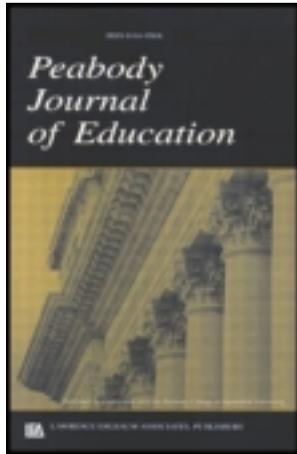


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Cultivating the Academic Integrity of Urban Adolescents with Ethical Philosophy Programming

Scott Seider, Sarah Novick, and Jessica Gomez

Boston University

This mixed-methods study considered the effects of ethical philosophy programming at a high-performing, high-poverty urban high school upon the academic integrity of participating adolescents ($n = 279$). Analyses of pre–post survey data revealed that participating adolescents reported significantly higher levels of academic integrity than their peers at a matched comparison school. Field notes from observations of ethical philosophy lessons and qualitative interviews with participating students revealed that this programming offered students frequent opportunities to practice moral reasoning and introduced philosophical perspectives that influenced students' conception of and commitment to academic integrity.

According to its 2003 charter school application, Classical Academy Charter School—a high-poverty, high-performing secondary school in a large northeastern city—was founded upon two central principles.¹ The first was that all students can learn and accomplish at high levels, and the second was that schools should provide training in ethical philosophy. As a result, Classical Academy students participate during all 4 years of high school in a weekly ethical philosophy course that introduces students to philosophical writings and perspectives on the school's five key virtues: courage, compassion, integrity, perseverance, and respect. Most relevant to the present study is Classical Academy's focus on integrity.² Specifically, in this mixed-methods study, we considered the effect of Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming on participating students' commitment to academic integrity in comparison to their peers at a matched comparison school. Next, we report on the extant research literature on academic integrity and ethical philosophy programming as well as the scholarship on adolescent identity exploration that serves as a theoretical framework for interpreting this study's key findings.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity can be defined as a commitment to honesty in one's work through avoidance of behaviors such as cheating and plagiarism (Ghaffari, 2008; Kisamore, Stone, & Jawahar,

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¹Classical Academy, Civitas Prep, and all students in this article are referred to by pseudonyms.

²A report on the effects of Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming on the school's other key virtues can be found in Seider (2012).

2007). A robust body of evidence suggests that many American adolescents and young adults engage frequently in both of these behaviors (McCabe, 2005; Miller, Murdock, Andersman, & Poindexter, 2007; Miller, Shoptaugh, & Woodridge, 2011; Stephens & Nicholson, 2008). Specifically, McCabe (2005) reported that, in a study of 50,000 American undergraduates, 70% reported engaging in some form of cheating behavior in the past year. Other scholars have reported that the proportion of students who engage in cheating behaviors during the high school years is even higher (Anderman & Midgley, 2004; Evans & Craig, 1990). In a national survey of 20,000 high school students, 80% admitted to having cheated on a school assignment in the past year (Strom & Strom, 2008). Likewise, in several large-scale studies, Steinberg (1996) found that two thirds of adolescents admitted to having cheated on a test in the past year, and 90% admitted to having copied a classmate's homework assignment. All of these findings are particularly concerning in light of research that has found cheating behaviors to have a detrimental effect upon students' mastery of academic content (Ma, Lu, Turner & Wan, 2007; Schab, 1991). Moreover, a study by the Josephson Institute of Ethics (2009) found that individuals who cheated on tests as teenagers were twice as likely as noncheaters to be dishonest in their professional lives and 50% more likely to lie to their spouses or cheat on their taxes.

Researchers have also found that youth become more likely to engage in cheating behaviors as they transition from elementary school to middle school and then from middle school to high school (Anderman & Midgley, 2004). Explanations for this shift have been attributed to the increased importance placed on academic marks by students' parents and teachers, heightened competition among classmates, and more superficial relationships with teachers (Anderman, Griesinger, & Westerfield, 1998; Murdock, Hale, & Weber, 2001). Support for these explanations can be found in research that has found higher levels of cheating among adolescents who report worrying about their performance on tests and examinations (Rost & Wild, 1990); in schools that emphasize competition and grades (Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Stephens, 2005); and in classrooms where students perceive the teacher to be incompetent, uncaring, or unfair (Calabrese & Cochran, 1990; Evans & Craig, 1990). Still other researchers have found that engagement in cheating (and other antisocial behaviors) relates negatively to an individual's ability to engage in moral reasoning (Carlo, Koller, & Eisenberg, 1998; Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1999; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984).

