

**Looking at School Violence Through the Eyes of Secondary, Public School
Teachers in the State Of Texas: What Role Do Teacher Behaviors Play?**

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by

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Abstract

A group of Texas, high school administrators met and asked for the author's assistance in helping them deal with school violence issues; more specifically, with how teacher behaviors escalate or de-escalate this problem. To find the answer, the constant comparative approach of qualitative theory was utilized for data collection, coding, and data analysis. Open ended questionnaires were completed by practicing school teachers to determine teacher behaviors that may either escalate or de-escalate potentially violent situations in the classroom and school. The completed questionnaires were then analyzed and reviewed by a violence learning focus group comprised of teachers, administrators, counselors, education professors, and experts outside of the field of education such as psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, medical personnel, law enforcement personnel, juvenile court judges, child advocates, and attorneys. From the findings of the research and the comments of the violence learning focus groups, suggestions were developed to help teachers and schools reduce behaviors that might escalate student violence and to increase behaviors that would de-escalate student violence.

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Introduction

Violent and aggressive students are of concern to every school in the region, state, and nation. Discovering ways to help teachers deal with such students is of great importance. While there are a variety of issues surrounding school violence, this research sought to discover knowledge which will affect one specific violence area: how teacher behaviors may either escalate or de-escalate potentially violent situations. Administrators from high need, low SES public, high schools in the state of Texas met and asked for the author's assistance in helping them deal with school violence issues, and more specifically, how teacher behaviors escalate or de-escalate this problem. To find the answer to this, the constant comparative approach of qualitative theory was utilized for data collection and data analysis. Open ended questionnaires were completed by practicing school teachers to determine teacher behaviors that may either escalate or de-escalate potentially violent situations in the classroom and school. The completed questionnaires were then analyzed and reviewed by a violence learning focus group comprised of teachers, administrators, counselors, education professors, and experts outside of the field of education such as psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, medical personnel, law enforcement personnel, juvenile court judges, child advocates, and attorneys. From the findings of the research and the comments of the violence learning focus groups, suggestions were developed to help teachers and schools reduce behaviors that might escalate student violence and to increase behaviors that would de-escalate student violence.

Review of Literature

There has been a great deal of research conducted on the topic of teacher behavior. Within this broad category, the author sought out specific information on how teacher behavior affects student aggression. In doing so, the goal was never to blame teachers for classroom or student aggression and violence; the goal was to discover how teachers can act and react in ways that will create positive and peaceful classroom environments. The literature supports this effort: "If administrators and teachers want to change student behavior and attitudes, they should start by modifying their own behavior and attitudes.

Students learn to act in the ways we have taught them to act” (Moore, 1997, p. 71). Van Acker, Grant, and Henry (1996) echo this sentiment: “teachers require information on their pattern of interaction with individual students. Only then would differential treatment of specific students become evident” (p. 332).

In a preliminary questionnaire designed by the author, teachers reported that they see the following behaviors in other teachers: bullying, derogatory comments, gossip, disrespect of authority, harassment, predetermined expectations of others, discord between individuals and groups, and angry outbursts. Not only did teachers witness these actions among themselves, but they labeled these behaviors as being either violence or precursors to violence. These are some of the very behaviors schools are trying to eradicate from the student population; yet, such efforts will find limited success if teachers continue to act in a like manner. As one survey respondent said, “Teachers model expectations – if they show aggression, they will get aggression.”

The literature documents similar findings to those of the preliminary study. Hymen and Perone (1998) determined that at least 50-60 percent of all students experience maltreatment by an educator at least once in their school careers. In general, a school may unwittingly contribute to student aggression through inappropriate classroom placement, irrelevant instruction, inconsistent management, overcrowded classrooms, rigid behavioral demands, or insensitivity to student diversity (Gable, Manning, and Bullock, 1997; Gable and Van Acker, 2000). Conversely, elements which may curb aggression include a positive school climate, identification of and response to early warning signs, relevant coursework which is neither too simple or too complex, clear classroom rules and expectations, and the avoidance of power struggles (Gable and Van Acker, 2000).

Other research has explored more specific teacher behaviors and results. For instance, Mullins, Chard, Hartman, Bowlby, Rich, and Burke (1995) studied teachers’ response to children who are depressed and discovered that there was an increase in a teacher’s self-reported level of personal rejection and a decrease in the level of personal attraction to children who were depressed. Furthermore, the same decrease in personal attraction and increase in personal rejection were found for boys aged six thru eleven who showed an increase in social problems or delinquency. Finally, Mullins (1995, et al.), reported that teachers’ negative responses to these troubled students might grow stronger over time.

Van Acker, Grant, and Henry (1996) drew several conclusions from their research. First, there is a connection between school climate and violence and that schools can adversely affect behavior. Second, teachers may displace their own feelings of anger and aggression onto students. Another potential problem is that labeling a particular student as being potentially violent may serve as self-fulfilling prophecy. This ties in with the need students have for predictability:

Thus a high-risk student wishing to increase the predictability of the classroom must resort to inappropriate behavior....The lack of predictable feedback following desired behavior appears to suggest a situation in which the school may well provide a context for the exacerbation of undesired social behavior on the part of students most at risk for demonstrating aggressive and violent behavior. (Van Acker, Grant and Henry, 1996, p. 331)

Krugman and Krugman (1984) echoed this idea of students behaving according to what is expected of them. They wrote that students adapt quickly to whatever label a teacher gives them in order to fit in the classroom environment.

