racism workshop will have significantly lower absences, higher grades, and lower discipline referrals when compared to African American students in classes where teachers have not received this training.

2. African American students in classes where teachers have had longer time to implement the skills learned through the unintentional racism workshop will have significantly lower absences, higher grades, and lower discipline referrals when

compared to African American students in classes where teachers are just beginning to implement skills learned through the unintentional racism workshop.

Comparisons Within Groups

3. African American students in classes where teachers began implementing the skills learned through the unintentional racism workshop at the beginning of the academic year will have significantly lower absences, higher grades, and lower discipline referrals from the beginning of the academic year to the middle of the academic year, from the middle of the academic year to the end of the academic year, and from the beginning of the year to the end of the academic year.

4. African American students in classes were teachers began implementing the skills learned through the unintentional racism workshop, during the middle of the academic year, will have significantly lower absences, higher grades, and lower discipline referrals from the middle of the academic year to the end of the academic year, and from the beginning of the academic year to the end of the academic year.

Methods

Participants

This study was conducted at an elementary school, which is part of a small magnet school system in North Carolina. Magnet schools provide parents with a choice in education rather than mandatory assignment. In addition, they provide an alternative to busing, for promoting racial diversity and achieve racial balance within the school (Goldring & Smrekar, 2002). During the 2009-2010 school year this magnet school had 420 students in grades in kindergarten through fifth grade. Thirty percent of the students qualified for a free or reduced lunch, and ten percent received special education. The student ethnicity rates in the school were 62% White; 21% African American; 8% Multi-racial; 5% Hispanic; 4% Asian; 0.2% American Indian.

Five teachers and fifteen African American students who were in the classrooms of these teachers, participated in the study. While all six teachers participated in the workshops, evaluation data were collected on the African America students of only five of the teachers. The school's administrative team selected the teachers for participation in this study. Students within the five teachers' classrooms were selected based on parental consent. The African American student sample consisted of nine (60%) females and six (40%) males. Two of the African American student participants (13.3%) qualified for special education services. Ten (66.6%) of the student participants were in kindergarten and five (33.3%) were in third grade. Table 1 shows the demographic variables of the student participants.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of African American Student Participants

Characteristics	Number	Percent
Gender		
Boy	6	40
Girl	9	60
Qualify for special education?		
Yes	2	13.3
No	13	86.6
Grade level		
Kindergarten	10	66.6
Third	5	33.3

Materials

Dr. Tom Ford and Dr. John Habel designed and implemented the unintentional racism workshop. The workshop was based on interactive case studies and discussions of unintentional racism and stereotype threat in educational settings. This workshop was predicated on the assumption that the dropout rate and poor academic achievement of students of minority status is, at least partially, due to educational environments that uniquely threaten or challenge these students. Educators who are knowledgeable about diversity and teachers who can respond to the needs of African American students can promote higher achievement in students of minority status (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In addition, an understanding of racial inequalities and multicultural experiences should

reduce the unintentional racial biases exhibited in classrooms and create a more comfortable learning environment for all children; specifically minority students.

The outline for the workshop and content provided by Tom Ford and John Habel is in Appendix A. The unintentional racism workshop covered topics such as aversive or unintentional racism, negative associations or stereotypes about African Americans, the operation of unintentional racism in a school setting, and ways to combat unintentional racism in the school setting. The workshops introduced interventions designed to foster greater trust between minority students and White educators, which has been shown to improve academic motivation and achievement in students (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; Steele, 1997).

Data regarding several student variables were collected through archival data from the NCWISE Student Information System. The North Carolina Window on Student Education (NC WISE) is a data system that integrates information from public schools and classrooms into one database. NCWISE allows school systems to assess, report, and evaluate a number of student and classroom variables. To assess the academic performance of the African American students involved in this study, grades in reading, math, and science were obtained from the NCWISE database for the selected students in each of the four participating teacher's classrooms. Grades are reported on a 1 to 4 point scale. To assess the classroom behavior and disciplinary action taken by classroom teachers and administrators in relation to the African American students involved in this study, disciplinary referrals were examined within the NCWISE database for the African American students in each of the five participating teacher's classrooms. Discipline

referrals were reported each 9-week grading period. Finally, attendance, and date of birth were also obtained for each of the students in this study using the NCWISE database.

