

The Effectiveness of the “Work on What Works Approach” in School Settings: A Pilot Study Conducted in Albania

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ABSTRACT

The impact of the teacher’s personal characteristics and communication style has been identified among other factors in the educational research area as one important factor that could bring changes to students’ academic and emotional development. This study aims to investigate the impact of teacher communication style on pupil behavior, focusing on discipline, responsibility, and cooperation. In particular, it focuses on the Work on What Works (WOWW) approach as a method of communication that promises to bring positive changes to the pupils. This program is delivered to three groups of fourth and fifth graders, between nine and eleven years old, who were randomly selected from a mainstream school in Tirana, Albania. A political and social authoritarian system historically characterizes the country. Similarly, the same cohort group is randomly assigned to the control group. A self-administered questionnaire and a five-point Likert scale are used to measure the three behavioral aspects at pre-intervention, post-intervention and follow-up. The method of difference-in-differences is used in order to estimate the impact of the program on the pool of cross-section data generated.

The results indicate that the WOWW program has a statistically significant impact on two indicators of discipline and no significant changes in other indicators of interest. One of the significant effects is negative, and the other is positive, questioning the expected positive impact of the program. No other significant changes in indicators of interest at two measures post-treatment are reported arguing on the proposed positive impact of the program. The unexpected outcome of this program could be due to cultural aspects and differences between Western and Eastern educational philosophies, as well as to the short period expected to influence significant changes that may still be foreign to the culture. Hence, a future direction of this research study would be a larger sample size selected from different schools and different cities, in order to generalize the outcome at the national level.

INTRODUCTION

Historical Overview and the Goals of Education in Albania

During the years of communism (1945-1990), the school system experienced many changes as a consequence of economic and political shifts that took place in the country. After the Second World War, the regime created effective reforms against illiteracy and promoted a high level of education in the country for everyone. 1963 marked the split of Albania from the Eastern Bloc

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accompanied by the new movement of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ that dramatically changed the structure of the school system¹.

For its successful implementation, the party leadership of Albania utilized the educational system and relied upon the creation of politicized schools with content and methods of a political character by putting extra emphasis not only on the content taught at school but also on the integration of school lessons with the manufacturing of goods and preparation for military training which significantly affected the lives of all students and teachers². Indeed, the creation of a monistic paradigm of values dictated and promoted by the party-state as the only admirable model relied upon the educational role of teachers through the so-called hidden curricula, which in itself imposed lots of respect toward the figure of the educators as a common practice to promote the socialist model and the establishment of a new moral order.^{3& 4}

The situation of the school system changed entirely during the years of the political changeover (1990-1992). This period was marked by indiscriminate vandalized acts directed towards schools and educational institutions as a form of protest against the unwanted system, terrifying children and teachers who consequently remained jobless and sustained using social assistance.² A consequential ten-year transition after the civil war (1997) arguably continuing indefinitely as a “feckless pluralistic country,”⁵ Albania was characterized not only by poor infrastructure and school quality but also by a non-egalitarian value system in which clientelism and corruption were at their highest level, making the educational system lose credibility and reputation.⁶

Finally, after more than 20 years of a post-communist era characterized by a blind drive to demolish reminiscences of communism, Albania was confronted with the new vision in the

¹ Schmidt-Neke M. Albania. In: Hörner W., Döbert H., Kopp B.V., Mitter W. (eds) *The Education Systems of Europe*. Springer, Dordrecht 2007, 13.

² Ibid.

³ Gordon, D. Rules and Effectiveness of the Hidden Curriculum. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 17(2), 1983, 207-218.

⁴ Konieczka, J. The Hidden Curriculum as a Socialization of Schooling is in Process at all Times, and Serves to Transmit Messages to Students about Values, Attitudes and Principles. *Advanced Research in Scientific Areas* (2), (2013, December), 250-251

⁵ Carothers, T. The End of the Transition Paradigm. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(1), 2002,11

⁶ Karstedt, S. Legacies of a Culture of Inequality: The Janus Face of Crime in Post-Communist Countries. *Crime, Law & Social Change* (40), 2003, 296.

framework of the *National Strategy for Development and Integration* as an EU candidate country. This platform unfolds less chaotically and seemingly includes educational outputs in order to match the Western standards for its integration in the European Union.⁷

