

*The Effects of Perceived Peer Behavior and Visual Art Content
on Students' Moral Action Confidence*

Ashley Kukula Cuevas

State University of New York at Oswego

Quest

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine whether observable peer behaviors and art unit content would positively influence moral confidence. The hypothesis was tested on 15 middle school students in a semi-rural school district in Central New York. Students completed questionnaires before and after participating in an art unit with pro-social themes. Answers from the questions were assigned numerical values based on their degree, and the cumulative score within a single questionnaire was referred to as a Moral Action Score. This score was recorded before and after the unit. The scores were also compared between three versions of the questionnaire. Moral dilemmas within the three versions displayed either pro-social, anti-social, or no peer behavior at all. Results suggest that unit content has the potential to influence students' moral confidence. Data also indicates that perceived peer behaviors are even more influential in raising or lowering a student's confidence to take moral action. It is therefore recommended that teachers make the effort to include moral action and pro-social content within unit instruction and encourage students to take action in accordance with their own values.

1. Introduction

Making decisions becomes more important as students grow older. This is clearly illustrated by the moral dilemmas that they encounter on a day to day basis in which they must make a moral judgment and decide if they will ultimately take action. As teachers, our task is not only to teach students information and concepts, but also life skills like ambition, goal setting, and positive community interaction. Placing moral action and pro-social behavior on the back burner of lesson content is symbolically placing it on the back burner of our priorities as educators. When curriculums outline specific skills and abilities, teachers sometimes have the option to modify the theme content for a specific group in order to create more authentic learning. Meaning creates interest, and interest increases the likelihood that learning will occur. Including moral confidence and pro-social topics within lesson content is not only possible but also relevant. “The conflicts students experience at every age involve issues such as social justice, the ethics of popular culture, environmental responsibility, cultural diversity, drugs, violence, respect, and human integrity” (Hanley and Gay, 2002, p. 24). It is imperative that these issues are prioritized when selecting classroom unit or project themes.

1.b A Teacher's Viewpoint

As a teacher, I am concerned with not only meeting the objective that I set for art education, but also with consistently reinforcing respectful behavior in the classroom community. I regularly witness occasions in which students, most notably middle school students, are struggling with the development of their personalities as well as trying to find their place in the world. Some of the most vivid memories I have as an adolescent involve those

moments in which it was necessary for me to decide what action to take within my own moral dilemma.

We do our best as professionals and confidants to correct impolite habits and positively reinforce those traits that we seek to foster in students. Many factors contribute to the success or failure of a student to develop into a compassionate and moral person. For example, students exist with their own experiences and assumptions just as adults do. However, their world is very different than that of an adult. Adolescent years are incredibly important, and often misunderstood. Loundsbury (1997) refers to,

“The frequent stereotyping of the age group. Adults talk about these kids in negative, belittling ways, focusing on their bizarre behavior, their silliness. Even educators sometimes exacerbate the problem by referring to young adolescents as "hormones with feet" or "the range of the strange"” (Manning, 1997, pg. 1).

Having used the term “range of the strange” before, I am taken aback by the relevance that this term has to my current research study, as well as my personal history.

Growing up, I had many opportunities to practice service work and develop empathy for others. I was not only taught that nice words were nice and rude words were rude, but I actually learned pro-social concepts through example from a mother who served as an important role model. No matter which job she was working, she treated every person she encountered with inherent value and respect. She overtly stood up for what she believed in and acted against injustice, no matter how small. I also have clear memories of shopping in a humble toys section for others because, as my mother put it, “A family we know doesn’t have enough money for Christmas.”

As a teacher, I feel it is my responsibility to pass the same value for others onto my students. Consequently, when I hear students consistently using the words “retarded,” “gay,” and “hobo,” I don’t look at them as if they are who they are, but I see what they are learning and feel the urge to help redirect who they will become. Much like my previous use of the term “range of the strange” as a student teacher, students use words that are objectifying and belittling an individual or type of individual. If we are to help them critically look at their own actions, middle school is the time. “It is precisely in the middle grades that children have the capacity to integrate their sense of self with their moral understanding” (Power, Roney, & Power, 2008 p.2). I support the belief that moral development is a key component of educating the whole child and should be integrated into the regular school curriculum. It is for this reason that my research seeks to answer the question of whether or not perceived peer behavior and art unit content can positively affect a student’s confidence to take moral action.

1.c Creativity and Values

Among the various school content areas, visual art provides a certain adaptability that allows for the exploration of various scenarios and moral dilemmas. By virtue of being a subject revolving around creation, art also provides a formal, substantial opportunity to thoughtfully represent various key points to a topic such as right and wrong. I have seen project content and guidelines help students identify with the feelings of others as well as to create fictional environments and characters. Hanley and Gay’s (2002) description of moral education within drama class is similar to that of art. “Improvisation... invites students to act intuitively, honestly, and openly to the unexpected, rather than forming contrived, highly structured responses. It stimulates flexibility, fluency, and tentativeness in problem solving” (p. 23). Creative, flexible,

and spontaneous thinking is important considering that Thornberg (2010) asserts that a major inhibitor to moral action is the conformity that is fostered by a school setting.