Procedures

      The superintendent of the school system in this study granted permission for the study to take place. The school administration provided information about the unintentional racism workshop and research project to every teacher within the elementary school. Teachers, who showed interest in participating, were instructed to complete a consent form. The six teachers who provided consent were then randomly assigned to two groups. An example of this consent form is provided in Appendix B. Three of the six teachers participated in workshops during October 2009; these teachers were assigned to Group 1. The other three teachers, assigned to Group 2, participated in the workshop in January 2010. Two workshop groups were established for reasons associated with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) dropout prevention grant evaluation.

      The workshop was implemented during the school day, in the library of the elementary school. Substitutes were provided while the teachers participated in the workshop activities. At the conclusion of each workshop, each teacher participant developed an action plan. Each action plan outlined strategies to reduce unintentional racism and stereotype threat in each of their classrooms. These action plans were developed based on information the teachers received from attending the unintentional racism workshop. Dr. Ford and Dr. Habel provided continued support as the teachers implemented their action plans.

While all six teachers participated in the workshops, evaluation data were collected on the African America students of only five of the teachers. The sixth teacher was eliminated due to problems with obtaining full teacher participation, and with getting consent forms from students in that classroom. At the end of the 2009-2010 school year, NCWISE data for all African American students were collected. Before collecting student data from NCWISE, parental permission was obtained from each student participant's guardian. Each teacher participant sent parental consent forms home to each student in their classroom. The parental consent form is provided in Appendix C. The students' teachers then contacted guardians by letter or by phone. Guardians were instructed to complete formal consent if they agreed to have their child's NCWISE collected for the research study. Even though student data were collected for all students whose guardians signed and returned consent forms, only African American student data were analyzed. NCWISE data was collected for the students whose guardians signed and returned the consent form. Students participating in the study also signed a student assent form. An example of this form is provided in Appendix D. African American student data for the year during which the training occurred (2009-2010 school year) were collected in June of 2010.

Results

Impact of Workshop on Student Variables

The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the student data. The design consisted of African American students in the classrooms of four teachers who had been randomly assigned to two training groups that received training at different time periods. Student data were collected and assessed in three waves of assessments or measures; First 9 weeks (T1), Second 9 weeks (T2), and Third 9 weeks (T3). This allowed for comparisons of student data across groups as well as across time. The research design is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Research Design

	Fall 2009			Spring 2010	
Group Set	Pretest		Posttest 1		Posttest2
1	T1	workshop	T2		T3
2	T1		T2	workshop	T3

Comparisons Across Groups

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare African American students in Group 1 and Group 2, at different time periods, to evaluate whether teacher participation in the workshops resulted in significant differences on the different student variables. The student variables considered included the number of absences, grades in reading, math, science, and student discipline referrals. It was predicted that at Time 1 no differences would be seen between the two groups since neither group had participated in

the training yet. At Time 2, after Group 1 had received training, it was predicted that there would be a difference between Group 1 & Group 2 with Group 1 having lower absences, lower discipline referrals, and higher grades. At Time 3, after Group 2 had received training, Group 1 would continue to be stronger than Group 2 due to increased length of time for implementation

Time 1: First 9 weeks. For the first 9 weeks, prior to either group receiving training, results indicated that there was a significant difference in the number of absences between students in Group 1 (M= 0.75, SD= 0.89) and Group 2 (M= 2.29, SD= 1.70); t= -2.33, p= .004 with Group 2 having significantly more absences. Results indicated that there was a significant difference in the Language Arts grades between students in Group 1 (M= 2.50, SD= 1.3) and Group 2 (M= 4.00, SD= 0.00); t= -3.24, p= .014 with Group 2 scoring significantly higher than Group 1. Results indicated that there was a significant difference in the Math grades between students in Group 1 (M= 2.75, SD= 1.16) and Group 2 (M= 4.00, SD= 0.00); t= -3.04, p= .019 with Group 2 scoring significantly higher. Results indicated that there was a significant difference in the Science grades between students in Group 1 (M= 2.75, SD= 1.16) and Group 2 (M= 4.00, SD= 0.00); t= -3.04, p= .019 with Group 2 scoring significantly higher. At Time 1, no discipline referrals were reported for the students in either group. These results indicate that prior to training there were significant differences between Group 1 and Group 2 in all of the areas measured. Results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Independent Samples T-test Time:1 First 9 Weeks/Baseline Data

