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# The impact and evaluation of forgiveness education with early adolescents

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THE IMPACT AND EVALUATION OF FORGIVENESS EDUCATION WITH EARLY  
ADOLESCENTS

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors

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Entitled: The Impact and Evaluation of Forgiveness Education with Early Adolescents

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation  
University Honors

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Date

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Dr. Suzanne Freedman, Honors Thesis Advisor

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Date

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Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	2
Research Questions.....	7
Methodology.....	7
Results.....	16
Discussion.....	19
Future Research.....	26
Conclusion.....	27
References.....	28
Appendix.....	31
Tables.....	32

## Introduction

Research has shown that forgiveness is a complex process and is vital to one's well-being (Coyle & Enright, 1997; Enright, 1991; Freedman, 2007). There have been several research studies conducted with various populations (Freedman & Enright, 1996; Coyle & Enright, 1997; Gambaro, Enright, Baskin, & Klatt, 2008; Waltman et al., 2009) who have experienced deep, personal, and unfair hurts. Forgiveness has been found to be healing and beneficial to one's overall psychological well-being in these studies. It is often assumed that forgiveness is a natural process, but this is not necessarily true. Forgiveness is something that can be taught (Freedman, 2007; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011), and should be explicitly taught to early adolescents, as they are developmentally ready to understand interpersonal forgiveness (Freedman, 2007). In addition, forgiveness education would be very beneficial to early adolescents, as recent incidents, such as the increase in bullying, have indicated that early adolescents are experiencing deep, personal hurts and forgiveness would help them to cope with those hurts. However, even though there is research supporting the benefits of forgiveness education, it is still not being implemented in the school curriculum. More research is needed in this field if forgiveness education is to be included in the school curriculum. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the impact of forgiveness education on early adolescents to add to the existing research on the topic, as more research is needed. In this study, a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was used and the Enright Process Model of Forgiveness was the basis for the education (Enright, 1991). The forgiveness education included lecture, small and large group discussions, as well as children's literature with a focus on the foundational themes associated with forgiveness. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the forgiveness education.

## Literature Review

### Forgiveness

Forgiveness has gained increased attention over the past few decades in several fields of study, as it has been found to be healing for individuals who have experienced a deep, personal, and unfair hurt (Smedes, 1996), as well as been effective in increasing psychological well-being among various populations. These populations include incest survivors (Freedman & Enright, 1996), men hurt after their partner's decision to have an abortion (Coyle & Enright, 1997), at-risk middle school students (Gambaro, Enright, Baskin, & Klatt, 2008), cardiac patients (Waltman et al., 2009), and adolescents hurt after their parents' divorce (Freedman & Knupp, 2003).

Although there is strong research supporting the positive effects forgiveness has on one's psychological well-being, people often have strong negative reactions towards forgiveness as they confuse it with excusing, condoning, pardoning, forgetting, and reconciling (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998). However, forgiveness is none of these. Forgiveness as defined by Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1991) "is a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her" (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998, p. 47). Other definitions of forgiveness exist, but all definitions identify that forgiveness is a conscious choice to release anger and resentment towards an offender (Smedes, 1996).

Forgiveness is often thought of as being a simple process as well. Many people believe an offense occurs, the offender offers an apology, and the victim accepts it leaving the

relationship mended (Freedman, 2007). However, this is a very simplistic view of forgiveness, and one that involves the offender apologizing. In reality, forgiveness is not this simple, and can occur without the offender ever offering an apology or admitting to any wrongdoing (Enright, 2001). In fact, many offenders never do offer an apology or admit to any wrongdoing.

Enright and colleagues developed a 20-step process of forgiveness model that encompasses four phases they believe are necessary to work through in order to come to total forgiveness (Enright, 1991; see Appendix A for the full table). The first phase in this model is the Uncovering Phase, in which a person analyzes the hurt they experienced, begins to release anger towards the offender, and gains insight into how the hurt they experienced may permanently alter their worldview or life. The second phase is the Decision Phase; it is in this phase of Enright's Forgiveness Process Model the injured decides to commit to forgiving their offender. It is in the third phase of Enright's Forgiveness Model, the Work Phase, the injured makes an effort to actually work towards forgiving his/her offender after having made the decision to forgive them in phase two. It is also during this phase the injured begins to engage in perspective taking and begins to gain empathy and compassion towards the offender. These are some of the most difficult steps in the process. The final phase of Enright's Forgiveness Model is the Deepening Phase and it is in this phase one comes to understand the value of forgiveness as a whole (Enright, 1991). This is a complex process and can be difficult for one to navigate without direction. Thus, the topic of forgiveness education has gained increased popularity in addition to forgiveness in general, in the field of psychology.



## **Forgiveness Education**

Forgiveness education includes helping people understand exactly what forgiveness is and is not, informing them about the benefits of forgiveness, as well as teaching them about the forgiveness process. The majority of the research done with forgiveness education in the past few decades has been with various adult populations, as described in the previous section. The Enright Process Model of Forgiveness (Enright, 1991) has been used as the basis for the forgiveness intervention or education in the studies mentioned in the previous section. Thus, it has been proven as an effective model to follow for forgiveness education. Other models of forgiveness do exist, but Enright's is one of the most thorough and comprehensive, and has research supporting its effectiveness.

