Friendship Workshop as an intervention model to promote empathy: A program review

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Friendship Workshop as an intervention model to promote empathy: A program review

Abstract
The purpose of this study was to research if the Friendship Workshop, a classroom intervention program, would enhance the empathy development in 68 students within four kindergarten/Grade 1 classes. The quasi-experimental quantitative approach incorporated a pre/post assessment design using the Empathy Quotient (EQ) to assess parent/guardian and teachers’ perspectives of their children and students, respectively. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the results to determine if the Friendship Workshops intervention's efficacy strengthened the students' empathy after the children experienced it for 6 months. The data review indicated that 81% and 60% of the students demonstrated an increase in empathy from the teacher and parent/guardian perspective, respectively. In addition, further review of the responses for students who demonstrated a decrease in empathy based upon the EQ scores rendered insight that over half of the students showed an increase in four specific statements suggesting improvement in some elements of empathy despite the decreased overall score. Recommendations for further research, and potential professional development for teacher preparation programs, school leaders, and experienced teachers are provided, given the overall potential of the Friendship Workshop approach on empathy development and the focus on emotional vocabulary development, emotional recognition, and emotion regulation. There is a potential for increased empathy to impact implicit bias, thus prejudice development; therefore, further merit should be granted to the prospective impact of the Friendship Workshop approach within classroom environments.

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The Friendship Workshop as an Intervention Model to Promote Empathy:

A Program Review

By

Danielle M. Dehm

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by
C. Michael Robinson, Ed.D.

Committee Member
Mary Coughlin, Ed.D.

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my daughters, Anna Marie and Olivia Lynn, who are my gifts to the world, my inspiration, and even as adult women, my greatest teachers. Anna, my calm and peaceful child, was home at just the right time to provide distraction, discussion, and delight amidst the focus. Olivia, my independent and determined child, provided challenge and feedback with a mental prowess that was generous and substantial. Singularly and together, you are complete perfection. Your support and encouragement provide me with perspective and persistence in continued steps toward a more just world. Our conversations about learning, loving, and living will always be those I hold closest to my heart. I am forever grateful for your comical and heartfelt reminders of what really matters.

To my dear husband, Mark, who is so happy and supportive in any and every endeavor I engage in. I know and believe in my heart that your love and adoration for me has never been compromised. This I know to be true.

To my parents, Jane and Albert Belliveau, who are models of endurance and commitment. “Danielle, remember that you can do whatever you put your mind to.” I hear you, Dad, and you are right. I can…and that mantra lives on within your granddaughters.

I offer special appreciation to Dr. C. Michael Robinson, my dissertation chair, who smoothly captivated me into the program then provided critical guidance. Thank you
for seeing continued potential in me despite the season of “retirement.” You put forth this doctoral challenge knowing the importance of honoring personal goals.

Dr. Mary Coughlin, thank you for being positive energy throughout this entire process, offering words of confidence and reassurance along the way. You are a master of kindness and professionalism. Dr. Rachel Santiago, your mathematical brilliance and generous gift of time and attention to “all things quantitative” provided encouragement and support whenever I needed it most.

To my team, E.L.I.C.I.T., forever friends Tanya and JJ, who helped me to think, listen, laugh, and grow in unanticipated areas of new learning and, most of all, made our dynamic age difference disappear. I care for and appreciate my Confidimus Processus VI comrades as we leaned on and learned more than we ever anticipated from each other. Francine, we faced yet another life-altering experience together. Our friendship is a blessing.

Thank you to the dedicated faculty at SJFC whose brilliant acumen and scholarly insight is recognized and valued. I extend deep gratitude for the plethora of compassion from friends and family members who championed me from afar in this worthy endeavor. I love you all dearly. And finally, thank you to the teachers and parents who believed in this important work, and to all the children in my career who have rendered the greatest insights in how to live. Most of all, Mary Anne Buckley, here’s to you—the true spirit behind Friendship Workshop.
Biographical Sketch

Danielle Marie Dehm retired after 25 years as the Principal of Victor Primary School. Prior to that, she taught kindergarten in the Batavia City School District.

Continued professional endeavors include increasing her 15-year commitment as an Adjunct Professor in the SUNY Oswego Educational Administration Department, as well as engaging as an Outreach Coordinator for the School Administrators’ Association of New York State, and the Co-Director of Summer LEAP at West Irondequoit, which provides a summer enrichment experience for elementary-aged children from the Rochester City School District. She also coaches leaders and teachers throughout New York State, serves on the LifeResults Board of Directors, and facilitates personal growth classes.

Ms. Dehm earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from St. Bonaventure University, a Master of Science degree in Learning and Behavioral Disorders from SUNY Buffalo, a Certificate of Advanced Study in Administration from SUNY Brockport, and certification from SUNY Oswego after completing the Superintendent Development Program. She has New York State certifications as an elementary and special education teacher as well as a school building and district leader.

Ms. Dehm began the Ed.D. program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College in the spring of 2018 and conducted her research “The Friendship Workshop as an Intervention Model to Promote Empathy: A Program Review” under the direction of
Dr. C. Michael Robinson and Dr. Mary Coughlin. The Ed.D. degree was earned by Ms. Dehm in 2020.
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to research if the Friendship Workshop, a classroom intervention program, would enhance the empathy development in 68 students within four kindergarten/Grade 1 classes. The quasi-experimental quantitative approach incorporated a pre/post assessment design using the Empathy Quotient (EQ) to assess parent/guardian and teachers’ perspectives of their children and students, respectively. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the results to determine if the Friendship Workshops intervention’s efficacy strengthened the students’ empathy after the children experienced it for 6 months.

The data review indicated that 81% and 60% of the students demonstrated an increase in empathy from the teacher and parent/guardian perspective, respectively. In addition, further review of the responses for students who demonstrated a decrease in empathy based upon the EQ scores rendered insight that over half of the students showed an increase in four specific statements suggesting improvement in some elements of empathy despite the decreased overall score.

Recommendations for further research, and potential professional development for teacher preparation programs, school leaders, and experienced teachers are provided, given the overall potential of the Friendship Workshop approach on empathy development and the focus on emotional vocabulary development, emotional recognition, and emotion regulation. There is a potential for increased empathy to impact implicit bias, thus prejudice development; therefore, further merit should be granted to the
prospective impact of the Friendship Workshop approach within classroom environments.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The news and social media include examples that demonstrate extreme negativity toward others, challenge White fragility, and suggest a culture whose foundation includes racism at its core (DiAngelo, 2018). Research on children’s experience of discrimination, the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or gender, show a robust association between these experiences and compromised development (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). In addition, a growing body of literature indicates a strong correlation between racial discrimination and poor mental health (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Priest et al., 2013). Evidence exists that racial discrimination is a critical factor for a child’s health and well-being, and racial discrimination has detrimental effects with the potential to last a lifetime. In addition, poor psychological, academic, behavioral, and health outcomes for children perpetuates social inequality and maintains an environment that resists equity and justice (Dessel, 2010; Priest et al., 2013). Efforts to reduce attitudes of prejudice have the capacity to diminish discrimination and its harmful effects. Empathy development and its potential to mitigate implicit bias and prejudice development has merit and is the focus of this study.

Problem Statement

Implicit bias, the unconscious unknowing that one is in favor of or against an idea or group, is part of the human experience. Tests of implicit bias demonstrate that people of all backgrounds have unconscious preferences. Gender, race, sexual orientation, and aspects of identity are elements of bias in each of us (Morin, 2015). Beginning at birth,
children are exposed to words and actions in the environment that set the stage for how they perceive people and groups. Developmental factors play a role in their ability to counterbalance these initial teachings (Allport, 1958).

Banaji and Greenwald (2016) suggested that hidden biases in thought and action cause undesired, unintended results. Without reason or experience, preconceived opinions about people or groups of people lead to prejudice formation when left unchecked. Dessel (2010) proposed that prejudice is a significant factor contributing to bullying and harassment in schools, and that members of diverse groups, based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other cultural factors, are more likely to be targeted. In addition, Priest et al. (2013) identified a strong and consistent relationship between racial discrimination and well-being for children. Children who experience discrimination as a result of prejudicial attitudes have a greater chance of experiencing negative mental health consequences including anxiety, depression, and psychological distress as well as delinquent behaviors (Priest et al., 2013). Evidence of discrimination as a deterrent to the health and well-being of children underscores the importance of interventions to reduce it.

on Children’s Mental Health (U.S. Public Health Service, 2000) expressed the importance of mental health promotion and social-emotional learning (SEL) for optimal child development and school performance. The U.S. Public Health Service (2000) also identified mental health as a critical component in learning and general health. Fostering the mental health of children as an element of healthy, overall development must be a national priority. The U.S. Department of Education (2011) stated that strategies to promote a positive school climate and prevent violence, including prejudice-related violence, are essential.

These foundational world and national political messages underscore the attention given to the importance of attending to discrimination by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Detailed instruction in civility, citizenship, and character development is outlined in New York Education Law Section 801-A (New York Senate, n.d.). All students are expected to receive instruction on the principles of tolerance, personal responsibility, and respect for others with emphasis on discouraging acts of harassment, bullying, and discrimination. To support this expectation, social-emotional learning standards and student learning benchmarks were identified by the School Culture and Student Engagement Workgroup of the New York State (NYS) Safe Schools Task Force (NYSED, 2018). Benchmark goals of the task force indicate the importance of developing self-awareness and self-management skills; using social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships; and demonstrating ethical decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts. Critical features are noted in the NYS SEL Benchmarks (Table 1.1). NYSED (2018) supports a focus on social and emotional well-being for school children.
Table 1.1  

*New York State Social-Emotional Learning Benchmarks*

<table>
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| 1. Develop self-awareness and self-management skills essential to success in school and in life. | A. Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior.  
B. Recognize personal qualities and external supports.  
C. Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals. |
| 2. Use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships. | A. Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.  
B. Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.  
C. Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.  
D. Demonstrate the ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. |
| 3. Demonstrate ethical decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts. | A. Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.  
B. Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.  
C. Contribute to the well-being of one’s school and community. |

*Note.* Adapted from “New York State Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks,” New York State Education Department, 2018. Copyright 2018 by New York State Education Department.

In addition to political support, there is confirming evidence that implicit bias and its potential lead to prejudice formation; and the violence that can occur, when ignored, can be influenced by intervention (Cristol & Gimbert, 2008; Midgette, 2018). In a meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs, Durlak, Dymnicki, Schellinger, Taylor, and Weissberg (2011) determined that programs targeting competencies and attitudes about self and others yielded significant positive effects. In fact, the largest effect size occurred for programs targeting emotional recognition and empathy development. In addition, the most effective delivery model was the incorporation of interventions into routine classroom practices.
Classroom interventions focused on empathy development also show potential to reduce prejudice formation through the use of storybooks (Burns, Lyons, & Niens, 2017; Johnson & Aboud, 2017; Mackey & Vocht-van Alphen, 2016). In addition, for intervention to be effective, it must also occur early in development before prejudice, stereotypes, and negative attitudes are deeply engrained (Levy & Killen, 2008; Quintana & McKown, 2012).

Despite political sentiment and education policies around this topic, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported the most prominent form of hate crime is anti-Black or anti-African American (Statista Research, 2019). A hate crime is defined as a criminal offense against a person or property motivated by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity. Disturbing reminders of the power of hate are also recent occurrences in the United States. A woman was killed during a neo-Nazi, Klu Klux Klan march in Charlottesville, Virginia (Heim, 2017). In a NYS school district, community members were in an uproar about the persistence of racial incidents, including calling Blacks the n-word, and it ignored the misinformation included on a Black History Month student-made poster (Murphy, 2019). Most recently, the highly publicized and national protest-initiating deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd, and threats by Amy Cooper (Burke, 2020; Hill et al., 2020; Shapiro, Fuller, & Sullivan, 2020, “Video shows,” 2020) are creating yet another tipping point for political, national, and social attention.

Implicit bias is part of the human condition, and it affects how people perceive and act—even when those thoughts and actions are unintentional. This bias can lead to attitudes of prejudice if ignored (Allport, 1958). Empathy development, which reduces or
deters the implications of implicit bias, can prevent prejudice development (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014). In a review of interventions aimed at reducing prejudice, Paluck and Green (2009) found only a fraction of the hundreds of studies examined speak to whether, why, and under what conditions an intervention works. The authors noted that reading interventions had potential to create narratives inspiring empathy and perspective taking. Although this intervention lasted longer than most others, the average was 5 weeks. Paluck and Green (2009) also recommended field experimentation to assess whether an intervention’s impact emerges and endures for a child among social pressures and distractions. Using an environment where interventions are being asserted as the laboratory has potential for generating a stronger, multidimensional theory on the topic of prejudice.

In a meta-analysis of child and adolescent training programs focused on preventing prejudice and improving intergroup relationships, Beelmann and Heinemann (2014) recommended developmental research focused on longitudinal designs to develop a closer link to prevention and intervention programs. Taylor, Durlak, Oberle, & Weissberg (2017) recommended pre- and post-intervention evaluations from the perspective of others to determine the effectiveness of social and emotional skill training. Regression analysis would identify the predictive power of the intervention and measure skills, attitudes, and behaviors. And finally, Berger, Brenick, Lawrence, Coco, and Abu-Raiya (2018) compared the effectiveness and strength of two prejudice reduction approaches: social-emotional skills training and intergroup contact. The skills-based group focused on cultivating perspective-taking, empathy, and compassion. While the results of Berger et al. (2018) indicated that the intervention was beneficial in reducing
prejudice attitudes with stability, over time, a noted limitation was the potential for self-reported data to include bias.

In addition to the limitations noted within empirical studies, research recommends that for field-based interventions, pre/post-intervention evaluations and including the perspectives of others is needed to provide a rationale for researching the effectiveness of a program. In this study, the program that was reviewed was the Friendship Workshop, which is a classroom intervention technique focused on emotional vocabulary, recognition, and regulation through the use of literature, peaceful moments, and perspective taking (Buckley, 2015). The Friendship Workshop program, at the time of this study, purported that these techniques have the potential to enhance empathy development, thus increasing understanding and reducing implicit bias that leads to prejudice. To date, there are no formal assessment measures to determine the efficacy of the Friendship Workshop. The goal for this research analysis was to determine if the Friendship Workshop intervention approach strengthened empathy development.

Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical foundation for this study is appraisal theory, and more specifically, the appraisal theory of empathy and other vicarious emotions. Appraisal theories claim that emotions follow an evaluation, or appraisal, of an event or situation. Appraisal theories were proposed to solve problems and clarify phenomena unexplained by theories attempting to explain causes of emotion. These phenomena included patterns of emotional response; differences in response to the same or different situations, evoking the same emotion; emotion triggers; appropriateness of emotional responses for
situations; irrational components of emotionality; and the explanation of developmental and clinically induced changes in emotion (Roseman & Smith, 2011).

Appraisal theory of emotion provides insight about coping strategies for those who have experienced emotional impact from others (Rogers, Holmbeck, & Levant, 1997), how people respond to hurtful communication (Bippus & Young, 2012), and how one’s well-being in stressful situations can be enhanced (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). Research focused on appraisal theory of emotion provided the groundwork for a recent theory developed by Wondra and Ellsworth (2015) that extended to empathy.

Emotions are felt in a wide variety of experiences. Firsthand emotions are those felt by individuals when an experience happens to them. At times, emotion is felt because something happens to someone else, and this is identified as vicarious emotion. Empathy is a vicarious emotion that occurs when one feels the same emotion felt by another because that person, too, has had the same experience. Wondra and Ellsworth (2015) based their appraisal theory of empathy and vicarious emotion on the appraisal theories of emotion. Because emotion theories say little about feeling emotion for others, and empathy theories say little about how feelings for others are similar to firsthand emotional experiences, Wondra and Ellsworth (2015) combined the theories of empathy and emotion to advance understanding of both.

Appraisal theory of empathy and vicarious emotion posits that emotions for others are based on how we evaluate their situations, just as firsthand emotions are based on how we appraise our own situations (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015). Therefore, empathy is feeling the same emotion as another when observing their experience. The theory
suggested by Wondra and Ellsworth (2015) is based on the appraisal theories of emotion and provides a unified view in which the appraisal process explains all three emotions: firsthand, empathy, and nonmatching vicarious emotions. This framework treated empathy as a normal emotional experience. It explains that the appraisal people make for others and their situations determines an emotional outcome of empathy.

Appraisal theory of empathy and vicarious emotion provided the background understanding about the process, or appraisal, one engages in prior to evoking empathy. The design of this study was based on the theory of empathy and vicarious emotion through a focus on empathy development via an analysis of the Friendship Workshop program. This analysis determined if this intervention approach included the ingredients to strengthen empathy development in young children. The theory provided the basis to understand whether the appraisal children make for another and their situation can be improved through this intervention that purports to enhance empathy development.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the intervention strategies incorporated in the Friendship Workshop intervention program. At the time of the study, the program purported to enhance empathy development in children after they had engaged in 6 months of participation in the Friendship Workshop. The analysis goal was to determine if children participating in the Friendship Workshop strengthened their empathy development, thus deterring the implications of implicit bias.
Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. After 8 months of participation in the Friendship Workshop intervention, what were the students’ changes in empathy, negative or positive, from the teachers’ perspectives as evidenced from the Empathy Quotient pre and post questionnaire?

2. After 8 months of participation in the Friendship Workshop intervention, what were the children’s changes in empathy, negative or positive, from the parent/guardians’ perspectives as evidenced from the Empathy Quotient pre and post questionnaire?

Potential Significance of Study

Prejudice has detrimental effects on the development and well-being of children and, if left unchecked, leads to harmful implications for society (Priest et al., 2013). The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of intervention strategies incorporated in the Friendship Workshop to increase empathy development, thereby preventing or reducing prejudice development, thus deterring the implications of implicit bias. Limitations in prior empirical studies underscored the need for additional empathy research with a pre/post-intervention design within the field with data other than self-reported data (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Berger et al., 2018; Paluck & Green, 2009; Taylor et al., 2017). The research design took these limitations into consideration to strengthen the data and findings.

Research findings have the potential to identify a process for a broader scope of study with a greater number of participants in various school districts to identify and
underscore the strengths and potential of the Friendship Workshop as an intervention to strengthen empathy development. This study will inform school leaders and teacher-preparation programs of a credible intervention technique as an element to enhance empathy development in young children. This research supported a commitment to social justice through its efforts to provide the background knowledge and evidence for the educational arena to consider. The potential of ultimately reducing prejudice and subsequent discriminatory actions through a plausible, classroom intervention technique is worthy of consideration (Beelman & Heinemann, 2014; Berger et al., 2018; Dessel, 2010; Paluck & Green, 2009).

Definitions of Terms

The following term is defined for the purpose of this paper:

*Other Vicarious Emotion* – emotion felt because something happens to someone else (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015)

Chapter Summary

There is strong evidence that racial discrimination is a critical factor for a child’s health and well-being, and it has detrimental effects that can last a lifetime. This chapter provided justification for conducting a program review of the Friendship Workshop, an intervention focused on emotional vocabulary, recognition, and regulation through the use of literature, peaceful moments, and perspective taking. These techniques have the potential to enhance empathy development, thus increasing understanding and reducing implicit bias that leads to prejudice. The purpose and significance for this study was established, in addition to a summary of the theoretical concept of appraisal theory of empathy and other vicarious emotions as well as a list of definitions to provide clarity.
Chapter 2 is a summarization of the pertinent research and literature focused on bias, prejudice, and empathy development. An overview of the Friendship Workshop is provided in Chapter 2 as well as a foundation for a program evaluation. The research design methodology is reviewed in Chapter 3 and includes the elements of the research context, participants, data collection instruments, and procedures for collecting and analyzing data. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the data including unanticipated findings, and Chapter 5 includes the implications of the findings, limitations, as well as recommendations for further research and practice within the educational arena.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the efficacy of the Friendship Workshop intervention program to enhance empathy development. The review of the literature contained in this chapter begins with an overview of bias, prejudice, and empathy development in children. Next, literature to support empathy as a mediator to prejudice is reviewed. An overview of social and emotional education at the elementary level follows. The chapter concludes with specifics about the Friendship Workshop intervention model.

Review of the Literature

Child development and bias. A child’s experiential world includes imitation, social influences, and experiences that are underpinnings of how they learn. Bias, judgment in favor of or against a person or group, usually in a way considered to be unfair, is shaped at a young age. Several authors provide evidence that children pay attention to what is going on around them, and they copy, or are influenced by, others (Dunham, Baron, & Carey, 2011; McGuigan, 2013; Wilks, Collier-Baker, & Nielsen, 2015).

Research focused on imitation theory between individuals and groups provided background knowledge about the phenomenon of learning bias. As selective imitators, children assess what to copy and from whom, and then they copy the behaviors of those who are perceived as having a higher status with greater reliability than the behaviors of
those with less status (McGuigan, 2013). The study suggests children are proficient at learning from others in their social group, particularly those who are perceived as having high social status. In addition, even at an early age of 5 years old, children are discriminate social learners whereby they engage in a copying process based by rank (McGuigan, 2013).

In support of this idea of learning from a group, Wilks et al. (2015) showed that children prefer to copy the successful actions of a group over an unsuccessful group or an individual’s actions. In addition, if the group action is unsuccessful, a child will choose the action of a successful individual, indicating an ability to break away from a group decision to determine a plan they deem more appropriate (Wilks et al., 2015). Children 4 and 5 years of age demonstrated that they favored proficiency and used a lens of success to decide how to act. Wilks et al. (2015) emphasized that children in the study could resist majority pressure from a group when they observed actions that did not meet an apparent goal, and they copied successful actions of an individual, suggesting adaptability in social learning.

Although children can resist group pressure when the group does not meet a goal, group dynamics influence the decision-making of children. Dunham et al. (2011) suggested that little is necessary to encourage strong group preference. In the Dunham et al. (2011) study, simple in-group and out-group categorizations resulted in the rapid development of bias without the consideration of supporting social information. In addition, when the study children assumed that members of the in-group were more likely to perform good actions and were generally more likeable, then children encoded actions in this way, and bias was established. Dunham et al. (2011) proposed that minimal group
effect was influential in learning bias, causing rapid internalization and entrenchment of social biases in the real world. Also confirmed was a robust preference for one’s own gender, which was particularly stronger for the girls than the boys (Dunham et al., 2011). In convergence with the findings about copying and group influence, understanding the origins of social bias is critical to the development of strategies to overcome prejudice early in ontogeny thus diminishing adverse consequences in society. Skinner, Meltzoff, and Olsen (2017) hypothesized that children would favor a target who received positive nonverbal signals from an adult and associates, or friends, of the target. Results indicated that children significantly preferred the target of positive nonverbal signals to the target of negative nonverbal signals. Children paid attention to how others interacted with peers, which influenced their decisions, suggesting that bias can be developed through social cues within the environment. Interestingly, children did not prefer the friend of the target of positive nonverbal signals over the friend of the negative nonverbal signals, although they were more likely to imitate actions demonstrated by the negative nonverbal individual (Skinner et al., 2017). This outcome demonstrates that nonverbal bias results in social bias among preschoolers and can be generalized to others, such as friends of the target. The children appeared to attend to actions demonstrated toward others to inform decisions about who they preferred and how they would act toward others within a social environment. This study has important implications for bias development given that exposure to nonverbal bias against another, or a few members of a group, could be generalized to other members of that group.

The literature provided additional insight about the influence of the social environment on bias development. Nesdale and Lawson (2011) questioned whether a
child would respond to a group or school norm, which is the stated expectation for all children to like kids in other groups and be friendly toward them. Nesdale and Lawson (2011) found that 7-year old children had greater negative attitudes toward the out-group than 10-year-old children did of the in-group, and toward others when the in-group had a norm of exclusion. Children were more positive toward the out-group when there was a school norm of acceptance. Nesdale and Lawson (2011) suggested that out-group acceptance increases with age, and positive expectations could counterbalance the influence of children’s social groups.

Social groups are influential and can be impacted by positive norms of expectation, yet Wilks, Kapitany, and Nielsen (2016) revealed that children demonstrated the ability to evaluate what to copy. This study supported the notion that groups were influential in a child’s decision-making process. Wilks et al. (2016) established that children were inclined to follow the action of a successful individual over an unsuccessful action supported by a group. Although, when the action was ritualized, or followed by a response perceived as normal, such as supportive applause, children were apt to follow the group in general (Wilks et al., 2016). Children are discerning followers and gauge what to copy and from whom across situations.

Overall, these studies provided insight about the decision-making process of children as it pertains to copying behaviors, evaluating what to copy including the successful actions of a group, favoring the target in receipt of positive nonverbal signals, and the impact of school norms to moderate social norms as the basis for bias development. All children enter school with a degree of bias developed since birth (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). The social learning environment provides a plethora of
opportunity for children to interact with peers where potential also exists for typical, daily social interactions, which reinforce bias because of the automaticity of responses thus creating disadvantages for another. Left unchecked, bias can result in prejudice, the unjustified, unfair, negative attitude toward another based upon their membership in a group. Akin to bias development, prejudice development has the potential to unfold during the early years of growth.

**Child development and prejudice.** Research on children’s experiences of discrimination, the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex, show a robust association between these experiences and compromised development (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Pascoe and Smart Richmond (2009) verified that poor psychological, academic, behavioral, and health outcomes for children perpetuated social inequality and maintained an environment that resisted equity and justice. Studies show that prejudice follows a predictable developmental course (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Quin et al., 2016; Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). In addition, awareness about how micro-protections moderate the discrimination that a child experiences, including verbal and nonverbal discriminatory interactions experienced by African Americans, sheds light on a prejudice backdrop through the parental and individual perspective (Winslow, Aaron, & Amadife, 2011).

The seminal work of Doyle and Aboud (1995) provided guiding research for understanding the developmental nature of prejudice. Kindergarten children were significantly more positive to White individuals and negative toward Black and Native American Indian individuals. By Grade 3, positive or negative evaluations by race do not
differ. In addition, positive evaluations of White individuals did not change significantly with age but increased for evaluations of Black and Native American Indian individuals. This early study documented that prejudice is high in kindergarten and decreases over the early years of childhood. This is supported by Baron and Banaji (2006), who reported that implicit race attitudes are acquired early, around age 6, and they remain stable, even though explicit attitudes became more egalitarian. By age 6, children appear to form noticeable implicit attitudes toward social groups. The authors indicated that conscious race attitudes began to emerge around age 10, when a balance between equal preference for the in-group and out-group continued into adulthood (Baron & Banaji, 2006).

A meta-analysis consisting of 113 research reports was conducted to understand age differences in ethnic, racial, or national prejudice among children and adolescents (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). The selected studies compared prejudice in at least two age groups, including participants up to age 19, and assessed prejudice as a negative reaction toward ethnic and racial out-groups. Age-related change in prejudice was limited to childhood only; there was no systematic prejudice development above the age of 10 years (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011).

It should be noted that systematic age differences in prejudice can be found in childhood, and age-related differences in prejudice among adolescents were only found within single studies (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Albeit the inverted U-curve in childhood prejudice development was supported within the literature, Raabe and Beelmann (2011) noted that changes in prejudice follow a predictable course when taking various facets of prejudice and the social environment into consideration. For example, social status is a key socioenvironmental element that influences prejudice growth in
childhood, yet findings also support the notion that children between middle and late childhood begin to control prejudice responses and make conscious assessments between social groups (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). In addition, it was noted that prejudice becomes more distinguished and increasingly complex with age, demonstrated by no change in prejudice toward national out-groups between middle and late childhood, yet there is a decrease in prejudice toward Black and other ethnic or racial groups. Raabe and Beelmann (2011) suggested that with increased age, social context has a stronger effect on prejudice development as one reaches adolescence.

Even in a homogenous culture, Chinese children demonstrated implicit racial bias starting as early as age 3, which remained stable through age 5 (Qian et al., 2016). This finding supports the outcome of prior studies and reinforces a potential foundation for prejudice development. Age-related changes in prejudice evidenced in childhood peak around age 7, then it slightly decreases. Additionally, when children are in contact with individuals of various races and ethnic groups, prejudice was reduced.

Confirming these findings, Enesco, Lago, Rodriguez, and Guerrero (2011) reported that children ages 3 through 5 maintained a preference for their in-group, in this case, Spaniard peers, over out-group targets of Latin Americans, Africans, and Asians, although they did not demonstrate a negative view of the groups. This supported Allport’s (1958) findings that attachment to one’s own group is primary and precedes intergroup hostility or prejudice. In addition, Enesco et al. (2011) noted that cognitive performance was positively associated with in-group favoritism and positivity. The higher the children performed on cognitive measures, the more likely they demonstrated
a preference for the in-group, suggesting a limitation on age, alone, is a predictor of early attitudes.

