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The Impact of Anger Management Training on Students of Skills for Managing Anger

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THE IMPACT OF ANGER MANAGEMENT TRAINING
ON STUDENTS OF
SKILLS FOR MANAGING ANGER

A Thesis

Presented to the

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

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the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

by

Kristin Lynn Mitchell

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ABSTRACT

Kristin Lynn Mitchell, The Impact of Anger Management Training on Students of Skills for Managing Anger

The purpose of this research has been to study the impact of anger management training on students of the Skills for Managing Anger (SMA) program used in Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). Conflict resolution programs and causes of violence in school age children are discussed. The company that produces SMA suggests that its program can reduce verbal and physical violence and increase the use anger management strategies. SMA was observed from the teacher training throughout the 12-session course. Increased awareness of anger and of anger management was seen, however no evidence was found that verbal and physical violence decreased. If PPS chooses to continue using the program I recommend these changes: class taken voluntarily, class size limited, course taught at beginning of school year, and all staff members trained to help support students. My final recommendation is for PPS to use pro-social teaching (e.g. Responsive Classroom or Resolving Conflict Creatively Program).

1st Reader: Charles Hanna, PhD

2nd Reader: Mary Frances Antolini, PhD

PREFACE

During the summer of 1997 I boarded a plane for the Philippines as a Peace Corps volunteer. I had no idea what would become of me, what (exactly) my job would be, nor did I know how I would be living for the next two years of my life. I did know that I was young (but feeling really old, I had already been out of college for (gulp) four years and hadn't found The Job yet) and needing to gain some direction. I was coming off a job as a first grade teacher in a school that could be described as dysfunctional on its best day. I was quite sure I was done with teaching and Peace Corps was going to prove that to me. I was going to meet a man, fall in love...and figure things out from there.

Needless to say, I did not meet a anyone with whom I wanted to spend the rest of my life. But I did, however, rediscover my love for teaching. Coming home, though, I knew things would be different. See, while I was gone Columbine "happened." In what is now called the nation's deadliest school shooting, 14 students and one teacher were killed while 23 others were wounded. This event understandably shocked and rocked the world. It altered mine in such a way that I went on to pursue a Master's degree in a field that would enhance my teaching degree. My goal as a teacher was no longer a mere attempt to alter the paths of young misguided souls, my goal in this post-Columbine, post-9-11 world is to help develop young minds that can empathize with their neighbors, handle stress, and treat each other with kindness or at the very least compassion.

I would like to thank the following for helping me start, start, and start again to finally be able to finish: Dr. Charles Hanna whose endless "How's the thesis?" comments kept just enough guilt on hand to keep a fire under me, Dr. Mary Antolini whose impending retirement relit the fire that was slowly fading, Dr. Stanley Denton without whom I wouldn't have been able to do this project, two extremely open and wonderful teachers and their sixth grade classes, Sarah Lynn who helped walk me through some very muddy ideas, my family without whom I wouldn't feel the need to make the world a better place, I love you all.

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“To reclaim our schools as nonviolent, caring, communities of learning, we can’t resort to cheap tricks (or even expensive ones) or simplistic thinking. What is needed is a systemic and comprehensive K-12 effort to equip young people with the skills and competencies necessary to be emotionally skillful, socially responsible *and* academically competent”
(Linda Lantieri, ESR <http://www.esrnational.org/whenlearn.html> last accessed 2.19.05)

THE IMPACT OF ANGER MANAGEMENT TRAINING ON
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When I began this project in the spring of 2001 school violence was on everyone's mind. In the fall of that same year, our lives were turned upside down as four planes were hijacked and flown into the Pentagon, the World Trade Center towers and a field in rural Pennsylvania. Violence in our schools was suddenly not a priority; fighting terrorism was.

In this post 9-11 America our main concern in education has not strayed far from school violence. Our primary concern has become testing our children and attempting to hold schools accountable for their perceived failures, but issues of violence have not gone away. Since I began the project there have been at least five more shootings at schools (<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0777958.html> last accessed 1-9-05). In November of 2004 in Virginia, a youth brought loaded guns to school but was ultimately talked out of doing any harm (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A820-2004Jun23.html> last accessed 1-9-05). We have not addressed the violence issue. We have closed our eyes and are still hoping it will go away.

In 1998, there were 2.7 million crimes committed against students ages 12-18 in the United States (Kaufman 2000). These same studies show a decrease of student nonfatal victimization from 1993 to 1998. But because of the killings at Columbine High School in Colorado and a string of random school shootings in Pennsylvania, California, Florida, and Michigan, many students and community members believe that violence is prevalent in their schools. While studies continually show this to be false, there still is some level of violence in our schools. There is a need to address violence among

school children and to find methods for further decreasing the numbers of behaviors that lead to violence in our schools.

Schools, parent groups and community groups alike are dealing with this phenomenon by attempting to make schools safer. Some of their suggestions have included installing metal detectors at all school entrances, stricter gun control laws, and better training for community crises workers. While these steps may make parents (and possibly students) *feel* safer, they are by no means solutions nor are they preventative measures. These programs do not allow students to assume responsibility for their actions. Students must be aware that they alone control their behavior and that it is their responsibility to do so. A proactive program that teaches responsible behavior and has potential to be successful is school participation in conflict resolution programs.

There are different kinds of programs varying in content but the central theme is taking preventative steps towards decreasing school violence. Not all school districts across the country have conflict resolution on their list of required curricula and if it is there, it is likely that they do not all follow the same guidelines for what should be taught. Some teachers are given extensive training in implementing conflict resolution programs and others are simply given the course materials and asked to execute the program on their own. Too much value has been placed on the mere existence of the program making it satisfactory to simply set up any type of conflict resolution program and not focus on any of the possible outcomes. If students are not given sufficient training and guidance they will not understand the program's importance and will be less likely to take their roles as active participants seriously. The more class time spent

on teaching conflict resolution skills the better equipped the students will be in handling disruptive situations in which they find themselves or a classmate.

If, as a result of a student's increased exposure to conflict resolution programs in middle school, there is a decrease in school violence, then this is the type of programming we should be implementing in our schools across the country. More money could be allotted to include more schools and to effectively train more teachers. Class time could be arranged for maximum time spent on training the students and giving them opportunities to practice their new skills.

There is widespread belief among educators that conflict resolution programs in our schools do work, but little is being done to assure that this is the case. Reassessment of the program may be a necessity if it is proving to be unsuccessful. Teachers would be spending valuable time on instruction that is not beneficial to students and the money spent could be transferred to other deserving programs.

Are students benefiting from the amount of conflict resolution instruction they are currently receiving? Incidents of disruptive/violent behavior are lower in middle schools that provide whole-school conflict resolution training than in those schools only offering needs-based or teacher-volunteer based training for its students.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Why Is Conflict Resolution Training Important?

