

Davidson Transcript

I think that my challenge today is to share with you what turns out to be thirty-seven years worth of work in thirty minutes. So I'm going to apologize up front for covering a whole lot of things in not a lot of detail. And I'm happy to answer any question or to be in touch afterwards. This has sort of been the love of my life for nearly four decades. Hi pointed out that he and I have been here together thirty-four and forty-two years respectively. He didn't add, that at least in my case, I was very young when I started, so if you're trying to do the arithmetic, he's a little older than I am. I get to stand up here and talk about this. This has involved, as you've seen some of the numbers, thousands of undergraduates and thousands of kids referred to us from a local juvenile court or entrusted to us from a local juvenile court in this community. Nearly two hundred graduate students over the years, one of whom it think is in the room, two of whom are in the room today. One of whom is one of my current colleagues. And dozens of community partners, so this is a way of saying that I am talking about this, but this is in no way my work alone. You can't do this kind of work alone.

I am also going to give you a presentation that is from a statistical standpoint relatively vanilla. I didn't think today was the day to give you a lot's of List(REL) models and multiple regression models and so on, so I'm going to ask you to quote unquote, trust me on that. This stuff has been published lots of places and I am happy to share that with you, but given thirty minutes that was going to get in the way. There are also many outcomes we could talk about but this presentation's going to focus on recurrent crime or recidivism; I'll try to touch on some of the others as we go.

It's also certainly a great pleasure today to share this audience with a long time friend, Steve Fawcett. It's an honor not only to be here with him given his absolutely exemplary career, but this is a guy who I've known for some time and I really love as a human being, this is a great guy and you should get to know him if you get the chance beyond the wonderful work that he has done.

I certainly need to give you some background here. The usual question that gets asked is, "What the heck is the university doing here in the juvenile court anyway?". That's the question that the community asks, especially juvenile court people who are inherently distrustful of academic types. But the corollary that we get from my colleagues is "Where the hell are you going, why aren't you here in the building?". Some of us believe in this model of outreach and engagement as it is now labeled; I have to point out that when we were very young and started this neither of those terms were around. But we very much at the time believed in a blend of research, teaching and community collaboration. And we really are silly enough to believe you can do those three things, that is what this is about. And further we believe that universities are in a unique role to do this kind of work. It is not at all clear to me that there is any other institution in our society who can do this blend of work. That is involved in education, that is involved in

collaborating with community on social problems, and actually brings research action to the table. That slide gets me in lots of trouble with some audiences, probably not this one.

This is also based off of a particular model of outreach scholarship which involves collaboration on important issues; in this case the example is going to be juvenile crime, development of alternative approaches. Usually we get involved in social issues where things aren't going so well. And if you've been anything but asleep in the last four decades you know that what we do with juvenile offenders in this society isn't going very well; it costs a lot and doesn't work very well. This is where the science comes in, we believe we have to test the alternative that we create and test it rigorously, and you'll see some of those kinds of data. And we're never satisfied, we believe you ought to replicate and not just look once at, "did something work under rather pristine conditions" because science really remains skeptical in that even when you're successful you need to be committed to that success. So dissemination or technology transfer is part of the scientist's commitment from Jump Street. And you actually need to engage in ongoing monitoring.

It's also probably important, by way of background, that you know that this project has gone through a number of phases. We had RO1 and three NIMH grants from '76-90 where we did four longitudinal experiments I'll share with you and we'll look at the impact quickly on the adolescent youth. I should define terms here. I am going to refer to the adolescent delinquent kids here as "youth" and I am going to refer to our undergraduate students at MSU as "students" because you'll get confused a lot because they're many times only three or four years apart. And then look at impact on the community.

This collaboration was built on an initial agreement that guaranteed that we would continue and partner with the local community if we were successful. And since '85 we have been jointly funded by the local county government and the university in a collaborative arrangement. And there's a whole series of stories I could tell you about how much fun that was to create, but I won't bother you with that today.

So let me take out my time machine and turn the clock back three and a half decades. These were the issues, and this was literally from an overhead that I did for my dissertation presentation. I should hasten to add that the subtitle to this talk—The Adolescent Diversion Project—colon, "why it's not necessarily a great idea to find unexpected positive results that are statistically significant in your dissertation because it'll cost you the rest of your life". We've been at it ever since. At that time crime was a major issue. We are today, I think twenty-seven straight years crime has been top five in the Gallup Poll of things Americans care about. And crime is largely an adolescent issue, about half the crime in the United States is done by kids we label "juveniles"; depending on the state, between under eighteen and under sixteen years of age. We're concerned with the ineffectiveness and the cost of current approaches. At the time this was originally written people were all excited that we were spending an average, nationally of thirty-seven dollars per day for kids in residential correctional treatment for juvenile offenders. Today that number is almost four hundred dollars a day. While that sounds expensive, it does pretty well compared to hospital care, which is around seven thousand dollars a day.

