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Ethical Sensitivity in the Academic Setting

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Abstract

Character education programming is gaining popularity in America's schools as one possible way to raise an intelligent and caring generation of students. However, many schools fail to allocate time, money, and resources to such initiatives. The present study examined the impact of an ethical sensitivity intervention in a religiously affiliated independent school. A self-report Likert scale and analytic rubric were used to measure development of different sub-skills of ethical sensitivity in fourth and fifth grade students (N = 25) before and after the intervention over a two-month period. Results suggest that degree of ethical sensitivity increased over the course of the intervention. More specifically, significant growth was noted in students' abilities to read and express emotion and control social bias, while not as much growth was detected in perspective-taking skills. In addition, written communication skills developed more over the course of the intervention than oral communication. Implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: character education, ethical sensitivity, ethical development, emotion, perspective, bias, communication

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Explanation
BSDS	Brief Social Desirability Scale
CSB	Controlling Social Bias
CW	Communicating Well
CWO	Communicating Well Oral
CWR	Communicating Well Rubric
CWW	Communicating Well Written
ECP	Evaluation of Class Participation tool
ESI	Ethical Sensitivity Intervention
ESS	Ethical Sensitivity Scale
RAIS	Religiously Affiliated Independent School
REE	Reading and Expressing Emotion
TPO	Taking the Perspective of Others

Issue

Many American schools today prioritize character development in their efforts to educate an intelligent and caring generation of students (Ohler, 2012). At a religiously affiliated independent school (RAIS) in Baltimore, Maryland that serves students in grades Pre-K – 5, the board and administration determined that development of ethical sensitivity, an awareness of how one's actions affect others (Narvaez & Endicott, 2009), should be a foundational tenet of the school mission. RAIS's mission statement contains the phrase "[w]e aim to produce ethically sensitive young men and women." However, no time, money, or resources have been allocated to ensure that students develop the ability to understand and address ethical issues. There is, therefore, a discrepancy between the RAIS's mission statement and what is currently being implemented.

Theoretical Background

Numerous tests that measure ethical sensitivity have been developed, though most pertain to practice in the professions or to cultural and gender intolerance, and are not easily adapted for a classroom setting (Bebeau, Rest, & Yamoor, 1985; Brabeck et al., 2000). Narvaez and Endicott (2009) saw the need to define ethical sensitivity in a manner that was relevant, appropriate, and more generally applicable. Based on their research, they identified seven skills that appear to be closely associated with ethical sensitivity: (a) reading and expressing emotion; (b) taking the perspective of others; (c) connecting to others; (d) responding to diversity; (e) controlling social bias; (f) interpreting situations; and (g) communicating well (Narvaez & Endicott, 2009). When students were given the opportunity to develop these social skills, they were better equipped to connect positively with others (Horner, R. H., & McIntosh, 2016). Such development is central to ethical thinking (Narvaez & Endicott, 2009).

Theoretical Rationale for the Study

Ethical development is necessary for positive social interactions, which, in turn, promote the common good and benefit society as a whole (Staub, 2013). Ethical sensitivity develops upon interacting with others in a social and cultural environment (Piaget, 1932; Kohlberg, 1971; Vygotsky, 1978). Ethical sensitivity is also the first of four sequential components of ethical behavior, laying the foundation for subsequent development in ethical judgement, ethical motivation, and eventually ethical action (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma,1999).

If development of ethical sensitivity is a first and necessary step in the sequence leading to ethical action, education oriented towards this goal cannot remain part of schools' hidden curricula (Lapsley, Holter, & Narvaez, 2013). It must be explicitly taught utilizing the best available evidence-based practices (Howard, Berkowitz, & Schaeffer, 2004).