Student Variable	Group 1	Group 2	*t*	p	df
Number of Absences			-2.23	.004*	13
Mean	0.75	2.29			
SD	0.89	1.70			
Language Arts/Reading Grade			-3.24	.014*	7
Time 1					
Mean	2.50	4.00			
SD	1.31	.000			
Math Grade Time 1			-3.04	.019*	7
Mean	2.75	4.00			
SD	1.16	.000			
Science Grade Time 1			-3.04	.019*	7
Mean	2.75	4.00			
SD	1.16	.000			

*p<.05, two-tailed

Time 2: Second 9 weeks. If teacher participation in the workshop had a positive impact on student variables, African American student data for Group 1 should be significantly more positive compared to Group 2. Prior to training, Group 1 already had significantly higher attendance rates than Group 2 and it would be expected that this would continue. However, results indicated that, at Time 2, there was not a significant difference in the number of absences between African American students in Group 1 (M= 3.00, SD= 4.54) and Group 2 (M= 0.86, SD= 0.90); t= 1.22, p= .243. Prior to training,

Group 2 had significantly higher grades in all areas than Group 1, and it would be expected that following the training of Group 1, this difference would no longer exist. However, results indicated that there continued to be a significant differences in the Language Arts grades between African American students between Group 1 (M= 2.50, SD= 1.31) and Group 2 (M= 4.00, SD= 0.00); t= -3.24, p= .014. The mean Language Arts grade for Group 1 continued to be significantly lower than the mean Language Arts grade for Group 2. In addition, results indicated that there was a significant differences in the Math grades between Group 1 (M= 2.63, SD= 1.31) and Group 2 (M= 4.00, SD= 0.00); t= -2.98, p= .020. The mean Math grade for Group 1 continued to be significantly lower than the mean Math grade for Group 2. Finally, results indicated that there was also a significant difference in the Science grades between Group 1 (M= 3.25, SD=0.71) and Group 2 (M= 4.00, SD= 0.00); t= -3.00, p= .020. The mean Science grade for Group 1 continued to be significantly lower than the mean Science grade for Group 2. At Time 2, no discipline referrals were reported for African American students in either group during the second 9 weeks. Results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4

Independent Samples T-test: Time 2-Second 9 Weeks for African American

Students

Student Variable	Group 1	Group 2	t	p	df
Number of Absences Time 2			1.22	.243	13
Mean	3.00	0.86			
SD	4.54	0.90			
Language Arts/Reading Grade			-3.24	.014*	7

Time 2

Mean	2.50	4.00			
SD	1.31	0.00			
Math Grade Time 2			-2.98	.020*	7
Mean	2.63	4.00			
SD	1.31	0.00			
Science Grade Time 2			-3.00	.020*	7
Mean	3.25	4.00			
SD	0.71	0.00			

* p<0.05, two-tailed

Time 3: Third 9 weeks. While no significant improvements were noted on any of

the data collected following the initial training of Group 1, it was still expected that, with

additional time for implementation, there would be significant differences between Group

1 and Group 2 following the initial training of Group 2. Results indicated that, at Time 3,

there was, once again, not a significant difference in the number of absences between

African American students in Group 1 (M= 1.63, SD= 2.07) and Group 2 (M= 2.00, SD=

1.83); t= -3.70, p= .717. In addition, results indicated that there continued to be a

significant difference in the Language Arts grades between African American students in

Group 1 (M= 2.75, SD= 1.16) and Group 2 (M= 4.00, SD= 0.00); t= -3.06, p= .019. The

mean Language Arts grade for Group 1 continued to be significantly lower than the mean

Language Arts grade for Group 2. Results indicated that there was not a significant

difference in the Math grades between Group 1 (M= 3.00, SD= 1.20) and Group 2 (M=

4.00, SD= 0.00); t= -2.37, p= .050. The mean Math grade for Group 1 continued to be

significantly lower than that mean Math grade for Group 2. Results indicated that there

continued to be a significant difference in the Science grades between Group 1 (M= 3.75,

SD= .463) and Group 2 (M= 4.00, SD= 0.00); t= -1.53, p= .170. The mean Science grade

for Group 1 continued to be significantly lower than that mean Science grade for Group

2. Finally, results indicated that there was not a significant difference in the discipline

referrals between African American students in Group 1 (M= 0.13, SD= .125) and Group

2 (M= 0.00, SD= 0.00); t= 1.00, p= .351. Results are reported in Table 5.

