

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This dissertation documents the impact of a standards-based humane education intervention for K-12 in-service educators. The intervention provided training on the topic of humane education, or the teaching of compassion and empathy for people, animals, and the environment, and it provided information about a proactive approach to building strong citizens and modeling positive behavior that does not develop naturally as individuals age. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an online class designed to facilitate in-service teachers' inclusion of humane education in their classroom teaching. I examined the teachers' conceptions, understanding, and perceptions of the value of humane education, as well as their intent to include humane education concepts, and their knowledge of strategies for integrating humane education before and after the online class. This chapter includes the research questions, culture of inquiry, setting, participants, procedures, data analysis, and protection of participant rights.

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?

Culture of Inquiry

An action research mixed-methods design including quantitative and qualitative data was used in this study. “Research methods should follow research questions in a way that offers the best chance to obtain useful answers. Many research questions and combinations of questions are best and most fully answered through mixed research solutions” (Johnson & Onwugbuzie, 2004, p. 18).

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies are complementary to one another (Jick, 1979). The triangulated and combined use of more than one method validates the data of the phenomenon by supplying agreement among the methods (Denzin, 1978; Jick, 1979). “Qualitative data and analysis function as the glue that cements the interpretation of multimethod results” (Jick, 1979, p. 9).

Action research, a term coined by Kurt Lewin, is research involving the interactive inquiry process (Adelman, 1993). It combines problem solving and data-driven analysis to help researchers understand reasons for circumstances and actions. Action research enables researchers to make predictions about ongoing change (Reason & Bradbury, 2009). Action research includes a four-step process: identifying the focus, collecting data, analyzing data, and developing an action plan (Mills, 2007).

Through action research, revision of the professional development course will best meet the needs of educators who take the course in the future. The utilization of a combined action research and qualitative approach is appropriate for this study involving educators because the professional development course in humane education utilizes numerous creative and writing activities. The materials produced allowed me to provide feedback that was both for the whole group and the individual student. Additionally, the materials produced

afforded a way to gain understanding of participant thoughts and knowledge. Qualitative research and specific study examples can therefore be used as a rationale or justification for a specific reform to pedagogical practices (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 1998).

Setting

The research included the use of the e-learning platform, Blackboard Learn ANGEL. I developed a course titled *Standards for Success in Humane Education* for the study in which participants engaged in eight weeks of learning about humane education. Each week had a general course discussion forum, a course folder containing weekly readings, and a course folder containing the weekly assignments. Participants communicated through discussion boards and by submitting assignments using the platform drop box. All course files are kept at Humane Society University, and all assignments and records are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) policy. All identifying student records are maintained by the university and are private to the student.

Participants

I invited credentialed K-12 in-service educators from the United States to participate (see Appendix B). Educators were recruited through the United Federation of Teachers elementary education group, Humane Society University e-news and Facebook page, and by asking members of the Association of Professional Humane Educators to share the study announcement with credentialed educators in their area. Additional teachers from local schools were invited to participate. Participants were asked to identify the state in which they live and subjects they are certified to teach prior to the course. They were also asked to provide their state ID or a copy of licensure. Those who qualified received enrollment information. Those who did not qualify received a rejection letter (see Appendix C) via

email or traditional mail informing them that they did not qualify for the study, but informing them that they may still register for the course in future terms when it may be offered.

The course enrollment cap was 30 students. If more than 30 individuals had applied to participate, two classes would have been offered. Those who applied after the cap for two classes has been met would have been sent a rejection letter (see Appendix D) via email or traditional mail informing them that the course was closed, but that they could still register for the course in the future terms when it may be offered. Any person who was not eligible for enrollment was also sent information about where they could find free or low-cost humane education materials.

Procedures

One online class of in-service teachers received an intervention (humane curriculum instruction) for eight weeks. Educators received a pre-survey (see Appendix E) prior to the instruction. During the pre-survey, they shared their conceptions, understanding, and individual perception of the value of humane education. They also shared their intent to include humane education concepts in their personal pedagogical practice and their knowledge of strategies for integrating humane education into a classroom understanding, as well as their perceived value of humane education, knowledge of strategies for integrating humane education into curricular work, and intent to teach humane education. They then engaged in a humane education intervention. Throughout the eight-week intervention, participants took part in on-line discussions and assignments that allowed them to share their knowledge and ideas with the instructor and classmates. A post-test (see Appendix F) was given to assess these four areas at the end of the class. This information was also analyzed. This section includes details about the pre-test, intervention course, and post-test.

