The Role of Group Psychotherapeutic Interventions in Youth Violence Reduction and Primary Prevention – A White Paper

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

In recognition of the American Group Psychotherapy Association's pre-eminent role in establishing national standards for group therapy practice, the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) awarded the Association a grant to evaluate group oriented school- and community-based violence prevention programs. CMHS specifically asked AGPA to identify, describe and evaluate programs that incorporate group therapeutic approaches characterized by a public health model of intervention. The CMHS mandate was to review programs which empower individuals to change their "…health damaging behaviors, and (to empower) entire communities to act as positive agents of change." Identifying effective programs will hopefully make it possible to support effective initiatives to reduce the "escalating, unacceptable levels of violent behaviors that plague this Nation." This White Paper reports on the findings of the AGPA review.

AGPA constituted a committee of three experts on child and adolescent group psychotherapy and assigned them the task of identifying and evaluating model school-based programs across the nation. A comprehensive literature search initially identified 25 programs that seemed to meet the aforementioned criteria. After discussion, the Committee members decided to focus primarily on those programs that had been formally evaluated through research studies published in nationally recognized, peer reviewed, scholarly journals. This approach was consistent with the CMHS standards, which include 1) initiatives "grounded in the scientific literature" and 2) initiatives that earned the Committee's "highest level of shared confidence" regarding their effectiveness. Applying these criteria reduced the number of model programs from twenty-five to nine. The Committee then recruited a larger panel of 10 expert (10 or more years of clinical, supervisory and/or research experience) child and adolescent group therapists and researchers to evaluate the nine programs. The review process methodology is presented in the following section.

Context

It has become commonplace for educators, mental health professionals and social scientists to comment that violence is as American as apple pie, woven into the fabric of American society and far more widely accepted than we ordinarily choose to acknowledge. In the aftermath of the recent attacks on the World Trade Center and on the Pentagon, it seems fitting to remind ourselves that deadly violence is a fundamental aspect of human behavior, perhaps as significant in its way as attachment, intelligent speech, and innovative problem-solving. Nonetheless most societies, including our own, do their utmost to protect children from violence, especially when they are attending school. Keeping children safe within the context of a socially prescribed educational environment is a fundamental characteristic of a civilized society.

In theory, American society is fully committed to enacting this principle. In practice, however, as the CMHS grant emphasizes, we fall far short of our goal of keeping children safe. Instead, we are faced with "escalating" and "unacceptable" levels of violence in society at large and in our school systems in particular. To put it bluntly, recent statistics regarding school violence are nothing less than appalling, especially if we take our commitment to protecting children seriously. This, despite a reported decline in the number of violent/crime related incidents in America' schools. For example, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in the U.S. Department of Justice issued a report in 2001 that found a decline by 2% of crimes reported in schools. However, this report still noted that in 1999, school students were the victims of 2.5 million crimes. 1.6 million of these crimes were thefts, 880,000 were nonfatal violent crimes and 186,000 were crimes of a serious violent nature such as sexual assault, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault – all sobering numbers, despite the reported decline (U.S. Department of Justice Annual Report, 2001).

Looking more closely at the data, we see the following trends. A U.S. Department of Justice (1991) study quoted by Goldstein and Conoley (1997) showed that "…during the first half of 1990, approximately 9% of all students ages 12-19 were crime victims in the United States; 2% were victims of violent crimes and 7% of property crimes. In addition, 15% of these 12 to 19 year-olds said that their schools had gangs, and 16 % claimed that their school had experienced an actual or threatened attack on a teacher. In this regard, Goldstein and Conoley (1997) note that there were 18,000 assaults on teachers in 1955, 41,000 in 1971, and 63,000 in 1975; by 1979 the number of such attacks had risen to 110,000. The statistics confirm the popular, media-enhanced impression that schools cannot maintain safe environments for teenage students, and that teachers and administrators, whose responsibility it is to ensure school safety, are finding it increasingly difficult even to ensure their own safety on school campuses.

Reflections on Etiology

Teachers, parents and almost everyone else who works with children and teenagers recognize that some forms of "misbehavior" are intrinsic to the process of growing up. In fact, it would be difficult to recognize children as children, if they did not sometimes misbehave. Goldstein and Conoley (1997, p.5) comment on this: "In U.S. public education for the many decades preceding the second half of the 20th century, school-based aggression was apparently infrequent in occurrence, low in intensity, and (at least in retrospect) almost quaint in character. 'Misbehavior,' 'poor comportment,' 'bad conduct,' and the like, in the form of getting out of one's seat, refusing to obey a teacher, throwing a spitball … or even (rarely) breaking a window, seem like and truly are, the events of another era -events so mild in comparison to the aggressive acts of today that it is difficult to think of the two types of behaviors as the extremes of a shared continuum." What then has happened over the past 50 years to affect a change of the magnitude we are observing?

Until recently the prevailing wisdom has located high rates of school violence in poor, decaying, urban neighborhoods with high rates of community crime. Since people of color tend to comprise a disproportionately high percentage of the population in such poor communities, it has also been widely accepted among educators, researchers and policy-makers that, typically, school violence reflects the kind of community violence that presumably is "endemic" among poverty class African-American and Hispanic children and youth. That analysis has focused national attention on poor, urban school systems primarily attended by students of color. For this reason, most school violence reduction initiatives, including almost all of those evaluated in this study, have been developed for use in schools which serve predominantly poor, "minority" populations. The unacknowledged, perhaps unreflective racist overtones of this analysis are troubling, especially since research has shown (Martin, 2001) that "…when socioeconomic status is taken into account, the disparity between African-Americans and the general population as both victims and perpetrators of violence becomes quite small." This finding is almost certainly equally generalizable to other populations of color.

Poverty then, (but not race) continues to be a significant predictor of interpersonal violence. When we consider the impact poverty has on children, we recognize that children measure themselves economically in terms of how they feel they and their families compare with others, including others known more from television, advertising, computer games, sports and other media disseminated information, than from real life experience. Garbarino (1999) observes:

"Being poor means not meeting the basic standards set by society. When you are poor, it is not so much a matter of what you have but what you don't have. It is a matter of being different from the 'regular' members of your society. And it is the message that that difference sends to kids that matters. If being poor means being consigned to second-class citizenship,

is it any wonder that it leads to feelings of shame in kids and that in a violent society such as ours those feelings of shame lead to aggression?"

Recent Trends

In the last few years, school violence has taken an unexpected turn that further challenges our previous assumptions. Between November, 1995 and May, 1999 (Twemlow, 2000) there were eight widely publicized shootings that claimed multiple victims. In those eight shootings alone, 29 students, 4 teachers, 1 principal and 2 parents were murdered. Sixty-one other students were wounded. The 10 "shooters" employed 12 handguns, 6 rifles, 3 shotguns, 30 homemade bombs and literally thousands of rounds of ammunition. The shootings occurred in junior or senior high schools located in predominantly middle class or affluent suburban schools primarily serving Caucasian students. Given the extensive media coverage of these incidents few educators, child mental health professionals, or policy makers, are likely to forget the names: Columbine High School; Pearl, Mississippi; and Jonesboro, Arkansas. Moreover, outside of the specific communities where the shootings took place, few children or parents have escaped the impact or misunderstood the implications of media-enhanced images of bloody carnage (which was certainly bad enough without enhancement). If we hypothesize about how these events affected children, parents and school systems it would be miraculous if only 12% of today's high school students view the schools they attend as unsafe.   And, we might well ask, what do their parents think?

By themselves, these eight shooting incidents are worse than shocking. As a nation, we find it difficult to fully comprehend their implications. If, as middle and upper middle class American scholars, mental health professionals and policy makers, we cannot adequately explain what caused these incidents by agreeing that social class and race (i.e., the actions of those among us who, for the most part, we define as "other") are most influential in determining the increasing deadliness of

school violence, where can we turn for explanations? How can we protect school children in the communities we live in? How can we protect our own children?

Consequently, we struggle with an increasing level of national concern directed not only to poor, urban children of color, but to every American child. In applying public health principles to this problem, the first step is to consider multiple intersecting social and emotional variables. The statistical evidence confirms that poverty is still a significant causal factor in many but not all instances of school violence. What other factors contribute to this fearful synergy? What follows is a discussion of three variables we think contribute significantly.