Table 5

Independent Samples T-test: Time 3-Third 9 Weeks

Student Variables	*Group 1*	*Group 2*	*t*	*p*	*df*
Number of Absences Time 3			-.370	.717	13
Mean	1.63	2.00			
SD	2.07	1.83			
Language Arts/Reading Grade			-3.06	.019*	7
Time 3					
Mean	2.75	4.00			
SD	1.16	0.00			
Math Grade Time 3			-2.37	.050	7
Mean	3.00	4.00			
SD	1.20	0.00			
Science Grade Time 3			-1.53	.170	7
Mean	3.75	4.00			
SD	0.46	0.00			

Number of Discipline Referrals	1.00	.351	7

Time 3

Mean	0.13	0.00
SD	0.13	0.00

* p<0.05, two-tailed

Comparisons Within Groups

Paired samples t-tests were conducted to compare African American students within each group across time in order to determine if teacher participation in the unintentional racism workshop had a positive impact on number of student absences, student grades in reading, math, and science grade, and number of student disciplines. If the workshop had a positive impact on African American students, each student assessment measure would be more positive for Group 1 from Time 1 to Time 2, and from Time 2 to Time 3 and for Group 2 from Time 2 to Time 3. For both Groups, there should be a significant differences in student variables from Time 1 to Time 3

Group 1: Student absences. Results indicated that there was not a significant difference in the number of absences for African American students from the first 9 weeks (M= 0.75, SD= 0.89) to the second 9 weeks (M= 3.00, SD= 4.54); t= -1.33, p= .227, from the second 9 weeks ((M= 3.00, SD= 4.54) to the third 9 weeks (M= 1.63, SD= 2.07); t=0.73, p=.490, and from the first 9 weeks M= .75, SD= 0.89) to the third 9 weeks (M= 1.63, SD= 2.07) ; t=1.26, p=2.47. Results are reported in Table 6.

Table 6

Paired Samples T-test: Group 1 Student Absences

			t	*p*	*df*
	First 9 weeks	**Second 9 weeks**	-1.33	.227	7
Mean	0.75	3.00			
SD	0.89	4.54			
	Second 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	0.73	.490	7
Mean	3.00	1.63			
SD	4.54	2.07			
	First 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	1.26	.247	7
Mean	0.75	1.63			
SD	0.89	2.07			

* p<0.05, two-tailed

Group 1: Language arts grades. Results indicated that there was not a significant difference in Language Arts grades from the first 9 weeks (M= 2.50, SD= 1.31) to the second 9 weeks (M= 2.50, SD= 1.31); t= 0.00, p= 1.00, from the second 9 weeks (M= 2.50, SD= 1.31) to the third 9 weeks (M= 2.75, SD= 1.16); t= -1.53, p= .170, and from the first 9 weeks (M= 2.50, SD= 1.31) to the third 9 weeks (M= 2.75, SD= 1.16); = -1.00, p= .351. Results are reported in Table 7.

Table 7

Paired Samples T-test: Group 1 Language Arts Grades

			t	*p*	*df*
	First 9 weeks	**Second 9 weeks**	0.00	1.00	7
Mean	2.50	2.50			
SD	1.31	1.31			
	Second 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	-1.53	.170	7
Mean	2.50	2.75			
SD	1.31	1.16			
	First 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	1.00	.351	7
Mean	2.50	2.75			
SD	1.31	1.16			

* p<0.05, two-tailed

Group 1: Math grades. Results indicated that there was not a significant difference in Math grades from the first 9 weeks (M= 2.75, SD= 1.16) to the second 9 weeks (M= 2.63, SD= 1.30); t= 1.00, p= .351, from the second 9 weeks (M= 2.63, SD= 1.30) to the third 9 weeks (M= 3.00, SD= 1.20); t= -2.05, p=.080, and from the first 9 weeks (M= 2.75, SD= 1.16) to the third 9 weeks (M= 3.00, SD= 1.20); t=1.53, p=1.70. Results are reported in Table 8.