Meeting the Social and Emotional Needs of Children in Albania

Schooling and education are used interchangeably nowadays, putting different importance and understanding of qualitative and quantitative levels of education – identified as a disparity between the developed and the developing countries.⁸ In this context, the legislation driven by the *National Strategy for Development and Integration* appointed the function of the school counselor for the elementary, middle, and high school systems as part of the implementation of the qualitative elements in education. It looks like Albania is embracing new functions and roles related to its educational settings without the assertion about the functionality level of its networking structures, readiness, or openness to these practices and the level of understanding of what is being entrenched. In this context, when the reformation of schools continues to develop and the field of school psychologists is growing around the world, it is imperative to build a clear picture of this profession and its understanding. When interviewed, the Albanian school psychologists have reported that the least-liked aspect of their work is lacking the power to intervene in all needed areas, no advice being heard by teachers and parents, experiencing pressure and high demands related to their role. The school psychologist's work can be unsuccessful if conceived in isolation or faced with resistance which appears to be the case in some of the developing countries, including Albania.⁹

As a new profession rapidly spreading all over the world and entirely new for the Albanian population, it may pose issues of disparity between contextual and professional school learned approaches. Based on literature suggestions, one of the main goals of a school psychologist is to instill intrinsic motivation in children – those that involve personal growth, freedom, and

⁷ World Data Education (WDE). United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, (Ed. 7), 2011, 1-19

⁸ Hanushek, E.A. & Woessmann, L. The Role of Cognitive Skills in Economic Development. *Journal of Economic Literature* 46 (3), 2008, 607–608.

⁹ Jimerson, R.S., Graydon, K., Farrel, P., Kikas, E., Hatzichristou, C., Boce, G., Bashi, G. & ISPA research committee. The International School Psychology Survey. Development and data from Albania, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, and Northern England. *School Psychology International* 25(3), (2004, August), 259-286.

autonomy as a predictor of better learning, happiness, and well-being.¹⁰ If we keep this in mind, it could be easily concluded that Albania may have a higher rate of unhappy people who struggle with learning compared to the Western world, given the fact that intrinsic goals are less expressed. We can easily reach an inaccurate conclusion if we do not consider the collectivistic nature of the society and the importance of extrinsic motivation (e.g., wealth, good appearance, social acceptance, school diplomas, money, and fame) of its members.¹¹

The question about how well the social and emotional needs of the Albanian school children are met remains unclear given the lack of research studies on this area. However, based on the few self-reported data gathered by Jimerson et al. (2004) it is not difficult to conclude that the school psychologist's role is faced with cultural rigidity when it comes to an understanding and acceptance of their work, therefore limiting the acknowledgment of any other than the academic needs in school children.

The Importance of Child-Teacher Relationship for Child's Success

The question of great importance after years of research on school-level factors was whether the individual teacher has an impact on child achievement apart from the school's factors.¹² The report of the analysis of the achievement scores for 60,000 students on five subject areas (mathematics, reading, language, arts, social studies, and science) revealed that the most important factor affecting students' learning was the teacher.¹³

Quantitative modern studies provide uncontested evidence that the impact of individual teachers is far more significant than the school-level factor and the teacher-level factor analyzed in isolation regarding the effect on instruction versus management and curricular design.¹⁴ The

¹⁰ Deci, E.L. & Ryan, R.M. The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behaviour. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 2000, 233.

¹¹ Martos, T. & Kopp, M. Life Goal and Well-Being: Does Financial Status Matter? Evidence from a Representative Hungarian Sample. *Social Indicators Research*. 105(3), 2011, 561-568

¹² Marziano, R. J. What works in School: Translating Research into Action. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. ASCD, Alexandria, Virginia, USA 2003, 72

¹³ Wright, S. P., Horn, S. P., Sander, W. L. Teacher and Classroom Context Effects on Student Achievement. Implications for Teacher Evaluation. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 11, 1997, 57-67.

¹⁴ Levy, J., Wubbels, T. Brekelmans, M., & Morganfield, B. Language and Cultural Factors in Student's Perception of Teacher Communication Style. *International Journal of Intercultural Relationships* 21(1), 1997, 29-56.

important underlying factor among all is the holistic, fluent, and free-of-factors art of communication, consideration, buoyancy, and patience with the students.¹⁵

High-quality relationships are generally defined by high levels of closeness and low levels of conflicts.¹⁶ Interestingly, studies show that once teachers enter the profession, their behavior is characterized as high in cooperation and this characteristic is interpreted lacking experience and leadership, given the fact that within the first six to ten years of teaching, their relationship to the students' changes to high levels of dominance and low levels of cooperation.¹⁶

The increase in dominance and the drop in cooperation are believed to affect students' attitudes negatively.¹⁷

The second line of attempt which tries to further analyze the aspect of closeness and conflict as influential for the quality of the relationship¹³ identifies a set of two continuum perspectives: teachers of high dominance versus submission and teachers of high cooperation versus opposition.^{13 & 14} It was concluded that neither extreme were characterized as the type of teacher-child relationship conducive to a child's success.¹⁴

To conclude, studies focused on teacher-child relationship have come to the conclusion that the teacher-child relationship is determined by the teacher and the quality of interaction with the child; the high-quality of teacher-child relationship predicts lower levels of externalizing behavior in school children, increased academic performance and acts as a supportive factor in prevention of internalized negative behavior in early and late childhood.^{13, 14 & 18} Therefore, the rationale for the program implementation is to empower the teachers with leadership qualities by increasing levels of cooperation and understanding.

