

Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Social Studies Teachers Towards Promoting Safe Spaces in the Academia: Basis for a Guide

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ABSTRACT

Safe space has become an imperative task for teachers because of its vital role in the teaching-learning process. Its meaning has developed over time due to its application in different instances. In academia, safe space is categorized as physical space, social space, and virtual space. Thus, this study aims to describe the knowledge, attitude, and practice of social studies teachers towards promoting safe spaces. The study utilized a descriptive quantitative approach consisting of 20 teachers as respondents from Ramon Magsaysay High School, Batasan Hills National High School, and Ilaya Barangka Integrated School. Findings indicate that the knowledge of the teachers in promoting safe space in three aspects is at a high level with a mean of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 0.66. Most of the time they practice promoting safe space in terms of physical space with a mean of 3.16 and standard deviation of 0.60, social space with a mean 3.28 and standard deviation of 0.69, and virtual space with a mean of 2.96 and standard deviation of 0.66. In terms of physical space, teachers give importance on routinary activities that ensure class and school are safe for the students. Further, in terms of social space, teachers practice values integration in their lessons on topics about respect for others regardless of their individual differences. Also, teachers are being held accountable for modeling this to the students such as avoiding discrimination and bias. Lastly, in terms of virtual space, teachers prepare students to be accountable for their actions online by reteaching the netiquette or dos and don'ts when using the internet. Findings of this study could be used as a guide by educational institutions when promoting safe space.

KEYWORDS

safe space; physical space; social space; virtual space; knowledge; attitude; practice

INTRODUCTION

Safe space is an environment where students feel the freedom to make mistakes without lasting judgment or ridicule and where they can engage in critical, honest, civil, and challenging discussions about sensitive topics (Fiebre, 2021). Historically, the concept of safe space has no exact beginning. It is regarded to have started from the 1960s during the women's movements against violence and has extended its concept to LGBTQ rights, fight against racism, and the quest to incorporate a welcoming atmosphere in a place, organization, or social interaction (Gunn, 2018). Safe space also includes places public or private where quality, security, and safety are observed. Examples of these are streets and



alleys, public parks, educational and training institutions (schools), buildings, workplaces (shopping malls, bars, restaurants, etc).

In school, when safe space is established, learning occurs because students feel more secure when taking risks, expressing their honest views, sharing, and exploring their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. On the other hand, failure to do so because of social injustice in education leads to risk of students' departure (Osman, Ojo, & Hornsby, 2018). Additionally, virtual safe space also needs to be dealt with especially with the advent of technological modalities in teaching. Examples of platforms that cater virtual spaces are Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, and Google Hangouts and other technological platforms (Sahu, 2020). Therefore, safe space in an academic sense can be categorized in terms of physical, social, and virtual.

Various practices are recorded towards the establishment of safe spaces in the classroom. Fievre (2021) listed numerous ways to promote safe space in the classroom. First is by revising the syllabus where teacher include a statement of diversity that indicates the intent to foster a diverse learning environment; second, inviting professionals of different backgrounds; third, using images that show a wide range of ethnicities in different roles; fourth, including differently abled people in classroom presentations such as person with disability; fifth, working together to establish classroom rules for the entire class; and lastly, validating students' emotions through micro-affirmation (listening, nodding, letting students share their ideas). Gunn (2018) cited a practice to affirm the rights, dignity, and safety of the LGBTQ students by posting a sticker on the teacher's door as a sign that it condemns anti-LGBTQ language and harassment. In school, in general, promoting a positive school culture, training the staff about it, establishing mental health resources, and encouraging students to have open communications are crucial in creating and maintaining safe space (Wellbeing, 2023). Therefore, promoting safe space does not have to be difficult as it could be built everyday starting from the mindset of offering a diverse and enriching atmosphere (Fievre, 2021).

