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DETERMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ANGER MANAGEMENT TRAINING AND CURRICULAR INFUSION AT AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS EXPELLED FOR WEAPONS

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Students in a school as an alternative to expulsion for carrying a weapon were provided regular direct anger management training. Veteran teachers were taught strategies for infusing the anger management skills into their lessons. Students were given the National School Crime and Safety Survey as a pretest and posttest. In addition, ethnographic field notes were used to examine the reactions of the staff and students to the interventions. Significant reductions in willingness to fight and improvements in ability to control anger were reported. Ethnographic reports indicated that staff and students felt safer and more positive about the school than before the interventions. The challenges to instituting these interventions are described.

Among the many challenges educators face in the next millennium is violence in our nation's schools. Most schools deal with violent episodes as they arise—in a reactive rather than proactive mode. Some proactive attempts include the implementation of stand-

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alone violence prevention programs in schools. Other attempts, although apparently much less abundant, include the integration of violence prevention programming into the overall culture of the school. This article describes an alternative education setting for students caught with a weapon in school in New York state. In this setting, teachers were given strategies for infusing aspects of anger management into their traditional curricula. The anger management competencies (see appendix) to be infused were developed through a textual analysis examining for common themes among a variety of social skills and anger-control curricula used in schools (e.g., Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, anger-reduction training, skill-streaming, and others described later in this article). These competencies included self-awareness, self-evaluation, and reflection; empathy; composure; communication; problem solving; and violence/anger awareness. Teachers were taught how to use these skills and then they were taught how to infuse these strategies into their existing lesson plans. In addition to curriculum infusion, all students received direct anger management training including the anger management competencies listed in the appendix during a weekly 2-hour class. All staff attended three half-day workshops on these anger management competencies and techniques to reinforce the skills taught in the class.

This article discusses the results of the implementation of curriculum infusion at the alternative school, using student pretest and posttest survey data in conjunction with interview and observational data the author collected before, during, and after the implementation process. In addition, the unique challenges posed by the school environment and the infusion process within this setting are discussed.

The first objective of this article is to discuss the alternative educational site's strategies for at-risk students. These strategies that were designed to reduce and eliminate aggressive behavior through various means, including curriculum infusion of anger management competencies into the traditional curricula combined with direct anger management training. The second objective is to describe the qualitative and quantitative data, drawing on ethnographic and pretest and posttest data. Finally, some of the challenges

to implementing anger management curriculum infusion and direct anger management training in alternative school sites are discussed.

**INFUSION AND DIRECT ANGER MANAGEMENT
TRAINING AS PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH:
PROMISING PRACTICES IN THE LITERATURE**

In an attempt to develop a comprehensive approach to school violence prevention programming, the alternative school for weapons implemented curriculum infusion in combination with direct anger management training. Loeber and Farrington (1998), in their thorough and comprehensive review of the literature on serious and violent juvenile offenders, identified the most promising practices for working with these youth. The programs with most promise were those that included multiple services such as personal counseling, tutoring, job skills training, family therapy, case management, mentoring, cultural education, and physical exercise (health and wellness training). Those that were multimodal—addressing law breaking, substance use and abuse, and academic (including learning disabilities, literacy, and special needs) and family problems—were also successful. Strategies that integrated multiple entities such as schools, juvenile justice, mental health, parents, and child welfare agencies had demonstrated success with youth.

A number of programs have had success in reducing or preventing adolescent violence (summarized in a program article entitled *Effective Programs and Strategies to Create Safe Schools* prepared by the Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence, 1999).

