

“The Transformative Power of Diversity in Education is Enormous”: Challenges and Opportunities in the 21st Century

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Thank you all for being here. Let me start by expressing my gratitude. It’s an honor to be delivering the inaugural lecture for the new SRCD lecture series on Child Development in a Diverse Majority Society

I’d like to thank my Dean, Bob Pianta, for his ongoing support and encouragement. Thank you to Laura Namy, SRCD’s Executive Director for the invitation. And thank you to Dawn Witherspoon and Eleanor Seaton for your active service in the SRCD Ethnic and Racial Issues Committee and for your role in creating a vision for this lecture series. I also need to share my appreciation to fellow members of the SRCD Black Caucus and the Latino and Asian Caucuses, whose leaders have provided clear vision in SRCD during times of change and uncertainty.

Here at UVA, I receive great support from my colleagues in Youth-Nex, the UVA Center to Promote Effective Youth Development, and in the new Center for Race and Public Education in the South. I truly appreciate my graduate students, who elevate my work tremendously, and I’m thankful to the William T. Grant Foundation for their generous support. Last, today’s event would not have been possible without the behind-the-scenes work of Curry staff, especially Diane Cole and Tom Rose.

Former Secretary of Education John King provided the inspiration for the title of my talk. In 2016, Secretary King gave a speech in Orlando Florida, not long after the Pulse nightclub shooting. During that speech he said, “The transformative power of diversity in education is enormous; it boosts empathy and reduces bias, and greatly increases the chances that low-income students will attend college without in any way compromising the academic outcomes of their middle class peers. It exposes students to perspectives and ideas that enlarge their world views.¹”

In the next half hour I’ll share with you what we know about the transformative power of diversity in education. While there are many kinds of diversity, I’ll specifically focus on racial and ethnic diversity in schools. What does research say about how and why bringing students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds together is beneficial? And what gets

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Press Office. (2016, July 1). Remarks by the Secretary of Education on procurement. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/stronger-together-need-diversity-america-schools>

in the way of realizing those benefits? [those challenges that result in segregated spaces and opportunities in the context of diverse schools]. Before I end I'll also suggest where I think we need to go in order to fully realize transformative power of diversity in education.

Why diversity and why now?

As a starting point, the bar graph on the left shows the population of students in K-12 public schools by race in 1968, 14 years after the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. For a child entering kindergarten 50 years ago, the large majority of students in schools—about 80%—were White, and the majority of remaining students were Black².

The bar on the right shows the population of students in k-12 public schools by race in 2013. For children entering kindergarten 5 years ago, about half of students were White, one quarter were Hispanic or Latinx, 16% were Black, five percent were Asian American or Pacific Islander, one percent were American Indian or Alaska Native, and three percent identified with more than one race. Moreover, about nine-and-a-half percent of the 50 million public school students participated in programs to support their development as English learners³. Following my remarks, you'll get to hear from my colleague, Dr. Natalia Palacios, about what growth in English learners, particularly from Latino families, means for schools.

As you can see, as a nation we've undergone an amazing transformation in a relatively short period of time!

Benefits of school diversity

So what does the science say about the benefits of diversity in schools? Well, as John King notes in his speech, attending racially integrated schools is indeed associated with improved attitudes towards members of racial/ethnic groups different than your own. It's also associated with college attendance and exposure to new ways of seeing the world.

Researchers, like Rucker Johnson of UC Berkeley, who've tracked the trajectories of African Americans who attended integrated schools following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision show that Black Americans who attended desegregated schools had a higher probability of graduating from high school. Attending desegregated schools was also connected to earning higher wages and a lower incidence of poverty⁴.

² Snyder, T.D., de Brey, C., and Dillow, S.A. (2016). *Digest of Education Statistics 2015* (NCES 2016-014). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

³ Musu-Gillette, L., de Brey, C., McFarland, J., Hussar, W., Sonnenberg, W., and Wilkinson-Flicker, S. (2017). *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2017* (NCES 2017-051). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.

⁴ Johnson, R. C. (2011). *Long-run impacts of school desegregation and school quality on adult attainments* (Working paper 16664). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from https://gsppi.berkeley.edu/~ruckerj/johnson_schooldesegregation_NBERw16664.pdf.

It's not just the "Brown" generation of African Americans who've benefitted from racially integrated and racially diverse schools. Indeed, there is well-documented evidence of the benefits of racial/ethnic school diversity for ALL youth. Researchers like Amy Stuart Wells, and our other panelist Dr. Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, in her work with the National Coalition on School Diversity, have published reports on the multiple benefits of attending racially integrated schools.

