Respect in Inner City Schools

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Respect in Inner City Schools

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This capstone focuses on respect within schools in the inner city. The literature review focused on emotional behavioral disorders and poverty, mainly whether or not the two are linked together. To find the presence of respect in the inner city schools, teachers and students were asked fill out a questionnaire giving their opinions on what respect is, giving and receiving of respect and whether or not respect is given at home. Ultimately, it was proven that the definition of respect between teachers and students is very different, thus resulting in a conflict that plays out in the classroom.

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Introduction and Review of Literature

The Rochester City School District is often in the headlines for one reason or another. Working in this district can be incredibly rewarding. It can also be incredibly frustrating. The main issue I hear primarily from teachers is about a lack of respect. Students often say that they do not act disrespectful if the teachers are not disrespectful to them. The goal of this capstone is to identify the schism between respect among the teachers and students.

The Rochester City School District has the highest poverty rate among the New York State Big 5 Districts. In 2007, 88% of the students in the RCSD qualified for free/reduced price lunch, and 17% were identified with students with special needs. Even students who are not classified need significant academic and behavioral support.

The purpose of this literature review is to find compelling research about emotional behavioral disorder (EBD) and poverty. Though there is no doubt that there is a link between the two, the questions that have been posed are: Is there a link between emotional behavior disorder and witnessing violence consistently? If poverty is removed, does the EBD wane? Is there effective behavior interventions put in place by schools?

As with most research and theories, there is no definite answer. There is no definite conclusion to whether EBD is more biological than ecological or vice versa. What this research does provide is some conflicting views that could possibly lead to a new hypothesis and hopefully new discoveries will be made.

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), an emotional disturbance means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that unfavorably affects a child’s educational performance:
• An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors.
• An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
• Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
• A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
• A tendency to develop physical symptoms of fears associated with personal or school problems.

This definition does not seem to get into any specifics. The relationship between environmental risk factors and the development of emotion or behavioral disorders in young children is well established in literature (Conroy & Brown, 2004, p.225). Compared with children who live in families with more financial resources, poor children face a higher risk of developing a variety of socioemotional problems (Eamon, 2001, p. 256).

This literature review is meant to find understanding between the links of poverty with the onset of emotional behavioral disorders. Since there is no denying the link between poverty and EBD, the questions posed reflect unanswered conundrums such as: If poverty is removed, does the instance of EBD decrease? Can a diagnosis of EBD be a lack of ability to cope following the witnessing of a violent act?

Ecological Factors

Because of financial restraints, it is likely that parents may have to work multiple jobs to support their family. The result of this may be less time spent with their children, which could result in behavior problems in the child. Eamon (2001) writes that, “Poverty may result in children’s socioemotional problems by impeding or influencing peer relations, attending low-quality schools, or being exposed to unsupportive school environments” (p.256). When behaviors are displayed at an earlier age, it is likely that they may carry on into adolescence.

Researchers have found that children who demonstrate significant problem behaviors in early childhood are more likely to be rejected by their peers, abuse
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...drugs, be clinically depressed, become juvenile delinquents, drop out of school and be identified as having E/BD during adolescence. (Conroy & Brown, 2004, p. 225)

A study done in Connecticut tried to determine what services should be offered to the community based youth who have needed care coordination over a year long period. The youth were chosen from both urban and nonurban parts of the state. Most of the children that entered care coordination over that year space long period were Caucasian (58.1%) boys (69.7%), with smaller proportions of Hispanic (21.2%), African American (13.7%), and Biracial youth (5.4%) (Dierker et al., 2004, p.239). The urban youth used in this study were more likely to be African American and Hispanic while the nonurban youth were more likely to be Caucasian. Urban and nonurban children entering care coordination were roughly around the same age, but overall girls were much older than boys, with girls averaging entry into care at about 13 while boys were around 11. In terms of specific diagnosis, nonurban youth were more likely to exhibit bipolar disorder compared to urban youth (Dierker et al., 2004, p.242). Gender differences resulted in the following: boys were more likely to exhibit attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and pervasive developmental disorders compared to girls, while girls were more elevated in having post-traumatic stress (Dierker et al., 2004, p.243). What is unique about the differences between boys and girls is that gender differences maintained despite the geographic location. At the conclusion of the study it seemed that urban youth were very much like the nonurban youth in terms of what services they needed, yet their average household income was about twenty thousand dollars less. The question remains if these children have similar problems, should they not be allowed the same types of services? According to Drieker et al. (2004), “urban youth were
found to exhibit better functioning than their nonurban counterparts on standardized behavioral ratings" (p.242). For example, urban youth exhibited higher levels of both intrapersonal strength and general functioning than nonurban youth (Drieker et al., 2004, p.242).