By measuring select performance criteria in students before and after participation in a project about moral action as well as among social variables, this research sheds light on the following areas: the ability of art content to influence moral reasoning and confidence and the role that perceived peer behavior plays in a student's confidence to take moral action.

2. Critical Review- A Growing Field, a Growing Need

The question is not whether moral development strategies are needed, but which methods are most effective in the school setting and what components of and contributors towards moral development lead to moral action. These questions are increasingly important. Behaviors in school such as bullying demonstrate a lack of respect for others and “The disengagement of young people...” (Sax as cited in Hoffman, 2007). Socially, many people are developing what Hoffman (2007) refers to as self-entitlement, an expectation of others to things for one's self or one's community. In a study done by Power, Roney, and Power (2008), of 48 surveyed middle school students, most were less likely to use moral characteristics to describe their ideal selves, yet used moral characteristics more frequently to describe their dreaded selves. Could this mean that our young people are not developing the desire to become moral individuals? Hoffman (2007) further summarizes modern shifts in virtuous behavior by stating that, “Twenty-first century citizens live in an era when self-centered and egoistic behaviors- “Success at any cost” combined with an “in your face” attitude – are rewarded, and self-entitlement attitudes are more pervasive among children as well as adults” (p. 88).

Because of these trends, it is no surprise that many research studies have been done in the area of moral education. Studies that were reviewed show a focus towards the components and stages of moral development. Also, researchers seem to analyze how to teach students independent moral reasoning, rather than values. Trends were also studied for both the elementary and middle years. Finally, research also sheds light on what teachers can do to help cultivate moral reasoning within students, including providing what is called *cognitive disequilibrium*.

2.b Moral Reasoning- Differing Opinions on Components and Stages

According to Kohlberg's theory of moral development stages as described by Barger (2000), the first stage of moral development, known as pre-conventional, involves moral decision making based on rules set by authority and the consequences of those rules. This stage is demonstrated at the primary level and provides an opportunity at the elementary level to examine two types of moral reasoning as described by Eliot Turiel (1971). His domain theory, as summarized by Murray (n.d.), consists of two ways of approaching values described as moral issues and conventional issues.

MORAL ISSUE: Did you see what happened? **Yes. They were playing and John hit him too hard.** Is that something you are supposed to do or not supposed to do? **Not so hard to hurt.** Is there a rule about that? **Yes.** What is the rule? **You're not to hit hard.** What if there were no rule about hitting hard, would it be all right to do then? **No.** Why not? **Because he could get hurt and start to cry.**

CONVENTIONAL ISSUE: Did you see what just happened? **Yes. They were noisy.** Is that something you are supposed to or not supposed to do? **Not do.** Is there a rule about that? **Yes. We have to be quiet.** What if there were no rule, would it be all right to do then? **Yes.** Why? **Because there is no rule.**

(Murray, 2008)

Some research strives to understand the interaction of components that contribute to moral reasoning, rather than linear stages. Jordan's (2007) discussion of measurements of domains within moral sensitivity refers to four components of moral action: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character. Research within her discussion makes a moderate connection between sensitivity and judgment, judgment and variances in moral-related behavior and prosocial moral reasoning as it relates to altruistic motives and behaviors. Jordan references studies by Eisenbuerg et al. (1987) who used moral stories to rate student moral reasoning from Level 1 (hedonistic, self-focused) to Level 5 (strongly internalized orientation). However, Kang and Glassman (2010) assert that moral thought/reasoning and moral actions are actually two separate phenomena that have little relationship to each other.

2.c Teaching Independent Moral Reasoning, Not Values

Because values and morals are subjective, researchers collect objective evidence about supporting a person's ability to progressively develop the ability to reason in regards to their own morality and ethics. Much research in the area of moral reasoning refers to the work of the Swiss philosopher and psychologist Jean Piaget (1965) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1971). Jean Piaget asserted that individuals will continue to build and re-build their knowledge as a result of repeated interactions with the world around them (as cited in Murray, 2008). Through many studies, Kohlberg (1971) was able to support the theory that humans progress through sequential stages of moral development. The pre-conventional stage is characterized by following rules out of fear of punishment, or due to self-interests. The conventional stage consists of an understanding of what is considered good to the community or society. Post-conventional moral reasoning is based on ethical principles of fairness which transcend cultural norms. Although

most adults are said to never reach the final stage, it is evident that children actively demonstrate traits of the beginning stages (Barger, 2000).

