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ABSTRACT

This study examines responses to a survey that assessed perceptions of racial relations in schools to highlight areas that would benefit most from school attention. The Racial Climate Survey was administered to 2,882 students and 377 teachers/administrators in a large school district in Florida. An exploratory factor analysis of the 12-item survey showed that items could be grouped into 3 themes: (1) perceptions of personal interactions; (2) perceptions of administrators' and teachers' respect and fairness for students of different races; and (3) perceptions of students' social interactions. Estimates of internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha coefficient were 0.77 for the total score, 0.31 for Factor I, 0.72 for Factor II, and 0.50 for Factor III. Multivariate analyses of variance were used to examine factor differences between school staff and students, males and females, and racial groups. School staff had significantly more positive perceptions of personal interactions and more positive perceptions of administrators' and teachers' respect and fairness than did students. Staff and students perceived students' social interactions as being less positive. Black staff members and Black students had fewer positive perceptions of fairness of treatment for students of different races (White, Black, Hispanic American, Asian American, and American Indian). Included are 10 references and 6 tables. (RLC)

Perceptions of Racial Interaction in the School: The Racial Climate Survey

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important correlates of an instructionally effective school is climate. With that understanding, this study examined responses to a survey that assessed perceptions of racial relations in the school. It was expected that results would provide information on areas that would benefit most from school attention. The Racial Climate Survey (RCS) was administered to 2882 students and 377 teachers/administrators in a large school district. An exploratory factor analysis of the 12 item survey suggested that items could be grouped into three themes: (1) Perceptions of Personal Interactions, (2) Perceptions of Administrators' and Teachers' Respect and Fairness for Students of Different Races, and (3) Perceptions of Students' Social Interactions. Estimates of internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha were .77 for the total score, .81 for Factor I, .72 for Factor II, and .50 for Factor III. A series of MANOVA's were computed to examine factor differences between school staff and students, between males and females, and between respondents racial groups. In general, it was found that school staff had significantly more positive perceptions of Personal Interactions and more positive perceptions of Administrators' and Teachers' Respect and Fairness than did students. Both staff and students perceived Students' Social Interactions as being less positive. When scores were examined by race, if was observed that Black staff members and Black students had less positive perceptions of fairness of treatment for students of different races.

Perceptions of Racial Interaction in the School: The Racial Climate Survey

This paper describes the results of a survey administered to measure perceptions of racial interactions in the school. The survey was part of an evaluation plan aimed at providing formative feedback to administrators of a Multicultural Awareness Program. The purpose in examining the results of the Racial Climate Survey were twofold: (a) to determine the psychometric qualities of the instrument for this District setting, and (b) to provide baseline information of students' and school staff' perceptions of racial interaction for Program intervention and future comparison.

Much research has focused on the effective school theory (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Edmonds, 1979; Rutter, 1979). Effective schools are defined as those that have equal proportions of students in high and low social classes obtain minimum mastery of academic content. Five correlates of instructionally effective schools have been identified: (1) Purpose, (2) High Expectations, (3) Leadership, (4) Testing Results, and (5) School Climate. It is school climate which is of particular interest to this study.

The Racial Climate Survey (RCS) taps many characteristics of the broad domain school climate. Characteristics, such as, the level of friendship and mutual support between school members,

the uniformity of treatment for students, perceptions of a safe and orderly environment, and the accessability of group membership and social mixing (Genova, 1979; Genova, 1980; Lanasa & Potter, 1984). The relationship between school climate and positive school outcomes suggests the importance of assessing climate and intervening in areas of weakness. Lanasa and Potter (1984) suggest that one intervention for strengthening schools serving students of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds is through multicultural education.

Method

The Racial Climate Survey was administered to a sample of students and school staff in all secondary schools in a large Florida District. An administrator in each of the 36 schools was requested to select one classroom from each grade level that best reflected the racial-ethnic composition of their school and a broad range of student achievement. Although random selection was not feasible for students, a stratified random sample of teachers were selected from each school. School administrators also completed the survey. The resulting sample consisted of 2882 students and 377 staff members. Approximately one half of the sample was from middle schools and the other half from high schools. Fifty-three percent of the sample was female and 47% male. Racial-ethnic groups were represented in the following manner: White, 72% Black, 17%; and Hispanic, Asian, American

Indian combined, 11%.

Instrumentation. The RCS contains 12 items selected from the Student Survey of Multicultural Relations developed in Dade County, Florida (Rothfarb, 1989). A student form and an adult form were developed for administration. Items from the Dade County survey were modified by changing the keyword "cultural" to "racial" and references to "city" to "school". Respondents selected one of five responses, with 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = uncertain, and 5 = strongly agree. The original survey was developed through extensive collaboration and review between County personnel, community representatives, and multicultural experts. Preliminary findings indicated estimates of internal consistency of .78 for the original 14 item survey.