**Intervention Strategies for Students Identified with Emotional Behavioral Disorder**

Currently, the Rochester City School District is reeling from the recent decision to forgo any out of school suspensions in favor of keeping students in school. The Rochester Teachers Association is up in arms by this decision, claiming this makes the schools a very dangerous place. A behavior intervention service may be put into place in the future. The study by Carol Dawson features schools in New York City specializing in students with emotional disturbance and how they respond to the Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI). Life Space Crisis Intervention is a therapeutic, strength-based strategy using a student’s crisis as an opportunity for personal insight and accountability (Dawson, 2003, p.224). It attempts to help bring teachers and students closer together by allowing each student to see the patterns of self-defeating thinking and behavior that have led to their crisis state.

The study takes the two schools, both located in the inner city, and uses one as the experimental group and one as the control group. Both groups have similar behavior management issues and similar amounts of students. When a crisis arose, students in the control group had their teachers react according to protocol, while the students in the experimental group were seen immediately and were involved in the reclaiming stages of the LSCI process (Dawson, 2003, p.225).

This study contradicts what the current policy is in the Rochester City School District. Currently when a student gets put on long-term suspension, they are sent to “Project I’m Ready,” a school for high-risk students. Since this is the only school of its kind in the area, it often gets
filled to full capacity. Another problem is taking several students who have issues with each another and putting them in the same building often leads to heightened conflict. A natural conclusion would be to ensure that both the RCSD and the schools used in this study have a well-trained staff with backgrounds in special education and in emotional behavioral disorders specifically. Surprisingly, many special educators lack formal training in working with students in crisis. This was apparent in the current study where 90% of staff in both schools initially reported that they did not believe they were competent in managing crises presented by students (Dawson, 2003, p.225).

The results of the study found that the amount of crises for the experimental group had decreased by more than half over time, while the control group's student crises had almost doubled. Both schools did make strides in reducing suspension rates, with the experimental LSCI school just edging out the control school. Attendance was also slightly higher for the LSCI experimental school compared to the control. A fascinating element of this study was how the staff whom received the LSCI training felt after the implementation of the LSCI. Before the LSCI, only 12.5% of the staff felt competent to manage a student crisis successfully (Dawson, 2003, p. 228). After the LSCI training, 100% of the staff felt competent opposed to only 12.5% of the control group.

The most important factor is always the students. Dawson (2003) reports:

At the end of the study, several youth at each school who had emotional outbursts resulting in removal from the classroom were interviewed. They were asked, “What do you need from teachers when you are most upset?” A typical student at the LSCI school replied, “Kids have a lot on their minds. Sometimes I can’t think at school when I am upset. It helps to talk to teachers.” In contrast, a youth at the
control school answered, "Nothing. Teachers can't help me with my problems. I have to take care of myself" (p. 228).

Unfortunately, this seems to ring true with many students coming from low income areas. The sense of instability and self-reliance often fuels their outbursts, leading to classification with EBD. More support from staff may be the key to helping many districts, including the Rochester City School District.

Removal of Poverty

Many studies have shown the occurrence of psychological disorders with poverty but not many have shown what happens to poverty once families are above poverty level. A study by the Journal of the American Medical Association examined the mental health of children whose families moved out of poverty, compared with children whose families remained poor despite the intervention and with whose were never poor. If family poverty caused specific emotional and behavioral problems in children, then after poverty was removed, these psychiatric symptoms should disappear (Costello et al., 2003). This study was also interesting because it focused on Native American children, as they were part of the focus group.

The study began in 1993 and lasted for eight years. Families were classified into three groups: (1) persistently poor, those families below the federal poverty line before and after the casino opened; (2) ex-poor, those families who moved out of poverty after the casino opened; and (3) never poor, those families above the poverty line before and after the casino opened (Costello et al., 2003). In 1996, the reservation began to receive funds from a casino that opened. Under the terms of the agreement with the casino operators, every man, woman and child receives a percentage of the profits paid every six months (Costello et al., 2003.). The percentage
of Native American families in poverty increased between 1993 and 1995, and then decreased 5% between 1997 and 1998, 6% between 1998 and 1999, and 18% between 1999 and 2000. These results show that the income generated by the casino had an effect on Native American family poverty but not on non-Native American family poverty from 1996 to 2000 (Costello et al., 2003).