Raabe and Beelmann (2011) and Qian et al. (2016) underscored evidence from Doyle and Aboud (1995) indicating prejudice increases until middle childhood then it decreases. This adds support to the notion that prejudice development takes a predictable course in early child development. In addition, the data have implications for the timing and identification of potential interventions to mitigate the development of both explicit and implicit bias in young children.

Weller and Lagattuta (2013) provided insight that revealed race influences European American children’s choice to favor the racial in-group when rating how happy they would feel helping another child and how obligated they would feel to make personal sacrifice to help another. Across ages 5 to 13, children judged that characters would feel more positive emotions helping an unfamiliar child from the racial in-group versus the African American out-group. They were also happier ignoring the needs of a child from the racial out-group over the in-group, and they expressed greater obligation to help a child from the racial in-group over the out-group. This study supports early bias development in children’s pro-social judgments as referenced by Dunham et al. (2011) and McGuigan (2013).

Social experiences of African Americans provide valuable insight regarding how prejudice is received through words and actions from those who live with it including name calling, stereotyping, rude behavior, avoidance, segregation, and paranoid behaviors (Winslow et al., 2011). This study reinforces the predictable, developmental
nature of prejudice during childhood and the implications for those on the receiving end of discriminatory words and actions.

The literature review continues with a focus on empathy. Empathy is a social and emotional skill that has been suggested as an anecdote to prejudice development (Durlak et al., 2011; Paluck & Green, 2009).

**Child development and empathy.** Empathy is a complex phenomenon involving both cognitive and affective processes. Cognitive empathy, or perspective taking, can be defined as the awareness and understanding of another’s emotion; affective empathy refers to the vicarious experience of emotions consistent with those of the observed target (Davis, 1983). Stern and Cassidy (2018) reviewed evidence that suggests the beginning of empathy appears early in ontogeny, and that individual differences have a meaningful impact on social behavior and relationships throughout development.

Laible, Panfile, Murphy, and Augustine (2013) studied 71 mother-child dyads to determine the influence of attachment security on empathy concern. Mothers completed a measure to determine their child’s degree of attachment at 42 and 48 months; the child was observed after hearing an infant, alone in another room, crying for 1 minute. Their empathetic responses were coded on a 4-point scale, ranging from no concern or change in expression to strong facial concern with furrowed brows and a downward turned mouth for at least 8 seconds. It was determined that greater attachment security at 42 months predicted higher levels of empathetic concern at both 42 and 48 months (Laible et al., 2013). The researchers suggested that sensitive care givers modeled empathetic responses. Liable et al. (2013) recommended future research to determine the processes that allow secure children to experience greater levels of empathetic response such as
emotion regulation. Findings suggest that secure children learn to improve emotional regulation, which, in turn, leads to greater empathetic responding.

Van der Graaff, Branje, DeWied, Hawk, and Van Lier (2013) engaged in a 6-year longitudinal study to determine gender development of perspective taking and empathetic concern where 497 adolescents, ages 13 to 16 years, who self-reported their empathetic dispositions. Perspective taking is defined as the actions one takes; empathetic concern is defined as how one feels. Reported results indicate that perspective taking increased during adolescence for both boys and girls, while it only increased for boys from age 15 on. Although the girls had higher levels of empathetic concern than the boys, there was not an increase over the age range studied for either gender. These results suggest that perspective taking and empathetic concern develop differently, and trends are also dissimilar between boys and girls.

Bensalah, Caillies, and Anduze (2016) sought to understand the correlation between a young child’s affective perspective taking, cognitive empathy, and theory of mind, which is the ability to attribute mental states to self or others. Results indicate that other-focused comes before self-focused attribution in the developmental process, suggesting that children focus on the experiences and feelings of others at an earlier age before engaging in the ability to explain shared emotions. In addition, a significant increase in self-focused attribution suggested that it could be an indicator of the emerging development of role taking, thus leading to empathy development in young children. Cognitive empathy scores, both other-focused and self-focused, were significantly correlated with theory of mind (Bensalah et al., 2015). When children were oriented toward others, they became involved with that person’s emotion or emotional event,
which is foundational for empathy development. This study suggests that empathy development is possible during childhood years.

Dixon, Murray, and Daiches (2012) posited that children have the ability to learn empathy. In this study, children were able to generate a range of possible explanations that focused around external, environmental causes for one’s emotionality such as family, friends, socioeconomic, and educational factors. The notion of fault also played a role in determining whether empathy or blame was a more appropriate response toward someone with unusual or difficult behaviors (Dixon et al., 2012). Children with emotional difficulties may be at risk of exclusion from their peer group if perceived as responsible for their actions. Conversely, they are more likely to be chosen as a friend, or accepted, if their actions are perceived as being outside of their control. The themes uncovered in Dixon et al. (2012) suggest that children can identify consequences and solutions for peers who demonstrate difficult or unusual behavior, and it also revealed an understanding for the emotional difficulties in others. The children’s eagerness to discuss those difficulties in relation to their experiences provides insight to empathy development.

**Empathy as a moderator.** Research has established that empathy can foster understanding of different perspectives, and it can assist in resolving differences, as noted in Dixon et al. (2012), Bang (2013), and Alverez-Castillo, Fernandez-Caminero, and Gonzalez-Gonzalez (2018). In addition, studies have revealed that empathy is important to model and foster in young children (Midgette, 2018; Parker et al., 2012).

Bang (2013) explored empathy and prosocial behaviors within real-world issues through the use of video vignettes outlining issues focused on children’s rights such as
poverty, war, and child labor. All of the children in the study, seven Korean middle schoolers living in Australia, responded with a demonstration of cognitive empathy, the ability to understand others’ feelings, situations, and thoughts. In addition, there was a positive connection between empathy and prosocial intentions and behaviors. Albeit limiting in terms of the number of participants, the findings reveal that children engaged in cognitive empathy, and they had the ability to determine prosocial responses, such as intention to help or give in some way, when faced with actual scenarios.

Midgette (2018) suggested that children and adolescents could generate strategies to correct misbehavior and modify personal shortcomings. The themes noted a desire for self-improvement and a realization that slowing down to think before acting and having awareness of a situation is beneficial. The children participants had a desire to correct their wrongs and, while they had strategies to correct their mistakes, they also indicated that learning to improve or strengthen these strategies would be helpful. The open-minded nature of young children suggests the potential for interventions to curtail implicit bias at a young age (Midgette, 2018).

Alverez-Castillo et al. (2018) engaged in a study with 260 university students with an aim at explaining the relationship between personality, ideology, and prejudice with empathy introduced as a mediator. Measures to explain prejudice focused on personality traits (agreeableness, openness, neuroticism); ideological attitudes (right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation); and general empathy. Right-wing authoritarianism was defined as an attitude identified with general aggressiveness directed at groups (Alverez-Castillo et al., 2018). The study shows that as openness and agreeableness increase, empathy increases. However, empathy was not dominant in the
ability to reduce blatant or subtle prejudice. Another interesting and significant finding was that as openness decreases, right-wing authoritarianism increases, which show statistical significance as a moderator, or predictor, of blatant and subtle prejudice (Alverez-Castillo et al., 2018). Although empathy did not have a direct impact on either blatant or subtle prejudice, there was an interesting path uncovered that would predict prejudice. This path was through right-wing authoritarianism. Therefore, a reduction in aggressive words and actions through the enhancement of an open and agreeable nature to others and experiences, which lead to perspective taking, has merit as a prejudice-reduction strategy. This Alverez-Castillo et al. (2018) study provides support for open and agreeable attitudes, including altruism, honesty, and acceptance, toward others as elements to consider in an effort to reduce prejudice development.

In a meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal SEL programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students, the positive impact of SEL programs for students were highlighted (Durlak et al., 2011). In addition to an 11% achievement gain for students engaged in an SEL program, Durlak et al. (2011) highlighted emotion recognition, stress-management, empathy, problem solving, and decision-making skills as elements of social-emotional skill performance yielding the largest effect size. The social-emotional ability of identifying emotion from social cues and perspective taking were the underlying skills required to demonstrate empathy, resulting in possible improved relationships. This study provided insight about specific elements of an anti-bias curriculum that would assist learners in developing empathetic interactions toward others.
Backstrom and Bjorklund (2007) sought to determine whether social dominance orientation, empathy, and right-wing authoritarianism has direct effects on generalized prejudice. It was determined that empathy contributed to the prediction of generalized prejudice, even when social dominance and right-wing authoritarianism were a part of the model. In addition, there was a direct effect of empathy on generalized prejudice in that one’s inability to put themselves in another’s shoes was related to both anti-egalitarian views and prejudice (Backstrom & Bjorklund, 2007). The findings indicate that empathy should be considered as a main predictor of individual difference in prejudice. Backstrom and Bjorklund (2007) demonstrated that empathy affects how we perceive others.

In a narrative, systematic review to determine factors that influence the development of empathy and pro-social behavior, Silke, Brady, Boylan, and Dolan (2018) noted that emotional regulation skills are significantly associated with empathy and pro-social responses, and empathy and prosocial responding are significantly correlated. They also suggested that the relationship between social and psychological factors and empathic attitudes have been less explored than that of prosocial responding (Silke et al., 2018). The authors suggested that future research would allow for greater inference about which factors are associated with greater empathic attitudes to inform and guide intervention strategies.

Burns et al. (2017) engaged in a qualitative study with children ages 7 to 11 in Northern Ireland to explore what respect for diversity meant in an increasingly diverse culture emerging from conflict. Empathy was an affective element identified, shedding light on a potential socialization approach to be employed by parents and teachers. The strategy of empathy development could result in children circumventing a prejudice
attitude. In addition to nurturing empathy in children, they also suggested that fostering respectful interactions teaches how to put empathy into action (Burns et al., 2017). This finding implies that programs aimed at promoting positive relationships within a community should also promote acts of solidarity, such as activism or protest, as a respectful action on behalf of others (Burns et al., 2017).

Abrams, Van de Vyver, Pelletier, and Cameron (2015) examined how intergroup competition, social perspective taking (SPT), and empathy influenced children’s pro-social intentions toward out-group members. Although empathy was not related to age in this study of children ages 5 to 10, SPT was related to age. In addition, empathy and SPT were not significantly related, demonstrating that they are independent of each other. Data showed that children with higher empathy had more pro-social intentions in both a competitive and noncompetitive context. Additionally, findings show that SPT may allow children to understand the perspective of another without sharing or agreeing with their view or motive. In a noncompetitive circumstance, children with greater SPT ability demonstrated greater pro-sociality toward an out-group member, and this increased with age (Abrams et al., 2015). This research demonstrates that empathy played a role in pro-social responses toward out-group members.

Miller, Nuselovici, and Hastings (2016) set out to understand the multifaceted nature of empathy and its relationship to pro-social development through a physiological perspective. Respiratory sinus arrhythmia (RSA), heart rate variability that corresponds to breathing, was measured as each of 180 children, ages 4 to 6, observed a video of another child experiencing sadness and the degree to which this would predict the pro-social act of kindness. This was measured at the time of the study and again 2 years later to
determine if this would forecast future pro-social behavior. Miller et al. (2016) showed that children with a more flexible RSA were more likely to report feeling sad during the video. These subjective reports also linked to greater empathy and pro-social behavior. This study suggests that children’s conscious awareness of their own feelings may be an important step in converting neurobiological responses into helping others.

**Social and emotional learning in elementary education.** The Report of the Surgeon General’s Conference on Children’s Health (U.S. Public Health Service, 2000) expressed the importance of mental health promotion and social-emotional learning for optimal child development and school performance. Mental health is purported as a critical component in learning and general health. Fostering this as an element of health child development was cited as a national priority (U.S. Public Health Service, 2000).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020), an organization whose mission it is to make social and emotional learning an integral part of a child’s education from preschool to high school, identified national data (Civic Enterprises, Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013) via teacher surveys, in the report, *The Missing Piece: A National Teacher Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Empower Children and Transform Schools: A Report for CASEL*, to assess the role and value of SEL. SEL involves processes through which people develop competencies in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013). Nearly all teachers surveyed, 93%, believed SEL was very or fairly important for a child’s school experience, and 95% believed these skills were teachable and beneficial to students from all backgrounds, rich or poor. In addition, a majority of the teachers
surveyed indicated that SEL enhanced academic performance (77%), increased student interest in learning (78%), improved student behavior (79%), and strengthen school climate (66%) (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013). Nearly half of the teachers identified bullying as, at least, somewhat of a problem, and 75% of these teachers identified SEL as very important. Key accelerators for SEL were identified as school-wide, programming-explicit standards that included in-state, education-standard documents, and improved professional development to support knowledge, pedagogy, and practices, as well as increased parent engagement through skill reinforcement at home. The report for CASEL (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013) identifies a call to action stating:

The lack of urgency around SEL implementation in schools threatens the future success of America’s children. SEL is a proven strategy that is endorsed by teachers across the country. Yet too few schools and far fewer school systems are adopting explicit evidence-based SEL strategies or integrating evidence-based SEL approaches, both of which are needed. SEL has been underutilized for too long. Our lack of action inhibits students across the country from fully realizing their potential as knowledgeable, responsible, caring, and contributing individuals. The time has passed to debate whether schools should make SEL a central focus. Now we must act to ensure our students and teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in school, work, and life.

(p. 8)

After an extensive review of the research, including the report for CASEL (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013), NYSED created a document to address the need for SEL in schools, with an introduction to a series of resources including voluntary Social

**Friendship Workshop.** The Friendship Workshop is a classroom intervention that incorporates explicit instruction on the social and emotional elements of emotion vocabulary, emotion recognition, and emotion regulation (Buckley, 2015). Durlak et al. (2011) noted that interventions incorporated into routine educational practices, which do not require outside personnel for their delivery, are most effective. Through the use of literature, mini-lessons, and active engagement, children can learn how to identify their own emotions and the emotions of others. Mackey and Vocht-van Alphen (2016) supported the use of story to make social justice more visible to children. In addition, Johnson and Aboud (2017) demonstrated that cross-race picture book intervention has the potential to reduce racial prejudice. The use of literature to foster affective development is supported in the research.