In terms of efforts to strengthen the integrity of young people, Stearns (2001) found that students are less likely to engage in dishonest behaviors in classes where they perceive the instructor to be skilled, fair, and caring in his or her teaching practices. Braumoeller and Gaines (2001) reported that cheating behavior diminished significantly in university classes in which the instructor announced at the outset of the course that he or she would be using plagiarism detection software. Yet Howard (2001) has argued that instructors should seek to strengthen students' commitment to integrity through pedagogical means, rather than investing their time in making plagiarism more difficult to accomplish. Toward this end, Stephens (2005) has found that secondary students are less likely to cheat in classes in which the instructor emphasizes mastery goals (i.e., learning the course content well) over performance goals (i.e., earning a good grade for the course). Other researchers have found that developing an honor code (McCabe & Trevino, 1997) and involving students in resolving cases that violate this honor code (Wangaard & Stephens, 2011) has a positive effect on students' commitment to acting with academic integrity. In the present study, we considered the effects of participating in ethical philosophy programming on students' commitment to approaching their academic work with honesty and integrity.

ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY

Due in large part to the efforts of Montclair State University's Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, there is a sizable amount of scholarship focused on the teaching of philosophy to young children (e.g., Johnson, 1984; Lipman, 1984, 1988; Reed & Johnson, 1999; Vansieleghem, 2005). The majority of this scholarship has focused on the ability of the Philosophy for Children curriculum to strengthen the critical thinking skills of participating children (e.g., Garcia-Moriyon, Rebollo, & Colom, 2005; Lipman, 1984, 1988; Trickey & Topping, 2004). In contrast, empirical research on philosophy programming in American *secondary* schools has been characterized as "scarce and scattered" (Macedo, 2011, p. 20). Moreover, much of this scholarship has focused on the ability of secondary-level philosophy coursework to strengthen participating students' critical thinking skills (e.g., Camhy & Iberer, 1988; English & Foster, 1996; Strong, 2004). Other studies have focused on the philosophical knowledge and teaching styles of secondary-level philosophy educators (Pinto, Boyd, & McDonough, 2009; Pinto, McDonough, & Boyd, 2011).

Few studies have examined the effects of high school philosophy programming upon students' moral character strengths, such as their commitment to academic integrity. One set of researchers found that high school students in an introductory ethics course demonstrated significant increases in their commitment to engage in ethical action (DeHaan, Hanford, Kinlaw, Philler, & Snarey, 1997). In related work, scholars have found that infusing ethical content into high school civics, biology, and English courses had significant effects upon students' understanding of ethical issues and their commitment to act in an ethical manner (Barden, Frase, & Kovac, 1997; Garrod, 1989; Pass & Willingham, 2009). The present study seeks to build upon these earlier efforts by considering the effects of stand-alone ethical philosophy coursework upon participating students' commitment to approach their academic work with honesty and integrity.

ADOLESCENT IDENTITY EXPLORATION

A key theoretical framework for considering the effect of Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming on participating students' academic integrity is psychologist Erik Erikson's (1965, 1968) work on adolescent identity development. Erikson (1968) defined identity as one's sense of self and theorized that individuals possess both a personal identity and an ego identity. The personal identity develops within an individual, whereas the ego identity develops from the individual's relationships with other people, institutions, and socio-historical contexts in which he or she lives.

According to Erikson, ego identity development typically occurs during late adolescence as individuals move beyond a blind adherence to the beliefs and values of their nuclear family and begin seeking out additional ways of understanding the world around them. In so doing, adolescents confront for the first time the questions "Who am I?" and "How do I fit into the world around me?" To address these questions, Erikson (1965) suggested that youth require exposure to "values and ideologies that transcend the immediate concerns of family and self and have historical continuity" (p. 32). Sources of such ideas include "religion and politics,

the arts and sciences, the stage and fiction” (p. 24). Erikson did not explicitly cite philosophy as a source of exposure for new values and ideologies, but the ethical philosophy programming at Classical Academy unequivocally seeks to expose students to the frameworks through which a variety of philosophers and thinkers sought to make sense of the world around them.

The present study investigated the role of Classical Academy’s ethical philosophy programming in guiding students’ exploration of their own commitment to academic integrity. The research questions driving this investigation were the following: (a) What is the effect of Classical Academy’s ethical philosophy programming on participating students’ commitment to academic integrity in comparison to their peers at a matched comparison school? (b) How do Classical Academy students describe and understand the impact of the school’s ethical philosophy programming on their commitment to acting with integrity? We addressed these questions with a mixed-methods research design that drew upon pre–post surveys, qualitative interviews, and observations of Classical Academy’s ethical philosophy programming.