How did this movement from poor to ex-poor affect the children’s behavioral symptoms? Costello et al. (2003), states:

Across the whole sample, the number of behavioral symptoms was almost the same as before and after the casino opened. Ex-poor children showed a 40% decrease in behavioral symptoms. Children from never-poor families maintained a steady, low level of behavioral symptoms before and after the opening of the casino. Before the casino opened, children from families destined to move out of the poverty had almost as many behavioral symptoms as the persistently poor. After the casino opened, the mean level of behavioral symptoms in children from ex-poor families was almost identical to that of never-poor children and significantly lower than...for the persistently poor children.

Anxiety and depression symptoms were more common in poor children, but moving out of poverty was not followed by a reduction in these symptoms. Anxiety and depression in children and adolescents may be caused by some characteristics of poor families not directly related to poverty. Alternatively, the remarkable speed of the change in behavioral symptoms after poverty was lifted may be specific to those symptoms; it might take longer for the reduction in poverty-induced family stress to be reflected in children’s mood and anxiety levels.
A common saying is “Money often costs too much.” Sadly, this study seems to prove his point. Thought the number of children whose depression and anxiety decreased with the onset poverty was not significant, it was still relevant.

Witnesses to Violence in Low-Income Areas

More than 70% of school-age children from low-income communities have observed domestic violence, assaults, arrests, drug deals, gang violence and shootings (Skybo, 2005, p.263). This may or may not affect the children in school, since it mainly depends on their coping skills. If children’s coping skills are not sufficient to deal with violent situations, stress may be manifested as psychological, physical or behavioral symptoms (Skybo, 2005, p.263). The study by Skybo analyzed what kind of violence students had seen, how often they had seen it, the student’s responses to the violence they had seen and the difference between race/gender with the violence exposed and the onset of emotional behavioral symptoms.

Skybo sampled 63 children from a metropolitan area with high instances of violence. Among this sample, there were 43 boys and 20 girls, ranging in age from seven to fourteen. Race was sampled as follows: 36% African American, 29% Hispanic, 27% Caucasian, 5% Biracial and 3% East Indian. The students were analyzed by answering open ended question and human figure drawing. At the end of the study almost all of the children said they had seen some form of violence (Skybo, 2005, p.266). Two-thirds of the students said they were somewhat or very upset by witnessing violence (Skybo, 2005, p.266).

Upon analyzing the stress symptoms of these students, the data became much more frightening. Skybo (2005) writes:

- 37 out of 43 students described their symptoms after witnessing violence as ‘confused’
- 26 out of the 43 described their symptoms as ‘feel sick’
• 11 of those 26 students called their degree of severity about feeling sick as ‘terrible’ (p.267).

Gender and race did not have significant outcomes in this study. African-American and Hispanic children did have more exposure to violence, but race/ethnicity did not have a significant effect on exposure to violence. Gender had no significant findings between boys and girls and their stress symptoms.

In a study by Evans and English (2002), the focus was on the rural poverty of America, which is often overlooked in studies on poverty. The goal of the study was to see if rural children confronted a wider array of multiple physical and psychosocial stressors than their middle-income counterparts (Evans & English, 2002, p.1238). Surprisingly, both those who were classified as living in poverty and those living middle income status had a large exposure to violence (73% and 49%, respectively). Evans and English (2002) also reported coping strategies are important to establish early on because, “by not doing so less flexible and more maladaptive coping strategies later in life may reflect early experiences of unsuccessful coping with overwhelming environmental demands” (p.1245).

Parental Environment

Whenever a child is classified as having EBD, occasionally the first eye of judgment usually looms towards the parents. Strange questions come up and usually, one common assumption is the answer to the question: poor parenting. While there is no doubt that poverty and EBD are intrinsically linked, is there also a link among parenting, race and EBD? A study by Hill and Bush (2001) asks if there is a relationship between parenting and a child’s mental health, but only among African American and European American parents. Going into the study, Hill and Bush (2001) noted that, “Previous research has suggested that African American
children may be more anxious and fearful than European Americans and talk about fears differently than European Americans, although these studies have confounded ethnicity with socioeconomic factors” (p.955).

