Creating Just and Fair Classroom Environments Requires Confronting Bias and Unfair Treatment in Schools

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Field Code Changed

Abstract

The classroom environment can be fraught with prejudice and bias from both teachers and peers. School represents an important context for children's social, moral, and identity development, but research suggests teacher bias and peer intergroup exclusion can have negative effects on students' development, especially for minoritized and marginalized children. Creating just and fair classrooms involves knowledge of children's social-cognitive and moral capacities as well as an understanding of how children coordinate their group identities and moral judgments in the contexts of societal inequality and social inclusion or exclusion. Acknowledging the current state of structural bias in schools, the effects of this bias on students, and how to change norms to create inclusive schools is both essential for change and urgent. This paper reviews this literature and proposes future directions for how to promote inclusive and fair classroom environments.

Key words: bias, teachers, inclusion, fairness, classrooms

Creating Just and Fair Classroom Environments Requires Confronting Bias and Unfair Treatment in Schools

When teachers display biases in the classroom, students experience unfair treatment (Glock & Kovaks, 2013; Starck et al., 2020; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Biases from teachers that favor a person or group without justification often reflect implicit or explicit forms of prejudice. Prejudice displayed in the classroom is harmful for children, especially those from marginalized or minoritized groups (Dovidio et al., 2009; Glock & Kovaks, 2013). Classrooms that reflect biased teacher attitudes that are left unchecked result in a hostile school environment not only for those who are the persistent recipients of biases, prejudicial attitudes, and exclusionary behavior but for all members of the community. Biased expectations and prejudicial attitudes have been shown to be related to the ethnic/racial achievement gap, low self-esteem, a lack of school belonging, and low motivation to attend school in addition to mental health outcomes such as stress, anxiety, and depression (İnan-Kaya & Rubies-Davies, 2022; Okonofua et al., 2016; Peterson et al., 2016; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014).

Further, children who exclude peers in classroom contexts based on group membership, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality, also contribute to the display of bias, the emergence of prejudicial attitudes, and a negative climate. Inclusion and exclusion of peers involves a number of social cognitive capacities including the evaluation of social inequalities, social status and hierarchies, detecting bias, awareness of status hierarchies, and decisions to trust peers. Understanding the context of teacher and student perspectives about their social relationships and the broader social context is necessary for creating inclusive classrooms, which, in turn, contribute to healthy child development and equal opportunities for all students to

reach their potential in terms of academic learning and achievement (DeCuir-Gunby & Bindra, 2022; Starck et al., 2020).

Schools are often viewed as contexts for promoting caring and fair treatment of others. Research on preservice and early career teachers finds that care for and enjoyment of students is an important motivating factor for teachers' work (Jarvis & Woodrow, 2005). However, research finds that many white teachers still struggle to relate to students of color, hold stereotypes about these students, and feel unprepared to teach diverse classrooms (Marx & Larson, 2012). To examine rates of teacher implicit racial bias compared with other American adults, Starck and colleagues (2020) analyzed two Implicit Association Test (IAT) national datasets. Data from the IAT, a tool to assess social group preferences based on the speed with which one associates members of that group with positive attributes, revealed few significant differences between teacher and nonteacher adults, indicating that teachers exhibit pro-white racial bias at about the same rate as the average American adult. Awareness of bias is the first step towards reducing negative attitudes, yet less is known about what helps teachers be aware of their own biases or about how their students make sense of teacher bias in action.

The focus on how students think about bias in the classroom is crucial for how to intervene to create more inclusive learning environments. Research on children's social and moral development has shown that children begin evaluating unfair treatment of others as wrong at an early age (Smetana et al., 2012; Sommerville, 2022).Yet, surprisingly little is known about the extent to which children view teacher biases in the classroom context as wrong or unfair. This involves multiple forms of judgment including the role of authority for decision making, as well as the recognition of unfair treatment that results from group norms and social inequalities. Recently, research has examined when children view group-level social inequalities as unfair and

whether they desire to rectify such disparities (Elenbaas, 2019; Mistry et al., 2021). These data are relevant for understanding how to create inclusive classrooms.