Students with social, emotional, or behavioral problems are greatly affected by the way others respond to them and to the feedback that they receive. Pace, Mullins, Beesley, Hill, and Carson, (1999) stated that:

It is argued that children who have significant emotional and behavioral problems respond less positively to others and thus elicit fewer positive responses and more negative responses from others in interpersonal relationships. These problems create a lower sense of acceptance or attraction toward the child and may increase avoidance and rejection toward the child. Thus, as suggested by the authors, these processes may become entangled in a vicious circle of reciprocal causation. (p. 151)

Moreover, White and Jones (2000) wrote that “a consistent flow of public correction of a child may serve to exacerbate the negative impressions peers often have of disruptive, non-compliant classmates” (p. 320). This negative impression can be countered over time, but the reputation earned earlier is difficult for a student to overcome.

Further research documents how a teacher’s response to a student affects that student academically. Carr, Taylor, and Robinson (1991) found that children who misbehave in response to instruction receive less instruction than do compliant children. Carr, et al., refer to this student behavior as “punishment of teaching efforts” (p. 532). Such punishment may lead to the “curriculum of non-instruction” whereby the teacher and the student covertly decide to leave one another alone (Van Acker, Grant, and Henry, 1996, p. 331).

This literature review documents that how a teacher treats a student has a profound impact on student behavior, student instruction, and classroom environment.

Methodology of Study

This is a qualitative study. As such, grounded theory methods were utilized for collecting, coding, and analyzing data. Guided by grounded theory, the data are “inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents [issues of school violence]. . . and are verified through systematic data collection and analysis of the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Specifically, two qualitative questionnaires were employed to determine whether teacher behaviors could either escalate or de-escalate potentially violent situations in the classroom and school. The first questionnaire (a copy of which is in Appendix A) consisted of six questions related to demographics and five questions about the respondents’ teacher education training. Following these initial questions were seven open-ended, qualitative questions covering teacher behavior, student behavior, and teacher training. Finally, the questionnaire provided space for additional comments.

The second questionnaire (see Appendix A) contained the same initial demographic and teacher education training questions as did the first. It also had five open-ended questions regarding teacher behavior, student behavior, and teacher training. In addition, this questionnaire asked the respondents to provide feedback to a sampling of teacher behaviors previously identified as impacting student behavior. Respondents were then asked if they could identify these same behaviors and attitudes in students at their schools and if they believed that their peer teachers engaged in such behaviors. Space for additional comments was available on the questionnaire for clarification purposes.

Demographics with Regard to the Respondents

The group of respondents consisted of eighty-nine public, secondary school teachers in the state of Texas. Of these, 70% were female, and 30% were male. Eighty-nine percent identified themselves as Caucasian, 2% Hispanic, 2% Native American, and 6% chose not to answer the question. The teachers represented 32 different public secondary schools. Forty percent were from low socio-economic (SES) high schools, 42% were from middle class SES high schools and 18% were from high SES schools.

As for length of time teaching, there was a fairly equitable representation across the categories provided with 21% having taught less than five years, 21% five to ten years, 26% eleven to twenty years, and 20% more than 20 years. Two percent did not answer the question.

Respondents were also asked about the subject they teach. The majority (58.9%) teaches one of the core subjects (math, science, English). Four percent identified themselves as special education teachers and one teaches English as a Second Language. The other teachers, accounting for 27% of the respondents, teach one of the following classes: foreign language, music/band/choir, physical education/athletics, speech/drama, business, industrial/vocational, art, computer technology, or ROTC. Almost 7% stated that they teach more than one subject.

Teacher Education Training of the Respondents

The respondents were asked about their pre-service teacher education training as it relates to classroom management, school safety, and school violence. Only 16.5% stated that they had received training in college to prepare them for school safety and violence issues. Of those who had this specific training, only 12% rated it effective.

When asked about training in classroom management, 72.5% reported that they received such training in college. In a follow-up question, they were asked to describe briefly the worth and value of their classroom management class or violence preparation training. Some simply responded with a general description of what the course was, e.g., classroom management, behavior modification or a methods class. Others specified what they had been taught including positive reinforcement techniques, conflict resolution, keeping students interested and on task, organizational skills, and discipline techniques.

Very few of the respondents reported a positive and worthwhile classroom management course. Instead, there were several negative comments. One teacher stated that their instructor had never taught in a public school and did not know what he was talking about. Another wrote that the class offered a number of theories that did not work in the real world. Several respondents who thought that classroom management training had absolutely no relationship to real life echoed this sentiment.

Additionally, many of the respondents reported that they could not remember what they had been taught in their classroom management courses, and stated that they did not have any such training in their

pre-service teacher education programs. The vast majority of respondents, 89%, said that school violence was an issue that should be addressed in university preparation programs.