Results of this study were mixed. Mothers who reported that they used “love withdrawal” as a disciplinary strategy found that their children, unsurprisingly, had higher levels of anxiety (Hill & Bush, 2001, p.960). This was consistent among both ethnic groups. The European American children used in this study reported higher instances of anxiety than African American children; however parents who reported that they felt they were good parents had children with lower cases of anxiety. Oddly, the research reported that high levels of consistent routines might inhibit flexibility and the development of autonomy in children (Hill & Bush, 2001, p.963). Such strict routines result in inflexibility which may be associated with anxiety. A large factor that contributed to behavior problems in this study was the lack of communication. It seemed that the more families, regardless of ethnicity, would talk about their negative feelings together, the less likely it was that a child would have behavior problems. Hill and Bush (2001), conclude:

The constellation of findings suggests that when behavior problems persist after using high levels of rule enforcement, exasperated parents, unable to effectively communicate their negative emotions, may increase their enforcements strategies to the point that they may appear or become harsh and inconsistent and inadvertently reward problem behavior (p.963).

Through this study, it was also determined that more educated mothers reported fewer behavior problems in their children. Hill and Bush (2001) suggest that since the educational level is higher, it is possible that the mother and child live in a larger space, where a child who is acting
out could find another area to exasperate their energy without bothering a parent. This study did not find any vast differences between African Americans and European Americans in terms of parenting and children's anxiety. Perhaps this concludes that good parenting is good parenting, regardless of race.

The findings of this review may help in finding a link between poverty and EBD. It is important for educators to keep in mind that EBD is not a form of acting out and should be patient with students diagnosed with this disorder. Patience could create a trusting relationship between student and teacher, and perhaps a mutual learning experience.

Many students may be living in poverty or are in home situations that do not model respect. Disagreements at home are often disciplined by parents or guardians physically. Absentee parents tend to express their love for their child through material rewards. This home life paired with teachers who may be culturally different and not understand where the students are coming from could create a difficult classroom experience for both teachers and students. A lack of the common definitions of respect causes conflicts that would otherwise be relatively solvable if the two parties worked together.

Methodology

Many instructors and students debate about the presence of respect in the classroom. Students claim they either do not disrespect their instructors or if they do, it is only because their instructors were disrespectful to them first. The instructors claim they are often disrespected no matter how well the students are treated. My stance as a researcher was to see if the way the students behaved at school was similar or different to how they behave at home. If they behave this way at home and it is acceptable behavior, students would have a hard time editing this behavior at school. Additionally, if the teachers believed this behavior was the norm at home.
why do they set such high standards for their own students when they know this respect will not be reinforced in the home? The goal of this study was to find out if respect in the classroom was truly not present and if so why or why not.

Through conversations and questionnaires completed by students and staff at a secondary high school in the Rochester area, information was obtained. These questionnaires were completed by students and teachers. Teachers and students were asked to complete these questionnaires at their earliest convenience. The questions were as follows for students:

1. Define respect (what does respect look like to you?)
2. Do you think you give your teachers respect? Why or why not?
3. Do you think your teachers give you respect? Why or why not?
4. Is respect shown in your home/where you live?
5. Are you disciplined for disrespectful behavior at home/where you live?
6. Is the way you behave in school similar to the way you behave at home? Why or why not?
7. If your parent/guardian came to observe you for a day at school, what do you think they would say about their behavior?

The questions for the teachers/instructors were the following:

1. Define respect (what does respect look like to you?)
2. Do you think you give your students respect? Why or why not?
3. Do you think your students give you respect? Why or why not?
4. Do you think your students are shown respect in their homes/where they live?
5. Do you think your students are disciplined for disrespectful behavior at the home/where they live?
6. Is the way your students behave in school similar to the way you believe they behave at home? Why or why not?

7. If a student's parent/guardian came to observe them for a day at school, what do you think they would say about their behavior?