Also important is the extent to which teachers are aware that children often exclude their peers based on group membership. Research has documented the factors that contribute to children's support or rejection of peer exclusion based on stereotypes and biases (Rutland & Killen, 2015). Further, children's trust in their peers as a source of knowledge and information reveals the contexts in which they may turn to their peers (instead of teachers) for social support and information (Sebastián-Enesco et al., 2020). Students who are rejected by teachers may also be more likely to be rejected by peers (Osterman, 2000). If teacher rejection occurs systemically as a manifestation of unconscious bias against certain groups, this may further intergroup peer exclusion. We propose that addressing the factors that contribute to promoting positive and inclusive classroom environments requires knowledge about teacher and student attitudes about bias in the classroom, children's judgments about fair and unfair treatment of others, and evaluations of group norms that support bias and exclusion.

Outline for the article. We begin with a review of the foundational theory that generated current research, focusing on development of moral concepts such as fairness and equality in childhood. We turn to more recent research focusing on the group and societal norms that influence children's evaluations of different types of inequalities, guided by the social reasoning developmental framework (Elenbaas, 2019; Rutland & Killen, 2017). Next, we discuss research on how children think about intergroup inclusion and exclusion, as well as social inequalities, with a specific focus on social inequalities in the classroom and school context. This background provides the basis for what we propose as a new and necessary area of research investigating children's perspectives about teacher biases in the classroom and the associated

consequences for students in terms of their own intergroup behaviors, academic outcomes, and mental health outcomes. We conclude with recommendations for future research on the factors that create inclusive classrooms.

Children's Critical Social-Cognitive and Moral Capacities

Children are capable of critically evaluating teachers' actions, such as when they punish the group for the misdeeds of one child (Piaget, 1965) or condone acts of moral transgressions, such as inflicting harm on another person (Smetana et al., 2012). As well, children recognize the domains of student behavior that fall within and without a teacher's legitimate authority (Guerero et al., 2017; Smetana & Bitz, 1996; Yoo & Smetana, 2022). In general, children view moral judgments as obligations that apply across scenarios, not as a matter of consensus, nor as under authority jurisdiction (Turiel, 1983, 2002). For example, children view teachers as having jurisdiction regarding conventions in the classroom such as how the classroom desks are arranged, the appropriate attire for classroom participation, and how teachers should be addressed in the classroom. By four years of age, however, children do not believe that teachers have jurisdiction to alter moral rules in the classroom, such as whether it is okay to hit someone, take away other students' resources, or engage in deception for personal benefit (Smetana et al., 2014); these actions are viewed as wrong and unfair *even* if a teacher condones them. Extensive research has shown that children in multiple cultural contexts (by nation, urban/rural, SES, and traditional/modern) view teacher jurisdiction for conventions that are designed to make groups work as distinct from teacher jurisdiction over moral obligations about mutual respect, fairness, and others' welfare (Helwig et al., 2014; Wainryb & Recchia, 2014). With development, children's depth of moral reasoning becomes more nuanced and robust, as they develop an

understanding of others' mental states (Lagattuta & Weller, 2014) and the role of authority (Turiel, 2015).

Children's peer relationships are crucial in this process. Piaget emphasized the role of peer interaction as a unique contribution to development, particularly for facilitating change regarding social-cognitive and moral development (Carpendale, 2000; Piaget, 1932). Piaget (1932) argued that peer relationships are among equals, allowing for greater cooperation and development of reciprocity, equality, and mutual respect. To Piaget (1932), the "equal status" nature of peer relationships stands in contrast to adult-child interactions, which are unilateral and constraining given that adults have power, knowledge, and status. However, research over the past two decades has demonstrated that both peer and adult-child relationships are multifaceted. Peer relationships may be a context for equality as Piaget imagined, but they may also be unilateral in the case of bully-victim relationships (Rubin et al., 2006). At the same time, adult-child relations may be unilateral, but they can also be constructive, with scaffolding and positive communicative interactions (Grusec, 2019; Kuczynski & Mol, 2015).