Results

Addressing the psychometric qualities of the RCS for this District setting, estimates of reliability using Cronbach's Alpha were .77 for both students and staff. Items #5 and #7 were reverse coded based on negative correlations to other items. To identify common factors among survey items, the data were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis using squared multiple correlations as estimates of communality. Examination of eigenvalues and scree plot suggested a three factor solution.

The decision was made to use a Promax oblique rotation (see Table 1) due to factors correlating between .40 and .43. Survey items with weights greater than .33 were included in the interpretation. The factors were labeled: Factor I: Perceptions of Personal Interactions; Factor II: Perceptions of Administrators' and Teachers' Respect and Fairness for Students of Different Races; and Factor III: Perceptions of Students' Social Interactions (see Table 2). In total, the three factor solution accounted for 38% of the sample variance. Estimates of internal consistency for the three factors using Cronbach's Alpha were: Factor I (.81), Factor II (.72), and Factor III (.50).

Insert Table 1 & 2 about here

Addressing the need for formative feedback for Program development, the data were subjected to both descriptive and inferential analysis. Means and standard deviations for each factor and total score were computed for students and staff by race (see Table 3). The summary statistics suggest that school staff tend to have more positive perceptions of racial interactions in the school than do students. Within-group means (students & staff) suggest possible differences in perceptions between racial groups.

Insert Table 3 about here

Total scores on the RCS were analyzed within a two-factor ANOVA using groups (students & staff) and schools (36 schools) as the independent variables. The ANOVA for total scores for groups and schools produced a significant main effect for groups, $F(1,3146) = 158.11$, $p = .0001$. No main effect for schools, nor interaction effects for groups by schools were found. The results showed that school staff had significantly higher or more positive perceptions of racial climate than students.

To investigate the differences in perceptions of staff and students as reflected in their total scores, responses to items with the greatest weight (4 items per factor) were summed to create estimates of factor scores. Estimated factor scores for students and staff were analyzed using a one-way MANOVA. As expected, the MANOVA for groups was significant, $F(3,3157) = 104.18$, $p = .0001$ (see Table 4).

Insert Table 4 about here

Results of the univariate F tests between staff and students showed significant differences for two of the three factors ($p=.0001$). Comparisons indicated that school staff had higher

scores on Perceptions of Personal Interactions (Factor I) and Perceptions of Administrators' and Teachers' Respect and Fairness for Students of Different Races (Factor II) than students. No significant differences were found between students and staff for Factor III, Perceptions of Students' Social Interactions.

To investigate whether there were within-group differences, student responses and staff responses were analyzed separately within a two-factor MANOVA using race and sex as independent variables. The MANOVA for students' factor scores by race (White, Black, & Other) and sex produced significant main effects for both race and sex (p=.0001). No interaction effects for race by sex were found (see Table 5).

Insert Table 5 about here

Results of the univariate F tests for students revealed that there were significant differences for race on all three factors and significant differences for sex on Factor I (Personal Interactions). Post hoc comparisons for race were performed using Dunn's test (p <.05). For Factor I scores, Black students and students in the category "Other" had more positive perceptions of personal interactions than White students. Female students were also found to have higher scores on Factor I than did males (Females $\bar{X}$=15.0 & Males $\bar{X}$=14.0). For Factor II scores,

White students and students in the category "Other" had more positive perceptions of administrators' and teachers' respect and fairness than Black students. Comparisons for Factor III revealed that students in the category "Other" had significantly higher scores on perceptions of students' social interactions than did White and Black students.

Due to the large sample size for the students, statistical differences were found for all three factors. Only Factor II, perceptions of fairness between races, suggests any practical utility in planning Program efforts (alternative eta squared = 3.0%).

The MANOVA for factor scores for school staff by race (White & Black only) and sex produced a significant main effect for race, $F(3,269) = 14.47$, $p = .0001$. No main effect for sex, nor interaction effects for race by sex were found (see Table 6).

Results of the univariate F tests revealed that there were significant differences for staff by race on Factor II ($p=.0001$, alternative eta squared = 8.0%). In examining means scores, White staff members had significantly higher or more positive perceptions of respect and fairness for students of different races than did Black staff members. The discrepancy in perceptions of respect and fairness was observed in both the staff and student sample.

Insert Table 6 about here

Discussion

The findings clearly suggest that teachers and administrators, as a whole, have fairly positive perceptions of racial climate in the school. Staff were also found to view their own interactions with people of different races and equity of staff's treatment of students of different races more positively than they did students' interactions with each other.

Students attitudes of racial relations in the school followed a pattern similar to adults, but were more moderate in their perceptions. Students viewed their personal interactions and fairness of treatment more positively than they did students' interactions as a group.