Introduction to Solution- Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) and Work on What Works (WOWW); A new Model of Psychotherapy that fits well with Children

Solution-focused therapy is a relatively new strength- and future-based model, which is growing

¹⁵ Marziano, R. J. What Works in Schools, 92

¹⁶ O'Connor, E. E., Dearing, E., & Collins, A. B. Teacher-Child Relationship and Behavior Problem Trajectories in Elementary School. *American Education Research Journal*, 48 (1), 2011 p.120-162.

¹⁷ Wubbels T., Brekelmans, M., van Tartwijk, J., Admiral, W. Interpersonal Relationships between Teachers and Students in the Classroom. In H. C. Waxman & H. J. Walberg (Eds.), *New directions for teaching practice and research*, 1999,151-170.

¹⁸ Davis, H.A. Conceptualizing the Role and Influence of Student-Teacher Relationships on Children's Social and Cognitive Development. *Educational Psychologists*, 38(4), 2003, 207-234.

in the psychotherapeutic area and is considered to be well suited to single individual clients or families. Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) initiated around 25 years ago at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, by Steve De Shazer,¹⁹ Insoo Kim Berg²⁰, and other colleagues.²¹ Their work was influenced by Milton Erickson, who, in the early 70s, challenged the traditional psychotherapeutic community by not doing what was expected to occur in therapy. It was believed that the problem cycle of a past-oriented and problem-generated approach, believed to be detrimental, would be interrupted by ways of looking into the future.²²

The use of a set of techniques aimed to identify resources and strengths by focusing on potential solutions to the problem was noted to indicate positive changes in patient's life since the early start of this therapeutic approach.²³ The empirical evidence gathered on the positive outcomes of SFBT has contributed to the recognition and acceptance of this treatment modality by many professionals²¹ in inpatient psychiatric clinics,²⁴ alcohol abuse,²⁵ sexual abuse²⁶ domestic violence intervention,²⁷ child and family-based service,²⁸ and school-related behavioral problems.²⁹

¹⁹ De Shazer, S. *Words Were Originally Magic*. New York: Norton 1994

²⁰ Berg, I. K., & De Jong, P. Solution-Building Conversations: Co-Constructing a Sense of Competence with Clients. *Families in Society*, 77(6), 1996, 376-390.

²¹ De Jong, P., Hopwood, L. E. Outcome Research on Treatment Conducted at the Brief Family Therapy Center, 1992-1993. In Miller, S. D., Hubble, M. A., & Duncan, B. L. (Eds). *Handbook of Solution Focused Brief Therapy*, 1996, 272-298.

²² Bond, C., Wood, K., Humphrey, N., Symes, W., & Green, L. Practical Review: The Effectiveness of Solution Focused Therapy with Children and Families: A Systemic and Critical evaluation of the literature from 1990-2010. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(7), 707-723.

²³ Franklin, C., Biever, J., Moore, K., Clemons, D., & Scamanrdo, M. The Effectiveness of Solution-Focused Therapy with Children in a School Setting. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 11 (4), 2001, 411- 434.

²⁴ Webster, D. C., Vaughn, K., & Martinez, R. Introducing Solution-Focused Approaches to Staff in Inpatient Psychiatric Settings. *Achieves of Psychiatric Nursing*, 8(4), 1994, 254-261

²⁵ Berg, I. K., & Miller, S. D. *Working with the Problem Drinker: A Solution-Focused Approach*. New York: Norton, 1992

²⁶ Dolan, Y. M. *Resolving Sexual Abuse: Solution-Focused Therapy and Ericksonian Hypnosis for Adult Survivors*. New York: Norton, 1991.

²⁷ Sirles, E. A., Lipchik, E., & Kowalski, K. A Consumer's Perspective on Domestic Violence Interventions. *Journal of Family Violence*, 8(3), 1993, 267-276.

