SUPPORTING INTERETHNIC AND INTERRACIAL FRIENDSHIPS AMONG YOUTH TO REDUCE PREJUDICE AND RACISM IN SCHOOLS:

Supporting interethnic and interracial friendships in schools among children and adolescents is an important part of a progressive educational agenda informed in equity, social justice frameworks, and critical multicultural education that leads to a reduction in racial prejudice. Positive intergroup contact is a necessary condition in prejudice reduction and the development of positive racial attitudes among ethnically and racially diverse groups of children and adolescents. School counseling initiatives focused on promoting interethnic and interracial friendships can have significant individual and systemic consequences such as: improving social, emotional, and cultural competence among youth; prejudice reduction; and the creation of equitable educational spaces informed in multicultural and social justice worldviews.

"You need to meet new cultures. You want to meet new people in a school that's very mixed… If you are hanging out with other people, you might just learn things about them."[1]

(Atabei, Haitian-American student, Grade 4)

Children's friendships are fundamental to the experience and expression of intimacy, affection, and companionship. Friendships provide contexts in which children learn how others feel, what they think, and what they believe (Dunn, 2004). In an increasingly global and multicultural society, interethnic and interracial friendships offer important opportunities for children to learn about how children of differing ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds make meaning of the world (Pica-Smith, 2009).

These relationships provide spaces in which children can explore and appreciate both the similarities and differences of their identities and experiences. School counselors, by virtue of their training, experience, and position in schools, can support interethnic and interracial friendships to improve cultural competence and understanding among young people. The purpose of this article is to review research and theory on interethnic and interracial friendships and provide examples of ways they may be promoted by counselors in schools.Services and Rehabilitation Stu

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Interethnic and interracial friend-
ships (also referred to as intergroup

timal intergroup contact in schools are interconnected, and none are possible without the support of educators and educational administrators.

Allport (1954) hypothesized that optimal intergroup contact would afford children and adults the opportunity to challenge stereotypes and prejudiced thinking by allowing people to acquire new learning about each other and each other's group. Hence, shifts in perceptions and cognition would contribute to changes in the way individuals of different groups interact with one another. More contemporary research on Allport's theory demonstrates a robust relationship between optimal intergroup contact, prejudice reduction, and intergroup friendships (Pettigrew, 1997, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000). Furthermore, advances in intergroup contact research add to Allport's original theory and elucidate the affective processes that help to reduce prejudice through the formation of intergroup friendships. Specifically, a recent meta-analysis of 515 studies demonstrated that intergroup friendships contribute to increased empathy and reduced anxiety toward the outgroup (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). In this analysis, the following dependent variables were affected positively by intergroup friendships: "reduced anxiety, outgroup knowledge, intergroup trust, forgiveness, and perceptions of outgroup variability" (Pettigrew et al., 2011, p. 275). Therefore, individuals who participate in intergroup friendships are both less prejudiced and more positive about members of different racial/ethnic groups.

Nationwide, the U.S. student population is becoming increasingly multiracial and multiethnic. Demographic shifts occurred from the 1970s, when students of color comprised 22% of the student population, to 2003, when they accounted for 39%, with this number increasing to 64% in urban schools (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006). According to the latest available data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), nearly 50% of students in the 5- to 17-year-old age range are students of color (NCES, 2013). Therefore, racially and ethnically diverse schools in the U.S. do exist, and represent important spaces in which children of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds may interact, work together, and form meaningful, reciprocal, intimate friendships, which could significantly impact prejudice reduction and racist bullying in schools (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008).

Yet, intergroup contact in and of itself is not a sufficient condition for positive intergroup contact and friendships (Pettrigrew et al., 2011). Demographic diversity among students does not guarantee that children will forge intergroup friendships. As per the tenets of Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew et al., 2011), optimal conditions in schools must be supported by equitable institutional policies and supported by educators to create the foundation upon which children can interact on equal footing and create reciprocal relationships (Zirkel, 2008).

Supporting Optimal Intergroup Contact

Equity pedagogy, critical multicultural and social justice frameworks that influence classroom and school climate, can make a significant impact on creating positive intergroup contact conditions. For example, Zirkel (2008) linked collaborative learning and teaching strategies in the classroom to increases in interracial and interethnic friendship and prejudice reduction. When children of differing ethnic and racial backgrounds work together, collaboratively, on common goals, the optimal conditions of intergroup con-

tact occur (Allport, 1954). Disciplinary practices and data on disciplinary actions can be tracked, analyzed, and used to inform more socially just discipline and referral practices, likely leading to more equal status conditions. School counselors who participate in efforts to disrupt inequitable practice

with families and the larger school community to support the conditions of optimal intergroup contact. Partnerships to connect the school to families and the larger school community can provide visible and tangible evidence that the school community values and benefits from diverse cultures and related customs, and models intergroup cooperation to achieve the common goal of student success. Through this leveraging of the larger school community to achieve student success, the potentially negative effects of the positional hierarchies common in the structure of schools are greatly reduced or eliminated (Moody, 2001). These partnerships can take many forms, but should leverage and link the entire school community, from businesses and community organizations to churches, higher education institutions, and even professional sports teams. While not previously linked explicitly to supporting positive

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