METHODS

Participants

This study’s participants consisted of 279 high school students (Grades 9–12) from a large northeastern city. The participants attended either Classical Academy or Civitas Preparatory charter schools. The summary statistics for these students in terms of gender and race/ethnicity are presented in Table 1. In terms of participants per school, the 126 participants from Classical Academy represented 94% of the school’s 133 high school students. Likewise, the 157 participants from Civitas Prep represented 92% of the school’s 171 high school students. These high participation rates were due in large part to the in-class administration of surveys and an “opt out” consenting procedure. The 21 students who did not participate in the study were students who were absent from school on the day the research staff administered the Time 1 survey.

As can be seen in Table 1, the student bodies at both schools were proportional in terms of gender, and the majority of students at both schools identified as students of color. In terms of socioeconomic status, 73% of Classical Academy students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (a proxy for low socioeconomic status) as compared to 54% of Civitas Prep students. In

TABLE 1
Summary Statistics for Classical Academy and Civitas Prep High School Students

	N	Gender		Race/Ethnicity				Academic Integrity	
		Male	Female	Af-Am	Latino	White	Multiracial	Time 1	Time 2
Classical Academy	126	64 (51%)	62 (49%)	74 (59%)	16 (13%)	11 (9%)	25 (20%)	4.05 (.95)	4.06 (.93)
Civitas Prep	157	77 (49%)	80 (51%)	89 (57%)	10 (6%)	40 (25%)	18 (11%)	4.05 (.91)	3.80 (1.02)

Note. Af-Am = African American.

terms of academic achievement, on the 2011 high-stakes assessment administered to all 10th-grade students statewide, 100% of Classical Academy students scored advanced or proficient on the math assessment and 98% on the English assessment. Similarly, 91% of Civitas Prep students scored advanced or proficient on the math assessment and 97% on the English assessment. These scores attained by students at the two schools were comparable to one another but significantly higher than the percentages of 10th-grade students scoring advanced or proficient both citywide (62%, 68%) and statewide (74%, 84%).

Participating Schools

Charter schools are publicly funded primary and secondary schools that are supervised by State Boards of Education rather than a local superintendent or school committee (Angrist, Pathak, & Walters, 2011). The two charter schools in the present study are located within 3 miles of each other in the same neighborhood of the same northeastern American city. Both admit students from any neighborhood in the city via a randomized registration lottery.

Beyond similar locations, student populations and records of student achievement, Civitas Prep serves as a robust comparison school for the present study because Classical Academy's 2003 charter application cites the founding team's goal of modeling Classical Academy upon the "curriculum, academic standards and disciplinary system" previously established at Civitas Prep. As a result, both schools feature an extended school day and year, require school uniforms, focus intensively on math and reading skills, utilize a behavior system based on demerits, and issue biweekly progress reports to communicate with parents about students' behavioral and academic outcomes. Both schools cite preparing students for college as a central focus of their mission and list integrity, perseverance, respect, and courage among their core values.

The most notable difference between the two schools is that Civitas Prep students participate in a twice-weekly advisory lesson focused on community building and academic support, whereas Classical Academy's leadership team has replaced *one* of these weekly advisory lessons with a lesson in ethical philosophy. This weekly ethical philosophy course is taught to Classical Academy students at all grade levels by a dedicated faculty member responsible for designing and executing the curriculum. Although the precise content of these lessons vary by grade level, students at all four grade levels explore the writings of classical philosophers such as Aristotle and Epictetus as well as contemporary thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi and W.E.B DuBois. Field notes from several ethical philosophy lessons offered in the Results section of this article provide a closer glimpse of students engaging in discussion, debate, and reflection on such writings. As stated in its 2003 charter application, Classical Academy seeks through such inquiry "to help students understand their role in society and to share their own moral principles." We believe the design of the present study can be characterized as quasi-experimental in that we are comparing two highly similar urban charter high schools located in the same city featuring highly similar curricula, standards, disciplinary practices, core values, test scores, and student bodies, and to which students have been admitted via random lotteries.

Data Collection

We collected several types of data to consider the effects of Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming on participating students.

Pre–Post Surveys

Students at both schools ($n = 279$) completed surveys in the opening week of the 2010–2011 school year (Time 1) and then completed a similar survey at the conclusion of the academic year in June 2011 (Time 2). In terms of attrition across each school, 126 Classical Academy students completed the Time 1 survey and 106 completed the Time 2 survey. At Civitas Prep, 157 students completed the Time 1 survey and 120 completed the Time 2 survey. The attrition of 57 students across the two schools between Time 1 and Time 2 can be explained by a combination of students having left their respective schools midyear as well as absenteeism on the school day in which the Time 2 survey was administered. The percentage of students completing *both* the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys represents 80% of Classical Academy’s total high school population and 70% of Civitas Prep’s total high school population.