Buckley (2015) suggested that learning empathy shifts one’s language to be honest, forgiving, and respectful. Beginning with an in-depth look at facial expressions and body language via large, close-up photographs of children in various emotional states, children described the physical aspects they noticed; they mimicked and observed peers express the same emotion; and they articulated situations that might have induced those emotions. For each of 7 weeks, the children focused on the physical features of happy, sad, mad, excited, disgusted, surprised, and being afraid.
Buckley (2015) described the format of the Friendship Workshop beginning with a whole-group mini-lesson focused on a specific social or emotional skill through the use of literature, photographs, or observing a short video clip. Children share their experiences within a safe circle with the teacher being an equal member of the group. Through honest discussion, where individuals reveal their mistakes or lack of knowledge, risking embarrassment, trust is created within the group. Trusting relationships foster conversations where the group learns from each other in a connected and safe space. Emotional vocabulary is introduced, incorporated into daily discussions, and reinforced throughout the day. Affirming this approach are the findings of Durlak et al. (2011), which identify the largest effect size for an emphasis on SEL programs that incorporated emotion recognition, empathy, problem-solving, and decision-making skills.

Following the mini-lesson and discussion, an activity, such as role playing or a group art project, highlights the targeted emotion, where additional time is created to share experiences. During this time, one-on-one conversations can take place between individuals and the teacher who is reinforcing that emotions are normal, passing, and changeable states of mind. This approach is supported by Burns et al. (2017) who suggested that for an intervention to be successful in building respect, the empathy being developed must also be turned into action.

In addition to this ongoing process of learning emotional vocabulary and recognition, emotional regulation is fostered through a classroom environment that promotes a student’s capacity to feel safe, calm, and peaceful (Buckley, 2015). As children learn to focus on how their bodies feel and notice the body language of their peers, self-control increases with these ongoing experiences. In addition to formal
lessons, learning opportunities are presented throughout each day for individuals to engage in one-on-one reinforcement by the teacher until their responses are generalized to others without adult support. The social and emotional skills that frame the Friendship Workshop are the affective curriculum. Buckley (2015) suggested that through these themes, a rigorous, dynamic, and supportive learning environment is created for each unique class.

Chapter Summary

The literature review provided insight regarding the nature of child development pertaining to bias, prejudice, and empathy development. Additional research was reviewed demonstrating the role of empathy as a moderator in one’s social and emotional development. The landscape underscoring the importance of fostering social and emotional development in the elementary education arena provides a rationale for including interventions within classrooms. And finally, an overview of the Friendship Workshop elements was provided for clarity about this classroom intervention. Together, these elements provide strength and meaning to the foundation to empirically study the Friendship Workshop as an intervention to reduce prejudice, thus addressing implicit bias, given the lack of research to support its efficacy.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Implicit bias, the unconscious unknowing that one is in favor of or against an idea or group, is part of the human experience. Banaji and Greenwald (2016) suggested that hidden biases in thought and action can cause undesired, unintended results. Without reason or experience, preconceived opinions about people or groups of people lead to prejudice formation if left unchecked. Dessel (2010) proposed that prejudice is a significant factor contributing to bullying and harassment in schools. In addition, members of diverse groups, based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other cultural factors, are more likely to be targeted. Priest et al. (2013) identified a strong, consistent relationship between racial discrimination and well-being for children.

Evidence of discrimination, which impacts the health and welfare of children, underscores the importance of interventions to reduce it.


In spite of political sentiment and education efforts around this topic, the FBI reported the most prominent form of hate crime as anti-Black or anti-African American
Recent occurrences in the United States are alarming reminders of the power of prejudice (Heim, 2017; Murphy, 2019).

In a review of interventions aimed at reducing prejudice, only a fraction of the hundreds of studies examined spoke to whether, why, and under what conditions an intervention works (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Berger et al., 2018; Paluck & Green, 2009; Taylor et al., 2017). An evaluation to support the efficacy of the Friendship Workshop, a classroom intervention technique to enhance empathy development (Buckley, 2015), had not occurred as of the start of this study. The following research questions guided the study:

1. After 8 months of participation in the Friendship Workshop intervention, what were the students’ changes in empathy, negative or positive, from the teachers’ perspectives as evidenced from the Empathy Quotient pre and post questionnaire?

2. After 8 months of participation in the Friendship Workshop intervention, what were the children’s changes in empathy, negative or positive, from the parent/guardians’ perspectives as evidenced from the Empathy Quotient pre and post questionnaire?

The nature of this inquiry justified a study design based on a quantitative, quasi-experimental research methodology, specifically noted as a preexperimental design owing to the lack of a comparison group (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2017). The one-group pretest and posttest design was utilized given that all the participants were assigned to the experimental group, a pretest occurred near the beginning of the intervention, and a posttest followed participation in the intervention. Gliner et al. (2017) indicated this
design is typical when exploring new interventions where there is no control group and the only comparison is from the pretest to the posttest with the same group. The quasi-experimental approach provided data about whether the Friendship Workshop, as the independent variable, had an impact on empathy, the dependent variable.

**Research Context**

The classrooms identified for this research were led by teachers who engaged in professional development focused on the Friendship Workshop, including a face-to-face workshop delivered by the author or with a professional book study. In addition, the teachers had experience implementing the intervention for 1 or more years. The names and districts of the participants were made available by the author, who provided the professional development course via a Teacher Center, by an invitation to the district, or by being contacted by a district to lead a book study. The research took place in two elementary schools where the Friendship Workshop professional development course occurred.

The two elementary schools that included teachers who met the above criteria were, at the time of this research, situated in the Eastern Region of the United States with enrollment ranging from 430 to 750 students between kindergarten and Grade 5. The schools were a part of a larger system with three to seven total elementary schools within the district. The demographic ranges included:

- an economically disadvantaged population between 24 and 31%,
- students with disabilities between 10 and 11%,
- a White ethnicity population between 75 and 84%,
- a Black or African American population between 2 and 7%,
• a Hispanic or Latino population between 7 and 9%,
• an English language learner population between 2 and 7%,
• an English language arts proficiency between 34 and 48%, and
• A math proficiency between 41 and 64% (NYSED, 2020).

The classroom teachers engaged in this study had between 15 and 25 years of teaching experience at the elementary level. All had strengthened their understanding of the Friendship Workshop, and they had the ability to integrate the intervention into their teaching repertoire by engaging in 2 to 5 years of book-study discussions with peers or at least one professional development workshop lasting between 4 and 6 hours by the author. At least two of the teachers provided staff development workshops on the concept of the Friendship Workshop to colleagues within and outside of their school district. The classrooms within this study were either kindergarten classrooms; integrated co-taught kindergarten classrooms, meaning there were children with individualized education plans within the class; or K/1 multi-age classrooms, meaning half of the classes were kindergarten students and half were in Grade 1.

**Research Participants**

Convenience sampling was used to identify available participants for this study. Eligible teachers were those who engaged in the Friendship Workshop professional development course and who implemented the intervention for at least 1 year prior to this research. The recruitment process identified a pool of candidates meeting the requirements for this study, beginning with a review of the Friendship Workshop professional development rosters from the previous 4 years, which were made available by the author of *Sharing the Blue Crayon* (Buckley, 2015). Professional development
experiences of the potential participants could include direct teaching in a seminar format, a professional book circle, or an overview at a professional conference. Eligible participant parents were those who had children within the identified classrooms who were experiencing the Friendship Workshop for the first time.

Using professional development rosters as a guide, contact via telephone was made with superintendents and then with building principals of the districts who had qualified participating teachers who had participated within the school year during which the Friendship Workshop was incorporated into the classroom routine. Background information about the study and teacher identification regarding who participated in the Friendship Workshop professional development was shared, and questions were answered. A follow-up introductory email provided information in written form (Appendix A).

After receiving written agreement from both the superintendent and building principal (Appendix B) to engage in the recruitment process, email contact was made with potential teachers that included an informed consent form and a letter of introduction (Appendix C and Appendix D). A maximum of three emails were sent during the recruitment process; if a teacher did not respond after the third email, the recruitment process for that individual ceased.

Once a teacher agreed to participate, by returning an affirmative email, two separate mailings were sent via FedEx delivery. The first mailing included a code reference list (Appendix E), a set of coded empathy quotient (EQ) teacher questionnaires (Appendix F), and an addressed, stamped envelope in which to return the completed questionnaires to the researcher. The return address matched the mailing address of the
research site to ensure confidentiality regarding which classes the questionnaires represented.

The teachers added student names, in random order, to the code reference list, which served as a memory guide to ensure student questionnaires matched between the pretest and posttest assessments. The teachers maintained this list; confidentiality for student names and codes was preserved as the researcher did not have access to this information throughout the study. The teachers shredded this document once the posttest questionnaires were sent to parents.

The second FedEx mailing included sealed, coded envelopes that were hand carried by the students to their parent via the routine system used by the teachers. These envelopes included an introductory letter signed by the classroom teacher and the school principal (Appendix G), an invitation from the researcher (Appendix H), the SJFC informed consent form (Appendix C), a coded EQ parent questionnaire (Appendix F); and an addressed, stamped envelope for return of the completed EQ questionnaire to the researcher. The return mailing address matched the mailing address of the research site to ensure confidentiality regarding which student the questionnaire represented. All information was returned to the research site. By returning the EQ questionnaire, a parent indicated agreement to participate in the study. Only a coded EQ parent questionnaire was returned to the researcher in the envelope provided so that the identity of the child was unknown to the researcher.

Given the unanticipated national pandemic caused by the coronavirus, resulting in school closures and strict quarantine measures throughout the state, the study concluded after 6 months. The participant teachers received a FedEx mailing that included the coded
EQ teacher questionnaires and an addressed, stamped envelope with the same return address as the researcher’s home. In addition, sealed and coded envelopes with a coded EQ parent questionnaire and the same addressed, stamped envelope were included for distribution via the USPS. The teachers only had to affix the parents’ address labels with the corresponding coded envelopes.

Parents/guardians and teachers were asked to consider their students’ behaviors prior to or at the beginning of the school year as the pre-assessment perspective, and behaviors to be noted at the conclusion of the school year for the post assessment. The 8-month period identified for the study correlated with a typical school year for an elementary student attending a public school. Results for individual children were not be provided to teachers or the parents. Confidentiality was maintained for all data associated with every child, class, and school.

The participating teachers completed the EQ questionnaire for each student in their class. While it was recognized that all parents may not have participated, additional data collected by those parents who did participate added a supplementary perspective to the results. Any parent or teacher could opt out of the study at any time and could choose to opt out of any statement noted on the EQ questionnaire. Data for children who entered or left the class within the school year were not included in the analysis. The researcher was available for parent or teacher questions via email or phone throughout the study.

According to Gliner et al. (2017), a quasi-experimental design includes a minimum of 30 participants. Therefore, to meet this threshold and obtain the maximum possible number of participants, every teacher and parent recruited who agreed to participate was included in the study to complete pre- and post-EQ questionnaires.
Parents who completed the measures received a thank you note at the
closure of the study. The teachers received a $100 gift certificate to a school supply
store for their time, which totaled approximately 3 hours each for the pre- and post-
survey. The gift certificates accompanied thank you letters that were sent to the
participants at the conclusion of the study. A copy of the letter and gift certificate is
stored with the researcher as evidence of their existence.

**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

The participant parents and teachers completed the EQ questionnaire
(Appendix F), a questionnaire with 27 statements, available within the public domain,
designed to provide a reliable and valid measure of empathy (Auyeung et al., 2009). The
same measure was used for the pre- and post-EQ assessments.

Response items for each statement included a 4-point Likert-type scale indicating
definitely agree, slightly agree, definitely disagree, and slightly disagree. Statement
examples included: the child shows concern when others are upset; the child gets upset
when seeing another child crying or in pain. The EQ assessment was expected to take
approximately 10 minutes to complete per child.

The EQ assessment was developed as a measure of empathy due to shortcomings
in existing instruments to assess subtle differences in empathy in both clinical and
general populations (Allison, Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Stone, & Muncer, 2011).
Auyeung et al. (2009) developed and administered the child version of the EQ assessment
to 1,256 parents of typically developing children, ages 4-11, who participated in a large,
epidemiological study of social and communication skills in and around Cambridge, UK.
Only parents of the children who previously reported their child had no special needs or
disabilities, otherwise identified as typically developing, were contacted for the study. Parents responded to 27 empathy statements requiring them to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed. Results indicated the questionnaire exhibited excellent test-retest reliability and high internal consistency and, on average, girls scored higher than boys (Auyeung et al., 2009). In addition, Allison et al. (2011) assessed the instrument using the Rasch and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) methods to test whether the questions were consistent with the theory it supported. Results suggest the EQ assessment measured a single dimension of empathy, was supported by the CFA, and was acceptable to use as a summed total EQ score. Previously reported differences in EQ scores between sexes and groups were also confirmed. Together, two statistical approaches, Rasch and CFA, highlighted complementary and similar results (Allison et al., 2011).

**Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis**

Data required for analysis were downloaded into an Excel file, systematized through confidential student codes, to organize pretest and posttest data. Data incorporated into the Excel file are secure and confidential and maintained at the researcher’s residence on a thumb drive or in a locked file cabinet, and all will be destroyed 3 years after publication of this study. A simple arrangement of data was presented in aggregate form with no identifiers of district, school, class, teacher, or student to maintain confidentiality and minimize potential teacher bias.

The EQ assessment scoring key, available in the public domain, indicates a *slightly agree* response score of 1 point, and a *definitely agree* response score of 2 points on 14 of the EQ assessment elements. A response of *slightly disagree* or *definitely
Disagree scores 0 points. Slightly disagree scores one point and definitely disagree scores 2 points on 13 of the EQ assessment elements. A response of slightly agree or definitely agree scores 0 points (Auyeung et al., 2009). The maximum attainable score is 54.

Descriptive statistical analysis serves to describe and understand the features of this specific data set in a sensible way (Gliner et al., 2017). Data received from the participant teachers and parents were analyzed to determine the change in student empathy. Each child’s score was created by the difference between their pre- and post-EQ assessment scores. Those children with parents who chose to participate in the study had an additional score. The mean, range, and median scores from the teacher and parents’ perspectives was determined for all the students. Confidentiality was preserved as the researcher was not privy to student names that were associated with the codes. Descriptive statistics were incorporated to note empathy change within the sampled population after engaging in the Friendship Workshop for a minimum of 6 months.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this research study was to determine whether the classroom intervention of the Friendship Workshop increased empathy development. The research methodology established elements of a quantitative design to determine whether the 6-month Friendship Workshop intervention changed the level of empathy demonstrated by the students from the perspective of their teachers and parents. Pre- and post-intervention data were collected, then descriptive statistics, as outlined by Gliner et al. (2017), informed and guided the analysis process.

