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WHAT IMPACT DOES SENSORY PROCESSING SENSITIVITY (SPS) HAVE ON STUDENT LEARNING IN TERTIARY EDUCATION? AN ON-GOING MIXED METHODS STUDY FROM NEW ZEALAND

Abstract:

Sensory Processing Sensitivity (SPS) is a genetic variance continuum that affects the way in which an individual notices, processes and responds to internal, external, environmental, emotional and social stimuli. The measure of SPS is the Highly Sensitive Person Scale (HSPS) which was developed by American psychologist Elaine Aron in 1997 and has been validated by numerous studies over many years and remains the only specific measure of adult sensitivity. For any given population, 30% is considered to be highly sensitive, 40% moderately sensitivity and a further 30% non-sensitive. Therefore 70% of a given population will exhibit varying degrees of sensitivity to a variety of stimuli. Further, three sensitivity subscales have been identified: AES (aesthetic); LST (low sensory threshold); and EOE (ease of excitation). There has been a dearth of research investigating the impact of sensitivity in the education setting. A pilot study conducted by the researcher at a New Zealand tertiary institution found that, for students who identified as sensitive on the HSPS, the knowledge of SPS was deemed to be useful for managing study, and life changing for the participants. This project is seeking to develop a composite data collection instrument the Perceived Success in Study Survey (PSISS) to measure students' perception of success in study and this instrument will be combined with the HSPS in an on-line survey. Data from this survey will be analysed to establish correlational associations between students' level of sensitivity and perceived success in study. A further study seeks to identify and compare the extent to which the SPS subscales may be associated with perceived learning success. Further quantitative data will be analysed for those students who identified as sensitive on the HSPS in the original study, and these data will be divided into the three subscales of AES, LST and EOE in order to ascertain if any of these subscales can be seen to be beneficial or obstructive for and to learning. Qualitative data will be collected through three focus groups, each reflecting high scoring AES, LST or EOE, and case studies. Themes will be identified and quantitative and qualitative data will be merged. It is hoped that the utilisation of both quantitative and qualitative data will contribute to an understanding of sensitive students' learning experiences in the tertiary setting, and in so doing, provide evidence to support change in educational practice, pedagogy and policy in order to better support sensitive students.

Keywords:

Composite data collection instrument development, Highly Sensitive Person Scale (HSPS), Perceived Success in Study Survey (PSIS), Sensory Processing Sensitivity (SPS),

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