- Administrative models include Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline (components include a caring environment, student involvement, leadership opportunities, community involvement activities), and the Constructive Discipline Model (involves a schoolwide behavioral improvement plan, reinforcing appropriate behaviors).
- Schoolwide approaches include the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (emotional, social, and ethical development of students are taught through conflict resolution and interpersonal communica-

tion), Second Step (curriculum, parent component, including empathy, impulse control, and anger management), Conflict Resolution: A Curriculum for Youth Providers (teaches conflict resolution and identification of conflict), Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, Straight Talk about Risks, The School Safety Program, Aggressors, Safe Dates, Dating Violence Prevention Program, Project ALERT, Project NORTHLAND, Life Skills Training, First Step to Success, Peacebuilders, Project Achieve, The Midwestern Prevention Project, and the Talent Development Middle Schools and High Schools.

- Counseling programs with demonstrated success include the Anger Coping Program, the Coping Power Program, and the Peer Culture Development Program.
- Alternative Education programs with demonstrated reductions in violent behavior include Reconnecting Youth, Positive Adolescent Choices Training, Contingencies for Learning Academic and Social Skills, and the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program.
- Community and family programs include Families and Schools Together, Functional Family Therapy, the Strengthening Families Program, the Self Enhancement Program, and the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program.

More information is available about these programs and others at the Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence Web site (www.hamfish.org).

The programs with demonstrated success in reducing youth violence have many common elements: self-awareness/evaluation and reflection of violence, empathy, composure, communication, problem solving, and violence/anger knowledge awareness. These elements comprised the anger management competencies. The intervention at the alternative school for weapons expulsion focused on teaching these skills, pulling from a variety of the above-mentioned intervention components.

THE INTERVENTION SITE

THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL FOR WEAPONS OFFENDERS: INFUSION COMBINED WITH DIRECT TRAINING

The alternative school is a school for students caught with a weapon in school. As an alternative to suspension, students are sent

to the school for one year before returning to their home school. This school had been in existence for 4 years with no comprehensive strategy for teaching students anger management or alternatives to violent and aggressive behavior. Supported with funds from the Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence, Syracuse University worked with the school to create a whole-school approach to violence prevention based on the results of a year-long, qualitative needs assessment (involving ethnographic methods such as observation, interviews, and focus groups). The needs of the school were determined. The most promising practices reported in the literature were examined. The realities of limited funding were considered. Then, direct anger management training for all students and teachers and curriculum infusion training for teachers to reinforce the skills learned in the direct service training were selected as interventions.

For the curriculum infusion component, veteran teachers in each of the major subject areas were taught the skills listed under the anger management competencies in the appendix. They practiced the skills listed (recognizing anger cues, triggers, reducers, problem solving, self-awareness, empathy, composure, and so on) during three half-day workshops. On the final day of the Summer 1998 training workshop, teachers were taught how to infuse these skills into their existing lesson plans. Teachers were given a small stipend for attending the workshop and were to receive more money upon receipt of their lesson plans demonstrating infusion of the skills. All of the other teachers and support staff received training workshops throughout the school year teaching anger management during their in-service training meetings. They were not paid, and they were not expected to produce lesson plans with the skills infused.

During the school year, all students received 2 hours of direct anger management training every week. Students were taught the anger management competencies using skill-streaming, the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), and others. Students were taught self-awareness (recognizing their own cues, triggers, and reducers) of anger, problem solving, conflict resolution, empathy, composure, and improved communication skills within these classes.

RESULTS

THE CORE FORMATIVE EVALUATION: PRETEST AND POSTTEST RESULTS

The National School Crime and Safety Survey was administered in September 1998 to students at the alternative school. This instrument was created by the Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence. The survey used a traditional Likert-type scale (*strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*). Students were asked to respond to the survey statements about their experiences with violence in school as perpetrators and victims (fighting, shoving, punching), the strategies they used to avoid violence in school, their relationships with teachers in the school, and their weapon-carrying behaviors. The Fish Institute examined the reliability of the items of the pretests and posttests. The items selected for analysis had test-retest reliability ratings of .52 or higher (Spearman's rho). A full report of reliability is available from the author.

