Tools for Teachers: Strategies for Addressing Racial Dynamics in the Classroom

Linda R. Tropp
Department of Psychology
University of Massachusetts Amherst

December 2014

Email: tropp@psych.umass.edu
What Can We Do To Reduce Racial Bias and Combat Racial Anxiety?

- Promote inter-racial contact
- Create situations that exemplify optimal conditions for inter-racial contact
  - Equal status between racial groups
  - Cooperative interdependence
  - Institutional support

(Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011)
Meta–Analysis of Intergroup Contact Effects

• Quantitative integration of research studies testing intergroup contact effects
  – Total of 515 studies (713 independent samples)
  – Studies conducted between 1940s and 2000
  – Data from 250,089 study participants

• Research conducted in diverse contexts
  – Contact studies from 38 different countries
  – Participants from different groups, ages, settings
  – Studies gathered from multiple disciplines
    (e.g., psychology, sociology, political science, education, social work, nursing)

(Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; 2011)
Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice?

Answer: YES
Greater contact between groups typically predicts lower levels of prejudice

Comparable effects across:
- Age groups
- Target groups
- Contact settings
- National contexts

(Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; 2011)
How Does Contact Reduce Prejudice?

(Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008)
How Does Contact Reduce Prejudice?

(Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008)
How Does Contact Reduce Prejudice?

(Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008)
Sample Graph

Lower Prejudice

Overall Effect
Does Type of Contact Matter?

Answer: YES, contact as friends shows stronger effects

(Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; 2011)
Effects of Cross-Group Friendship: An Experimental Test

- 80 White and 64 Latino(a) participants randomly assigned to “same group” or “cross group” friendship dyads
- Before first meeting (baseline), participants completed a measure of implicit prejudice (IAT) and provided saliva samples to assess cortisol reactivity (stress response)
- Dyads returned to lab for three “friendship building” meetings (see Aron et al., 1997), and provided saliva samples after each meeting
- After third friendship meeting, participants kept diaries and reported cross-race interactions they initiated

(Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008)
Among those paired with a cross-group partner...

participants high in prejudice showed greater cortisol reactivity (stress response) at the first friendship meeting, but this effect attenuates by the third friendship meeting.

(Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008)
Among those high in prejudice...

Participants in the cross-group condition were significantly more likely to initiate new cross-group interactions than those who were in the same-group condition

(Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008)
Does Type of Contact Matter?

Answer: YES, contact under optimal conditions - such as equal status between groups, cooperative interdependence, and institutional support - also yields stronger effects

(Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; 2011)
Does Contact Show Positive Effects for Children and Adolescents in K-12 Schools?

Answer: YES, school contact between youth from different groups shows positive effects, and especially with optimal conditions

(Tropp & Prenovost, 2008)
How to Create Optimal Conditions in Classrooms?

**Interdependence:** Cooperative Learning Strategies  
(e.g., *Jigsaw Classroom*; Aronson et al., 1978)

**Equal Status:** Classroom Composition and Representation  
(e.g., Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987; Wright & Tropp, 2005)
Equal Status through Classroom Composition and Language Use

• 351 White children from K-2 public school classrooms in central California (5-9 years old, mean = 6.55 years)

• Classrooms varied in proportions of Latino students and levels of instruction in English and Spanish

  • Predominantly White - English Only
    (10 classrooms, n = 162)
  • Ethnically Mixed - English Only
    (12 classrooms, n = 80)
  • Ethnically Mixed - English and Spanish Bilingual
    (16 classrooms, n = 109)
Equal Status through Classroom Composition and Language Use

- Eight target photos placed in front of the child, including photos of 4 Latino and 4 White children (matched by gender and physical attractiveness)

- Children were asked to pick all the children they would “like as best friends”

(Wright & Tropp, 2005)
Predicting Children’s Friendship Preferences

Percentage of Target Photos Selected

- **White English Only**
- **Mixed English Only**
- **Mixed English-Spanish**

Legend:
- Red: Latino Targets
- Blue: White Targets
What Other Factors Can Reduce Racial Bias and Promote Positive Intergroup Relations?

• **Perceived Norms of Peers and Teachers**
  Perceived support for cross-group contact among ingroup peers, and among teachers and principals, predict greater interest in cross-group friendships (Jugert, Noack, & Rutland, 2011; Tropp, O’Brien, & Migacheva, 2014).

• **“Extended” Contact**
  Knowing that members of our groups are friends with members of other groups promotes positive intergroup attitudes and greater willingness to engage in contact (Cameron, Rutland, Brown, & Douch, 2006; Gómez, Tropp, & Fernandez, 2011; Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997).
Summary and Conclusions

- Bias and anxiety can be reduced through contact between different racial and ethnic groups.

- Positive effects of intergroup contact are especially likely to occur when:
  - Contact involves cross-group friendships.
  - Contact occurs under optimal conditions (equal status, cooperative interdependence, institutional support).

- Positive effects of contact occur both when children:
  - Develop cross-race friendships themselves.
  - Observe others’ friendships in social environments.

- Supportive norms for cross-group relations among students and teachers can further promote interest in contact and development of cross-group friendships.
References

References