The survey tool included items adapted from Stephens, Young, and Calabrese’s (2007) Academic Motivation and Integrity Survey (Moral Disengagement subscale).³ Specifically, this measure consisted of four Likert-style items soliciting students’ response to several statements regarding their willingness to engage in cheating or dishonest behavior if other members of the class were cheating, the teacher was a poor instructor, to keep a friend from failing, or to earn a grade of A. On this Likert scale, a 1 represented a response to the behavior of *a lot like me*, and 5 represented *not like me at all*. Exploratory factor analysis (promax rotation) with these items resulted in one factor with an eigenvalue greater than one (eigenvalue = 2.59) accounting for 65% of the variance and showing good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$).

Qualitative Interviews

We also conducted in-person, semistructured qualitative interviews with 12 Classical Academy students. These students were identified with the assistance of a Classical Academy faculty member involved with the ethical philosophy program, with the goal of interviewing a diverse range of students in terms of their gender, race/ethnicity, and grade level. These 12 students consisted of six male students and six female students. Eight identified as African American or Black, three identified as Latino, and one identified as White. Four were in the ninth grade, three in the 10th grade, two in the 11th grade, and three in the 12th grade.

Interviews with these students lasted approximately 45 min each and were conducted at the school site. All of the interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of participating students. For each of these interviews, we structured the protocol to ensure that questions posed to participants were open-ended and clear (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) but also allowed the interviewer to pose probes or follow-up questions (Patton, 1990). Specifically, the interview protocol focused on students’ experiences within their ethical philosophy courses. These experiences included the following:

- Favorite and least favorite aspects of studying ethical philosophy
- An example of a powerful ethical philosophy lesson

³Also included in this survey tool were measures of Classical Academy’s other key virtues. See Seider (2012) for a report on these additional measures.

- An example of a debate that occurred during an ethical philosophy lesson
- An example of an ethical philosophy lesson with which participant disagreed
- Perceived effects of studying ethical philosophy upon participant's worldview
- Perceived effects of studying ethical philosophy upon participant's actions

For each of these interviews, we took steps to reduce social desirability biases in responses (Dillman, 2007). Specifically, prior to the start of each interview, we assured participants that the interview was not a test with right or wrong answers, that this was a project to learn more about character education practices at their school, and that their responses to the interview questions would not be shared with faculty or administrators. All participants were also assured that their responses would remain confidential and that pseudonyms would be used in any published account of the study.

Field Notes

Our research team also conducted more than 60 observations at Classical Academy and Civitas Prep of community meetings, advisory classes, ethical philosophy classes, and academic classes. Most relevant to the present study were observations of 31 ethical philosophy lessons at Classical Academy. We completed extensive field notes for each of these observations. In these field notes, we sought to transcribe as closely as possible the entire lesson including questions and comments made by individual students and faculty members within the class.

Data Analysis

First, we conducted exploratory factor analysis (promax rotation) to form a composite of the survey items adapted from Stephens et al. (2007) Academic Motivation and Integrity Survey. Before carrying out the analysis of interest, we conducted preliminary checks to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate. We then began our analyses by fitting an unconditional multilevel regression model for the academic integrity construct, with students' postintervention (Time 2) scores as the dependent variable. Next, we built a baseline control model by adding a number of individual-level control predictors such as gender, race/ethnicity, grade level, academic performance, demerits, and students' preintervention (Time 1) integrity scores. We excluded from the model those participants who had not completed either the Time 1 or Time 2 survey. We also added a school-level control predictor to account for participants being nested within particular advisory and ethical philosophy classes within their respective schools. Next, we added to the model our question predictor of interest: students' affiliation with Classical Academy and, thus, their engagement in weekly ethical philosophy programming. Finally, we tested for cross-level interactions between our within-school and within-student variables and calculated effect size using Cohen's *d*.

We audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim the qualitative interviews with students. Our analysis of these interviews was an iterative process consistent with research methods focused on emic perspectives—descriptions of behaviors or beliefs by participants in a study in language

that is culturally specific to those participants (Becker, 1996). First, our research team worked collaboratively to develop a codebook based on the different ways in which interview participants described (a) the content and nature of their ethical philosophy course and (b) what they perceived to be the effects on their own beliefs and actions of studying ethical philosophy.

Two members of the research team then coded each qualitative interview independently during two separate readings of the transcribed interviews. The first reading focused on descriptions by participants of the elements of the ethical philosophy coursework. The second reading of each interview transcript focused on descriptions by participants of the perceived effects of this programming on their own beliefs and values. After coding each interview independently, two members of the research team then compared their analyses of each interview transcript, recoded, and then compared again until all coding discrepancies were resolved. An identical coding process was carried out with the field notes recorded during observations of ethical philosophy classes, community meetings, and special events.