Pretest and posttest surveys were used in conjunction with other contextual data collected. In the alternative school, 43 students in Grades 7 through 12 (with 72% in Grades 7-9, 35.7% were males and 64.3% females) completed the pretest questionnaire. At the conclusion of the formative year (May 1999), 41 students completed the posttest (11 of whom had completed the pretest)—73.2% in Grades 7-9, 55% male, and 45% female. The following highlights the list of responses related to the goals of the anger management training and curriculum infusion.

Only 39.5% of students reported that they could keep from getting very angry at the pretest (i.e., they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *I can keep from getting really angry*) ($M = 3.13$). The posttest data revealed that significantly more students (51.7%) could keep from getting very angry, indicating that they thought they had become better able to handle their anger since they came to the school ($M = 1.40$), $t(24) = -4.503$, $p < .01$. Also, 60.7% of students taking the posttest revealed that they had become better able to deal with conflicts with their friends, acquaintances, and family without becoming violent since they came to the alternative school. This result was significantly higher than those taking the pretest

who reported that they could not keep from getting very angry ($M = -1.54$), $t(23) = -5.43$, $p < .01$.

Approximately 64% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they would get into a fight if someone disrespected them at the time of the pretest compared with 14.7% of students taking the posttest. This demonstrated a significant reduction in the number of students who reported a willingness to fight because they were disrespected ($M = 1.71$), $t(30) = 5.484$, $p < .01$.

One of the primary goals of teaching school staff ways to infuse anger management into their curriculum was to improve students' ability to manage their anger. Students reported an improved ability to recognize their anger cues and triggers and to handle their anger without becoming violent. The second major goal of the program was to reduce the number of everyday student fights that resulted from feeling disrespected (a major cause of fights in the school). This number was dramatically reduced. Finally, another goal of involving the faculty and staff in the anger management curriculum development was to reduce the number of students who felt disrespected by school staff. This was not achieved: There was no significant change between those in the pretest group ($M = 3.057$) and those in the posttest ($M = 3.11$), $t(34) = -.195$, $p = .846$ group.

Upon completion of the anger management course and courses with anger management infused throughout, students were asked to report on their ability to manage their anger and handle conflict. Because of high student turnover throughout the year, only 11 of the 41 respondents had completed the pretest. Nearly half (45.5%) had been at the alternative school since January 1999 and had participated in the program since that time. Most of the students had several months of the interventions before taking the posttest.

At posttest, most of the students (86.2%) believed that they were good at listening to others, and 41.4% thought they had become better listeners since they had come to the alternative school. Most of the students (greater than 75%) answered positively that they thought they were good communicators (i.e., could recognize their own and others' body language, could get others to listen to them without threatening them). Nevertheless, most of the students reported that when someone made them angry, they wanted to fight

(55.6%) even though most students reported that they could recognize when they were getting angry and knew what to do to calm themselves when they became angry (92.9% and 75%, respectively). Although 51.7% reported that they had become better able to handle their anger after they came to the alternative school, only 20.7% said they usually walk away from an argument, 39.3% said that they usually tried to talk to the person with whom they were in conflict, and 82.8% said that they usually would physically fight if they were having a fight or argument. At the conclusion of their time at the alternative school, many students attributed their improved ability to handle conflict and anger to their time at the school, where they learned anger management directly and had these skills reinforced in their traditional curricula.

THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND STAFF PERSPECTIVES

Qualitative Results from Observations and Interviews

Throughout the school year, ethnographic assessment was conducted by analyzing field notes collected during observations of and interviews with staff and students for emerging themes. I examined field notes for themes related to students' and teachers' reactions to the programs as well as students' changes in violent and aggressive attitudes and behaviors. Classroom observations and interviews with students and teachers were used to gather data about the daily workings of the school and the interventions.

