

Running head: Beyond Anti-bullying

Beyond Anti-bullying: Studying Nobel Peace Laureates to
Enhance School Climate and Reduce Aggression-related Referrals

Richard Gratz

Action Research Project

School Counseling Specialization

Portland State University

2006

Professional Responsibility: This project has been reviewed by collegial professional peers and has been submitted for on-line publication before being evaluated by faculty members from Portland State University. I am the author and take full responsibility for the project's contents and quality. This work serves as a baseline for my professional school counselor skills and demonstrates some of what I have done to develop and/or assess my actions directed toward serving students and schools. In other words, this is a snapshot or one indicator of my work at this stage of my career.

Citation: Gratz, R. (2006). Beyond anti-bullying: Studying Nobel peace laureates to enhance school climate and reduce aggression-related referrals. Retrieved [date], from Portland State University, Counselor Education, School Counseling Specialization, School Counseling in Action, Intern Projects 2006. Web site: <http://www.ed.pdx.edu/coun/sca.htm>

Beyond Anti-bullying: Studying Nobel Peace Laureates to Enhance School Climate and Reduce Aggression-Related referrals.

“Our true character is defined by our behavior when one is looking.”

--Anon

While bullying and various forms of aggression among children has long been a concern of school administrators, in the decade following the first school shooting in 1996 in Moses Lake, Washington there has appeared a proliferation of violence prevention efforts, materials, policies, and mandates. These violence prevention measures have taken various forms, as suggested by the terms used to describe them (e.g., “Violence Prevention”, “Bully Prevention”, “Anti-bullying”, “Safe Schools”). “Violence prevention” approaches have been mostly preventative and procedural in scope, emphasizing the value of adult supervision, creating a physically safe school environment, and having emergency plans in place (e.g., Brunner, 2005 & Dorn, 2005). In contrast, many of the “anti-bullying” camp have had a predominantly reactive approach. For example, Monohan (2005) and the Anti-bullying Alliance of Great Britain have emphasized working with students in their role as witnesses to bullying events, Mueller and Parisi (2002) demonstrated the benefits of teaching children how to respond to aggressive behavior and resolve conflicts, and Coloroso (2002) stresses the roles students play in a bullying scenario. In further contrast with the violence prevention approach, the bully prevention/ anti-bullying approaches have tended to emphasize the social-emotional aspects of aggression, addressing such components as school culture

(Gubler & Croxall, 2005) family interventions (Fraser, et al. 2004), and peer support (Luck, 2005). Many other researchers have stressed the need for a comprehensive approach combining preventative and reactive measures such as developing clearly stated school-wide policies, implementing ongoing classroom-level education and interventions, and following specific intervention strategies for individuals involved in bullying incidents (Mullin-Rindler 2003, Salmivalli et al. 2005, Fraser et al. 2004). Thus it appears that programs for violence prevention have tended to reflect a control and containment emphasis, whereas anti-bullying programs have emphasized the development of individual skills, character traits, and social participation among students.

The primary school in which the current research takes place may be representative of many primary schools in the sense that overt or physical violence is not a significant problem. There have been no suspensions the past three years for physical fighting or for a student deliberately harming another physically, yet the most common office referral is for another type of aggression involving taunting, threatening, mean teasing, verbally provoking, or harassing of another. As the school counselor, I have seen the negative effects of this type of aggression, both on the individual and group level. Although many interventions and methods (including those sighted above) have been shown to reduce violence and bullying, it remains to be determined how schools can eliminate violence altogether in order to create not just physically safe environments but also the emotionally and intellectually safe environments needed for optimizing student learning.

Indeed, Bickmore (1997) has suggested that individual and group violence may be inescapable. This seems particularly true when one considers that the more common form of violence in schools is not physical but “relational” aggression (Butcher & Lee, 2005). Relational aggression (RA) has been defined as “a non-physical form of violence or aggression which typically includes such behaviors as name-calling, exclusion, ridicule, teasing, offensive touching, and racial, ethnic, or sexual slurs”(Hernandez & Seem, 2004). While RA does not represent life-threatening behavior, secondary students rate it as more harmful and more concerning than physical aggression (Linder, 2005). And while students develop a perception as early as 3 years of age that girls show RA more than boys and boys show physical aggression (PA) more than girls (Giles & Heyman, 2005), Tiet, et al. (2001) found that girls and boys ages 4-18 both use RA similarly. Besides its frequency, rated harmfulness, and universal use by both genders, RA is logically viewed as a precursor to any later physical violence (i.e., either on the part of the bully or as part of the victim’s retaliatory response to RA). Clearly, a truly comprehensive anti-bullying effort would address relational aggression, both for the harm it does and for the risk of it leading to further violence.