1)   Guns: Here, There, Everywhere:

At present, according to the most recent Milton Eisenhower Foundation update of the original 1967 Kerner Commission report, there are currently over 200 million guns in the United States; almost one for every man, woman and child. Martin (2001) points out that these weapons are increasingly finding their way into the hands of youth. Between 1980 and 1990, arrest rates for weapon law violations increased 63% among juveniles, and the number of juveniles who committed murders increased 79%. Today, teenagers have ready access to guns either because they belong to family members and are readily available at home, or because they are easy and cheap to buy on the street. Impulsivity, poor judgment, alienation from peers, intolerable social, educational or familial frustrations, spurned love, simmering resentments, fantasies (both paranoid and real) about being attacked, narcissistic injuries, intense feelings of shame, drug or alcohol addiction, severe psychopathology, and a host of other factors, can all lead to sudden and potentially lethal behavior, especially if guns are readily available. It is important for us to remember that we are talking here about teen-agers

whose developmental achievements, at any given time, may or may not include a well-developed capacity for self-restraint when they begin to feel stressed.

A fundamental problem with guns is that, when employed, for whatever reason, they almost always cause serious harm. Goldstein and Conoley (1997) quote a 1993 study from the National School Safety Center which found that 53% of 132 students who brought guns to school did so to "protect themselves," 21% because "their enemies had guns" and 10% because they "wanted to get someone." Guns give teenagers instant access to lethal force. Even if only a relatively small minority of students bring guns to school, and even if an even smaller minority ever use them either to threaten or to harm others, their use almost always has dire consequences. An experienced street gang worker (Klein, 1956) once commented: "There are very few things on this planet that are more frightening than a pissed off 16 year old with a sub-machine gun." Although he did not realize it at the time, this was a truly visionary statement. At the time, the really dangerous weapons were knives, belts, chains and "zip guns" (wood, heavy rubber bands and bullets if one knew how to put them together). Today, of course, a remarkably wide range of teenagers have access to automatic weapons.

2.)   <u>Television and Media Games:</u>

The influence of media and computer games is considerably greater than Americans have, until recently, recognized. It is a well known fact that by the time an American child is 16 years old, he or she has witnessed hundreds of thousands of acts of violence on television, and many thousands of murders. And, in spite of our tendency to be complacent about television violence (after all, everyone watches) research studies show that "violence observed on television does increase aggressive and violent behavior in children and youth (Lowry, Sleet et al., cited in Martin, 2001). Not surprisingly, research confirms that violence-laden

television programs are linked to overt aggression, anger, motor restlessness and poor behavioral adjustment in school (Martin, 2001).

Bushman and Anderson (2001) argue that scientific data, based on over 1000 studies, "point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in (at least) some children." They hypothesize that the overwhelming weight of the research findings are obscured by misguided application of "fairness standards" which mandate an even-handed presentation of opposing points of view. In spite of the preponderance of scientific evidence demonstrating a causal link between TV exposure and increases in aggressive behavior, industry spokespeople get equal media time to refute this data even though their opinions are unsupported by scientific evidence. In concluding, the authors comment that "…the mass media industry has the money and expertise to hire top guns to create such obfuscations and to deliver them in a convincing fashion, much as the tobacco industry successfully did for several decades" (Bushman and Anderson, 2001).

Commenting on a somewhat different but related phenomenon, Garbarino (1999) argues that a subgroup of popular video games systematically undermines certain prosocial inhibitions against violence that adults teach children and youth. These inhibitions are specifically designed to prevent children from actually pointing a real gun at another human being, and shooting him/her. Garbarino further observes that during past wars, most soldiers had marked difficulty in actually firing their weapons with deadly intent, even at enemy troops in combat situations. The U.S. Defense Department, in its efforts to prepare soldiers for actual warfare, developed video games to help them overcome this inhibition. These games are remarkably similar to games now widely disseminated, for "entertainment purposes", to children and youth. In Garbarino's (1999) view, the proficiency young people readily develop

while mastering these games markedly increases the likelihood of lethal impact when, for whatever reason, they turn real guns toward their classmates and teachers.

3.)   <u>Exposure to and Participation in Violence Begets Further Violence:</u>

Traumatic exposure is likely to beget either violent behavior, or conversely, tendencies toward passively accepting or actively seeking victimization. Trauma experts agree that exposure to intensely stressful events, especially repeated exposure, is likely to impair the functioning and influence the general behavior of children and adolescents. Such events include physical or sexual abuse, community violence (whether as a witness or a participant), family violence such as spousal or child abuse, the death or serious illness of a parent, grandparent, sibling or friend, and divorce (especially when there is extreme conflict), to name only a few.

Notable among these "triggers" is domestic violence. Older children and adolescents who are exposed to violence at home are at high risk for delinquency, including crimes such as burglary, prostitution, arson, drug abuse, and assault and battery. Adolescents who have witnessed domestic violence also show high levels of aggression accompanied by anxiety, school problems, truancy and revenge-seeking behavior (Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, 1990, cited in Martin, 2001). Adolescents who have had such experiences report giving up hope, deadened feelings of pain and serious constrictions in emotional development. They are more likely to become attached to peer groups and gangs and are more likely to use violence to deal with conflict, frustration or disputes (Osofsky, 1995, cited in Martin, 2001). In a nationwide study, Kilpatrick and Saunders (1997) assessed teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 years of age for histories of sexual or physical assault, harsh physical discipline, exposure to violence, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, substance abuse and delinquent offenses. For all these variables, including PTSD, exposure to violence either at home

or in the community was the most influential factor in increasing the risk of violent behavior in both male and female adolescents.

The findings speak for themselves. Of course, as a society, we must decide whether we will listen. We now know that being the object of violent behavior, especially if it is regularly repeated, begets violence toward self or others. Witnessing violence has similar effects. For many children so exposed, the only choice left to them is between assuming the role of victim or victimizer. Knowing this, do we have the will and knowledge necessary to reduce traumatic exposure among children and youth in our schools and our communities? At present the answer seems unclear.

Summary

The literature identifies a number of factors that reliably predict the incidence of violent behavior. Social factors include poverty, unemployment, housing instability, deterioration of social and economic supports, participation in gang activity, the breakdown of community-specific social support networks, and, in general, a "dramatic destruction of the infrastructure of daily life" (Garbarino, 1997) Psychological factors include substance abuse, schizophrenia, paranoid states, psychopathy, PTSD, and certain personality disorders characterized by explosive temper, social intolerance, extreme alienation, narcissistic vulnerability, and intense feelings of shame, hatred, or despair accompanied by violent fantasies. All have been shown, individually, to increase the likelihood of violent behavior.

In this chapter, we have emphasized four additional factors, three of them social and one of them psychological. The social factors are 1) easy access to guns, 2) the simultaneously stimulating and numbing effects of continual exposure to violence on television, and 3) the desensitizing effect of violent, "point and shoot" video games. The psychological factor we emphasize is traumatic ex-

posure, particularly exposure to or participation in violent behavior. We have focused on these factors because of their apparent universality. In cutting across social and economic distinctions, they seem to expand the available explanatory paradigms in ways that address the recent increase in incidents characterized by lethal shootings, with multiple victims, that have occurred in relatively affluent, predominantly Caucasian suburban schools. The large number of factors cited above supports the view that school violence is a multi-determined phenomenon on, usually precipitated by the interaction of a number of social and psychological variables that shape children's behavior in school, but typically do not originate within the school environment. Incidents and interactions at school may trigger violent behavior, but they do so only when the necessary pre-conditions are already present. To complicate the issue further, actual violence, particularly lethal violence, is usually multi-determined, resulting from the confluence of two or more such variables. In this context, it is important to emphasize the research literature which indicates that, especially among children and youth, individual functioning is increasingly compromised as the number of impinging variables increase (Garbarino, 1999).

All of these observations converge to confirm the CMHS view that a public health approach is likely to be the most promising way of addressing issues of school violence. At this point in time, however, most if not all of the programs we identified and reviewed in this study are designed to promote pro-social behavior by improving cognitive problem-solving ability and increasing social skills within specific school communities. Although there is some literature which attempts to emphasize the importance of community-school partnerships (Smith Studies, 2001), the programs identified in this review are, for the most part, more narrowly conceptualized. Given that schools are academic institutions, it is not surprising that they strongly prefer interventions conceptualized as curricula. Interventions of this kind are compatible because they are designed to promote some form of learning, and can be readily located within an established classroom schedule. Even given this

preference, some of the programs reviewed below are designed to modify aspects of the school-as-a-whole emotional-social-educational environment, a promising way station on the road to authentic school-community partnerships. In addition, the research suggests that teaching social skills does, in fact, effectively modify attitudes, cognitive patterns, and problem-solving ability in ways that seem likely to change behavior patterns. We will say more about this in the conclusion to this White Paper. This review suggests we have made real progress toward developing group dynamic interventions that effectively limit and/or reduce school violence. The goal may well be within reach, even though we are not there yet.