While fighting terrorism may well be a noble and needed cause in our present world situation, we cannot forget that we do indeed still have violence in our schools. Is it a rampant problem that needs to be addressed above all else? Not according to current research, but the perceived notion of violence in schools is still too high. While reclaiming the lost innocence of our country's youth may not be a realistic goal for educators, aiding children in becoming responsible citizens is not only within our control, but a necessity. Since the mid 1980's there has been a slow shift in the educational approach. Schools are no longer a place for simply learning to read and write. With more and more single parent families and families with 2 full-time working parents children are spending more time alone and parents are becoming increasingly dependent upon school for the character development of their children. In response to this trend programs have been implemented in schools to teach conflict resolution skills to students. These programs vary from school to school, but their objective is the same: to create emotionally and socially responsible members of their community. The Department of Justice states "delinquency and violence are symptoms of a juvenile's inability to handle conflict constructively" (LeBoef and Delany-Shabazz 1997). Knowing how to deal with conflict (real or perceived) is learned behavior. Most situations of conflict are socially constructed and in turn, our ability to deal with these conflicts is a learned behavior. With any amount of conflict that can lead to violence in our schools, children must be equipped with the knowledge of conflict resolution skills so that they are able to make responsible choices.

This does not mean that conflict is not normal and that we should eliminate it from children's lives. On the contrary, we need to embrace the possibility of conflict and train our children to be prepared to face that possibility should it present itself. What we can hope for in educating our youth in this aspect is that when faced with a situation that makes them angry, upset, or scared they are fully prepared to make nonviolent choices.

Conflict Resolution Training

In 1999, a study focusing on both elementary and junior high school students looked at the effect of an education program aimed at improving the students' ability to manage conflict (Karneboge, Smith, VandeSchraaf, Wiegardt, and Wormer). The research team looked at five classrooms (roughly 100 students) at two elementary schools and one junior high school within the same district. A six-week curriculum was designed to look specifically at "cooperative learning techniques, anger management skills, conflict resolution and personal interaction strategies" (Karneboge, et al. 1999). The study ultimately found that office referrals were cut in half and that physically and verbally abusive behavior was dramatically reduced in the classroom. They also noticed that verbal disagreements outside of the classroom increased during the study period suggesting that the education program needed to be school wide.

In a similar, yet smaller, study on the effects of conflict resolution education of a class of 18 seventh graders, Mantovani (1999) found significant change in her pre- and post- study surveys. This project was carried out over seven weeks during which time the class was exposed to conflict resolution instruction for twenty minutes a day, three days a week. The students were to keep a "Conflict Journal" for the duration of the

program. These journals held all notes and handouts from the conflict resolution training as well as their “Conflict Journal Log Sheets.” The log sheets were a tool for the students to keep a record of any conflict encountered during the training. These logs were also used for the students to express how they resolved the conflict as well as their feelings, reaction and response to how they felt they handled the situation. Through these journals and the surveys Mantovani found that over the course of the seven weeks, the students gained the cognitive skills necessary to recognize conflict and that they understood they had a choice in how they responded. The students also learned that anger was a possible effect of conflict and were taught techniques for avoiding violent reactions. Although this study shows promising results, the students were from a mostly white, middle class community, which does not allow for range in issues for possible conflict. I also studied teachers who work with a student body with more a diverse background allowing for a broader base of potential conflicts (e.g. SES, race, gender, etc.).

Peer Mediation Programs

When Hessler, Hollis, and Crowe (1998) studied an existing conflict resolution program, they found that students trained as peer mediators were able to view their mediation skills as something that they could use throughout their lives. This ethnographic study focused on three diverse elementary schools in the Midwest that participated in a peer mediation program. How students perceived conflict, violence, value of the mediation process, their role as mediators and their individual values were all examined. The research trio used what they called “youthful frames” to help analyze their data. These frames were an essential aspect of the study as it helped the

researchers compare the different ways in which each type of participant saw to the analysis of their data. They found that the students had quite differing views than their adult counterparts in their schools regarding the mediation process and their role within that process. Hessler et al. stated, "The adult designers and implementers of the programs focused on empowerment, social integration, and status. The children, on the other hand, framed the program as an intellectually challenging opportunity to be of service (1998). While this study recognizes the importance of students serving as peer mediators, it does not address the possible benefits to the rest of the school's student body. This study shows the importance of the student's attitudes towards conflict resolution training; they held a positive view of their role as mediators. This study also points out the importance of differentiating the student's view from the educator's view of conflict and conflict resolution training. While I will be taking into consideration the students' view on the training program, my primary focus will be on the teachers and the program itself.

In a whole school study, McMahon (1995) implemented peer mediation into his school's curriculum to test its effectiveness in eradicating harassment at the junior high school level. This was an eight-month study using both peer mediation and group exercises to educate the target audience of sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. Using a short questionnaire McMahon determined how many students had been affected by harassment before he implemented any corrective curriculum. Ultimately, McMahon did not reach his goal of a 50% reduction in the amount of reported harassments. The peer mediation program was being implemented simultaneously to

the study; suggesting that his results may be altered if studied now that the program has been in place for five years.

There is strong support for using conflict resolution programs such as peer mediation in schools, but unless the staff supports its existence it will have limited success. Matloff and Smith (1999) have shown that a program's success depends on staff members' attitudes towards that program. This study spanned a two-year period. Year one was used to implement the peer mediation aspect and year two was used for the research. The teachers were interviewed over a four-month period and were asked questions addressing both the effectiveness of the program and the schools' current situation concerning conflict. All of the staff members interviewed shared both positive and negative opinions about the program. The more general the teacher's view on conflict (name-calling, pushing in line, 'horsing around,' fighting, etc.) the more likely they were to see the program as useful. But to those teachers who could not see conflict in the daily lives of the students the thought was that the program needed to be broadened. There were still staff members who advocated removal of a disruptive student from the classroom, ignoring that this action goes against reasoning for using peer mediation. This study shows that, just like students, if a staff member isn't fully trained to understand the importance of the program they are not going to operate correctly within it's guidelines, therefore causing it to be ineffective (Matloff and Smith 1999). While my study will focus on the actual conflict resolution program, this study suggests to me that it is important to have an understanding of the teachers' attitude toward the program as crucial to it's success or failure. If teachers teach a lesson they

do not believe in, that message may be conveyed to their students causing possible program failure.

Who Benefits From Conflict Resolution Programs?

The National Institute of Justice published a study in late 1997 that focused on at-risk students (Lockwood). Their pre-survey data showed that although juvenile violent crime is declining, children between the ages of 12-17 are increasingly more likely to become victims of a violent crime. Lockwood interviewed 110 students in schools that either had high rates of violent crime within the school or the school was located in a neighborhood with a high rate of violent crime. Their findings showed violent behavior did not arise because of a child's lack of values, rather students held a strong belief that this type of behavior was acceptable. The student believed in retribution above all else. What needs to be done is to surround these students with adults who are living examples of working conflict resolution (Lockwood 1997).