RESULTS

Academic Integrity

The descriptive statistics related to total mean scores for Classical Academy and Civitas Prep students on the pre–post academic integrity measure are reported in Table 1. As is evident, students at both schools exhibited, on average, high levels of optimism about their commitment to academic integrity at the outset of the 2010–2011 academic year. Specifically, the student bodies at both schools reported a mean commitment to academic integrity of 4.05 on a 5-point Likert scale on the Time 1 survey administered in September 2010. On the Time 2 survey administered in May 2011, however, Classical Academy students reported an equally high mean academic integrity score of 4.06 ($SD = .93$), whereas their peers at Civitas Prep demonstrated a lower mean academic integrity score of 3.80 ($SD = 1.02$).

The estimates and statistics of the multilevel regression model presented in Table 2 reveal that, after adjusting for students' Time 1 academic integrity scores, Classical Academy students demonstrated a significantly stronger commitment to academic integrity ($p = .002$) over the course of the 2010–2011 academic year than their peers at Civitas Prep. In other words, students at Classical Academy expressed a stronger commitment, on average, to avoiding cheating or plagiarism in their academic work even if other members of the class were cheating or the teacher was a poor instructor, or if engaging in such behaviors would result in higher marks. The effect of attending Classical Academy upon the integrity of participating students can be characterized as a relatively small one (Cohen's $d = .27$).

Also evident in Table 2 is that, across both schools, being a ninth grader was a significant positive predictor of a commitment to academic integrity ($p = .007$). In other words, students in the ninth grade at both Classical Academy and Civitas Prep demonstrated, on average, stronger commitments to academic integrity than their peers in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. There was also evidence of a negative cross-level interaction approaching significance ($p = .07$) between being in the ninth grade and attending Classical Academy. This interaction suggests that attending Classical Academy had a weaker effect upon the academic integrity scores of ninth-grade students than upon the school's upperclassmen. Several possible explanations for this interaction are

TABLE 2
Multilevel Regression Model for the Effects of Classical Academy's Ethical Philosophy Programming Upon Participating Students' Academic Integrity

	Integrity			
	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Fixed Effect				
Intercept	0.28	0.44	0.65	.52
Level 2				
Classical Academy	0.49	0.16	3.12	.002
Level 1				
Time 1 Integrity	0.74	0.06	13.38	<.001
Gender	0.01	0.09	0.07	.94
African American	0.09	0.10	0.84	.40
9th grade	0.45	0.17	2.69	.007
Grade point average	0.01	0.01	0.77	.44
Demerits	-0.01	0.01	-0.61	.54
Classical \times 9th Grade	-0.50	0.27	-1.83	.07
Random Effect	<i>Var</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
Level 1 (r_{ij})	0.41	0.04	9.44	<.001
Level 2 (u_{0j})	0.03	0.03	1.12	.13
-2LL			409.4	

Note. *n* ethics/advisories = 22; *n* students = 226. LL = log-likelihood.

offered in the Discussion section. Finally, although attending Classical Academy was a significant predictor of students' shifts in academic integrity, the random effects for this model suggest that the particular cohort in which students were embedded for their ethical philosophy courses did not have a significant effect upon students' integrity scores ($p = .13$). The implications of each of these findings are taken up in the the Discussion section.

Teaching Integrity

Field notes from more than 30 observations of ethical philosophy lessons at Classical Academy offer a useful window into the pedagogical levers through which these lessons sought to influence the academic integrity of participating students. It is important to note that none of these lessons focused specifically on the topics of cheating or plagiarism but rather sought to introduce students to philosophical thinkers writing about the virtue of integrity more broadly. For example, in a 10th-grade ethical philosophy lesson on September 24, 2010, Classical Academy tenth graders read excerpts from a Platonic dialogue about Socrates's refusal to apologize or cease teaching philosophy to the youth of Athens, even though such actions would lead to his imprisonment and death. Next are field notes from the subsequent discussion of Socrates's refusal to compromise his personal integrity by fleeing the city of Athens after a death sentence had been handed down to him.

Student1: I think he should escape for his life and keep contemplating.

Student2: And he should escape to spread his philosophy to others.

Student3: He did nothing wrong, so there's no reason to be in jail in the first place.

Student4: He should stand up for what he believes in, fight for what he believes in.

Student5: I would stand up for what I believe in.

In this excerpt, one can see Classical Academy students grappling with the extent to which Socrates should prioritize his personal integrity—his commitment to engaging in philosophical inquiry and instruction—over his freedom and ultimately his life.

A second ethical philosophy lesson on April 15, 2011, focused on American boxing champion Muhammad Ali's decision in 1967 to adhere to his Muslim beliefs and accept a prison sentence rather than participate in the Vietnam War. In the ensuing discussion, students revealed differing opinions about Ali's decision to prioritize his personal conception of right and wrong over his reputation, freedom, and duty to serve his country:

Student1: Going against the law means he is a criminal.