METHOD

Program Selection

An extensive literature search was conducted to discover which programs aimed at adolescent violence prevention were a) school-based and b) group-based. Our research turned up ap-

proximately twenty-five programs. These programs were then reviewed to ascertain if there were any empirical studies that were conducted to prove their efficacy, and if such studies were conducted, where the results were published (refereed journals vs. anecdotal accounts). It was our committee's consensus that we should focus primarily on programs which had been evaluated empirically and whose results were published in refereed journals. Some programs were eliminated because they failed to meet these criteria, while others were eliminated because they were not specifically aimed at adolescents; rather, they had been developed for younger children, with hopes of applicability to an adolescent population. As a result of this paring down process, nine programs were selected for review. The programs selected have been implemented in seven different geographic areas across the United States with a range of populations across demographic categories.

Program Evaluation

Our working committee contacted ten senior clinicians who had, at minimum, ten years of experience working with adolescents in groups in both the public and private sectors. This cadre includes several well-published authors in the field of adolescent group therapy, as well as teachers and supervisors, and is drawn from six different geographic areas. They were asked to review the programs and all the corresponding documentation we were able to gather, including program manuals and published studies. They utilized an instrument specifically developed for this purpose (to be described below). Members of this panel represented the disciplines of psychiatry, social work, psychology and education. The list of reviewers can be found in Appendix 1.

A sub-committee of three renowned researchers was formed to develop an instrument to be used for the program reviews. The three researchers, all with extensive experience in program evaluation and research in group psychotherapy, were asked to develop a "user-friendly" instrument that would allow our panel to evaluate the programs and provide a) descriptive information about the

program (e.g., population, credentials of group leader); b) content information (e.g., theoretical orientation, goals, types of aggression targeted); c) format of intervention (e.g., length of intervention – short vs. long term, size of group, structure); d) empirical evaluation (e.g., type of data collection, sample size); e) psychometric properties of measures used (e.g., test-retest reliability, criterion validity, established sensitivity to change); and f) additional comments. The names of the members of this sub-committee can be found in Appendix 2. A copy of the instrument itself can be found in Appendix 3.

Each program was randomly assigned to a minimum of two different reviewers. No reviewer knew who else was assigned to review the programs they were evaluating. In addition to completing the instrument, reviewers were asked for their anecdotal thoughts regarding the efficacy of each program reviewed as well as the degree of confidence they had in the program.

DESCRIPTION AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS

The Positive Action Program

The **Positive Action** program (published by Positive Action Company, 264 4th Avenue South, Twin Falls, Idaho 83301) is a school-based program aimed at promoting character develop-

ment by teaching "positive actions". The program (PA) is predicated on the idea that "You feel good about yourself when you do positive actions". In the words of the program, "A thought or idea leads to an act, the act is confirmed by a feeling and a habit is formed". Its aim is to create a community of caring within the school, recruiting parents and community in the character-building effort.

The PA program is a six-unit program that is designed to be integrated into the school-wide curriculum from kindergarten through grade 12. The six units include: Positive Self-Concept; Positive Actions for Physical and Intellectual Functioning; Social/Emotional Positive Actions for Managing Yourself Responsibly; Positive Actions for Getting Along with Others by Treating Them the Way You Like to Be Treated; Being Honest with Yourself and Others and Improving Yourself Continually. It utilizes multiple methods of instruction such as stories, small group discussion, role plays, games, music, visuals, play and art. There are corresponding kits for parents and the community at large to implement as well. The program encourages higher -level thinking that spurs moral development. The program's units are sequenced for grades kindergarten through 12, with each segment being geared toward the developmental level of the participants. The program claims to be applicable to culturally diverse populations because of the universal applicability of the concepts targeted. It addresses high-risk concerns such as violence, drug and alcohol use, bullying, etc., and offers solutions such as improved communication skills, peer mediation, and conflict resolution.

The program is said to be designed for use with all SES populations and in all settings (rural, suburban and inner-city). Teachers and school personnel are the main leaders/implementers of the program. It is designed to be administered to all students, whether at risk or not, and is thus a primary prevention program. It utilizes various theoretical orientations, such as behavioral reinforce-

ment and humanistic principles, and has a psycho-educational component. It targets many types of aggression, ranging from bullying and verbal abuse to physical violence. It is unusual in that the PA program includes units specifically aimed at parents and the community, recognizing their role in character development and in creating a safe school environment. Because there are up to 42 lessons, each forty-five minutes long, PA can conceivably run throughout the school year. As mentioned earlier, it is meant to be a school-wide intervention, delivered in a classroom setting to either boys and girls together or separately, depending on the school. Delivered in a classroom (non-clinical) setting, the characteristics of the members of the group (e.g., aggressive vs. non-aggressive) are therefore mixed and heterogeneous. The program has a high degree of structure, with training for the adults involved in delivery, lesson plans, and suggested activities.

The PA program has been researched fairly extensively, utilizing small experimental/control groups, pre-post case studies, national comparisons, and matched case-control designs. Findings report effects on both achievement and multiple problem behaviors (such as absenteeism, physical altercations, general discipline and suspension problems). These results were obtained in schools with high versus low minority representation and varying levels of socioeconomic status. There is a question about its applicability to more aggressive youth as well as to adolescents of diverse ethnic/cultural backgrounds. Although the results reported are impressive, the program's theoretical underpinning is unclear and there is virtually no mention of any difficulties with the program's

implementation, which does not seem plausible. Also, although the program makes claims regarding violence reduction, it tends to be more about character building. Nevertheless, the program clearly has merits.

Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways ("RIPP")

RIPP is based in social learning theory and cognitive theory. It represents an application of research about cognition and aggression to violence prevention in early adolescence. The social information processing model for understanding children's social adjustment describes children's behavioral responses as a function of their personal capabilities, their memory of past experiences, and the way they process social cues (Crick and Dodge, 1992; Dodge, 1986). According to this model, children who behave aggressively have deficits in one or more of these areas. How individuals respond when faced with a conflict depends on their capabilities: for instance, their ability to fight and their ability to resolve conflicts peacefully. It also depends on social knowledge (e.g., personal and vicarious memories of the success of various conflict resolution strategies, and their relationship history), and their ability to process social information accurately, including their capacity to determine the dangerousness of a situation and understand another person's body language (Farrell, Meyer and White, 1997).

The goals of the RIPP program are to increase adolescents' capacity to respond to developmental challenges in ways that facilitate social skill acquisition and acceptance of personal responsibility. Overall, the intervention is designed to prevent and/or reduce the frequency and intensity of aggressive/violent behavior in young adolescents: specifically, 6th graders in middle school settings.

The format of the intervention was that sixth grade students (boys and girls) in three middle schools in an urban community with high rates of violence were randomly assigned to "intervention" and "control" groups. The school population was comprised primarily of African-American students. A manualized RIPP curriculum was "taught" to the intervention groups in 25 weekly sessions, each of

which was 50 minutes in length. Three "prevention specialists," all African-American men, presented the curriculum.

The RIPP curriculum has three major components: 1) behavioral repetition and mental rehearsal of a social-cognitive problem solving model; 2) experiential learning techniques; and 3) didactic learning techniques. Initial sessions were designed to promote team-building and knowledge transmission, while later sessions focused on skills building and critical analysis. The RIPP curriculum was implemented within the context of a school-wide peer mediation program, supervised by the same "prevention specialists." The researchers were aware that the two programs might enhance each other and thereby positively affect the overall cultural/emotional climate of the schools.

This large quantitative study utilized a primary prevention model with careful attention to experimental design and analysis of measurable results. While the high rates of violence in the community at large justified designating the student subjects as an "at risk" population, the curriculum was presented to all 6th grade students chosen for the intervention groups. No special attempt was made to identify or include students who had previously demonstrated aggressive or violent behavior. Students in both the intervention and control groups completed a pre-test instrument designed to assess their attitudes toward violence. Modest but consistent gains (disciplinary code violations, reductions in school suspensions, violent behavior frequency scores) were seen for the intervention group in follow-ups at six and twelve months. It is especially noteworthy that the greatest reduction in violent behavior occurred in youth with the highest delinquency/violence scores in the pre-test.

It should be stated, however, that there was considerable attrition in the twelve-month follow-up. Only fifty-seven percent (57%) of the intervention group participants completed the follow-

up. Reasons for this included refusal to respond, transfers to other schools, and school drop- outs. The authors report that, overall, the non-responders had a higher rate of delinquency responses in the pre-test than the responders. This observation might suggest that the non-responders, like the re-sponders with the highest delinquency/violence pre-test ratings, might have been in the subgroup that benefited most from the curriculum. On the other hand, because they did not respond, there is no data either to support or challenge this view. Given the high attrition rate, it is difficult to be fully confident about the gains reported. It is clear, however, that the data for students who completed the follow-up demonstrate modest gains in the direction of the study's hypothesis. Accordingly, the au-thors' conclusions are valid for that population.