Causes of Violence

Today schools have community response teams ready for action in case of a shooting. Staff are trained in school lock-down procedures. Some schools are employing full time on-duty police officers. Teachers are finding they have less time for classroom instruction because they are spending more and more of their time diffusing conflicts among students (Johnson and Johnson 1995). Parents and communities are demanding more reassurance that their children will be safe while at school all day. Many schools have responded by creating safety measures such as installation of metal

detectors or having extra security guards on campus. While this gives the illusion of safety it is not preventing violent behavior. Increasingly, schools are implementing conflict resolution programs that teach the students how to respond to conflict responsibly thereby decreasing the aggressive behavior that can lead to violence.

Ideally, we would like to eliminate all crime from our schools, both violent and non-violent. This was attempted in 1993 with Goal 6 of the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* that stated, “by the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning (DOE 1993:8).” It continues on to say that, “no child or youth should be fearful on the way to school, be afraid while there, or have to cope with pressures to make unhealthy choices (DOE 1993:9).” While this was a grand gesture, statistics from the *2000 Report on School Safety* (DOE/DOJ 2000) clearly show us that this goal was not fully accomplished.

This same report indicates that although school violence has not been eradicated, overall school crime *has* decreased since 1992. The *Report* was based on several studies carried out by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan, the National Center for Education Statistics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics. All studies used representative samples except for school-associated violent deaths, in which case all incidents were tracked.

It was found that the rate of serious violent crime (rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault) remained consistent with the statistics from the 1992 study. Also found was that fewer students were carrying weapons and/or engaging in physical

fight on school grounds. These rates decreased for black, white and Hispanic students, although it was found that, “in 1999 non-Hispanic students were less likely than Hispanic students to report carrying a weapon to school (*Report 2000:6*).” Though students are still bringing weapons to school, school-associated violent deaths are still rare. The rates of homicide and multiple victim homicide on school grounds have declined.

Outside of school (to and from school, at home and/or in the student’s community) the rate of crime against students has been declining. *The Report* indicates that crime in and out of school continues to decrease; yet students still perceive their schools to be unsafe. *The Report* also showed that teachers also fall victim to crime in the schools. The most common crime committed against both teachers and students in school is theft. While schools do, in fact, continue to witness minor crimes and disorder they are safer now than in 1993 (*Report 2000*).

In its 1998 study, the National Center for Education Statistics found of the 1,234 schools from each of the 50 states that were studied ninety percent reported no incidents of violent crime for the 1996-97 school year, while forty-three percent reported no crimes at all. Forty-seven percent reported at least one nonviolent crime and no violent crime (ERS 1998:1).

In studies dealing with youth violence or violence in schools there are many differing opinions on how the subject should be studied and presented. Rarely will you find studies that conceptualize “violence” in exactly the same way. In the studies researched here, definitions ranged from violent crime (homicide, rape) to nonviolent crime (underage smoking, cutting class). Another difference is what exactly the

researcher is looking for; sociologists focus their attention on youth crime while psychologists will spend their time looking into physical aggression (Tedeschi 1997). Regardless of the school of thought, these studies complement each other in covering aspects of youth violence that one field alone cannot represent.

There are many factors in allocating the causes of violence in schools. You must take into consideration the child's life at home, their life at school, their life on the way to and home from school, what books they read, what television programs they watch, the music they like to listen to, do they play video games, what are their friends like and what about the friend's family? For the purpose of my study I will focus on three causes: media, family and community violence, and peer groups.

Media. By the time young persons in the United States turn 18 they will have seen two hundred thousand violent acts on television. While parents play the central role in influencing their children's lives, kids are watching twenty-three to twenty-eight hours of television a week. This three to four hours a day impacts the child not only because it is mostly unsupervised but also they are bypassing healthy activities such as exercise, play, reading, and homework. By his or her high school graduation, the average teen will have spent twelve thousand hours in the classroom and fifteen thousand hours sitting in front of the TV (Derksen and Strasburger 1996).

The media is allowed to have such a profound affect on our children because we are allowing them to inhale the images and language without filtering the exposure. We expect children to absorb all that they hear and see on TV, in magazines and on the radio and to be able to digest it as we adults would. At a young age,

children are not cognitively equipped to comprehend that what they see happening on the television or in pictures in magazines is not real; that in real life a person might be killed or may choose to walk away from a potentially harmful situation. From the classroom perspective, a majority of teachers believe exposure to violence in the mass media to be one of the major causes of the violence they are seeing in schools (Futrell 1996). As a general rule of studies discussed here the major media outlets for youth are considered to be: television (movies, videos, video games) print (comic books, magazines, and newspapers) and radio.

In their review of studies on the effects of media and television violence on children, Derksen and Strasburger (1996) recognize that not only were youth not participating in healthy activities because of television consumption, but the role models in the programs they watched were modeling inappropriate behavior. There are over one thousand studies that link media violence with real-life violence. Kids look up to attractive role models and being young and impressionable, they don't often see the actions of these characters as misguided. Also cited as effects of violence and aggression in the media were: disinhibition, desensitization, aggressive arousal, and association with risk taking behavior. They go on to identify factors that have an influence on violent and aggressive behavior in schools:

- How aggression is depicted—"justified" aggression, especially when directed towards women. Justified retribution is one of the most strongly reinforcing elements of learned aggression.
- Rewarded aggression—depiction of an immediate reward for the aggressive or antisocial behavior, with both the characters and the viewer feeling gratified, (Derksen and Strasburger 1996:70).

They use the learning theory to explain that, "exposure to media violence influences children's violent or aggressive behavior by demonstration (modeling), reward

(reinforcement), and practice (rehearsal) (Derksen and Strasburger 1996:64).” If children are emulating what they see on television and are using aggressive behavior at a young age, they are more susceptible to later use of violence. It has been shown that that aggressive behavior displayed by 6-13 year old boys is a predictor of later violence among males. Studies have not successfully predicted a relationship between aggression by females at age 10 and later recorded violent offenses (Hawkins et al.1998).

Goldstein’s (1990) study of delinquents explored their perspective on what causes juvenile delinquency. The research was conducted by employing 35 staff members to help interview 250 “delinquents” (youth in juvenile residential facilities, group homes and/or community aftercare agencies) from 19 sites in seven states. When asked what role television played one youth responded,

Well, I think a lot of it has to do with TV. Like when I watch TV, like “Miami Vice” or something like that, it’s these guys who have all the money or all the girls, they glorify, you know, there’s a lot of publicity around negative things. Al Capone, you know, he was glorified for being a mob king, you know, running prohibition so he was famous for doing bad and, you know, basically for popularity. (P. 67)

Goldstein (1990) also reports that these youth claim a connection to movies and music that glorify and encourage delinquent behaviors.