Findings: Questionnaire I

This discussion will focus on the findings from questionnaire I (found in Appendix A). The first question was “What teacher behaviors and actions may help to prevent or de-escalate violent situations in the classroom or school?” The responses were grouped into three categories as displayed on Table 1.1 below:

**Table 1.1
What Teacher Behaviors May Help to Prevent or De-Escalate Violent Classroom Situation**

Category	Specific Action or Trait
Classroom Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be visible and maintain order • Set boundaries; have, follow, and enforce class rules daily • Give students a voice in discipline • Be observant and aware of subtle changes or when something is getting out of control • Be proactive, prepared, and organized; keep students busy • React with authority to arguments • Pick battles – ones that can be won • Predictable behavior • Allow students to express themselves appropriately and teach them how to do this • Be fair • Positive learning environment and interaction
Attitudes and Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build relationships with students • Self-control: control temper and anger • Respect students • Positive attitude: friendly, kind, encouraging, supportive
Skills and Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand body language – teacher’s and students’ • Abnormal student behavior • Good listening skills with and between students • Conflict management • Have good instructional skills

Overall, these responses reinforce the belief that teachers need to be proactive and should seek to remove any obstacles that would prevent the creation of classroom environments in which all students feel valued and capable of learning and succeeding. Teachers need to be proactive by careful planning and

preparation, establishing clear rules and expectations that are enforced consistently and fairly, being observant, building relationships with students, exercising self-control, and by showing students respect. Such efforts, according to the respondents, lead to a safer, more positive classroom climate.

Furthermore, teachers need to be aware of the nonverbal messages they are sending as well as students' nonverbal communication. Respondents confirmed that when verbal messages and nonverbal messages conflict, the nonverbal messages are the ones that will be received. Respondents said that teachers must pay careful attention not only to what they say to students, but how they say it. The same applied to student messages. The need for teachers to monitor student nonverbal communication was expressed. According to teachers, aggression builds slowly from other emotions such as anger, frustration, depression, and embarrassment. An observant teacher will be able to discern subtle but serious shifts in a student's mood and demeanor, and that is the time to take a special interest in that student.

One respondent summed up the comments of others by saying, "Those who maintain good order in the classroom, show *respect* for others, and have high expectations for appropriate behaviors do not usually have violence issues to face" (emphasis in original).

The second question from questionnaire I was: "What teacher behaviors and actions may increase the likelihood of violent situations in the classroom or school?" The responses (see Table 1.2) fell within two main categories: classroom management and attitudes and behaviors.

Table 1.2
Teacher Behaviors That Increase the Likelihood of
Violent Situations in the Classroom

Category	Specific Action or Trait
Classroom Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No control or authority • Lack of supervision; not visible • Unclear rules or requirements; not addressing early behavior • Too controlling, rigid; unwilling to compromise • Inconsistent treatment of children • Paying too much attention to small problems
Attitudes and Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backing kids into a corner; humiliating challenging, confronting, provoking, demeaning students in front of the class • Not listening to students • Failure to notice warning signs • Disrespectful, rude; verbal bullying and attacks; sarcasm; prejudice • Negative attitude/rapport with students; not

	<p>caring, accepting, nurturing, sensitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting and staying angry; not remaining calm with angry students; taking problems with students personally; being argumentative or belligerent • Unfair; operating under preconceived ideas • Threatening body language • Not asking for help from other adults • Not learning true situation of students • Very passive or too nice • Unreasonable expectations
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The responses to question two are directly opposite of the behaviors given in response to the first question, particularly those listed under classroom management. By far, the most common answer to what teachers do that may increase the chances of a violent situation was backing students into a corner. Again and again, the responding teachers stated that humiliating, provoking, or demeaning students publicly is one of the worst actions a teacher can take and carries with it the potential for future problems. For many of the respondents, it comes down to the issue of respect. There is no doubt that teachers expect to be treated with respect; however, according to the respondents, there is a problem with teachers not respecting students. One teacher commented that “even the ‘worst’ kid can be treated respectfully within the classroom (by the teacher), and problems usually will not escalate into violence.”

Along with not respecting students is the concern among the respondents that some teachers do not care about students, verbally bully students, are belligerent towards students, and, in general, have a poor rapport with them. One respondent made the comment that “I think that many teachers don’t like kids, but they choose to teach. If there is any way to get the concept that you must like children in order to teach, that would be great.” This concern is supported in the literature. Anderson and Anderson (1995) studied pre-service teachers’ attitudes toward children and found that 15% of the subjects in their study had negative attitudes toward children with the most likely to hold negative attitudes being males majoring in secondary education. Furthermore, the authors found evidence that pre-service teachers are even more distrustful and hold more negative attitudes after completing student teaching. Such teachers will be unhappy and frustrated in the classroom and will be less likely to display the attitudes, behaviors, and skills needed to decrease the risk of aggression and violence in the classroom.

Additional pitfalls for teachers include not listening to students, negative body language, not noticing warning signs, and being too nice or passive. Just as one of the traits of a de-escalator was building relationships with students, one of the behaviors of a teacher more likely to experience student aggression was not learning the true situation of students. For example, one teacher related that an eighth grader's parents and younger sister had moved while he was at school, but they didn't tell him they were moving or where they were going. They were tired of feeding a big, growing boy and thought that he would be able to fend for himself. He did this for a few days by staying with friends. Eventually, his coaches found out what had happened, and his sister was contacted for the new address. Students, such as this young man, experience a variety of painful and overwhelming events that impact what happens at school. Teachers who know their students can help students receive proper care and supervision and facilitate services to meet other needs. According to respondents, this is vital in preventing unwanted behaviors from impacting the classroom environment.