Table 8

Paired Samples T-test: Group 1 Math Grades

Group 1 Math Grades			*t*	*p*	*df*
	First 9 weeks	**Second 9 weeks**	1.00	.351	7
Mean	2.75	2.63			
SD	1.16	1.30			
	Second 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	-2.05	.080	7
Mean	2.63	3.00			
SD	1.30	1.20			
	First 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	1.53	.170	7
Mean	2.75	3.00			
SD	1.16	1.20			

* p<0.05, two-tailed

Group 1: Science grades. Results indicated that there was not a significant difference in Science grades from the first 9 weeks (M= 2.75, SD= 1.16) to the second 9 weeks (M= 3.25, SD= 0.71); t= -1.87, p= .104, from the second 9 weeks (M= 3.25, SD= 0.71) to the third 9 weeks (M= 3.75, SD= 0.46); t= -1.87, p=1.04. Results indicated that there was a significant difference in science grades from the first 9 weeks (M= 2.75, SD= 1.16) to the third 9 weeks (M= 3.75, SD= 0.46); t=3.05, p=.018. Results are reported in Table 9.

Table 9

Paired Samples T-test: Group 1 Science Grades

Group 1 Science Grades			t	p	df
	First 9 weeks	**Second 9 weeks**	-1.87	.104	7
Mean	2.75	3.25			
SD	1.16	0.71			
	Second 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	-1.87	.104	7
Mean	3.25	3.75			
SD	0.71	.46			
	First 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	3.05	.018*	7
Mean	2.75	3.75			
SD	1.16	0.46			

* p<0.05, two-tailed

Group 1: Discipline referrals. Group 1 reported no discipline referrals for African American students during the first and second nine weeks. Results indicated that there was not a significant difference in discipline referrals from the second 9 weeks (M= 0.00, SD= 0.00) to the third 9 weeks (M= 0.13, SD= 0.35); t=-1.00, p=.351, and from the first 9 weeks (M= 0.00, SD= 0.00) to the third 9 weeks (M= 0.13, SD= 0.35); t=1.00, p=.351. Results are reported in Table 10.

Table 10

Paired Samples T-test: Group 1 Discipline Referrals

Group 1 Discipline Referrals			*t*	*p*	*df*
	Second 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	1.00	.351	7
Mean	0.00	0.13			
SD	0.00	0.35			
	First 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	1.00	.351	7
Mean	0.00	0.13			
SD	0.00	0.35			

* p<0.05, two-tailed

Group 2: Absences. For Group 2, results indicated that there was not a significant difference in the number of absences from the first 9 weeks (M= 2.29, SD= 1.70) to the second 9 weeks (M= 0.86, SD= 0.90); t= 1.70, p= .140, and from the second 9 weeks (M= 0.86, SD= 0.90), to the third 9 weeks (M= 2.00, SD= 1.83); t=-2.25, p=.066. There was not a significant difference in the number of absences from the first 9 weeks (M= 2.29, SD= 1.70) to the third 9 weeks (M= 2.00, SD= 1.83); t=-.296, p=.797. Results are reported in Table 11.

Table 11

Paired Samples T-test: Group 2 Absences

			t	p	df
	First 9 weeks	**Second 9 weeks**	1.70	.140	6
Mean	2.29	0.86			
SD	1.70	0.90			
	Second 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	-2.25	.066	6
Mean	.86	2.00			
SD	.90	1.83			
	First 9 weeks	**Third 9 weeks**	-.269	.797	6
Mean	2.29	2.00			
SD	1.70	1.83			

* p<0.05, two-tailed

Group 2: Language arts grades. There were no reported differences in Language Arts grades for Group 2 for the first, second, and third 9 weeks. All African American students maintained a 4.00 grade point average for Language Arts.

Group 2: Math grades. There were no reported differences in Math grades for Group 2 for the first, second, and third 9 weeks. All African American students maintained a 4.00 grade point average for Math.

Group 2: Science grades. There were no reported differences in Science grades for Group 2 across for the first, second, and third 9 weeks. All African American students maintained a 4.00 grade point average for Science.

Group 2: Discipline referrals. There were no discipline referrals reported at for

Group 2 during the first, second, and third 9 weeks.

Discussion

The school social climate relates to specific behavioral and academic predictors of dropout, such as attendance, school performance, and number of discipline referrals of African American students (McNeal, 1997; Donaldson, 2001). Given the notion that successful dropout prevention programs address the social environment of the school and target the knowledge, dispositions, and behaviors of educators rather than the behavior of a particular group or groups of students, it was expected that the unintentional racism workshop presented by Dr. Tom Ford and Dr. John Habel, would have positive impact on student variables. The following hypotheses were addressed:

1. African American students in classes where the teachers have received the unintentional racism workshop will have significantly lower absences, higher grades, and lower discipline referrals when compared to African American students in classes where teachers have not received this training.