These findings have several implications for creating inclusive classrooms. Children's conceptions of authority play a role in how children view teachers, including teachers who foster inclusive relationships as well as those who display biases. Further, with age, children are capable of critically evaluating biased behavior from peers. Teachers can support students who reject stereotypic expectations from peers or resist unfair treatment. For this to happen, both students and teacher must bring to bear an awareness of bias, their own group identity, and moral judgments about a fair classroom (see Nucci & Ilten-Gee, 2021).

Group Identity and Moral Judgment: A Theoretical Model

Just as morality naturally develops, so too does an awareness of group dynamics and the human desire to affiliate with groups (Tomasello, 2014). Social identity theory (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Nesdale & Lawson, 2011; Verkuyten, 2014) theorizes that ingroup preference develops as individuals affiliate with groups. Strengthening one's ingroup affiliation can result in ingroup bias which often leads to outgroup distrust. Theories of social exclusion have drawn on social identity theory to explain processes of intergroup inclusion and exclusion (Abrams et al., 2005). Extensive research has found evidence of ingroup preference from early childhood (Dunham et al., 2011; Kinzler & Spelke, 2011) through adolescence and adulthood (Levy et al., 2016). This natural preference does not have to become a bias against a particular outgroup, but affiliation with one's ingroup can become bias against an outgroup in contexts that promote and perpetuate social hierarchies and inequalities. The social identity approach is consistent with current theories about anti-racism which focus on systemic racism (Kendi, 2016) in that prejudice is characterized as a systemic aspect of societies that allows groups to maintain power and privilege (Dovidio et al., 2015). Thus, understanding how children and adults morally reason through issues like bias and prejudice in the classroom requires consideration of group identity, especially in a sociocultural context that places some groups in power while subjugating others.

The social reasoning developmental (SRD) model provides a framework to consider children's reasoning about intergroup settings, such as a diverse classroom context in which group identity is salient, by drawing from social domain theory (Killen & Smetana, 2015; Turiel, 2015) and social identity theory (Rutland et al., 2010). Social domain theory holds that individuals consider their social world by coordinating concerns in the moral (e.g., fairness, equality, wellbeing of others), social-conventional (e.g., norms), and personal/psychological (e.g., personal preferences, autonomy) domains (Killen & Smetana, 2015). Social identity theory

posits that one's group identities, such as race or gender, play a crucial role in the development of one's self concept, affecting how one interacts in social situations (Rutland et al., 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The SRD model integrates these two frameworks to propose that children develop cognition about their social world by balancing concerns about their group identity, social-conventional norms, and morality (Rutland et al., 2010). This model also contends that children bring their psychological knowledge to bear on their social cognition, including their interpretations and awareness of others' intentions, feelings, and mental states (Elenbaas et al., 2020). These same forms of psychological knowledge about others are likewise relevant to how children think about inclusion and exclusion of peers in the classroom.

Children's Evaluations of Social Inclusion and Exclusion

A child's choice not to affiliate with a peer can occur in multiple ways. While interpersonal peer rejection may occur because of an individual's personality traits, intergroup social exclusion occurs when children are rejected based on their group identity, a result of prejudice and bias. Children often justify intergroup exclusion (based on gender, race, and ethnicity) by using conventions, traditions, and group functioning reasons, for instance rejecting an outgroup peer because they expect not to have much in common (Mulvey, 2016).

Research on bias in the peer context at school finds that children may also encounter and reason about intergroup social exclusion differently based on age and social identity. Cooley et al. (2019) found that white 12- to 14-year-olds tended to expect a group of same-race peers to include someone of a different race less than did white nine- to 11-year-olds. By middle school, children are aware of societal racial biases and take these into account when considering their expectations about peer inclusion behavior. In the same study, Black children evaluated racial exclusion as more wrong than did their white counterparts (Cooley et al., 2019). Thus, though

with age white children appear to be more aware of racial bias and discrimination among peers, their privileged racial identity moderates their moral judgments about the acceptability of bias-based exclusion. Research finds that as children age, though, shared interests can prevail over group identity, and children can become more capable of valuing diverse peer groups. Through classroom discussions, teachers can scaffold this process, helping children to recognize what makes intergroup exclusion wrong and the benefits of including peers of many identities (Killen et al., 2022b).