Mass media is also looked at from the health perspective. In a study on mass media’s influence on teens, Klein, Brown, Childers, Oliveri, Porter and Dykers (1993) found that adolescents partaking in “risky” behaviors (sex, drinking, smoking cigarettes, smoking marijuana, cheating, stealing, cutting class, driving a car without permission) listened to the radio and watched music videos and movies on television more than those who had participated in fewer risky behaviors. Race, gender, and/or parental education were not found to be contributing factors. Coming from a medical

perspective, Klein et al. were looking to show a correlation between an adolescent's use of mass media and "unhealthy" behavior. They hypothesized that these same adolescents were less likely to feel connected to adult society, thus not participating in traditional health, education or social services effectively. They concluded that targeting specific forms of mass media could be used for health promotion aimed at at-risk youth (e.g. advertising in such magazines as Sports Illustrated, Ebony, Seventeen [targeting male/female and black/white teens], and using television advertisements during programming on MTV and during TV movies) (Klein et al. 1993:24).

Family and Community Violence. Children are not only witness to violence through mass media, but often they are exposed throughout their daily lives. It may be as close to them as within their own family or within their community. Though not all children exposed to violence will become violent themselves, there is extensive evidence that these children are more likely to become violent than those children with little or no exposure.

Not only are children exposed to more and more violence in everyday life, the face of the American family has changed. A family is no longer defined as having a stay-at-home mom, a working dad and three kids. While the change in the family unit is not bad, we as a culture have not found ways to shift to the new version of the family; we have not learned how to restructure ourselves and our lives in order to meet the changing needs of our children (Curwin and Mendler 1988).

With more and more parents joining the workforce outside the home, students are aware that it is difficult for school administration to get in touch with them. When the

parents are reached they often do not respond because the child is “always in trouble” and they are tired of dealing with it, they blame the school or they believe that nothing can be done. Students report that parents tell them that they don’t have to do what the teacher says and that they should fight back if hit, insulted, or someone tries to steal from them. This contradictory information on how to behave can be confusing and distressing for children who are trying to decipher right from wrong. Another risk factor mentioned with both parents working was the lack of supervision of the children from after school until the parents get home from work. (Futrell 1996).

According to English psychiatrist John Bowlby’s theory of attachment, the relationships we make in our lives are a direct result of the relationship formed with our mother in infancy. Research on the subject has shown that a child’s attachment to her/his parents is telling in how s/he is likely to handle aggression. Children with secure attachment to their parents are more assertive, have higher self-esteem, and show little aggression. Whereas preschoolers who experience abuse or neglect are at a higher risk to show signs of hostility or aggression towards other children (Levine 1996).

In April of 2000 the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) published the study: “Predictors of Youth Violence (Hawkins, Herrenkohl, Farrington, Brewer, Catalano, Harachi, and Cothorn 2000).” For this study, they drew from 66 quantitative studies and supplemented them by using OJJDP research reports and analyses of the Seattle Social Development Project longitudinal data set. Their findings suggest mistreatment (physical/sexual abuse, neglect), parents who practice poor family management, and parents who are not actively involved in their lives are all key predictors to later violence. They do suggest, though, that broken homes and

abusive parents are the weakest possible predictors of subsequent violence (Hawkins et al. 2000).

The Seattle Social Development Project (Herrenkohl et al. in press) studied the effect of different factors faced by children at 10, 14, and 16 to predict violent behavior by the age 18. Their findings show that if parents condone violence when the child was 10 their chances of engaging in violent behavior at age 18 more than doubled. Poor family management did not prove to be an issue until the child was 14 when his/her risk for later violence doubled. If a parent engaged in criminal behavior then the child's risk for later involvement doubled. By the age 16, if a child was faced with a parent involved with crime, poor family management, family conflict, and having to move residences doubled the risk for involvement at age 18 (as cited in Hawkins et al. 2000). Research conducted to determine if there was a biological link between a parent's violent criminality and a child's found there to be no consistent relationship. What the study did suggest was that the violent criminal behavior is learned (Hawkins et al. 1998).

The degree of community disorganization, poverty, availability of drugs and guns, racism, frequency of violence and gang activity in the communities where at risk children are living all play a role in their potential to use violence in school (McWhirter 1993, Hawkins et al. 1998, Margolin 2000).

Peer Groups. Peer group pressure may be the fastest growing cause of acts of violence among youth both in school and out (Toby 1994 & Futrell 1996). Adolescents may know the difference between right and wrong and, if left to their own devices, would probably make "good" choices but resisting the temptation to misbehave while alone is

far easier for adolescents than when they are with their peers. When adolescents commit a crime they are usually with one or more people whereas adults generally make the decision to commit and actually commit the crime on their own (Zimring 1998).

In Goldstein's (1990) delinquency study peer groups and a youth's acceptance into them was shown to be a major factor. One child reported, "a lot of my peers made me feel that I was wanted more than I felt at home. The littlest thing could happen at home that made me feel that my friends like me better than my own family. And I would just turn to them. And you turn to them more and more. You become bad" (Goldstein, 1990; 48).

As to why youth begin drinking, "Some people will do it just to rebel against their parents (P. 158)". Some of the youth interviewed claimed that stricter parental control was what was needed to get them to curb their delinquent behavior. However studies show that parents who are too strict often run the risk of their children acting out making it difficult to know how much control is too much (Hawkins et al. 2000).

Peer pressure is very real to school age youth:

A kid wants to be accepted, so he will do what the other kids are doing even if he knows it's wrong. He doesn't want to be embarrassed or disrespected by refusing to do something. On the other hand, he doesn't want to be seen doing something good or positive, then he'll get ridiculed for it. The people I knew and hung out with would really disrespect you and sometimes hurt you if you didn't do what they wanted you to. There's a code among friends, and if you want to be with them then you do everything they say and you cover up and look out for each other. This means lying and doing a lot of illegal stuff. If you don't they will hurt you and disrespect you, ridicule you and use you in any way they can. It's unbelievable pressure. You have to work your way up within a gang. You do this by doing everything they want. This means dressing like them, acting like them, and looking like them. (Goldstein 1990:46)

Students report that a major contributor to school violence is the presence of gangs and/or peer group pressure (McWhirter 1993). When at-risk youth are surrounded by

negative role models they are less likely to believe that they will get caught in similar situations, "I thought I never would get locked up, I never thought I would" (Goldstein 1990:47).