2.d Factors at Play in the Playground- Studying Traits

Bullying and defending against bullying are two behaviors that may offer insight into elementary social and moral reasoning. Caravita, Di Blasio, and Salmivalli (2008) constructed a survey study of 266 primary students and 195 secondary students in order to learn the factors that are associated with bullying and with defending the victims of such bullying. After questioning the students about peers who met certain criteria, student surveys and empathy assessments disclosed that those students bullying were generally of low social preference, high perceived popularity, and have low affective empathy. Adversely, students associated with defending bully victims have high affective empathy and high social preference. (Caravita, et al 2008). A student who is not generally well-liked by others may experience enough popularity to exercise force or oppression over others. Students who have the moral reasoning to stand up and defend others may only do so if they feel that they have the social preference of the group, and therefore run a smaller risk of being ostracized.

Woods, Wolke, Nowicki, & Hall (2009) developed a study to determine the emotional recognition abilities of four types of children: the bullies, the neutrals (non-participating bystanders), the victims of physical bullying, and the victims of relational (non-physical) bullies. While the size of the study was modest – 373 primary students – the initial hypothesis was supported, showing that the relational victims had poorer emotional recognition skills, mostly in relation to the emotions of anger and fear. This may mean that the victims make incorrect

judgments about the motivation of others and then act on poorly made decisions (Woods, et al 2007).

2.e Middle School Potential

As students advance to middle level grades and closer to adulthood, the question becomes: at what point does the individual internalize moral, not just conventional, reasoning for its own sake? Research done by Bergmark (2008) suggests that the desires of students within the school community can be summarized with four categories: striving for mutual understanding, being accepted for who you are, seeking honesty and truth, and being acknowledged, recognized, and encouraged. When these findings are considered alongside the link between moral understanding and the self that is created around age 12, and can be entirely absent in children ages six to eight, as suggested by Power et al (2008), the middle school level appears to be a most worthy time to help students develop moral reasoning skills.

2.f What Teachers Can Do

According to Banks as cited in Hanley and Gay (2002), “Teachers often avoid questions about morality and divert attention away from controversial or contentious issues” (p.23). This does not stop researchers from seeking effective methods of moral education. Assuming that teacher support of critical thinking would contribute to the increased moral reasoning skills of students, Weinstock, Assor, & Broide (2008) developed research comparing frequent critical thinking with moral reasoning abilities among high school students. The hypothesis was that individuals who are encouraged to practice critical thinking on a regular basis will also practice *autonomous moral judgment* in which one does not automatically accept the “dictates of an external authority” (Weinstock et al 2008). The findings of the study suggested that students’

level of autonomous moral reasoning is positively associated with their teachers' support for criticism. These findings were based on student reports on a 4 point Likert-scale and utilized information from students either attending a democratic school or a regular school. Considering the fact that autonomous reasoning leads to an internalization of personally established values (Weinstock, et al 2008), teachers are not only helping students to make more meaning out of their reasoning, but are aiding students in reaching what Kohlberg would describe as a post-conventional stage of moral development (Barger, 2000).

2.g Cognitive Disequilibrium

A common method of encouraging students to confront their own reasoning is the "moral dilemma" in which individuals are presented with a scenario and must state what action should be taken. This method was often used by Kohlberg, in which students "Should... be forced to face the contradictions present in any course of action not based on principles of justice or fairness" (Murray, 2008). Cain and Smith (2009) established the opportunity to examine the use of contemporary technology in such discussions. Their study consisted of 48 male and 76 female students in their second year at a southeastern pharmacy school. The rationale behind the asynchronous discussions via the internet were as follows: All participants may reflect on a situation before contributing a well-reasoned response; Responses are anonymous; Participants are free from social restraints; Social hierarchies are incapable of regulating others' responses; physical cues that may influence others are removed from the situation (Cain and Smith, 2009). These factors contributed not only to the honesty of the responses, but also to the degree of critical thought that the participants gave toward their own opinions.

By creating an environment, whether digital or actual, that allows people to logically discuss differences in opinion; researchers also make it possible for individuals to experience *cognitive disequilibrium* (Cain & Smith, 2009). Only by seeing the potential faults within one's own beliefs can one begin to critically and autonomously evaluate initial reactions to situations. Increasing what Cain and Smith refer to as "Fairness Reasoning" (2009) means increasing the probability that people will be able to more logically and morally act in response to certain dilemmas. I believe that this has the potential to impact whether or not students will partake in activities such as using hateful speech, defending others, or bullying.

2.h Minding the Gap- Providing Needed Research

In order to contribute to this ever-expanding area of research, I chose to focus my efforts on factors that are significant and within my realm of experience. My research resembles that of Krettenauer, Jia, and Mosleh (2011) which focused specifically on emotional outcomes as variables within scenarios. The study suggested that the expected emotion associated with making a moral decision meaningfully influences that decision. I attempted to show that perceived peer behavior, as well as consideration within art project content, has a similar effect.