Finally, the respondents said that teachers who do not ask for help from other adults might increase the likelihood of classroom aggression. Teaching can seem like a very isolated occupation, and for those experiencing problems with students, this isolation may seem even more profound. These are times when it is imperative that help is sought. One respondent mentioned that school administrators need to support teachers, but this support will be limited if administrators, or other teachers for that matter, do not know what kind of support or assistance is needed.

Findings: Questionnaire II

Approximately one-half of the questionnaires contained a chart which listed twenty-two behaviors or attitudes previously identified by a sample group of teachers as escalating the violence in classrooms. For each of these behaviors or attitudes, respondents were asked three questions: "Would you consider this violence, a precursor to violence, or neither?"; "Do you see this type of behavior in the students at your school?"; and "Do you think that teachers themselves engage in this behavior?" The responses to these questions can be found in Table 1.3 below. (Although *both* was not one of the responses offered for the first question, several people put it, so it is included in the Table.)

Table 1.3
A Response to Teacher Behaviors

Behavior or Attitude	Precursor to Violence, Violence, or Neither?	Do you see this behavior in students at your school?	Do you think that teachers engage in this behavior?
Social Isolation	Precursor: 58.1% Neither: 41.9%	Yes: 76.1% No: 19.6% No answer: 4.3%	Yes: 50% No: 39.1% No answer: 10.9%
Bullying	Precursor: 45.2% Violence: 54.8%	Yes: 65.2% No: 30.4% No answer: 4.3%	Yes: 32.6% No: 58.7% No answer: 8.7%
Derogatory Comments	Precursor: 83.9% Violence: 6.5% Neither: 9.7%	Yes: 93.5% No: 2.2% No answer: 4.3%	Yes: 58.7% No: 32.6% No answer: 8.7%
Verbal Abuse	Precursor: 58.1% Violence: 35.5% Neither: 3.2% Both: 3.2%	Yes: 82.6% No: 10.9% No answer: 6.5%	Yes: 39.1% No: 47.8% No answer: 13%
Threats	Precursor: 58.1% Violence: 41.9%	Yes: 69.6% No: 23.9% No answer: 6.5%	Yes: 30.4% No: 56.5% No answer: 13%
Stealing/Theft	Precursor: 41.9% Violence: 48.4% Neither: 6.5% Both: 3.2%	Yes: 76.1% No: 17.4% No answer: 6.5%	Yes: 8.7% No: 76.1% No answer: 15.2%
Truancy/Coming in late or leaving early	Precursor: 41.9% Neither: 58.1%	Yes: 95.7% No answer: 4.3%	Yes: 28.3% No: 60.9% No answer: 10.9%
Disrespect of authority	Precursor: 67.7% Violence: 12.9% Neither: 12.9% Both: 3.2 % No answer: 3.2%	Yes: 93.5% No: 2.2% No answer: 4.3%	Yes: 34.8% No: 56.5% No answer: 8.7%
Weapons possession	Precursor: 32.3% Violence: 67.7%	Yes: 26.1% No: 67.4% No answer: 6.5%	Yes: 2.2% No: 89.1% No answer: 8.7%
Vandalism	Precursor: 41.9% Violence: 58.1%	Yes: 80.4% No: 15.2% No answer: 4.3%	Yes: 2.2% No: 89.1% No answer: 8.7%
Bomb/bomb threats	Precursor: 12.9% Violence: 87.1%	Yes: 43.5% No: 47.8% No answer: 8.7%	Yes: 2.2% No: 89.1% No answer: 8.7%
Exhibits improper dress or clothing	Precursor: 38.7% Violence: 3.2% Neither: 58.1%	Yes: 91.3% No: 4.3% No answer: 4.3%	Yes: 34.8% No: 56.5% No answer: 8.7%
Gang membership or activities	Precursor: 61.3% Violence: 35.5% Both: 3.2%	Yes: 78.3% No: 15.2% No answer: 6.5%	Yes: 4.3% No: 89.1% No answer: 6.5%
Physical fights	Precursor: 12.9% Violence: 87.1%	Yes: 80.4% No: 13% No answer: 6.5%	Yes: 2.2% No: 91.3% No answer: 6.5%
Pushing and shoving	Precursor: 48.4% Violence: 45.2% Neither: 3.2% Both: 3.2%	Yes: 82.6% No: 10.9% No answer: 6.5%	Yes: 4.3% No: 89.1% No answer: 6.5%