A plan of action began with a presentation of the dissertation proposal, then completion and approval of the IRB process. Initial contact was then made with
superintendents and principals of schools including possible teacher recruits. After receiving signed agreements, the teachers were recruited via email. After receiving an affirmative email, two FedEx mailings were sent to the participating teacher containing information specific to the teacher and the parents. At the conclusion of 6 months, nearly an entire academic school year, coded EQ post assessments were delivered, in the same format, to the teachers and parents for completion.

An analysis of the results commenced. Thank you notes were sent to teachers and parents in coded envelopes for distribution. Data stored on a labeled thumb drive will be maintained for a period of 3 years in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s residence. This goal of this study was to determine the degree to which empathy increased for children who participated in the Friendship Workshop for a minimum of 6 months from the perspective of their teacher and parents.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the intervention of the Friendship Workshop changed students’ empathy, from both the teachers and parents’ perspectives. Empathy development can prevent prejudice development, which reduces or deters implications of implicit bias (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014). The need to identify educational interventions that increase empathy development is high, particularly in light of the current-day social injustices that continue to have racist overtones and often relate to implicit biases, including the highly publicized and national protest-initiating deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd, and threats by Amy Cooper (Burke, 2020; Hill et al., 2020; Shapiro et al., 2020; “Video shows,” 2020).

Additionally, CASEL (2013), an organization with a mission to make social and emotional learning an essential element of a child’s educational experience, emphasizes elements to hasten this process to ensure student success in school, work, and life. The Friendship Workshop, as a classroom intervention to promote empathy development, directly correlates with CASEL’s recommendations to identify evidence-based school-wide programming to support student potential.

The CASEL endorsement for explicit standards to be highlighted by state education departments is also acknowledged by those competencies outlined in the NYSED (2018) Social Emotional Learning Benchmark guidance document including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible
decision-making. This study correlates with the goals specifically outlined in the self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness goals and benchmarks that speak to identifying and managing one’s emotions and behaviors as well as recognizing the feelings and perspective of others (NYSED, 2018).

It should be noted that a national pandemic caused by a coronavirus, COVID-19, resulted in the closing of schools throughout New York State in mid-March of the 2020 school year in which this research took place. At that point, virtual instruction was implemented in varied ways within the school districts. This study concluded at the time of school closures, resulting in a 6-month Friendship Workshop experience rather than the 8 months originally articulated in the research questions.

**Research Questions**

The quantitative research design provided data regarding the effect the Friendship Workshop had on children’s empathy. Without a control group, the only comparison was with the scores from the pretest to the posttest within the same group of students. To guide this study, the EQ assessment was used to answer the following research questions:

1. After 6 months of participation in the Friendship Workshop intervention, what were the students’ changes in empathy, negative or positive, from the teachers’ perspectives as evidenced from the Empathy Quotient pre and post questionnaire?
2. After 6 months of participation in the Friendship Workshop intervention, what were the children’s changes in empathy, negative or positive, from the parent/guardians’ perspectives as evidenced from the Empathy Quotient pre and post questionnaire?
Data Analysis and Findings

Using Excel, the EQ questionnaire data were examined in relationship to the research questions to determine a positive or negative change in the children’s empathy level. The lens of descriptive statistics served to explain the features of this data set from four elementary classrooms, from both the teachers and parents’ perspectives. Data received from the teachers and parents were analyzed to determine the change in student empathy score. The difference between each student’s score was calculated between the pre- and post-EQ assessment, for which the questionnaire was completed by the teachers and parents who chose to participate in the study. Descriptive statistics from the teacher and parent/guardian perspective were then computed.

Four sets of classroom teachers completed a pre- and post-EQ questionnaire for 68 students ($N = 68$). Table 4.1 indicates the students’ change in empathy score from the teacher’s perspectives by determining the difference between the pre- and post-EQ assessment. Empathy increased for 81% of the student population, while 17% resulted in a reduction of empathy. One student, or 1.5%, showed neither an increase nor decrease in empathy. This calculation indicates that a majority of the children exhibited an increase in empathy after engaging in the Friendship Workshop intervention for 6 months.

The average performance of the total group on the EQ assessment, or the mean score, was calculated by adding all the individual differences and dividing by the number of total scores. The mean scores from the teacher perspective for the pretest and posttest, as shown on Table 4.2, were 30.8 and 38.57, respectively, which represents an overall increase of 7.77 points. The range is the difference between the lowest and highest scores, which is effective in showing and comparing the spread within the dataset and
similar datasets. The range of EQ scores from the teachers’ perspectives for the pretest was 49, calculated from scores of 5 to 54, and 43 was the score on the posttest, representing scores from 10 to 53. Within this perspective, the range of scores was reduced, demonstrating less dispersion, or distribution, from the mean, as teachers considered the actions of their students at the conclusion of the study. This statistic also supports an increase in empathy from the beginning of the school year to the point of school closure from the classroom teacher perspective.

Table 4.1

*Teacher Perspective, EQ Pre/Posttest Difference*

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<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
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*Note.* Maximum score = 54.
Table 4.2

EQ Pre/Posttest Descriptive Statistics from Teacher and Parent Perspectives

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher Perspective (N= 68)</th>
<th>Parent Perspective (N = 25)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
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<td>Standard Deviation</td>
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</table>

Because the mean, or average score, can be affected by outliers, the median score was also determined. By ranking data from largest to smallest then identifying the middle, a clearer representation of central tendency is determined. The median value for the pretest and posttest from the teachers’ perspectives was 30.5 and 42.5, respectively, representing an increase of 12 points. Compared to the mean, this calculation indicates a greater increase in empathy at the conclusion of the Friendship Workshop intervention, given the average posttest score was 38.57, 3.93 points less than the 42.5 median value. Overall, the descriptive statistics of mean, range, and median demonstrated an increase in student empathy throughout the 6 months of the Friendship Workshop intervention within the classroom environment from the teachers’ perspectives.

The standard deviation demonstrates the position of a value relative to the mean. Initial calculation of the variance, or the average of each distance from the mean squared, results in a reduction between the pretest and posttest from both the teacher and parent/guardian perspective as noted in Table 4.2. The square root of the variance results in the standard deviation measuring how much spread there is to the data set. A reduced
standard deviation from both perspectives indicates that most points are close to the average.

In addition to gathering teacher perspective data, every student’s parent/guardian was invited to complete a pretest and posttest questionnaire. Of the 68 students a total of 25 returned both questionnaires, resulting in a return rate of 36%. As noted in Table 4.2, two students, representing 8% of the test group, showed neither an increase nor a decrease in empathy, while 32% demonstrated a reduction in empathy. Most students, 60%, demonstrated an increase in empathy from the perspective of their parent/guardian.

Parent/guardian scores indicated a mean, or average, score of the total group, of 30.2 on the pretest and 34.48 on the posttest, representing an increase of 4.28 points (Table 4.3). While this was less of an increase than perceived by the teachers, which was 7.77, it illustrates an increase in empathy, nonetheless. The range, or difference between the lowest and highest EQ scores, was 43 and 35 for the pretest and posttest, respectively. Like the teachers, the parents communicated a range of scores for the posttest, representing less dispersion at the end of the study. This represents enhanced support of the mean as a representation of the data and less differences between the scores.

From the parent/guardian perspective, the median value of empathy scores increased by 6 points, using scores of 30 to 36 from the pretest and posttest, respectively. Comparing student datasets from the teachers and parents’ perspective through this lens indicates that both expressed an increase in empathy for the students engaged in the Friendship Workshop.
Table 4.3

Parent Perspectives, EQ Pre/Posttest Difference

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</table>

*Note.* Maximum score = 54.

Unanticipated Findings

A paired *t* test was used to compare the means of the teacher and parent/guardian EQ scores, the two populations that submitted pre- and post-data regarding the same subjects. This was used to determine if the mean of empathy, as the dependent variable, was the same within the participants when measured by two different groups. The purpose was to determine if there were any significant differences in the reporting of EQ scores from the parent/guardian perspective versus the teacher perspective. While there was no significant difference between groups on the pretest data, *t*(32) = 1.58, *p* = 0.062, there exists a significant difference in the mean reporting between groups on the posttest data, *t*(34) = 1.84, *p* = 0.037.

While the lack of a control group negates the ability to compare the increase in empathy of students who participated in the Friendship Workshop versus students who did not, the results of the study show that both parents and teachers indicated increased EQ scores for the students engaged in the Friendship Workshop for 6 months. Even though the study was unexpectedly shortened by the national coronavirus pandemic and...
there is a significant difference in the posttest scores between the teacher and parent results, both perspectives showed increased empathy on the part of the students engaged in the Friendship Workshop for the 6-month intervention period. Most of the statistics highlight this increase and suggest that the Friendship Workshop intervention model in the educational setting demonstrates promise to increase empathy. This model was supported by feedback from the teachers, who provided insight about the students’ behavior within the school setting, as well as the parents, who provided insight about their children’s behavior at home.

**Summary of Results**

This chapter reported the findings of this study which examined the change in student empathy after engaging in the Friendship Workshop, a classroom intervention to affect empathy development. After reviewing pre-intervention questionnaire data from the beginning of the school year and the post-intervention data, after 6 months of the Friendship Workshop implementation, descriptive statistics were calculated to describe and understand the features of this specific data set in a sensible way. Additionally, a paired *t* test was calculated to determine the difference between the teacher and parent data on both the pretest and posttest assessments. Data received from the teachers and parents were analyzed to determine the change in the students’ empathy. The implications of these findings, the limitations of this study, and the recommendations for future research are discussed in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the efficacy of the Friendship Workshop as a classroom intervention technique to enhance empathy development through emotion vocabulary, identification, and regulation (Buckley, 2016). Results indicate that students who engaged in the Friendship Workshop for the duration of the study increased their levels of empathy, suggesting promise for this intervention model. Implications of the findings are reviewed in addition to the limitations, recommendations for future research, and ideas for professional programming.

This study contributes to the research supporting empathy development to mitigate prejudice and the resulting discriminatory actions. Specifically, additional research supporting empathy development, as a social justice action for the educational arena to consider, is critical in its timing given the current national climate. While this study occurred during the onset of a national pandemic, there was also increased attention given to uprisings resulting from a tipping point of egregious experiences captured on social media highlighting the need for strengthened empathy in our society. Within a short span of time, a White female made erroneous accusations against a Black man bird watching in Central Park (“Video shows,” 2020); Black Lives Matter protests occurred worldwide, sparked by the murder of George Floyd (Black Lives Matter Protests 2020, 2020; Cave, Albeck-Ripka, & Magra, 2020; CNN World, 2020; and reactionary political actions, such as Civil War monument removals (Aguilera, 2020; Ebrahimji, Moshtighian,
& Johnson, 2020), added verve to public sentiment. As discussions within the personal, professional, and political arenas continue, increased empathy to increase one’s ability to recognize and experience the vicarious emotion of a target will enhance insight and support change. It is critical that the United States moves toward the dismantling of systemic racism and injustice. Incorporating classroom interventions to foster empathy development is a key element in this effort.

Implications of Findings

To accomplish the objectives outlined in Chapter 1 and further understand if the Friendship Workshop promotes empathy development, the following research questions were explored:

1. After 6 months of participation in the Friendship Workshop intervention, what were the students’ changes in empathy, negative or positive, from the teachers’ perspective as evidenced from the Empathy Quotient pre and post questionnaire?

2. After 6 months of participation in the Friendship Workshop intervention, what were the children’s changes in empathy, negative or positive, from the parent/guardians’ perspective as evidenced from the Empathy Quotient pre and post questionnaire?

Given the increased EQ scores for 81% and 60% of the student participants from the teacher and parent/guardian perspective, respectively, it is possible that the Friendship Workshop positively impacted empathy development during the 6-month experience. Researchers highlight emotion recognition and empathy as elements of social-emotional skill performance, yielding the largest effect size and note that social cues and
perspective taking were the underlying skills required to demonstrate empathy (Durlak et al., 2011). The Friendship Workshop is a classroom intervention that purports to foster a child’s perspective-taking ability through emotional vocabulary development and recognition. Overall, an analysis of the data gathered suggests that the Friendship Workshop demonstrates promise as an effective intervention to support empathy development.

The increased EQ scores suggest that the elements of emotion vocabulary, emotion recognition, and emotion regulation, which are foundational skills taught and reinforced within the Friendship Workshop model, improved a child’s ability to empathize. This study implies that the participants may have increased their capability to name and identify emotions within themselves and others. The appraisal theory of empathy and vicarious emotion identified by Wondra and Ellsworth (2015) treats empathy as a normal emotional experience and indicates that the appraisal people make for another and their situation determines an emotional outcome of empathy. Results indicate that the appraisal process, or the evaluation of an event or situation, may be further developed through the classroom intervention of the Friendship Workshop.

Additionally, a mean increase of 7.77 and 4.24 points from the school and home perspective relates to the findings of Bensalah et al. (2015) who conveyed that cognitive empathy scores, both other-focused and self-focused, increased when children were oriented toward others. The Friendship Workshop serves to provide a means for children to articulate their emotions or the emotions of others through a shared vocabulary that provides a foundation for the experience. This study further validates evidence suggesting
that empathy development is possible during childhood (Bensalah et al., 2015; Dixon et al., 2012).

While the overall descriptive statistics of this study suggest a general increase in empathy, a closer analysis of those who demonstrated a reduction occurred to determine possible patterns or trends within that population. Despite composite scores that rendered a reduction in empathy for 15 children, there is evidence that they, too, demonstrated a positive change within several statements. Over half of this group showed a reduction in an inclination to name call or tease, a reduction in their own preoccupation, thereby increasing their ability to notice others, and a reduction in blaming others for their actions. In addition, increased sensitivity for movie characters was noted. This would suggest that despite an overall reduced score for empathy development, improvement was noted in elements of the EQ that speak to a concern for others and perspective taking.