Before curriculum infusion, teacher training, and comprehensive efforts to reduce violence in the school, student and staff reports regarding the school were profoundly negative. Interviews, observations at staff meetings and classes, and focus groups yielded evidence of frustration and dissatisfaction with the school. The year after implementing the intervention strategies previously mentioned, most students reported that they liked the school very much and felt comfortable and secure there. All of the students interviewed felt that the teachers were very helpful and attempted to help them and work with them. However, as one student stated, "[the school] is very easy." Few students felt they had to work very

hard. This lack of academic rigor placed them far behind their peers when returning to the regular schools.

Interviews were conducted with staff, students, and parents, and observational data were collected. Compared with the previous year, students all said that they liked the school better and felt more comfortable and safer. Students were interviewed before their return to their regular schools. Despite liking their experience at the school and feeling like they “learned their lesson,” most were excited to return to the standard school setting. However, many parents wanted their children to stay as long as possible because the school provided smaller classes and more individualized attention. Most of the parents described their children as having difficulty in school, but that they thought they were doing better academically and socially in the more intimate setting. Teachers noticed a difference, too. They said there was more of a feeling of community in the school than in previous years when teachers would come in, teach their classes, and leave. After the interventions, teachers came in early, stayed late, and came to activities. The tone at staff meetings was no longer one of hostility and frustration—it had become one of collaboration and fun.

Staff Survey Results

Staff also completed a posttest created by the Hamilton Fish National Institute about their experiences in the school and their perceptions of the interventions. Teachers, administrators, and other school staff ($N = 16$) were given a survey at the conclusion of the first year of the intervention. Most teachers prior to the intervention complained that students rarely treated adults in the school with respect. At the end of the first year, only 13.3% of the staff agreed with the statement “Students rarely treat school personnel with respect.” All of the staff agreed that school personnel were respectful to students, and all except 13.3% felt that students received appropriate punishment for infractions.

Compared with the previous school year when the school was located in one of the more notorious sections of the city, all staff at the end of the intervention year (when the school was located in the

heart of the downtown business district) reported feeling moderately to very safe in the building during and after class hours.

Nearly 90% of staff reported that they were moderately to highly satisfied with the violence prevention activities (direct anger management and staff training), 93.3% felt that violence prevention knowledge among student participants improved, and 73.3% felt that violence-related attitudes and beliefs among the student participants improved. More than 93% of staff felt that relationships between student participants in the anger management project had improved. All staff members said they would recommend the interventions to other schools.

The overwhelmingly positive staff ratings of the school and the intervention indicate that during the first year of the intervention, there was a dramatic improvement in the overall attitudes of the school's staff. Some of this improvement may be attributed to the anger management training of students and staff and the work with teachers on infusion, but there were many changes happening in the school simultaneously. First, the new building was a beautifully restored historical library as compared with the previous site, which was a dilapidated former Catholic school. Second, there was a change in leadership—the school received a new principal who was a 35-year veteran of the district and had the power to make the changes wanted by the teachers. Third, the administration supported the programs, and thus, the teachers were more involved with and supportive of the interventions. Fourth, there were more full-time staff added, including more teachers. There had previously been no police officer or security guard; however, during the year of the intervention, a full-time police officer and security guard were hired, which made staff and students feel safer. Also, all staff and students mentioned the presence of the anger management trainer who modeled the behavior she taught. She was respectful of students and staff and worked with them to resolve conflicts nonviolently. Her room became a safe haven for students and staff where all were expected to be respectful and kind. Clearly, no intervention exists in a vacuum: There are always other factors at work. However, it is important to recognize how individuals make sense of these factors and their impact on their lives. Students and teachers felt better about being at the school.

CHALLENGES TO CURRICULUM INFUSION AND OTHER STAFF TRAINING

There were many challenges to implementing curriculum infusion. Teachers were relatively inexperienced in curriculum development, which required intensive support from coordinators. Despite offering the teachers monetary compensation for participation as well as training and support, difficulties arose in completing the curriculum. Lesson plan timelines were ignored. One teacher expressed his frustration and reported that he felt as though he was being asked to infuse the competencies “too much” and said, “It’s like I invite you to my house for a couple of days and you move in!” Some teachers also had difficulties finding places to infuse the competencies into the curriculum. In all, the demand on the curriculum designers was far greater than anticipated.

