



DEVELOPMENTS

Newsletter of the Society for Research in Child Development

Volume 46, Number 1

January 2003

Notes from the Executive Officer...

Summary of the COSSA and the Human Development and Public Policy Consortium Meetings

From my Fall travels, I have chosen two of the meetings I attended to highlight in this column. COSSA, the Consortium for Social Science Associations, celebrated its 20th anniversary a year ago and SRCD has been a member since its beginning. The second, the Human Development and Public Policy Consortium, is new, and held its second meeting this Fall.

Almost all the major behavioral and social science associations are members of COSSA. It is an advocacy organization, and its mission includes representing the interests of the relevant sciences, educating federal officials about the social/behavioral sciences, and producing a newsletter (biweekly) and occasional congressional briefings. Many of these have relevance to developmental issues. For example, in May 2002, the topic of the briefing was Welfare, Children, and Families: Results from a Three City Study. The speakers were Ronald Angel (University of Texas), Lindsay Chase Lansdale (Northwestern), Andrew Cherlin (Johns Hopkins) and Robert Moffitt (Northwestern).

The transcript of the proceedings is available through www.cossa.org.

At the November annual meetings of COSSA in Washington, D.C. the agenda consisted of several speakers who addressed matters of interest and concern to

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Focus on...

Developmental Psychology and the Argument for School Desegregation

Melanie Killen, *Professor of Human Development, Associate Director, Center for Children, Relationships, and Culture University of Maryland*

I was an expert witness in a school desegregation case in Lynn, Massachusetts, last spring. This came about because I went to a conference in Washington, D.C. two years ago sponsored by the Department of Justice. The meeting was with civil rights lawyers and social scientists; the goal was to discuss how lawyers and social scientists could exchange information relevant for school desegregation cases. It was a small meeting, 25 or so, and Janet Reno, then Attorney General, was present for part of it. Surprisingly, I was the only developmental psychologist. The other social scientists were political scientists and experts in school desegregation cases. A few minutes before the meeting began, my former dean, Bill Hawley, who invited me to attend, asked me to say a few words about my recent research on how children and

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Mark Your Calendar!

Feb

- 14 Deadline for Special & Preconference Event Scheduling
- Earlybird** Biennial Meeting REGISTRATION deadline - to receive a program book by mail
- 15 Application deadline for Millenium Fellows Program

Mar

- 15 Deadline for Biennial Meeting Childcare Applications available on the SRCD website
- 23 Deadline for Biennial Meeting HOUSING
- 28 Biennial Meeting Preregistration deadline

Apr

- 17 Audio Visual Equipment Reservation Deadline

FOCUS ON...(CONT.)

School Desegregation (cont. from p. 1)



Melanie Killen

adolescents evaluate the wrongfulness of exclusion and discrimination based on gender and race. I had not prepared anything because I had assumed that I would be a passive observer.

What began as a 5-minute talk turned into a 2-hour discussion. The civil rights lawyers wanted to know about our research on how children and adolescents evaluate gender and racial exclusion as well as current findings in the areas of developmental social cognition, intergroup attitudes, and racial biases. Based on this extended discussion, Richard Cole, the Assistant Attorney General for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (and Senior Counsel for Civil Rights & Civil Liberties), asked me to serve as an expert witness in his upcoming school desegregation case in Lynn, Massachusetts. He said that it was time for lawyers to bring in the developmental evidence when arguing for school desegregation. *Apparently, this has never been done.* Typically, expert witnesses come from political science or school desegregation research fields but not developmental psychology. The need for developmental evidence stems from changing political viewpoints about desegregation cases. Over the past 15 years, as the federal courts moved away from desegregation remedies, many state and local

governments have turned to voluntary plans (using race as a consideration when asking for out-of-district transfers) to maintain integration in their schools. Voluntary plans to desegregate are now under attack because race is taken into consideration, even though it's done to avoid racial isolation or imbalance.

Research in developmental psychology has shown that integration is beneficial for all children because interacting with kids who are racially and ethnically different from yourself contributes in a positive way to understanding the wrongfulness of exclusion, and for fostering social cognitive development,

“it was time for lawyers to bring in the developmental evidence when arguing for school desegregation”

moral development, and positive intergroup attitudes. Further, the earlier, the better, because stereotypes get quite entrenched and are hard to change by adolescence and adulthood.

In order to prepare for the trial, Jack Dovidio, a social psychologist, and I made several trips to Lynn, Massachusetts to conduct systematic and extensive observations and interviews in the public schools. We conducted observations of children, teachers, and staff, and interviewed children, lunch aides, counselors, principals, football coaches, athletic directors, librarians, parents, and administrators. Our observations and interviews revealed that integration was working very well; there were positive intergroup interactions at all levels of schooling (for example, adolescents from different ethnic backgrounds sat *together* in the cafeteria, contrary to many other reports from places around the country).

Serving as an expert witness was an extraordinary experience. The case was tried in the Federal Courthouse in Boston. Richard Cole, who was defending the voluntary desegregation plan in the

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, conducted the direct examination, and a lawyer for the plaintiffs conducted the cross-examination. We communicated the idea that children, from all backgrounds, benefit from being in positive and diverse environments. As the social psychologists have demonstrated, however, intergroup contact alone is not enough to reduce prejudice. A number of conditions have to be met and these include: common goals, authority sanctioning of intergroup interactions, cooperative exchanges, and personalized interactions. When these conditions are met (or partially) the result can be very positive. This is what we witnessed in Lynn, Massachusetts. The closing arguments for the case are scheduled to begin on December 13, 2002. Reporters covering this case expect it to go to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The most relevant aspect of this experience for developmental psychologists is that we have a history of research findings that bear on school desegregation cases. Yet, until very recently, these findings have not been used by trial lawyers to make the case for integration. Because it has become increasingly difficult to argue for desegregation on the grounds that past wrongs (segregation) have to be undone, our research is relevant for making the argument from a developmental viewpoint. Arguing for integration is not just about undoing historical wrongs, it's about creating positive and racially diverse learning environments for children for now and for the future.

Acknowledgements

Richard Cole is the Senior Counsel for Civil Rights & Civil Liberties and the Assistant Attorney General for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the Lynn, Massachusetts case. John Dovidio, Colgate University, a social psychologist, and Gary Orfield, Harvard University, a political scientist, were also expert witnesses. I would like to thank Stephen Thoma for suggesting that I write this article.