Given the optimistic descriptive statistics noted in the data analysis, the Friendship Workshop appears to have merit in supporting the social and emotional standards outlined by the NYSED, which specifically indicates a goal for students to increase their ability to identify and manage emotions and behaviors and recognize the feelings and perspectives of others (NYSED, 2018). These guiding standards articulated for New York State schools were identified, recognizing that knowing one’s emotions and how to manage them are important life skills (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013). In addition, the ability to recognize ideas, feelings, and viewpoints of other individuals, including those who are different from one’s own, and to empathize with others from diverse backgrounds, is vital to developing and sustaining positive relationships at all life stages (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013).
Unanticipated results were found when a paired $t$ test compared the mean of the teacher and parent/guardian scores. The difference between the reported scores on the posttest was found to be significant. Several possibilities exist for this difference. Due to the national coronavirus pandemic, schools swiftly closed as a response, and virtual instruction ensued. This interruption in the research required teachers and parents/guardians to complete the posttest during the early stages of this closure without clarity of when it would conclude. This dynamic may have impacted the scores from both perspectives. An increase in scores by teachers may have occurred as they reflected on their students within the classroom environment from the safety of their homes. While the change in instructional approach may have caused varied stress for teachers engaged in a virtual instructional approach for the first time in their careers, it also may have reduced the day-to-day stress of a classroom environment. This brings into question whether possible embellishment of scores occurred during the posttest data collection timeframe.

Concurrently, parents may have experienced increased responsibilities with instruction occurring at home, an unknowing timeline of how long that would continue, and possible personal or professional stressors given the impact of strict quarantine measures within the community. Any one of these factors could potentially have resulted in increased stress and reduced scores. Although the general analysis of parental/guardian data showed an increase in empathy on the part of their children, all scores were slightly lower than those reported by teachers. This is also supported by 32% of parents/guardians reporting a reduction in empathy on the posttest, whereas only 17% demonstrated a decrease from the teacher perspective. In addition, a parent/guardian may not have had the objective perspective of seeing their child interact with others outside their family.
unit during this unique time period, which may have impacted the manner in which they scored their child’s behavior noted on the EQ.

Another plausible consideration for the significant difference in the mean posttest scores is that the respondents observed the children in two different contexts, home and school. School may be more controlled. Teachers may have observed students within an environment of greater diversity including variety of students with varied life circumstances. There is likely a greater opportunity for children to engage with others they do not choose and are randomly grouped with the situations that occur within a typical school day. The random compilation of students with diverse experience and backgrounds creates an environment of forced relationship where learning to get along becomes an element of creating an environment, or classroom culture, conducive to learning.

Although it is less of a difference than that of the teachers, the 4.28 difference between the mean pretest and posttest data from the parent/guardian perspective may be more significant because what was being reported is empathy growth within a known and consistent environment. In addition, it is likely that the home conditions included less variation of participants with whom the children would be required to engage. The home environment is potentially more stable and inclusive of the same family members, so a positive change in empathy would include a level of steadiness that is different than that of the school experience.

Research suggests that empathy appears early in development, even prior to formal education experience (Bensalah et al., 2015; Liable et al., 2013; Stern & Cassidy, 2018). It is also evident that children can learn empathy (Burger et al., 2018; Dixon et al.,
2012; Taylor et al., 2017). It is unknown whether the change in empathy for the majority of children within the classrooms where the Friendship Workshop was implemented is due to the intervention, maturation, the overall experience of engaging in the educational setting, the children’s home lives, or a combination of these experiences. Empathy is a complex experience resulting from both cognitive and affective processes as both are integrated to incorporate perspective taking and the vicarious experience of emotion that is consistent with a target (Davis, 1983). While the EQ scores indicate an increase in empathy for most of the students, maturation, and life experiences in and outside the school environment likely impacted the results as well.

In summary, an analysis of the pretest and posttest findings indicates a general increase in empathy for most of the students engaged in the Friendship Workshop for 6 months. It is possible that the elements of the intervention, which were designed to increase empathy, including emotion vocabulary, emotion recognition, and emotion regulation through literature, peaceful moments, and perspective-taking experiences, impacted this improvement. Additionally, even most of the students who showed a decline in their EQ score demonstrated improvement in four specific elements of the questionnaire. This review suggests that the Friendship Workshop is a plausible intervention to support the NYSED SEL goals.

An unanticipated result is the significant difference in the mean posttest between the teachers and parent/guardians’ perspectives. Possible explanations for this disparity are noted. Finally, it is difficult to tease apart the roles that the Friendship Workshop, maturation, and various home and school experiences played in the increase in empathy scores.
Limitations

Although this study contributes to the literature regarding educational interventions that may increase empathy in children, there are limitations to consider. Shortcomings include a worldwide pandemic and the disruption of classroom experiences for children and adults, an inability of the survey research technique to ensure participant authenticity, survey response rate, and the fidelity of the Friendship Workshop implementation between participating classrooms and the research participants.

The first limitation relates to a worldwide pandemic, which interrupted the educational experience of nearly every child across the United States for 13 weeks, impacting the length of time this intervention was integrated into the four participating classrooms. While virtual learning experiences were employed, the degree to which this experience impacted the outcome of this study is unknown. The ability for families to engage in synchronous or asynchronous instruction is undetermined and anticipated to be varied. Any virtual instruction would be void of the classroom climate created within the typical setting, impacting a teacher’s ability to respond to student experiences in the moment throughout a school day. An additional 8 weeks of the Friendship Workshop intervention implementation within the typical classroom culture and experience may have resulted in an increased change from either the teacher or parent perspective, or possibly both.

Additionally, schools swiftly closed as a response to the national coronavirus pandemic. Soon after, schools adjusted, and some element of virtual instruction ensued. This interruption in the typical school year, thus the research, required teachers and parents/guardians to complete the posttest during the early stages of this closure without
clarity of when it would conclude. This dynamic may have impacted the scores from both perspectives.

A second limitation is that of a survey research technique, which does not guarantee the authenticity of the participant who responds to the paper/pencil survey questions. It is unclear whether the same parent or guardian completed both the pre- and post-questionnaire. Therefore, the perspective provided has potential to be from a different individual, which could alter the feedback provided on the questionnaire thus impacting pretest and posttest scores. This would result in potentially skewed data.

A third limitation is an average survey response rate. Greater attention to a stronger parent/guardian response rate would have further enhanced the results. While the EQ questionnaire response rate from the parents of 37% was within the benchmark of 35-40% identified for academic studies in the behavioral sciences (Baruch & Holtom, 2008), other techniques may have increased the size of this data set. Examples include a general reminder encouraging parent/guardian participation after the initial request; the use of a mixed-mode survey approach incorporating both a technological data collection tool, such as a survey app or web version, in addition to a paper/pencil approach; and use of incentives to encourage participation. Although, it should be noted that based on a recent meta-analysis conducted by Daikeler, Bošnjak, and Manfreda (2020) examining the differences in the response rate between web surveys and other survey modes, it was estimated that a web survey response rate is approximately 12% lower than other survey modes. Additionally, in mail surveys, consistent evidence indicates that pre-paid incentives boost response rates, but post-paid incentives do not (Porter, 2004).
It is also noted that the fidelity of the Friendship Workshop implementation between the four classrooms is unknown and, therefore, results in a fourth limitation. While every teacher engaged in professional development and self-disclosed implementation experience of 1 year or more, the degree to which the elements of the intervention were incorporated into the classroom environment is unspecified. A calibration of the intervention strategies, including time, resources, or degree of confidence between the classrooms, did not occur. The Friendship Workshop training and follow-up support between the teachers may have varied. It is also possible that because the study was not experimental in design with the consideration of data from a control group, other factors may have influenced a child’s empathy development over the course of the 6 months.

Finally, a fifth limitation is that the sample in this present study was confined to primary classrooms from school districts with similar demographics, within the similar region of New York State. The recruitment information was sent to three classroom teachers who were slightly known to the researcher and one classroom teacher, the author of the Friendship Workshop, who is a colleague of the researcher. Regardless of these relationships, the communication regarding this research followed the strict adherence to the protocol outlined, to professionalism, and to confidentiality. The geographic limitation and known teacher participants may have reduced the generalizability of the findings. A larger and more diverse respondent group may produce different results.

**Recommendations**

The results of this study suggest several recommendations for future research and practice. Stakeholders interested in these recommendations may be collegiate leaders
administering teacher certification programs, practitioners responsible for professional development to strengthen the social and emotional development of children within the educational arena, and programs designed to prepare and certify educational leaders and administrators. The following sections address these groups.

**Recommendations for further research.** This study is the first of its nature to explore the Friendship Workshop as a classroom intervention to increase empathy development. It provides a foundation for further exploration to determine if the approach overall impacts empathy or whether specific elements incorporated into the approach have significance.

A comprehensive study using instruments other than surveys to measure empathy would add to the body of knowledge. Sources of error from survey methodology could include bias from the individual completing the questionnaire. It is possible that teachers are cognizant of desired positive results resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy where expectations influence one’s behavior to bring about expected results. Confirmation bias from any respondent may occur as individuals tend to favor information that confirms their existing beliefs. A teacher or parent/guardian could provide increased or decreased value to questions that hold some element of deep belief, have the potential to be emotionally charged, or is indicative of a value held for teaching or parenting philosophy. The survey respondents may have believed that the Friendship Workshop increases empathy because they are not blind to the research focus. Consciously or not, reported scores on the posttest may have been biased and enhanced the findings.

Recognizing that parents and teachers do have a unique perspective of a child across the school year, a qualitative research design could include studies that interview
the teachers and parents who are engaged in a Friendship Workshop experience to gain personal data into this phenomenon of empathy development. Listening to and examining perceptions may provide insight into the specific features of the lived experiences that have merit in the design of the intervention.

Further quantitative and qualitative research on the children engaged in the Friendship Workshop intervention would also provide greater understanding around the intervention’s impact on the population it is meant to serve. In this study, the EQ only assesses an outside observation, or an other-reported method, about a child’s empathy, which may be different than how empathetic they are. Future work might usefully compare an individual’s own beliefs about their own empathy, which may be different than how they are perceived by others. Comparing an individual’s own self-assessed EQ score with that based on the ratings by a teacher or parent/guardian of that same individual would be useful. It cannot be overlooked that empathy is a complex mental process that incorporates both cognitive and affective responses that result in an individual’s response of sharing another’s emotional state. Identifying the emotion of a target, then sharing that emotion results in empathy (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015). The degree to which empathy can be perceived by a parent/guardian or teacher rather than being deduced by what the student is experiencing from their own mental and emotion perspective is uncertain. While an observational, other-person research design was the basis for this study, an individual’s perspective about their cognitive and affective response would increase the efficacy of research focused on empathy.

Replicating this study with a larger and more diverse sample from multiple states would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Statistical analysis of the participants
in the Friendship Workshop, based on age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and specific questions within the EQ, may render insight useful to identify whether a certain population demonstrates greater empathy development through the Friendship Workshop intervention. Additionally, a study that continues in an uninterrupted fashion could determine to a greater degree whether the Friendship Workshop incorporated for a complete school year has an impact different than that which is concluded in this research.

Finally, it is important to consider research to determine the level of implicit bias and empathy development of teachers within the classrooms where SEL is paramount to the academic growth and learning environment for children. It would serve the professional well to establish that individuals responsible for strengthening these qualities within children have strengthened them within themselves first. Teachers are crucial role models for the students they serve.

**Teacher certification programs.** It is imperative that teachers entering the field are secure in their understanding of the importance of the social and emotional growth and development of students at every age. This must begin with reflection and consideration of one’s own implicit biases, how that bias can impact the classroom environment. Strategies to overcome, thus limiting, and constantly reducing the inclusion of bias within the teaching and learning environment, is imperative for those in teaching positions who have influence over the social and emotional learning of others. Demonstrating the ability to manage one’s own emotions with an increased ability to empathize with others, particularly the children within the classroom environment, is a critical basis for entering the education arena.
In addition, they must be armed with the disposition and skill set to foster this growth through their understanding of how to create a classroom environment and climate conducive to the guiding framework set forth by specific state education department and district expectations. In addition to other research-based classroom intervention approaches that support social and emotional learning standards, the Friendship Workshop is a worthy consideration given this initial study regarding its potential for enhancing empathy development.

It is critical that teacher-preparation programs equip new teachers with the skills and dispositions necessary to create a classroom environment where SEL is at the heart of the community of learners. The meta-analysis performed by Durlak et al. (2011) found that participation in high-quality, evidence-based social-emotional learning programs can reduce emotional distress, improve engagement, improve social-emotional skills, and improve academic achievement. There is increasing evidence that the social and emotional arena is a critical foundation within the learning environment from which academic skills are strengthened (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013). Explicitly teaching social-emotional skills to build competency can have a wide-ranging impact on children’s development. This initial research provides data that the Friendship Workshop is a viable consideration as a model to strengthen the social and emotional development of a child, specifically in the arena of empathy. It is imperative that college programs that lead to teacher licensure foster the professional dispositions and skill set to ensure a learning environment that teaches and promotes these foundational elements.

**Professional development possibilities.** The social and emotional learning for children is highlighted in the literature as a critical component of the educational
experience (CASEL, 2013). Professional development for all practitioners who play a role in the classroom environment, including principals, teachers, teaching assistants, and school aides, is imperative when striving to create a school-wide approach to supporting the social and emotional standards outlined by the state education department. In addition to many selective elementary SEL programs promoted by CASEL (2013) including Responsive Classroom, Leader in Me, and Open Circle to name a few, Friendship Workshop holds promise as an effective intervention approach.

The tenets to support the Friendship Workshop as a classroom intervention can be provided through professional development facilitated by Teacher Center Directors, master teachers, or the author of Sharing the Blue Crayon (Buckley, 2015). Grounding the adults responsible for creating an engaging and effective learning environment in the knowledge and skills to support a Friendship Workshop approach has the potential to impact empathy growth for individual students, an entire class, and a whole school. The Friendship Workshop shows promise as an effective practice that incorporates strategies that students can access. Ongoing professional development is key for teachers at all experiential levels given the potential impact that social-emotional competency has on a student’s academic achievement.

**Educational leadership and administration preparation programs.**

Educational leaders have a responsibility to set the vision and tone of a school. They have a voice and lead the direction for social and emotional learning by virtue of the school-wide approach chosen and the efficacy in which that method is cultivated throughout the school or district. In addition, leaders also influence the curriculum development focus and process within a district. Whether in foundational aspects of implicit bias and its
relationship to prejudice development or the importance of empathy development, those in leadership positions within a school district have a responsibility to promote the elements of SEL in a meaningful and effective manner which enhances the learning environment overall. This includes experiences for the adults within the system to consider their biases and ability to empathize given the responsibility they have to promote this, and the NYSED (2018) SEL standards overall, within the culture of the school.