3. Methodology

In order to measure the influence of art lesson content on moral action, I employed experimental research. Students in 7th and 8th grade art classes in a semi-rural middle school in Central New York participated in a unit that involved the discussion of moral dilemmas and the inclusion of moral action or belief within each artwork. Students completed a pre-test questionnaire consisting of dual choice, multiple choice, likert-scale and short answer questions

regarding moral beliefs and hypothetical actions in given situations. They completed the same questionnaires before and after participating in the unit.

3.b Sampling

All students in both classes were invited to participate. Out of the 16 8th grade students, eight returned consent forms and participated. Out of the 18 7th grade students, seven students returned consent forms. Consent forms were completed by students, parents, and administrators from the school district. Each included a summary of the research and a list of activities that students would be participating in. The study took four weeks, including one 15-20 minute questionnaire, two weeks of instruction, and a repeat questionnaire one week after the unit. All student participants were assigned a number that remained the same for both questionnaires. A list of students and accompanying numbers was kept on file in case students forgot. Otherwise, numbers were the only way to identify the participants' questionnaires, and participation was kept anonymous.

3.c Participants

A total of 15 middle school students participated in the study, resulting in 44% participation from those invited to participate. Students ranged in age from 12 to 15. All students in both classes participated in the units, which focused primarily on necessary skills and knowledge for the designated grade level. Only those students whose parents signed the consent form took the questionnaires. Non-participating students answered similar questions as an anticipatory set to the unit while participating students took the questionnaire.

3.d Instruments

The information gathered was both quantitative and qualitative, and was derived from two rounds of three versions of questionnaires given to participants. Initial questions in each questionnaire gauged the students' understandings of their own moral views and helped to initiate an understanding of what the questions meant by *moral* and other terms. In developing the dilemmas, I modified my original ideas to create a hybrid of two categories of Kohlberg dilemmas as described by Cummings (2010). I combined the concept of *hypothetical dilemmas*, which provide lack of personal bias, and *real-life dilemmas*, which feature actual events that participants may already be aware of and represent natural, familiar settings. I tried to incorporate benefits from both options by using natural settings (such as the bus, the cafeteria, the classroom) as well as fictional situations and nameless characters that allow for some personal, social detachment. While Kohlberg dilemmas are deliberately constructed to allow varied opinions as to the right or wrong action to take, this study's dilemmas display scenarios with fairly concrete, traditional social "rights" and "wrongs" (Cummings; 2010 p.631-632) The purpose is to remain focused on the decision making of the students and their subsequent confidence in taking moral action when they know that they do not agree with what is happening .

3.e Procedure

The three versions of questionnaires provided multiple groups of information. The different versions were given to students in a pattern that spread the variation out randomly. Students received the same version in the post-test that they received in the pre-test based on their identification number.

Version One included no by-standing peer behaviors. Example:

You are in class and everyone is working. You notice that one of your classmates is calling another classmate hurtful names, but the teacher does not notice. The bullied classmate does not say anything and the name-calling continues.

Version Two displayed peer behaviors that condone the anti-social behavior. Example:

You are in class and almost everyone is working. You notice that one of your classmates is calling another classmate hurtful names, but the teacher does not notice. Other students begin to watch. The bullied classmate does not say anything and the name-calling continues. Several other students are having a hard time controlling their laughter.

Version Three displayed peer behaviors that disapproved of the anti-social behavior. Example:

You are in class and almost everyone is working. You notice that one of your classmates is calling another classmate hurtful names, but the teacher does not notice. Other students begin to watch. The bullied classmate does not say anything and the name-calling continues. Several other students begin to tell the bullying student to stop.

Data from the three versions was intended to show the degree in which observable peer behaviors will influence a student's likelihood to take moral action. The possible answers were listed as follows. Numeric assignments- not listed on student questionnaires- reflect increasing degrees of social or anti-social behaviors. The sum of chosen selections from three scenarios were combined on each questionnaire and referred to as the total *Moral Action Score*:

What do you truthfully think you would do? (circle all actions you would be willing to take)

- a. 0 Not intervene.
- b. +1 Show your disapproval with body language. (non-verbally)
- c. -1 Show your approval with body language. (non-verbally)
- d. +2 Show your disapproval with words.
- e. -2 Show your approval with words.
- f. +3 Demand that the name calling stop.
- g. -3 Cheer on the name-calling.
- h. +4 Alert the teacher or another adult.

*Numeric scores were not listed on student questionnaires.

The treatment in this experimental research consisted of a unit of instruction in which moral decisions were discussed and eventually depicted in artwork through either imagery or personal belief quotes. Once the students decided and planned an idea, they performed the

necessary steps to create the artwork. 7th grade students created self-portraits with accompanying captions that expressed their beliefs about what is right and wrong(A). 8th grade students created visual representations of what they saw as scenarios in which someone takes moral action (B).



A.



B.

Closure included a self-assessment sheet about theme, artistic techniques, and final thoughts.