Children's Evaluations of Societal Inequalities

Part of understanding how children think about bias in the school context is understanding how they evaluate social inequalities in general. Recognizing societal level inequalities is especially important for majority group members, contributing to perspective-taking and empathy for groups that are not majority status. By middle childhood, children gain the ability to use their moral reasoning in the context of societal inequalities, recognizing that some inequalities are unfair and need to be rectified. This reasoning gets more complex with age. When shown a pre-existing resource inequality between two groups, five- to six-year-olds considered both a rectifying (giving more to the disadvantaged group) and equal allocation of resources to be fair, while eight-year-olds evaluated equal allocations that perpetuated the inequality as less fair than allocations that rectified the inequality (Rizzo & Killen, 2016).

Importantly, these social inequalities are not arbitrary. While certain social groups have been given power based on identities such as race and gender, others have been systematically subjugated and disadvantaged, and the child's world is not free of these influences. As children develop their own sense of group identity, they must navigate how their identification with certain social groups intersects with their sense of morality.

Prior research has explored how children balance moral priorities with group identity through the framework of the SRD model. These studies have examined how children understand societal biases that result in structural inequality. Children recognize systemic biases, such as those based on gender and race, and they bring to bear their own group identities. In the context of resource inequalities, when children identify with a disadvantaged group, they recognize the inequality, disapprove of it, and act to rectify it at an earlier age than when they identify with the advantaged group (Elenbaas et al., 2016; Rizzo & Killen, 2020). Likewise, Elenbaas and colleagues (2016) found that when children were shown unequal distribution of school supplies between a school with African American children and a school with white children, all children gave more resources to the disadvantaged groups, but younger children were more likely to give even *more* resources to their own group, displaying an ingroup bias. With age, children recognized the societal inequality; older children gave more resources to the African American disadvantaged schools. White and African American participants were equally likely to rectify the inequality between the two schools. Rizzo and Killen (2020) investigated how three- to eight-year-old children evaluated individually and structurally based inequalities. Children were asked to evaluate allocations made by a hypothetical allocator who gave more resources based on merit (hard-working) or more resources based on group identity (gender bias). Overall, children evaluated structurally based inequalities to be more unfair and worthy of rectification than individually based inequalities. However, when given the opportunity to allocate resources themselves, most children allocated equally, which is not the most direct means for rectifying a pre-existing inequality. These findings reveal that even young children have the cognitive capacity to recognize what makes a structural inequality different from an

individual inequality but do not consistently use strategies that fully rectify the inequality based on a gender bias.

The recognition of the presence of systemic bias is the first step for children applying their moral reasoning to bias, but the next is the understanding that individuals perpetuate these biases. Additionally complex moral reasoning is required when children must make sense of and respond to bias in an individual whom they may have viewed as inherently fair and just, such as a teacher or friend.

Structural Bias in the School Context

School is an environment rife with salient peer and adult relationships in which children receive social information about conventional rules (e.g., norms) and moral rules. Children are faced with the challenge of distinguishing when what appears to be a norm (e.g. a bias against certain students) may in fact be a moral violation within the complex intergroup context of their classroom across multiple dimensions: gender, race, ethnicity. Teacher racial bias has been observed by different methods, but extant literature suggests that these biases show up in consistent ways and tend to consistently benefit and harm the same groups of students. A meta-analysis examining research on differences in teachers' behavior toward ethnic minority compared with white American students found that teachers held the highest expectations for Asian American and white American students and lower expectations for Latino (d=0.46) and African American (d=0.25) students (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). The authors also found that teacher speech toward these ethnic groups differed, with more positive and neutral speech toward white students than Latino and African American students (d=0.31). These findings are consistent with results from Starck et al. (2020), which found that teachers hold pro-white implicit racial bias at about the same rate as non-teacher adults in the United States. Other

studies use student self-reports of unjust or discriminatory treatment from a teacher and find that students of color report discriminatory treatment via grading, discipline, and lack of positive feedback at higher rates than white students (Čiuladienė & Račelytė, 2016; Crystal et al., 2010).