Setting

This data was collected in a secondary school in the Rochester area. For the 2008-2009 school year, Superintendent Jean-Claude Brizard implemented a policy where out of school suspensions are no longer an option for the schools. If a student is written a referral, the student is sent to in-school suspension (ISS) room, where the student is expected to remain there for as long as deemed by the administrator. If the student is unable to control themselves in ISS, they are either sent to ISS+, which is a more isolated in-school suspension room that is staffed with social workers to find a deeper problem with this student, or the student is removed from school and placed in a new school called Project I'm Ready, where the student is taught life skills, given more one on one time with teachers and once behavior is improved, the student is sent back to their original school. This has caused a substantial amount of tension between the Rochester Teachers Association and the school board. Many teachers have questioned their safety while students who may have gotten into physical altercations during the school day remain in the school building to stay in ISS or ISS+. It is safe to say that many students have become insubordinate to their teachers, since they realize their consequences are much less severe. Teachers and critics have accused Brizard of indirectly taking away students accountability for their actions. Brizard still says he wants to keep students in school; since he believes that out of school suspension has no benefits. In turn, perhaps teachers have become more disillusioned
with a school that does not seem to hear their concerns. Needless to say, the school environment is very intense at the moment and a very interesting place to be.

Participants

I surveyed various 7th and 8th grade students at a secondary school in the Rochester area. These were students I work with at the school in classrooms, groups and workshops. They were selected mainly based on willingness to participate and by my personal opinion that they would be truthful. A difficulty with this process was finding students who were willing to either complete a small questionnaire or students who were willing to sit down for an interview. If a student was willing to participate in the process I would have the chance to let them know that the information would be confidential and that no one would be able to figure out what they said. These students were all between the ages of 12 and 16, as some of these students had repeated a grade, while an even 50% of males and females completed this survey. None of these students were white, as 33% were Hispanic or Latino, while 77% labeled themselves as Black. In addition, none of these students identified themselves as needing special education. Whether or not they are in special education classes is knowledge I am unable to obtain in my position, as is their socio-economic status. Many of these students have told me that they have very young parents; one student who is 12 has a mother who is 28 years of age. These students all identified themselves as speaking English as their first language.

Questionnaires were handed out to teachers at random. Teacher’s surveys were confidential. Many questionnaires were not returned at first by the teachers. All of the teachers who responded to back did so anonymously. A difficulty with this survey is that teachers were using a questionnaire on respect as a tool to vent their issues with students and their job. All of these teachers instruct grades 7 through 12th grade.
Respect in Inner City Schools

Procedures

The study was completed over a few months in the 2008-2009 school year. The study consisted of questionnaires handed out to students and teachers that I work with on a regular basis. Questionnaires were handed out and participants were given two weeks to complete the questionnaires. Unfortunately, both teachers and students did not return many of the questionnaires. Many teachers claim they simply forgot and many students just did not want to formally write out anything. Therefore, I took several conversations with teachers and students into account as feedback. These interviews were done informally, but the study itself was discussed and each person agreed they did not mind being a part of the study if it meant that they had confidentiality.

Findings/Results

1. Define respect (what does respect look like to you?).

This question was given to both the students and the teachers and a variety of answers were given. Two students gave part of their answer as “not fighting.” Student 3 wrote down “show respect; get respect, get respect, respect back.” Student 4 reported that respect means to be nice. Student 6 wrote, “A certain trust you would like to have with someone and would like them to have with you.”

Teachers/Instructors gave answers such as “tone of voice, respectable language, and demeanor/behavior of an adult, understanding, tolerance, and acceptability.” Teacher 1 stated simply that respect was honoring another person through your actions. Teacher 6 responded, “Treat others the way you want to be treated.” Teacher 4 responded, “Valuing others opinions and thoughts, speaking and interacting in a polite way.” Several teachers stressed the point of cursing with Teacher 2 stating, “Cursing around adults is disrespectful.” The teachers and
students seem to have a totally different definition of what respect is. Without an open dialogue, how can respect be reached?

2. Do you think you give your teachers respect? Why or why not?

This was a question posed only to students. Student 1 responded, “I think I give my teachers respect but not the amount they deserve because I lie to them a lot and I am very noisy when they are trying to teach.” Student 2 responded, “Yes because I do work, take good criticism and don’t talk back.” Student 3 stated that when he/she is upset, “it doesn’t matter what (about), I can disrespect.” Student 5 did not correctly answer this question. Student 6 responded by saying, “when my own mother and father are not there, they (teachers) are responsible for me and they are my elders. It says in the Bible to respect elders.” Student 4 stated that he/she does respect their teacher but, “only when they don’t trip or disrespect me.”