Students who attend such schools have higher average test scores, are more likely to attend college and more likely to choose to live in integrated neighborhoods as adults. Diverse schools and classrooms help enhance student leadership skills and can create more equitable access to educational resources.

Attending a diverse, integrated school is also associated with reduced racial bias and stereotypes, reduced racial disparities in educational achievement and a lower likelihood of dropping out of high school⁵.

Katherine Phillips, a professor at Columbia Business School, argues that diverse groups provide more opportunity for innovative thinking, she says, "*Diversity jolts us into cognitive action in ways that homogeneity simply does not*"⁶. Numerous studies of college students confirm that in the context of diverse groups, students are more likely to engage in creative problem-solving and complex thinking.

Intergroup Contact

We've long understood that there can be benefits of bringing people from different backgrounds together. In the 1950's Gordon Allport described his theory of Intergroup Contact, noting that increased tolerance and reduced prejudice can result when people from different groups come together, but only in the context of four conditions⁷:

1. Equal group status
2. Common goals
3. Intergroup cooperation

⁵ Ayscue, J., Frankenberg, E., & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2017, March). The complementary benefits of racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools (Research Brief No. 10). Washington, DC: The National Coalition on School Diversity. Retrieved from <http://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo10.pdf>.
Wells, A.S., Fox, L., & Cordova-Cobo, D. (2016). Research fact sheet: The educational benefits of diverse schools and classrooms for all students. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
Wells, A.S., Fox, L., & Cordova-Cobo, D. (2016, February 9). *How racially diverse schools and classrooms can benefit all students*. New York: The Century Foundation. Retrieved from <https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/>.

⁶ Phillips, K. (2014). How diversity works. *Scientific American*, 103, 42–47. doi:10.1038/scientificamerican1014-42. Retrieved from <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/>

⁷ Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Oxford, England: Addison-Wesley. Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup Contact Theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49, 65-85. Retrieved from <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.65>

4. Institutional support

Arguably, schools with racially and ethnically diverse student populations have the potential to create these four conditions⁸. And in recent years, scholars have started to examine more closely the specific processes through which the benefits of racial/ethnic diversity are operating.

“How (Not if) School Diversity Matters”

One of the leading researchers in this area, and a mentor of mine, is Sandra Graham, a professor at UCLA. Earlier this year, Dr. Graham published a summary of over 10-years’ worth of research she and her team have been doing in diverse, public middle schools in California⁹. Their work goes beyond the positive outcomes I described earlier and really tries to understand the processes of “why” and “how” school diversity is beneficial to youth.

Imagine Mateo, a Mexican-American 7th grader who attends an ethnically-diverse middle school. In his school, Mateo will have more opportunities for cross-ethnic friendships than he would if his school were less diverse. While just bringing kids from different backgrounds together in a school does not guarantee that cross-ethnic friendships will occur¹⁰, a point I’ll return to later, if Mateo does have cross-ethnic friendships he’s more likely to have positive attitudes, beliefs, and acceptance towards racial/ethnic groups other than his own. Indeed, having cross-racial and ethnic friendships is one of the mechanisms through which the benefits of diversity emerge, perhaps because friendships meet many of the important conditions that Gordon Allport theorized about, like equal status, cooperation, and common goals.

For Mateo, another benefit of attending his diverse middle school is that exposure to multiple groups will provide opportunities for him to think of himself as being multidimensional. During the middle school years in particular, many youth are starting to explore their identity, reflecting on questions like, “who am I?”, “How do others see me?”, and “How do I want others to see me?”. Peer relationships are an important space for figuring these things out.

In diverse schools, kids are more likely to envision their identities as being multidimensional, rather than limiting themselves to stereotypes about their group. For instance, Mateo may

⁸ Tropp, L. R., & Saxena, S. (2018, May). Re-weaving the social fabric through integrated schools: How intergroup contact prepares youth to thrive in a multicultural society (Research Brief No. 13). Washington, DC: The National Coalition on School Diversity. Retrieved from http://school-diversity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/NCSD_Brief13.pdf

⁹ Graham, S. (2018). Race/ethnicity and social adjustment of adolescents: How (not if) school diversity matters. *Educational Psychologist*, 53(2), 64-77. doi: 10.1080/00461520.2018.1428805

¹⁰ Graham, S., Munniskma, A., & Juvonen, J. (2014). Psychosocial benefits of cross-ethnic friendships in urban middle schools. *Child Development*, 85, 469–483. doi:10.1111/cdev.12159. Moody, J. (2001). Race, school integration, and friendship segregation in America. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107, 679–716. doi:10.1086/338954

see himself as Chicano, an honor roll student, a decent volleyball player, and a member of a group of friends who are all “gamers.” In contrast, when norms about what kids from particular racial/ethnic backgrounds can do, or how they should act, are limited, or based in narrow stereotypes, young people may restrict their visions for “possible selves”¹¹.