Regarding which age group to target, there is much evidence suggesting anti-bullying programs are more effective and have longer lasting effects for primary students than secondary students (Mueller & Parisi, 2002, Pepler, et al. 1994 cited in Salmivalli, et al. 2005, Stevens, et al. 2000 cited in Salmivalli, et al. 2005). However, a possibly more significant concern is that with any program at any grade level there lies the potential for

students to gain new awareness, learn new attitudes, and even rehearse new behaviors, without this learning becoming part of their actual behavior. Mullin-Rindler (2003) and Thompson (2001) provide much support for the notion that in the presence of peers, individual children's sense of empathy and responsibility is diminished. While at a minimum (i.e., in a reactive approach) school staff and parents need to be aware of RA to at least recognize when it is happening and to be able to respond to these situations effectively, any adult-driven intervention will be limited by the extent to which it does not become part of the students' personal and collective peer culture.

Some researchers have sought to determine what helps students act in accordance with their best judgment when no adult is looking. Heightening awareness of bullying problems and teaching actual conflict resolution skills has helped minimize RA in some schools (Mueller & Parisi, 2002). Olweus (1991, cited in Salmivalli, et al. 2005) and Salmivalli, et al. (2005) address possible means to reduce this apparent discrepancy between students' attitudes or values and their behavior. In addition to teaching conflict resolution skills Bickmore (1997) developed this idea of making student action more congruent with their values further by accounting for the subtle differences in the manner in which schools implement their chosen anti-violence measures. Bickmore also emphasized establishing student participation and democracy throughout the school culture as a means to reduce student apathy and increase the likelihood of students participating actively (and pro-socially) in their peer culture. The achievement of such independent involvement and initiative would seem one of the best manifestations of

students learning to contribute, as outlined in the Oregon Framework for Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance (2003).

In an attempt to address the core of the elusive relational aggression problem in my school, the current action research project combines the teaching of conflict resolution skills with activities designed to create a culture of peacemaking among the students. Specifically, with this project I hope to determine whether a school's climate can be made to feel safer to students, and whether a reduction in aggression-related problems is noted, as a result of learning about Nobel Peace Prize Laureates and practicing the skills of deliberation.

Method

Participants

All fifth grade students of this K-5 primary school with a population 575 agreed to participate (100%, N=approximately 95). This school is designated a "strong" school, based on test scores and yearly progress monitoring.

Intervention

Students were given a pretest, involved in 6 half-hour guidance lessons over the course of 3 months, then given a post-test. The study culminated in student group presentations about their specific Laureate, and their subsequent nominations of classmates for the "Peacemaker" award which will be presented at the final all-school assembly in June.

Session One: Students were given the pretest and an introduction to what the Nobel Peace Prize is, who are some prize winners, how long this has been going, etc.

Session Two: Students were assigned to groups of 4 to 6 members, assigned their peacemaker to study, provided with several guiding questions about human rights, and given a fact sheet about their peacemaker (from web sites) which had answers to some (not all) of the questions. Students were asked to formulate their own questions they were curious about, to be answered later. **Session Three:** Students were provided another sheet of questions more specific to their Laureate, instructed on how to access the elementary library site and other relevant web sites, and were asked to divide tasks of compiling information (research) and answering questions (assimilation) among the group members. **Session Four:** Students were given another half-hour to compile and assimilate information, answer the prompted questions and their own questions, and prepare for their group presentations to the class. **Session Five:** Each group presented their findings about their Laureate to the class, using the format of providing (1) Basic facts, (2) Interesting information about the person or organization, their methods, the conflict they worked on, geography, related issues, etc., and (3) Their own opinions about what they discovered. **Session Six:** Involved teaching steps for deliberation. In groups of four, two students with opposed views on a topic deliberated their opinions and were observed and evaluated by the other two as to how well they honored the other deliberator (in their greeting), whether they agreed on a goal for the 5-minute session, how well they did justice to the other's position, and how many connecting points they could find. Post-tests were distributed, to be completed later. The classroom teachers distributed the peacemaker nomination forms approximately one week later.

Evaluation Methods

Student perceptions related to feeling safe at school were measured by a twenty-two item pre-and post-test questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree/Always, Agree/Usually, Disagree/Not Usually, Strongly Disagree/Never). Teacher perceptions of the relative problem with aggression within their class throughout the year and the perceived effects of the peace study were measured on a three-item questionnaire.