Harassment	Precursor: 61.3% Violence: 35.5% Neither: 3.2%	Yes: 80.4% No: 13% No answer: 6.5%	Yes: 17.4% No: 73.9% No answer: 8.7%
Gossip	Precursor: 51.6% Violence: 3.2% Neither: 45.2%	Yes: 89.1% No: 4.3% No answer: 6.5%	Yes: 63% No: 26.1% No answer: 10.9%
Pre-determined expectations of others	Precursor: 22.6% Violence: 3.2% Neither: 71% No answer: 3.2%	Yes: 63% No: 23.9% No answer: 13%	Yes: 60.9% No: 28.3% No answer: 10.9%
Discord between individuals or groups	Precursor: 80.6% Violence: 6.5% Neither: 9.7% No answer: 3.2%	Yes: 76.1% No: 15.2% No answer: 8.7%	Yes: 45.7% No: 45.7% No answer: 8.7%
Vulgar, obscene language or gestures	Precursor: 51.6% Violence: 41.9% Neither: 6.5%	Yes: 87% No: 8.7% No answer: 4.3%	Yes: 21.7% No: 67.4% No answer: 10.9%
Serious discipline problems	Precursor: 61.3% Violence: 29% Neither: 6.5% Both: 3.2%	Yes: 80.4% No: 13% No answer: 6.5%	Yes: 6.5% No: 82.6% No answer: 10.9%
Angry outbursts	Precursor: 54.8% Violence: 41.9% No answer: 3.2%	Yes: 84.8% No: 8.7% No answer: 6.5%	Yes: 39.1% No: 47.8% No answer: 13%

Out of the twenty-two behaviors and attitudes, a majority of the respondents labeled the following twelve behaviors as precursors to violence: social isolation, derogatory comments, verbal abuse, threats, disrespect of authority, gang membership/activities, harassment, gossip, discord between individuals or groups, vulgar or obscene language or gestures, serious discipline problems, and angry outbursts. Additionally, a majority also reported that they see this type of behavior in the students at their school. Furthermore, majorities stated that they think teachers themselves engage in three of these behaviors: social isolation, derogatory comments, and gossip. In one behavior, discord between individuals and groups, the respondents were evenly divided on the question of teachers behaving in such manner. Respondents also stated that teachers exhibit the following negative behaviors: threats (30.9%), disrespect of authority (34.8%), and angry outbursts (39.1%). Overall, one-third of the respondents think teachers engage in these negative behaviors. Six of the behaviors listed were labeled as violence by a majority of the respondents: bullying, stealing/theft, weapons possession, vandalism, bomb/bomb threats, and physical threats. Of these six, a majority reported seeing only three of these behaviors in the students at their school: bullying, vandalism, and physical fights. Respondents did not think that teachers engaged in these behaviors; however, one-third of the respondents do think that teachers bully their students. This supports unpublished research

done by Olweus (1996, cited in Hyman and Perone, 1998), who found that 10% of 5100 Norwegian elementary and junior high school teachers had bullied their students on a regular basis.

Implications and Recommendations

Recommendations and Implications by the Violence Learning Focus Group

A summary of the findings were submitted to a group of experts from education and from fields outside of education including psychology, the behavioral sciences, medicine, and law enforcement. Along with the results of the questionnaires, the members of this focus group were asked the following questions: What responses do you agree with and why; what responses do you disagree with and why; what, if anything, do you think has been overlooked.

Generally, the members of the focus group agreed with the results of the questionnaires. Their comments reinforced the finding of showing respect toward students as a way to de-escalate potential violent behavior. They discussed fair and consistent treatment of all students, teachers' awareness of their own behavior, and teachers being willing to admit their mistakes and apologize to students. The one dissent arose regarding the idea of letting students have a say in discipline: "I do not think letting your students have a voice in discipline is particularly important. They really don't care as long as you are fair and consistent. They will adapt to almost any structure of discipline."

When asked what had been overlooked, there were only a few suggestions. First was that discipline should be age appropriate which can be difficult because not all students in a class will be on the same maturity level. Another stated that class rules need to be posted as a reminder and that teachers need to find opportunities to model appropriate behavior and rule following. Again, the issue of respect was brought up in terms of respecting those with whom one disagrees.

The next question asked what behaviors, attitudes, skills, knowledge, or training should be emphasized. The focus group's suggestions first addressed skills teachers need to possess. For instance, teachers need to learn to read and understand both verbal and nonverbal communication, to "listen with your eyes." Also, teachers need to be adaptable and not afraid of change. Additionally, teachers need to be compassionate and truly care for their students. One member of the focus group encouraged teachers to ask themselves, "What will students remember about me in twenty years?"

The focus group suggested that teachers need to be able to help students develop the skills and self-discipline to reach their potential and succeed in school because too many students lack these skills and do not receive encouragement and support at home. Along with this, teachers also need to be able to teach and model for students respect and tolerance for others because, again, some children do not learn this elsewhere.

The final question, how teachers can be made aware of their own negative behaviors and trained to replace them with more positive ones, prompted few suggestions and a warning of the inherent difficulty in achieving the aim of the question. The two concrete suggestions were role-playing as “one of our best teaching methods” and student and mentor evaluations. In response to this question, two focus group members sounded a pessimistic tone. One wrote that “teachers must be committed to be open to learning regarding their negatives. This may be harder than working with the students.” The other member, a secondary administrator, responded:

This is tough. The problem is that the patient, in this scenario, does not believe he/she is sick. Even when these teachers are made aware of their own negative behaviors, they often do not care to change, expecting all around them to adapt. In dealing with these people, I always discuss how their behavior is affecting the student, trying to get them to focus on what’s best for kids and not on what’s best for me.

The focus group recommended that effort be made to develop an instrument by which teachers could evaluate their own behavior and make the necessary changes – in other words, an instrument that would assist teachers in recognizing their negative behaviors without the perception that such efforts are an attack on them personally or professionally.