But those were the issues at the time that brought us into this. There were rather specific ideas that lead us to design what we were doing. We wanted to pick promising directions, translation to today: evidence based practice. We probably for mostly serendipitous reasons picked what today get called cognitive behavioral interventions based on Social Learning Theory. As good behaviorist at the University Of Illinois in the mid 1970s, if you'd have said the word "cognitive" next to the word "behavioral" they would have flunked you right out of your comprehensive exams. Only a few of us are old enough to even think that's funny.

Non-professionals, the use of existing non-paid, non-professional change agents was a big movement in community psychology at the time, and that was wrapped up in this. And there have been some early promising results, including from my mentor Julian Rapport's dissertation where he had found rather dramatic effects using college students as change agents with chronic mental patients. And the need, specifically within the juvenile justice area, the need to create alternatives; Social Labeling Theory was coming into play. Martin Gold had just finished his study in Flint: Delinquency in American City and then replicated it nationwide, which showed—are you ready for this—arresting kids and putting them into the juvenile justice system increases the probability of future crime. And you can imagine the stir that that created. So it looked to us that we had to do things outside the system.

I think it's important to understand this collaboration and what we each brought. MSU certainly was bringing faculty and student time. We put in place a new course that undergraduates would be involved in, this is probably important in universities and communities collaborating. And we certainly thought we brought theory and research acumen. The community put together for us a community board; I'll show you the makeup of that in a minute. It guaranteed us referrals of kids from the local juvenile court and provided records access. No minor accomplishments if you've even tried to access school and/or court records. And certainly they knew what they were doing and they brought experience to the table. We had a board made up of; I guess by today's standards you would say the usual suspects. We didn't talk about community collaboration in those days; it was community coordination and sharing of services. But we had folks from the justice system, we had folks from the County Board of Commissioners—which turned out to be a brilliant move in hindsight because it was the future source of funding but it wasn't really what it was about at that time—and then we had school administrators.

I've really got three stories I've got to tell you, here. The first one is about the youth and how they get involved, the second is about the students and the third will be about the impact on the justice system and the community itself. I am going to do decreasing amounts of those because people tend to be most interested in "what are the effects on kids". So let's talk about how kids get involved and I am going to show you four different studies that have been done within this project, because it changes a little bit.

If you think about the juvenile justice system in an over simplified fashion, you've got some amount of delinquency going on out there, someone complains about it. About half of those complaints result in nothing, kids get quote unquote "curb side justice". The others go by

way of juvenile petition to the juvenile court and the court has to make a decision about what they are going to do. Before the existence of the diversion project, they could dismiss the case or put the kid on probation or place them in out of home care. Essential what this program did was to put an alternative disposition inside of that system, ok? So keep that one in mind.

This first study was relatively small, it was my dissertation. I told you this was trouble. It involved seventy three kids; actually that's two years worth of kids. My dissertation involved thirty six kids, for those of you in the room who thing you have to have huge ends to do dissertations. And the rest of this is probably fairly obvious. The kids are mostly boys which is important to know if you are concerned what net-wide really dealing with delinquent offenders, you need to have three to four boys to girls if you're not grabbing a bunch of kids that the court would otherwise ignore. These kids look demographically like their community, they're about a year behind in school and they are first time offenders to the court, but not first time to arrest. And all the data I am going to show you here is arrest. A little sidebar, we collect sixteen different outcomes of crime, they're all very highly correlated, so I am going to present to you arrest data. They have all been analyzed multi-variably and yada yada. The most common offenses are larceny and building breaking and entering and they range all over the board. Neither one of those offenses make ten percent, and no offense does.

This first study was really a pass at can you generate any evidence that what you are trying to do here might work? We trained the undergraduates for six weeks in what we now call cognitive behavioral and child advocacy. Kids, students and kids were matched one on one for six to eight hours a week for eighteen weeks after that. This involves written contracts and so on with kids and mostly their parents. There was also an advocacy condition and it had the same general characteristics. And this is sort of based on what many would stereotypically call a Jewish mother model of child rearing, and in my case I would call a Dutch mother model of child rearing, meaning "this is my kid and they have rights to certain things and they need an education, and they need a job, and they need good peer activities, and they need things to do in their free time". That's the short story of what advocacy is, you could read lots about it.