Empirical Rationale for the Study

Seventy-seven RAIS stakeholders and decision makers (parents, teachers, administrators and board members) responded to a questionnaire aiming to determine the need and rationale for an ethical sensitivity intervention (ESI). Additionally, one member of the administrative team and three teachers engaged in semi-structured interviews. Even though the majority of the questionnaire respondents and interviewees noted only minor degrees of unethical conduct among the students, they expressed the need for explicit ethical sensitivity training for the students because (a) it is in the school's mission statement; (b) it aligns with religious values; and (c) it is important for maintaining positive school culture. Additionally, the overwhelming majority of respondents and interviewees felt that, regardless of whether or not the students exhibited unethical conduct, it was important that they further develop ethical sensitivity.

While the reported instances of misbehavior at RAIS may not seem extreme, it is incumbent on educators to be aware of possible problems that can result from ethical insensitivity. The more pressing issue identified at RAIS, from the needs assessment survey and semi-structured interviews I conducted, was that (1) members of the RAIS community believe that skills supporting ethical sensitivity should be developed in the students, and (2) many stakeholders perceive that teaching of ethical sensitivity is not a part of the current curriculum.

If this element of education is missing at RAIS, then the school is failing to live up to its mission. While this disconnect potentially threatens RAIS's good standing with existing stakeholders, recent studies suggest it is the students and future society who suffer the consequences. Multiple research findings indicate that significant improvements are noted in students' emotional and social skills, behavior, attitudes, and academic performance when ethical sensitivity is developed (Dahlberg & Moss, 2004; Narvaez & Endicott, 2009; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2014; Noddings, 2013).

Potential Solution

Four of the seven sub-skills of ethical sensitivity identified by Narvaez and Endicott (2009) were used as a framework to develop the ESI at RAIS. The first three were a) reading and expressing emotion (REE); b) taking the perspective of others (TPO); and c) controlling social bias (CSB). Each was developed through a corresponding unit in the intervention.

Communicating well (CW), the fourth sub-skill, was embedded within each of the three units.

The ESI utilized research-based methods such as analyzing photographs and video clips, cooperative learning opportunities, and class discussion. The decision to utilize or avoid other researchers' methods was partially based on the perceived strengths, weaknesses, and efficacy of

such interventions as applied to RAIS. Other considerations included access to resources, relevance to the RAIS's context and population, and time constraints of the study.

Description of the Process of Implementation

The research question that aimed to assess this intervention asked: To what extent does participation in the ESI lead to increased student ethical sensitivity as measured by the Ethical Sensitivity Scale (ESS; Tirri & Nokelainen, 2012) and the Communicating Well Rubric (CWR)? My hypothesis was that students would score higher on the ESS and CWR upon completion of the ESI.

Twenty-five fourth and fifth grade students participated in this study. The students, researcher, and research assistants met for eight one-hour sessions over the course of two months.

In an effort to develop the ability to read and express emotion (REE), in the first unit students engaged in group discussion while analyzing film clips that portrayed fear, anger, and sadness (Blasco et al., 2011; Woelders, 2007).

In an effort to develop the ability to take others' perspectives (TPO), in the second unit students engaged in role-playing and cooperative learning opportunities (Tsay & Brady, 2012; Turiel, 1983), by playing a game called *Should I or Shouldn't I?* The object of the game was to become aware of one's own thoughts and behaviors and those of others, in various situations.

In the third unit intended to explore controlling social bias (CSB), students engaged in group discussion while analyzing photographs that depicted social differences the students were likely to encounter on a daily basis: different kinds of disabilities, religions, and socioeconomic statuses.

Opportunities to demonstrate communication skills (CW) were embedded within each of the three sub-skill units. Students demonstrated ability to communicate orally (CWO) when speaking in small groups and in a whole-class setting. Students demonstrated ability to communicate using written language (CWW) through written responses to prompts at the conclusion of every session.

Results and Observations

Quantitative and qualitative data indicated an increase in students' scores on the ESS and CWR, which suggests that the degree of ethical sensitivity increased after engaging in the ESI. Further investigation of skill-specific sub-sections of the ESS revealed significant increases in the REE and CSB sub-skills, but not in the TPO. Additionally, the ESI may have improved students' abilities to communicate using written language, but not oral language.