Pre-test

A 16-item open and closed-ended question pre-test was administered via the Blackboard Learn ANGEL online platform using the survey-development program prior to the beginning of the professional development course (see Appendix E). The pre-test allowed educators to share their conceptions, understanding, and individual perceptions of the value of humane education. For example, participants were asked in question five to rank their familiarity with humane education on a Likert Scale with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 5 being *strongly agree*. Additionally, the pre-test asked educators to share their knowledge of strategies for integrating humane education into a classroom, their understanding and perceived value of humane education, their knowledge of strategies for integrating humane education into curricular work, and their intent to include humane education concepts in their teaching. Both questions eight and nine were Likert Scales with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 5 being *strongly agree*. Question eight asked participants if it was important for teachers to incorporate humane education into lessons, and question nine asked participants if they are familiar with instructional strategies to plan and teach different kinds of lessons containing humane-related content. The qualitative and quantitative questions allowed me to understand the experience of the educator and baseline knowledge of each participant.

Intervention

The course consisted of eight weeks of readings and assignments. (See syllabus in Appendix G.) Weekly content included instructor-provided journal articles, humane education reference materials, and online materials from both formal educational sites and humane education resource groups. Participants were responsible for reading the required materials and responding to discussion forum questions. Participants were required to complete a minimum of three posts each week. One post was an original response pertaining

to the weekly readings in which participants referenced not only course materials, but also self-selected outside resources. Additional weekly posts required students to build upon the original posts of others and continue or question the ideas presented. Sample discussion forum questions include

Week One—Think back to your definition of humane education before you completed the readings. Did the content reaffirm or change your thoughts in any way?

On which aspects of humane education do you plan to focus? Would any of these topics be considered controversial? Have you planned how you might deal with concerns expressed about controversial topics?

Week Three—Think about a student who does not see humane behavior modeled in the home. This may be a student who comes to your program with much on his or her mind, and he or she may not be used to seeing or hearing certain things. For example:

I once had a young man in my classroom who came from a very rough home life. He was often hungry and dirty, and food was his main concern. He was not used to being told he was good at things, and he did not have a lot of practice in looking out for the well-being of others. He also lived in a home where care for companion animals was not valued the same way we would value it. The modeling he saw regarding the treatment of others and family pets was very different than the modeling he saw in our classroom.

Assignment: In situations such as the above, how can you, a humane educator, use your knowledge of education versus indoctrination to help build a social norm that includes humane ideas? These may be ideas related to the culture of the classroom or a lesson being taught. Please use the course readings from the past two weeks and your favorite search engine to locate additional information and post at least two suggestions you find. Please describe how each supports humane education.

Each week, participants were also required to complete a minimum of one course assignment or quiz. The course assignments and quizzes were placed in Blackboard Learn ANGEL Drop Box or Quiz folders. Sample assignments included the following items:

Week Three—Locate the standards for your state and read through the *health* standards. Choose two or three standards and brainstorm a list of ways that your current humane education lessons fit into the state standard. If you have not developed any lessons yet, brainstorm a list of how humane topics can be covered while teaching each standard.

In your submission, please be sure to tell me what state and specific standard you have chosen before you begin each list.

Please include the following in your submission:

Choose and list:

- state
- grade level
- two or three standards [Please note: standards are often written in a specific manner. (Example: CA Kindergarten Health 1.2. N Identify a variety of healthy snacks)]
- ideas for teaching each standard including humane education

Week Four—Please answer the following questions:

1. Is character education or social and emotional learning mandated or encouraged in your state? (You may wish to use the links provided in the course this week.)
2. Are character education, social and emotional learning, or anti-bullying programs being implemented in schools in your community? Please choose one of the options below to find out and answer the questions in the item you select:
 - a. Contact teachers or other school officials and search online to find out. Describe the specific school program(s) and their content. What aspects of humane education are included (animal welfare, environmental, social justice)? Describe how you could possibly work within this program.
 - b. Choose one or two local schools. Study their website(s) and do a search (using Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc.) for "[their name] and character education". Describe any character programs and the specific school program(s) and their content. What aspects of humane education are included (animal welfare, environmental, social justice)? Describe how you could possibly work within this program.
3. Have the programs been evaluated to determine their effectiveness? If so, what were the results?