It is of interest that both staff and students viewed students' social interaction as being the weakest. Individual items may suggest promising areas of intervention in promoting school climate. Findings for individual items suggest that students tend to associate with students of the same race, do not easily interact across racial groups, have concerns for personal safety, and do not show respect for students racial differences.

The forming of groups is a natural human phenomenon and is particularly important in the adolescent years (Genova, 1980).

It is possible, however, for schools to foster an atmosphere of flexible group membership by providing opportunities for constructive racial interaction in learning, social, and recreational activities. Allport (1954) and others, have demonstrated that racial mixing promotes positive interracial attitudes and behaviors.

The extent to which students feel safe in the school in their interactions with students of different race and ethnic backgrounds is another key element of climate. Students who feel safe in their associations with students of different backgrounds are shown to possess more positive interracial attitudes and behaviors than do students who feel unsafe. The school principal plays a critical role in establishing a secure environment that minimizes harassment, threats, theft, or bodily harm. Literature suggests that schools found to be most effective in providing a safe and secure setting for students and staff are those that: (1) establish clear rules for order and apply them equitably, (2) have a representative system of governance that encourages acceptance of rules by the majority of its members, and (3) have incentive programs for learning (DOHEW, 1978).

Respect implies an understanding of the customs, values, and beliefs of people with backgrounds different than our own. The infusion of information concerning many races and cultures into the curriculum is part of the multicultural educative process.

But multicultural education must go beyond curricular exposure if it is to foster positive human interactions (Lanasa & Potter, 1984). Schools must actively and systematically provide opportunities for the exchange of ideas and feelings if they are to peel away the layers of unacceptance through fear of difference or lack of understanding.

In turn, when survey responses were examined for staff by race it was found that attitudes differed only in regards to perceptions of administrators' and teachers' respect and fairness for students of different races. Black staff members perceived treatment of students of different races as less fair than did White staff members. The discrepancy in perceptions of respect and fairness were also observed for Black students. Heid (1984) had similar findings in an investigation of students perceptions of Court ordered busing. Several reasons why Black members perceive treatment as being less positive have been suggested, they are as follows: (a) over-representation in lower achieving and lower status tracks, (b) more frequently disciplined, (c) higher suspension rates, (d) lower average course grades, and (e) less positive reinforcement. This area offers particular promise for Program examination and intervention.

Relative to this study's limitations, the lack of random sampling of students should be considered. Taking a district-wide perspective, it is unlikely that 36 administrators could

select intact classrooms that were racially representative with any particular or systematic bias. Therefore, if analysis of results are not microscopic, the sample can be viewed as being fairly representative of the student population. In addition, interpretation of Factor III has some limitations due to moderate subscale intercorrelation. In consideration of this concern, suggestions for promoting interaction among students was addressed at the individual item level.

In summary, the findings suggest two broad areas in which the Multicultural Awareness Program can affect change. School climate can be impacted by: (a) promoting social interaction of students of different races through flexible group membership, understanding and respect for cultural differences, and school safety, and (b) examining the reasons why Black staff members and Black students perceive treatment of students of different races differently than their counterparts. It should be noted that areas for intervention were <u>not</u> identified based on negative scores, but rather, were based on areas shown to be weaker than others and on differences consistent across students and adults.

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Table 1

Factor Pattern, Communalities, and Factor Structure of Item Responses on the Racial Climate Survey.

ITEMS	Pattern Matrix				Structure Matrix		
	F1	F2	F3	h^2	F1	F2	F3
1	.74*	.00	-.08	.50	.70	.28	.24
2	.80*	-.02	-.10	.58	.76	.29	.24
3	.74*	.02	.04	.59	.77	.36	.37
4	.51*	.03	.15	.37	.59	.32	.39
5	.02	-.16	.39*	.13	.12	.03	.33
6	.17	.11	.43*	.34	.40	.38	.55
7	-.12	.06	.36*	.12	.06	.17	.33
8	.03	.59*	-.04	.35	.27	.59	.25
9	.02	.46*	-.04	.22	.22	.47	.22
10	.08	.33	.34*	.38	.37	.52	.52
11	-.05	.71*	-.01	.46	.25	.68	.30
12	.02	.74*	-.09	.51	.31	.71	.27

Proportion of variance explained = 4.55/12 = .379

note: * standardized regression coefficients >.33

Table 2

Factor Labels for the Exploratory Analysis of Item Responses on the Racial Climate Survey.

FACTOR I: PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL INTERACTIONS

ITEMS	WEIGHTS	
2	.80	I enjoy having friends from other racial groups.
1	.74	I like to be with people who have a different racial background from mine.
3	.74	I like attending (working in) a school with people from different racial groups.
4	.51	My friends (colleagues) like attending (working in) a school with different racial groups.