This is an important study because of its large sample size, school-wide scope, and careful assessment techniques. The findings support the view that social skills acquisition can play a posi-tive role in reducing aggressive behavior in school settings, and may also enhance the pro-social cul-ture in school settings.

RIPP is also one of the few programs in which the authors consider the synergy activated by com-bining the research intervention with other pro-social initiatives running concurrently within the school setting. In emphasizing the synergistic effect, the authors acknowledge the importance of the

school-as-a-whole environment as a crucial factor both in promoting progressive social and emo-tional development, and in limiting violent and other forms of antisocial behavior.

The Rethink Program

The Rethink Program is a program designed to teach young people how to manage their an-ger by teaching them a set of skills (**R**ecognize, **E**mpathize, **T**hink, **H**ear, **I**ntegrate, **N**otice, **K**eep).

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The importance of these skills was identified through a synthesis of findings reported in the literature. The goal of the program is to transmit these skills, as literature and research has proven them to be most effective in anger management and violence reduction. The program is disseminated through the Institute for Mental Health Initiatives, which is part of George Washington University's School of Public Health and Health Services. A manual and videotape are provided to help the group leader become familiar with the program prior to implementation. Further references are provided as well. A complementary program for parents to manage their anger (and thus prevent child abuse) has also been developed.

The program is designed specifically for adolescents of all SES populations in a wide range of communities. The program it can be led by any adult in a group leadership position and is not limited to teachers or mental health personnel. Its methodology is psycho-educational. Its goal is primary prevention and thus designed to be administered to all teens, whether at risk or not. It targets anger management and thus all types of aggression. The Rethink Program is time-limited (8 sessions), with each session 90- 120 minutes. The number of participants the program can accommodate is not specified. The composition (male vs. female vs. mixed composition) as well as level of aggression of group members are not specified. Rethink is offered with a manual, and utilizes activities such as checklists, role plays, and music videos.

No empirical data were provided for review although there are clear indications of pre-test – post-test research. Therefore, no evidence of its effectiveness can be ascertained. Although the manual is clear and easy to understand, it needs to specify more guidelines concerning its targeted population, such as "This program is particularly effective with groups of __, between the ages of and __". Also, the use of sophisticated vocabulary such as "lethargic" and "hyperventilating" raises a question about its broad range of applicability to various adolescent populations, such as those

with English as a second language.

Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders: An Assessment-Based Middle School Violence Prevention Curriculum

This program is based on social learning theory and cognitive theory. It begins with the proposition that children develop patterns of thought about how to solve social problems and about what role violent and nonviolent alternatives play in solving these problems. These patterns become "increasingly individualized and stabilized with development" and yet they are "potentially modifiable through direct intervention" (Slaby and Guerra, 1988; Kazdin, l987, 1994). Slaby and his collaborators contend that an individual's cognitions may play an enduring organizing role in guiding his or her violence-related behaviors (Slaby & Roedell, 1982; Slaby & Stringham, 1994). Therefore, interventions designed to influence the formation and use of these patterns can have important implications for preventing violence. This project broadens the traditional focus on the aggressor by integrating it with a public health perspective that considers the roles played not only by perpetrators of violence but also by victims and bystanders. Public health research has helped to introduce both the victim's perspective and the bystander's perspective into the dialogue about the problem of violence and how to prevent it. Victims often know their perpetrators and share some common characteristics and risk factors. Furthermore, acts of violence often occur in social settings (e.g., in schools, families and neighborhoods) in the presence of more than two individuals. Thus, third party bystanders may themselves play a pivotal role in enhancing or inhibiting violence (Slaby et al., 1994).

The goals of this program include the following: 1) To address a broad range of problems involved in the primary prevention of violence as it occurs in middle schools located in high-risk communities; 2) To study the extent that the study measures were useful in assessing change; 3) To

determine the extent that the curricular intervention influenced students' violence-enhancing patterns of thought and behavior; and 4) To prevent or reduce violent behavior among middle-school students by altering established patterns of thought, belief and behavioral intent that support the use of violence as a (the) preferred way of solving social problems.

The intervention was conducted with 237 students (sixth, seventh and eight graders) in 23 classes in three Boston public middle schools. Boston was chosen as an urban community at high risk for violence. Forty six percent of the students in the study (N= 109) were male and 54% (N= 128) were female. Less than five percent of the subjects were Caucasian, and 69.1% were African-American. The remainder were divided among Asian, Latino, Haitian, Puerto Rican and "other," with no single group comprising more than 5% of the total population. Of the total study population, 188 students (79%) were randomly assigned to the intervention groups and 49 students (21%) were randomly assigned to the no-treatment control group.

After human subject review approval was granted by the Boston Public School Department, the School Department chose three schools to participate in the intervention/research study. The principals of the chosen schools agreed to include their schools in the study. The curriculum was presented by faculty homeroom teachers who were selected by their school principals. The teachers were given one-half day's training in administering the "Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders" curriculum prior to initiating the program. The 20-session curriculum was presented three to five times a week during social studies classes. Each "lesson" lasted 30-45 minutes and was supplemented with a follow-up activity. The no-treatment control group was presented with the standard social studies curriculum. At least one observation was made in each treatment class by an Education Development Center staff member. The curriculum is manualized, and available in: Slaby, R.G., Wil-

son-Drewer, R., & Dash, D.H. (1994). <u>Aggressors, Victims & Bystanders: Thinking and Acting to</u> <u>Prevent Violence.</u> Newton, MA.: Education Development Center.

Before implementing the intervention, the authors conducted a pilot assessment study in a Boston parochial school located in a high-risk community. Fifth and sixth graders participated. The assessment was designed to answer the following questions: 1) "What patterns of thought and be-havior can be identified among children identified as "at-risk" for aggression, victimization, and/or bystander support for violence -- or alternatively, as nonviolent problem solvers?"; 2) "What were the relationships among the peer nomination, cognitive and behavioral measures utilized in the pilot study?"; and 3) "What implications did these findings have, together with those of previous research, for the development of a curriculum designed to address the habits of thought that put children at risk for involvement with violence?" The measures were revised on the basis of the pilot study.

Slaby & Guerra (1998) point out that most tests of overt behavior tap only the first response in one's hierarchy. Yet in many situations an aggressive response is unlikely to be the most pre-ferred response, even for adolescent violence offenders. Instead, the relative position of aggressive responses in a child's response hierarchy is predictive of his or her observed aggressive behavior (Leifer & Roberts, 1972). Thus, the measurement of an individual's probability of committing an aggressive act can be a valuable instrument in violence prevention research. To the extent that a par-ticular treatment lowers the individual's priority for aggressive responses and/or raises the position of alternatives to aggression in the response hierarchy, the treatment can be regarded as successful in reducing the probability that aggression will occur (Slaby et al., 1994).

With respect to the hypothesis about social problem solving skills, the findings were mixed. Although there were no overall treatment vs. control group differences in students' change scores,

several significant changes occurred within the treatment group with respect to both the aggression-perspective story and the victim-perspective story in the curriculum (Slaby et al., 1994). With respect to behavioral intent, findings show a clear pattern of support for the hypothesized changes in the direction of decreased preference for physical aggression, but the results were not strong enough to demonstrate overall significance (Slaby et al., 1994). There was clear and only marginally significant support for the hypothesized change of decreased bystander support for aggression (Slaby et al., 1994). Finally, difficulties in collecting data from the teachers made it impossible to assess this dimension of the study.

Thus, the results of the study provided limited support for the hypothesized effects of the intervention, particularly with respect to behavioral intent. Therefore, the connection of the observed changes to independently assessed, reliable, and valid measures of violent behaviors is unclear (Slaby et al., 1994).

Given the authoritarian nature of many school systems, it is worth noting that the lack of cooperation in completing the follow-up study on the part of teacher-facilitators suggests that they might have had reservations about the curriculum's effectiveness after presenting it, or more fundamentally, that they might have been unwilling participants in the first place. The research components of this study are extremely impressive and the authors should be commended for the rigor of their research methodology and for the careful presentation of their data.

Among the authors' most interesting comments is the following (Slaby et al., 1994, pp.7-8): "… in previous research it was found that both aggressive and victimized children were highly likely to be rejected by their peers, apparently for different reasons (Perry, Kusel and Perry, 1988). Our findings replicated this finding and extended it to bystanders. Bystanders who supported violence

either by passively accepting it or by actively encouraging it among others were also likely to be socially rejected by peers, whereas bystanders who tried to stop violence, as well as students who solved the problem nonviolently, were highly likely to be socially accepted.

