

Introduction

Elementary and middle school students should be educated about stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. These are all fundamental elements that we come to know about in life through many different and collective pathways. Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination are extremely prevalent in current events. Between the Black Lives Matter Movement, people applying biases against Asian Americans due to the COVID-19 virus, and biases toward other disenfranchised groups, there is an overall fear that has been heightened by current issues that contorts people's moral views regarding social justice. Racism is a prevalent example of such biases. Many United States citizens perpetuate the dismissiveness rather than being accountable or even just open to a discussion themselves. The focus is to educate our youth accurately about history and how it makes an impact on today's society as well as what it means to treat one another equally. Education of history has been watered down in schools across the United States. Teachers are afraid to teach history truthfully when it runs counter to national prejudices (e.g.- Christopher Columbus, Thanksgiving, MLK, the Civil War, etc.) (Hartz, 1963). History is the study of change over time, and it covers all aspects of human society. If standards of egalitarianism can be set in people at a young age, they could grow to be kinder, more gentle people.

Early Childhood Development of Biases: Children develop stereotypes early on, developmentally speaking. By the ages of 3 and 4 a child becomes aware of gender and ethnicity (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). At this time, they begin to categorize themselves and others by gender and ethnicity. Categorization is the root of stereotyping, thus leading to stereotypes being created by children at the 3–4-year-old age. At the age of 6, a child is able to infer an individual's stereotype which raises the possibility in an assortment of situations that a child will be judged stereotypically. The study measured stereotype consciousness by having children look at a diverse group of vignettes and ask them a number of questions regarding them to come to their conclusions. Logistic regression was used to reach the findings by McKown and Weinstein. They used measures of vocabulary raw score, vocabulary scaled score, ranked alphabet score, word puzzle score, anxiety, effort withdrawn, and self-appraisal for covariates to run with variables of gender, ethnicity, age, and highest parent education as independent variables. These variables were used to measure cognitive ability to see if stereotype consciousness had an effect on cognitive ability. They were also used to evaluate the age at which children develop stereotype consciousness (McKown & Weinstein, 2003).

Importance of Changing Behaviors: Aboud's 2008 meta-analysis suggests that children actively co-construct norms with parents, teachers, peers and the society and environment around them. However, they do not always notice the modeling, the approval, or the norms unless explicitly told by an instructor. They say children can believe that a bias is acceptable if it goes uninterrupted (Aboud, 2008). Aboud cites research from Hirschfeld's 1996 study to support this notion, as it states that children notice certain regularities and may infer that these are rules or norms (Hirschfeld, 1996).

Positive Consequences of Learning About Implicit Biases: Bigler and Wright's 2014 meta-analysis shows that educating children about the implicit biases specified as stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination may also advance the idea that all children recognize and build their own constructs against discrimination and in turn challenge their own privilege. They claim that less stereotyping occurs when children are aware of gender bias and can discuss the correlations to which, say, males were attributed to at a certain point in history when females were disregarded (Bigler & Wright, 2014).

Counter: There is a reasonable chance that lessons on ingroup bias could backfire. When teaching young children about stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, there is a reliance on the idea that they are consistently capable of seeing things from others' point of view. If a child has difficulty in doing so, it is possible that they will relate the implications of the lesson as it pertains to the self rather than viewing it objectively. For instance, a child's takeaway from a lesson could be, "I'm glad that I'm not Black." Similarly, ingroup biases can be strengthened if they focus on the face validity of a social injustice, causing the origin of the injustice to be blurred (Bigler & Wright, 2014). Negative emotions are subject to be invoked by the discussion of topics of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, as they are laden topics that are often condemned by adults. Anger could arise from stigmatized children toward outgroup members. Anxiety may arise in children who feel that they could potentially be victimized. They say educating the younger population about discrimination could predispose them to biases of which they did not know existed, thus creating an increase in the chance that they will lack trust in other groups outside of their normed classifications. Further education of children on biases may engrain or increase (rather than counteract) the predisposed prejudices. When children can learn that other groups are seen negatively, especially over time and with radius, stereotyping and prejudice may become established and deep seeded (Bigler & Wright, 2014).