Conceptual Framework

In the Philippines, the Department of Education in its DepEd Order No. 34 series of 2022, included social emotional learning as part of the key areas to focus on under the framework of "Learning Recovery and Continuity Plan (LRCP)". Social emotional learning is defined as "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, establish and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions" (Beacon Park K-8 School). Therefore, safe space has a key role in the realization of this framework since it is within its goals which puts premium on the assurance of holistic well-being of the students towards learning. As a result, implementing safe space has become an imperative task for teachers. This means avoiding judgment on students' behavior, understanding their circumstances, making them comfortable in the classroom, and even allowing student interaction that alleviates stress (Educators 4SC).

In this study, the input-process-output was utilized as a conceptual design. In the conduct of the study, the inputs were the profile of the teachers (school assignment, gender, education, and years in service). To gather the data, a survey was conducted using google forms. Findings of the study will be used as a guide towards promoting safe space in academia.



Ethical Consideration

The study was conducted with the permission of the Department Heads of respective schools. Also, the participants were informed of the purpose of the research through a statement on the instruction part of the survey questionnaire. They were asked if they agreed before proceeding to the survey proper. Lastly, a confidentiality clause was added to assure participants that the data gathered will be treated with confidentiality and in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs descriptive quantitative research. This method is used to describe certain characteristics or experiences. In this study, indicators included in the research instrument were the characteristics that pertain to the knowledge, attitude, and practice of the respondents in promoting safe space.

Population and Sample

The study utilized a random sampling technique through an online survey. The respondents of this study are twenty (20) Social Studies Teachers who are teaching at the schools where the researchers are currently employed. These schools are Ramon Magsaysay High School, Batasan Hills National High School, and Ilaya Barangka Integrated School.

Research's Instrument

The instrument is a survey questionnaire adapted from "The My-Peer Toolkit [1.0]" which was used to determine the safe space level in a particular program. This was developed by Western Australian Centre for Health Promotion Research. In this study, the survey was used to determine the knowledge, attitude, and practices of social studies teachers in promoting safe space. This is composed of three of three parts. The first part is a self-assessment scale which tries to identify the level of knowledge of teachers on the given indicators per categories. The level of knowledge was classified into four namely 1-Low, 2-Moderate, 3-High, 4-Excellent. The second part is the Likert scale which is used to identify the attitude and practice of the teachers in promoting safe space in the mentioned categories. Each category has five indicators. The participants need to answer by rating themselves on how often they do such practices using the four classification namely 1-Never, 2-Occasionally, 3-Most of the time, 4-Always. Lastly, an essay activity where participants are asked to share other practices which they do to promote safe space.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data are the knowledge and the attitude of the respondents derived through self-assessment and Likert scale in terms of physical space, social space, and virtual space. This data was analyzed by obtaining the mean and standard deviation. On the other hand, descriptive data was obtained from the open-ended questions which were analyzed to determine the themes and patterns that encompasses the respondents' practices on promoting safe space in academia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and interpretation of data based on quantitative analysis. Results are tabulated, and implications are drawn.

Table 1. Profile of the Teachers

Category	Number	Percentage
School		
- Ramon Magsaysay High School	11	55%
- Batasan Hills National High School	5	25%
- Barangka Integrated School	4	20%
Gender		
- Male	10	50%
- Female	10	50%
Education		
- Bachelor's Degree	3	15%
- Master's Degree (Units & Graduate)	16	80%
- Doctorate Degree (Units & Graduate)	1	5%
Years in Service		
- 1-10	9	45%
- 11-Above	11	55%

Table 1 shows the distribution of the teacher respondents where 11 are from Ramon Magsaysay High School, 5 from Batasan Hills National High School and 4 from Barangka Integrated School. In terms of gender, 10 are males and 10 are females. Mostly, 16, have obtained their units in master's degree, 3 with bachelor's degree, and 1 with units in Doctorate degree. Based on years of service, 9 are within 10 years and 11 have been in the teaching profession for 11 years above.