From a criminological viewpoint there is disagreement over whether delinquent peer groups influence delinquent behavior or if it is the delinquent behavior that influences delinquent peers. Elliott and Menard (1996) used data from the National Youth Survey that followed a probability sample of 1,725 youth ages 11-17 during the years 1976-1980 and 1983. It was compiled of self-reports on delinquency, the delinquency of friends, involvement with friends and other variables relevant to their study. They were looking at the development of delinquent behavior and the formation of delinquent friends during the adolescent ages of 11-20. What they found was that from early to middle adolescence the youth gradually became involved with delinquent friends and then gradually engaged in delinquent behavior. As they enter young adulthood their involvement with both delinquent friends and delinquent behavior decreases. Within more delinquent peer groups it is suggested that the behavior preceded the making of delinquent friends (Elliott and Menard 1996). It is clear that a child's friends have a distinct and important role in influencing her/his decisions. Within the school we need to educate students on the choices they can make and their consequences. As Goldberg (1990) suggested with his study of delinquents, negative role models can effect the youth's false perception of being able to risk the same behaviors as their negative role model without being caught.

McWhirter et al. (1993) suggest that adolescents are attracted to delinquent friends because their non-delinquent peers reject their aggressive and antisocial

behavior. The social and cognitive skills of these youth are quite often underdeveloped which leads to the inappropriate perception and interpretation of peer group norms leaving them little choice as to whom will ultimately be their friends. Once accepted into a peer group it is difficult for adolescents to make appropriate choices if the group is delinquent. They have finally been accepted and if they were to conform to normal social standards they may face rejection from the group. Conversely, adolescents whose peers disapprove of delinquent behavior and conform to the accepted social norms are less likely to commit delinquent acts (OJJDP 1998).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Looking for a way to make sense out of adolescent anger, I searched for ways to study the phenomena. During this exploration, I found Dr. Stanley Denton, Multicultural Education Coordinator for the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Dr. Denton gave me the names of teachers who were involved with various conflict resolution programs in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). After numerous meetings with these teachers, Dr. Denton proposed I work with him on the Skills for Managing Anger (SMA) pilot in PPS. We determined that I would help collect data from various schools around the district in return for access to the data. I also acted as a liaison between a particular middle school using the program and the PPS multicultural office. Because of my role as liaison, I also gained access to two classrooms that executed the SMA program during the spring of the 2001-2002 school year.

My thesis is an evaluation study of an anger management training that was conducted in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) during November of the 2001-2002 school year. Thirty teachers from PPS were trained to teach *Skills for Managing Anger*, one of the two anger management curricula used by the district. This one-day seminar prepared the teachers to teach a 12-session course.

In 1989 when conflict resolution programs were first forming within PPS, there was a staff of 22 to help teach, implement and monitor the programs. Eleven years later with an established and well-known program there are only two people left on the staff. They simply do not have the time to test program effectiveness. I aim to provide PPS with much needed information and feedback that could help to direct (or redirect) their energy and monies.

Schools are always on the lookout for programs that work. Due to budget and time constraints, a quick fix is sometimes more appealing than it should be. Superintendents, principals, school board members, teachers, parents, concerned citizens all need and want their chosen programs to be not only cost-effective, but goal oriented. What do I mean by this? They want to get the most out of their money. Excess money is not common in the public schools. If a program is chosen to be implemented, then it is expected to provide the advertised results. This is why private companies (such as SERA Learning/Bete Channing) pay for their own research. They need a client base, and in order to establish that they have to have proof that their programs work.

SERA Learning contracted a man from the University of Texas to provide evidence that their Skills For Managing Anger program is effective. His findings show that "SMA participants report:

- Reduced verbal and physical aggression
- Greater use of anger management strategies
- Increased confidence in their ability to deal with difficult situations"

(<http://www.sera.com/index.php?section=results&option=results&page=evaluationdata#>

SERA Learning website, last accessed 2-20-05)

As I will show later, this says nothing of the actual effectiveness of the program, only that participants show a stronger awareness. While I do not disagree that there is greater awareness of anger management ideals, the program far from reduces the amount of violence seen in schools.

Is behavior better overall in schools that provide anger management training? Is individual student behavior better for those who participate in anger management training? Does the quality of the teacher's implementation have any effect on a student's success? Do students' attitudes towards conflict change as a direct result of anger management classes? Can students gauge their own anger signals as a result of anger management training? Can students alter their reaction to conflict or a conflict situation as a result of anger management training?

By being a participant observer I was able to take a more comprehensive look into the value of teaching anger management to test the following hypotheses:

- Students are able to modify their behavior in situations of conflict as a result of anger management training.
- Students are able to recognize their own anger signals in situations of conflict as a result of anger management training.
- Students' retention of anger management skills will be higher for those whose teacher executed a high quality implementation of the program.
- Teachers who teach anger management classes will experience less class time disruptions after completion of the 12 sessions.
- Observations done later in the training program will see fewer class distractions than observations made earlier in the program.

I observed two of the four teachers that taught SMA during the spring 2002 semester. I observed 21 sessions and attended the training for teachers and two support follow-up meetings for the four teachers at Reizenstein. Of the 21 sessions,

two were of Teacher 4 and 19 were of Teacher 3. The sessions observed were 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12.

ACCESS AND PROJECT FRAMES

Together with Dr. Denton, I attended the November 2001 *Skills for Managing Anger* teacher training. Before I spent time in classrooms a letter of introduction and invitation to participate was given to members of the school community. Permission to observe and further study the individual responses to the anger management curriculum came through consent forms for teachers and parents/guardians and assent forms for students (please see Appendix A). Finally, I looked for certain behaviors during my observations I wanted to look specifically at students' use of skills learned in their conflict resolution training (can the child remain calm when angered, can they handle a tense situation without aggravating their 'opponent', does the student resort to violence to 'solve' a disagreement?) and at the teacher's implementation of the curriculum. All data gathered for the study were kept confidential and in a locked file cabinet to which I, alone, had access. Upon completion of the study, all records will be destroyed. Because students who participated in the anger management program were in self-contained "therapeutic classrooms," I was unable to control the sample selection of students. However, I was able to randomly select two teachers from among the 30 that participated in the early November 2001 *Skills for Managing Anger* training. I observed a total of 21 sessions (including the teacher training session and sessions one, five, six, seven, eight, ten, eleven and twelve of *Skills for Managing Anger*) and 2 staff check-in meetings.

For the purpose of this study disruptive/violent behavior refers to using or threatening to use a weapon on school grounds, involvement in physical fights on school grounds, bullying classmates at school, and startling or intentionally damaging someone else's property. "School grounds" includes inside and outside the actual school building, on or waiting for the school bus, any place where students may be while on a school related outing or the student's route to and/or from school. Also, "disruptions" are student initiated within the classroom (i.e.: calling out, getting out of seat, talking to other students during lesson).

Reizenstein

The base of my study was Reizenstein Middle School that serves, among many diverse neighborhoods, the Homewood section of Pittsburgh. There are obvious signs of the income discrepancies and while the school serves many communities, it predominantly represents a lower income community. It is a 6-8 middle school with an average class size of 20.2. The population of the school is 921 with 92.5% African American and 6.3% White, 0.8% Asian, and 0.4% Hispanic (<http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/reizenstein.asp>).