The initial training for teachers occurred during the summer of 1998. Teachers took longer than expected to return completed drafts of their lesson plans. Also, because the teachers came with such varied experiences and competence levels for creating lesson plans (many were new and relatively inexperienced teachers), the curriculum designer spent more time than anticipated with the teachers. Teachers revised their lesson plans—some several times. Beginning in Fall 1998, the curricula were delivered to students.

A major factor influencing the project was that the school was made up of part-time teachers (hourly wage with no benefits) who were resentful of their status; most were trying to find other jobs. In addition, they faced demanding teaching loads, sometimes doing seven different preparations a day. The teachers did not feel inclined to use the lesson plans because they did mostly individualized instruction with students, who entered and exited on a rolling basis. Although they were paid for the lesson plans and for their attendance at the training, teachers did not feel that they had the time to implement these lesson plans or that traditional lesson plans made sense in this context. These aforementioned variables are important to consider when demonstrating the possible effectiveness of whole-school interventions. During the year, when working with all the teachers, the newer teachers seemed more open to developing and implementing lesson plans with us than the veteran teachers had been. Examining institutional and individual readi-

ness for an intervention of this magnitude is essential in the early stages of planning.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Because of the small sample size of this project, the scope of the quantitative results alone is limited, and one should be cautious when generalizing the results to other settings. Nonetheless, the quantitative results reinforced the findings from the qualitative component of this study: Students behaved less violently in the school. They felt better about themselves as communicators and their ability to handle conflicts nonviolently. Teachers also felt better about the school environment and how the students behaved toward them and toward each other than they did prior to the interventions. Both the qualitative and quantitative data support the findings that the school environment was more peaceful (fewer fights, violent behaviors, and cruel treatment) after the interventions. Although more work needs to be done to examine the generalizability of these results to other populations, the results suggest that direct anger management training combined with infusion of the skills within the traditional curricula can have a positive impact—even for students identified as weapon carriers. As we create programs for this special population of students, teaching anger management competencies to the students and reinforcing these skills in traditional subject areas can be successful in reducing violent behaviors.

Although there were reductions in violent behavior reported by staff and students, there is still work to be done to bridge the gap between recognizing one's anger cues and triggers, knowing the skills, and choosing to use them to avoid fighting. Sixty-one percent of students said that they were better able to deal with conflicts with their friends, acquaintances, and family without becoming violent since they came to the alternative school. Nevertheless, most students (82.8%) reported that they handled conflict differently on the streets than at school; thus, there is still a need to determine strategies that will work for students within various contexts. Clearly, there are gaps between the skills learned and students' use

of these skills in school and on the streets. There remains a need to determine the best strategies for filling these gaps.

Students thought that they did learn the skills of anger management (see Competency in appendix). However, they did not report a significant reduction in their perception of disrespect by teachers despite the work with teachers. It is difficult to differentiate how many of the skills that students reported learning were due to direct anger management training and how many were due to of curriculum infusion. Only two of the teachers completed the infusion project, half the teachers had a 3-day workshop on anger management, and the rest of the staff had three half-day workshops. However, all students received 2 hours of the direct anger management training every week with a skilled, well-respected, experienced anger management trainer teaching the skills that students felt they had obtained. It is likely that the direct training of anger management skills was more successful in achieving desired results (i.e., reduction in aggression, anger, and violence) than the curricular infusion and that the staff training provided reinforcement of the skills taught in the class. Nevertheless, more work needs to be done to determine the relative effectiveness of each strategy.

For direct anger management training to be successful, students and staff (including administration) need to see its value and support it in terms of time, rules, and other resources. Teachers and all other staff need to have regular opportunities to reinforce the anger management skills with one another through in-service training or staff meetings. Clearly, the staff by the end of the first year of the intervention saw the value of the anger management training and demonstrated support for it. The following year, plans were in place to integrate the direct anger management training into the regular school day, giving students the same amount of time in the anger management training as they would get in the other core subject areas.