Student2: I don't think anyone gained anything from him breaking the law.

Student3: It's a big deal because Black people were already seen as being criminals, bad people doing bad things.

Student4: Then you're saying that Rosa Parks was wrong too, and she should go to jail.

Student5: Rosa Parks broke the law, and now Black people can sit wherever they want. It's not breaking the law for no reason.

Teacher: So you're saying Muhammad Ali is making a similar choice that Rosa Parks made? He broke the law for a higher moral purpose?

Student5: He made the right choice because if he did join the war, he's killing innocent people to satisfy someone else, the federal government. Just because the federal government feels he should join the war. You have to go find something that satisfies you.

In this discussion as well, Classical Academy students can be seen debating the role of personal integrity in guiding one's actions and decisions. Both of these lessons went on to provide students with opportunities to reflect in small groups and in writing about the extent to which they did (or did not) demonstrate a similar commitment to personal integrity in their own lives.

Integrity and Ethical Philosophy

Of the 12 Classical Academy students who participated in qualitative interviews, five explicitly raised the topic of cheating in their discussion of the effects of studying ethical philosophy. For example, 12th grader Flavia conceded,

I just think that cheating happens everywhere, in the real world, in schools. . . . [But] I think ethics class helped me personally to be more mature because we learned that you shouldn't do things or not do things because you're afraid of getting in trouble, but because you know it's not the right thing and you know integrity is right.

Flavia went on to express her belief that Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming has motivated many of her classmates to resist cheating and other types of dishonest behavior, "[not] because they fear the small consequences but because they know in their hearts it's the wrong thing to do." On a similar note, ninth grader Alisha asserted that studying ethical philosophy at Classical Academy leads her and her classmates to "think deeper about things. You have a deeper

comprehension of things. . . . And I feel like we are in a stage where we should know the rules. We should do things because it's the right thing to do." Finally, 10th-grade student Brandy explained of ethical philosophy class,

We're not saying we're complete saints or anything, but if you're going to go with the decision of cheating or not, that comes into your head. You're thinking, 'Oh my God, what is this going to affect?' You kind of think of everything instead of just doing it and thinking, 'I don't care.' Everyone gets that feeling, and I think it comes from ethics class.

According to each of these students, ethical philosophy class discouraged them from engaging in cheating behaviors by providing opportunities to think deeply about the importance of doing the right thing for its own sake rather than out of fear of the consequences of getting caught.

Four other Classical Academy students characterized their learning about integrity in somewhat different terms. Namely, these students described the school's ethical philosophy programming as introducing a conception of integrity that emphasized taking responsibility for one's actions and choices. For example, 10th-grade student Nick explained that the improvement in his grades and conduct over the course of the 2010–2011 school year could largely be attributed to a philosophical perspective he had learned about in ethical philosophy class:

We've been studying Stoicism. Making you take responsibility for your actions and not blaming anyone else. And I feel like that's played a really big part in my success now. I have honors [grades] now and my behavior's better. Ethics class changes people and changes their perspectives on things and why they should change and how they should change.

Likewise, 11th grader Theresa offered the following example of translating the central tenets of Stoicism into action:

I realized my AP U.S. History grade was not where it's supposed to be. So it's low. And for me to figure out what to do, I had to be true to myself. I had to use integrity. I had to say, 'Theresa, what are you doing?'

In this explanation, Theresa alluded as well to a conception of integrity rooted in taking responsibility for the events in one's life.

Finally, 12th grader Abner explained that he has been motivated to demonstrate integrity in his own life through "reading [about] all these philosophers being truthful to themselves and studying integrity and all that. I want to work to become just like that. Show integrity all the time and have people trust me because they know I always tell the truth no matter what." As an example of his own burgeoning commitment to integrity, Abner explained that "I don't get sent out [of class] now, but like before when I used to, when you were younger, you would always say, 'Oh, I didn't do such and such.'" According to Abner, learning about integrity in ethical philosophy class allowed him, on such occasions, to "have the integrity to tell [myself], 'Yeah, I did that,' and take that responsibility." He added that, over the course of 4 years of studying ethical philosophy, "Personal integrity has become a habit and not just something that I do once in a blue moon." In each of these students' explanations, one can see evidence of a conception of integrity that discourages engagement in cheating and other antisocial behaviors by emphasizing taking responsibility for one's actions and decisions.

DISCUSSION

The present study tested the hypothesis that Classical Academy's substitution of ethical philosophy programming for one of its weekly advisory lessons would have a significant positive effect upon participating students' academic integrity. We found that Classical Academy students demonstrated significantly larger shifts in their commitment to academic integrity over the course of the 2010–2011 academic year than their peers at a matched comparison school. Specifically, after adjusting for students' initial commitment to academic integrity, Classical Academy students expressed a stronger commitment than their peers at Civitas Prep to avoiding a variety of cheating behaviors, even when such behaviors might result in a grade of A, keep a friend from failing, or compensate for a poor instructor.