In addition, the focus group suggested more field experiences and more exposure to real life situations through classes led by people with classroom experience and those who have been involved in crisis situations such as current teachers and administrators, school counselors, and police liaisons. The teachers we surveyed also thought that pre-service teachers need more exposure to actual classrooms and that university professors should spend more time in the schools so that they stay current with the issues and problems of the profession.

A concern was also expressed about giving pre-service teachers instruction in psychology:

Giving teachers training in psychology may be as dangerous as letting someone read about surgery and then allowing them to operate. I'm afraid some of us would find the "boogey man." We need some understanding of our limits and trained professionals available if we need help.

Recommendations and Implications by Teacher Respondents

The teacher respondents of the study felt that teacher preparation programs could improve teacher training with regard to issues of school violence. Their responses (found in Table 1.4) were grouped into these three categories: special classes, special knowledge and skills, and warning signs.

**Table 1.4
How Teacher Preparation Programs Can Improve Teacher Training with
Regard to Issues of School Violence**

Category	Specific Training
Special Classes or Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taught by specialists, i.e., psychologists, law enforcement, someone who has seen school violence • Psychology: abnormal psychology, emotionally disturbed children, child psychology, adolescent behavior • Criminal justice • Counteracting violence in the media • Mediation training • Conflict management/resolution • Character education • Classroom management • Personality differences – what triggers different reactions • Behavior management/modification • Anger and stress management • Law and legal responsibilities • Age specific knowledge about likely responses to stress
Presentation of Special Skills and Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict management and resolution • Listening skills • Anger and stress management
Presentation of Warning Signs of Particular Social Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gang involvement • Depression and suicide • Drug/alcohol use and abuse
A Knowledge and Understanding of Teacher-Student Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of own behavior toward students and impact on students

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to develop rapport with students
Understanding Student Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Cultural differences and attitudes • Past violence

The suggestions for special training flow naturally from the responses about teacher actions and attitudes. The respondents believe that teachers need a greater understanding of child and adolescent psychology and behavior and to be taught by experts. Conflict resolution and anger and stress management training would benefit teachers and students alike. It is not surprising that the respondents would recommend training in listening skills since this came up in both of the previous questions. As concerning the warning signs, it was surprising that signs of potential aggression or violence were not suggested; however, the three behaviors listed (gang involvement, depression and suicide, and drug/alcohol abuse) are often associated with aggressive and violent outbursts.

This is a vast and broad list of training that practicing teachers believe teacher education programs need to include in their curricula; however, this special training could be grouped into existing courses such as classroom management (mediation training, conflict management, behavior management, recognition of and response to precursors), psychology (personality differences, depression and suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, anger and stress management, mental health training), and multicultural studies (poverty, cultural differences and attitudes).

Other suggestions may require additions to existing teacher education curricula. For instance, training in school law is not usually addressed in pre-service teacher training but in educational leadership programs. Additionally, criminal justice training is not a normal part of teacher education training, and a separate criminal justice course may not be necessary; it might be sufficient to include it as a chapter in another course. The point these teachers are making is that pre-service teachers need to be exposed to the fundamentals of certain areas outside of education.

Preliminary Recommendations and Implications for a Teacher Behavioral Assessment Model

As previously mention, one recommendation for helping teachers understand and detect their own teaching behaviors was the development of a teacher behavior assessment instrument. The primary reasons

for assessment is improvement (Helm, 1997; Natriello, 1990; Stronge, 1997). The developed instrument must be designed so that it generates feedback and promotes improvement. Stronge (1997), wrote that assessments should be outcome-oriented, improvement-oriented, and characterized by two-way communication between evaluator and the assessor.

To achieve the goal of an outcome-oriented and improvement-oriented assessment model, the researcher has proposed a three-part instrument (self-evaluation, student evaluation, and peer evaluation) to be implemented throughout a cycle of on-going self- and peer partner assessments (an example of the model is located in Appendix B). The three separate evaluations were designed to ensure that a balanced view of the teacher emerges from this assessment process.

The questions and issues raised in the assessment model were based on the responses to the teacher questionnaires and the feedback from the Violence Learning Focus Group. Thus, the major themes are classroom management, attitudes and behaviors, and skills and knowledge. Though addressed in different ways, the three different evaluations (self, student, and peer) work together to present an accurate and fair picture of an individual teacher's strengths and weaknesses in these areas.

Phase One: Initial Evaluations

As stated above, there are three different evaluations in the proposed Teacher Behavior Assessment Instrument: self, student, and peer. Each of these was chosen for a specific reason based upon a careful review of the literature, the research findings, and input from the focus group.

Self-Evaluation. The first step in the TBAI is a questionnaire that allows teachers to evaluate themselves in the areas of classroom management, behavior and attitudes, and skills and knowledge. This is accomplished through a series of open-ended questions that require teachers to reflect on how they interact with students in instruction, discipline, behavior, and attitudes as well as how confident they feel as regards skills and knowledge such as verbal and nonverbal communication, conflict management, and warning signs of troubled or violent students.

According to Airasian and Gullickson (1997), teacher self-evaluation should have the following elements: a clear focus, information that offers an objective perspective, opportunities for reflection, and a decision about practice and strategies for any needed improvement.