Aggressive behavior at this was also measured by consulting the computerized School-Wide Information System (SWIS) and comparing the number of aggression-related referrals across the fifth grade before, during, and after the peace study lessons.

Results

Minor changes of student perceptions were noted on seven of the post-test questionnaire items (Pre-test percentages are in parenthesis, Likert rating is abbreviated): “I feel safe at school”, (51%) SA changed to 57% SA; “I feel left out or alone at school”, decreased (13%) A, to 8 % A; “This school needs to be safer”, decreased agreement from (12%) SA to 8% SA; “I try to make the world more peaceful”, decreased agreement from (51%) A to 40% A and (11) D to 17 D; “Some classmates can be hard to like” increased agreement from (13%) SA to 25% SA and (40%) D to 33% D; “Other students try to make me feel bad”, decreased disagreement (45%) SD to 38% SD, (12%) A to 13% A and (4%) SA to 6 % SA; “I can make the world more peaceful”, decreased agreement (46%) SA to 41% SA. Teacher perception surveys indicated no appreciable difference in the monthly pattern of aggression this year compared with other years, and all four teachers concurred that they needed more time to judge the effects of the study on their classroom culture

(although one student was overheard using some of the language of deliberation to solve a group conflict days after the post-test). Finally, office referrals for aggressive behaviors decreased from 53 (4 weeks prior to the study) to 40 (during the first 4 weeks of the study), to 18 during the last 2 weeks and 2 weeks following the study. Total referrals for the entire school paralleled this same decrease, from 73 to 53, to 26).

Discussion

The students' post-test responses suggest a slight trend toward feeling safer and less lonely or left out at school as a result of the study, which is what the interventions were designed to do. These responses also (and more strongly) suggest the students moved away from the belief that they try or that they are able to make the world more peaceful, and toward the notion that some classmates can be hard to like. This unanticipated possible effect (along with feeling safer at school) could be due to a perceptual shift that came from discovering the presence of unfair, violent human rights abuses happening in the world. It would seem easy to feel less significant as a student peacemaker after learning that one previously had little idea what peacemakers in the world have to endure. Though teacher surveys were inconclusive, the observation of even one student applying some of the principles of the study is encouraging. The decrease in total referrals throughout all grades suggests the peace study accounted for no significant change in office referrals for aggression.

Limitations/Suggested Improvements

The need for tracking the month-to-month referral patterns over several years is apparent, as the data from all sources (student perceptions, teacher perceptions, and office referrals)

seemed influenced by this inevitable cycle. Starting the study in the fall would give teachers more time to further integrate the concepts into their culture, and to observe the effects on the classroom culture over time. With the low numbers of total referrals for fifth graders (10, 2, and 1 for the three month period surrounding the study), it is unlikely office referrals would be a valid source for measuring the climate in these fifth grade classrooms. Another confounding variable may have been that the whole school received lessons related to being a peacemaker, and so the fifth graders would not necessarily stand out. Conversely, the other grades were told of this study at the peacemaker assembly, and this could have increased the impact of the peacemaker theme on all grade levels. In this sense, the peace study could possibly affect the climate of the entire school in just the manner that was intended for the fifth graders studying (being inspired by) the peace prize winners. I would predict that schools without a comprehensive guidance curriculum (i.e., especially without lessons on being a peacemaker) would likely see a more dramatic effect from these interventions. In any case, owing to the complex nature of much of the material related to the Nobel Peace Prize the students would likely benefit from more guidance and access to information at their level. Teacher comments suggested that they would like to see the Nobel laureates be presented in a more personal way, the ideal being to have a laureate speak at the school or locally. This has been done in Portland through The Wholistic Peace Institute.

References

- Bickmore, K. (1997, July). Teaching conflict and conflict resolution in school: (Extra-) curricular considerations. Unpublished paper presented at Connections International Social Studies Conference, Sydney NSW, Australia.
- Brunner, J., & Lewis, D. (2005, September). A safe school's top 10 needs. Education Digest, 71 (1), 21-24. Retrieved January 19, 2006, from the Professional Development Collection Database.
- Butcher, K.T., & Manning, M. Lee (2005, September/October). Creating Safe Schools. Clearing House, 79 (1), 55-60.
- Coloroso, B. (2002). The bully, the bullied, and the bystander. New York: Harper Collins.
- Dorn, M. (2005, November). Beyond bullying programs. School Planning and Management, 44 (1), S8-S10. Retrieved January 19, 2006, from the Professional Development Collection Database.
- Fraser, M.W., Day, S.H., Galinsky, M.J., Hodges, V.G., & Smolowski, P.R. (2004). Conduct problems and peer rejection in childhood: A randomized trial of the Making Choices and Strong Families programs. Research on Social Work Practice, 14 (5), 313-324. Retrieved January 19, 2006, from the Professional Development Collection Database.
- Giles, J.W., & Heyman, G.D. (2005). Young children's beliefs about the relationship between gender and aggressive behavior. Child Development, 76 (1), 107-121. Retrieved January 19, 2006, from the Professional Development Collection Database.