Our analyses also revealed that, across both schools, being a ninth grade student correlated with a stronger commitment to academic integrity. This finding aligns with prior research that has found the likelihood of students engaging in cheating to increase as they progress through the middle and high school grades (Anderman & Midgley, 2004). Explanations for this trend have been attributed to the increased importance placed on academic marks by parents and teachers and the increased competition among classmates as students approach both the end of high school and the college admissions process (Anderman et al., 1998; Murdock et al., 2001).

There was also evidence of a negative cross-level interaction approaching significance between attending Classical Academy and being a ninth-grade student. In other words, the school's ethical philosophy programming exerted a weaker effect upon the academic integrity of ninth-grade students than upon the school's upperclassmen. One explanation for this interaction is that studying ethical philosophy had a weaker effect upon Classical Academy's ninth-grade students because, as noted previously, ninth graders began the academic year with a higher commitment to academic integrity already in place. A second explanation is that the complex reading and subject matter involved in Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming was more accessible to older adolescents. This latter explanation aligns with Erikson's (1965, 1968) assertion that ego identity development typically occurs in *late* adolescence as individuals begin seeking out new and different perspectives to help make sense of the world around them. From Erikson's framework, then, one might expect ethical philosophy coursework—which introduces students to such new and different perspectives—to exert a stronger effect upon older adolescents than early adolescents.

The effect of Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming upon participating students was a relatively small one (Cohen's $d = .27$). However, this small effect size may have been due in part to the high integrity scores reported, on average, by students at both schools on the preintervention (Time 1) survey. Recall that on the Time 1 survey both student bodies reported identical mean academic integrity scores of 4.05 along a 5-point Likert scale. In other words, the student bodies of both schools reported high levels of optimism about their commitment to academic integrity as the school year commenced. As for the source of this optimism, recall that in the opening days of the school year tests had not yet been taken, essays not yet assigned, report cards not yet issued, and, thus, ethical crossroads not yet confronted. Although Classical Academy students, on average, maintained this commitment to academic integrity over the course of the school year and Civitas Prep students did not, the optimistic baseline scores reported by both sets of students may have masked the full effect of Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming upon participating students.

The positive effects of Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming upon the academic integrity of participating students is particularly important given the alarmingly high frequencies of cheating behaviors in American secondary schools (Anderman & Midgley, 2004; Strom & Strom, 2008). In the short term, such behaviors have a negative effect upon student learning and mastery of academic content (Ma et al., 2007; Schab, 1991). In the longer term, scholars have found that students who engage in cheating behaviors during their high school years are more likely to engage in dishonest practices as adults in both their personal and professional lives (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2009). Consequently, schools that are able to effectively promote a commitment to academic integrity among their student bodies are both improving the school culture in which teaching and learning are taking place and also priming their students to be more ethical members of the communities in which they will live and work as adults.

As noted in the Introduction section, the research literature on discouraging cheating and plagiarism has focused primarily upon improving teacher–student relationships (Anderman et al., 1998; Calabrese & Cochran, 1990), using plagiarism detection software (Braumoeller & Gaines, 2001), and emphasizing mastery learning goals over performance learning goals (Stephens, 2005; Wangaard & Stephens, 2011). Little research has considered the potential for ethical philosophy programming to deepen students' commitment to academic integrity. The results of the present study, however, find support in Erikson's (1968) work on adolescent identity development. Namely, Erikson (1965) characterized adolescence as a developmental period in which individuals are actively seeking out new perspectives and worldviews in "religion and politics, the arts and sciences, the stage and fiction" (p. 24). Damon (1991) added that some "recurring themes" influencing adolescents include "relativism, utilitarianism, perfectionism, asceticism, and even mysticism" (p. 119). Together, these scholars portray adolescence as a search for new and different *systematic* ways of conceptualizing the world around them. Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming addresses this need by offering students philosophical perspectives ranging from Plato to Epictetus to DuBois on the importance of virtues such as integrity.

Levers for Strengthening Academic Integrity

To explore *how* Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming impacted participating students, we also observed more than 30 ethical philosophy lessons and conducted qualitative interviews with 12 Classical Academy high school students. The field notes from several of these lessons revealed that the ethical philosophy curriculum did not home in specifically on students' approach to their academic work but rather introduced students to complex case studies on the virtue of integrity offered by classical philosophers such as Plato and contemporary figures such as Muhammad Ali. In the first case, students debated the merits of Socrates choosing death over compromising his belief in the importance of philosophical inquiry, and the latter case entailed students discussing Ali's decision to prioritize his own moral code over his reputation with the American public and freedom from imprisonment.