It is possible that these effects vary with age and gender. Before participating in this study, females were significantly better able to communicate through written communication (CWW) than their male counterparts. After participating in this study, fifth grade students perceived their own ability to take others' perspectives (TPO) as significantly higher than their fourth grade counterparts.

Discussion

In this study, I investigated the extent to which participation in the ESI led to increased student ethical sensitivity, as measured by the ESS and the CWR, and as reflected in qualitative data collected. My results show that, after engaging in this study, students' self-reported levels of ethical sensitivity significantly increased in two out of three sub-skills that served as the framework for this intervention (communication was not self-reported). Students did not develop

significantly in perspective-taking ability; however, they did develop significantly in their abilities to read and express emotion, control social bias, and communicate in written language.

That students developed significantly in their reported ability to read and express emotion is supported by qualitative data and results from one-way ANOVA and paired-samples *t* tests. Previous studies also found an association between school-based interventions and students' development of this skill. Blasco et al. (2011) and Woelders (2007) showed that film clips can be utilized to help students develop their abilities to better understand emotion. The students in this study were particularly enthusiastic about the opportunity to view film clips during class time. They viewed it as a special reward and were excited to be involved in the decision making process of which film clips would be chosen. The contagious enthusiasm among the students was not measured, but may have aided in the development of this sub-skill. After all, teachers must not underestimate the degree to which emotions influence learning (Hardiman, 2012).

The students seemed to enjoy discussing what they saw in the film clips and relating the content to their past experiences. According to Ellis & Gauvain (2013), prior experiences are pivotal in helping students connect to content. They are able to comprehend new ideas more deeply if they can relate to them (Ellis & Gauvain, 2013). Additionally, it likely felt validating for the students in this study to learn that film characters and fellow students experienced similar emotions (Denham, Bassett, & Zinsser, 2012). According to Hardiman (2012), this dynamic of emotion and student conversation likely contributed to the cognitive development reflected in my results.

Through the REE brief constructed responses, students not only shared indicators of emotion through body language and facial expressions, but also shared suggested action upon noticing how others feel. Students described the process of reading another person's body

language (i.e. their head is down), interpreting what that body language meant (i.e. they are sad), and attempting to make that person feel better. This thought process not only suggests a developed awareness of and sensitivity to emotion, but because of the proposed course of action, also suggests a commitment to the well-being of others (Noddings, 2015). Concern for the well-being of others is a foundational aspect of ethical sensitivity (Narvaez & Endicott, 2009).

My second finding, that students developed significantly in their ability to control social bias, is also supported by qualitative data and results from the statistical analyses. Lintner (2005) showed that photographs can help students recognize social differences as nonthreatening. A valuable contributing factor to the students' development may have been the emphasis on similarities among children as opposed to differences. Additionally, students' social development is an important consideration. Students in upper elementary grades are easily influenced and may initially notice differences between themselves and peers, but are often eager to find common ground (Merrell & Gimpel, 2014).

At the beginning of the CSB unit, students were easily able to identify the differences between themselves and the children in the photographs that represented social differences. Such differences were mostly external. As the unit progressed, however, I encouraged the students to also think about and discuss the similarities between themselves and the children portrayed. Some students shared similarities that were obvious, but most speculated on inferred similarities. According to Billington (2012), it is natural for children to immediately notice physical differences between themselves and others. Noticing similarities, physical or otherwise, does not always come as naturally and needs to be outright stated and encouraged by others. This is especially the case when relating to children with undeniable physical differences (Stone et al., 2013).

By the end of the CSB unit, all students were able to articulate some point of similarity between them and children of a similar age in the photographs. Students were given a great deal of autonomy throughout this unit as they held weekly discussions with minimal facilitation from the researcher. According to Perrott (2014), this empowerment likely encouraged the students' cognitive development as they attempted to recognize social differences as nonthreatening.