For Mateo, having a more complex social identity¹² means he’s more likely to have positive attitudes about other racial/ethnic groups, and, he’s more likely to report better mental well-being.

Imagine that Mateo’s diverse middle school has kids from five different racial/ethnic groups, and no one group is numerically in the majority. This kind of school provides what Graham and her colleagues refer to as a “balance of power” between groups; in other words, when there are kids from lots of different groups in a school, no one group has a majority influence. In this diverse setting, Mateo is likely to feel less vulnerable to peer victimization, less lonely, and more safe. Because of this, he’s also more likely to have a healthier sense of mental well-being.

To summarize, Graham and her team, along with others studying school diversity¹³, show consistently that through exposure to different groups, cross-ethnic friendships, and a more even distribution of power, kids get to know others in mutual friendships, they build multidimensional identities, and feel more safe. These factors help foster more positive beliefs about other racial/ethnic groups and better mental wellness.

What gets in the way of realizing the benefits of diversity?

So now you’ve heard about the many benefits of racial/ethnic diversity in schools. Indeed, the positive correlates do suggest that John King’s belief in the “transformative power” of diversity is not just hyperbole. Moreover, the work of Sandra Graham and others suggests that these benefits may be maximized through social interactions that foster values around

¹¹ Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, 41(9), 954-969. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954

¹² Brewer, M., & Pierce, K. (2005). Social identity complexity and outgroup tolerance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31, 428–437. doi:10.1177/0146167204271710. Roccas, S., & Brewer, M. (2002). Social identity complexity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 6, 88–106. doi:10.1207/S15327957PSPR0602_01

¹³ Graham, S. (2006). Peer victimization in school: Exploring the ethnic context. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 15, 317–320. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8721.2006.00460.x. Graham, S., Bellmore, A., Nishina, A., & Juvonen, J. (2009). “It must be me”: Ethnic diversity and attributions for victimization in middle school. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38, 487–499. doi:10.1007/s10964-008-9386-4. Graham & Juvonen, 2014. Juvonen, J., Kogachi, K., & Graham, S. (2017). When and how do students benefit from ethnic diversity in middle school? *Child Development*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1111/cdev.12834. Kawabata, Y., & Crick, N. (2015). Direct and indirect interactive links between cross-ethnic friendships and peer rejection, internalizing symptoms, and academic engagement among ethnically diverse children. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 21, 191–200. doi:10.1037/a0038451. Knifsend, C., & Juvonen, J. (2014). Social identity complexity, cross-ethnic friendships, and intergroup attitudes in urban middle schools. *Child Development*, 85, 709–721. doi:10.1111/cdev.12157

difference. While there is indeed great opportunity in diversity, there are also challenges, misinterpretations, and missed opportunities.

The first is a reality: we live in a racially stratified society¹⁴. The history of this stratification is embedded in the bones of the very building where I stand right now. Thomas Jefferson's Rotunda symbolizes his belief in the critical value of education¹⁵. It was also built by the hands of the people he enslaved. And while Thomas Jefferson gave us the language of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and "all men are created equal,"¹⁶ which we think of as quintessentially "American," he also wrote in his "Notes on the State of Virginia," that "I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstance, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind."¹⁷

Two hundred thirty years later, we live in a United States with incredibly rich racial and ethnic diversity, but one in which spaces and opportunities often remain segregated, and forces of structural oppression continue to benefit some groups over others.

So what does this look like for schools?

The re-segregation of schools

First, while our population continues growing in racial and ethnic diversity, patterns of racial resegregation in schools are actually on the rise¹⁸.