The course also required participants to develop lesson plan ideas connecting academic content to humane education content. In week three participants brainstormed the way in which humane education could connect to academics, specifically health or science education. Weeks six and eight required participants to craft full lesson plans to use in their future classroom work. Week three and six assignments were open to peer review, thus

allowing the participants to ask questions of one another and to provide suggestions or additional resources.

Post-test

A 16-item open and closed-ended question post-test was administered via the Blackboard Learn ANGEL online platform using the survey-development program at the end of the professional development course. The post-test allowed educators to share their conceptions, understanding, and individual perception of the value of humane education, as well as their intent to include humane education concepts in personal pedagogical practice. Additionally, educators shared their knowledge of strategies for integrating humane education into a curricular work, their knowledge of strategies for integrating humane education into curriculum, and intent to teach humane education. The qualitative and quantitative questions allowed me to understand the growth in knowledge of the participants and how or if they believed they will be able to incorporate humane-themed concepts into their personal pedagogical practices.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

In the quantitative phase of the study, the data from the pre- and post-tests were placed into the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 19.0. I ran the descriptive statistics to provide a basic understanding of the participants and their knowledge of humane concepts. I ran paired-samples *t* tests to examine differences in teacher familiarity, intent to include, and the subjects into which teachers felt they could incorporate humane education.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data from the study were placed into the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis program. The program allowed for comparison among discussion forum topics during the eight weeks. The discussion forum narratives and submissions in which participants shared their own experiences were coded with themes and points of emphasis (Riessman, 1993).

I coded the discussion forum transcripts and used constant comparison analysis (Glaser, 1965) to understand participant conceptions, understanding, and individual perceptions of the value of humane education, as well as intent to include humane education concepts in their personal pedagogical practice. These practices included classroom culture and lesson plans. Other items that were coded included knowledge of strategies for integrating humane education into a classroom, understanding and perceived value of humane education, knowledge of strategies for integrating humane education into curricular work, and intent to teach humane education.

During open coding, data were analyzed, examined, and categorized (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I reviewed word count and frequency for each theme or category in this initial coding and analysis. Axial coding, following the initial categorization, placed data together “in new patterns after open coding, by making connections between categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). Patterns indicating change in each theme were noted, and sub-themes and categories were developed as needed.

Protection of Participant Rights

The study involved an eight-week course in which participants shared and conversed in discussion forums. Participants were asked to share experiences in their lives, the lives of

their students, or occurrences in their classroom that were related to humane education.

While the discussion questions and assignments were not designed to be overly personal or sensitive, in any group discussion, there is a risk that material may feel uncomfortable or beyond a level a participant wishes to disclose. Participants maintained the right to disclose only that which they felt comfortable sharing. Additionally, the coursework was designed around the work done in personal classrooms and teaching methodology. Most questions did not relate to personal information that could place a participant in an uncomfortable situation.

Pre- and post-tests were placed into the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 19.0. Participants' names were separated from the data for review, with each participant receiving a number. Data will be stored electronically on a password-protected computer for which only I have the password until five years after the study has been completed. Hard copy files will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home for five years after I have completed the study. Data will be deleted five years after the completion date. All files will be deleted, and hard copy materials will be shredded at that time.

Intervention materials, including course content and readings, discussion forums, and assignments will be stored on the Blackboard Learn ANGEL course platform and are part of the Humane Society University system. All course and student records will be protected by FERPA. Finally, potential participants were provided with the Informed Consent form upon registration and approval of proof of certification. Participants received the Informed Consent form via email. Forms were returned via electronic or hard copy and were received before the course start date.

Summary

In conclusion, an action research mixed methods design including quantitative and qualitative data was used for this study. Credentialed educators participated in an eight-week standards-based humane education intervention housed through Humane Society University and on the Blackboard Learn ANGEL platform. Participants completed a pre-test before receiving the intervention materials. During the eight-week intervention course, participants completed readings and assignments, and they participated in discussion forums. Upon completion of the course, participants completed a post-test.

The multi-layered nature of the research questions allowed for both qualitative and quantitative exploration. Analyzing both pre- and post-tests and participant discussion permitted understanding of credentialed educators' conceptions, understanding, and individual perception of the value of humane education, as well as their intent to include humane education concepts in their personal pedagogical practice, their understanding and perceived value of humane education, their knowledge of strategies for integrating humane education into curricular work, and their intent to teach humane education.