

Proposal to the Undergraduate Research Program

By

Robert Shelton

Highlands College: Psychology

April 14, 2017

Research Advisor

Dr. Elyse D'nn Lovell, Ed.D.

Prosocial Behavior: Analysis of Ted Talk Viewers'

Learning – Empathy in the College Classroom

Researcher Background

The degree that I am pursuing is an Associate of Science, and my future goals include earning a Bachelor of Science from Montana Tech and pursuing a career path in research. I am a full-time college student. During the spring semester of 2017, I conducted a pilot study during my Research Methods class, *Prosocial Behavior, and Empathy among College Students*. Students viewed a Ted Talk, and completed a pre and post assessment measuring their empathy levels prior to and following the viewing of the film. I wanted to understand if there were differences in students' empathy levels over time, and if there were differences between groups: gender, age, and parental status. Initial findings suggested differences in empathy levels between males and females and significant differences in empathy levels over time following the viewing of a prosocial behavior film. The sub-group sample sizes for age and parental status were not sufficient to run an analysis. I would like to continue this study and explore empathy among traditional aged and non-traditional aged students, student-parents, males and females when viewing prosocial behavior. The study has IRB approval and would require an addendum. It is my intent that this study will begin fall 2017 and continue through spring 2018 obtaining a larger sample.

Introduction

When observing prosocial behavior, people may have an emotional reaction; it is the intent of this study to clarify if college students' levels of empathy may shift while watching a video in the classroom about prosocial behavior. The purpose of the study is to explore if students become more empathetic after watching a Prosocial Ted Talk video about Vivienne Harr, a nine-year-old girl who sells lemonade from her lemonade stand to help end child slavery in the world. The problem is to understand potential changes in students' empathy levels over time when watching a Ted Talk video; this may increase understanding about learning when using videos to enhance a student's education. Empathy skills are an essential part of the day to day life of students and empathy has long been associated with prosocial behavior. Films are often shown in an academic setting to teach and influence students' learning experiences. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index pre/post measure will be used to assess changes in student's empathy levels prior to and following film viewing.

Research questions:

- 1) Can empathy levels change over time when viewing a prosocial behavior video?
- 2) Is there a difference between groups in empathy levels when viewing a prosocial behavior video based on gender, age, and parental status?
- 3) Could gender, age, or parental status be a predictor for change in empathy levels when viewing a prosocial behavior video?

Literature Review

Research suggests that "empathy is the capacity to understand and respond to the unique experiences of another person" (Lamm, Batson & Decety, 2007, pg. 42). Tello, Egido, Ortiz & Gandara, (2012) state that "empathy can be defined as a vicarious emotional response to the perceived emotional experiences of the others and also can be identified regarding the accuracy of cognitive, social insight or social/affective role taking" (pg. 320). Empathy gives us the

ability to see and feel the world through another person's eyes and respond properly to different social situations (Tello, 2012). The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) is the most extensively used measure of individual differences in empathy (Pulos, Elison & Lennon 2004). "The IRI has been utilized in numerous research studies, particularly those that aim to evaluate sex differences in empathetic disposition" (Tello, 2012, pg. 321).

Prosocial behavior can be defined as helping behavior that is voluntary and intended to benefit another (Holmgren, Eisenberg, and Fabes, 1998). Research suggests that students may develop empathy and understanding through the use of Ted Talk videos in a classroom setting, and have suggested a strong emotional bond to viewing Ted Talk videos (Loya & Klemm, 2016). The new discovery in this study is to quantitatively assess potential changes in empathy levels when viewing a video. Qualitatively people's opinions about videos and specifically Ted Talks are evidenced, but quantitative assessment over time was not found. Additionally, understanding differences in empathy levels based on gender was prominent, while differences based on college students' ages was minimal, and evidence was not found for differences between student-parents and non-parents.

Method / Timeline:

- Continuing Literature Collection 08/24/2017 through 04/01/2018
- Addendum of IRB 09/15/2017
- Distribute Survey Assessment (Entire Sample 150 Highlands College students)
Distribution 1 - 09/25/2017 (Sample 75 students)
Distribution 2 - 01/15/2018 (Sample 75 students)
- Write paper – Literature Review (08/2017-4/2018); Methods (10/2017); Results (11/2017 and 2/2018); Discussion and Conclusion / Recommendations (12/2017 and 3/2018)
- Complete Data Analysis: Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach Alpha, T-test, Regression Analysis (10/15/2017 and 2/15/2018)
 - Empathy levels change viewing a video? Descriptive Stats percentages / means
 - Can a video about prosocial behavior influence emotional responses among college students *over time*, and is there a *difference between groups* based on gender, age, and parental status? Pre / Post Paired Samples T-test AND Independent Samples T-test
 - Could gender, age, or parental status be a *predictor for change* in empathy levels when viewing a prosocial behavior video? *Regressions*
- Presentations: Present in Highlands College Research Day Poster Session 4/2018; Present at Techxpo 04/2018; Present at Montana State University Poster Session 04/2018
- Publication: Peer Reviewed Journal to be determined

References

- Holmgren, R. A. (1998). The relations of childrens situational empathy-related emotions to dispositional prosocial behavior. *International Journal of behavioral Development, 22*(1), 169-193.
- Lamm, C. B. (2007). The neural substrate of human empathy: Effects of the perspective-taking and cognitive appraisal. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience 19*(1), 42-58.
- Loya, M. A. (2016). Teaching note-using ted talks in the social work classroom: Encouraging student engagement and discourse. *Journal of Social Work Education, 52*(4), 518-523.
- Pulos, S. E. (2004). The hierarchical structure of the interpersonal reactivity index. *Socila Behavior and Personality, 32*(4), 355-360.
- Tello, F. P. (2013). Interpersonal reactivity idex: Analysis of the invariance and gender differences in spanish youth. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development, 44*, 320-333.