Future leaders must be apprised of the social and emotional learning research, standards, and strategies to increase their propensity to make it a priority in their efforts to create a quality learning culture within the school environment. It would be imperative to outline specific approaches, including their advantages and research-based outcomes, to ensure those entering the leadership field are aware of options. The Friendship Workshop, in addition to other programs and methodologies, show promise in strengthening specific elements of a child’s social and emotional health.

Conclusions

The results of this quantitative study, conducted with the teachers and parents in four elementary classrooms, provides a foundation for further examination into the Friendship Workshop as a classroom intervention designed to enhance empathy development. It adds to the body of knowledge for understanding a potential model to promote empathy in a classroom environment. Chapter 1 introduced the role of racial discrimination as a critical factor for a child’s health and well-being, with detrimental effects having the potential to last a lifetime (Dessel, 2010; DiAngelo, 2018; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Priest et al., 2013). Studies on implicit bias (Allport, 1958; Banaji
& Greenwald, 2016; Morin, 2015) and a strong political framework supporting the significance of attending to discrimination (New York State Senate, n.d.; United Nations, 1948, U.S. Department of Education, 2011; U.S. Public Health Service, 2000) are reviewed. This agenda is further reinforced by recent social and emotional learning standards and benchmarks published by the NYS Safe Schools Task Force (NYSED, 2018).

The role of empathy development within the classroom environment is introduced as a response to reduce prejudice formation, which has the potential to reduce or deter the implications of implicit bias (Burns et al., 2017; Christol & Gimbert, 2008; Durlak et al., 2011; Johnson & Aboud, 2017; Mackey & Vocht-van Alphen, 2016; Midgette, 2018). Evidence exists that for an intervention to be effective, it must occur early in a child’s development before prejudice, stereotypes, and negative attitudes are deeply rooted (Levy & Killen, 2008; Quintana & McKown, 2007).

Political sentiment and education policies around this topic are not enough to impact continued hate crime (Burke, 2020; Heim, 2017; Hill et al., 2020; NPR, 2020; Shapiro et al., 2020; Statista Research Department, 2019; “Video shows,” 2020). Racial overtones in the U.S. culture, which some believe is built on a foundation of racism (DiAngelo, 2018), endure. Allport (1958) noted that implicit bias is part of the human condition, and it affects how people perceive and act, even when those thoughts and actions are unintentional. This bias can lead to prejudice if ignored. Beelmann and Heinemann (2014) demonstrated that empathy development can prevent prejudice development.
The Friendship Workshop is a classroom intervention model that includes elements to enhance empathy development, which has not been studied to date (Buckley, 2016). Based upon the limitations within the current research regarding a pre/post-intervention evaluation, which includes the perspective of others (Berger et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017), this research was designed to determine whether the Friendship Workshop strengthens empathy development from the perspective of teachers and parents/guardians after implementation within four classrooms for 6 months of the 2019-2020 school year. The appraisal theory of empathy and vicarious emotion (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015), based on appraisal theories of emotion, was the basis for understanding the process one engages in prior to evoking empathy.

The significance of this study is increasing as time goes on, given the detrimental effects of prejudice on the development and well-being of children, leading to harmful implications for society (Priest et al., 2013). This is further reinforced by the increased awareness of toxic and destructive outcomes of racism and prejudice purported by enhanced social media. The outcome of this research has potential to inform preparation programs for school leaders and teachers of an intervention approach to strength empathy development within the social and emotional development of young children. Highlighted is the potential for ultimately reducing prejudice and the resulting discriminatory actions in the growth and improvement of society overall.

Chapter 2 reviewed the research literature to understand the nature of bias, prejudice, and empathy development in young children. Empathy as a moderator was also examined. Finally, a review of the social and emotional education at the elementary level
and specific elements regarding the Friendship Workshop intervention model are outlined.

Bias is shaped beginning at a young age as children attend to and copy others (Dunham et al., 2011; McGuigan, 2013; Wilks et al., 2015). This influence is shaped by imitation theory as children learn to assess what to copy and from whom and the impact of group pressure in the development of bias that is further affected by gender influence (McGuigan, 2013). Social bias is also developed as children attend to social cues and how others interact with peers (Dunham et al., 2011; Nesdale & Lawson, 2011; Skinner et al., 2017; Wilks et al., 2015). This background provides insight about the decision-making process of children as the basis for bias development resulting in their entry into the school environment with a degree of bias developed since birth (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013).

Like bias development, prejudice development also follows a predictable developmental course (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Doyle & Aboud, 1995; Quin et al., 2016; Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). For the children who experience discrimination, the unjust treatment based upon their race, age, or sex, a robust association between these experiences and compromised development exists (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Winslow et al., 2011). The seminal work of Doyle and Aboud (1995) provides the backdrop for further research to understand the developmental nature of prejudice. Early race attitudes (Baron & Banaji, 2006), age differences in prejudice (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011), and evidence of prejudice in a homogenous cultures (Enesco et al, 2011; Qian et al, 2016), supports a predictable course of prejudice development. The impact of how race influences European American children’s choices adds further support (Weller &
Lagattuta, 2013). The impact of prejudicial social experiences by African Americans provides further insight about the implication of discriminatory words and actions through the lens of those who live with it (Winslow et al., 2011).

In addition, a review of the literature demonstrates that empathy development also appears early in a child’s development (Stern & Cassidy, 2018). The influence of maternal attachment (Liable et al., 2013), gender development of perspective taking and empathic concern (Van De Graaf et al., 2013), other orientation as a foundation for empathy development (Bensalah et al., 2016), and insight, indicating that children have the ability to learn empathy (Dixon et al., 2012), provides evidence that children begin the process of empathy development in early childhood.

Research also establishes that empathy as a moderator can promote an understanding of diverse perspectives, assist in resolving differences, and is an important emotional construct to model and foster in young children. Children demonstrated cognitive empathy engagement through their demonstration of prosocial responses when faced with authentic scenarios (Bang, 2013). The open-minded nature of children was also demonstrated through children’s ability to correct their misbehavior and modify personal shortcomings, suggesting potential for interventions to curtail implicit bias at a young age (Midgette, 2018). While empathy was not a dominant factor in its ability to reduce blatant or subtle prejudice, perspective taking showed merit as a prejudice-reduction strategy (Alverez-Castillo et al., 2018).

Additionally, Durlak et al. (2011) highlighted emotion recognition and empathy as elements of social-emotional skill performance yielding the largest effect size. Identifying emotion from social cues and perspective taking were deemed as underlying
skills required to demonstrate empathy. Empathy as a main predictor of individual
difference in prejudice revealed that empathy affects how we perceive others (Backstrom
& Bjorklund, 2007). Emotional regulation skills were significantly associated with the
development of empathy and prosocial responses (Silke et al., 2018). Empathy
development through the promotion of acts of solidarity, such as activism or protest,
erved to promote positive relationships within a community, providing an action-
oriented approach (Burns et al., 2017). This is supported by the findings illustrating that
social perspective taking and empathy influenced children’s prosocial intentions toward
outgroup members (Abrams et al., 2015). A physiological perspective displayed the
multifaceted nature of empathy and its relationship to prosocial development by
measuring RSA and the degree to which this would predict kindness (Miller et al., 2016).
A conscious awareness of personal feelings has potential in translating physiological
awareness into a response to help others.

Chapter 2 continued with an overview of social and emotional learning with the
elementary education arena. Optimal child development requires attention to factors such
as mental health (U.S. Public Health Service, 2000). Social-emotional learning includes
processes that support the development of self-awareness, self-management, social
awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, and they have been
determined by educators to be imperative in the overall academic development of
students (CASEL, 2013). NYSED’s response to the CASEL findings include a series of
resources and benchmark documents as a guide to systemic, whole-school
implementation of social-emotional learning competencies that support and promote this
research (NYSED, 2018).
Finally, an overview of elements incorporated in the Friendship Workshop model concluded Chapter 2. Explicit instruction on the social and emotional elements of emotion vocabulary, emotion recognition, and emotion regulation occurs throughout the literature, and mini-lessons and active engagement support children’s authentic experiences to learn how to identify their own emotions and the emotions of others (Buckley, 2015). Through language that incorporates honesty, forgiveness, and respect, in-depth studies and observations of facial expressions and body language within photographs of children are described and connected to students’ classroom and personal experiences. Mini-lessons, shared experiences to promote emotion vocabulary, and role-playing serve to highlight targeted emotions. One-on-one discussions between individuals experiencing various emotions within the school experience and the teacher occur to reinforce that emotions are normal, passing, and changeable states of mind. The ongoing process of learning emotional vocabulary and recognition within the experiences of the classroom community provides a foundation for supporting emotion regulation in a genuine manner when an occurrence of heightened emotion occurs. By promoting children’s capacity to feel safe, calm, and peaceful, they learn to focus on how their body feels and the body language of their peers (Buckley, 2015). With enhanced insight, emotional regulation is strengthened over time. Reinforcement and support from the teacher create an environment where learning is generalized, over time, to others without the necessity of adult assistance.

The research design and methodology to understand whether the Friendship Workshop increased empathy development for children from the teacher and parent perspective was described in Chapter 3. A quantitative, quasi-experimental research
methodology was designed to answer the identified research questions. The context for this research included teachers who engaged in the Friendship Workshop professional development and implemented the model for one or more years. Through convenience sampling, teachers from two elementary schools who met these criteria were invited to participate in the study once written agreement was received from both the school superintendent and principal.

The recruitment process occurred via email and included a letter of introduction and the informed consent form. Upon agreement, each teacher received a mailing including all relevant materials: a code reference list; a set of coded EQ teacher questionnaires; an addressed, stamped envelope to return completed questionnaires; sealed, coded envelopes to distribute to students who would hand carry the introductory letter, consent form, coded parent/guardian EQ home, and an addressed, stamped envelope to return the completed questionnaire to their parent/guardian. All parents received a thank you note for considering or participating in the study; teachers received a $100 gift certificate in addition to a thank you note for their time and participation.

By completing the EQ, parents/guardians and teachers considered student behaviors prior to or at the beginning of the school year as the pre-assessment perspective, then again at the conclusion of the study. Descriptive statistics, along with a $t$ test, were used to analyze teacher responses; additional data was provided for analysis and comparison by parents/guardians who chose to participate in both the pre- and post-assessment. An Excel document systematized the confidential student codes to organize pre- and post-data. Confidentially was maintained for all data associated with every child, class, and school.
Chapter 4 presented the analysis and results of the research examining teacher and parent perceptions of increased empathy development after a child engaged in the Friendship Workshop for 6 months. Data indicate an increase in empathy from both the teacher and parent/guardian perspective for most of the students in the four participating classrooms. The mean, median, and range from all perspectives on both the pre- and post-assessment demonstrate an increase, although the teacher perspective indicates a greater increase overall than the parent/guardian perspective. This includes a significant difference in the mean reporting on the posttest from the teacher perspective.

The implication of the findings, limitations of the research, and recommendations for practice including future research, teacher certification programs, professional development possibilities, educational leadership and administration preparation programs, and recommendations for further research are highlighted in Chapter 5. The research indicates that the Friendship Workshop is a classroom intervention model that shows promise in promoting empathy development. According to the data, empathy increased for the students engaged in the model from the perspective of their teachers and parents/guardians who engaged in a pre- and post-assessment questionnaire to measure this change.

In conclusion, the results of this study align with research claiming that empathy can be enhanced through interventions that include emotion vocabulary, emotion recognition, and emotion regulation. The Friendship Workshop is one such intervention that, to date, has had no empirical evidence to support its potential to foster empathy development. This early research suggests that it has initial credibility as a classroom intervention with positive potential.
Social justice reform depends on increased empathy development within our culture. When empathy increases, implicit bias is mitigated and increases the possibility that prejudice will be reduced. Given the national crisis highlighting systemic racism, there is a moral imperative to constructively impact a child’s empathy development by integrating classroom interventions that strive toward and are proven to do just that.
References


Appendix A

Introductory Email to the Superintendent and Principal

Dear (Superintendent/Principal):

As a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership (Ed.D.) program at St. John Fisher College, I am in the process of conducting research on the topic of empathy development and its potential to mitigate implicit bias, thus prejudice development. Friendship Workshop is a classroom intervention proposing to enhance empathy development for which there is no current research to support its efficacy. I am interested in understanding the potential that this intervention has to strengthen empathy development.

The purpose of this letter is to ask for your approval to recruit classroom teachers in the (Name) School District to consider participation in this research. Teachers who have engaged in professional development focused on *Sharing the Blue Crayon*, a book outlining Friendship Workshop by Mary Anne Buckley, and who have incorporated this intervention for at least one year will be contacted. Once a teacher has agreed to participate, the parents of the students in the class will also be recruited to participate. The research will include a pre- and post-assessment using the Empathy Quotient, a 27-item questionnaire, to be completed by the teacher and parents within eight weeks of the beginning and end of the school year.

Please be assured that district, school, and classroom information will be kept in strict confidence and will never be associated with this study or within the dissertation. Participation is voluntary and anyone can withdraw from the study at any time.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I can be reached at ___-___-____ or ___________@sjfc.edu. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed and approved this research. I appreciate your anticipated support noted by returning the attached agreement by (date). Your willingness to allow this research to occur within your District has the potential to enhance the body of research supporting the importance of empathy development.

Sincerely,
Appendix B

Written Agreement of the Superintendent and Principal

My signature denotes agreement for Danielle M. Dehm, a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership (Ed. D.) program at St. John Fisher College, to engage in teacher and parent recruitment. I understand that this study will focus on Friendship Workshop, an intervention to enhance empathy development. I understand that all information including that of the district, school, class, and students, will be kept in strict confidence and will never be associated with this study or within the dissertation.

________________________________________  (Signature)

________________________________________  (Date)

________________________________________  (Email)
Appendix C

St. John Fisher College Informed Consent Forms

Teacher Copy

St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board

Statement of Informed Consent for Adult Participants

Friendship Workshop as an Intervention Model to Promote Empathy and Reduce Implicit Bias: A Program Review

SUMMARY OF KEY INFORMATION:
You are being asked to be in a research study of Friendship Workshop, a classroom intervention technique to enhance empathy development through emotion vocabulary, identification, and regulation. As with all research studies, participation is voluntary.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether Friendship Workshop includes the elements to strengthen empathy development which has potential to reduce or prevent prejudice development.