Students foreshadowed possible outcomes, both negative and positive, in an attempt to think about the consequences of their actions when interacting with those who are different. This valuable exercise, that likely encouraged growth within the realm of better understanding social bias, occurred during opportunities to engage in oral and written communication. According to Merrell and Gimpel (2014), this conscious practice of articulating predictions in theoretical social settings helps students interact with each other in a way that suggests greater acceptance of social differences.

My third finding, that students developed significantly in their abilities to communicate in written format, is also supported by qualitative data and results from paired-samples *t* tests. Throughout the study students were encouraged to brainstorm before responding to the written prompts. Students were shown examples of exceptional work and were encouraged to include detail in an effort to illustrate their points. Additionally, students were encouraged to relate past experiences in their writing as a way of showing an in-depth understanding of the material. As shown in Table 1, about halfway through the intervention most students started including examples to illustrate their points as well as generally including more detail in their writing.

Table 1
Excerpts from Students' Responses to a Prompt on Bias Recognition of Others

Prompt	Student V	Student W	Student X
Why is it important to recognize our own biases towards others?	We shouldn't be mean or say something that would hurt their feelings. For example, if a person doesn't have legs and she's using crutches you shouldn't say she is so horrible.	We should let anyone realize from our body language that we have a bias toward them. For example, if you think someone in your class is really smelly don't move away from them. Just try to withstand it. We should not tell our friend about it while the person is around or any time.	You should make sure that someone that you are talking about is not listening - you can hurt there [*sic*] feelings. For example, if you were talking about how someone is in a wheelchair is weird but then your sister in a wheelchair overheard you, you can hurt her feelings.

I also offered similar support and guidance to the students with regard to oral communication. I encouraged students to share examples and past experiences during class discussion, and students were shown video clips of exceptional examples of verbal dialogue. Why then, did students significantly improve in one domain but not the other? The work of Nash, Crimmins, & Oprescu (2015) suggests the students in this study may have not developed significantly within the realm of oral communication because it is much easier to share thoughts, ideas, and opinions privately, on paper, rather than publicly. Such social anxiety could occur because of fear of being perceived as strange or different (Leary, 2013). Students in the elementary setting are cognizant of social differences, and will often try to avoid being perceived as different at all costs. Therefore, students may be more willing to share ideas privately on paper, but may hesitate to share ideas orally. The lack of as much practice in the realm of oral communication as compared to written may explain the limited change in the former as compared to the latter.

The students' written communication scores also demonstrated a significant difference between males and females.

Before the ESI, females were better written communicators than males, as measured by the CWR. By the end of the ESI, however, all students demonstrated improvement in this capacity, and the distinction between girls and boys was no longer apparent. The gender difference noted before the ESI may reflect social learning rather than inherent gender traits (Booth & Nolen, 2012). Research controversy exists regarding whether boys or girls are stronger writers. Booth and Nolen (2012) suggest that both genders are equally capable of being receptive to intervention, and equally capable of improvement. That both genders are equally capable of improvement is confirmed by the results of this study.

Fifth grade students scored significantly higher than fourth grade students on the TPO sub-skill of the ESS posttest. Could one year, at this age, really be a contributing factor to the development of social competency? Merrell and Gimpel (2014) would argue that it could. In one year, elementary-aged students can mature significantly with regard to social skills and perspective-taking ability. However, self-reported perspective-taking ability may require more than a couple of months to significantly change. Michelson, Sugai, Wood, and Kazdin (2013) found that, depending on the population and context, it may actually take several years to note such developmental change. Their finding may be a possible explanation of why the students in this study did not develop significantly in the perspective-taking sub-skill from pretest to posttest: the intervention did not last long enough.