²⁸ Berg, I. K. *Family Based Services: A Solution-Focused Approach*. New York: Norton 1994

²⁹ Murphey, J. J., & Ducan B. L. *Brief Intervention for School Problems*. New York: Guilford, 2010

The co-construction and the visualization of a future in the absence of the problem created through the power of language offer a picture of the desired change, which then facilitates the exploration of possibilities to achieve it.³⁰ The fact that this method is focused on the client's present and desired future rather than insight and feelings makes this therapeutic approach specifically suitable in working with children who are believed to have not yet developed certain sophisticated cognitive capacities to deal with inner dynamics, causes and consequences of their problems.^{31 32} It is not surprising and may even be considered common sense that a traditional school psychologist would be deeply immersed in identifying and analyzing the etiology of the undesired behavior in order to deal with it successfully. However, practitioners agree upon the fact that the more attention is given to pathologies and deficits, the higher the risk is that therapeutic work would face two main issues: firstly, to have bias embedded in theoretical psychology which as a consequence may impede the understanding of all possible potentialities of human functioning, and secondly, focusing on pathologies and deficits may imply feelings of failure, which may as a consequence be internalized in the child client.³³

The principals of the SFBT have started to be embraced by many school psychologists in their work with children. One practical application of the principals of SFBT for the school environment on which a few empirical pieces of evidence have been published is the Work on What Works (WOWW) approach. WOWW is a program intended to produce effects in a short-time period for more than one individual at the time, targeting the whole class.³¹ This program was developed by two of the pioneers of SFBT, Insoo Kim Berg and Lee Shilts in Florida in 2002.^{30 & 34} Based on their observations and positive outcome of this approach, Berg and Shilts built their future work on this idea and authored a program which they named "*Classroom*

³⁰ Gingerich, W. J., & Wabeke, T. A Solution-Focused Approach to Mental Health Intervention in School Settings. *Children & Schools*, 23 (1), 2001, 33-47

³¹ Franklin, C., Biever, J., Moore, K., Clemons, D., & Scamardo, M. The Effectiveness of Solution-Focused Therapy with Children in a School Setting. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 11 (4), 200, 411-434.

³² Kelly, M. S., Kim, J. S., & Franklin, C. *Solution-Focused Brief Therapy in Schools; a 360-Degree View of Research and Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008

³³ Fernie, L., & Cubeddu, D. WOWW: A Solution Orientation Approach to Enhance Classroom Relationships and Behavior within a Primary Three Class. *Educational Psychology in Practice* 2016, 1-12.

³⁴ Kim, J. S., Franklin, C., Zhang, Y., Liu, X., Qu, Y., Chen, H. Solution-Focused Brief Therapy in China: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Ethic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 24 (3), 2015, 187-201.

Solutions: WOWW Approach.” Initially, this program was piloted in several urban schools in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and soon after the first promising positive outcomes, it was implemented in other states in the USA³⁵ and later came to Europe.³¹

The Tenets and Foundation of WOWW and the Current Research on it

The WOWW approach is an innovative program, rooted in SFBT which does not target the individual pupil rather than the group as a whole to enhance the quality of education in the classroom^{30 & 34} and to positively influence each child of the class. The WOWW utilizes the natural environment of the child during the whole intervention in which no additional curriculum modifications are required.³⁶

One of the most essential elements of the success of WOWW is the collaboration between the teacher and the children, and through this cooperation, children are encouraged to identify and set achievable goals, ideally shaped by them rather than the teacher, in line with one of the core therapeutic tasks of SFBT which sees the client as being one’s own expert.^{33 & 34} This process allows the WOWW school psychologist to observe the group and the class teacher and share the positive comments in the form of compliments, coping questions or exception identifications.³⁴

It is important to note that WOWW is not intended to deal with the unacceptable behaviors or refer to them rather than modeling a competency-based approach which builds upon the importance of the use of a gentle voice, focusing solely on desired exceptions, curiosity and exploration by positively shaped questions, in which accusatory and menacing cues are not acceptable.³⁷ The way the program is designed and unfolds allows for a closed communication between the school psychologist and the classroom teacher, in which the presence of a possible conflict is undermined.

WOWW has been embraced in many more schools in the United States, after its first testing and spread to Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. Despite its short lifetime, WOWW has been recognized as a practical tool to help solve the everyday problems within the

³⁵ Berg, I.K. & Shilts, L. Classroom Solutions: WOWW Approach. Milwaukee: BFTC Press, 2004

³⁶ Bruce, S., Mackintosh, K., & McDonald, J. WOWW. Working on What Works. Workshop Presented at the Annual Conference for EPs in Scotland, Edinburgh. September 2009.

