Mindfulness, Consent, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation: Health Education in Elementary School

REED COLLEGE

Jessie S. G. Willson, Jennifer Henderlong Corpus, & Presence O'Neal Reed College, Portland, OR, USA

INTRODUCTION

Comprehensive sex education is effective at decreasing negative outcomes (Trenholm et al., 2008), and consent education in K-12 settings protects against sexual assault in college (Santelli et al., 2018), but little research has focused on the effects of comprehensive sex education in elementary school populations.

A key part of such education, which has been newly mandated by the Oregon Department of Health, is promoting acceptance of a variety of **gender identities** and **sexual orientations**. Access to information on LBGTQ+ issues **decreases bias** in adults (e.g., Brookman & Kalla, 2016), but few studies have examined this relationship in children.

The present study tested the effects of a curriculum on consent, gender identity, and sexual orientation on **self-efficacy for boundary setting** and **pro-LGBTQ+ attitudes** for 4th grade students

In addition we examined whether a mindfulness component would enhance the effectiveness of the curriculum given that studies using **mindfulness** interventions have lead to better **academic outcomes** (Ksendzov, 2017), and aided in **decreasing racial biases** (e.g., Lueke & Gibson, 2016).

METHOD

Participants: 24 fourth-grade children (13 female) enrolled in an inquiry-based science program as part of their regular classroom activities

Procedure: Students were administered an identical pre- and post-test and survey. The curriculum took place across 4 sessions, about 1 week apart. Two classrooms participated, one was assigned to the mindfulness + curriculum condition and the other assigned to the curriculum-only condition

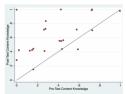
eurriculum-only condition. PRE-TEST Boundary-Setting Self-Efficacy Efficacy LGBTQ+ Attitudes Content Knowledge POST-TEST Boundary-Setting Self-Efficacy Emotional Self-Efficacy LGBTQ+ Attitudes Curriculum Curriculum Curriculum Curriculum Curriculum



RESULTS (QUANTITATIVE)

There were no differences between the curriculum-only versus mindfulness+curriculum conditions on any of the measures. Results below present pre-test versus post-test differences collapsed across condition.

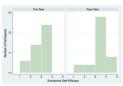
Figure 1. Effect of Curriculum on Content Knowledge



Points above the line represent individuals' improvement preto-post test; points below the line represent a decrease.

ANOVAs revealed significant learning benefits for topics of consent, gender identity, and sexual orientation, as shown by differences in pre-test to posttest scores, F(1, 19) = 18.56, p < .01.

Figure 2. Effect of Curriculum on Emotional Self-Efficacy



Bar graphs show the number participants earning scores between 1 and 5 on the preand post-test measure of emotional self-efficacy.

Emotional self-efficacy significantly increased from pre- to post-test, F(1, 20) = 2.56, p < 0.05. There were no pre-post differences in the survey measures of boundary-setting self-efficacy and LGBTQ+ attitudes.

CONTACT

If you have questions or would like to request more information from the authors, please contact jessie.sgw@gmail.com

RESULTS (QUALITATIVE)

Q1: Relative Asks for a Hug

There were no pre- to post-test differences in the codes 'Avoid Hug' or 'Hug Anyway.' But there was a trend for the 'Maintain Boundaries' code such that more students reported this after (n = 12) compared to before (n = 9) the curriculum, $\chi^2(1, N = 20) = 3.00$, $\rho = 0.08$.

Q2: Best Friend Comes Out to You

There were no pre- to post-test differences in the codes for 'Neutral' or 'Supportive' responses. But there was a trend for the 'Uncomfortable' responses code such that fewer students reported this after (n = 3) compared to before (n = 7) the curriculum, $\chi^2(1, N = 20) = 2.67$, p = 0.10

Q3: Friend Says No to a Hug

There were no pre- to post-test differences in the codes for 'Clear' or 'Alternative' responses. There was a significant decrease in 'Extraneous' responses after (n = 3) compared to before (n = 10) the curriculum, χ^2 (1, N = 20) = 4.45, p = 0.03

CONCLUSION

- State mandated curriculum-content is academically appropriate for fourth grade students, seen through significantly improved scores on content knowledge.
- Access to information on consent, gender identity, and sexual orientation positively affects students' emotional self-efficacy.
- Participants' responses to qualitative prompts indicate a greater awareness of maintaining boundaries, respecting others' boundaries, and less discomfort with a diversity of sexual orientations.

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