Gubler, R. & Croxall, K. (2005). Reducing bullying through prevention. Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences, 97 (2), 65-66. Retrieved January 19, 2006, from the ERIC Database

Hernandez, T.J., & Seem, S.R. (2004). A safe school climate: A systematic approach and the school counselor. Professional School Counseling, 7 (4), 256-262.

Linder, J. (2005, April). Relational aggression among youth and adolescents: I hurt you through the grapevine. Presentation at Verbal bullying and relational aggression: Structuring a safe social atmosphere for youth, Portland, Or.

Beyond Anti-bullying 12

Luck, A. (2005, September 23). 50 ways to tackle bullies. Times Educational Supplement, 4653, 5. Retrieved January 19, 2006, from the Professional Development Collection Database.

Monohan, J. (2005, October 7). Days of reckoning. Times Educational Supplement, 4655, 12-13. Retrieved January 19, 2006, from the Professional Development Collection Database.

Mueller, M.E., & Parisi, M.J. (2002). Ways to minimize bullying. Master of arts action research project, Saint Xavier University and Skylight Professional Development Field-Based Master's Program. Retrieved January 19, 2006, from the ERIC Database.

Mullin-Rindler, N. (2003). New fixes for relational aggression. Education Digest, 69 (1), 9-11.

Oregon Department of Education (2003). Oregon's comprehensive guidance and counseling framework. Salem, Or: Author. Retrieved January 18, 2006, from <http://www.ode.state.or.us/cimcam/>.

Salmivalli, C., Kaukiainen, A., & Voetenm, M. (2005). Anti-bullying intervention: Implementation and outcome. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 75 (3), 465-487. Retrieved January 19, 2006, from the ERIC Database.

Thompson, M., & Grace, C.O. (2001). Best friends, worst enemies: Understanding the social lives of children. New York: Ballantine Books.

Tiet, Q.Q., Wasserman, G.A., Loeber, R., McReynolds, L.S., & Miller, L.S. (2001). Developmental and sex differences in types of conduct problems. Journal of Child and Family Studies, 10 (2), 181-197. Retrieved January 19, 2006, from the Professional Development Collection Database.



*Wholistic Peace Institute & the Oregon Department of
Education Nobel Peace Laureate Curriculum Pilot Study*

Peace Study – Survey #1

I am a: BOY GIRL (circle one); My Age: _____

My Teacher's name _____

Circle what you think for each of these statements

1=Strongly Agree; 2=Agree; 3=Disagree; 4=Strongly Disagree
(1=always) (2=usually) (3=not usually) (4=never)

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I feel safe at school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I feel safe going to and from school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I like to go to school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I am sometimes afraid to go to school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. Most people at school are kind. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I <u>do not</u> feel part of this school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. (Answer only if you ride the school bus,
Skip if you don't): I feel safe on the bus. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. I have friends at school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. My school is peaceful. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |



*Wholistic Peace Institute & the Oregon Department of
Education Nobel Peace Laureate Curriculum Pilot Study*

1=Strongly Agree; 2=Agree; 3=Disagree; 4=Strongly Disagree
(1=always) (2=usually) (3=not usually) (4=never)

10. I am bullied at school.	1	2	3	4
11. Other students are friendly to me.	1	2	3	4
12. I feel left out or alone at school	1	2	3	4
13. This school needs to be safer	1	2	3	4
14. I feel upset when someone is picked on	1	2	3	4
15. I solve problems without being mean	1	2	3	4
16. Violence is never a good solution	1	2	3	4
17. I try to make the world more peaceful	1	2	3	4
18. Some classmates can be hard to like	1	2	3	4
19. I feel some kid(s) might beat me up	1	2	3	4
20. Other students try to make me feel bad	1	2	3	4
21. I can help make the world more peaceful	1	2	3	4
22. I think being a peacemaker is important	1	2	3	4