2. African American students in classes where teachers have had longer time to implement the skills learned through the unintentional racism workshop will have significantly lower absences, higher grades, and lower discipline referrals when compared to African American students in classes where teachers are just beginning to implement skills learned through the unintentional racism workshop.

3. African American students in classes where teacher began implementing the skills learned through the unintentional racism workshop at the beginning of the academic year will have significantly lower absences, higher grades, and lower discipline referrals from the beginning of the academic year to the middle of the

academic year, from the middle of the academic year to the end of the academic

year, and from the beginning of the year to the end of the academic year.

4. African American students in classes were teachers began implementing the

skills learned through the unintentional racism workshop during the middle of the

academic year, will have significantly lower absences, higher grades, and lower

discipline referrals from the middle of the academic year to the end of the

academic year, and from the beginning of the academic year to the end of the

academic year.

Comparison Across Groups

Teacher participation in the unintentional racism workshop did not result in

differences across groups for any of the areas measured in this study. Several factors

contributed to the inability to determine any impact across groups from teacher

participation in these workshops. First, the data collected prior to training indicated that

there were already significant differences between the two groups in terms of attendance

and grades. Group 1 had significantly lower attendance rates and Group 2 had

significantly higher grades. In addition, neither group had any discipline problems prior

to the implementation of the training workshops. In regards to attendance, the rates

seemed to go up and down for both groups. Therefore, despite the significant difference

found at Time 1, the lack of significant differences in attendance at Time 2 and Time 3

appeared to be random with no indication that teacher participation in the workshop had

any impact positive or negative. The fact that there was a significant difference in grades

between the groups at Time 1, but not at later times, would indicate that, while Group 1

might have made some improvements in grades, those improvements could not be

compared to improvements in grades made by Group 2, since those students started out with the highest grades possible and remained at that level throughout the study.

Comparisons Within Groups

For the most part, teacher participation in the unintentional racism workshop resulted in no significant changes in grades, attendance, or discipline referrals within each group across time. There was one significant difference for Group 1 in science grades from Time 1 to Time 3. Group 1 had significantly higher science grades at Time 3 compared to Time 1. However, no other improvements in grades were indicated for either Group 1 or Group 2. In addition, teacher participation in the unintentional racism workshop did not result in significant changes in attendance or discipline referrals for either group. Several factors contributed to the inability to determine any additional impacts across time for Group 1 and Group 2. First, with little differences in academic data across time, it is difficult to draw conclusions about teacher workshop participation improving academic performance of African American students in Group 1. For Group 2, teachers were providing their students with grades as high as they could get at Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3, making it impossible to show improvements in academics across time. In addition, neither group began with any discipline problems. In regards to attendance, the rates seemed to go up and down for both groups. Therefore, there was no indication that teacher participation in the workshop had any impact positive or negative.

Strengths and Limitations of Research

There were several potential strengths associated with this research. The unintentional racism workshop is based on research that shows educational environments must be addressed in order to reduce dropout predictors in African American students. In

general, participant feedback indicates that teacher participants enjoyed the unintentional racism workshop, and enjoyed learning about, discussing, and exploring cultural differences with their colleagues. Teacher participants informally provided feedback indicating that the unintentional racism workshop helped them to be more aware of their own racial biases, and how racial biases impact teaching and the classroom environment. Teacher participants also stated that they learned how to communicate higher expectations to African American students. In addition, the instrument used to collect African American student data was an accurate depiction of their attendance, discipline records and academic performance. Student variables were collected through archival data from the NCWISE Student Information System. NCWISE allows school systems to assess, report, and evaluate a number of student and classroom variables.

There were several limitations associated with this research study. The student sample of 15 was small, causing difficulty in making statistically strong comparisons across groups and within groups. For several student variables, there was no room for growth since some students had a low number of absences during baseline or were receiving the highest grades possible across Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3. Teacher attitudes, feelings, and personal growth were not assessed. Student motivation, including how well they identify with academics and sense of belonging, was not assessed. In addition, students in Group 1 started out with strong attendance and no discipline problems and Group 2 started out with strong grades, and no discipline problems making it difficult to show that teacher participation in the workshop had any positive or negative impact for either group.