The Second Step Program

The Second Step program is designed to prevent aggressive behavior by increasing pro-social behavior. Pro-social behavior is thought to reflect competence in peer interactions and friendships and in interpersonal conflict resolution skills. Second Step is designed to be administered as lessons. Each lesson begins by displaying a photograph accompanied by a social scenario that then forms the basis for discussion, role plays, and conceptual activities. The lessons are developed around empathy training, impulse control management, and anger management by teachers within a classroom setting. These skills and lessons can then be reinforced by school counselors, parent volunteers and support personnel. Second Step is published through the Committee for Children /Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center at the University of Washington.

Second Step is mainly designed for elementary and middle school aged children of various SES levels and in various settings. As noted earlier teachers, rather than mental health personnel, present the program. Its methodology is mainly psycho-educational. Its goal is primary prevention and hence is aimed at all students, whether at risk or not. It targets varying levels of aggression, including bullying, physical aggression, scapegoating and even gossiping. Because Second Step is designed to be administered in a classroom setting, it can be presented over the course of the school year in 30-40 lessons, once or twice weekly for approximately 35-40 minutes. The size of the group can be as small as the number of students in the classroom. Composition of the group can be mixed and the characteristics of group members (e.g., varying levels of aggression) can be mixed as well. Second Step has a moderate amount of structure, complete with manual and suggested activities such as role

plays, discussion and conceptual activities.

Second Step in elementary schools has been empirically validated, with results published recently in <u>The Journal of the American Medical Association</u> (1997). Its implementation in schools has been measured by pairing the schools so as to achieve SES and ethnic balance. Experimental and control groups were used. Trained coders, blind to assignment, observed children at both pre-testing and post-testing. Results indicate that in schools offering Second Step, there were moderate decreases in aggression and increases in neutral and pro-social behavior; in the control schools, student behavior worsened with increases in incidents of physical and verbal aggression. Preliminary evaluations in middle and junior high schools are following the same procedures, and early results are promising, with Second Step students less likely to endorse anti-social behavior, and less likely to perceive prosocial skills as difficult to perform. These are encouraging results, as research has shown that these attitudes are predictive of decreased aggression. Pre- and post-test measures indicate benefits from the program.

The extensive research done to evaluate this program is impressive, as is its wide range of applicability. However, it could be improved if personnel other than teachers (e.g., trained mental heath professionals) could be involved as well.

Aggression Replacement Training: Curriculum and Evaluation

This program is the work of Goldstein and his colleagues. Its theoretical base is social learning theory and interpersonal skills training. In a series of books and manuscripts, Goldstein et al., propose a multifaceted psycho-educational approach designed to teach pro-social behavior by replacing aggressive thinking and behavior with a set of new social skills presented in a series of structured, progressing, manualized curricula. These include Aggression Replacement Training (ART),

which encompasses (1) skill streaming, 2) anger-control training, and 3) moral reasoning training, followed by the remainder of the Prepare Curriculum which includes 4) problem-solving training, 5) empathy training, 6) situational perception training, 7) stress management training, 8) cooperation training, 9) recruiting supportive models, and 10) understanding and using group processes. This approach is unique in its attention to social class, community and racial factors in maintaining or modifying aggressive behavior, and is one of the very few interventions that emphasizes experiential activities designed to help children develop collaborative/consensus-building skills in order to resist group pressure toward participating in antisocial behaviors.

These progressive curricula focus on low-income children and adolescents. They emphasize "interpersonal influence learning experiences" based on research about how particular groups of clients (in this instance, low-income youth) learn most effectively. The theoretical framework emphasizes that middle-class children are repeatedly taught to look inward and consider their motivation and the causes of their behavior, to look outward and accurately decipher the feelings of others, and to employ restraint, regulation and other expressions of self-management/control in their interactions with others. Lower-class children, on the other hand, are taught to focus on the consequences of their enacted behavior, and rely heavily on direction from others (external authorities), rather than on internal controls. While middle-class children respond well to interventions that focus on understanding motivation, discussing feelings and developing greater self-control, research findings suggest that lower-class children are likely to respond more positively to interventions that emphasize "modeling, role-playing, performance feedback and transfer training."

The goal of the program is to socialize or train the target population to fit within the unchanging requirements of the psycho-educational intervention offered. This strategy requires those who do the training to avoid insight-oriented interventions and to develop an approach that specifi-

cally addresses the learning styles and interpersonal relationship patterns of (in this instance) low income clients.

ART and the Prepare Curriculum is a culturally sensitive, multimodal, psycho-educational intervention, offered through a series of manualized curricula facilitated by trainers who are teachers, counselors, child care workers and other caregivers who have direct caretaking or educational responsibility for children and adolescents. ART was initially offered in small groups to adolescents in residential treatment who had been identified as delinquent, many of who were gang members and who had histories of physically assaulting others. It has subsequently been expanded to include the full "Prepare Curriculum" and has been implemented in school settings with elementary school, middle school and high school students who are considered at "high risk," but who have not been identified as aggressive. For the most part, the curricula are presented in 10-session modules with groups of 6-8 students.

Goldstein et al., have published three major research studies. The first two involved delinquent, low-income youth incarcerated at medium-security or maximum-security facilities. The third was community-based, and sought similar efficacy information for the intervention employed with chronically aggressive youths residing in either their own or group homes (Goldstein, Glick et al., 1989). The research demonstrates reductions in aggressive behavior, and most significantly, a significant decrease in recidivism (subsequent arrests).

This is a very impressive intervention in terms of its recognition of and emphasis on social class and community variables, its appreciation of the influence and power of antisocial group processes, and in its comprehensive multi-modal, experientially informed approach to teaching a range of interpersonal social skills that are designed to reduce violent behavior and to connect children

with prosocial community resources. In and of itself, the research finding that delinquent youth who completed the curriculum had a significantly lower recidivism (arrest) rate than a matched control group, makes the intervention worthy of national recognition and replication in other school settings. A search of the literature did not uncover any more recent studies that evaluate the intervention's effectiveness in school settings with youth who are "at risk" but who have not been formally identified as delinquent. Given the limited resources available to most school districts, it seems unlikely that many schools will allocate the funds and personnel necessary to offer all ten curriculum modules. For this reason it is particularly important to evaluate which sub-group of curricula produce clear improvement.

Resolving Conflict Creativity

The Resolving Conflict Creatively program (RCC) began as a result of a collaboration of Educators for Social Responsibility and the New York City Board of Education. The program helps children develop social problem-solving skills through teachers' classroom instruction and delivery of the curriculum in approximately 25 lessons throughout the school year. RCC consists of a curriculum that teaches skills such as active listening, empathy and perspective-taking, negotiation, appropriate expression of feelings, and assertiveness. Lessons include role plays, group discussion, and brainstorming. There is professional development for teachers which includes 24 hours of training; student-led mediation which provides a peer model for non-violence; administrator training for school administrators to help the school and community promote and reinforce the program; and parent education in the form of four three-hour workshops. Currently, RCC serves 6,000 teachers and 175,000 young people in 375 schools nationwide, and offers a Masters of Education with concentration in conflict resolution in collaboration with Lesley College.

RCC is designed for all ages, and is aimed at inner city schools with lower SES levels.

Teachers are the main deliverers of the program. Its theoretical orientation is psycho-educational. It is aimed at all students --whether at risk or not--in any given classroom, with its goal being primary prevention. All types of aggression are targeted, ranging from bullying and verbal abuse to physical aggression. RCC is, in its structure, time-limited and can be delivered in up to 25 lessons over the course of the year. It is designed to be implemented throughout the school via the classroom and thus group size depends on the number of students per classroom. Composition (mixed vs. single gender) is dependent on the class and characteristics of group members (high vs. low aggression) and is also dependent on the class composition. The program is manualized and includes activities such as role plays. Empirical evaluation has been extensive, utilizing a Management Information System to track implementation, a large-scale longitudinal process and outcome study, and teacher interviews. Recent program evaluations have shown that children who participate in RCC are more likely to choose non-violent ways to resolve conflicts. There also were substantial academic gains on academic achievement tests for those who participated in RCC. As a result of RCC, teachers have also reported less physical violence in the classroom and parents involved in the workshops have reported increases in their own communication skills.

While this is an impressive program in some ways, the results of outcome studies have been published independently by RCC itself, rather than in refereed journals. Also, it is unclear if the teachers who report gains are, in fact, the same teachers administering the program. But the program's broad scope and its inclusion of school personnel and parents is promising.