This graph shows the percentage of Black students attending majority White schools in the South from the time of the *Brown v. BOE* decision in 1954 to 2011. That percentage peaked in 1988; however, in 1991, in *Dowell vs. the Oklahoma City BOE*, the Supreme Court lifted many of its mandates for compliance with school desegregation orders. As you can see, schools in the South have continued to become more segregated since that time¹⁹. While some have argued that this trend—of fewer Black students in historically White

¹⁴ Coll, C. G., Crnic, K., Lamberty, G., Wasik, B. H., Jenkins, R., Garcia, H. V., & McAdoo, H. P. (1996). An integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children. *Child development*, 67(5), 1891-1914. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1996.tb01834.x>

¹⁵ University of Virginia (n.d.). The Rotunda. Retrieved from <https://rotunda.virginia.edu/>

¹⁶ The National Archives (n.d.). The Declaration of Independence. Retrieved from <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration>

¹⁷ Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia (n.d.). Notes on the State of Virginia. Retrieved from <http://notes.scholarslab.org/milestones/laws.html>

¹⁸ Stangil, W. (2018, March 14). School segregation is not a myth. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/03/school-segregation-is-not-a-myth/555614/>

¹⁹ Orfield, G., & Frankenberg, E. (2014, May 15). *Brown at 60: Great progress, a long retreat, and an uncertain future*. University of California, Los Angeles: The Civil Rights Project. Retrieved from <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/brown-at-60-great-progress-a-long-retreat-and-an-uncertain-future>

schools—is due to the fact that schools are becoming more diverse²⁰, there is plenty of evidence to show that patterns of racial resegregation are a reality.

Of course, the South is not the only region where resegregation of schools is common. In fact, in many school districts across the country, particularly in large urban areas, school districts are highly segregated by race²¹. And when we consider the intersections of race and income, recent data from the US Government Accountability office shows that the percentage of high poverty schools with high proportions of Black and Latinx students are also on the rise²².

So school resegregation, often fueled by racially biased lending and housing practices and other forms of systemic oppression, is one of the challenges to realizing the benefits of diversity. That one deals with segregation BETWEEN schools—but what about segregation that happens WITHIN schools?

Friendship and social segregation

Beverly Tatum opens the 4th chapter of her book, “Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the Cafeteria?”, with the following observation: “Walk into any racially mixed high school cafeteria at lunchtime and you will instantly notice that in the sea of adolescent faces, there is an identifiable group of Black students sitting together” (p. 131).²³

While cross-race friendships are more likely to occur when schools are more diverse, lots of studies show that same-race friendships are quite typical and actually more likely than cross-race friendships²⁴. As I said earlier, just because you bring kids from different backgrounds together, this doesn’t guarantee they will interact with one another. Sociologists refer to the tendency of people to hang around others who are like them as “homophily”²⁵.

There are multiple reasons for racial homophily in friendships. During middle and high school in particular, being around racially-similar others can provide a sense of identity-safety and create a context for building a positive racial identity²⁶. This is especially

²⁰ Verbruggen, R. (2018, February 16). The resegregation myth. *National Review*. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2018/03/05/the-resegregation-myth/>

²¹ Chang, A. (2018, March 5). The data proves that school segregation is getting worse. *Vox*. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/2018/3/5/17080218/school-segregation-getting-worse-data>

²² United States Government Accountability Office (2016, April). *Better use of information could help agencies identify disparities and address racial discrimination* (GAO-16-345). Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-345>

²³ Tatum, B. D. (2017). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?: And other conversations about race* [20th anniversary edition]. New York: Basic Books.

²⁴ Graham, Munniksmá, & Juvonen, 2014; Moody, 2001.

²⁵ McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 415-444. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.415

²⁶ Camacho, T. C., Bañales, J., Cross, F. L., Marchand, A., & Rivas-Drake, D. (2017). Psychological Aspects of Ethnic/Racial Identity and Their Associations with Social Behavior. In Blume, A. W. (Ed.),

meaningful for students of color, since having a sense of racial or ethnic pride can buffer against the negative effects of discrimination that many of them experience in schools.

And some studies show that for students of color, being in a diverse school is associated with greater racial discrimination. Eleanor Seaton (who is here today) and her colleagues, along with Sandra Graham and Aprile Benner, have found that when Black and Latino students attend, or transition into racially diverse secondary schools, they report higher levels of discrimination²⁷. This may be due to the lack of a “critical mass” of same-race peers in the school setting²⁸ and a loss of the positive benefits of racially similar others for identity safety.

It may sound contradictory to mention the benefits of same-race friendships after I’ve just finished describing all of the wonderful benefits of diversity, but it’s not. Part of the reason for this is grounded in the realities of racial stratification. Students from historically oppressed racial groups often face barriers that interfere with access to equitable educational opportunities²⁹. The social and emotional buffering that can come from having access to same-race peers can be extremely important.