Table 2. Teachers' knowledge in promoting safe space in terms of physical, social, and virtual space

What is the level of your knowledge in promoting safe space in academia in terms of:	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Physical space			
- Eliminating hazards in classroom/school	3.10	0.72	High
- Managing student documents by designating proper storage	3.15	0.67	High
Social space			
- Maintaining a respectful environment	3.40	0.60	High
- Establishing a support system	3.25	0.64	High
Virtual Space			
- Establishing adequate security, monitoring, protection for safe and appropriate online interactions	3.05	0.69	High
OVERALL	3.19	0.66	High

Table 2 shows that the teachers' level of knowledge in three aspects of promoting safe space is at a high level. This means that they are aware of these practices. Among the three, social space got the highest weighted mean of 3.15 in indicator 2 which means respondents are highly knowledgeable of managing student documents. On the other hand, the lowest mean is virtual space with a weighted mean of 3.05, though it is still within the high level. This means that respondents are also highly knowledgeable in establishing adequate security, monitoring, and protection for safe and appropriate online interactions. Overall, respondents are considered highly knowledgeable on three aspects of promoting safe space with a general weighted mean of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 0.66.

Table 3. Teachers’ attitude and practice in promoting safe space in terms of physical space

Physical Space	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
I make sure the classroom is secure and free from physical hazards.	3.2	0.7	Most of the Time
I implement policies on maintaining physical safety within and outside the classroom for all students.	3.3	0.57	Most of the Time
I practice proper storage and management of documents with confidential information.	3.35	0.59	Most of the Time
I participate in tasks on security and monitoring that ensure school remains secure during and outside class hours.	2.95	0.6	Most of the Time
I am aware of the student records and informs staff of special health needs and ensures students are aware of support services if needed.	3	0.56	Most of the Time
OVERALL	3.16	0.60	Most of the Time

Table 3 shows that the respondents promote safe space in terms of physical space most of the time. Among the 5 indicators, respondents scored highest in indicator 3 with a weighted mean of 3.35 which means that most of the time, they practice proper storage and management of documents of the students with confidential information. Additionally, the respondents scored lowest in indicator 4 with a weighted mean of 2.95, although it is still interpreted as most of the time. This means that even if it is the lowest, it could be said that most of the time respondents participate in tasks on security and monitoring that ensure school remains secure during and outside class hours. In general, respondents have a positive attitude towards the practice of promoting safe space in terms of physical space with a general weighted mean of 3.16 and standard deviation of 0.60.

Table 4. Teachers’ attitude and practice in promoting safe space in terms of social space

Social Space	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
I allow students to express their personal beliefs and identities without judgment.	3.2	0.77	Most of the Time
Students can actively seek help and ask for peer support in my class.	3.2	0.62	Most of the Time
I maintain a positive vibe to make my students feel welcomed and respected.	3.3	0.66	Most of the Time
I implement policies on maintaining psychological safety within the school, e.g. zero tolerance of harassment/bullying	3.3	0.68	Most of the Time
I encourage students to interact with one another in positive ways.	3.4	0.73	Most of the Time
OVERALL	3.28	0.69	Most of the Time

Table 4 shows that the respondents promote safe space in terms of social space most of the time. Among the 5 indicators, respondents scored highest in indicator 4 with a weighted mean of 3.4 which means that most of the time, they encourage students to interact with one another in positive ways. Additionally, the respondents scored lowest in indicators 1 and 2 with a weighted mean of 3.2 respectively, although it is still interpreted as most of the time. This means that even if it is the lowest, it could be said that most of the time respondents allow students to express their personal beliefs and identities without judgment, and students

can actively seek help and ask for peer support in their classes. In general, respondents have a positive attitude towards the practice of promoting safe space in terms of social space with a general weighted mean of 3.28 and standard deviation of 0.69.