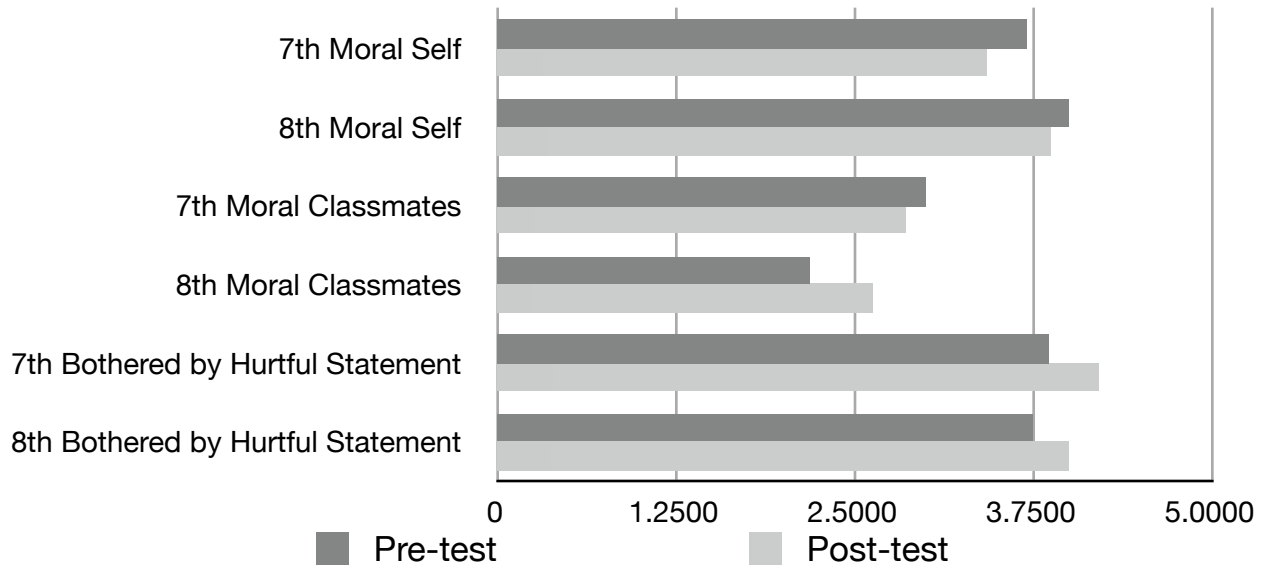
The data from different questionnaire versions were compared regarding peer behavior and Moral Action Score. The data from post-test and pre-test are compared regarding differences in Moral Action Scores and other questions before and after the unit. Because the 7th and 8th grade students participated in different units, their scores will be presented separately.

4. Analysis and Results

General Moral Outlooks

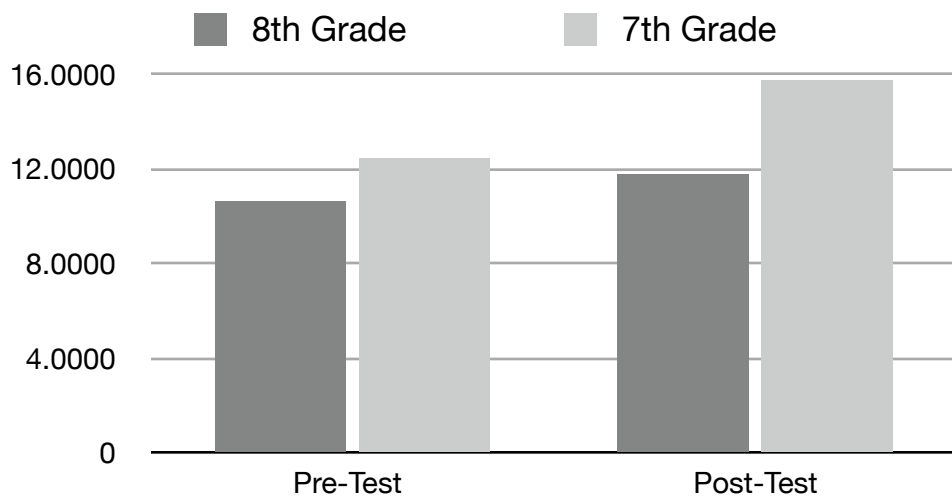
Students were asked what they believed about themselves and others, as well as right and wrong. The data solely from the pre-test reveals how these students felt about themselves and

others, and when compared to the post-test, small changes are shown and indicate possible effects of the unit. The results also show that students believed that classmates were generally less “moral” than themselves. Also, after the unit, students appeared to be more “bothered” by