Many studies that have been done using the Enright Process Model of Forgiveness (Enright, 1991) involve various adult populations. Research regarding children and adolescent populations do exist though. Holter, Magnuson, Knutson, Knutson-Enright & Enright (2008) conducted a study in which they analyzed the impact of forgiveness education using the Enright Model on excessive anger with elementary-aged children in Milwaukee's Central City schools. This study consisted of three mini-studies. The first study involved 119 first grade students from ten different classrooms. The students were divided into an experimental and control group, and were given the Beck Anger Inventory for Youth (BANI-Y; The Psychological Corporation, 2001) to determine their current level of anger. After receiving the forgiveness education the students in each group were again administered the BANI-Y, and on average, the students who had received the forgiveness education had decreased levels of anger in comparison to the control group who did not receive the forgiveness education. The second study within this larger study analyzed the impact of forgiveness education on Milwaukee third grade students' anger

and depression levels. The same design was used with the third grade students, as with the first grade students. In this study, there were no significant differences pre and post-test between the experimental and control groups, however both groups, on average, went down in their levels of anger and depression on the post-test in comparison to the pre-test. The authors hypothesized whether the students whom received the forgiveness education shared what they learned with their peers in the control group, as there was interaction between the two groups. Finally, this same design was used with fifth grade Milwaukee students, and results illustrated that there were no between group distinctions regarding depression, but the experimental group showed less anger when evaluated on the post-test in comparison to the control group. Thus, this study supports the idea that forgiveness education can have a positive effect on children and adolescents' psychological well-being (Holter et al., 2008).

Another forgiveness education study was conducted in a boys' Catholic school in Hong Kong (Ho, Kin-yi, Daphne, 2002). In this study, a forgiveness education curriculum was implemented within a school curriculum. Again the design of an experimental and control group was used. The students in the experimental group received the forgiveness education, whereas the students in the control group followed the original syllabus. This study aimed to determine the effect forgiveness education had on students' self-esteem and hope. A pre-test-post-test format with appropriate assessments was utilized to test the impact of the forgiveness education. The results of this study showed that the students who received the forgiveness education had a more positive attitude towards people in general, and illustrated a better understanding of forgiveness in general. However, there were not significant changes seen in students' self-esteem and hope.

A third study that examined the use of a forgiveness intervention with adolescents was Freedman and Knupp's (2003) study in which they analyzed the impact of forgiveness education in helping adolescents cope with a specific hurt related to parental divorce. Participants in this study were 10 adolescents who attended a junior high school in a small Midwestern community. The design of an experimental group and a no-treatment control group with a pre-test-post-test component was used to carry out this study. Participants in the experimental group received eight weekly forgiveness education sessions that were approximately 60 minutes in length. The results from this study were not significant but were moving in the expected direction. There was statistical significance shown on the hope assessment and the anxiety measure, with the experimental group showing higher hope and lower anxiety as a result of receiving the forgiveness intervention. The authors concluded that students who received the forgiveness education illustrated greater psychological well-being following the forgiveness intervention.

Other individual case studies exist (Freedman, 2007), as well as studies with forgiveness education in a large group setting (Enright, Knutson Enright, Holter, Baskin, & Knutson, 2007); all illustrating that forgiveness education has positive psychological benefits. Forgiveness education has shown to have a positive impact on students' overall well-being, as well as increased students' conceptual knowledge of forgiveness, and their willingness to forgive.

## **Research Questions**

This study sought to address the following research questions:

1. Does forgiveness education increase students' understanding of what forgiveness is and is not, as well as help them to gain an understanding of the critical components involved in forgiveness?
2. What impact does forgiveness education have on students' forgiveness towards a person who has hurt them?
3. What impact does forgiveness education have on students' level of anger?
4. What impact does forgiveness education have on students' personal definition, understanding, and view of forgiveness?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

This study was carried out at the University of Northern Iowa's Center for Urban Education (UNI-CUE) in Waterloo, Iowa. UNI-CUE works to serve the educational needs of students in Black Hawk County, particularly students of minority and low socioeconomic status. UNI-CUE offers free tutoring for students in grades Kindergarten-12<sup>th</sup> throughout the school year, as well as offers a leadership program in the summer for students transitioning to middle school in the fall. Many of the students attending UNI-CUE have experienced deep and unfair hurts, thus would benefit from a forgiveness education program (Scoggins-Rose, Personal Communication, 2014). Early adolescents (children ages 10-15) who participate in programs at UNI-CUE were asked to volunteer for this study. Any early adolescent who volunteered to

participate in this study and received parental consent was able to participate. After distributing a flyer describing the study at UNI-CUE and the assistant director of UNI-CUE making personal phone calls to early adolescents attending programs at UNI-CUE, 11 early adolescents volunteered for this study and received parental consent. The average age of participants in this study was 13.6 years. The range of age of participants in this study was 11-15 years. The ethnicity of participants included: Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic. There were six females and five males. (See Table 1 for more specifics regarding participants.) Each student who participated in this study received compensation in the form of a \$15.00 gift certificate to Subway at the end of the study, as well as pizza and juice at each forgiveness education session as an incentive to attend.

### **Instruments**

The questionnaires, surveys, and interviews described in this section were used as pre-test and post-test assessments in this study to determine the impact of forgiveness education with early adolescents.

#### **Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire**

The Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire measures a person's understanding of forgiveness. In this study, we used a revised version of the Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire used in Hui and Chau's (2009) study that examined the use of a forgiveness intervention to help Hong Kong children cope with a hurt from an interpersonal relationship. The Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire we used, which was revised by Dr. Freedman to better serve the needs of early adolescents, consists of twenty-two questions regarding forgiveness. The questionnaire asks the student to circle yes or no in response to each question.