Alternatively, it is possible that significant development in the students' perspective taking ability did not occur due to an already developed ability prior to ESI. After all, the average pretest score for this sub-skill (M = 14.8) was higher than the average pretest score for the REE (M = 13.6) and CSB (M = 13.8) sub-skills. Students' responses to the written prompts and anecdotal evidence from the TPO unit support the notion that students were able to

adequately express ability to take others' perspectives, leaving room for the possibility that students were already well developed in this area prior to the start of the ESI. As the anecdotal evidence stated, when playing *Should I or Shouldn't I?* students enthusiastically collaborated in an effort to rate a given prompt on the behavior scale. Students not only shared their opinions, but also tried to understand where their teammates were coming from when sharing conflicting opinions. It is possible that there was less room for improvement here when compared to the other sub-skills. This phenomenon is quite common in social science research (Morris, 2007). The students' developmental needs and cognitive capabilities were key factors in the significance of the findings for each sub-skill (Spodek & Saracho, 2014).

In addition to developmental and cognitive capabilities, prior experiences are not to be downplayed. According to Thompson (2014), prior experiences both at home and at school shape students' perceptions of the world around them. This is likely why students sometimes disagreed when trying to categorize prompts during the *Should I or Shouldn't I?* game. For example, when discussing the behavior of changing one's mind when placing an order at a restaurant, some students felt this behavior was okay while other students felt this behavior annoyed others. Those who come from homes with patient family members may have felt this behavior was acceptable while those who come from homes with impatient family members may have perceived this behavior to be annoying. Students were likely drawing on past experiences when analyzing such scenarios, and thus expressed a variety of opinions.

The results of this study confirmed the convergent validity of the ESS since the results are in line with studies that have utilized comparable instruments (Blasco et al., 2011; Kuusisto & Rissanen, 2012; Lintner, 2005; Tsay & Brady, 2012; Turiel, 1983; Woelders, 2007). The results of this study not only confirmed a narrow association between research-based practice

and development in corresponding sub-skills of ethical sensitivity, but also showed that development in multiple sub-skills can occur in a classroom setting designed to develop facets of ethical sensitivity.

Limitations

Several limitations that could not have been controlled constrained the methodology and the scope of potential conclusions that may be drawn from this study. These limitations may be explained within the contexts of study design and data analysis.

Study design. Intervention fidelity, the extent to which delivery of an intervention adheres to the model originally developed, needs to be verified, and variations from the design need to be assessed (O'Donnell, 2008). Infidelity can also result due to external factors rather than study design. Implementation and evaluation of the ESI went according to plan with regard to resources at my disposal, availability of participants, duration of the intervention, and appropriate utilization of data collection instruments; however, it is noteworthy to recall that the ESI only measured four of the seven sub-skills of ethical sensitivity as identified by Narvaez and Endicott (2009).

Duration of the intervention went according to plan, but the possibility exists that the plan was faulty. Above it was mentioned that a longer-lasting intervention could potentially have improved TPO results, so that this study's duration was a limiting factor. Another potential limitation of this study may have been insufficient frequency of the sessions. Higher frequencies of activities have shown greater effects in different intervention programs (Ramey & Ramey, 2003). It is therefore possible that the implemented schedule of one session per week may have been a plan of insufficient intensity. Even though increasing the number of sessions would have presented a challenge due to competing school programming, it is important for future studies to

explore optimal duration and frequency of sessions (Hermida et al., 2015). Doing so can potentially generate a more substantial impact.

There was no control group, which is another limitation of this study. A control group establishes a baseline, serves as a point of comparison for the experimental group, and helps researchers isolate the independent variable (Hinkelman, Kempthorne, & Kshivsagar, 1996). Utilizing a control group was not possible because dividing the already relatively small sample size (N = 25) would have further reduced the statistical power of the design, and because my executive sponsor requested the involvement of all fourth and fifth grade students in the pilot intervention. Considering students in nearby schools was not an option because the students in this study were representative of a specific religious demographic that was only present in this particular school in Baltimore. Traveling to other major cities, where students of comparable demographic might be located, was not practical for my small-scale research purposes. However, reproducing these results in a similar setting in the future, with or without a control group, could lend support to the present study and strengthen conclusions drawn from these data.