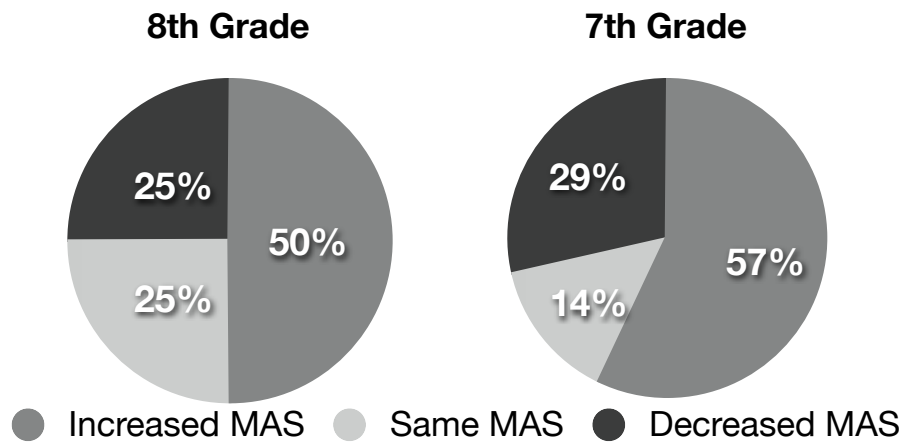


hurtful statements made against a classmate.

4.b Unit Participation and Moral Action Score



For the 8th grade pre-test, the Moral Action Scores ranged from 0 (no actions taken) to 32 (all but one action taken). The average was 10.63. On the post-test, the scores ranged from 2 to 32. The average was 11.75. The difference in the average Moral Action Score was 1.12 points, and showed an increase of 10.54%. When a single low-degree action selected by one person in the entire group could result in a 1-4 point difference, this difference does not appear to be significant. As far as individual students, four students showed a higher Moral Action Score, two students showed no difference, and two students showed a lower Moral Action Score. Half of the students showed an increase. This information may prove to be more significant than the change in average, considering the amount of participants who improved their own moral action score outnumbers any other.

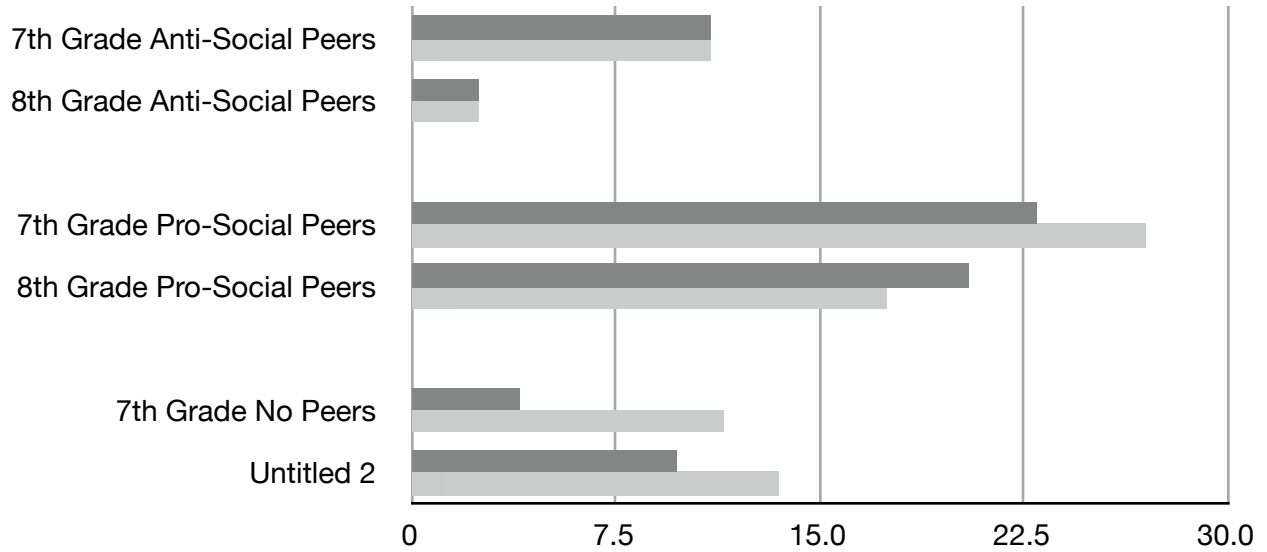


For the 7th grade pre-test, the Moral Action Scores ranged from 4 to 26. The average was 12.43. On the post-test, the scores ranged from 0 to 32. The average was 15.71. The difference in the average Moral Action Score was 3.28 points, and showed an increase of 26.39%. Again, a single low-degree action selected by one person in the entire group could result in a 1-4 point difference. Like the 8th grade, this difference does not appear to be significant, but it greater than the 8th grade. As far as individual students, four students showed a higher Moral Action Score,