Table 5. Teachers’ attitude and practice in promoting safe space in terms of social space

Virtual Space	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
I allow students to access and leave the online class anytime and without risk.	2.7	0.73	Most of the Time
I provide adequate security and monitoring to ensure online activities remain secure during and outside class hours.	2.75	0.64	Most of the Time
Appropriate measures are taken to protect students’ privacy. For example, lessons are sensitive to potential stigma associated with the target group and ensures that students are not exposed to any discrimination or harassment e.g. from other groups using the same space.	3	0.56	Most of the Time
Group rules/norms for behavior are established and communicated online. They include respect for others, being non-judgmental and inclusive, constructive feedback etc.	3.15	0.67	Most of the Time
I ensure safe peer group interaction and prevents unsafe or confrontational peer interactions online (e.g. harassment, bullying, violence) to maintain safety for all (e.g. moderation/monitoring of group discussions/online chat on the appropriateness of their content)	3.2	0.7	Most of the Time
OVERALL	2.96	0.66	Most of the Time

Table 5 shows that the respondents promote safe space in terms of virtual space most of the time. Among the 5 indicators, respondents scored highest in indicator 5 with a weighted mean of 3.2 which means that most of the time, respondents ensure safe peer group interaction and prevent unsafe or confrontational peer interactions online. Additionally, the respondents scored lowest in indicators 1 with a weighted mean of 2.7, although it is still interpreted as most of the time. This means that even if it is the lowest, it could be said that most of the time respondents allow students to access and leave the online class anytime and without risk. In general, respondents have a positive attitude towards the practice of promoting safe space in terms of virtual space with a general weighted mean of 2.96 and standard deviation of 0.66.

Establishing Routines to Promote Safe Space In Terms of Physical Space

In establishing safe space in terms of physical space, teachers practice the “reminding of the rules and regulations” of the school, a “routinary” activity. This includes “checking the cleanliness and orderliness of the classroom” before the class starts. Some of the things they do are checking if the classroom is “free from hazards”; ensuring students are “safe to move” in a way that they maintain “personal boundaries as teenagers” to protect their “privacy”. Lastly, if there are concerns about facilities which may cause “accidents”, teachers “raise it to proper authority” immediately for the improvement of school premises.

Values integration in the lesson as a way to promote safe space in terms of social space

To promote safe space in terms of social space, teachers integrate lessons about it in their classes. These include lessons on “respecting individual differences in relation to religion, family background and personality”. This is in addition to the existing “anti-bullying policy” of the school which they always observe. Some key factors to maintain social space are avoiding “discrimination” both on teachers and students; practice “not being biased” to students; “checking students well-being”; and even giving a student a “me time” if necessary to give them time to think before they express their sentiments. This way, students would also be “mindful of their social interactions and attitude in relating to others and become courteous”.

Making students accountable as a way to promote safe space in terms of virtual space

When students are in virtual space they are reminded of “netiquette”. This means that the “instructions and rules in virtual gathering are always retaught and implemented”. Some of the aspects that must be included in this netiquette are “privacy, safety, and security in online activity and sharing of data”. Additionally, when they are already in online classes, they are reminded to be respectful and responsible for their actions. One strategy that teachers do to help students realize this is by allowing them to “use the internet to research, express their ideas, and aspirations but with limitations in a way that they value others’ opinion”. To ensure that students are protected, they are required to “use the school account” to avoid untoward incidents.

CONCLUSION

The knowledge of the teachers in promoting safe space in three aspects is at a high level with a general weighted mean of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 0.66. Also, most of the time they practice promoting safe space in terms of physical space with a general weighted mean of 3.16 and standard deviation of 0.60, social space with a general weighted mean 3.28 and standard deviation of 0.69, and virtual space with a general weighted mean of 2.96 with a standard deviation of 0.66. In terms of physical space, teachers give importance on routinary activities that ensure class and school are safe for the students. Further, in terms of social space, teachers practice values integration in their lessons on topics about respect for others regardless of their individual differences. Also, teachers are being held accountable for modeling this to the students such as avoiding discrimination and bias. Lastly, in terms of virtual space, teachers prepare students to be accountable for their actions online by reteaching the netiquette or dos and don’ts when using the internet.

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