To gain a better understanding of the types of questions on the questionnaire, two are listed below.

- “Is an apology necessary before you would forgive someone?”
- “Does anger go away when you forgive?”

### **Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (EFI-C)**

The Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (Enright, 2000) asks a child to identify someone whom has deeply or unfairly hurt him/her, and then answer 30 questions/statements, 10 questions/statements per subscale, regarding how they feel towards their offender cognitively, behaviorally, and emotionally. Five questions/statements per subscale assessed for the presence of positive feelings towards the offender in that subscale (affect, behavior, and cognition) and five questions/statements assessed for the presence of negative feelings towards the offender in that subscale (affect, behavior, and cognition), for a total of 30 questions/statements. Scores range from 30-120 on this inventory, with a higher score representing higher forgiveness. To gain a better understanding of the types of questions/statements on this assessment, there are six questions/statements listed below, two from each subscale, one assessing for positive feelings and one assessing for negative feelings towards an offender.

- “I feel happy toward him/her.” (affect scale, assessing for positive feelings)
- “I feel upset toward him/her.” (affect scale, assessing for negative feelings)
- “Would you be a friend to him/her?” (behavior scale, assessing for positive feelings)
- “Would you stay away from him/her?” (behavior scale, assessing for negative feelings)

- “Do you think (name) is a good person?” (cognition scale, assessing for positive feelings)
- “Do you think (name) is mean?” (cognition scale, assessing for negative feelings)

### **Beck Anger Inventory for Youth (BANI-Y)**

The Beck Anger Inventory for Youth (The Psychological Corporation, 2001) is a twenty-question survey. It includes twenty statements regarding how some children feel, and the child is asked to rank the statement as never, sometimes, often, or always in relation to how they feel. A few statements from the inventory are listed below (The Psychological Corporation, 2001):

- “I feel like screaming.”
- “I think people try to cheat me.”
- “I think my life is unfair.”

### **Written Interview**

Collaboratively, Dr. Freedman and I created a pre-test and post-test written interview regarding forgiveness that we administered to each student. The purpose of these written interviews was to gain qualitative data regarding how each student thinks about forgiveness, and their current understanding of it. A few questions we included on the written interviews are listed below.

1. “How would you define “Forgiveness?”” (pre-test)
2. “Have you heard about forgiveness before or learned about it? If so, where?”  
(pre-test)

3. “How has your definition of forgiveness changed as a result of the forgiveness education?” (post-test)
4. “When you think of the word, “Forgiveness”, what comes to mind?” (post-test)

## **Design**

A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was used to carry out this study. There were several reasons this design was used for this study. First, the low number of volunteers for this study and the concern of the reliability of the participants made it unwise to divide the students into two groups. Second, because of time constraints it was not possible to give the forgiveness education to two different groups of students. Thus, the pre-test/post-test design was the best choice of design to use with this study.

## **Procedure**

Before beginning this study, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Northern Iowa was granted. The study was then conducted in the following manner, prior to receiving any forgiveness education sessions; each student was given the pre-test assessments, described above. The pre-test assessments were administered to the majority of students one week prior to the forgiveness education beginning and a few students completed the pre-test assessments prior to the first forgiveness education session on the date it occurred. After all the students completed the pre-test assessments, the participants received four 45-minute forgiveness education sessions, administered by Dr. Suzanne Freedman, who has studied interpersonal forgiveness for 28 years. The forgiveness education sessions took place for four consecutive weeks, other than skipping one week for Spring Break. Each session was one hour



in length, with pizza and juice being served the first 15 minutes and forgiveness education taking place during the last 45-minutes of each session. Dr. Freedman followed the Enright Process Model of Forgiveness (Enright, 1991) in her education sessions, as well as incorporated other materials, such as literature in her education. The education sessions included a lecture component, as well as small and large group discussions. Each session is described in detail below.

**1<sup>st</sup> Session.** Nine of the eleven participants were present for the first session. The two participants that were absent received the materials that we went over in this session the following week. Dr. Freedman began this forgiveness education session with the icebreaker game *Two Truths and a Lie*. Dr. Freedman then had students share things that make them feel angry or hurt with the large group. Next, Dr. Freedman had students share how they respond to being hurt or angry, and I wrote their responses on the board. One student shared that she puts headphones in and listens to music or she vents to a friend. A couple of students responded that they work to get revenge with whoever made them angry. Dr. Freedman then had students determine whether the ways in which they respond to anger or being hurt are healthy or unhealthy. As a class, a list of unhealthy and healthy ways to respond to anger and/or hurt was compiled by the end of this class period. Finally, this session ended with Dr. Freedman reading the book *A Terrible Thing Happened* by Margaret Holmes aloud to the class and having a brief discussion about the book. This book is a fictional book about a character who witnesses something terrible happen and how he copes with his feelings related to witnessing this event.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Session.** Ten of the eleven participants were present for the second session. The student not present received the handout from this session the following week. Dr. Freedman began this session with another icebreaker; having students go around and share an adjective that describes them and that starts with the same letter as their first name. For example, “Happy Hillary”. Some students seemed to really understand this concept, but other students did not use adjectives, but rather said things such as, monkey or zebra opposed to an actual adjective. This activity showed the immaturity that some students participating in the study illustrated. After the icebreaker activity, Dr. Freedman had students list their definitions of forgiveness. Students’ definitions included: saying sorry, giving someone a second chance, not being so dramatic, and accepting and moving on. Next, Dr. Freedman discussed what forgiveness is not. She explained to the students that forgiveness is not the same as pardoning, is not reconciliation, is not condoning, is not denial or indifference, is not forgetting, and is not simply a diminishing of angry feelings over time. Finally, Dr. Freedman ended this forgiveness education session by reading aloud the book *The Forgiveness Garden* by Lauren Thompson. This book is a parable that describes forgiveness as a positive way to resolve conflicts and how to move forward. Overall, students seemed very attentive during this session, and seemed to illustrate a lot of knowledge regarding forgiveness, as their definitions of forgiveness included: letting go after a hurt occurs, accepting and moving on, giving someone a second chance, and not being so dramatic.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Session.** Ten of the eleven participants were present for the third forgiveness education session. The student not present received the handout from this session the