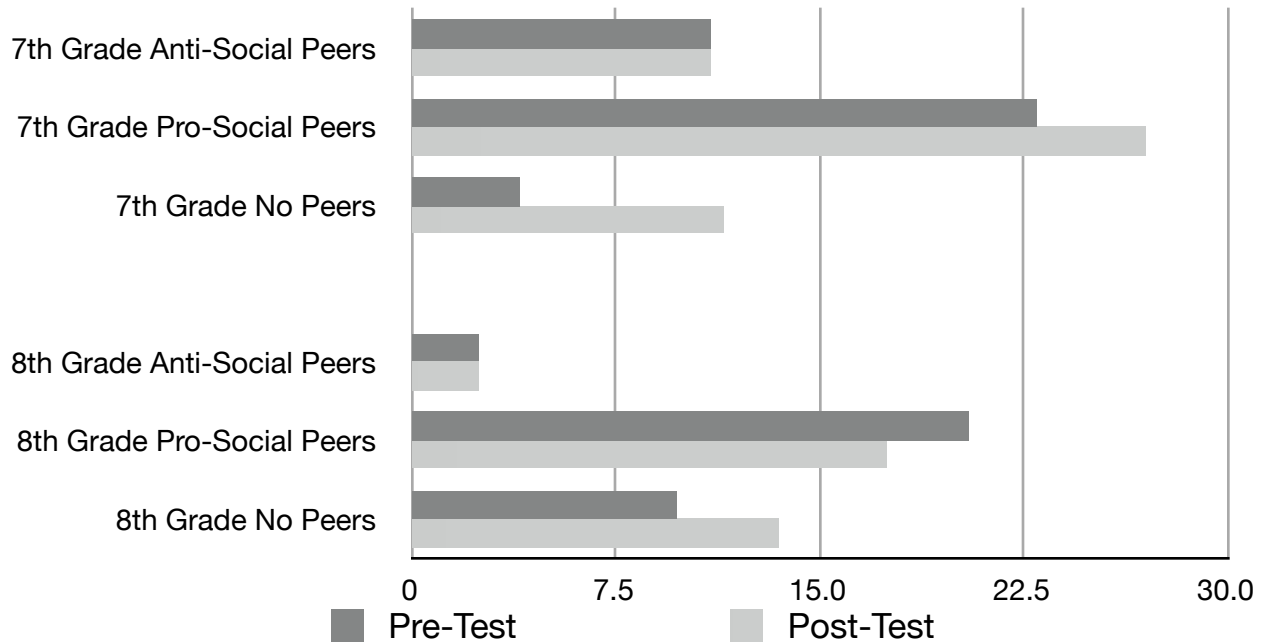
one student showed no difference, and two students showed a lower Moral Action Score. 57% of the students showed an increase in their scores. Also like the 8th grade data, the amount of participants who improved their own moral action score outnumbers any other.

4.c *Observational Peer Behaviors*

Three Versions of Questionnaires by Type



Three Versions of Questionnaires by Grade Level



The Moral Action Scores from the three types of questionnaires show greater differences than the data from pre- and post-test Moral Action Scores. The scores from the questionnaires that displayed observable pro-social peer behavior were the highest by far, averaging between 17.5 and 20.5 for 8th grade and 23 and 27 for 7th grade.

5. Discussion and Interpretation

5.b Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of several factors on middle school art students' abilities to develop moral confidence within a unit. Among these factors were perceived observable peer behaviors and project/unit content. After collecting and organizing the data, I was able to make several possible conclusions. First, it is suggested that the influence of perceived observable peer behaviors, especially pro-social peer behaviors, within a moral dilemma substantially influence the likelihood that students will have the confidence to act according to their moral standards, including interrupting what they perceive to be a wrongdoing. Secondly, the influence of pro-social and moral confidence-themed project content appears to have a positive association with development of students' own moral confidence levels.

5.c Discussion

Although both of the variables that were included in this empirical research showed an effect on student moral confidence, observable peer behavior proved to have a more substantial effect on confidence than the two week art unit. The three types of peer observable behaviors were consistently presented within dilemmas that illustrated a clear cut anti-social situation, and reasons for not taking action were few; most were out of self-preservation. Alternatively, the unit

content was initially presented in a discussion format, which allowed for more powerful personalities to come forward and present alternative reasons for not taking moral action, which I believed changed the direction and mood of the unit.

5.d Reactions to Peers and Peer Behaviors

Data from the first section of the questionnaire showed that students believed that classmates were generally less “moral” than themselves. This relates to Power, Roney, and Power’s (2008) study in which 48 middle school students were less likely to use moral characteristics to describe their ideal selves. Perhaps going into the project, students did not see their peers as ideal counterparts at all. This is influential because as research continued, it was shown the students were more likely to feel moral confidence when they observed peer behavior that was pro-social and reflected their own moral outlook. The scores from the questionnaires that displayed observable pro-social peer behavior were the highest by far, averaging between 17.5 and 20.5 for 8th grade and 23 and 27 for 7th grade.