Approximately 4 teachers and 32-60 parents will take part in this study. The results will be used for a doctoral dissertation as well as a vehicle to inform school leaders and teacher preparation programs of a credible intervention technique with empirical data.

If you agree to participate, you would:
1. Add student names to the Code Reference List to ensure corresponding pre- and post-questionnaires are used for all participants.
2. Send the corresponding coded envelope home in each child’s backpack within eight weeks of the beginning and end of the school year which includes the following: a supporting letter from the principal, an introductory overview, a SJFC Consent Form, a coded Empathy Quotient parent survey, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for returned, confidential questionnaires.
3. Complete a coded Empathy Quotient teacher questionnaire for each child in your class within eight weeks of the beginning and end of the school year and return to the researcher in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided.
4. Engage in Friendship Workshop as you have in the past.
I believe this study has no more than minimal risk. Minimal inconveniences potentially include the amount of time it may take a teacher to complete the pre- and/or post assessment for the children in the class.

While you may not directly benefit from this research, I hope that your participation in the study may identify a process for a broader scope of study to underscore the strengths and potential of Friendship Workshop as an intervention to strengthen empathy development. This study may inform school leaders and teacher preparation programs of an intervention technique to enhance empathy development in young children. This research supports a commitment to social justice through its efforts to provide background knowledge and evidence for the educational arena to consider. The potential of ultimately reducing prejudice and resulting discriminatory actions through a plausible, classroom intervention technique is worthy of consideration.

DETAILED STUDY INFORMATION
You are being asked to be in a research study of Friendship Workshop, a classroom intervention technique to enhance empathy development through emotion vocabulary, identification, and regulation. This study is being conducted by Danielle M. Dehm, a student in the Executive Leadership Doctoral Program at St. John Fisher College. You were selected as a possible participant because you received professional development on Friendship Workshop and have implemented it in your classroom for at least one year. Please read this consent form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be in the study.

PROCEDURES:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
Complete the Empathy Quotient for each child in the class. This survey includes 27 questions and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete for each child. You will be asked to do this within the first and last eight weeks of the school year that Friendship Workshop is implemented.

COMPENSATION/INCENTIVES:
Teachers will receive a $100 gift certificate to a school supply store which will be sent directly to you at your school through the U.S. Mail at the conclusion of the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
The records of this study will be kept private and confidentiality will be protected. In any sort of report the researcher might publish, no identifying information will be included. Identifiable research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All data will be kept on a thumb drive and/or in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s residence. All study records with identifiable information, including approved IRB documents and consent forms, will be destroyed by shredding and/or deleting after three years.

The data collected in this study as well as the results of the research can be used for scientific purposes and may be published. An anonymized version of the data from this study may be made publicly accessible, for example via the Open Science Framework (osf.io), without obtaining additional written consent. The anonymized data can be used for re-analysis but
also for additional analyses, by the same or other researchers. The purpose and scope of this secondary use is not foreseeable. Personal information will be protected closely so no one will be able to connect individual responses and any other information that identifies an individual. All personally identifying information collected about an individual will be stored separately from all other data.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:
Participation in this study is voluntary and requires informed consent. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. John Fisher College or the elementary school you are affiliated with. If you decide to participate, you are free to skip any question that is asked. You may also withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

CONTACTS, REFERRALS AND QUESTIONS:
The researcher conducting this study is Danielle M. Dehm. If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact her at ___-_____ or ________@sjfc.edu. The advisor is Dr. C. Michael Robinson who can be reached at ___-_____ or ________@sjfc.edu.

The Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study, or if you feel that your rights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional distress), please contact the SJFC IRB administrator by phone during normal business hours at (___) ____-____ or irb@sjfc.edu.

Please keep a copy of this informed consent for your records.
Statement of Informed Consent for Adult Participants

Friendship Workshop as an Intervention Model to Promote Empathy and Reduce Implicit Bias: A Program Review

SUMMARY OF KEY INFORMATION:

- You are being asked to be in a research study of Friendship Workshop, a classroom intervention technique to enhance empathy development through emotion vocabulary, identification, and regulation. As with all research studies, participation is voluntary.
- The purpose of this study is to determine whether Friendship Workshop includes the elements to strengthen empathy development which has potential to reduce or prevent prejudice development.
- Approximately 4 teachers and 32-60 parents will take part in this study. The results will be used for a doctoral dissertation as well as a vehicle to inform school leaders and teacher preparation programs of a credible intervention technique with empirical data.
- If you agree, you will engage in this study twice. Parent participants are asked to complete a pre- and post-survey for their child which will take approximately 10 minutes to complete for a total of 20 minutes.
- I believe this study has no more than minimal risk. Minimal inconveniences potentially include the amount of time it may take a teacher to complete the pre- and/or post assessment for the children in the class.
- While you may not directly benefit from this research, I hope that your participation in the study may identify a process for a broader scope of study to underscore the strengths and potential of Friendship Workshop as an intervention to strengthen empathy development. This study may inform school leaders and teacher preparation programs of an intervention technique to enhance empathy development in young children. This research supports a commitment to social justice through its efforts to provide background knowledge and evidence for the educational arena to consider. The potential of ultimately reducing prejudice and resulting discriminatory actions through a plausible, classroom intervention technique is worthy of consideration.

DETAILED STUDY INFORMATION

You are being asked to be in a research study of Friendship Workshop, a classroom intervention technique to enhance empathy development through emotion vocabulary, identification, and regulation. This study is being conducted online by Danielle M. Dehm, a student in the Executive Leadership Doctoral Program at St. John Fisher College. You were selected as a possible participant because your child is enrolled in a classroom where Friendship Workshop is implemented. Please read this consent form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be in the study.
PROCEDURES:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
Complete the Empathy Quotient for your child. This survey includes 27 questions and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. You will be asked to do this within the first and last eight weeks of the school year that Friendship Workshop is implemented in your child's classroom.

COMPENSATION/INCENTIVES:
No compensation will be given for participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
The records of this study will be kept private and confidentiality will be protected. In any sort of report the researcher might publish, no identifying information will be included. Identifiable research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All data will be kept on a thumb drive and/or in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s residence. All study records with identifiable information, including approved IRB documents and consent forms, will be destroyed by shredding and/or deleting after three years.

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VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:
Participation in this study is voluntary and requires informed consent. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. John Fisher College or the elementary school you are affiliated with. If you decide to participate, you are free to skip any question that is asked. You may also withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

CONTACTS, REFERRALS AND QUESTIONS:
The researcher conducting this study is Danielle M. Dehm. If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact her at ___-____ or ________@sjfc.edu. The advisor is Dr. C. Michael Robinson who can be reached at ___-____ or __________@sjfc.edu.

The Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study, or if you feel that your rights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional
distress), please contact the SJFC IRB administrator by phone during normal business hours at (___) ___-____ or irb@sjfc.edu.

*Please keep a copy of this informed consent for your records.*
Appendix D

Introductory Email the Teachers

Dear (Teacher):

As a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership (Ed.D.) program at St. John Fisher College (SJFC), I am in the process of conducting research on the topic of empathy development and its potential to mitigate implicit bias, thus prejudice development. The Friendship Workshop is a classroom intervention proposing to enhance empathy development for which there is no current research to support its efficacy. I am interested in understanding the potential that this intervention has to strengthen empathy development.

As a teacher engaged in professional development focused on *Sharing the Blue Crayon*, a book outlining the Friendship Workshop, by Mary Anne Buckley, and who has incorporated this intervention for at least 1 year, please consider this invitation to participate in the research. Responsibilities would include the following:

1. Add student names to the Code Reference List to ensure corresponding pre- and post-Empathy Quotient questionnaires are used for all participants.
2. Send the corresponding coded envelope home in each child’s backpack within 8 weeks of the beginning and end of the school year, which includes the following: a supporting letter from the principal, an introductory overview, a SJFC Informed Consent Form, a coded Empathy Quotient parent survey, and an addressed, stamped envelope for returning the confidential questionnaires.
3. Complete a coded Empathy Quotient teacher questionnaire for each child in your class within 8 weeks of the beginning and end of the school year and return to the researcher in the addressed, stamped envelope provided.
4. Engage in the Friendship Workshop as you have in the past.

Please be assured that all information, including that of the district, school, class, and students, will be kept in strict confidence and will never be associated with this study or within the dissertation. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. You will receive a $100 gift certificate at the conclusion of the study in appreciation of your time.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I can be reached at _______ or _______@sjfc.edu. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed and approved this research. I appreciate your anticipated support noted by reviewing the enclosed SJFC Informed Consent Form and sending me an affirmative email. Your willingness to allow this research to occur within your classroom has the potential to enhance the body of research supporting the importance of empathy development.

Sincerely,
Appendix E

Sample Code Reference List

Classroom Teacher:
In the middle column, please add student names in any order. Please send the corresponding coded envelope to the parent. Complete the teacher questionnaires with the corresponding codes for each student and return them in the addressed, stamped envelope.

Please maintain this reference list to ensure corresponding coded questionnaires are used for the Friendship Workshop study in October and May. Thank you.

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<th>Student Name (Added by Teacher)</th>
<th>Parent Code</th>
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</thead>
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<td>P20</td>
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<td>P37</td>
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Appendix F

Child Empathy Quotient (EQ) – Parent Version

Code: _____________

(Pre-EQ Questionnaire Directions)

Dear Parent,
Thank you for volunteering to participate in this research study to determine empathy growth within a school year. All information about your child is confidential. Please complete the questionnaire by putting one check mark for each statement indicating the degree to which you agree with that statement when you think about your child in relation to other peers prior to starting school. This questionnaire should be returned by using the enclosed addressed, stamped envelope within 2 weeks of receipt. Thank you again for your valuable contribution.

Sincerely,
Danielle M. Dehm
SJFC Ed.D. Candidate

(Post-EQ Questionnaire Directions)

Dear Parent,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this research study to determine empathy growth within a school year. All information about your child is confidential. Please complete the questionnaire by putting one check mark for each statement indicating the degree to which you agree with that statement when you think about your child in relation to other peers at this point in the school year. This questionnaire should be returned by using the enclosed addressed, stamped envelope within 2 weeks of receipt. Thank you again for your valuable contribution.

Sincerely,
Danielle M. Dehm
SJFC Ed.D. Candidate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>My child likes to look after other people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>My child often doesn’t understand why some things upset other people so much.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>My child would not cry or get upset if a character in a film died.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>My child enjoys cutting up worms or pulling the legs off insects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>My child has stolen something they wanted from their sibling or friend.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>My child has trouble forming friendships.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>When playing with other children, my child spontaneously takes turns and shares toys.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>My child can be blunt giving their opinions, even when these may upset someone.</td>
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<td>My child would enjoy looking after a pet.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>My child is often rude or impolite without realizing it.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>My child has been in trouble for physical bullying.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>At school, when my child understands something, they can easily explain it clearly to others.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>My child has one or two close friends, as well as several other friends.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>My child listens to others' opinions, even when different from their own.</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>My child shows concern when others are upset.</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>My child can seem so preoccupied with their own thoughts that they don't notice others getting bored.</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>My child blames other children for things that they themselves have done.</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>My child gets very upset if they see an animal in pain.</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>My child likes to help new children integrate in class.</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>My child tends to resort to physical aggression to get what they want.</td>
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</table>
Child Empathy Quotient (EQ)

Teacher Version

Code: ___________

(Pre-EQ Questionnaire Directions)

Dear Teacher,
Thank you for volunteering to participate in this research study to determine empathy growth within a school year. All information about this child is confidential. Using the matching coded form for each child based upon the Code Reference List you created for the class, please complete the questionnaire by putting one check mark for each statement indicating the degree to which you agree with that statement when you think about this child as they interacted in the classroom within the first 2 weeks of school. All questionnaires should be returned by using the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope within 2 weeks of receipt. Thank you again for your valuable contribution.

Sincerely,
Danielle M. Dehm
SJFC Ed.D. Candidate

(Post-EQ Questionnaire Directions)

Dear Teacher,
Thank you for volunteering to participate in this research study to determine empathy growth within a school year. All information about this child is confidential. Using the matching coded form for each child based upon the Code Reference List you created for the class, please complete the questionnaire by putting one check mark for each statement indicating the degree to which you agree with that statement when you think about this child as they interacted in the classroom at this point of the school year. All questionnaires should be returned by using the enclosed addressed, stamped envelope within 2 weeks of receipt. Thank you again for your valuable contribution.

Sincerely,
Danielle M. Dehm
SJFC Ed.D. Candidate

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Appendix G

Supporting Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

Please note that we are in complete support of the research study by Danielle M. Dehm titled *Friendship Workshop as an Intervention Model to Promote Empathy and Reduce Implicit Bias: A Program Review*. Because of our classroom focus on Friendship Workshop, the data has the potential to be extremely valuable to the educational arena. All of the data from our school, class, and your child will be strictly confidential. Even we will not know whatever information you share about your child from your perspective!

We strongly encourage you to participate in this study which will benefit all future educators. As always, thank you for your confidence in all we do at (school name) and within our classroom!

Sincerely,

(Classroom Teacher Signature)  (School Principal Signature)
Appendix H

Introductory Letter to Parent

Dear Parent:

As a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership (Ed.D.) program at St. John Fisher College (SJFC), I am in the process of conducting research on the topic of empathy development and its potential to mitigate implicit bias, thus prejudice development. Friendship Workshop is a classroom intervention proposing to enhance empathy development for which there is no current research to support its efficacy. I am interested in understanding the potential that this intervention has to strengthen empathy development.

Your child is in a class where the teacher has engaged in professional development focused on *Sharing the Blue Crayon*, a book outlining Friendship Workshop, by Mary Anne Buckley, and has incorporated this intervention for at least 1 year. Please consider this invitation to participate in this research. Your role would be to complete the Empathy Quotient, a 27-item questionnaire, about your child at the beginning of the school year and again at the end of the school year.

Please be assured that all information, including that of the district, school, class, and students, will be kept in strict confidence and will never be associated with this study or within the dissertation. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I can be reached at [insert phone number] or [insert email address]. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed and approved this research. I appreciate your anticipated support noted by reviewing the enclosed SJFC Informed Consent Form and returning the coded EQ questionnaire in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided. If you choose not to participate, please destroy the questionnaire.

Your willingness to participate in this research has the potential to enhance the body of research supporting the importance of empathy development.

Sincerely,