The internal reliability of the ESS (made up of individual statements) was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha. Although Cronbach's alpha is widely used, obtaining a high value for Cronbach's alpha (indicating good internal consistency of the items in the scale) does not mean the scale is unidimensional (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Factor analysis is a method used to determine the dimensionality of a scale; however, partially due to the high risk of incorrect and misleading diagnoses of items, this is beyond the scope of this study (Cattell, 2012).

Another generally applicable limitation of self-report questionnaires such as those used in this study is the reliability of responses. The integrity of responses depends on the respondents' level of honesty. Even if a participant is trying to be honest, however, he or she may lack the

introspective ability to provide accurate information (Ganellen, 2007). Moreover, because the ESS utilized rating scales to offer respondents a variety of ways to respond, the downside of that design is that respondents may interpret the scale points differently (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Gannellen, 2007). Response bias is an additional flaw of self-report scales. It refers to individual's inclination to respond a certain way, despite actual evidence. For example, some individuals consistently respond in a more conservative manner than others. Some of the problems listed above were countered through careful design and application. For example, in an attempt to discourage dishonest reporting, anonymity and confidentiality of responses were ensured.

While it is important to consider the multitude of problems associated with self-report questionnaires, the main reason the ESS was used as a data collection tool in this study was because attitudinal change was the dependent variable. A self-report survey was the most effective and efficient way to gather data on the students' self-perception. Interviews and focus groups, alternative ways to gather such data, are not cost-effective, compromise anonymity, and may limit objectivity.

Response bias can occur when an individual intentionally (or unintentionally) chooses the same answer repeatedly without even reading the question. In future research, the issue of response bias could be addressed by reversing half of the questions on the questionnaire, so that the variable is scored by higher-numbered responses on half the questions and lower-numbered responses on the other half, as was the case with the BSDS in the present study (Wilcox, 2012).

Survey fatigue occurs when individuals involved in research grow bored, tired, or uninterested with the task and begin to respond at a substandard level (Porter, Whitcomb, & Weitzer, 2004). It is possible that the participants of this study experienced survey fatigue upon

responding to the 12-question ESS on three separate occasions. Also, if such fatigue occurred, it may even have occurred as a result of classwork students were engaged in prior to the ESI. Students may have responded to the ESS one way if they sat in a math class for the hour before the ESI, and they may have responded in a completely different manner if they experienced a thirty-minute recess prior to the start of the ESI. Neither of these circumstances could have been controlled for in this study. Regardless, if survey fatigue had occurred, it could have produced measurement error (Egleston, Miller, & Meropol, 2011). While lower response rates and survey abandonment may not have been major factors affecting these results, it is possible that the quality of responses might have been affected by fatigue, though care was taken to reduce the chances of survey fatigue. The ESS was administered three times, and was limited to 10 minutes each time.

In future research, I would design the questionnaire to be completed in three to five minutes and allow respondents the freedom to skip a question in order to minimize frustration (Nair, Adams, & Mertova, 2008). Additionally, I would tell the respondents why their input is important, what I plan to do with the information, and provide an opportunity to include free-form comments (Nair et al., 2008).

The Hawthorne effect refers to the tendency of some people to perform better when they are aware of their involvement with a study (Fernald, Coombs, DeAlleaume, West, & Parnes, 2012). This phenomenon could have been a factor in the students' oral participation as well as their written communication throughout the ESI. Students might have made comments in the group setting or in their written brief constructed response that were not accurate representations of their viewpoints and opinions. Possibly, students could have participated more or less in this intervention than they would have otherwise because they were aware of being under

observation. To minimize factors connected to the Hawthorne effect, participants' responses to the written prompts were anonymous and confidential.

Ideally, in future research, participants would be observed using the naturalistic observation technique, which would help support its external validity. Even though the ESI was implemented in a relaxed and relatively typical setting at RAIS, two grades that didn't normally interact with each other were grouped together for an hour per week. Additionally, students were relocated to a multipurpose room and a researcher conducted the sessions. In future research at RAIS, the naturalistic observation technique would include aspects such as ensuring that students are participating in the intervention with their own grade, in their own classroom, with their own teacher.