Rebuttal: In response to stereotype threat, research suggests that simply informing members of stereotyped groups about the effects of stereotype threat can lessen such effects greatly. The anxiety that stems from stereotype threat is lessened, thus they are able to perform better. There is clear evidence that teaching stigmatized individuals about stereotype threat might be a simple approach to counteracting the detrimental effects that negative stereotypes have on performance (Johns et al., 2005). In regard to other possible negative consequences cited by Bigler and Wright, those negative consequences may only be temporary as further education and understanding can be reached over time in the developmental process as development involves change. Furthermore, evidence that lessons about intergroup biases prompt stereotyping and prejudice among children is weak (Bigler & Wright, 2014).

The positive consequences of teaching young children about stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination outweigh the negative consequences that could arise from it. It is an inevitable lesson and a vital part of understanding history. As contributing members of society, it is our duty to educate ourselves and our youth about social injustices in order to promote social justice. Formal discussion of ingroup biases is often put on the back burner, and when talked about openly, can be a healthy addition to the developmental process. Given how early children recognize stereotypes, how they adapt to rules and norms, and the positive consequences related to education of implicit biases, there is support for educating children about implicit biases.

Abstract

Implicit biases like stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination show negative consequences throughout life. People are not always equipped to deal with situations of bias. Will implementing education about implicit bias for 5th grade students show significant positive effects on students? To measure effectiveness of implicit bias education, a quasi-experimental design will be conducted. Participants will be 5th grade students. Groups will be split so half the students will be taught new subject matter during fall semester while the spring semester students will serve as the control group. New subject matter will include teaching stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination at an appropriate level for 5th graders. An Implicit Association Test will be given as a pre-test for implicit biases to be measured. Post-test will be given upon completion of a semester of the pilot curriculum. Predictions are that post-test implicit bias scores will be lower than pre-test scores indicating biases to be less.



Methods

Population: The population will consist of roughly 100 participants comprised of 5th grade students
Potential Harm to Participants: The design is of low risk to participants. However, it is possible that psychological harm could come into effect. There is potential to cause undesired changes in thought processes and emotion including episodes of depression or confusion resulting from feelings of stress, guilt, and/or loss of self-esteem. The design protects participants from harm by being conducted in a classroom setting where they will be monitored by the teacher of the class and the school guidance counselor. Participants' answers will be confidential and not tied to identifying information.

Components of Design: It will be a pre-test/post-test design. An Implicit Association Test will be given to students as the first step of the study as well as the last thing the students will be asked to do. It measures the strength of associations between concepts and evaluations or stereotypes. A score is on a scale of -2.0 to 2.0, with anything above 0.65 or below negative 0.65 indicating a "strong" link to show biasness (Azar, 2008). The test is confidential and will be delivered online. The link provided is where the test can be accessed. The test will ask (optionally) to report one's own attitudes or beliefs about these topics and provide some information about themselves. The actual test has participants distinguish photos of people according to their race, skin-tone, gender, disabilities, weight, transgender, and sexuality (respectively). They are designed to identify biases, even if they are slight (Projectimplicit, n.d.).

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Another component of the design is the curricula on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. It will be taught in congruence with the students' withstanding history class. The students who receive the added education in the second semester will be used as a control group for the students who will serve as the treatment group by receiving that education during the first semester. The scores of the pre-test and post-test will serve as the independent variables. The first and second groups will serve as the dependent variables.
Plan: Contact needs to be made with principals of different schools to find interest. Some schools may already be looking to include a similar curriculum. Permission will be needed by parents and participants. A plan will need to be approved by school boards, or respected authority of the two schools chosen to carry out the study. This will be similar to the IRB.

Predicted Results

It is predicted that students will show less bias as a result of being educated about implicit biases in school over the course of a semester. To test this hypothesis, a 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA will be used to compare levels of bias across time, and across training. If results are not congruent with this prediction, future research in testing the demographic elements may reveal their potential impact on this study.

Discussion

If findings show that education of implicit biases has a significant positive effect on 5th grade students, it will lend reason to incorporate those teachings in schools everywhere. If these predictions are correct, these teachings may make students more equipped to handle social structures and conflict that they encounter in their lives. Such findings could assist children in becoming kinder, more gentle people.

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