A child's own racial identity affects not only their vulnerability to racial bias from teachers (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007) and peers (Greene et al., 2006) but also the likelihood that they recognize when peers may be victims of bias (Elenbaas et al., 2016). Classroom and school norms also play an important role in whether children see instances of bias as the expected status quo or whether they see bias as an injustice to which they have the power to respond. By adolescence, when children report high levels of prior unfair treatment by authorities such as teachers, they are less likely to recognize later prejudicial mistreatment of a peer (Crystal et al., 2010). Instances of teacher bias inherently involve children's moral concerns, as they think about whether their peers are being treated with equality and fairness. When witnessing bias at school, children are also engaged in the intricate social cognition of understanding others' mental states, as they might consider the intentions of the teacher as well as the emotions and experiences of peers being treated unfairly based on their identity.

As children gain an understanding of the nature of fairness and inequalities, they also must parse out the reasons for the inequalities they see at school, attempting to make sense of the roles of bias and merit. Rizzo and Killen (2020) found that children tend to approve of group inequalities when they believe the inequality is earned (one group works harder than the other), but not when they see the inequality as structural, or bias-based (one group's gender is preferred by the leader). Still, a child's sense of fairness and justice is not impervious to the influence of societal inequalities. Importantly, Pauker and colleagues (2016) argue that merit-based and bias-based perceptions of inequalities can become conflated as children internalize stereotypes; when

certain social groups are preferred over and over again with merit-based justifications, children may eventually come to assume that disadvantaged groups have somehow earned their lower status. Thus, though Rizzo and Killen (2020) show that though children have the capacity to distinguish between group inequalities that are earned or based in bias, repeated exposure to differential treatment based on stereotypes, such as from peers or teachers at school, may eventually lead to children holding these stereotypes themselves. It is for this reason that research gaining a deeper understanding of how children reason about bias in the classroom is so important.

Effects of Teacher Bias on Student Intergroup Behavior

While most current research on how children evaluate bias has been in the peer context, we also know that the peer-to-peer and child-to-adult contexts are not fully independent in a young person's world, especially in the classroom. In this environment, the way a teacher treats a student is likely to influence the way that student's peers treat them, and the teacher creates norms around who is worth including and celebrating, and who is not. Geerlings and colleagues (2019) examined the relationship between Dutch teacher interethnic attitudes, student perception of teachers' expressed multicultural norms (e.g., "all cultures should be respected"), and students' ethnic outgroup attitudes. Classrooms in the study included Dutch majority students, Turkish-Dutch minority students, and Moroccan-Dutch minority students in fourth to sixth grades. Among the Dutch majority students, observing a teacher's positive relationship with ethnic minority students had a positive effect on ethnic outgroup attitudes, but only among those who reported few instances of teachers' expressed multicultural norms. The authors posit that students may form their ethnic outgroup attitudes based more on how their teachers model

interaction with minority students than on what their teachers state explicitly (Geerlings et al., 2019).

Importantly, teachers' interactions with minority students may also be better indicators of teachers' implicit attitudes than the norms teachers overtly express. Prior research has found that negative implicit teacher attitudes are more indicative of teacher behavior than explicit attitudes (Glock & Kovacs, 2013), highlighting the need for further research on how children respond to actual teacher behavior. While teachers (like most adults) tend to report that they have few biases (Marx & Larson, 2012), the study of the true impact of teacher bias has been hindered by a dearth of quality measures for this bias in context (DeCuir-Gunby & Bindra, 2022). Additional research with emerging tools (e.g., Teacher Race Talk Survey, Milner, 2017) is needed to capture more nuance about teacher bias, such as teacher attitudes toward the role of their students' ethnic-racial identities in their education.