Creating a Peaceful School Learning Environment: A Controlled Study of an Elementary School Intervention to Reduce Violence

This program, developed by Twemlow and his colleges, is based in psychoanalytic, group-as-a-whole, social systems, and community development principles. The authors postulate that the power dynamics inherent in bully-victim-bystander interactions and in "rituals of exclusion" reliably predict function and dysfunction in institutional systems. In schools, the roles of bully, victim and bystander are dialectically structured so that the individual who enacts a specific role depends on and is in constant interaction with the individuals who enact the other roles. Bully-victim-bystander roles develop in the context of power struggles between children and adults, between individual children and/or between subgroups of children. Under ordinary circumstances, the roles are interchangeable and may fluctuate from hour to hour or day to day. Bullies and victims tend to develop intense, mutually dependent, cyclical, sado-masochistic relationships that persist and perpetuate themselves over time. Nonetheless, bully-victim interactions rarely occur in school settings unless there is covert support from bystanders who identify with and encourage either the bullies or the victims. These dialectically structured relationships are normative in institutional life and as long as they remain relatively fluid, organizational systems function adequately, although less than ideally. When, however, bully-victim-bystander relationships become rigidly fixed, tragic (potentially lethal) consequences are likely to occur, both for individuals and for the institutional system.

The goal of the Twemlow et al., program is to create a peaceful school learning environment by developing a set of norms, the most important of which is zero tolerance for bullying, bystanding, and being a victim. It includes the institution of a "gentle warriors" martial arts program and includes a discipline plan that emphasizes rewards, and focuses on how incidents of bullying affect classroom climate and the school as a whole.

The intervention depends on developing a psychologically informed, supportive partnership with the school administration, teachers, students and parents. The partnership is aimed at actively

modifying the functioning of the school system-as-a-whole, attempts to inculcate the following: 1) learning to tolerate differences, 2) developing a habit of collaboration around issues that are not points of conflict, 3) developing personal relationships in which people see each other as more rather than less human, 4) modifying stereotyped racial, religious and gender perceptions, 5) developing a mutually agreed upon common language, and 6) agreeing that change can only occur as a result of collaborative rather than competitive initiatives. The program depends on active endorsement by the school administration and genuine, truly voluntary support from teachers/school personnel and parents.

The first set of interventions involve modifying the school-as-a whole environment by: 1) Establishing a norm of "Zero Tolerance" for bullying, bystanding and being a victim. Accomplishing this involves placing posters that depict desirable behavior for handling bullies at strategic places around the school. The poster messages are supported by regular discussion groups in each class, and by a Family Power Struggles workshop conducted once each semester. In addition, a system of rewards is developed for each class that aims at maintaining a fight-free environment. 2) Developing a new approach to discipline which involves helping teachers use rewards more than negative consequences, and focusing on how each fighting incident affects the emotional climate for the classroom-as-a-whole. Special reward/discipline cards reinforce the discussion process and children are referred for counseling on the rare occasions when teachers decide it is needed. Children are encouraged, on a daily basis, to reflect on bully-victim-bystander interactions in their classrooms, and to decide whether they have earned a banner celebrating a fight-free environment that will be displayed outside their classroom the next day. This process is designed to emphasize greater self-discipline and capacity for self-reflection for the classroom group-as-a-whole. 3) Providing a twelve-week "gentle warrior" module that provides children with <u>defensive</u> martial arts training that emphasizes self-respect, self-control and respect for others in the context of role-playing about de-

fusing bully-victim-bystander interactions. 4) Instituting a "Bruno" program which pairs volunteer adult mentors with older children in the school. These adult-child pairs perform a surveillance function during recess, lunch and the transition at the end of the school day, and are available to offer consultation to students who are having conflicts. 5) Initiating a peer mentorship program that recruits high school students (from the high school the elementary school students will eventually attend) to serve as mentors to the elementary school children. The peer mentors are granted academic credit for their work with the younger students, and after a period of orientation help the younger students: 1) deal with secrets and confidences; 2) manage incidents of physical violence; 3) develop an appreciation of the importance of keeping one's word, showing forgiveness and practicing honesty; and 4) through role playing, learn skills for dealing with problematic feelings and interpersonal conflicts. Each peer mentor is supervised for one hour a week.

Finally, it is important to note that experienced mental health volunteers are available in the experimental school, to consult on school climate issues, and to advise the mental health team as needed.

The "Creating Peaceful Schools" program was evaluated in a sophisticated research protocol that compared one urban, midwestern elementary school located in a violence-prone community with a second matched school in a similar community. The research protocol included: 1) teacher-rated behavioral scales designed to reflect reduced disruptive classroom behavior; 2) measures of academic achievement assessed through the Metropolitan Achievement Test given at the 3rd and 5th grade levels; 3) data on disciplinary referrals and on student perception of school safety using the School Atmosphere Scale; 4) the teacher-rated Child and Adolescent Adjustment Profile; and 5) a

newly created teacher-rated Target Behavior Scale designed to assess target behaviors such as bullying, loss of temper, distractibility and social isolation.

Over a two-year period, there was 1) a marked reduction in disciplinary referrals involving serious physical aggressiveness; 2) a dramatic rise in the number of in-school suspensions during the first year of the project followed by a gradual and well-maintained reduction in the second and third years; and 3) a statistically significant improvement in academic performance in the experimental school with no change in the control school. It is noteworthy that, in the experimental school, the youngest groups of children reported feeling most in danger, while the oldest age group felt least threatened and were quickest to benefit from the program in terms of their subjective experience of safety (Twemlow, Fonagy et al., 1999). And finally, there was a statistically significant reduction in dependence among children in the experimental group, but only a marginal reduction in teacher- observed hostility ratings for children in the experimental group.

While all the research findings do not reach the level of significant improvement, the changes reported are, nonetheless, quite impressive, especially when compared with the findings for the control school. In addition, the program is very cost-effective because it is implemented by teachers, other school personnel already on the school payroll, and volunteers. When delivered in the manner described, the only additional paid personnel are a part-time mental health professional who consults on programmatic issues, and a teacher of defensive martial arts.

The intervention is designed to radically transform the emotional climate and hierarchical power relationships within participating schools, and accordingly requires a high level of commitment and cooperation from school administrators and teachers. For this reason it is also likely to evoke considerable resistance in schools that are not open to change. In addition, the theoretical

formulation, while well articulated and compelling, is likely to be controversial in many school settings, and among at least some experts in the field. Nonetheless, the research findings strongly support the value of replicating the project in other school settings. In this regard, the authors advise that a number of additional studies of this program are currently underway in other elementary schools.

Prevention Groups for Aggressive Children (Bibliotherapy)

This program is slightly different from some of the others reviewed as it represents a more "clinical" intervention, based on group principles, and was developed by a psychologist rather than educators. The prevention groups are designed to be run in the school setting, in small group format, initially aimed at establishing a safe setting so that members can develop the skills for self-expression, awareness, and empathy. The major tool is the use of "Bibliotherapy" (i.e., use of film and literature to stimulate discussion). Through identification with the characters portrayed in the literature as well as with the other group members, the members learn to identify feelings, give and receive interpersonal feedback. There is progression from indirect intervention (e.g., observation of stories and films) to more direct discussion of the members' difficulties. It is a structured approach that involves training for the personnel running the groups. It was developed and researched by Zipora Shechtman, a research psychologist in the area of child group therapy.

The prevention groups are aimed at elementary and middle school-aged children. The population described is generally lower SES. Although the research has been conducted in another country (Israel), the groups seem to have been run in inner-city schools, with populations similar to those found in urban centers in this country. The group leaders are mostly graduate students in counseling and special education, trained in group techniques. The groups are composed of children who are all high-risk, with histories of aggressive behavior as well as learning difficulties; however, pro-social

students are added for heterogeneity. Multiple theoretical orientations (e.g., psychodynamic, humanistic-interpersonal, cognitive-behavioral) are cited by the author in her description of the program. The program's goal is secondary prevention, as those students participating have already been identified as high-risk due to aggressive behavior. All types of aggression are targeted (verbal and physical), and group members are selected by teachers who rate their behavior on a scale measuring aggression. The intervention is time-limited (ten sessions). The format for presentation is small groups, with five to eight members recommended. Group composition is limited to boys. The characteristics of the groups are mixed, in that not all the boys are identified as aggressive. This is done because the author feels that prosocial children within the group are needed to balance the lack of social skills in aggressive youth. The program is semi-structured, with use of literature to trigger discussion and activity. A variety of pre- and post-test measures have been utilized to ascertain results. Direct observation of children's behavior during the group sessions, derived from coding of group transcripts, have yielded measures of self-disclosure, responsiveness, empathy, insight, and aggression. A control group was utilized as well. The sample size consisted of 31-50 students. Sensitivity to change was clearly established, in that constructive traits such as self-disclosure, empathy, and responsiveness increased over time. In addition, self and teacher reports, when compared with actual behavior, also demonstrated decreases in aggression.