The act of engaging with peers in such discussions of moral matters has been shown to increase participants' moral reasoning skills (Damon & Killen, 1982; Kruger, 1992; Self, Olivarez, & Baldwin, 1998). Moreover, scholarship by Lawrence Kohlberg and others has found evidence of a negative relationship between moral reasoning and delinquent behaviors such as cheating (Carlo et al., 1998; Fabes et al., 1999; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984). One lever, then, through which Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming sought to positively influence students'

commitment to academic integrity was by offering sustained and deliberate practice in moral reasoning. Further evidence for this effect can be found in qualitative interviews with Classical Academy students such as Alisha and Brandy who explicitly commented on the role of the school's ethical philosophy lessons in strengthening their moral reasoning skills.

Several other students pointed to a different component of ethical philosophy class to explain its effect upon their commitment to acting with integrity. For example, 10th graders Nick and Theresa specifically cited their study of Stoicism as having introduced them to a conception of integrity that emphasized taking responsibility for one's actions and decisions. For these students, the primary effect of studying ethical philosophy lay in exposure to *specific* philosophical content, which had altered their perspective and investment in acting with integrity. Similarly, 12th grader Abner explained that, for him, the value of studying ethical philosophy lay in the extent to which philosophers such as Plato and Socrates represented exemplars of acting with integrity.

In short, each of these students perceived the value of studying ethical philosophy to lie in their exposure to new and different perspectives on the world around them—explanations that align with Erikson's (1965, 1968) depiction of adolescence as a period in which individuals are actively reaching out for new perspectives that can help to organize their experiences and growing understanding of the world. Our quantitative and qualitative data suggest that Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming provided students with such organizing frameworks for the virtue of integrity as well as opportunities to engage in discussion, debate, and reflection about the role of integrity within their own lives. In so doing, Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming contributed to students' development of a mature adult identity that included a strong commitment to approaching their academic work with honesty and integrity.

Limitations

Although we believe the results of the present study to be robust, there remain many questions about the role of ethical philosophy in promoting students' academic integrity that will need to be considered in future research efforts. First, both Classical Academy and Civitas Prep represent high performing urban public schools, as measured by student achievement on high-stakes state assessments. It will be important in future research efforts to consider whether ethical philosophy programming exerts a similar effect upon students in more typical public school contexts.

A second limitation to the present study is its lack of a true experimental design. Although we sought in the present study to identify a comparison school that was highly similar to Classical Academy in terms of location, size, educational philosophy, school culture, student demographics, and student achievement, a more robust research design would involve a randomly assigned comparison group from the identical school context rather than a highly similar school context. A reasonable question, then, is whether firm conclusions can be drawn that the differences in academic integrity scores between the treatment and comparison groups are due specifically to Classical Academy's ethical philosophy programming rather than a broader focus on issues of academic integrity throughout the school day.

Certainly this study would have benefited from a true experimental design; however, it is also important to note that field notes from our observations of Classical Academy's community meetings and academic classes highlighted ways in which the school's ethical philosophy programming impacted other aspects of the school day as well. Specifically, the fact that all

Classical Academy students had engaged in discussion and reflection upon the virtue of integrity in their ethical philosophy courses allowed faculty to draw upon this common knowledge during the weekly all-school community meeting to celebrate students who had demonstrated personal integrity, to exhort students in their academic classes to approach a test or assignment with honesty and integrity, and to reprimand students for engaging in behaviors that compromised their integrity. In short, the emphasis upon academic integrity at Classical Academy *does* extend beyond the weekly lessons in ethical philosophy; however, it is these lessons that establish the common vocabulary and understanding of integrity that allows for such an emphasis in other parts of the Classical Academy school day.

CONCLUSION

Scholars Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon (2001) argued that preparing contemporary young Americans to become productive citizens in the 21st century will require schools to rededicate themselves to instilling in youth a commitment to doing work that is excellent in quality but also carried out in an ethical manner. The concerning levels of cheating and plagiarism that have been reported in American middle schools (Steinberg, 1996), secondary schools (Strom & Strom, 2008), and universities (McCabe, 2005) further underscores this assertion. For these reasons, Classical Academy's success at deepening students' commitment to academic integrity through ethical philosophy programming is worthy of greater attention by researchers, educators, parents, and policymakers. The final graduation requirement of many 19th-century American universities was a capstone course in moral philosophy that sought to emphasize for participating students the importance of directing the academic skills they had acquired toward ethical ends (McLellan, 1999). This study of ethical philosophy programming at Classical Academy points to the potential role for such ethical inquiry in 21st-century educational institutions as well.

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