following week. Dr. Freedman began this session by reviewing what forgiveness is. Some students still had misconceptions about forgiveness, as one student said forgiving means, “To forgive and forget,” which is not correct, as forgiveness does not involve forgetting the hurt. Many students did remember a lot about forgiveness from the previous week though, as they recognized that forgiving someone does not mean that you have to get back into a relationship with that person. Dr. Freedman then presented students with the 4-phase, 20-unit forgiveness model developed by the Enright and Human Development Study Group (1991) (See Appendix A). Dr. Freedman explained this model to the students, and then focused on the Work Phase of this model, in which a person rediscovers the humanity in the person that they are working to forgive, a foundational principle of forgiveness. To help students better understand this phase of the forgiveness process, Dr. Freedman referenced the movie, *Because of Winn Dixie*, in which there is a scene where it discusses that someone is not a bad person just because they do something bad. After discussing the Enright Model of Forgiveness in more depth, Dr. Freedman concluded this session by reading the book *Enemy Pie* by Derek Munson. This book is about a young boy who initially does not like a new boy that moves in down the street, but after he gets to know him, he becomes friends with him. The purpose of reading this book was to help students understand how our view of people can change and how our view of a person may not always reflect the whole person or be completely accurate. Sometimes seeing a person with “new eyes” is necessary to obtain a complete and thorough picture of someone, and that is what Dr. Freedman was conveying to the students.

**Final Session.** The final session took place two weeks after the 3<sup>rd</sup> session due to Spring Break for the students and the university. Ten of the eleven participants were present for the last forgiveness education session. Dr. Freedman began this session by reviewing what the students did in the sessions prior to Spring Break, specifically discussing *Enemy Pie*. Dr. Freedman then asked the students if any of them had changed their mind about a person before. A few students shared that they had, one for the better and one for the worse. Next, Dr. Freedman reviewed the Enright Forgiveness Model with the students again. After reviewing the Enright Forgiveness Model, Dr. Freedman read aloud a story by Gayan Macher about what inspired him to write the song, *Black Madonna: A Song of Forgiveness*. Gayan Macher was inspired to write the song, *Black Madonna: A Song of Forgiveness* after watching a mother in an Alabama courtroom forgive a man who had brutally beaten and lynched her son, simply because he was black. After Dr. Freedman read this story aloud, she asked students to share their thoughts. Students did not volunteer much information, but did clarify their understanding that forgiveness does not always have to include an apology. Dr. Freedman then played the lyrics to the song *Black Madonna* aloud to the students. Next, Dr. Freedman had the students work in groups to come up with two truths and a lie regarding forgiveness. Finally, Dr. Freedman concluded this session by reading aloud the book, *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson. This book discusses how each small act of kindness makes the world a better place.

Following the four forgiveness education sessions, the students took the post-test assessments, which were the same as the pre-test assessments, other than the written interview, which included questions more fitting for a post-test as opposed to a pre-test,

such as, “How has your definition of forgiveness changed as a result of the forgiveness education?” Pizza and juice was again provided for the students, and each student received a \$15 gift card to Subway on this day for completing the study.

## **Results**

Descriptive statistics, means, standard deviations, and ranges were computed for each dependent variable on the pre-test and post-test assessments. These statistics are summarized in Table 2. A series of *t*-tests were computed to determine if there were any significant differences between the average pre-test scores and the average post-test scores on the measures. A *t*-test was used to compare the statistical data of this study, as a *t*-test determines whether there is statistical significance between two means and is ideal when working with a small sample size, as in this study. In addition to the descriptive statistics for the three quantitative assessments given, student responses were analyzed for the written interviews, both pre-test and post-test.

### **Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire**

The Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire consists of 22 questions, but only 14 questions have actual right or wrong answers, the other eight questions are opinion questions. Thus, the possible range of scores for this assessment is 0-14. The higher a person’s score is on this assessment the higher one’s knowledge of forgiveness. Table 3 illustrates students’ scores on the pre-test and post-test for this measure, as well as shows the change score for each individual participant from pre-test to post-test. It is important to note that seven students’ scores went up from the pre-test to post-test. Table 4 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire. It is important to note that the overall average score on this questionnaire increased by more than one full point from pre-test to post-test. In addition, a

one-tailed paired *t*-test was used to compare the means from the pre-test to the post-test on this questionnaire;  $t=-2.10$  and  $p<.05$ , illustrating a statistically significant difference between the average pre-test and post-test scores on this measure; supporting the hypothesis that forgiveness education will increase students' conceptual understanding of forgiveness in this research study.