So yes, cross-race AND same-race friendships each have benefits. This means that we need to consider if and how schools create opportunities for students to engage in each kind. For instance, the UCLA team has found that the greater belonging and safety, and lowered vulnerability associated with diverse schools goes away if friendships in the overall student body are very segregated³⁰.

Social Issues in Living Color: Challenges and Solutions from the Perspective of Ethnic Minority Psychology [Vol. 1] (pp. 165-188). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger. Hamm, J. V. (2000). Do birds of a feather flock together? The variable bases for African American, Asian American, and European American adolescents’ selection of similar friends. *Developmental Psychology*, 36, 209-219. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.36.2.209. Kiang, L., Witkow, M. R., Baldelomar, O. A., & Fuligni, A. J. (2010). Change in ethnic identity across the high school years among adolescents with Latin American, Asian, and European backgrounds. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39(6), 683-693. Santos, C. E., Kornienko, O., & Rivas-Drake, D. (2017). Peer influence on ethnic-racial identity development: A multi-site investigation. *Child Development*, 88(3), 725-742. Tatum, 2017.

²⁷ Benner, A. D., & Graham, S. (2011). Latino adolescents’ experiences of discrimination across the first 2 years of high school: Correlates and influences on educational outcomes. *Child Development*, 82(2), 508-519. Seaton, E. K., & Yip, T. (2009). School and neighborhood contexts, perceptions of racial discrimination, and psychological well-being among African American adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38(2), 153-163.

²⁸ Benner A. D., Crosnoe R. (2011). The racial/ethnic composition of elementary schools and young children’s academic and socioemotional functioning. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48, 621-646. Linn R. L., Welner K. G. (2007). *Race-conscious policies for assigning students to schools: Social science research and the Supreme Court cases*. Committee on Social Science Research Evidence on Racial Diversity in Schools. National Academy of Education. Retrieved from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/Brief-NAE.pdf>

²⁹ Garcia Coll, et al., 1996.

³⁰ Kogachi, K., & Graham, S. (2017). Ethnic segregation in diverse middle schools: Predictors and consequences of segregated friendship networks. Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research on Child Development. Austin, TX.

Social and cultural capital

Although the psychosocial benefits of diverse friendships likely result, in-part, from improved outgroup attitudes, another question requiring attention is how social and cultural capital bears out in cross-race friendships in diverse schools. In the US, White Americans as a racial group have historically had greater access and opportunity than other racial groups. In schools, White students may have more of the social and cultural capital that is most valued by the school, compared to their peers from other racial or ethnic groups³¹.

For example, in my work with Jill Hamm, a professor at UNC Chapel Hill, we found that teachers viewed students of color in diverse friend groups with many White friends as having higher levels of social and academic competence compared to students of color in same-race friend groups. On the surface, this seems like a positive—being in a diverse friend group is associated with positive outcomes. However, it also suggests that students of color who have same-race peer groups—a normative and important setting for identity safety—may be getting unfairly penalized by teachers. In our study we also found that teachers' perceptions of White students' academic and social competence didn't change based on who the students' friends were like it did for students of color³². Similarly, other studies show that students of color have more benefits from cross-race friendships on academic outcomes than their White peers³³. Taken together, these findings reflect the reality that social capital is not equitably distributed across all kids. This is an ongoing challenge structured into our schools through centuries of systemic oppression, and one that complicates the diversity narrative.

Induced segregation: Academic tracking

Friendship segregation in schools is one mechanism that can affect whether or not attending a diverse school is beneficial. But a more significant barrier to maximizing the benefits of racial/ethnic diversity in schools is what I'll call "induced" segregation. This

³¹ Burton L. M., Welsh W. (2015, December). *Inequality and opportunity: The role of exclusion, social capital, and generic social processes in upward mobility* (A William T. Grant Foundation Inequality Report). New York, NY: William T. Grant Foundation. Retrieved from

<http://blog.wtgrantfoundation.org/post/135258445927/new-report-the-role-of-exclusion-social-capital>

Coleman J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120. McPherson, et al., 2001. Yosso T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8, 69-91.

³² Williams, J. L., & Hamm, J. V. (2018). Peer Group Ethnic Diversity and Social Competencies in Youth Attending Rural Middle Schools. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 38(6), 795-823.