A strength of the program is the strategy of using books and films, which represents perhaps a less threatening way of addressing highly charged issues, while maintaining a focus on the issue of aggression. Also, the integrative theoretical approach to aggression, outlined by the author, which recognizes the complexity of aggressive behavior, is a strength. Limitations include the fact that there are as yet no follow-up studies, which is essential to note maintenance of those gains achieved initially, as well as a perceived lack of uniformity of experimental design: i.e., bibliotherapy and low structure makes it difficult to ascertain if it was the content or structure that precipitated change. At

this point the program is best seen as a promising, but as yet not well documented, new approach.

CONCLUSION

For the purposes of this concluding section, we have divided the programs we have reviewed into the following categories: Social Learning Theory/Cognitive (SLT-C); Multi-model/Group Dynamic (MM-GD); and Psychodynamic/Group Dynamic (P-GD). Following this scheme, the programs can be categorized as follows:

SLT-C 1:   "Positive Action" (PA)

Implementation and research with children from kindergarten through 12th grade. It is integrated into school curricula and administered in classroom groups by teachers and other school personnel. It is designed for use across SES populations.

SLT-C 2:   "Rethink"

Implementation and research with adolescents. Structured psycho-educational curriculum, administered to all teens in a school by any adult in a group leadership position. It is designed for use across SES populations. A complementary program is offered to parents to help them better manage their anger with the goal of preventing or reducing child abuse.

SLT-C 3:   "Second Step"

Implementation and research with elementary and middle school children. Structured psycho-educational curriculum, integrated into the overall school program. It is administered in classroom groups by teachers and is designed for use across SES populations.

SLT-C 4:   "Resolving Conflict Creatively" (RCC)

Implementation and research with a wide range of students in 375 schools across the country. It is integrated into school curricula and administered in classroom groups by

teachers who have completed a 24 hour training course. It is specifically intended for use with children at lower SES levels.

SLT-C 5:   "Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways" (RIPP)

Implementation and research with 6th grade students. Structured psycho-educational curriculum, integrated into the overall school program. It is administered in classroom groups by specially trained "prevention specialists," all of whom were African-American men in the study we reviewed. The program is designed for use in urban communities with high rates of violence.

SLT-C 6:   "Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders"

Implementation and research with 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. Structured psycho-educational curriculum. Administered by teachers in classroom groups. The program was specifically designed for use in low SES schools, and tested with a predominantly African-American population.

SLT-C 7:   "Aggression Replacement Training"(ART)

Implemented with a wide range of children and adolescents in school settings. Structured, psycho-educational curriculum, administered in classroom groups. Research was conducted with delinquent teenagers in residential treatment centers and in their home communities. The program is designed to address social class issues.

MM-GD 1:   "Bibliotherapy"

Implementation and research in elementary and middle schools. Semi-structured group process-oriented intervention. Administered in small groups composed of children referred because of aggressive behavior. Facilitators were graduate students in counseling and special education who had been trained in group techniques.

P-GD 1:   "Creating a Peaceful School Environment"

Implementation and research with an elementary school population. Carefully structured intervention designed to modify the school-as-a-whole emotional environment. All teachers and administrators participate in changing school norms. Defensive martial arts training is provided to all children in gym classes by a part-time specialist.

Focus/Theoretical Orientation

Eight of the nine programs reviewed focus on primary prevention in the sense that they include all students in a particular class, grade or school.   No attempt is made to identify students who are violent or aggressive, or to compose the intervention groups to meet particular criteria. Seven of these programs assume that addressing issues of violence and anger management through a broadly defined educational program will effectively reduce problematic behavior among students who participate. The eighth program ("Creating Peaceful Schools") assumes that prevention can be achieved by altering the emotional climate in the school-as-a-whole.

Only one program ("Bibliotherapy") addresses issues of secondary prevention. Bibliotherapy groups are comprised of students who have been referred by teachers who view them as "high risk" because of their aggressive behavior. In this context it should be noted, however, that seven of the eight other programs could easily be modified to address the problems of selected sub-groups of students identified as "at risk" because of aggressive behavior. The "Creating Peaceful Schools" program does not lend itself to such modifications since it is specifically designed to change the school-as-a-whole environment.

A mixture of social learning and cognitive theory informs seven of the nine programs reviewed. Essentially, these psycho-educationally oriented programs are based on the principle that violent behavior results from problematic patterns of thought ("deficits" in how children understand and respond to social cues) that predispose some children to react aggressively when faced with ambiguous or openly conflictual social situations. As aggressive response patterns become ingrained over time, they play a central organizing role in shaping behavioral responses, predisposing children to act violently when stressed. Learning and practicing new pro-social skills is an effective way of modifying such dysfunctional cognitive/behavioral response patterns. Accordingly, such learning promotes a capacity for peaceful, non-violent problem-solving that manifests itself in new behavioral responses. This theoretical model assumes that violent behavior can be replaced by new problem-solving skills that are fundamentally pro-social in character.

Two of the programs, "Bibliotherapy" and "Creating Peaceful Schools", are informed by psychodynamic and group dynamic principles. Bibliotherapy is based on the principle that films and literature can be used to stimulate discussion of conflictual or otherwise problematic feelings, and to promote constructive interpersonal feedback. The intervention encourages group members to communicate symbolically through identification with fictional characters, thereby allowing them to safely express painful, defended-against emotions in the context of a supportive group environment. Accordingly, groups are designed to promote self-reflection and helpful feedback from peers with regard to dysfunctional (especially overtly aggressive) patterns of interpersonal interaction.

The "Creating Peaceful Schools" program is informed by a combination of psychodynamic and group-as-a-whole theory. It hypothesizes that the power dynamic inherent in bully-victim-bystander interactions and in "rituals of exclusion" will reliably predict how well a particular school

is likely to function in relation to a wide range of variables (fighting, school suspensions, attendance, academic achievement, etc.).

By modifying the school environment in ways that reduce covert social support for aggressive behavior, and by teaching "victims" to disengage or defend themselves when bullied, victimization decreases, children throughout the school become less anxious, and the school environment is better able to achieve its educational objectives.

Group Dynamics

Interestingly, although all of these interventions are administered to groups of children, few of the models address group dynamic issues directly. Seven of the nine programs are conceptualized as curricula. Accordingly, most of the authors focus on describing curriculum content and research methodology rather than on how the groups are actually conducted. It is tempting to think the emphasis on curriculum content is based on research findings which demonstrate that group dynamics do not significantly influence outcome. However, as best we can determine, no research regarding this variable has been reported.

As academic institutions, schools tend to have a strong preference for interventions that are educational in nature. For this reason, they are more likely to implement psycho-educational interventions that can be administered in time-limited blocks within a normal classroom schedule: e.g., forty-five or fifty-minute "lessons" offered with the same frequency as academic subjects. Such interventions are considered even more desirable when there is a rationale for assigning academic credit to students who complete the "course." In addition, teacher training and certification programs tend to encourage teachers to ignore group dynamic issues in the classroom and in the school environment as a system. The assumption is that students will be mature and cooperative enough to

behave properly, and learn effectively, when offered a well-designed curriculum. Typically, students who find it difficult to behave and attend are pathologized within school systems.

Given this orientation, it is not surprising that almost all of the interventions reviewed in this project de-emphasize group dynamic/group interaction issues in their descriptions of how programs work. In most instances published reports indicate that curricula have been "delivered" to students in classroom groups, without reference to how students respond to what they are being taught. Pre- and post-intervention testing evaluates whether, or to what degree, attitudes have changed. Published reports pay little attention to what individual students say about the curriculum, whether they are encouraged/allowed to question or challenge the content, to what degree spontaneous or semi-structured peer interaction is permitted, and, if it is, what questions students ask and what issues they raise for consideration. Also unreported, is how group leaders respond to difficult questions or to classroom disruptions when group members become anxious.

Because group dynamic issues are not directly reported in the published literature, they are implicitly de-emphasized, as if student participants can be viewed as passive, receptive consumers of whatever curriculum material is presented. In many of the programs reviewed in this White Paper, this seems to represent a reporting convention rather than an implicit or explicit program value. Of the seven psycho-educational curricula reviewed here, four briefly report on experiential activities utilized to promote interaction: The programs are 1) "Positive Action", which utilizes stories, games, music, etc. to encourage discussion; 2) "Second Step", which encourages discussion using photographs, "social scenarios," and role plays; 3) "Resolving Conflict Creatively", which utilizes role playing, mental rehearsal of social-cognitive problems and experiential learning exercises; and 4) "Aggression Replacement Training", which emphasizes "interpersonal influence learning experiences." It seems likely that the other three curricula utilize similar techniques in order to encourage

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participation, mobilize affect, and promote discussion. It is impossible, however, to evaluate how any of these curricula are actually "delivered" and to what extent group dynamic issues arise in the absence of published material that focuses on and emphasizes these issues.