In this particular study we had outright releases; a control group. Kids were assigned in equal thirds, randomly stratified by order, gender and seriousness of crime. These are the measures we used; there are a bunch of measures I didn't put on here that we also used because they didn't work out. Lots of times when you do work the advice is "why don't you go grab existing theoretically driven measures off the shelf and try them?". I could give you a list of seven or eight of those that don't work with adolescent delinquent kids, primarily because they don't read that well and they think they're stupid. So in this first study, there really were not any data to come out of the self report measures because they didn't even show basic psychometric reliability. I am making lots of long stories very short. At two and a half year; this slide's entitled Simple Recidivism, this means one or more re-arrests. And you could put up the same slide for numbers of arrests, number of convictions, number of petitions, seriousness of arrest and so on and so forth at nauseum. This is sort of what it looks like.

Two and a half years later, kids regardless of particular intervention, get re-arrested about a third of the time. And those in the outright release control group get re-arrested nine out of ten times. This is the first place where—another side bar—this is an example of why, of two things. The first is the importance of a need for an absolute control group that is randomly assigned because if you just put up the first two bars you might not be very excited. And the second is that you have to be very careful about how crime rates vary over time within a community and across communities. So I would not make much of absolute level, which probably dismisses most of what the media presents to you about crime rates when they do the comparisons.

Reaching ahead now another three or four years, and we start study number two which ran over the course of three years. These kids look basically the same demographically, so we probably can move through this quickly. We at that point combine the advocacy and social learning theory models into one. This now gets called the action condition. One of the things you'll note over time is the length of training increases—as good educators we always think we need more training. I have absolutely no evidence that that's true, but training now went from six to eight weeks. The amount of intervention remained the same. What's interesting to us is looking back now, if you look at Mark Lipsy's work on evidence based practice with adolescent delinquent kids we, for good or ill, have many of the conditions that he finds are the minimum conditions for effective change. Meaning the amount of intervention being based on a cognitive behavioral active model using one on one matches, having weekly supervision, being proactive and so on.

So in this second study we compare the action condition to now an attention program. One of the criticisms of that early study is “well you can get that effect with sort of a big brother, big sister model, it's just the attention the students are giving the kids”. So we actually put in place, and had the local Big Brothers Big Sister folks map out for us what they did. So instead of eight weeks of systematic training, there are three general orientation sessions, the requirements were for the same amount of intervention. In fact from the process data we had the same amount of intervention occurred. It was monthly rather than weekly supervision; that turned out to be important. And it was based on that sort of natural skills, helping model that Big Brothers Big Sisters puts forth. And there was no explicit transfer model, and in this case the control group was returned to courts for normal processing. We did lots of measurement. This is just to show you that lots went on. These Y, P & P Life Domain and intervention interviews were two hour interviews done at six week intervals with the kid, their parent, their nominated best friend and a change agent in case of experimentals that began to look at self report delinquency and self reported arrests and looked at the other variables.

Again, now turn the clock ahead another couple more years while you do two and a half year follow up and the action condition's two and a half year recidivism rate looks a lot like it did before and is significantly better than the attention group whose also significantly better than the treatment as usual control group. So we kept putting this thing to different tests. The other thing I'm not putting up is we also see school effects, another example of why it's very important to have equivalent control groups. The two and a half year attendance rate, for example for

diversion project kids is sixty three percent. That doesn't really sound very good, right? That means they're missing something like two days a week. It doesn't sound good until you consider the fact that the control group kids are going to school twenty one percent of the time; they're going to school one day a week. So it matters a lot.

As I said, we did lots of interviews. Some of you in the room have probably labeled me a rabid experimentalist; in fact the interview work was done as very open ended, taped, content analyzed. I remember a part of my office at home being full of these boxes of audio tapes, you know cassette tapes that we did in those days, we didn't have all this digital stuff. Because we had, I have to do the math, two hours' times four sources times six. I can't do the math; thirty-two hours of interviews per case on over two hundred kids, that was a lot of tapes. And a small army of people to begin to content analyze, reduce to these things called life domain areas; reduce to these things called intervention areas.

Again a lot of material, but what did we learn? Well we got done with all of this and a graduate student of mine, at the time Craig Blaquest, said you know we did all this fancy multi-variable modeling over time and HLM and stuff and a lot of the conclusions, Craig said, "My grandma could have told us this". And that may be what science is about is confirming things we know are true and disconfirming things we think are true. But low and behold we found that under conditions in which we kept kids relatively more involved in their family and school, those were the kids who stayed out of trouble. There's no doubt that just attention has some affect, it didn't have no effect. This was very difficult to disentangle: interventions that started early in the eighteen weeks rather than were reactive to something that happened in the family's life, were much more effective. That now gets called proactive intervention, I'm not sure that there was the word there. There's no doubt that the systematic intervention that focuses on particular criminogenic factors' meaning; if kids come in with needs in the school area and you work on school, those kids are less likely to recidivate. You can imagine that took some time to sort out, as in years.