³⁷ Berg, I.K. & Shilts, L. Classroom Solutions: WOWW Coaching. Milwaukee: BFTC Press. 2005

classroom environment, challenge the old tradition of removing disruptive pupils for individual attention, address teachers' concerns by introducing new non-threatening ways, and offering cooperative teamwork based on interaction and communication.^{30 & 34} Literature reveals that the engagement of the professionals in the direction of strengths-based and positive-focused approach is a protective factor towards professional burnout.³⁸

Possible Benefits of WOWW for the Albanian School Context and Culture

Research studies, although still limited in number, have supported the effectiveness of this approach in educational environments.^{34, 35, 39 & 40} After the turbulent years of the post-communist era (1991-2000) and extra years of unsuccessful attempts to rebuild educational standards in Albania, the agreement for the European Union membership status marked the beginning of a new period of reformation with a special attention to the school psychologist and mental health services offered to children and young people in Albanian schools.⁶

Due to lack of research, it is quite unclear what the implications for the Albanian school psychologists might have been especially in a country like Albania, in which during the communist era the school psychologist not only did not exist, but mental health services were charged with a lot of stigmas, seen as a domain of psychiatry.⁴¹ The report of the data analysis proposed by Jimerson et al. on international school psychologists revealed that Albanian psychologists have the youngest mean age and the fewest years of experience, implying the necessity for a collaborative, motivational and supportive approach to come into the foreground. Given the young age of school psychologists and lack of experience on the field compared to that of teachers, it could be speculated that an experienced school teacher would not be willing

³⁸ Medin, A., & Beyebach, M. The Impact of Solution-Focused Training on Professional's Beliefs, Practice, and Burnout of Child Protection Workers in Tenerife Island. *Child Care in Practice*, 20(1), 2014, 7-36.

³⁹ Brown, E. L., Powell, E. & Clark, A. Working on What Works: Working with Teachers to Improve Classroom Behavior and Relationships. *Educational Psychology in Practice: Theory, Research and Practice in Educational Psychology*, 28(1) 2012, 19-30.

⁴⁰ Gingerich, W. J., & Eisengart, S. Solution Focused Brief Therapy: A Review of the Outcome Research. *Family Process*, 39 (4), 2000, 477-498.

⁴¹ Petrea, I., & Haggenburg, M. Mental Health Care. *Observatory Studies Series* 35, 159-172. In Rechel, B., Richardson, E., & Martin McKee. Health Systems in the Former Soviet Countries. European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies 2014.

to collaborate with them nor to accept advice from a young professional who in their thinking does not justify better knowledge.

Assuming that the bridge of communication remained fragile between the teacher and school psychologists, the WOWW offers a new perspective in which no parties would blame the other in the search of underlying motives on the child's behavior. Alternatively, WOWW recognizes a common focus on finding resources, strengths, and motivational goals for the child.

One aspect of WOWW that could fit perfectly well with the Albanian collectivistic society relates to its systemic nature. On the other hand, in the last two decades, research has provided evidence on the importance of managing the system,⁴² given the fact that school-home interaction involves not only teacher and school staff but also parents and grandparents. Foreign literature of the last two decades shows that due to a number of social concerns, grandparents have increasingly taken an active role in the lives of their grandchildren.⁴³ In the absence of national studies conducted in Albania, it is difficult to estimate if the same factors are contributing to grandparents' involvement as well, however, given the complexity and challenges that the Albanian families have to face during the democratic era, it could be easily deduced that these factors may contribute to a higher grandparent involvement rate. WOWW not only acknowledges it but also relies on the involvement of the child's important figures such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, and neighbors as relationship resources to support the child's overall development.³⁴

Study Aim

The current study has the primary purpose of testing the effectiveness of the WOWW program for elementary school-age children namely 9-11 years old by analyzing the direct effect of the WOWW program on their subjective ways of perceiving the class concerning school-related components such as discipline, responsibility, and cooperation to disseminate the results of the study to a future possible implementation of the program at a national level. The implementation of this program aims to improve and strengthen the relationship between the parties (child,

⁴² Waldrop, D., P. & Weber, J., A. From Grandparents to Caregiver: The Stress and Satisfaction of Raising Grandchildren. *Families in Society*, 82(5), 200, 461-473.

⁴³ Newsome, W. S., & Kelly, M. Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Solution-Focused Brief Therapy Approach in School Settings. *Social Work with Groups*, 27(4), 2004, 65-84.

school psychologist, teacher, and family) toward a common qualitative approach that is assumed to be crucial for the child's emotional and academic development.