Every morning two school police officers would greet me at the front door, but pay no attention. They were never concerned with me in particular, as I would check in with the front office and walk to the classroom as if I belonged there. I was not required to wear any form of identification. Their presence was to help keep order with the crowds of students who would arrive early and throughout the day. Whenever classes changed, kids were running and pushing their way to their destination (which may or

may not have been to their classroom) rendering near chaos in the halls. Students needed a note if they arrived to their class after the bell. The kids of this school were streetwise and, as I learned from observing many of the classes, many had been witness to violence in their neighborhoods or even homes. There was a call button in every classroom. I watched one day as Teacher 3 (seven months pregnant) called for the police for fear she would be pushed like she had been the day before.

The school itself is divided into three “houses.” One is The Arts, Humanities, And Mass Communications Academy, the second is the Math, Science, and Technology Academy and finally the Program for Academic Success. Each has its own unique program of study and students may choose which “house” they want to attend, but ultimately they must meet certain requirements for admittance. The Skills for Managing Anger Program was not chosen to be used within a certain House rather that decision fell to the teachers’ willingness to pilot the program for their school. There are four classes or “groups” of sixth graders.

The school utilizes a rotating schedule where they use a 6-day rotation, rather than the traditional 5-day rotation. The students are broken up into five groups and rotated through their subject area classes. The veteran teacher (teacher “4”) taught Group 3 and 5 SMA on Wednesday mornings. The first year teacher (teacher “3”) taught SMA to Groups 1, 2, and 4 on Fridays. One class was particularly unruly (talking to each other while she talked, getting up and walking around the room without permission) and she would choose not to do SMA if their behavior was out of control. Due to scheduling conflicts there were no observations for group 5.

In May of 2002 this school was being threatened to be designated (along with one other area school) as a “needs improvement” school; these schools were targeted under the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994. Because major improvement was not indicated by their tests scores under President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 they face becoming a school of choice, which would give parents the opportunity to transfer their children to higher performing schools (PPG 9-9-02). Fortunately for the students of Reizenstein, by July of the same year they had narrowly avoided being placed on “needs improvement” list. Then Superintendent Jack Thompson seemed stymied by the findings saying, “...that doesn't change the academic performance of those students. I said before that I don't need the state government or federal government to tell us which schools are low-performing. This doesn't take the burden of accountability off those schools.” (PPG 5-21-02)

Skills For Managing Anger/SERA

SERA Learning is an organization that develops and provides life skills education materials to various organizations that deal with young people ages 10-24. Their programs are designed to work by providing the adults involved (those who act as facilitators for the course) a training that will introduce them to the concepts of a particular program and allow those adults to experience the activities they will be facilitating. During the course of the writing of this paper SERA Learning shifted distribution of SMA to a company called Bete Channing.

Building Personal Power: Skills for Managing Anger (SMA) was released in 1996 after extensive trials in California high schools, job corps centers and juvenile centers.

It is based on SERA Learning's belief that there is a need to teach skills that seem to be missing from many young people's lives. SMA focuses its efforts on skills such as anger management, negotiation, conflict resolution, communication and job skills/retention. The program itself uses Tutored Video Instruction (TVI) technology, which is essentially a video run class. The teacher's role is to act as a facilitator while the video supplies background information, a model class and vignettes or role plays of conflict situations.

The goal of SMA is to teach children and young adults to gain perspective of their anger and to handle that anger in a constructive rather than destructive way. SMA seeks to teach the concepts of personal power, setting and attaining realistic goals, recognizing their body's anger signals, recognizing things that make them angry, creating images and phrases to help talk themselves down from a tense situation, exploring how to get out of a difficult situation without escalating it, learning calming techniques, and ultimately creating an action plan on how to use the skills learned in the program. The program acknowledges the limitations of their 12-session program but believe that their lessons provide a solid base upon which to build a lifetime of learning (see Table 1).

Table 1: Program Overview

Session	Objective
Session 1: Getting Together	Getting-to-know-you activities; setting ground rules so participants can feel safe and open to sharing experiences with the class
Session 2: Personal Power	Teaches participants about "personal power," which is the idea that if you identify goals and use self-control to reach those goals you have power over others
Session 3: Setting Goals	Delves into goal setting and gives

	participants the opportunity to set realistic goals for themselves
Session 4: Anger Signals	Becoming aware of what makes you angry
Session 5: Hot Buttons	This session focuses on the idea that we have buttons (emotional soft spots) that people can push that make us angry
Session 6: Self Talk	Students are asked to come up with images or phrases that can help remind them of what is important when they are feeling angry (i.e. a jail cell, is it worth going to jail over this? or, what would my grandmother think if I gave in to this anger?)
Session 7: More About Self Talk	Continues the conversation of self-talk
Session 8: Getting Out	Strategies for getting out of difficult situations without escalating them
Session 9: More About Getting Out	Continuation of Session 8
Session 10: Cooling Off	Techniques for “Cooling Off” once the participant has gotten out of a difficult situation
Session 11: Putting It All Together	This session gives the participant the opportunity to act out, write and/or talk about all the concepts s/he has learned so far in the course
Session 12: Personal Action Plan	Creating personal action plans where students can figure out how to take all of the idea and strategies they have learned and create a plan for future use

Each lesson begins with a “check in” where the facilitator takes a few moments to see how the participants are doing and to find out if there is anything pressing on anyone’s mind. As stated earlier, the course is mainly taught using a video instructor; each lesson also includes an arena to write about and act out the concepts they are learning. In the “Before you Begin” section of the manual it suggests that if you need to trim the lessons, the last thing to go should be the role plays as they are a powerful tool in giving people the opportunity to actually get a feel for the ideas being learned.

OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS FROM REIZENSTEIN

Does this program work?

SERA provides a training for teachers and staff who will facilitate the program. The goal of the training is to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully facilitate the *Skills For Managing Anger* program. I was able to attend the training for the Pittsburgh Public Schools on December 1, 2001. The training was from 8am-3pm and held in the upstairs library. There were no signs to point out how to get to the library, nor was there anyone there when I arrived at 7:50 (I had not been teaching for a few years and had forgotten that teachers arrive on time to late for Saturday trainings). The training did not begin until 8:30 when the principal decided to begin. I sat at the U-shape table set up among the other teachers. I was able to blend in because there were 27 teachers present and only four were from the host school, Reizenstein.

Like most teacher trainings, this was a model of the actual anger management class. The trainer (a representative of SERA Learning) acted as the facilitator as the participants worked on the activities that the students would complete. After each activity we would briefly discuss its merits and go over any questions any participants had.