FACTOR II: PERCEPTIONS OF ADMINISTRATORS'/TEACHERS' RESPECT AND FAIRNESS FOR STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT RACES

ITEMS	WEIGHTS	
12	.74	Administrators in this school respect the racial differences among students.
11	.71	Teachers in this school respect the racial differences among students.
8	.59	In this school, discipline is enforced fairly among students regardless of their racial background.
9	.46	In this school, teachers deal with racial or ethnic insults immediately.

FACTOR III: PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS' SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

ITEMS	WEIGHTS	
6	.43	In this school, students mix easily with students who have different racial backgrounds than theirs.
5	.39	Students in this school usually "hang out" with students of the same race.
7	.36	Students in this school are afraid of students who have different racial backgrounds than theirs.
10	.34	The students in this school respect the racial differences of other students.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Factor Scores and Total Score on the Racial Climate Survey for Students and School Staff by Race.

	STUDENTS				SCHOOL STAFF			
	White	Black	Other	TOTAL	White	Black	Other	TOTAL
SCORES	$\bar{X}$ (SD)	$\bar{X}$ (SD)	$\bar{X}$ (SD)	$\bar{X}$ (SD)	$\bar{X}$ (SD)	$\bar{X}$ (SD)	$\bar{X}$ (SD)	$\bar{X}$ (SD)
Personal	14.34 (3.72)	14.83 (3.59)	15.01 (3.50)	14.52 (3.68)	16.60 (2.46)	16.18 (3.02)	14.67 (3.94)	16.50 (2.61)
Fairness	13.69 (3.71)	11.95 (3.97)	13.31 (3.85)	13.32 (3.83)	17.08 (2.87)	14.57 (4.24)	15.56 (4.30)	16.67 (3.27)
Social	11.28 (3.33)	10.85 (3.12)	11.96 (3.31)	11.29 (3.27)	11.50 (3.15)	12.07 (3.57)	9.33 (3.32)	11.54 (3.23)
Total	39.33 (8.01)	37.61 (7.64)	40.29 (7.93)	39.17 (7.97)	45.17 (6.30)	42.67 (8.48)	39.56 (9.34)	44.68 (6.84)
	n=1963	n=378	n=343		n=299	n=55	n=9	

Table 4

MANOVA on Factor Scores for the Racial Climate Survey by Students and School Staff.

Multivariate Test Statistics			
Wilks' Lambda	df	F	p
.91	3,3157	104.18	.0001

Univariate F Tests		
FACTORS (df = 1,3159)	F	p
Perceptions of Personal Interactions	94.73	.0001a
Perceptions of Administrators'/Teachers' Respect and Fairness	248.80	.0001b
Perceptions of Students' Interactions	1.97	.1610

a School Staff > Students, means 16.47 and 14.54 respectively.

b School Staff > Students, means 16.66 and 13.35 respectively.

Table 5

MANOVA on Racial Climate Factor Scores for Students by Race and Sex.

Multivariate Test Statistics				
	Wilks' Lambda	df	F	p
Race	.95	6,5150	20.08	.0001
Sex	.99	3,2575	7.14	.0001
Race x Sex	.99	6,5150	.84	.5403
Univariate F Tests				
FACTORS		df	F	p
Factor I: Perceptions of Personal Interactions.				
Race		2,2577	7.73	.0005
Sex		1,2577	17.82	.0001
Race x Sex		2,2577	1.52	NS
Factor II: Perceptions of Administrators'/Teachers' Respect and Fairness for Students of Different Races.				
Race		2,2577	36.47	.0001
Sex		1,2577	.83	NS
Race x Sex		2,2577	.22	NS
Factor III: Perceptions of Students' Social Interactions.				
Race		2,2577	9.06	.0001
Sex		1,2577	.08	NS
Race x Sex		2,2577	.05	NS

note: Groups for Race variable are Whites, Blacks, and Others (Hispanic, Asian, & American Indian): NS not significant, p >.02.

Table 6

MANOVA on Racial Climate Factor Scores for School Staff by Race and Sex.

Multivariate Test Statistics				
	Wilks' Lambda	df	F	p
Race	.86	3,269	14.47	.0001
Sex	.99	3,269	.57	.6375
Race x Sex	.98	3,269	1.48	.2198

Univariate F Tests			
FACTORS	(df = 1,271)	F	p
Factor I: Perceptions of Personal Interactions.			
Race		.59	NS
Sex		1.57	NS
Race x Sex		2.12	NS
Factor II: Perceptions of Administrators'/Teachers' Respect and Fairness for Students of Different Races.			
Race		24.67	.0001
Sex		.50	NS
Race x Sex		2.67	NS
Factor III: Perceptions of Students' Social Interactions.			
Race		2.27	NS
Sex		.56	NS
Race x Sex		.02	NS

note: groups for Race variable are Whites and Blacks; NS not significant, p > .02.