³³ Hamm J. V., Brown B., Heck D. (2005). Bridging the ethnic divide: Student and school characteristics in African American, Asian-descent, Latino, and white adolescents' cross-ethnic friend nominations. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 15, 21-46. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2005.00085.x. Kawabata Y., Crick N. R. (2015). Direct and interactive links between cross-ethnic friendships and peer rejection, internalizing symptoms, and academic engagement among ethnically diverse children. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 21, 191-200. doi:10.1037/a0038451. Wilson T. M., Rodkin P. C. (2013). Children's cross-ethnic relationships in elementary schools: Concurrent and prospective associations between ethnic segregation and social status. *Child Development*, 84, 1081-1097. doi:10.1111/cdev.12020

refers to the structures created WITHIN schools that keep kids apart, and result in what researcher Miles Hewstone calls “diversity without contact”³⁴.

For instance, identification for gifted education is greatly influenced by race and income; Black, Latinx, and Native American students are less likely to be identified as gifted compared to their White and Asian peers³⁵. Gifted education programs along with academic tracking can create “diversity without contact,”³⁶ and perpetuate disparities in academic opportunities and outcomes. If you bring kids from different racial and ethnic backgrounds together into the same school, but keep them segregated during the school day through racially stratified tracking, then of course the benefits of the diverse student body will never be realized.

Amanda Lewis and John Diamond discuss what this looks like up close in their detailed study of Riverview High School, a racially diverse, high-performing public school; it’s a school that many families choose to send their kids to because it’s so diverse. In their book, “Despite the Best Intentions, how racial inequality thrives in good schools,” they identify tracking and several other mechanisms that illuminate how diversity does not lead to equity³⁷.

Discipline

In addition to tracking, one of the other important realities Lewis & Diamond and many others document is that of racial disparities in discipline³⁸. Many schools laud the importance of diversity in their mission statements or claim it as a core value. But we need look no further than school discipline data to know that students’ diverse ways of being and knowing in school, which are grounded in histories of adaptive culture in the face of structural racism, are not valued equally across racial and ethnic lines.

The evidence that Black, Latinx, and Native American students are more likely to be disciplined, including getting suspended or expelled from school, compared to their peers, is

³⁴ Hewstone, M. (2015). Consequences of diversity for social cohesion and prejudice: The missing dimension of intergroup contact. *Journal of Social Issues, 71*(2), 417-438.

³⁵ Grissom, J. A., & Redding, C. (2015). Discretion and disproportionality: Explaining the underrepresentation of high-achieving students of color in gifted programs. *AERA Open, 2*(1), 2332858415622175. McBee, M. (2010). Examining the probability of identification for gifted programs for students in Georgia elementary schools: A multilevel path analysis study. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 54*(4), 283-297.

³⁶ Hewstone, 2015

³⁷ Lewis, A. E., & Diamond, J. B. (2015). *Despite the best intentions: How racial inequality thrives in good schools*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁸ Carter, P., Fine, M., & Russell, S. (2014, March). *Discipline disparities series: Overview*. Bloomington, IN: The Equity Project at Indiana University. Retrieved from <http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/briefing-papers/>. Skiba, R. J., Horner, R. H., Chung, C. G., Rausch, M. K., May, S. L., & Tobin, T. (2011). Race is not neutral: A national investigation of African American and Latino disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Review, 40*(1).

undeniable³⁹. Moreover, many of the infractions leading to discipline are subjective offenses falling into categories like defiance, disrespect, or disobedience⁴⁰.

I often share a story in my courses about an African American 10th grade teen, who I'll call Monica. One day, Monica raised her hand in history class and asked her teacher, "How come the only thing we ever learn about Black people is slavery?" Now a question like that might catch any teacher off-guard. But it's a valid question, one that demonstrates curiosity and careful observation over years of schooling. And perhaps if the question had come from another student who was not Black, it might have been perceived that way. But Monica's question was treated as defiance, disrespect, and disobedience, and she was promptly thrown out of class.

When we only embrace a surface-level appreciation of diversity—we say we love seeing students from different groups, but we actually want them to act the same and to conform to standards of the dominant group—than we undermine the value of diversity and instead perpetuate inequality.

Curricular representation

Monica's question also taps into another way in which we undercut the rich benefits of a culturally diverse student body. In our interviews with middle school students, one of the questions we asked was when and how they learned about race, and different racial or ethnic groups, in school. Several students said they never learned or talk about race in school. Those who remembered learning something often mentioned their social studies classes as being the one place where race came up. Upon probing, the big picture message they learned about race was that Black people used to be treated poorly, but now things are better⁴¹. Jasmine, a biracial 7th grader said, "the main point of history is about segregation between Black and White." Very few students said they learned anything about other racial or ethnic groups beyond the "dark history" of African Americans as one student called it.