Research Design

The current study is using a survey-based platform for data collection. The effectiveness of the WOWW program delivered by a trainee educational psychologist is measured in a convenience sample of approximately two hundred participants (N=100 experimental and N=100 control) from three different fourth and fifth grade classes, aged between nine and eleven years old, selected from a mainstream elementary school Kongresi i Manastirit in Tirana, Albania. Information regarding the WOWW study is sent to the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth Albania with the aim to be approved and to then provide information about teachers' willingness to participate. After the list of the teacher's willingness to participate is known, eight teachers are randomly selected and assigned to the experiment and control group. The rest of the teachers that are not selected are ensured that they will be given the manual of the program and offered to participate in a second trial.

The current study uses a quantitative research design for the data collection, which are gathered at three points in time during the duration of a full academic year. Besides the pre-test and post-test, a follow-up study takes place six months after the termination of the program.

The reason for selecting an age group between nine and eleven years old consists of the fact that the grade four and five children, according to the Albanian school system, have one primary teacher, and despite the developmental differences, children around nine can answer well-designed questions with some consistency.⁴⁴

The program is delivered to the participants in their natural environment in which no additional arrangements are involved, and no stress-provoking changes for the children are foreseen in this study. There are no inclusion/exclusion criteria applied given the nature of the homogeneity of primary schools in Albania, which implies the presence of children with no special needs. The inclusion/exclusion criterion regarding the participating teachers is that of

⁴⁴ De Leeuwe E. D. Improving Data Quality when Surveying Children and Adolescents: Cognitive and Social Development and its Role in Questionnaire Construction and Pretesting. Report prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Finland: Research Programs Public Health Challenges and Health and Welfare of Children and Young people. May 2011, 10-12

gender, age, and same educational training. All female teachers aged between forty-five and fifty are participating in this study. The reason for doing so consists of the fact that previous studies have included only female teachers, assuming common characteristics related to gender. The selection of teachers of similar ages controls for different levels of experiences and educational training.

Procedure

The school psychologist who is external to the classroom delivers the program once a week for sixty minutes in three of the assigned experimental classes and visits the control group classes on the same days without delivering the program. In order to feel confident with the program, the selected school psychologist has had previous training in solution-focused approach and spends two to three hours weekly for the duration of four months with the researcher on mastering the manual of WOWW and practices concrete case examples on the method, illustrated in the coaching manuals of WOWW.³⁶

Teachers are informed about the study before the onset of the program and briefly introduced to the specificities of the approach, the new ways of communication intended to occur, how the program develops, and how the gains may be maintained. This program puts a special consideration on assisting teachers before the delivery of the program, during, and after if necessary, as teachers are seen as the only facilitator of the WOWW program after the first four to six weeks, the time in which they take over the program from the school psychologist.

The WOWW program begins two months after the beginning of the school year in order to allow participants to be able to report on their experiences with their school environment. Before the start of the WOWW program, pupils were asked to fill out a survey. This survey is given again two weeks after the completion of the WOWW program. A follow-up study takes place six months after the completion of the first outcome study, coinciding with the end of the academic year. The follow-up study aims to analyze the sustainability of gains of the first phase in the absence of the psychologist, facilitated only by the class teacher. Each WOWW session lasts for approximately sixty minutes along a five-week period.³⁶ In these sixty minutes, approximately fifty minutes are dedicated to observation and the last ten to fifteen minutes to positive feedback delivered in front of the pupils and the classroom teacher.

Measures

Demographic data such as age, gender, grade, and first initials of their classroom teacher are gathered from the pupils. There are 19 behaviors used to measure pupil's perceptions of their peers' behaviors measuring Self-Control/Discipline, Responsibility/Accountability, and Cooperation, which are subtracted from the larger version of the instrument *The Character Trait Survey*.⁴⁵ The instrument has an overall reliability of + .96 as measured by the Cronbach alpha, whereas the translated shorter version used in the study has a reliability of +.86 as measured by Cronbach alpha. A cyclic process of forward translation, backward translation, and a third comparison are conducted by independent bilingual experts to achieve conceptual equivalence between the original and the translated instrument, which is then presented to the pupils to be filled out at three points in time.

Pupils are asked to rate using a Likert scale the behaviors characterizing their classmates rather than themselves. The reason for doing so consists of the fact that middle childhood years are characterized by a tendency to please others and/or fear of doing things wrong, which may result in superficial answers, influenced by social desirability effect⁴³. The pupils are not asked to identify themselves in this survey to avoid biased answers and to contribute as much as possible to the pupils' accuracy of their subjective evaluation on the area of concern.