Student Evaluation. Though there has been some debate regarding the validity of student questionnaires in primary and secondary schools, Peterson, Wahlquist, and Bone (2000) determined in their study that “student surveys are not merely popularity contests; students distinguish between merely liking a teacher and recognizing one who enables their learning” (p. 148). The researcher included student surveys not only for the reason cited by Peterson, et al., but also because students spend more time with teachers than anyone else in the school setting.

The student evaluation is a short, fifteen-question survey that may be used to determine how students perceive an individual teacher and how students think that particular teacher relates and interacts with them. It covers a variety of aspects of the teacher-student relationship including classroom management and discipline, schoolwork, rapport, and nonverbal communication. The students are asked to respond to the fifteen statements by indicating that they agree, disagree, or are not sure.

Peer evaluations. According to Barber (1990), the role of peer reviews is not to pass judgment but to keep teachers objective in their own self-assessments; therefore, we have included peer assessments as part of the Teacher Behavior Assessment Instrument.

The peer survey consists of eighteen statements, most of which mirror those on the student survey and also offer the same responses (agree, disagree, or not sure). Careful thought was given to what should be asked on this instrument because peer evaluations should elicit factual job-related information that the respondent can provide through first-hand knowledge and observation (Stronge and Ostrander, 1997). Areas addressed include teacher-teacher relationships, student comments, professionalism, classroom climate, behavior and attitudes, teacher-student relationships, and school climate. The number of teachers submitting peer assessments may depend of the size of a school, but it is recommended that five-ten peers evaluate each teacher.

Phase Two: Meeting with a Peer Partner

After all of the evaluations are completed, it is proposed that the teacher will schedule a meeting with a peer partner. This partner will be chosen by the teacher to increase the likelihood that the teacher trusts the partner and is comfortable addressing discovered weaknesses. Keig (2000) states that “colleagues who respect and trust each other can be invaluable in helping to improve each other’s teaching” (p. 148).

Another reason for letting the teacher pick the peer partner is to make it clear that this evaluation is for the purpose of feedback for improvement and not for personnel decisions.

The first part of the meeting will be a review of the teacher's self-assessment. Helm (1997) writes that it is important for the teacher to offer his or her evaluation first because it can be more productive and may mitigate defensive feelings or reactions and because self-criticism is easier to handle than criticism from another.

Once the self-assessment has been discussed, the teacher and peer partner will move on to the student and peer evaluations. These responses should be compared with the teacher's and should lead to a discussion of ways in which the perception of the various parties do or do not differ from one another. From this discussion, an image of the teacher should emerge which takes into account the feedback from the different assessments.

Based upon the above information and discussion, the teacher, with the help of the peer partner, should set goals and design a plan of improvement to meet those goals. The goals should be attainable, and the improvement plan should include definite actions to be taken. Examples of goals and improvement plans include:

Goal: I will work to stop bringing up my students' past mistakes.

Plan: Stop and think before I speak when talking to students about current problems. Give students a specific phrase they can use if I do bring up past mistakes such as "Let's only discuss what has happened right now."

Goal: I will develop a greater understanding of the warning signs of drug abuse.

Plan: Meet with the counselor or other knowledgeable individuals about what the warning signs are. Find out about different drugs and how they affect the user. Find out what my school's procedure is for reporting suspected drug use.

Goal: Take time to learn more about my students and their lives.

Plan: Listen to conversations in hallways or in class during free time to learn what they are interested in. Take small steps to build trust, i.e., ask about their weekends, the bands on their t-shirts, books they are reading, favorite TV shows. Make writing/journal assignments that encourage students to provide appropriate personal information by asking about families, friends, plans for the future, etc.

Once goals and plans are set, the teacher and peer partner will schedule another round of assessments and evaluation meeting. The timing of this will be determined by the amount of time needed to meet the set goals. Enough time should elapse to allow for improvement but not so much that the teacher is deprived of important feedback on his/her progress. In between evaluations, the teacher should practice on-going self-evaluation through reflective journaling and monitoring progress according to the improvement plan.

At the end of the designated time, the teacher should complete the self-evaluation tool, and students and peers should be given the chance to re-assess the teacher. The same evaluations may be used, or they may be modified to better measure the progress made since the initial assessment. The meeting with the peer partner will be very similar to the first one with a discussion of the new evaluations. The main difference will be that the discussion will center on the goals set earlier and whether or not they were met. If any were not met, it will be necessary to determine why. Reasons for this may include that not enough time was allowed to achieve the goal, the steps in the improvement plan were not what was needed, or the goals may have been too far-reaching. Whatever the reason, the goals and improvement plan should be revised. Additionally, for goals that were met, steps to maintain this progress should be discussed to help the teacher stay on track.

Plans for Future Research

The Teacher Behavior Assessment Instrument needs to be piloted and evaluated. It has been reviewed by a focus group of teachers and administrators but much more work needs to be done. The instrument needs to be field-tested and research conducted to see if it has merit.

Conclusion

There is work yet to be done on this research, namely further piloting of the Teacher Behavior Assessment Instrument to determine its usefulness. However, this research has resulted in important findings with regard to teacher behaviors. Through this research, specific teacher behaviors that either escalate or de-escalate classroom violence have been identified. As such, it is the desire of the researcher that the information will be useful to teachers as they work to create classroom environments in which all students are treated with respect and compassion, thereby helping to reduce aggression and violence in our schools.