We might chalk this up to being 13—perhaps students at this age aren't thinking too deeply about academic content. But Stephanie, a Mexican-American 7th grader, was definitely

³⁹ American Institutes for Research (2016, October 24). *Infographic: School suspensions and expulsions*. Retrieved from <https://www.air.org/resource/infographic-school-suspensions-and-expulsions>.

⁴⁰ Bradshaw C. P., Mitchell M. M., O'Brennan L. M., Leaf P. J. (2010). Multi-level exploration of factors contributing to the overrepresentation of black students in office disciplinary referrals. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(2), 508–520. doi:10.1037/a0018450. Gregory A., Weinstein R. S. (2008). The discipline gap and African Americans: Defiance or cooperation in the high school classroom. *Journal of School Psychology*, 46, 455–475.

⁴¹ Mims, L. C., & Williams, J. L. (2018). "We were, like, slaves and stuff like that": Black Girls' Experiences of School and Peer Group Socialization. Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence. Minneapolis, MN. Mims, L. C.*, & Williams, J. L. (manuscript in preparation). Mapping the contours of Black middle school girls' informal and formal racial identity socialization in school. University of Virginia.

attuned to the messages she was receiving in her history classes. She said she learned very little about racial and ethnic minority groups, and when she did, it was one-sided.

Stephanie said: *“There should be other topics that bring up other races... we’re just under-rated ‘cuz it’s always just about White people and like war...Like now we’re just learning about World War II, and that had like a bit of [information about] Asians, but that was just like showing their bad side, and you never get to see, like, what their culture is or any of that. We [Latinos] only come into news when it’s about immigration...”*

Me: *What do you feel you have learned about people who are White or European American?*

Stephanie: *“That they’re more superior than us.... They get to seem like they’re good, but, it’s equal. We’ve all done some bad and some good”⁴².*

In order to maximize the benefits of diversity, we need to carefully consider the messages and narratives students are internalizing, both through formal curriculum, and through informal interactions⁴³. What the middle school students in our study remembered learning about racial groups was shallow and one-dimensional. They also had little exposure to the kinds of language about racial and ethnic diversity that might support their racial literacy—many observed race-related social dynamics in the school but had few tools in their vocabulary box to express and make sense of them.

So where do we go from here?

I’ve shared with you the research evidence confirming that racial/ethnic diversity in schools is associated with many positive social and academic benefits for youth. We also know more and more about the mechanisms that support these benefits, which are generally still aligned with Gordon Allport’s 1954 theory of Intergroup Contact—contact between students from diverse backgrounds will be most effective when there’s equal group status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support that genuinely values and supports diversity.

Unfortunately, as I’ve also discussed, these ideal contact conditions are not always present in schools, and there are myriad challenges to realizing the benefits of diversity. These include segregation between and within schools, and calling diversity a value but engaging in practices that reflect a greater commitment to assimilation. In doing so, we marginalize the cultural wealth of students from non-dominant racial and ethnic groups.

⁴² Williams, J. L. (2018). Investigating Diversity in Early Adolescence: The IDEA Project. Unpublished raw data. University of Virginia.

⁴³ Aldana, A., & Byrd, C. M. (2015). School ethnic-racial socialization: Learning about race and ethnicity among African American students. *The Urban Review*, 47(3), 563-576.

So it's important to ask, where do we, as researchers, educators, youth, parents, and policymakers, go from here?

First, we must resist and challenge the re-segregation of our schools.

Very recently the current DOE removed guidelines for school districts on ways of supporting school integration⁴⁴. While the removal of the guidelines does not impact federal or state laws regarding school integration, it does send a message about the value the current administration places on maintaining integrated schools. Several policy scholars, including Dr. Siegel-Hawley, have provided evidence-based policy recommendations for maintaining racially- and socioeconomically integrated schools⁴⁵. Importantly, these recommendations, as scholar Amy Stuart Wells argues, cannot be race-neutral. Claims of neutrality are often used to perpetuate oppression. If race is a central factor in maintaining inequality in schools, then it must play a role in policy-making to disrupt the inequality.

Second, we must also resist and challenge segregation of students and resources within schools

We can never realize the benefits of racial/ethnic diversity in schools if students within those spaces are segregated from each other. While there are many arguments in favor of separating students by ability, we inevitably end up segregating students by race through processes of racial bias, AND we segregate student access to high-quality teaching and learning, since the strongest teachers are often assigned to the most advanced students⁴⁶.