During breaks and lunch I was able to gain insight into the student population of Reizenstein because teachers discussed students during this time. It helps to gain insight or clarify what might be going on in their world for the teacher. The teachers conversed about students' wardrobes (unable to buy more than two shirts, almost getting into a fight because someone almost stepped on their new shoes, etc.),

problems with students' home lives, and whether or not it was actually anger the kids feel. Some teachers see the behavior as a direct result of being angry about the "lack of freedom to be a kid," others see the issue much differently. They think the students are using anger as a "cop out" because their parent(s) are drug addicts or alcoholics. One teacher suggested that because no one is nice to these kids, they don't feel the need to treat others with respect.

There are many lessons we can learn from Reizenstein. The most glaring appears to be program implementation and, to a degree, teacher dedication. One teacher was young, pregnant and subbing for the year; another, a veteran, was clearly dedicated to her students and her job. Limiting both teachers' success were constraints put upon them such as testing, behavior, and scheduling.

Teacher 3, young, white, and a first year teacher, had a very relaxed style to her teaching and often spoke to her students as a peer, blurring the line between teacher and friend. While this often helps teachers bond with their students, it does make it difficult to gain control once lost. Teacher 3 had a relatively good rapport with them, but discipline seemed lacking. She often read from the resource book without looking up while twirling her hair.

She was eager to teach the SMA program when first trained in November, but the stresses of pregnancy, being a first year teacher, and teaching high-poverty students proved to be a major struggle. She showed signs of wear by the end of the year. Her dedication to the program was lacking, as she would often start the first class of the day without even looking over the notes for the class. I also question her dedication to the kids at that point in the year, she was focused on her pregnancy and

often couldn't get involved in situations between students for fear of being pushed or knocked over (she was pushed to the ground once during the study when a fight broke out in the hall and she tried to intervene).

Teacher 3 also chose to hold the class on Fridays. This sends the message to the kids that this is something fun or not worth taking seriously. Fridays are not always the best day for introducing new skills; it is a better day for review and remediation. He students were often playing games, writing notes, and being generally disruptive.

Teacher 4 was an experienced teacher. She was in her mid-fifties, a mother of two boys (she would often connect stories of her boys to the lessons she was teaching), and had a chronic cough. The cough could be very distracting as she taught her lessons. Her classroom had the feel of a teacher who has clear systems and routines. Students were calm and spoke in hushed tones. These students clearly knew what was expected of them as was shown by their quietly watching video installments and following the teacher's directions without much interruption.

This veteran teacher saw more participation as she had clear expectations of her students. She implemented more rigid systems and routines. She held her class at the same time every week (and with the rotating schedule, that meant it would be on different days each week), and her students knew what to expect from the sessions and from her. In general, her students paid attention to the class and knew what was expected of them.

There were also two men, whose classes I was unable to observe. Both were African American males who had many responsibilities beyond teaching SMA and would often have to postpone or severely modify their lessons. They were present for

the meetings with Dr. Stanley Denton and were in contact with me regarding questions and timing of lessons.

EVALUATION

Question 1: Were students able to modify their behavior in situations of conflict as a result of the anger management training?

Across the board, I did not see much growth in this area throughout the program. While I do believe both Teacher 3 and 4 provided the students with satisfactory presentation of the material in the course, the students were not able to transfer the information to their own lives. In Session 12 (taught just over 14 weeks after Session 1) only 13 students in Group 1 came to class (two of whom were not registered students and were virtually ignored the entire class). The reason for the small class size was two-fold; one, it was Honor's Day and there was a celebration for those students who had earned high honors and two, it was a Friday. There were 24 students on the roster; however, throughout the 14 week period there was an average attendance of only 17. Within 10 minutes of Session 12's start Teacher 3 asked her class, "Which strategies have you used over the past week?" A student answered, "I ain't used 'em." The teacher responded quizzically, "There haven't been times when you've walked away from a situation?" To that the student replied, "No." No other students offered information regarding their usage (or lack thereof) of strategies (observation notes 6-7-02).

The intention of session 12 is to give students an outlet for developing an action plan as to how they will use the skills learned during the program. Teacher 3 did not follow the program very closely (she often didn't know what the lesson was about until she opened it up for the first class of the day) and this particular day she changed the presentation because she believed the session would be too difficult for her students.

Rather than have the students pair up to create a personal action plan she decided to do this as a group. The program also calls for a certificate of completion and class party to recognize the students and their work during the program. This did not occur during any of the classes. This only added to the disconnectedness that seems prevalent throughout the program.

Group 3 used the class as a venting place for the issues going on between classes and on the bus before and after school. Due to the extreme disruptions while Teacher 3 tried to facilitate the class, Group 4 did not even finish the last session as suggested (kids were told to get books out and read quietly).

Question 2: Were students able to recognize their own anger signals in situations of conflict as a result of anger management training?

I was unable to observe the students in a social setting. In the classroom, I observed students being able to discuss anger signals. They became familiar with the terminology; however, there was no proof that the students were using this skill to help diffuse a conflict situation. Teacher 3 only once acknowledged her anger signals during my observations thus modeling incorrect behavior. Modeling expected behavior is crucial for retention of skills. According to Robert J. Marzano, “[l]earning a complex skill mandates that a person properly demonstrate that skill, with attention to the many variations in implementation the skill may require (Marzano 2001 p. 156). If modeling of the skill does not occur, the student must interpret the meaning on their own and this often leads to a misunderstanding of the concepts.

Question 3: Was the student's retention of anger management skills higher for those whose teacher executed a higher quality implementation of the program?

The quality of teaching I saw at Reizenstein was not outstanding. It was far from inadequate, but I saw few of the things that research shows to be effective. One strategy neglected by Teacher 3 was modeling. She did not appropriately model the various aspects of SMA. She conveyed personal stories, but did not acknowledge that students were "pushing her hot buttons" when she would get angry with their behavior.

As stated before, Teacher 3 was often unprepared for her sessions. She would leaf through the facilitator's manual as the students walked into class. On one occasion she even confused the session she was supposed to be teaching and had to skip sections of the session in order to manipulate the lesson.

Question 4: Did the teachers who taught the anger management classes experience fewer class time disruptions throughout the course?

Disruptions from the various classes did not decrease over the course of the program. Having classroom experience myself since beginning this project, this sort of variable is not changed due to programs implemented, but by teacher controls. If a teacher has weak or nonexistent management of his or her class it does not matter what program they are implementing, they will see as many disruptions in the beginning of the program as in the end. Considering this program began mid-year, there should have been systems and routines in place that would have prevented disruptions throughout this program. Also, the student population needs to be taken into account. As of the 2003-2004 school year, 83% of students were part of the free or reduced

lunch program (<http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/pa/other/2274> last accessed 2-16-05). This can be a sign of high mobility, which makes the connections between the student and the school weak. If the students feel no connection to the school they have little need to behave appropriately or strive to succeed. "Schools that experience high mobility--many well over 70 percent--spend a lot of time on activities that impede direct, uninterrupted instruction...The mobility of urban students disconnects the long-term relationships and follow-up necessary for the best learning to take place (Fowler-Finn 2001).