### **Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (EFI-C)**

The Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (EFI-C; Enright, 2000) measures the degree to which a child forgives someone, by asking him/her to identify a past hurt and offender and then answer 30 questions/statements regarding his/her feelings, behaviors, and thoughts towards that person. Scores can range from 30-120 on this assessment, with a higher score representing higher forgiveness. Table 5 illustrates students' scores on the pre-test and post-test for this measure, as well as shows the change score for each individual participant from pre-test to post-test. It is important to note that half of the students' scores went up from the pre-test to post-test. Table 5 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children. There is no significant difference on the average score for this assessment from pre-test to post-test, but the average did not decrease, which is important to note. In addition, a two-tailed paired *t*-test was used to compare the means from the pre-test to post-test on this assessment;  $t=.067$  and  $p>.05$ , which illustrated that there was not a statistically significant difference between the average pre-test and post-test scores on this measure. However, the data was trending in the correct direction. (Note: Participant number 05's data was not included in the analysis of this data, as he/she did not identify a deep, personal, hurt on the post-test assessment. Thus, this measure was not able to accurately measure his/her's willingness to forgive someone.)

**Beck Anger Inventory for Youth (BANI-Y)**

The Beck Anger Inventory for Youth (BANI-Y; The Psychological Corporation, 2001) consists of 20 questions with possible raw scores ranging from 0-60. T-score equivalents for raw scores by sex and age were determined using a chart from the publishing company of the assessment. Possible T-scores for females ages 11-14 range from 31-100. Possible T-scores for males ages 11-14 range from 32-96. Possible T-scores for females ages 15-18 range from 36-97. Possible T-scores for males ages 15-18 range from 38-93. The lower a person's score on this assessment the less anger they are experiencing. Table 7 illustrates students' scores on the pre-test and post-test for this measure, as well as shows the change score for each individual participant from pre-test to post-test. It is important to note that seven of the students' scores went down from pre-test to post-test, thus showing a decrease in anger. Table 8 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the Beck Anger Inventory for Youth. In analyzing this table, it is important to note that the average score on this assessment did decrease from pre-test to post-test; indicating students were experiencing less anger post-test. In addition, a two-tailed paired *t*-test was used to compare the means from the pre-test to post-test on this assessment;  $t=.31$  and  $p>.05$ , illustrating that there was not a statistically significant difference between the average pre-test and post-test scores on this measure. However, on average, students' scores went down from pre-test to post-test, which is what one would hypothesize.

**Written Interview**

The final assessment given to students during this study was the written interview, which incorporates qualitative rather than quantitative data. In analyzing the written interviews, it is clear that the forgiveness education changed several students' views on forgiveness for the

better. The pre-test responses to the question, “When you think of the word “forgiveness,” what comes to mind?” included: *people fighting, making peace, forgiving people, and nice*. Post-test responses to the question, “How has your definition of forgiveness changed as a result of the forgiveness education?” were the following: *saying sorry isn't always forgiving, it has taught me how to not go for revenge after they have hurt me, to recognize what they did and accept it, and admitting that the person who hurt me is not 100% awful*. In addition, on the post-test in response to the question, “Do you think that you will use forgiveness in the future as a result of learning about it?” all 11 participants answered that they would use forgiveness in the future as a result of learning about it. Also, in response to the question on the post-test, “How do you think that forgiveness can help you or your friends?”, students answers included: *it makes peace, it helps control anger, you do not have to carry it with you all the time, makes relationships less tense, and it helps to build a better connection and relationship*. In comparing students’ answers to questions on the pre-test to the post-test, their responses to the questions on the post-test illustrate that the forgiveness education helped the students develop a more thorough and accurate understanding of what forgiveness is and is not.

## **Discussion**

### **Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire**

Pre-test scores for the Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire illustrated that most students had a decent understanding of forgiveness, but had room to develop a better understanding. In looking at Table 3, it can be concluded that seven of the eleven students increased their conceptual knowledge of forgiveness as a result of receiving the forgiveness education. In addition, the *t*-test illustrated that there was a statistically significant difference



between the average group pre-test score and the average group post-test score on this assessment, which is important to note, because with such a small sample size, it is often difficult to find statistical significance but this measure illustrated it. Also, it is important to note the statistical significance of this measure, as this occurred with only four weeks of forgiveness education.

The main goal of this study was to increase students' knowledge of forgiveness through forgiveness education sessions. In analyzing the data from the Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire, it can be concluded that students' knowledge of forgiveness did improve as a result of receiving forgiveness education. In addition, one of the research questions this study sought to answer was whether forgiveness education increases students' understanding of what forgiveness is and is not, as well as whether it helps students gain an understanding of the critical components involved in forgiveness. In analyzing the data from the Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire, it can be concluded that forgiveness education does increase students' understanding of what forgiveness is and is not.