Recommendations for Future Research

The link between school climate and student achievement is well documented, but more research needs to be done regarding strategies to improve school climate and reduce dropout predictors of African Americans. Teachers are an important factor in dropout prevention programs and changing the school environment for African American students. Influencing what happens in the classroom can be very difficult (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Teacher perceptions of the drop out prevention programs, and knowledge of multicultural education must be evaluated before and after a program to change the social environment for African American students is implemented. Teachers can directly influence the academic achievement, academic engagement, and disciplinary problems of African American students through the environment created in their schools. How teachers understand their role as teachers to African American students affects how unintentional racism affects the environment of their classroom. Knowing teacher perceptions and knowledge of multicultural education prior to and following a program, will provide evidence that the dropout prevention program effectively changed teacher's perceptions of unintentional racism and stereotype thereat in their classrooms.

When developing a dropout prevention program it is important to identify schools and student populations within schools that would benefit most from dropout prevention efforts. This study raises questions about diagnosing a school and determining what factors make a school a good candidate for dropout prevention programs. Throughout the study, there were no discipline concerns and students in Group 2 received the highest grades possible. It is important to introduce dropout prevention efforts in school that have high populations of at risk students. In addition, it is important to consider what grade

levels within an elementary school will benefit most from dropout prevention efforts. The majority of students in Group 2 were kindergartners and received the highest grades possible throughout the academic year, making it difficult to show changes in grades for this group.

When developing a dropout prevention program with the goal being to change the school's social environment, the program should address every classroom within a school. Collecting data from a larger student sample may provide more evidence that the impact had a positive or negative impact on dropout predictors for African American students. Focusing on an entire school should increase the sample size for assessing student variables and allow researchers to examine the long-term effects of the program on student variables. Additional student variables such as how they identify with academics, their motivation, and sense of belonging in the school environment should be examined. The experiences students have in the school environment are the most common reasons for dropping out (Mann, 1986). Many students who drop out of school lack a sense of belonging in the classroom and school environment. They have negative attitudes associated with school and have difficulty identifying with academics. Therefore, they place little importance on academic achievement (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; Griffin, 2002). Collecting measures on student motivation and sense of belonging in the classroom may provide information on the impact of dropout prevention programs or trainings for teachers.

Research shows that successful dropout prevention programs for African American students must address the social environment of students (Dynarski & Gleason 2002; West, 1991). Research clearly indicates social climate relates to specific behavioral

and academic predictors of dropout, poor academic achievement of African American students; especially among students of minority status (McNeal, 1997; Donaldson, 2001). It is clear that changes in the social environment for African American students could produce promising results (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002; Rumberger, 2004). The purpose of this research was to examine the effectiveness of an unintentional racism workshop for teachers designed to reduce dropout predictors in African American students. No conclusions could be drawn from the data collected. To ensure workshops for teachers and dropout prevention programs improve dropout predictors, it is important to examine all aspects of the students such as academics, attendance, discipline records, motivation, and sense of belonging. In addition, it is important to show that the workshop or dropout prevention program helps all teachers understand their role as teachers to African American students, and how well they combat unintentional racism and stereotype threat within their classrooms. More research is needed to examine how changing the school environment can reduce dropout predictors for minority students.

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Appendix A

Unintentional Racism Workshop Outline

Unintentional Racism

Isaac Dickson Workshop 2009-2010

Thomas E. Ford

and

John Habel
Department of Psychology, Western Carolina University

I. **Theory of Aversive Racism**
   A. *What is Aversive Racism?*
   B. *Stereotypes*
   C. *Operation of Unintentional (Aversive) Racism in School Settings*

II. **Biased Thinking: Fundamental Attribution Error**
   A. *Stereotypes Shape Our Attributions*

III. **Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**

IV. **Positive Feedback Bias**
   A. *Perspective of the Teacher*
   B. *Perspective of the Student*

V. **"Wise Schooling": Combating Unintentional Racism**
   A. *Set High Standards*
   B. *Encourage Self-Affirmation.*
   C. *Discuss with Students External Attributions for Difficulties*

VI. **Action Plan**

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form
Western Carolina University

Dear Teacher Participant:

As a school psychology graduate student, I am going to examine the effectiveness of an unintentional racism workshop for teachers designed to reduce dropout predictors in African American students.