Question 5: Were fewer distractions observed in the later classes than in the beginning of the program?

On the day of Session 12 there are only 13 students present, 7 of whom are girls. This day happened to be Honor's Day at this school and all honor students had been taken to a local water park. With so few students there are fewer disruptions. Seven minutes after the lesson started a student who had been in the office all morning arrived. Due to technical difficulties (TV not working), Teacher 3 was not able to begin session 10 on time. This is not a student initiated disruption, but it is a reality of working in public schools. Often technology is unreliable, especially when it is shared among classes. The teacher gave her students a grammar usage test while a student went in search of a working television set. Twenty-one minutes later, a television arrives. This lesson starts at 11:30. Within the first 10 minutes of class the teacher sends a student to the office for disruptive behavior (the student tried to engage in a power struggle, but

left when told). He returns 20 minutes later and the counselor announced that if he had any more problems that he would be sent home.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If Pittsburgh Public Schools chooses to continue using the *Skills for Managing Anger program* in their schools, there are changes I would recommend they make. First, classroom management needs to be monitored. A novice teacher with little classroom experience is not the best suited to facilitate the program as PPS has them doing currently. Second, the class should be taken voluntarily. If this is not possible, they need to limit the class size. Even in the video that directs the sessions there is a class size of 10. Smaller classes allow for greater participation from students. The program is set up for little teacher interaction (teacher as facilitator only), but if there is no student participation then the chances of program success diminish. Many days I observed kids playing games with paper and pencil, or sketching on their notebooks. Some kids went so far as to darken the eyes on the front cover picture so deeply as to rip through the paper making a kind of mask (observation notes). Parent or community volunteers could be trained to help off-set the time demand for classroom teachers.

Third, this program would be most effective if it were taught at the beginning of the school year. This way the staff and students all have time to practice the skills and use the terminology. Teaching it so close to the end of the school year allows too much time to pass before the students are surrounded by people who reflect the same language and skills. If they choose to keep teaching it in the second semester, they should open a session to parents and guardians so they too can utilize the language and skills.

Fourth, all teachers and school staff should be trained. This enables all adults in the school building to be on the same page. If the language does not permeate through

the walls of the building it leaves too much room for neglect. An easy, cost-effective way to train building staff is to have those trained at the original training do an in-house training (this is a very common practice in schools).

Fifth, because this is not a mandated program in the PPS, they need to make sure that the teachers who volunteer to facilitate truly believe in the program. This will help with teacher dedication and execution of the program. The students are more likely to take the class seriously if their facilitator is invested in the program. Leaving the class for a Friday afternoon activity does not send a message that this is a class that should be taken seriously.

Finally, I recommend that Pittsburgh Public Schools use pro-social teaching. Start early. By the time kids reach 6th grade the struggle to teach pro-social behavior intensifies. Peer groups bonds are tighter and often more important than family or school bonds (NEA 10-99). Programs such as the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program or Responsive Classroom helps schools promote a “peaceable school.” The entire staff is trained in not only the strategy, but in the theories behind the program.

CONCLUSION

There are many factors that contribute to youth resorting to the use of violence in our schools. The media, family and community violence, and peer groups all have an immense influence over the decisions an adolescent will make. If they suffer from weak attachment to their parents or school and they are surrounded by negative influences it is likely that they will engage in delinquent behavior. Although current studies on crime and violence in our schools indicate the trend to be on the decline, violence in our schools does exist. Any violence committed against and by our children has to be addressed. The major area open to further study is the relationship between the decrease in violence and the presence of conflict resolution education programs. Is the rate of violence in schools decreasing because of the implementation of conflict resolution curriculum? Are these programs helping to address the negative influences individual youths face with everyday?

If we are seeing direct correlations between conflict resolution education programs and the decrease in violence, we need to be focusing our energies and monies in that direction. While assuring our children are reading and writing is not only a noble goal, but a realistic one as well, we first must make sure we are creating environments where kids are actually learning.

Policy makers need to focus on community programs that work with the school and families of at-risk youth. More than ever before schools have the burden of teaching children how to decipher right from wrong and how to handle the “wrongs” when they the present themselves. We need to work with children to help them understand that they are capable and competent to make wise decisions concerning

their behavior. We need to monitor and guide our children's media intake, not censor it. We need to educate our communities on the effects of their behavior on their youth. We cannot control our children once they have formed their sense of being, but we can influence and guide them if we understand the consequences of our input. Parenting and anger management classes should be offered free of charge for those who cannot afford them. With community involvement, some of the pressures would be lifted from the schools and they could focus on their original goal: academic education. Only then can we reclaim schools as a safe place for our children to spend their days.

In a world where we are increasingly blaming others for our mistakes (suing, and winning, for spilling an obviously hot cup of coffee on yourself; suing, and winning, for not wearing protective gear while riding your bicycle in the pitch dark and then getting hit by a car...) and feeling entitled to compensation for those mistakes, it is no wonder children are disillusioned. We have not been very good role models. The days of schools being a place where children simply learn academics are over. It is now a home away from home. Teachers are in a position where they are challenged to teach a child not only all the material expected from their particular grade level, but they are expected to catch the child up for any gaps in their education as well as making sure these children are model citizens.

Having a class of 22 fourth graders myself, I came into the job certain I was going to make a difference. I knew I would have my challenges; it comes with the territory. What I didn't know was that out of my 22 I would have 13 English Language Learners, and 6 children in after school care until 6pm. Nine are on free and reduced lunch, at least 2 who have a family member in jail (and these are only the kids who tell

me these things!), one has ADHD and is heavily medicated, and one who, for multiple reasons, is both academically and emotionally on a first grade level.

Waiting until these children are in 6th grade to teach them anger management seems laughable. Most of these children aren't allowed to play outside after school due to gang activity in the neighborhood (and this school is in the suburbs!). These children understand they have drawn a difficult card in life. By fourth grade many of these kids expect help and complain when they don't get it (or totally break down seeing as they are still children). My school has chosen to deal with our challenges by implementing Responsive Classroom (RC).

RC is a school wide based framework where children are taught about being part of a community. We teach that you have a responsibility to your community. Every class comes up with its own rules, but they all boil down to children being safe, respectful and responsible. Punishment is not necessarily punitive. When you have broken a rule the motto is "You break it – you fix it." This includes material objects as well as children's feelings.

With the overall rate of school crime on the decline, the question must be asked: are conflict resolution programs working? Are these programs producing the results we see? It cannot be coincidental that the increase in conflict resolution programs and the decrease in school violence are happening simultaneously. As school crime reports are compiled in the future, they should include data concerning the existence of conflict resolution programs and whether or not they are school-wide.

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