### **Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (EFI-C)**

Pre-test scores on the Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children indicated many students were already fairly forgiving towards their offender for a past hurt they had experienced. Thus, one may not expect to see significant changes from pre-test to post-test on this assessment, when students were illustrating fairly high forgiveness on the pre-test assessment. However, there was still room for several students to become more forgiving towards an offender for a past hurt they had experienced. The types of hurt students identified included: *friends making fun of them, fighting with friends, a peer making fun of them for having*

*bald spots, fighting with their mom, being punched for no reason by a peer, and cruel jokes played on them by friends.* A limitation of this particular measure and the way in which we distributed it was that some students identified a different hurt on the post-test assessment in comparison to the pre-test assessment. Students' scores who identified a different hurt on the post-test in comparison to the pre-test may not show as great of a difference as those students' scores who reported the same hurt on both the pre-test and post-test assessments. In addition, as mentioned above, when students are already forgiving, a large increase in actual forgiveness from pre-test to post-test cannot be expected. However, despite these limitations, the results from this assessment were trending in the correct direction. This is important to note with only 11 participants and only four weeks of forgiveness education. This assessment addressed the second research question this study sought to address, regarding the impact forgiveness education has on one's forgiveness toward a person who has hurt them. In analyzing the data from this assessment, it can be concluded that forgiveness education seems to have a positive impact on students' forgiveness of a person who has hurt them, but four weeks of forgiveness education is probably not long enough to see significant changes in one's actual forgiveness towards an offender.

### **Beck Anger Inventory for Youth (BANI-Y)**

Pre-test scores for the Beck Anger Inventory for Youth assessment indicated that the majority of students did not illustrate a high level of anger. Thus, one would not expect to see a significant change from pre-test scores to post-test scores on this assessment since students did not indicate a high level of anger. In addition, four weeks of forgiveness education may not be enough to see a significant change in a person's level of anger. However, despite these limitations, seven students' score on their post-test was lower than their pre-test, thus indicating

that their anger did decrease. In addition, the average score on this assessment did decrease from pre-test to post-test, again illustrating an average decrease in anger. Thus, when considering the impact forgiveness education has on students' level of anger, which was one of the research questions this study sought to answer, it can be concluded that four forgiveness education sessions is probably not enough to see a significant change in one's level of anger, especially when the level of anger illustrated on the pre-test was low. However, students' scores from pre-test to post-test were trending in support of forgiveness education lowering students' level of anger.

### **Written Interview**

The largest impact the forgiveness education had on the students can be seen when analyzing how students' personal definition of forgiveness and their thoughts regarding forgiveness changed from their pre-test interview to their post-test interview. For example, a 14-year old, female, African American student stated on her posttest that the forgiveness education "has taught me how to not go for revenge after they have hurt me." A 12-year old, male, African American student stated that forgiveness education has taught him, "to recognize what they did and accept it." One of the most powerful points made on the post-test was by a 15-year old female Caucasian student when she wrote, "I have realized that admitting that they are not 100% awful is part of the process." A 12-year old, female, African American, student made another powerful statement, which was, "Some people make mistakes when they do not mean to hurt you." Finally, a 14-year old, female, African American student stated that forgiveness education "showed me that you can forgive even if the ones who hurt you don't say sorry to better yourself." These statements illustrate that the students understood the concept that all people have worth regardless of their offense, and that a deep hurt can occur with unintended

cause, a foundational principle of forgiveness. In comparing these statements to students' definition of forgiveness on the pre-test written interview which included: *being understanding, forgiving someone, it is when a person says sorry and you become friends again, and forgive and over*, it is clear that students' personal definition and understanding of forgiveness became more accurate and sophisticated as a result of receiving the forgiveness education. In addition, all of the participants indicated that they think they will use forgiveness in the future as a result of learning about it on the post-test. Also, students indicated that they felt forgiveness could be helpful to themselves or their friends, as their responses to a question addressing that included: *it makes peace, it helps control anger, you do not have to carry it with you all of the time, it can make relationships less tense, and it can help build better relationships*. Thus, it can be concluded that forgiveness education has a positive effect on students' personal definition and understanding and view of forgiveness, which was the final research question this study sought to answer.

### **Limitations**

In evaluating this study, it should be kept in mind that there were several limitations, in addition to the ones mentioned above. One of the main limitations was the lack of a control group, due to limited volunteer participation at the start of this study. Without a control group, it is impossible to compare how students who received the forgiveness education benefited in relation to students who did not receive forgiveness education. It is also impossible to know what other circumstances students in this study encountered during the time period that they took the pre-test assessments and the post-test assessments. Thus, other outside factors could have influenced students' scores on these assessments.

In addition, to the lack of a control group, another significant limitation of this study was the limited duration of the forgiveness education. In a study conducted by Freedman and Enright (1996) in which they conducted a forgiveness intervention with incest survivors, it took some of the participants over a year to forgive their offender. Thus, only four forgiveness education sessions may not have been enough time for many of the participants in this study to increase their level of forgiveness. Research also illustrates that forgiveness is not a quick and easy process (Al-Mabuk et al., 1995; Freedman & Enright, 1996); again supporting the fact that four weeks may not have been long enough to see significant results in students' forgiveness of an offender. However, this study does illustrate that less than four hours of forgiveness education can improve students' understanding and knowledge of forgiveness. Teachers and/or counselors may not have much time to spend on forgiveness education, and this study illustrates the value of including forgiveness education in the curriculum, even if it is only for a short duration.

The group setting that was used to deliver the forgiveness education could have also negatively influenced the results of this study, particularly students' ability to forgive an offender, as the group setting did not allow students to work through the forgiveness process at their own pace. In addition, the way in which the forgiveness education was conducted in general, may not be the most effective way for all early adolescents to learn about forgiveness, thus, this could also be a limitation of this study.