This was the beginning of the interest in dissemination in the world, the last time we were interested in this, it was a while ago. So this study was an attempt to see could you take this model and transfer it to other settings? Did you have to have a captive audience of university students to do this? So another hundred plus kids are involved in a four group by time period design. Again they look about the same; they're not really remarkably different in any way. So we ran for two years a program at this university with major university students, a program at the local community college with community college students, and community volunteers that we recruited. There's another whole series of stories about recruiting community volunteers and hanging onto them that would be discouraging to many people who are in that area. They all got the same amount of training, they all got the same amount of supervision and the same intervention model and they were compared to controls. Again there's a three year piece of work in seven or eight sentences. We did the same kind of measures that you just saw before. And actually all the process measure results that I just gave to you were a combination of studies two and three.

And low and behold two and a half years later we do not find differential effects of the kind of change agent that you have, meaning you have the same effects with Michigan State University students as you can have with community college students, as you can have with community volunteers. There's a huge difference; I didn't put up the cost graph. The cost of recruiting and hanging onto a community college student is about four times the cost of hanging onto an MSU student. MSU students clamor for the experience and stay in the course. LCC students you have to recruit actively and they come and go because they've got real lives going on. How dare they? Community volunteers, you get to recruit—anybody who's ever done, used community volunteers—you get to recruit fourteen community volunteers for every one that survives training. That turns out to be really expensive. And part of that is because this work is scary, you're going out into kids' homes and schools and natural environments, you're not going down to Sparrow Hospital and being a candy stripper for two hours a week. It's a different kind of volunteer experience. But we had the same effects long term.

Now there was sort of one more thing that we felt we had to button up before we sort of got done with the testing phase and replication phase of this. There were two comments that we kept getting up to this point. One was "Gee you've done this in two medium sized cities in the Midwest, there isn't any real crime there, why don't you take this to a real city and deal with some real delinquent kids", so you can imagine where we went, that would be called Detroit. The other comment was, "You've never really compared outright release, treatment as usual release to your intervention in the same study". So this was the third time we convinced NIMH to give us probably more money than we deserved.

So this study, done with four precincts along the northern border of the city of Detroit involved nearly four hundred kids, a third of whom were released to parents after intake. Intake was done blind, as it was done in all the studies. This project, or a treatment as usual control which meant going to the Wayne County Juvenile Court. Probably shouldn't get into too much trouble, but many would argue that being sent to the Wayne County Juvenile Court is not unlike a no treatment control, but that's what happened. We did not do as much self report measurement here. And this graph here has gotten me nearly killed on several occasions. Of course the thing you think we're interested in is that the middle bar of the diversion project is significantly better than sending kids home and doing nothing, the purple graph, or sending kids on to court. Ok, that's the thing that we're thinking about at the moment.

Now if you're a juvenile court judge and you're sitting there, what you see here is that having kids in your court is no different than doing nothing. And I had the illustrious pleasure one time of presenting to the Juvenile Court Judges Association in the state of Michigan and was lucky to get out of town. I won't tell you what the woman who is the current head of the state Supreme Court said to me about my methodology. When people don't like your results they all become methodologists by the way, very sophisticated science.

But these were studies that wrapped up what we saw as the testing phase for the kids. We've done parallel things with students and I'm gonna do this more briefly because again, there's lots of stories here. And I've always been interested in the question of which students

should be involved in this, what is the effect of their experience on them, what does it involve for them, and how does this go? There are a couple people in the room who've worked on some of this, most recently Tiffany has. So I'll probably misreport some of her results right here.

People have often asked, "How do you get these students"? We, today, put out a college-wide e-mail, college-wide meaning the College of Social Science. We tend to get about three or four times the number of people interested in than we have slots. Meaning we get three or four hundred per year, we have a hundred to a hundred and twenty-five slots. We also have contacts with advisors and do guest speeches and all that. Way back in the good 'ole days when we had lots of NIMH money we spent thousands and thousands of dollars trying to figure out how to select these students. And if you name a standard psychological instrument, an interaction technique, an interview technique, a group interview technique, we did it, we tried it and found we were not able to predict which students would, A: do a good job. We couldn't predict even which students we'd like. Supervisors were doing ratings at the beginning of each quarter and none of that predicted. What we learned did predict is if we made it very darn difficult to get into this high demand course. The people who come out of that self selection are pretty darned good people. And probably is what whipped out all the variability we had in all of our selection techniques. And you know, being good practitioners we still do interviews even though they're of no known validity. That probably just got me in trouble with some of my staff who spend dozens of hours a year doing interviews.