2. Do you think you give your students respect? Why or why not?

Each teacher has said yes, but each with different reasoning. Teacher 2 said, “I try, but I know that sometimes they perceive what I’m saying as disrespectful.” Teacher 3 claimed, “I think I do, but the respect has to be earned, but undoubtedly being abused at times on a daily basis, you wonder how to cope.” Teacher 4 said, “Yes, do not speak loudly, listen and allow them to express themselves and opinions.” Teacher 1 wrote, “I think that I give students respect by speaking positively, listening to them and providing academic and emotional support.” Teacher 6 claims to respect his/her students and wrote, “They deserve respect as everyone else does.” Teacher 5 said in an interview, “I respect them, but no one in this school can tell you that getting constant disrespect back eventually wears you out. It’s hard to start fresh every day.”

3. Do you think your teachers give you respect? Why or why not?
Every student's questionnaire claims they believe their teachers give them respect. Student 1 responded, “I think they respect me, but I disrespect them so it’s hard for them to respect me.” Student 3 responded, “Yes, all my teachers give me respect, but sometimes one teacher can really get on my nerves and that’s when I disrespect.” Student 2 wrote, “Yes, because they respect what I have to say.” Student 6 wrote, “Yes! I think it’s because of the way I am with them and the cool relationship I have with them.” Student 5 had a slightly more direct comment by writing, “Yes because if I wanted respect then they would give it to me.” Student 4 wrote, “Yes because they don’t be picking on me or doing un-necessary stuff.”

3. Do you think your students give you respect? Why or why not?

Sixty-seven percent of teachers/instructors polled believe their students respect them but only sometimes. Seventeen percent answered yes and 17% answered no. Teacher 2 answered no and added, “I think my definition of respect is not the same as theirs, therefore they feel they don’t have to treat me that way.” Teacher 6 answered yes and said, “Yes, I have always come across to youth, that how they feel and what they feel is important. Good listeners and students can see that.” As for the teachers who answered sometimes, Teacher 1 answered, “Most speak to me in a positive way and are careful to return my belongings. Some students have spoken negatively to me and stolen my possessions.” Fifty percent of teachers mentioned that students have stolen their possessions and consider that a part of disrespect. Teacher 3 answered sometimes and said, “Many do, others do not. Those who do because their lives, families have taught them their morals. Others live by the streets’ intolerance.”

4. Is respect shown in your home/where you live?

This question was directed toward the students only. Eighty-three percent of students answered that respect was shown in their home. Student 6 answered, “Of course, that’s how I
learn respect.” Student 4 answered, “No, sometimes, only when people don’t act stupid.” Student 3 wrote, “Yes, respect is show at my house! I believe respect is everywhere. Just some people have a different way of showing it.” Some students simply answered yes with no further explanation.

4. Do you think your students are shown respect in their homes/where they live?

This question was directed towards teachers only. Sixty-seven percent of teachers did not believe students were shown respect. Teacher 3 wrote, “Many not, I fear, meeting their parents and getting no response shows me so. Respect is not taught by morals but often by money, things bought or verbal/physical abuse.” Teacher 1 added, “Sometimes. Some students have stories of very concerned and supportive parents and others have horror stories of neglect and abuse.” Teacher 6 replied, “Some, I believe that it’s demanded by the elders, but not given to the younger members of the family. I also think it depends on the culture structure of the family.” Teacher 5 said in an interview, “I’m not sure if it is really respect or dominance. The line is often blurred.” Other teachers answered by writing the word “no” and underlining or writing it in all capital letters.

5. Are you disciplined for disrespectful behavior at home/where you live?

This question was directed for the students only. Fifty percent of the students questioned said they are disciplined for disrespectful behavior. Student 3 wrote, “I think everyone has been disciplined for disrespecting.” Seventeen percent of students answered no. Student 6 answered, “Not really, they just talk to me.” Sixteen percent of students did not answer the question. Seventeen percent of students answered sometimes. Student 1 responded, “Sometimes. Other times I just get grounded.”
5. Do you think your students are disciplined for disrespectful behavior at home/where they live?

This question was directed toward teachers only. Seventeen percent of teachers responded yes. Teacher 1 stated, “Yes, some parents tell me that they don’t put up with disrespectful talk or behavior. Sometimes this is addressed with physical punishment.” Thirty-three percent of teachers answered sometimes. Teacher 6 wrote, “Some, I do believe that their way of being disciplined is very different at home than in school. There is more fear instilled in students at home, as the consequences are higher and maybe at times be physical.” Teacher 3 states, “Some yes, others not. Talk is cheap. You can tell who a student is once the parent walks away and the show is over. Many parents are uninvolved so discipline is minimal.” Fifty percent of teachers said no. Teacher 2 stated, “No, not for what I view disrespect as.”