Research

Of the nine programs evaluated here, eight present carefully designed empirical research studies. The one exception is "The Rethink Program", which does not appear to be supported by any empirical data. Of the remaining eight programs, the research findings indicate that three programs produced moderate (but promising) results, while five others produced very impressive results.

The programs that achieved moderate results are: 1) "Second Step", which demonstrated moderate decreases in aggressive behavior and moderate increases in neutral and pro-social behavior in a very sophisticated research study involving paired control and experimental groups. 2) "Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways" (RIPP), which also reported modest but consistent gains in reducing violent behavior, as well as other problematic behaviors: e.g., school suspensions and disciplinary code violations. Given the careful experimental design, confidence in RIPP would have been higher, except for a 57% attrition rate among participants at follow-up. 3) "Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders", which reported limited support for the study's hypothesis about decreased preference for physical aggression after participating in the program.

Five programs evoked the highest level of confidence among the reviewers. Their confidence was based on the adequacy of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings, and the degree to which meaningful behavioral changes were reported. 1) "Positive Action", which reported positive effects on both academic achievement and multiple behavior problems in a care-

fully designed research study. 2) "Resolving Conflict Creatively", which reported increases in student willingness/ability to respond non-violently to conflict as well as significant improvements in academic performance. While the reviewers expressed considerable confidence in this intervention, they also noted that the outcome results had been published independently by RIPP and, therefore, had not been subjected to peer review. 3) "Aggression Replacement Therapy", which reported reductions in aggressive behavior as well as significant reductions in recidivism (arrests) among a population of violent, delinquent adolescents living in their home communities. In evaluating this program, however, the reviewers noted that there do not seem to be any research studies demonstrating the efficacy of this intervention as adapted for use in school settings, a significant gap in the empirical research. 4) "Bibliotherapy", which reported decreases in aggressive behavior as well as increases in self-disclosure, empathy and responsiveness to peers in a carefully designed pre- and post-test research evaluation. The reviewers felt these findings were particularly important since "Bibliotherapy" is the only intervention directed specifically toward a sub-group of children identified as problematic because of aggressive behavior. This intervention was piloted, implemented and evaluated in Israel and needs to be tested in the United States to evaluate to what degree it is transferable. 5) "Creative Peaceful Schools", which reported a marked reduction in disciplinary referrals involving serious physical aggressiveness, a reduction in the number of school suspensions during the second and third years of the program, and a statistically significant improvement in academic performance. This pre-post test design was conducted in paired intervention and control schools over a three-year period, and is the only program that tracked students longitudinally over a relatively extended time period.

Thus, the nine programs reviewed all have aspects to recommend them. What statements can be made about the key components that are integral to the success of a school-based group intervention to address the problem of adolescent violence and to prevent further episodes?

First, aggression is a complex phenomenon. There are psychodynamic, cognitive, behavioral, social and ecological factors involved in its etiology. Any successful treatment program must start with a comprehensive perspective about anger and aggression.

A successful program must also account for the role of peers, role models, the school-as-a-whole, the family, the host culture, and society at large. Consequently, the second key component is to have, as a focus, target populations other than adolescents themselves: e.g., school administrators, parents, and even at times communities. It is crucial that the "larger group" -- the system -- be targeted as well, in the creation of a total milieu that discourages violence in all forms. In other words, taking into account the entire school, and the community in which it is embedded, is critical. Beyond the school, parent and community involvement is crucial in ultimately reducing levels of violence. Parents must take a more active role in their children's emotional and social upbringing if the issue of aggression is to be addressed effectively. Therefore, a successful program must find some way to involve parents and provide them with the support and education they need to effectively address this issue. In addition to parental involvement, creating partnerships with community agencies is a way to reinforce any learning that occurs in the school setting and to involve the community as a whole in the education of its youth. Ultimately, this can lead to societal change. We wish to underscore the need for such community-school partnerships.

Third, any successful program must have an avenue in which follow-up can occur. Once at-risk students have been exposed to a program, those in need of further services must be able to be identified and referred. Therefore, those programs which help teachers and school personnel identify students who require additional help are most useful to schools. These programs typically make use of mental health professionals: school counselors, psychologists, and guidance staff. A relatively smooth process of referral must be in place prior to the implementation of such programs.

Finally, any successful program must have been thoroughly and rigorously evaluated. Some programs are evaluated, but not independently. Such programs conduct their own evaluations, which can be useful, but evaluations conducted by independent researchers would constitute stronger support concerning these programs' efficacy. Such evaluations should ideally include instruments that measure behavioral change as well as attitudinal change. For example, the programs developed by Twemlow et al., and Goldstein et al., both utilized measures that assessed concrete behavioral changes (such as rates of recidivism in delinquent youth) as well as attitudinal changes (such as advocating pro-social behavior). If the evidence demonstrates that actual behavior is changed as well as participants' attitudes, it is most impressive.

Thus, the idea of addressing the school-as-a-whole and creating a pro-social milieu within the school with the help of school administrators, parents, and the community is crucial to the task of preventing adolescent violence. In this way, adolescents' emotional, social and moral educational issues and needs are addressed in addition to their primary educational needs. Such interventions aim at creating an environment in which altruism and empathy are reinforced, and role modeling of acts of kindness and non-violent ways of dealing with conflict occur regularly.

Several of the societal issues outlined in our introduction to adolescent violence can be addressed in the context of a successful parent component of a violence reduction program. For instance, the risk factor of children's exposure to violence through television and media/computer games can begin to be limited when a program addresses the necessity for the parents' role in careful supervision of their children's activities. In addition, if parental anger management is addressed, levels of domestic violence, a further risk factor, can be affected, which in turn can potentially decrease levels of adolescent aggressive behavior. It is also conceivable that access to guns in the home could be influenced by parents' participation in an educational program that complements the programs in which their children participate in school.

Several of the programs reviewed deserve special mention. Twemlow et al.'s "Creating Peaceful Schools" program is noteworthy for addressing the school system as a whole, as well as for its partnership with school administration, teachers and parents. "Creating Peaceful Schools" use of mentors from high school with elementary school-aged students helps to create bonds between older and younger children, increases a sense of responsibility for peers, solidifies ties within a school community, and provides role models for altruism. Its martial arts component is a way of meeting the needs of youth and channeling aggression into appropriate avenues of expression. It also is one of the few programs that measured behavioral change in addition to attitudinal change.

Aggression Replacement Training as described by Goldstein et al., also deserves special mention. It is a multi-modal program with a culturally sensitive curriculum that can be used with all populations, including those most at risk for violence. Its focus on the larger community is also noteworthy. Goldstein and his collaborators tested the impact of their curriculum on adolescent offenders, and found significant behavioral as well as attitudinal change. They are to be commended

for targeting and measuring concrete behavioral change in those adolescents who were exposed to their curriculum.

The Resolving Conflict Creatively (RCC) program also has much to recommend it. It is a culturally sensitive program that demonstrated not only attitudinal change, but actual changes in academic achievement. The developers of the program have a comprehensive view of the nature and causes of aggression and, as a result, their program is geared toward change in the school-as-a-whole. RCC includes teacher training as well as training for school administrators and additional personnel, in the hopes of creating a milieu within the entire school that promotes non-violence. RCC appears to have been researched extensively and has links to the National Center for Children in Poverty, a center concerned with issues of children and poverty (another risk factor as outlined in our Introduction). Its parent component maximizes the likelihood that gains made in school will be reinforced at home and in the community at large.

Other programs that we reviewed have notable strengths. The Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways program made use of a large sample size and careful assessment measures. Its emphasis on the school-as-a-whole and changing the entire milieu is also noteworthy. The Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders program features a rigorous research component, as does the Second Step program. Finally the "Bibliotherapy" program, while modest in size, uses careful assessment measures and represents one of the few directly clinical attempts at violence prevention.

Unfortunately, none of these programs are able to address two of the critical factors contributing to school violence: the availability of guns and the accessibility to violent television and media programming, as well as computer/video games. These two issues represent major social phenomena that must be addressed as national public policy or through the economic infrastructure of the enter-

tainment industry. However, the programs reviewed do address the creation of non-violent environments in schools. Such environments can be arenas in which conflict is addressed and resolved in prosocial ways. In doing so, they present a countervailing influence that may ameliorate some of the effects described above. None of the programs we reviewed have components that address education regarding the influence of media and video/computer games as well as the danger of firearms. It is recommended that these programs (and all other such programs) be encouraged to experiment with incorporating such components into their existing protocols.

It is our hope that the deadly consequences of adolescent violence can be combatted throughout our society via the implementation on a wider scale of some of the commendable programs reviewed in this White Paper.

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APPENDIX 1

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