Graduate students have been mostly in psychology, a few from criminal justice, a few from social work. Our undergrads are mostly juniors and seniors who do this work. There are almost twenty-two. Two out of five are psychology; we've had literally every major on campus. Most of them plan graduate school or human service career and it looks like this course is a gateway for some of them. Meaning it's a decision point, they get to see if they like it in which case it accelerates their move into the profession or they don't like it in which case it's probably a pretty good decision. And we view that as very positive.

What do the students get out of this? The graduate students have a year long assistantship. The graduate students supervise the undergrads, that's probably something I completely left out; it's so obvious to me after thirty seven years. These classes that meet once a week for two and a half hours are in small groups of eight. They meet with two graduate students so the instructor student ratio is four to one. That's very much the standard at Michigan State University. I think I got away with that. And so the graduate students get experience as teachers, they get experience as trainers, instructors and they get experience as supervisors. And weekly supervision occurs two and a half to three hours per week.

The undergraduate students must enroll in a two semester course; they can't get out after one. They have two and a half hours of class meeting per week. And they have eight to ten hours of work in the community per week. And this is sort of one of the points of contention that comes up in recruitment. Many students think, "Oh applied experience working with a delinquent kid that sounds like fun, probably guaranteed 4.0, won't be a lot of work". The

experience is actually the opposite. When we query students later about how they compared this to their other classes, they say this is much more difficult which is curious.

In thirty seven years there have been over four thousand involved. On four different occasions we've had the opportunity to actually do a randomized trial where we've had way too many students and so we could let students into the course randomly, and this is a sample of some of the findings. Two year follow-ups, we did two year follow-up phone interviews. They're more likely to be in a human service career, they give a more positive evaluation of their overall undergraduate education which, you know, Deans like. They have a much greater—the work Tiffany did—they have a much greater sense of political efficacy and commitment to social justice and social change, which are things we like to see. My other favorite finding that isn't up here is they're more likely to give money to the university. I won't tell you the dollar amount.

There's a whole set of findings here that I'm not going to go into due to time. We did a lot of system modeling of the juvenile justice system's decision making before and after we put this alternative disposition in place. We at the time were primarily worried about, was the court viewed as an organization—and we were all into systems theory—gonna readjust it's decision making to accommodate its own hunger for cases. The point of the realm in the justice system is cases. So dollars equal cases. And we were going to peel off a hundred and twenty-five cases a year which in this county is something like a third. Big enough to make a difference, not to shut them down. So what was the system going to do in result, in response to that? So we modeled two years of decision making before and seven years of decision making afterwards, and again I won't bore you with all those details, but the short story is it looks like the system did some adjusting to begun to take some less serious kids they would have otherwise ignored to compensate for the fact that they were giving us some kids. But in the main they targeted their resources much more carefully, their caseloads dropped from in the fifties to in the thirties, and some of those kind of desirable effects happened.

Other things that they found desirable as we have chatted with them is they now value a partnership with the university and have engaged us in several other projects, which we won't go into. It was very interesting to go to them with a five year grant in hand and offer to do this if they would collaborate. It's a lot easier to go as Santa Clause than as other characters you might imagine. They now understand they have a safer community because recidivism was cut in half. People often view this kind of work as “well that's nice, that's kind of touchy feely, it'd be nice if you helped the kids, but we're interested in safe communities here”. Well bottom line is this program costs a lot less. Putting a kid on probation costs about five thousand dollars, we cost about eleven hundred. And recidivism is half of what you get out of that procedure. And in theory they can target more serious repeat cases.

I'd probably be remiss if we didn't talk about, so what was the effect on the university? And this is a lot harder to measure; we work on this kind of stuff. We've had a partnership with this local community now for thirty-three years. No small undertaking was getting three federal research grants, that was valued as much then as today. We've had a twenty four year fiscal collaboration where we actually share money. This has become my new definition of what a real

collaboration is. In a capitalist society collaboration means you share money, you get some of theirs, they get some of yours. There's little doubt about the impact on our students and that is no minor undertaking. And the scholarly productivity that comes out of a project like this I think is not to be underestimated.

That concludes the formal comments I had, I'm happy to answer any questions.