

Classroom Instructional Aggression: Considering the role of classroom instruction on the presence of general-strain in school.

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Research on student behavior both within and outside of school-based settings has confirmed the severity of student aggression (Rocca, 2002; Alvarez, 2007; Bergsmann et al., 2013; Frey, Strong, & Onyewuenyi; 2017). Such behavior has been shown to impede academic, social and emotional development (Myers & Knox, 1999; Denham et al., 2002; Estell, Cairns, Farmer, & Cairns, 2002; Alvarez, 2007). Aggression in the classroom setting may go far beyond a teacher's grasp of classroom management skills, and may stretch into instructional methodologies to decrease aggressive peer connections (Thomas, Bierman, & Powers, 2011). However, educators' perceptions of student aggression directly relating to an educator's own instructional methods within a classroom setting, and the delivery of such instruction, has yet to be understood.

While aggressive behavior exists between teachers and students regarding discipline and misbehavior (Riley, Lewis, & Brew, 2010), constant victimization reduces the likelihood of self-control, in particular in the short term (Agnew et al. 2011). If aggression is present within a classroom setting and condoned, the socially aggressive students are likely to flourish as opposed to their less aggressive peers (Jackson, Cappella, & Neal, 2015). Such aggression within a classroom setting is directly attributed to poorer classroom climates, poorer levels of student aggression, worse peer relations, and decreased academic focus (Barth et al., 2004; Brendgen et al., 2015). Student

aggression levels are also altered as a result of the school's environment from a socioeconomically standpoint (Thomas & Bierman, 2006).

Prospective teachers themselves view physical aggression to be far more detrimental than verbal or relational bullying (Garner, Moses, & Waajid, 2013). Varying perceptions of aggression and violence within school environments may cause teachers themselves to view their role as a classroom instructor as a position that is free from an aggressive influence among the student population. Such feeling may also contribute to classroom aggression among students, in particular those who are deemed as being more popular or possessing abundant social relationships (Garandean, Ahn, & Rodkin, 2011; Rohlf, Krahe, & Busching, 2016).

If interpersonal aggression is openly displayed within classroom settings between teachers and students, student-to-student and peer aggression increases (Lucas-Molina, Williamson, Pulido, & Pérez-Albéniz, 2015). Teacher driven aggression may become a source of emotional, verbal, and physical maltreatment for students. For example, Olweus (1999) found that 2 percent of 2,400 primary and middle school students in Norway reported maltreatment by teachers and 10 percent of teachers reported that they themselves harassed their students in the past. Olweus (1999) also found that in about 50 percent of the classrooms studied, teacher harassment had occurred. As teachers' communicative behaviors can have an impact on student behavior and academic achievement, teachers must balance communication behaviors that might positively effect or negatively impact student learning (Mazer, & Stowe, 2016). Furthermore, such experiences with classroom aggression have not been currently measured regarding the instructional antecedents to such behaviors. While some forms of instructional practices

may be unique to a particular school-based subject (i.e., debates within history class), other practices may be used universally, regardless of the subject matter being taught. These practices may lead to general-strain between students, and between students and teachers within school-based settings, specifically within classroom environments, thereby potentially generating aggression through the application of specified classroom instruction.

Attitudes and perceptions need to be understood from both the teacher and students' points of view in order to further understand what climate is being generated from aggressive instructional practices. Is there a shared belief that some classroom instructional practices are aggressive, and if so, are these practices implemented anyhow, without thought of inflating the aggressive levels of students within classroom settings? Thus, this builds upon Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) to better understand the motivations of teachers and students regarding classroom aggression and instructional practices that may lead to, or fuel individual or group levels of strain.

GST specifically states that everyone, not just a select few, are prone to frustration and aggression depending on the type and frequency of stressors: (a) the inability to achieve positively valued goals; (b) the removal of or threat to remove positively valued stimuli; (c) to present a threat to one with noxious or negatively valued stimuli (Agnew, 2001). GST states that adults and youth are both susceptible to such stressors and the existence of any prevailing short and long-term consequences (Agnew, 2006). An inability to receive accurate information or achieve goals may lead to episodes of strain, in particular in educational environments where an abundance of adults and youth are present (Agnew, 2006).

With GST in mind, there are a variety of instructional methods that are heavily relied on given the specificity of a classroom setting. For example, within K-12 math classes, is it possible that having students line up at the front of the room and complete math problems on the front board, in front of their peers, could give rise to anxiety, bullying and interpersonal conflict arising as a result of public embarrassment? Within history classes, is it possible that facilitating political or historic event debates could give rise to a fluster of shouting and arguing over opinions, instead of a sharing of proven facts? Within science classes, could debates or students challenging the veracity of the content itself, to the teacher, create a less productive and more aggressive classroom environment? Within language arts/reading classes, could the forced reading of the same text, in particular fictional texts, create a lack of interest that may lead to higher levels of general strain and lower levels of literacy and achievement? Could all of these commonly used dogmas generate a reduced willingness to learn or a reduced interest in a specified subject matter itself?

All of these questions should be examined before formal instruction is planned and delivered within classroom settings by the teacher. This can, or should be done in an effort to ensure that teachers themselves, and the instructional approaches that are employed, are not adding to the predecessors that lead and contribute to the presence of conflict and violence in school. By passing instructional ideas through a filter of this already-researched subject on aggression and general-strain within school and classroom-based settings, may produce a more productive and higher achieving classroom environment. Less game-playing, reduced or non-existent competitive moments and divisiveness—may ensure more individuality, personal responsibility and higher

individual achievement. After all, aren't these three latter points the ultimate purpose of the individual student attending school in the first place?

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