Teacher behavior has the power to influence not only majority student bias and moral reasoning but can affect that of minority students as well. Crystal et al. (2010) examined children and adolescents' perceptions of unfair treatment by authorities and responses to unfair treatment of a peer. Students in minority racial-ethnic groups reported more unfair treatment by authorities. Also, adolescents who reported fair treatment by authority were more likely to perceive peer interracial exclusion as wrong than were adolescents who reported unfair authority treatment. This is particularly interesting in that it points to the complexity of the teacher-student power dynamic and its effect on how children relate to their peers. One might expect that, given Crystal and colleagues' (2010) finding that racially minoritized children experienced more unfair treatment by authority, these participants would thus be more likely to recognize the unfair treatment of someone else in a situation of interracial exclusion. Rather, their repeated

experiences of unfair treatment may, by adolescence, have desensitized them to recognizing the unfair treatment of others, now seeing injustice as the norm. The findings suggest that if children are repeatedly subject to teacher bias, they may be less likely to recognize, name, and thus to act to prevent prejudice of others in the future. More research is needed to understand how children and adolescents think about their experiences of bias in the classroom, to inform prevention and intervention.

Effects of Teacher Bias on Student Achievement and Wellbeing

Experiences of prejudice and bias at school affect not only students' own intergroup behavior, but also their academic and mental health outcomes. Peterson et al. (2016) found that teachers' implicit racial biases (as measured on an IAT) predicted student performance on an end-of-year standardized test, with students in their teacher's preferred racial-ethnic group scoring higher on average than students not in this group. A longitudinal study of racial minority students throughout high school similarly found that students who reported unjust treatment in their classrooms showed lower grades on average in the next semester (Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006). Student reports of unjust and discriminatory treatment in the classroom have also been associated with academic disengagement (Berti et al., 2010; Gasser et al., 2018).

Encountering bias at school also has consequences for students' mental health. Okonofua and colleagues (2016) review the substantial evidence that racially biased school discipline practices have harmful mental health outcomes on students of color. Wong et al. (2003) followed students from ninth to twelfth grade and found student reports of racial discrimination at school were associated with lower self-esteem among minoritized students over time. Greene et al. (2006) similarly followed students identifying as Black, Latino, and Asian American and found adult discrimination at school to be associated with decreased self-esteem and increased

depressive symptoms across time. This study also found that perceived peer discrimination remained stable over time, but perceived adult discrimination increased over time. This highlights that the way children recognize and reason about bias at school changes with development and may differ depending on the peer or student-teacher context. This research points to the need for further study of how children and adolescents think about teacher versus peer bias at school.

Creating Inclusive Classrooms: What Comes Next

Developmental research has explored how children think about social inequalities (Burkholder et al., 2021; Elenbaas & Killen, 2016; Olson et al., 2012; Rizzo & Killen, 2016), the role of group identity in these scenarios (Elenbaas et al., 2016), and the role of group identity in peer inclusion/exclusion contexts (Cooley et al., 2019). Meanwhile, educational research has established the pervasive presence of teacher racial bias (İnan-Kaya & Rubie-Davies, 2022; Starck et al., 2020; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007) and the associated negative impacts of bias and discrimination at school, primarily for students of color (Gasser et al., 2018; Greene et al., 2006; Peterson et al., 2016). However, research has yet to focus on how children think about classroom inequalities that originate from teacher or peer racial bias in the classroom context. The teacher-student power dynamic is unique to the classroom and has yet to be used as the situational basis for developmental studies that ask children about their reasoning and judgments about bias. While prior studies of how children think about authority suggest children are aware of this power differential as they consider the moral acceptability of a teacher's lying behavior (Peng et al., 2021) or unjust directives (Gingo, 2017), research has not yet examined how children consider teacher bias in the same way.