This consent form will be the only document with your name. For the report and data collection, a pseudonym will used that will in no way resemble your actual name or any identifying information about you. However, for descriptive purposes, your age and race might be used in reporting.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, feel free to ask questions. You may contact me, Leah Edwards, at lredwards1@catamount.wcu.edu or by phone at (828-773-1602). You may also contact my faculty advisor (Dr. Lori Unruh, Department of School Psychology, WCU) with questions and concerns regarding your participation in this study by email (lunruh@email.wcu.edu) or by phone (828-227-2738). If you would like the results of this study or a copy of the report, please include your email address or mailing address. Thank you for your and your child's time and cooperation.

Additionally, if you have any concerns about how you were treated during the experiment, you may contact the office of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Western Carolina University, a committee that oversees the ethical dimensions of the research process. The IRB office can be contacted at 828-227-3177. This research project has been approved by the IRB.

Name: _____   Date: _____

Signature: _____

Email address (if you'd like results):
_____

Mailing address (if no email address): -
_____

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form
Western Carolina University

Dear Parent/Guardian:

     As a school psychology graduate student, I am going to examine the effectiveness of an unintentional racism workshop for teachers designed to reduce dropout predictors in African American students. I will be evaluating the unintentional racism workshop's effects on teacher's perspectives of the workshop and student academic performance, attendance, and classroom behavior. Student academic performance, student behavior, and student attendance will be collected from the NCWISE Student Information System. The North Carolina Window on Student Education (NC WISE) is a data system that integrates information from public schools and classrooms into one database. NCWISE allows school systems to assess, report, and evaluate a number of student and classroom variables.

     By signing this form, you are allowing your child to participate in this study that will consist reviewing their academic performance and classroom behaviors. Data from this study will be collected and will be used in a written report of the study. The identity and the name of your child will remain anonymous. By signing this form, you are agreeing to release your child's academic records and observations of classroom behavior for this use.

     This consent form will be the only document with your child's name. For the report and data collection, your child's actual name or any identifying information about your child will remain anonymous. However, for descriptive purposes, your child's age and race might be used in reporting. Your child may withdraw from this study at any time, at no cost, and her information will not be included in the report.

     If you have any questions or concerns about the study, feel free to ask questions. You may contact me, Leah Edwards, at lredwards1@catamount.wcu.edu or by phone at (828-773-1602). You may also contact my faculty advisor (Dr. Lori Unruh, Department of School Psychology, WCU) with questions and concerns regarding your participation in this study by email (lunruh@email.wcu.edu) or by phone (828-227-2738). If you would like the results of this study or a copy of the report, please include your email address or mailing address. Thank you for your and your child's time and cooperation.

     Additionally, if you have any concerns about how you were treated during the experiment, you may contact the office of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Western Carolina University, a committee that oversees the ethical dimensions of the research process. The IRB office can be contacted at 828-227-3177. This research project has been approved by the IRB.

Child's Name: _____   Date: -_____

Parent/Guardian's Name (please print) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Email address (if you'd like results):
_____

Mailing address (if no email address):
_____

                              _____

Appendix D

Student Assent Form
Western Carolina University

Dear Student:

As a psychology graduate student, I am conducting research on school-aged African American students. I want to know about your feelings towards school, your teachers, and your classroom experiences. By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in a study that will examine your academic performance, attendance, and classroom behavior for the year. Your parent/guardian already has signed a consent form stating that you are allowed to participate in this study. This form states you agree to participate in this study. Answers from this study will be used in a written report of the study with a code name used instead of your real name. By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate. Once the study has been completed, the audio recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

This assent form will be the only document with your name. For the report and data collection, a code name will used that will in no way resemble your actual name or any identifying information about you. However, your age and race might be used in reporting.

During this study, you will be asked to share with me some personal experiences and feelings about your experiences. You may withdraw from this study at any time, without any consequences, and your information will not be included in the report.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, feel free to ask questions. You may contact me, Leah Edwards, at lredwards1@catamount.wcu.edu or by phone at (828-773-1602). You may also contact my faculty advisor (Dr. Lori Unruh, Department of School Psychology, WCU) with questions and concerns regarding your participation in this study by email (lunruh@email.wcu.edu) or by phone (828-227-2738). If you would like the results of this study or a copy of the report, please include your email address or mailing address. Thank you for your and your child's time and cooperation.

Additionally, if you have any concerns about how you were treated during the experiment, you may contact the office of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Western Carolina University, a committee that oversees the ethical dimensions of the research process. The IRB office can be contacted at 828-227-3177. This research project has been approved by the IRB.

Name: _____   Date: _____

Signature: _____