This is an area where parents may have more sway than we think. As a parent, I understand the desire to want the best opportunities for our own children, but the high-quality educational experiences we want for our own kids are the same experiences we should want for ALL kids. Parents can play an important role in dismantling the racialized academic hierarchies that frequently result from the creation of “elite” academic spaces⁴⁷.

Third, we must resist and challenge xenophobic rhetoric.

⁴⁴ Marcus, K. L., & Gore, J. M. (2018, July 3). Dear Colleague Letter. U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-title-vi-201807.pdf>

⁴⁵ Ayscue, et al., 2017; Wells, et al., 2016; Wells, A. S. (2014, March). *Seeing past the “colorblind” myth of education policy: Addressing racial and ethnic inequality and supporting culturally diverse schools*. National Education Policy Center. Boulder, CO. Retrieved from <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/seeing-past-the-colorblind-myth>

⁴⁶ Lewis & Diamond, 2015. Oakes, J. (2005). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality* (2nd edition). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Tyson, K. (2011). *Integration interrupted: Tracking, Black students, and acting White after Brown*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Tyson, K. (2013). Tracking, segregation, and the opportunity gap: What we know and why it matters. In P. L. Carter & K. G. Welner (Eds), *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child and even chance* (pp. 169-180). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁷ Reeves, R. V. (2017). *Dream hoarders: How the American upper middle class is leaving everyone else in the dust, why that is a problem, and what to do about it*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Just outside of these doors last August, White Supremacists marched, bearing torches and spewing venom. They were seemingly motivated by hatred and fear- fear of difference, fear of “being replaced.”⁴⁸ Standing here in the shadow of those recent events, brings into sharp focus the fact that we live in a time when rhetoric from people in positions of power fueling anti-immigrant sentiments, xenophobia, and White supremacy in the form of physical violence is rampant. One of the biggest impediments to realizing the benefits of diversity is FEAR⁴⁹. Those in positions of influence know this and are capitalizing on it. They argue that diversity can disrupt social cohesion and disintegrate trust. But what research actually shows is that in the context of diversity, the negative impacts only result when there’s no intergroup contact⁵⁰. So we all must do our part in resisting the xenophobic rhetoric that preys on our fears of difference.

Indeed, for diversity to be beneficial, it requires a steadfast commitment to seeing and valuing others as they are, rather than expecting them to be our mirrors. Katherine Phillips, the Columbia Business School Professor notes that this can be challenging. She writes, “*This is how diversity works: by promoting hard work and creativity; by encouraging the consideration of alternatives even before any interpersonal interaction takes place. The pain associated with diversity can be thought of as the pain of exercise. You have to push yourself to grow your muscles. The pain, as the old saw goes, produces the gain. In just the same way, we need diversity—in teams, organizations and society as a whole—if we are to change, grow and innovate.*” (p. 47)⁵¹

Diversity is necessary but insufficient

At the end of the day, diversity is important, but it’s only one lever for achieving racial equity in schools. Most of the challenges I mentioned that interfere with realizing the benefits of diversity speak to deeper, more entrenched forms of systemic inequality. Whether or not all schools are diverse enough is not always the right question. Instead, we should ask, “why do only a limited number of schools provide opportunities for the kinds of high-quality educational experiences we know are beneficial to all kids?” So diversity is necessary and it’s transformative power in education may indeed be enormous, but a focus on diversity alone will be insufficient if our goal is educational equity.

Finally, for scholars who study issues of racial/ethnic diversity in schools, I think we can feel good about what we know so far in terms of the benefits for promoting positive intergroup contact, appreciation of difference, and greater social belonging. Further advancing our understanding of how schools can meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student

⁴⁸ Daily Progress Staff. (2017, August 11). Fire and fury: Unite the Right torch rally ends in violence at the Rotunda. *The Daily Progress*. Retrieved from https://www.dailyprogress.com/news/local/unite-the-right-torch-rally-ends-in-violence-at-the/article_32a1a082-7f0a-11e7-9f72-f3433c42fb49.html

⁴⁹ Portes, A., & Vickstrom, E. (2011). Diversity, social capital, and cohesion. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37, 461-469. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150022>. Van der Meer, T., & Tolsma, J. (2014). Ethnic diversity and its effect on social cohesion. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 40, 459-478. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043309>

⁵⁰ Hewstone, 2015.

⁵¹ Phillips, 2014.

population will require interdisciplinary perspectives that address the psychological and socio-emotional experience as well as the structural context of schools. Looking ahead, the next question we as researchers need to tackle is “what are the contact conditions needed for promoting equitable outcomes in diverse schools?” Thank you.