Another explanation related to the results obtained is due to the fact that the cognitive and maturity levels of some of the participants were low. Thus, taking the assessments was cognitively challenging for several of the participants, which could have resulted in them not completing them as thoroughly and accurately as students at a higher cognitive level may have completed them. In addition, the varying cognitive and maturity levels of students could have

negatively impacted how much students were able to learn at each forgiveness education session, as some of the students with a higher cognitive and maturity level could have probably benefited from a more in-depth discussion than students with a lower cognitive and maturity level. We do not know how much individual students were able to comprehend during the large group discussions, due to the varying levels of cognitive ability. Also, the participants in this study were early adolescents, so they may have just not felt like completing these assessments thoroughly and accurately, which could have contributed to the lack of significant change from pre-test to post-test on some of the assessments.

### **Strengths**

This study did have several strengths, despite its limitations. One strength of this study was the statistically significant difference illustrated between the average score on the pre-test and post-test for the Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire. It is often difficult to find statistical significance with a small sample size, as this study had. However, statistical significance was illustrated on this assessment. The main purpose of this study was for students to gain a better understanding of what forgiveness is and is not, so to find a statistically significant difference between the average pre-test and post-test scores on the Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire is a major strength. In addition, the results of the Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children and the Beck Anger Inventory for Youth were trending in the anticipated direction. Finally, the qualitative data from the written interviews indicated students' understanding of forgiveness improved as a result of receiving the forgiveness education sessions. Examples of this include, students recognizing that an apology does not have to occur for forgiveness to occur, that a person is not 100% awful just because they hurt you, that you must accept a hurt and then move forward, and that revenge is not a healthy form of handling anger. If students are able to develop

this knowledge in just four forgiveness education sessions, this illustrates that forgiveness education can be beneficial to early adolescents. In addition, all 11 participants indicated that they think they will use forgiveness in the future as a result of learning about it, thus supporting the benefit of receiving forgiveness education.

### **Future Research**

Further research regarding the power of forgiveness education is still needed if it is to become part of the school curriculum. Future research should examine the impact of forgiveness education in a randomized experimental and wait-list control group study. This would allow the comparison of data of students who receive the forgiveness education to students who do not receive the forgiveness education. Future research regarding the best way to teach early adolescents forgiveness is also needed, because there may be better approaches to teaching early adolescents about forgiveness than were used in this study. In addition, a study taking place over a longer period of time that allows participants more time to work through the forgiveness model would be an important study to conduct for future research. Finally, a study including follow-up assessments regarding how well students retain what they were taught about forgiveness education would be beneficial to future research. This research is a starting point for researchers interested in the benefits and impact of forgiveness education with early adolescents. It is critical that forgiveness education be included in the school curriculum, but further research in this field will be helpful in making that happen. If students learn about forgiveness, the possibility of positive consequences for their peers, family, community, school, and themselves would loom large.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, although the majority of the data from this study was not statistically significant, it can be concluded that forgiveness education is beneficial to early adolescents. Students' understanding of what forgiveness is and is not improved as a result of this study, as shown by the statistically significant difference between the average pre-test and post-test scores on the Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire. In addition, students' feelings of anger and forgiveness towards an offender were trending in the right direction. However, due to the small sample size used in this study, results cannot be generalized to the larger population. It can also be concluded that four forgiveness education sessions may not be enough time for students to be able to change their feelings towards an offender. If students were to receive more forgiveness education sessions, I would anticipate that their understanding of forgiveness would increase even more, and that their forgiveness towards an offender would increase as illustrated on the Enright Forgiveness Inventory and their level of anger would decrease as illustrated on the Beck Anger Inventory for Youth. It takes a while to work through the forgiveness process, so a forgiveness education program needs to be longer than four weeks if one wants to see stronger results and changes in forgiveness towards a specific offender. Despite the short duration of this study though, forgiveness education proved to be beneficial for students. Thus, this study supports the existing research that forgiveness education is beneficial to one's overall well-being. The more research that supports the benefits of forgiveness the better, as it will help illustrate the value of including forgiveness education in the school curriculum. This study is one of many that may help forgiveness education become part of the school curriculum.



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## Appendix A

Figure 1

### *The Phases and Units of Forgiving and the Issues Involved*

#### **Uncovering Phase**

1. Examination of psychological defenses and the issues involved
2. Confrontation of anger; the point is to release, not harbor, the anger
3. Admittance of shame, when this is appropriate
4. Awareness of depleted emotional energy
5. Awareness of cognitive rehearsal of the offense
6. Insight that the injured party may be comparing self with the injurer
7. Realization that oneself may be permanently and adversely changed by the injury
8. Insight into a possibly altered “just world” view

#### **Decision Phase**

9. A change in heart/conversion/new insights that old resolution strategies are not working
10. Willingness to consider forgiveness as an option
11. Commitment to forgive the offender

#### **Work Phase**

12. Reframing, through role-taking, who the wrongdoer is by viewing him or her in context
13. Empathy and compassion toward the offender
14. Bearing/accepting the pain
15. Giving a moral gift to the offender

#### **Deepening Phase**

16. Finding meaning for self and others in the suffering and in the forgiveness process
17. Realization that self has needed others’ forgiveness in the past
18. Insight that one is not alone (universality, support)
19. Realization that self may have new purpose in life because of the injury
20. Awareness of decreased negative affect and, perhaps, increased positive affect, if this begins to emerge, toward the injurer; awareness of internal, emotional release

*Note:* This table is an extension of Enright et al. (1991). Details of each unit can be found in Enright (2001).