6. Is the way you behave in school similar to the way you behave at home? Why or why not?

This question was directed at students only. Fifty percent of students responded with a yes. Student 2 responded, “I am supposed to act the same way at home and at school.” Student 4 responded, “Yes, because I be myself everywhere, but when I’m at home I’m safe.” Student 3 wrote, “Basically! I am who I am! I know I have a little bad attitude and I can change it. Just sometimes it’s hard, but I live a happy life with a wonderful family.” Thirty-three percent of students responded no, with Student 1 saying, “Not at all. I act way much better at home.” Student 6 said, “Not really. In school, I don’t really know too many people so it’s hard for me to show them respect.” Seventeen percent of students wrote “sometimes.”

6. Is the way your students behave in school similar to the way you believe they behave at home/where they live? Why or why not?
This question was directed at teachers/instructors only. This question also received a variety of answers. Teacher 1 responded with, “Yes, parents report similar behavior when I call home, both positive and negative,” while Teacher 3 responded, “Again, school/streets mirror home life. Many are absentee parents literally/figuratively. I think many mirror their parent’s behavior for good or bad, unfortunately peers have more clout.” Teacher 4 answered, “I have no idea! Perhaps, I think they may behave differently at home but not ‘better.’ They may be more respectful at school but still very disrespectful. I do not think they know how to behave or what socially acceptable behavior is.” Teacher 2 responded, “For some kids yes, some no. Because they can get away with it here rather than at home or they are treated badly at home, therefore they in turn treat everyone badly.” Teacher 6 was similar to Teacher 3 in responding with, “No. I believe most students put on an act while around their peers so that they feel a sense of acceptance. Although some students would act the same because there is no sense of ‘home’ or structure outside of school.”

7. If your parent/guardian came to observe you for a day at school, what do you think they would say about your behavior?

This question was directed to students only. Seventeen percent of students declined to answer this question. The remaining 83% of students had a variety of answers. Student 1 wrote that his/her parents would, “be surprised about my behavior,” but does not indicate whether would be behavior would be received positively or negatively. Student 2 said his/her parent would tell him/her, “You are supposed to act this way all the time!” Student 3 wrote, “I think my mother wouldn’t be disappointed, but a little angry. I have my bad days and I have my good days.” Student 4 responded that his/her parents would say, “Nothing really, just shut up because
I'm mad loud when I laugh or when I argue.” Student 5 wrote, “They would maybe be happy that I respect the teachers but then again, they may have an attitude."

7. If a student’s parent/guardian came to observe them for a day at school, what do you think they would say about their behavior?

This question was posed to teachers/instructors only. Thirty-three percent of teachers thought the student would accommodate their behavior to what their parent expects to see. Teacher 1 wrote, “If they were observing disrespectful behavior here at school they would be very upset. Often when parents do come in to observe the kids are on their best behavior and it does not provide the parent with an accurate picture of the student.” Teacher 2 wrote, “Probably nothing because most students know what their parents want so they show that to them.” Seventeen percent of teachers thought the parents would be shocked by their child’s behavior in school. Teacher 3 wrote quotations in what they thought a parent would verbally say to them, “Oh my god...what can I do? In my home he/she knows better. Can you help? I need to take away the phone. I don’t understand how this could be my child.” Thirty-three percent of teachers/instructors thought parents would be fine with how the students behaved at school. Teacher 4 wrote, “They would probably think their student was fine, behavior was okay and that any issues was a result of the teachers or other peers.” Teacher 5 said, “Often times I have sat in mediations with parents who seem to blame their child’s actions on peers. Very rarely have I seen a parent admit their child was wrong. It is always something else that caused their child to react the way that they did.” Seventeen percent of teachers/instructors surveyed were undecided. Teacher 6 wrote, “If it was unknown that the parent/guardian was present. I believe the parent would be shocked to see how different their child acts when they are around their peers. If the student knew their parent/guardian was present, they would most likely be acting appropriately.”
Discussion

Through the research conducted, several conclusions can be made. To make the breakdown as simple as possible, conclusions will be sorted by question.

1. Define respect (what does respect look like to you?).

Students seemed to define respect by being trustworthy, non-violent and being kind. These students also believe that yelling is a sign of disrespect. Since many teachers often get frustrated and do raise their voice, this is perceived as disrespect according to this data. This belief system is most likely a product of home life. Teachers on the other hand have a much different view of respect, expecting students to be mature and kind. Age and poverty level were not factored into teacher’s reasoning as far as the researcher can tell. Perhaps a conversation on respect should have been had in the beginning of the school year, to make the classroom a more accepting environment for both teachers and students.