Status hierarchies perpetuate inequalities in children's lives by benefiting or constraining access to opportunities based on youth's group identity including gender, ethnicity, race, and

wealth status. In many school contexts, youth experience status hierarchies created by school authorities, as biases may lead teachers to unfairly distribute leadership roles to students based on group membership. As an example, in a recent study, U.S. youth (eight- to 14 year-olds) evaluated teachers' assignments of leadership roles across three conditions: equal (assigning both European-American and Latinx students), unequal majority (assigning only European-American students) and unequal minority (assigning only Latinx students) conditions. Adolescents, but not children, evaluated each context differently, viewing a teacher favoring European-American students as most unacceptable, followed by unequal allocations favoring Latin-American students. Adolescents viewed equal allocations between the two ethnic groups as most acceptable. Adolescents also evaluated unequal leadership allocations more negatively than did children. These findings revealed that, with age, students distinguish between high and low status groups and view ethnic bias as unfair regarding the allocation of leadership roles in school contexts (Killen et al., 2022a).

Findings from educational research have revealed common manifestations of teacher racial bias, such as differential expectations, grading, discipline, and speech directed at students based on their ethnic-racial identity (Čiuladienė & Račelytė, 2016; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). These findings can now be used to inform research protocols and stimuli focused on both children and teachers. One such ongoing study of teacher perspectives uses new measures to gain a more nuanced picture of how teachers think about the role of their students' social identities in their education (Teacher Race Talk Survey, Milner, 2017) and how teachers think about the malleability of prejudice itself (Theories of Prejudice Scale, Carr et al., 2012), potentially revealing biases that prior measures of teacher bias have failed to capture (DeCuir-Gunby & Bindra, 2022; Glock & Kovacs, 2013) (see Killen et al., 2022c).

We propose that research needs to pay particular attention to elementary and middle school aged children, as much of the current research on student-reported experiences of teacher bias and discrimination focuses on high school students (Crystal et al., 2010; Greene et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2003), leaving more to learn about when and how awareness of classroom racial bias emerges in childhood. Similarly, much of the current literature on outcomes of teacher bias focuses on these outcomes for students of color (Greene et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2003). While it is crucial to identify these negative outcomes for minoritized students so that policy and interventions can aim to mitigate such consequences, research must also examine how white and other majority group students process bias in the classroom, especially in light of research showing that teacher behaviors toward minority students affect majority student ethnic outgroup attitudes (Geerlings et al., 2019).

Importantly, Killen and Rutland (2022) note that creating inclusive classrooms is not only a research issue but is also a policy issue affected by socio-historical trends and events. Advancements in addressing prejudice in the classroom have been hindered by disruptions to schooling from the COVID-19 pandemic and by the rise of politically polarized discourse around topics like perceptions of critical race theory. Hindrances like these make the need for evidence-based interventions and educational policies for creating inclusive classrooms that much more urgent. To inform such policy, further developmental research is needed to understand how children perceive teacher bias, how teachers perceive their own bias, and how teachers perceive their students' intergroup behavior.

Conclusions

Children's concepts of fairness and equality develop in an environment laden with the social hierarchies of the surrounding culture, and children must navigate moral decision making

and group identity concerns in this milieu. We discussed the social reasoning developmental model as a robust paradigm which aids in understanding the intersection of moral reasoning, group identity, and social norms. Recent research on how children think about moral issues such as social inclusion and resource allocation in intergroup peer contexts reveals novel findings about how children navigate multiple considerations in everyday settings.

We propose that in the classroom, children's group identities and moral concerns may particularly come into conflict in the context of teacher or peer bias. The classroom is a crucial context for moral development which research has yet to fully explore, especially for understanding how children think about intergroup inequalities caused by an authority figure. Current research on teacher bias, its effects on student intergroup behavior, and associated outcomes for minoritized students reflects the integration of concerns about morality (fair treatment of others) as well as group norms and group identity. How children identify bias in the classroom and how they think about rectifying or addressing such biases informs interventions and policies to support the creation of inclusive classrooms.

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