Statistical Analysis

The data is analyzed through the statistical software SPSS (version 22). In order to test whether the measures of the three behavioral traits (discipline, responsibility, and cooperation) have significantly higher scores in the experimental group when compared to the control group at post-treatment-phase, the difference-in-differences methodology is employed. The difference-in-differences methodology is widely applied and especially employed when the data arise from a natural experiment.⁴⁶ According to this methodology, controlling for a systemic difference between the control and experiment groups means to have two sets of data, one before exposure to the treatment and one after the treatment, which technically is broken down into four groups: the control group before the treatment, the control group after the treatment, the experimental

⁴⁵ Bulach, R. C., Lunenburg, C. F., & Les Potter. *School Climate and Culture Vis-à-vis Student Learning*. Rowman & Littlefield. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London, 2016.

⁴⁶ Wooldridge, M.J. *Introductory Econometrics. A Modern Approach 5th Ed.* South-Western Cengage Learning, 2013.

group before the treatment, and the experimental group after the treatment. Each individual in the control and experimental group will typically have two observations each, one pre-treatment and one post-treatment.

To reflect the fact that the population may have different distributions in different time periods, we allow the intercept to differ across time periods using the dummy variables, considering it as dummy variable d_1 for those in the experiment group and d_0 otherwise. A naive analysis would be: $\text{Effect} = d_0 + d_1 + \text{other factor}$.⁴⁴

Consider C the control group and E the Experiment group, letting dE take the unit value for those in the Experiment group E, and zero otherwise. Then, letting $d2$ denote a dummy variable for the second (post-treatment) time period, the equation of interest would be:

$$y = \beta_0 + \delta_0 d2 + \beta_1 dE + \delta_1 d2 \cdot dE + \text{other factors}$$

where y is the outcome variable of interest and δ_1 measures the effect of the policy. Without other factors in the regression, δ_1 is the difference-in-differences estimator showing the difference in the average treatment effect between the experiment group and the control group.

In order to test the sustainability of the result of the treatment over time, the difference-in-differences methodology was applied. Two regressions with different baselines and the same post-treatment measures are run in order to estimate the sustainability of the intervention as well as to check the robustness of the impact.

Results

The results of this study indicate that out of seven behavioral estimators on discipline, a statistically significant effect of the treatment for the first item: “*Student control themselves/ behave, when they feel the need to*” with a negative coefficient of $\beta = -.6$ and $p = .003$, whereas, for the second, third, fourth, and fifth items measuring discipline, the coefficients are respectively $\beta = -.06$; $\beta = -.002$; $\beta = -.16$; $\beta = .17$, indicating a negative trend but lacking the power to indicate a significant change. Differently, the sixth item measuring discipline: “*Students let other students tell them what to do*” indicates a statistically significant effect of the treatment with $\beta = .51$ and $p = .004$, showing that the WOWW led to 0.5 points improvement in the score of the sixth item of discipline.

The six behavioral items measuring responsibility and the other six behavioral items measuring cooperation show no statistically significant effect of the program.

The results of the regression analysis using the second measure post-treatment indicate a sustained effect of the treatment. The score of the first item measuring discipline is significantly lower by about 0.5 points in the last phase measuring the sustainability of the treatment, a difference that can be attributed to the program ($\beta = -.54$, $p = .003$). No changes are reported on other items of discipline at the last phase. Hence, similarly to the previous results using immediate measures of discipline at post-treatment, the score of the sixth item measuring the sustainability of the treatment is sustained ($\beta = .6$, $p = .01$), showing a difference that can be attributed to the program. No other statistically significant changes are reported on other items measuring respect and cooperation.

Discussion

The current study conducted in Tirana, Albania, aimed to test the effectiveness of the WOWW program for elementary school-age children delivered by a trained school psychologist and then carried out by the class teacher. The direct effect of the WOWW program on pupils' subjective ways of perceiving their classmates in regards to school-related components such as discipline, responsibility, and cooperation was analyzed. In addition, the aim of the study is to broadly disseminate its results which would lead to a possible future implementation of the program at a national level as part of the teacher development training curriculum. It is believed that the implementation of this program apart from expected emotional, behavioral and academic improvement would bring positive changes in the three behavioral components: discipline, responsibility and cooperation. It is also expected that the gains would be sustained over time when the teachers would carry it out without the school psychologist as a facilitator. It is important to note that the current study is the only quantitative study that uses surveys for its data collection, and differently from other studies, the units of the study are elementary school children and not their teacher.

This study concludes that the delivery of the program significantly decreased the score in only one indicator of discipline and significantly increased the score in another indicator of discipline. It is imperative to explain that one of the main explanations of the discrepancy of the results lies in the culture and the understanding of the educational philosophy of the country.

