



Research Snapshot

Safe Schools course increases knowledge and self-efficacy in pre-service teachers



What you need to know:

What is this research about?

School climate includes many aspects of students' educational experiences such as safety, quality of relationships, and different school environments (e.g., academic, physical). School climate can both predict and be affected by bullying, school violence, homophobia and family violence. Researchers at the Faculty of Education at Western University developed the Safe Schools course to help prepare pre-service teachers for their important role in promoting a positive school climate. The 18-hour course focuses on the issues that can affect students and school climate (e.g., bullying), teaches the mandated reporting and responding obligations of teachers, and provides strategies for effective prevention and intervention.

"It is not enough to teach the facts about bullying, homophobia, family and community violence, and other threats to school climate. A sense of personal conviction and self-efficacy must also be fostered among pre-service teachers."

The current study examined Safe Schools' impact on factors that predict effective responding to situations involving students' exposure to violence. This study investigated whether the course improved knowledge about bullying and self-efficacy (i.e., belief in one's ability to respond effectively). The study also explored the importance of moral disengagement (i.e., views of students' exposure to violence as not important and/or not their responsibility to address) and its role in regards to promoting positive school climate.

This study evaluated the impact of Safe Schools, a pre-service teacher course addressing factors that affect school climate. Pre-service teachers showed increased knowledge about bullying and self-efficacy for intervening in incidents of students' exposure to violence following the course. Teachers need opportunities to learn about factors that affect school climate in order to provide effective intervention and foster a positive school climate.

What did the researchers do?

Pre-service teachers (n=212) completed a survey before and after their Safe Schools course. This survey assessed experiences with violence, knowledge about bullying, and aspects of moral disengagement relevant to children in school (e.g., beliefs about the impact of bullying and media violence). The last section of the survey included four scenarios where teachers described how they would respond. These scenarios included students' exposure to domestic violence, bullying, cyber-bullying, dating violence and distributing naked pictures of another student. A comparison group that had not taken the course completed the survey once so that researchers could assess whether students were learning this material in other courses and experiences.

What did the researchers find?

Pre-service teachers in the Safe Schools course demonstrated significant increases in bullying knowledge and self-efficacy regarding appropriate responses. Increases in bullying knowledge were significantly predicted by changes in moral disengagement. More specifically, reduced moral disengagement predicted increases in knowledge about bullying. Personal experience with violence was a significant predictor of increases in self-efficacy.

There were significant decreases in moral disengagement for males and females by the end of the course, despite males scoring higher than females at the beginning. Additionally, Intermediate/Senior teacher candidates (grades 7-12) demonstrated the highest moral disengagement scores in comparison to Primary/Junior (grades K-6) and Junior/Intermediate candidates (grades 4-10). Findings suggest moral disengagement is an important factor to be considered in teacher education.

Further, a comparison group of pre-service teachers who were at the same point in the program but who had not taken the Safe Schools course scored lower on knowledge and self-efficacy and higher on moral disengagement, suggesting that these outcomes are not gained through other coursework and experiences.

How can you use this research?

This study shows that the Safe Schools course can aid in the development of pre-service teachers' specific knowledge and self-efficacy. These factors have shown to help promote a positive school climate. By countering moral disengagement with engagement in real world scenarios and empathy building, Safe Schools can have a greater impact.

The findings of this study further support the underlying message of Safe Schools, which emphasizes the importance of preparing pre-service teachers to take on a role that involves more than teaching academic subjects. Pre-service teachers must be encouraged to embrace a role that also includes connecting with youth and helping to develop an environment that is safe and supportive. Pre-service teachers need intentional and explicit opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes that will support them in this expanded role.

Original Research Article:

For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article:

Crooks, C. V., Jaffe, P. G., Rodriguez, A. (2016). Increasing knowledge and self-efficacy through a pre-service course on promoting positive school climate: The crucial role of reducing moral disengagement. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 1-16. DOI: 10.1080/1754730X.2016.1249383

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