

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Prosocial behavior, or behavior that demonstrates empathy, is made up of “voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another” (Eisenberg, Lennon, & Roth, 1983, p. 3). Formed during childhood through modeling on the part of parents, educators, and caregivers, prosocial behaviors become a practiced part of personal agency. Prosocial behavior is “learned, molded, and shaped by environmental events, especially rewards, punishment, and modeling” (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989, p. 25). Humane education, or the teaching of kindness and compassion to people, animals, and the environment, is one form of prosocial learning. This proactive form of teaching moral development in the United States can be traced back to before 1900. At this time, support for humane education was growing, and youth animal protection groups such as the Bands of Mercy were developing in schools and communities (Unti & DeRosa, 2003).

Humane education can be a conduit for both academic and affective success. The prosocial components of humane pedagogy allow for the modeling of important character traits and the increase in the humane narrative of a student who is learning new behaviors. In a meta-analysis of 213 studies of after-school programs, the researchers found that teacher-led evidence-based initiatives designed to promote academic, social and emotional skills, improved test scores, as well as reduced behaviors that put students at-risk for academic and social failure (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Shellinger, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Educators play a large role in providing modeling experiences to students, spending 990 hours minimum on average with youth each school year (Center for Public Education, 2011). According to the study completed by the Humane Literacy Coalition in 2012,

educators felt that humane education was an area of interest and one that could be introduced in their classroom work to increase the culture of compassion in their room and school; however, few knew how to incorporate the ideas of humane pedagogy into their work. In phase two of the Humane Literacy Coalition study (Itle-Clark & Forsyth, 2012), 97% of primary school teachers ( $n = 109$ ) felt that incorporating humane education into personal classroom pedagogy was very important or somewhat important. Secondary educators ( $n = 47$ ) reported similarly, with 100% stating that incorporating humane education into their work was very important or somewhat important. While the educators reported their interest in humane education, over 50% of those participating were unaware if their state required humane education at any level. Of the participants who lived in a state with a humane education requirement, only 12% ( $n = 35$ ) reported correctly, and 57.2% of respondents ( $n = 167$ ) were unacquainted with any type of requirement (Itle-Clark & Forsyth, 2012, pp. 16-18).

Additionally, the average classroom teacher in the Humane Literacy Coalition study indicated a lack of understanding of humane education concepts and practices. The limited understanding could likely impede the implementation of humane education curriculum or program of study. In phase two of the Humane Literacy Coalition survey,

Fourteen responses (12.6%) to the question, “Into what subjects or specific lesson topics have you incorporated humane education?” seemed to indicate a disconnect between the definition of humane education (specifically animal welfare) and how humane education is taught in independent classrooms. Responses included: *Animal testing and dissections, biology, and medical testing*. The responses were short; therefore, more information is needed to know exactly what was meant by each of these responses and why/how the educator felt that humane education was included. (Itle-Clark & Forsyth, 2012)

Other educator responses pointed to concerns related to professional development training opportunities and time restrictions for any type of new program added to the school day or year.

A majority of educators receive little or no training in humane education during pre-service programs of study or in-service courses. Educators do take courses in social sciences and social and emotional learning theory. In these courses, learning and personal mastery supports qualitative development, or personal change based upon experience and modeling (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Piaget, 1990; Vgotsky, 1978).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate how effective an eight-week course can be in enabling educators to better understand humane education and weave the concepts into their pedagogical practices. The study examined teacher comprehension and conceptions of humane education and the intent and ability of credentialed educators to incorporate humane education strategies in the classroom, both before and after a professional development intervention. Engaging educators in intervention discussion forums and activities provided evidence of the degree of growth in comprehension of skills related to humane education and intent to incorporate humane education strategies into classroom work. Pre- and post-surveys measured knowledge of strategies and intent to utilize humane pedagogy in the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. In what ways do educators' conceptions and understanding of humane education change as a result of professional development?

2. In what ways do educators' individual perceptions of the value of humane education change as a result of professional development?
3. In what ways do educators' intent to include humane education concepts in personal pedagogical practice change as a result of professional development?
4. In what ways do educators' knowledge of strategies for integrating humane education into a classroom change after professional development?
5. What factors predict the intent to include humane education in the professional practice of a credentialed educator?

### **Summary**

Credentialed educators play a large role in the development of the students in their care. Educators who incorporate concepts of prosocial teaching models (including humane education) into their pedagogical practice have reported fewer conduct problems and less aggressive behavior (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Shellinger, 2011). Many educators wish to include humane education in their personal pedagogical practice, yet have received little to no training or support from states or districts. My goal was to inquire how humane education, as a form of prosocial and social and emotional teaching, could be woven into pedagogy, and how offering professional development classes to formal educators influenced their practice. This humane pedagogy can positively impact classroom and teacher outcomes.