Cross-cultural research has applied different lenses through which the complex role of cultures can be understood and explained based on two components: the strength of societal norms and the strength of sanctioning⁴⁵. Some societies are generally collectivistic like Albania but ‘loose’ (e.g., Brazil, Hong Kong); others are individualistic (e.g., the U.S., Germany), and others are collectivistic but ‘tight.’ Based on these characteristics, Albania seems to be a collectivistic tight society characterized by parents and teachers emphasizing and applying stricter rule obedience, punishments, and monitoring their child’s behavior extensively when compared to other loose societies.⁴⁷

During half a century of communist discipline, education played a crucial role in the socialist model formation; Albanian people and especially school children were accustomed to living by strict societal norms, strong sanctions, and zero tolerance for deviance. The paucity of data makes it difficult to ascertain the actual level of change regarding the educational philosophy characteristic of Albanian society. The report on the appraisal of the pre-university education strategy program 2014-2020 approved in January 2016 by the Government of the Republic of Albania reports, among other issues, the improvement of quality of education as a matter of concern.⁴⁸ Based on the same source, Albania is recognized as lacking the competency-based curriculum (known as learner-centered adaptive approach that emphasizes the complex outcomes of the learning process), and there is evidence that competency-based curriculum may only survive in schools that are given the flexibility to meet the needs of non-traditional learners in ways that transcend the traditional and inflexible education.⁴⁶ Based on recent findings of UNICEF Albania, it is not difficult to assume that the sudden change of the teacher from relatively punitive to a more understanding and collaborative would confuse the pupils and would allow for certain changes in the level of perceived freedom of expression. These changes could lead to their perception of the class as less disciplined. The same logic would drive us to believe that the negative outcome trend on some measures of discipline and the statistically significant negative effect of the treatment on one measure of it “*Student control*

⁴⁷ Gelfand, M. J., Nishii, L. H., & Raver, J. L. On the Nature and Importance of Cultural Tightness-Looseness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(6), 2006, 1225-1244.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.6.1225>

⁴⁸ Wort, M., Pupovici, D., & Ikonimi, E. Appraisal of the Pre-University Education Strategy 2014-2020. UNICEF Albania. Lund, Prishtina, Tirana. July 2019, 4-7

themselves/ behave when they feel the need to” is portraying the confusion of the class as faced with the teacher’s sudden change.

Whereas, the measure on discipline: “*Students let other students tell them what to do*” differently from the cases mentioned above, which shows a statistically positive change at post-treatment and confirms the positive effects of the WOWW program could have a context-specific explanation. It is argued that this outcome may describe a perceived change in power and dominance levels. The collaborative nature of the program and the item meant to measure discipline increased as a consequence of perceiving the class as more collegial.

In addition, the inconclusive outcomes of the study are as well considered to be subjected to treatment fidelity and time frame. Given the fact that this program is a learned practice and lacks personal inclination, the teachers’ day-to-day mood and emotional states may have impacted the outcome of the study by impacting the treatment fidelity. The time frame of the program taking place during an academic year may be considered as too short to have left a consolidated impact on the child.

Despite the inconclusive findings on the effectiveness of the WOWW program in Albania, the program shows sustainability during a full academic year and that the results at post-treatment were maintained until the end of the school year, supporting other findings of its long-term effectiveness.

A special consideration deserves the understanding of the levels of openness and readiness of the Albanian society to new educational philosophies and psychotherapeutic approaches that may be foreign to the country. School children as members of the system may thrive when crucial parts of the system share a common philosophy. It is difficult to predict what the outcome of a mixture of Eastern and Western philosophies would be on the child’s emotional, behavioral, and academic well-being. The adoption of westernized practices in the educational system as part of the dictated strategy for development would create confusion and unpredictable outcomes if the child’s families may still be guided by the beliefs that criticism serves as a motivator to work hard. However, it may be argued that the best education should be the kind

of education that utilizes both Eastern and Western educational philosophies.⁴⁹

Further studies are needed to test whether more prolonged exposure to new psychotherapeutic practices in a school setting would fit the culture in positive ways, creating an organic entrenchment between the traditional and new beliefs. The current findings consider the potential for future implementation of the program at a national level after a replication of the study with a larger sample size, selected from different schools and different cities, in order to generalize the outcome at the national level.

⁴⁹ Aminuddin, H., & Nur, S., J. Approaches and Values in two Gigantic Educational Philosophies: East and West. *Online Educational Research Journal*, 1 (2). 2010, 1-5