2. Do you think you give your teachers respect? Why or why not? / Do you think you give your students respect? Why or why not?

Students for the most part believed that they gave their teachers respect, but some only believed they gave respect if they themselves felt respected. Considering the answers students and teachers/instructors put for question 1, the definition of respect is so different to both parties; the students may or may not be truly respecting their teachers. Teachers in turn do believe they respect their students, but some claim that the constant disrespect they receive from students does get to them and effects how they treat their students.

3. Do you think your teachers give you respect? Why or why not? / Do you think your students give you respect? Why or why not?
Again, every student polled believed they gave their teacher respect. Although some did admit giving their teachers respect was hard at times, students still maintain that they do respect their teachers. In turn, only 17% of teachers believe their students respect them. A surprising part of research was that many teachers wrote down that they have had things stolen from them and that is part of the disrespect they feel. No follow-up questions were asked about the stealing, as this was a surprising answer to the question posed.

4. Is respect shown in your home/where you live? Do you think your students are shown in their homes/where they live?

All students believed that respect is shown in their home sometimes or at least sometimes. Sixty-seven percent of teachers do not believe this is the case. Many teachers commented on how they do not think students are shown respect based on interactions they have had with parents or lack of interaction with parents when their child's welfare is a concern.

5. Are you disciplined for disrespectful behavior at home/where you live? Do you think your students are disciplined for disrespectful behavior at home/where they live?

Most of the students did respond that they were disciplined, but only one student went into detail by stating he/she gets grounded. Other students did not go into further detail. Teachers were concerned that if and when students are disciplined, the consequence often is a physical punishment. Teachers who wrote this as a concern followed up by saying that home instill more fear in the students than consequences at school.

6. Is the way you behave in school similar to the way you behave at home? Why or why not? Is the way your students behave in school similar to the way you believe they behave at home?

This question received the most scattered answers. Most students said they act the same more or less because they are who they are no matter where their location may be. This question
also made it clear that teachers were not quite sure how students behaved at home, since answers were so scattered, ranging from thinking students behave the same way at home and at school, to students behaving a certain way at school to impress their peers.

7. If your parent/guardian came to observe you for a day at school what do you think they would say about your behavior? / If a student’s parent/guardian came to observe them for a day at school, what do you think they would say about their behavior?

Student’s answers were quite mixed, but teachers had some confusion on the question itself. Teachers were not sure if the student had previous notice that the parents were coming to observe them or if the students were able to see their parents observing them. This changed the answer for many teachers, implying that the student would act differently if their parents were there to observe them and the student was aware of the observation.

Limitations of Study

This study was met with many limitations, mainly regarding the questionnaires themselves. It was very difficult to have the students fill out the questionnaire, since many of the students do not like to complete written work for assorted reasons. Many of the students who did finish the questionnaire did not elaborate in their answers, often just plainly stating yes and no. Most teachers did not return the survey within a reasonable time frame, blaming forgetfulness and disorganization.

Another large limitation of this study was that shortly after questionnaires were distributed to teachers, it was announced that the school used in this study was closing. This was met with much controversy, since many teachers felt the school district itself was planning on closing this school since the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year, but kept this away from the staff, with the exception of school administration. This caused a substantial rift within the school
climate. Shortly after the announcement was made, I received many questionnaires back. It appeared teachers were using this opportunity to remain anonymous and voice their true feelings on the school and students. This could have swayed the results of this study more towards negativity, since teachers could have been both shocked and angered by the announcement of the school closing.

Gaps in Literature

One question that was not addressed to the students was whether or not they receive free lunch. This question did not pertain to respect, so it was omitted, but it would have been more helpful in linking the literature review to the study.

Additionally students were not asked if their teachers address the issue of respect in the classroom with them in the beginning of the school year. Many students need specific guidelines in order to ensure good behavior. Teachers also were not asked if they have a respect talk with their students.

For students, perhaps it would have been easier if some of the questions were multiple choices, since many students declined to elaborate on their answers.

Next Steps

For further research, I would recommend doing interviews with both students and teachers. This could follow up with a focus group involving both parties. It would be interesting to see what either group says while in the same room.
References