According to the needs assessment, stakeholders at RAIS cited religion, improved school culture, students' minor unethical conduct, and upholding the mission statement as some of the important reasons to implement an Ethical Sensitivity Intervention. Despite the fact that the needs assessment showed a need for the intervention, a potential limitation of this study is the little room for ethical sensitivity development among the participants. The students in this study are mostly exposed to positive examples of ethical decisions at home, school, and in their community. Therefore, they might have less room for development than less-fortunate counterparts who regularly observe negative examples of ethical decisions.

The design of this study involved a double pretest and a posttest. It is possible that the very exposure to the pretests, not participation in the ESI, affected how the participants responded to the posttest questionnaire. This is called a testing threat and could be eliminated in future research if the pretests are eliminated and a control group was used for comparison (Woodman, 2014).

Data analysis. Pearson's correlation coefficient (Pearson's r) was used in this study to determine the degree to which one variable covaried with another. This test assumes a linear relationship between variables even though it may not be there (Bishara & Hittner, 2012). Additionally, it is liable to misinterpretation because a high degree of correlation does not necessarily indicate a close relationship between the variables. As is the case with any test of correlation, causation cannot be inferred from correlation (Kazdin, 2011).

The *t* test was used in this study to determine whether or not there were statistically significant differences between the students' CW and ESS scores before and after the intervention. Additionally, this test was used to determine whether or not there was a significant difference between the scores of males, females, fourth grade students, and fifth grade students. Every time I conducted a *t* test, there was a chance I made a Type 1 error which is usually 5%. By running multiple *t* tests on the same data, I increased the possibility that any significant results were due to chance. Additionally, parametric tests are not valid on very small data sets and they require that the populations being studied have the same variance (Murray, 2013). Ideally, in future research, an ANOVA would control for the Type 1 errors so that it remains at 5%.

Recommendations

Statistical analysis of the data from this study found that students' abilities to read and express emotion and to control social bias, as measured by the ESS, were higher after engaging in the ESI. Their ability to communicate in a written manner also increased. Thus, if teachers, administration, board members and parents want students to develop ethical sensitivity, then such stakeholders and decision makers need to make it possible for teachers to spend class time implementing various ethical sensitivity interventions in which students are exposed to and can

practice ethical thinking. Students rarely understand and internalize concepts of ethical sensitivity without explicit instruction (Baron-Cohen, 2012; Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2010; Gratz & Roemer, 2006).

Given the interest in character education in America at this time, the question becomes: What should such interventions consist of? How should various components be implemented? What should the intervention's duration be?

A strong correlation was found between participation in the intervention and ability to communicate, one of the sub-skills of ethical sensitivity. This correlation suggests that one of the most important components of any comparable intervention is student engagement. Such engagement, if not obtained through intrinsic motivation, can sometimes be obtained through verbal praise or extrinsic motivation (Gillet, Vallerand, & Lafrenière, 2012). For elementary-aged students, such external reward can be in the form of candy, stickers, or even raffle tickets (Lemos & Veríssimo, 2014).

During the course of this pilot study, the researcher and participants met on a weekly basis for about two months. This was the maximum amount of time allotted within the professional context. Research suggests that comparable interventions, aimed to deeply affect attitudinal change, last for several months, if not years, with sessions taking place on a weekly basis at a minimum (Cohen, 2006; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Though attempting to develop students' ethical thoughts is potentially time-consuming and may not always prove to be successful, several researchers note that it is essential to successful education (Lapsley, Holter, & Narvaez, 2013).

Lapsley et al. (2013) argued that such values are immanent to school life and that instruction in this domain is inescapable and inevitable. Character education must not remain

part of a school's *hidden* curriculum, especially since teaching and learning are value-laden activities. It is not a question of whether or not character education should be taught in the classroom, but rather "how consciously and by what methods" (Howard, Berkowitz, & Schaeffer, 2004, p.210).