Although both the anti-social peer behavior versions and no peer behavior versions are both lower than pro-social peer behavior, they alternate in regards to which is lower. This leads me to wonder if students are sometimes more likely to take moral action, for whatever reason, when they see that others are encouraging the “immoral” behavior. At this point, it seems very likely that even the sight or observation of another person who shares the same disapproving opinion of an immoral act provides fuel for a student’s moral confidence. This provides a great reference when attempting to teach children to stand up for what they believe in. They may realize that they are in fact *not* alone in their desire to take moral action and have the power to inspire others.

5.e Influence of Art Unit Content

Student Moral Action Scores showed a difference when compared before and after the Moral Confidence unit. However, the results were not as substantial as those obtained from the peer behavior comparison. The relatively short time span of the unit and mixed personal investment of the students may have affected the quantitative and qualitative influence of the unit. However, there was a measurable difference when data averages were compared pre and post unit, suggesting that project content in artwork can, to some degree influence the moral confidence in students. Also, according to post-unit questionnaires, students appeared to be more “bothered” by hurtful statements made against a classmate.

While teaching the unit, I utilized the information presented in Weinstock, Assor, and Broide (2008) which asserted that students who are encouraged to openly practice critical thinking will also practice autonomous moral reasoning. However, I was not able to encourage this “on a regular basis” in the sense that it was found within their study. In turn, what may have transpired was more of an illustration of Caravita, Di Blasio, and Salmivalli (2009). Their study concluded that according to students, bullies have low social preference, high perceived popularity, and low affective empathy. These students, who have a high influence on the classroom atmosphere, may have guided the direction of thought in a negative manner. Adversely, students associated with defending bullied students (those who would have provided positive outlooks during discussion) are found to have high affective empathy and high social preference, but not necessarily as high of perceived popularity. This may explain why they were not heard from as much during class discussions.

6. Limitations

The results from this study suggest a very exciting potential in the art room. However, it is not without limitations worth noting. Of the general research, one limitation was the low number of participants. In conducting this research again, I would recommend that some sort of incentive be presented to participating students. My pilot study was given to a very different group of students- a gifted class- who are more likely to choose to participate. This led me to overestimate the likelihood that my general education students would choose to participate. Also, due to this difference, I underestimated the time that it would take for a general education group to finish as a whole, as my pilot group had finished in 10-15 minutes. The questionnaires, in turn, took more time out of the unit than anticipated.

6.b Pre and Post Unit Moral Action Scores

Although the data listed provides some insight as to how the content of an art lesson may affect a student's confidence to take moral action, the changes listed in a group this small could be attributed to one student's significant difference in the post-test. I would have clarified some questions so that students were encouraged, even beyond the directions, to list multiple possible answers, especially in regards to the Moral Action Score and dilemmas. Erased answers on the papers lead me to believe that some students felt that they had to choose only one option, even though the directions stated otherwise.

The four week time frame limited any longitudinal potential of a study like this. A longer study with more than one unit would paint a more accurate picture of the long-term potential of pro-social unit content. Also, due to very different learning goals between grade levels, the two

groups were completing two different units which likely affected their moral confidence in different ways.

7. Implications

As a result of this study, I feel that integrating moral education within my regular curriculum will be more habitual. I feel that the results of this study justify the modification of at least one unit per level to incorporate aspects of moral reasoning and exploration. This decision will benefit students in that they will grow to understand their own personal values to a greater extent, as well as inject more meaning into their artwork. Teachers of all subjects will learn that their assignments and units can similarly cultivate moral reasoning skills in their students. Also, as the data quantitatively demonstrates an improvement in Moral Action Scores, administrators may feel compelled to incorporate such practices into their district goals.

Parents may also appreciate the efforts being made to teach the whole child. Such a practice benefits the community as a whole because students who are exposed to this type of thinking and experience are more likely to take moral action within their everyday lives as a result. Most importantly, as this information is shared with students, the observable peer behavior data provides clear evidence that taking moral action inspires others to do so as well.

8. Recommendations for Further Research

From this research, I noticed that students elected to take different routes in their projects. Most notably with the 8th grade students, they either created a project that depicted themselves performing what they thought was a moral action or they used their own silhouette to show another person performing a similar act. Further research exploring the effect of personal

representation versus depiction of a third person in the artwork might show a difference in the amount of personal moral confidence growth.

While reading through the comments and explanations that were given, few students acknowledged that the likelihood that they would take action in a given dilemma was partially determined by whether or not the situation involved someone that they knew, either as the anti-social perpetrator or the victim in the situation. Researching the percentage of students who feel this way and the degree to which either scenario affects their decision to act against anti-social behavior would help determine how to cultivate healthy friendships among students that encourage pro-social behavior.

Finally, the captions associated with the artwork, while mandatory for all, varied in their degree of meaning and development. A researched connection between writing and artwork could be made, exploring the relationship between significantly prepared written accompaniments in artwork versus artwork without captions, and the effect that either has on student's moral confidence or development.

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