Lessons learned about curriculum infusion and adding direct anger management training into an alternative school were ongoing throughout this project. One critical finding was that for these interventions to be successful, support from the administration and teachers is essential. The successful implementation of infusion

must involve curriculum development and ongoing refinement; a curriculum coordinator can be an essential person in this process. The coordinator needs to understand the anger management competencies and be able to assist teachers in incorporating these competencies into lesson plans. This process requires group and individual mentoring. Teachers in alternative education sites tend to possess varying levels of education and experience. At this particular site, there was frequent teacher turnover. Determining the teachers' levels of education and experience with lesson plan development and infusion is a mandatory first step in an infusion project.

Teachers also need to have continuous support, which can be provided through the availability of a resource library. They also need feedback after delivering their lessons to make adjustments. This step is critical and is often left out. The curriculum coordinator or someone aware of the anger management competencies should conduct the observations and feedback. Finally, curriculum infusion cannot be the only violence prevention effort in a school; it must be a component of a comprehensive, whole-school approach.

Curriculum infusion requires a great deal of support from other teachers, administrators, and curriculum designers. All must have the training to understand the anger management competencies and an opportunity to model and practice these skills in their own lives and classrooms. This type of change results in the school culture-shift necessary to reduce even the subtlest forms of violence. Perhaps the most important lesson learned during the infusion portion of the project was that successful curriculum infusion requires a great deal of help and support for teachers. The administration must hold teachers accountable for the implementation and improvement of their lesson plans, but also needs to provide time and support.

In sum, by teaching anger management skills to students and reinforcing these within classrooms (through curriculum infusion) and school sites (by training all staff about the skills), students at the highest risk of violent behavior in schools can learn and use strategies that will reduce violence in schools.

APPENDIX

Anger Management Competencies^a

<i>Competency</i>	<i>Component/Skill</i>			<i>Stage of Delivery^b</i>
	<i>Anger Awareness</i>	<i>Violence Awareness</i>	<i>Links Between Anger and Violence</i>	
Knowledge awareness	Anger triggers Anger cues Anger control reminders Anger reducers Developmental growth factors	Types of violence Good/bad violence Controllable violence Uncontrollable violence Hot spots Social perceptions of violence	Connections Consequences Establishing the need to change	Cognitive preparation Primarily related to the knowledge awareness & self-evaluation/assessment/reflection competencies
Self-evaluation/ -assessment/ -reflection	<i>Self-respect</i>			
		Self-awareness & acceptance Self-appraisal Self-reinforcement Ability to change		

(continued)

APPENDIX Continued

	<i>Component/Skill</i>				<i>Stage of Delivery^b</i>
	<i>Increasing sensitivity</i>				
Empathy	Awareness of own point of view Awareness of others' point of view				Skill acquisition Related to all competencies through cognitive, physiological and behavioral influences
	<i>Personal control</i>				
Composure	Dealing with anger Dealing with embarrassment Dealing with pressure Techniques to keep calm/ relaxation training				
	<i>Verbal skills</i>	<i>Non-verbal skills</i>	<i>Negotiation skills</i>	<i>Listening skills</i>	
Communication	Open-ended questions Paraphrasing Laundering language / statements	Eye contact Body language	Finding commonalties	Paraphrasing Summarizing	

Problem solving

Awareness of necessary conditions for problem solving
Defining the problem
Generating *how to* statements
Brainstorming possible solutions
Negotiating
Choosing alternatives
Considering implications
Developing follow-up plans

Application training
Related to all competencies, utilizing role-plays, homework, hassle logs, etc.

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- a. This is an overview matrix of anger management competencies and is not complete.
b. Stages of delivery are not necessarily sequential and definitely overlapping.

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