**Table 1: Characteristics of Participants**

<b>I.D. #</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>School Attending</b>
01	Female	14	Hispanic	8 <sup>th</sup>	Bunger Middle School
02	Male	15	Hispanic	10 <sup>th</sup>	East High School
03	Female	13	African American	9 <sup>th</sup>	Peet Junior High
04	Female	14	African American	8 <sup>th</sup>	Peet Junior High
05	Male	12	African American	7 <sup>th</sup>	Bunger Middle School
06	Male	15	Caucasian	9 <sup>th</sup>	West High School
07	Female	15	Caucasian	10 <sup>th</sup>	East High School
08	Female	12	African American	6 <sup>th</sup>	Central Middle School
09	Male	15	Hispanic	9 <sup>th</sup>	Columbus High School
10	Male	11	Caucasian	6 <sup>th</sup>	Hoover Middle School
11	Female	14	African American	8 <sup>th</sup>	Carver Middle School

Note: This table illustrates the characteristics of the 11 participants in the study.

**Table 2: Dependent Variables, Means and Standard Deviations for Assessments**

Variables	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Forgiveness 1	26.7	7.1	27.5	7.5
Forgiveness 2	28.6	8.1	29.5	6.6
Forgiveness 3	27.8	10.2	26.3	9.3
Total Forgiveness	83.1	19.7	83.3	20
Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire	8.2	2.1	9.8	1.6
BANI-Y	54.3	6.3	53.7	9.5

Note: This table summarizes the descriptive statistics for the three quantitative measures

used in this study. Forgiveness 1-Affective scale; Forgiveness 2-Behavior Scale;

Forgiveness 3-Cognitive Scale, Total Forgiveness-Combined Forgiveness 1,2, and

3 scores

**Table 3: Students' Scores on the Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire**

<b>Students' Scores on Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire</b>			
<b>I.D. Number</b>	<b>Pre-Test Score</b>	<b>Post-Test Score</b>	<b>Change in Score (+ = increase; - = decrease)</b>
01	8	11	+3
02	10	9	-1
03	10	11	+1
04	5	10	+5
05	10	10	No Change
06	6	9	+3
07	11	11	No Change
08	5	9	+4
09	9	6	-3
10	9	10	+1
11	7	12	+5

Note: This table illustrates each participant's score on both the pre-test and post-test for the Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire, as well as their change score from pre-test to post-test.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Scores on Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire**

<b>Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire</b>								
<b>Pre-Test</b>			<b>Post-Test</b>			<b>Change Scores</b>		
<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
5-11	8.2	2.1	6-12	9.8	1.6	(-3)-5	1.7	2.6

Note: This table summarizes the descriptive statistics of the Conceptual Forgiveness Questionnaire, both pre-test and post-test, and change scores.



**Table 5: Students' Scores on Enright Forgiveness Inventory**

<b>Enright Forgiveness Inventory</b>				
<b>I.D. Number</b>	<b>Pre-test</b>	<b>Post-test</b>	<b>Change in Scores (+ = increase, - = decrease)</b>	<b>Same or Different Hurt Identified</b>
<b>01</b>	103	92	-11	Same
<b>02</b>	102	105	+3	Same
<b>03</b>	101	102	+1	Different
<b>04</b>	83	76	-7	Don't know
<b>06</b>	95	83	-12	Same
<b>07</b>	78	77	-1	Different
<b>08</b>	70	73	+3	Different
<b>09</b>	72	92	+20	Don't know
<b>10</b>	39	36	-3	Same
<b>11</b>	88	97	+9	Different

Note: This table illustrates each participant's score on the Enright Forgiveness Inventory, both pre-test and post-test, their change score, as well as if the hurt they identified on the pre-test and post-test was the same.

**Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Scores on the Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children**

<b>Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children</b>								
<b>Pre-Test</b>			<b>Post-Test</b>			<b>Change Scores</b>		
<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
39-103	83.1	19.7	36-105	83.3	20.0	(-12)-20	0.2	9.6

Note: This table summarizes the descriptive statistics of the Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children, both pre-test and post-test, and change scores.

**Table 7: Students' Scores on the Beck Anger Inventory for Youth (BANI-Y)**

<b>Student Scores for Beck Anger Inventory for Youth (BANI-Y)</b>			
<b>I.D. Number</b>	<b>Pre-test</b>	<b>Post-test</b>	<b>Change Scores</b>
<b>01</b>	TS: 43	TS: 48	5
<b>02</b>	TS: 51	TS: 44	-7
<b>03</b>	TS: 46	TS: 45	-1
<b>04</b>	TS: 60	TS: 72	12
<b>05</b>	TS: 55	TS: 49	-6
<b>06</b>	TS: 50	TS: 41	-9
<b>07</b>	TS: 55	TS: 54	-1
<b>08</b>	TS: 60	TS: 55	-5
<b>09</b>	TS: 62	TS: 64	2
<b>10</b>	TS: 54	TS: 62	8
<b>11</b>	TS: 61	TS: 56	-5

Note: This table illustrates each participant's score on the Beck Anger Inventory for Youth, both pre-test and post-test, as well as their change score.

**Table 8: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Scores on Beck Anger Inventory for Youth (BANI-Y)**

<b>Beck Anger Inventory for Youth (BANI-Y)</b>								
<b>Total Scores</b>								
<b>Pre-Test</b>			<b>Post-Test</b>			<b>Change Scores</b>		
<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
43-62	54.3	6.3	41-72	53.7	9.5	(-9)- 12	-0.6	6.7

Note: This table summarizes the descriptive statistics of the Beck Anger Inventory for Youth, both pre-test and post-test, as well as change scores.