Future Implementations of ESI

During this study, the mission statements of thirty religiously affiliated independent schools were reviewed, and 100% of them referenced the importance of developing ethics or morals among their students. Upon completion of this study, I plan to further develop and expand an ethical sensitivity professional development workshop for RAIS and other schools that value the development of ethics and morals among their students. Schools that value such development, but have yet to find the time or resources to put a plan into action, could benefit from this professional development opportunity.

The intended audience would be teachers and administration. Prior to conducting the workshop, I would meet with administration in an effort to learn about the school and tailor the workshop to meet their needs. In an effort to avoid redundancy, it would be important for me to find out about any existing school programming that might already aid in the development of one or more of the sub-skills of ethical sensitivity within the student body.

The first half of the teacher training workshop would be informational, where the participants would learn about the benefits of actively developing ethical sensitivity among their students. The ESI that was piloted at RAIS would be referenced and used as a sample program, and participants would experience some of the activities used at RAIS and their ensuing group discussions. The second half of the workshop would be interactive; participants would create their own plans for implementation should they choose to incorporate the information. As

Dahlberg and Moss (2004) note, ethics education can help our students act more responsibly. While such intervention will not ensure moral action, ignorance almost certainly increases the chances of immoral behavior (Noddings, 2013).

Future Research

Ethical sensitivity is a complex construct, influenced by a large array of factors. Although this study measured development of some sub-skills of ethical sensitivity through the use of an already validated ethical sensitivity scale, it is not a perfect assessment of how children think. Educational researchers need to keep this in mind as they conduct future research in order to refine measurement of this construct. A great deal is known about the benefits of developing ethical thinking; however, what that looks like in the classroom is open to discussion.

First, researchers should intimately know their audience and the respective context so they can identify which sub-skills of ethical sensitivity should be prioritized. Second, researchers should aim to implement activities that reliably predict development of the given sub-skills. To this end, experimental research should be conducted to test which methods of ethical sensitivity development are most effective, especially given that many of them are likely to be context specific.

An intriguing question that remains was why TPO was the least successful of the sub-skills in the ESI. Above, the work by Michelson, Sugai, Wood, and Kazdin (2013) was mentioned, indicating that TPO may take years to develop. To what extent can this skill be really taught?

Perspective-taking and oral communication, the two domains that did not see significant growth in this study, serve as topics for future research in an even wider context. Are students from certain demographics, ages, genders, or academic abilities more or less likely to develop

within these areas? Given the context, what are the best methods for developing such skills? The school environment is sometimes overlooked, but Wang and Eccles (2013) argue that it is often a determining factor in the success or failure of many interventions that focus on academic, social, and behavioral improvement.

The professional context of this study, a religiously affiliated independent school, undoubtedly influenced the findings. The Needs Assessment, discussed in Chapter 3, showed that consistency with religious values at home was an important reason why parents wanted RAIS to focus on developing ethical sensitivity within their children. Furthermore, although not measured in this study, RAIS students engage in religious studies for a portion of their school day. Future research can attempt to pinpoint how such influences affect ethical sensitivity development, especially when compared with students from different contexts. Are some students primed for such moral development, whereas others may be fighting an uphill battle? In a similar vein, would this ESI, or a variation of it, work similarly in a non-religious school?

The ESS was designed to apply to people from different backgrounds and cultures (Kuusisto, Tirri, & Rissanen, 2012). However, the method of intervention may vary depending on context. Religious schools with similar missions may be able to use this study as a model to implement their own comparable interventions, while non-religious schools in different settings with different student-populations may be unable to adapt as much from this study. Implications, applications, and recommendations from future research could potentially help tailor future ethical sensitivity interventions as well as other pursuits in various school settings and contexts.

Conclusion

This study provided evidence that, given appropriate time and resources, ethical sensitivity interventions have the potential to help fourth and fifth grade students develop ethical

sensitivity in a religiously-affiliated school setting. According to Rest's (1983) Four Component Model ethical sensitivity is a necessary condition for development of ethical judgment, ethical motivation, and finally ethical action. Well-designed ethical sensitivity programs and interventions might truly be able to teach kids to care.

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