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Appendix A
Surveys Administered at Participating Schools

Survey I:**School Safety and Violence Questionnaire**

The following survey is being conducted to determine how best to prepare future and current teachers to deal with incidents of violence in the classroom. The answer to this question is being sought from current teachers. As a professional who experiences life in the classroom on a daily basis, we consider you "a source of expert information" with regard to this issue. If you would, please give careful thought to the following questions and answer them as completely as possible. Your answers will remain strictly confidential and will help universities develop curriculum for pre-service teachers and in-service training for current teachers. Thank you so much for your willingness to help in this important endeavor. Please also know that you are under absolutely no obligation to participate in this project. If you do choose to participate, please know how very grateful we are and how much we appreciate your professional concern.

Please tell us about yourself:

Gender: _____
 Current Position: _____
 Length of time in teaching: _____
 Subject area you teach: _____
 Grade level you teach: _____
 Your ethnicity: _____

College or university from which you graduated: _____

Did you have any classes or training in college that helped you prepare for school safety and violence?

Yes _____ No _____ Was it effective? Yes _____ No _____ N/A _____

What about training in classroom management? Yes _____ No _____

Could you briefly describe your classroom management class or violence preparation training (content, worth)? _____

Do you believe school violence is an issue that should be addressed in university preparation programs?

Yes _____ No _____

Have you seen an increase in the amount and intensity of violence at your school? Yes _____ No _____

We know that your time is so limited. We appreciate your willingness to help the profession in a very profound manner by providing your expertise. Would you take a few extra minutes to answer the following seven questions? Please feel free to add additional comments based on your own insights, expertise, or experiences at any point.

1. What *teacher behaviors and actions* may help to prevent or de-escalate violent situations in the classroom or school?
2. What *teacher behaviors and actions* may increase the likelihood of violent situations in the classroom or school?
3. What *student behaviors and actions* may help to prevent or de-escalate violent situations in the classroom or school?

4. What *student behaviors and actions* may **increase** the likelihood of violent situations in the classroom or school?

5. What student behaviors, attitudes, statements, etc., do you think may serve as warning signs of future violent behavior?

6. How can teachers best be trained by teacher education preparation programs to recognize precursors (i.e., teacher and student behaviors, events or actions) that lead to school violence and respond appropriately?

7. In order to deal with possible school violence, what training and areas of knowledge or content should pre-service teachers be exposed to and proficient in before becoming a teacher (i.e., conflict resolution/management, character education, etc.)?

Please feel free to add additional comments based on your on insights, expertise, or experiences.

Survey II:

School Safety and Violence Questionnaire

The following survey is being conducted to determine how best to prepare future and current teachers to deal with incidents of violence in the classroom. The answer to this question is being sought from current teachers. As a professional who experiences life in the classroom on a daily basis, we consider you "a source of expert information" with regard to this issue. If you would, please give careful thought to the following questions and answer them as completely as possible. Your answers will remain strictly confidential and will help universities develop curriculum for pre-service teachers and in-service training for current teachers. Thank you so much for your willingness to help in this important endeavor. Please also know that you are under absolutely no obligation to participate in this project. If you do choose to participate, please know how very grateful we are and how much we appreciate your professional concern.

Please tell us about yourself:

Gender: _____
 Current Position: _____
 Length of time in teaching: _____
 Subject area you teach: _____
 Grade level you teach: _____
 Your ethnicity: _____

College or university from which you graduated: _____

Did you have any classes or training in college that helped you prepare for school safety and violence?

Yes _____ No _____ Was it effective? Yes _____ No _____ N/A _____

What about training in classroom management? Yes _____ No _____

Could you briefly describe your classroom management class or violence preparation training (content, worth)? _____

Do you believe school violence is an issue that should be addressed in university preparation programs?

Yes _____ No _____

Have you seen an increase in the amount and intensity of violence at your school? Yes _____ No _____

We know that your time is so limited. We appreciate your willingness to help the profession in a very profound manner by providing your expertise. Would you take a few extra minutes to answer the following seven questions? Please feel free to add additional comments based on your own insights, expertise, or experiences at any point.

1. What teacher characteristics and behaviors create aggressive and violent behavior in students?

2. What **teacher behaviors and actions** may help to prevent or de-escalate violent situations in the classroom or school?

3. For each behavior listed on the chart below, please answer if you consider that behavior violence, a precursor to violence, or neither; if you see each type of behavior in the students at your school; and if you think that teachers themselves engage in each type of behavior.

Behavior	Would you consider this violence, a precursor to violence, or neither?	Do you see this type of behavior in the students at your school?	Do you think that teachers themselves engage in this behavior?
Social isolation			
Bullying			
Derogatory comments			
Verbal abuse			
Threats			
Stealing/theft			
Truancy/coming in late or leaving early			
Disrespect of authority			
Weapons possession			
Vandalism			
Bomb/bomb threats			
Exhibits improper dress or clothing			
Gang membership/activities			
Physical fights			
Pushing and shoving			
Harassment			
Gossip			
Pre-determined expectations of others			
Discord between individuals or groups			
Vulgar, obscene language or gestures			
Serious disciplinary problems			
Angry outbursts			

4. What other actions, not listed above, would you consider violent behaviors or precursors to violence?
5. How can teachers best be trained by teacher education preparation programs to recognize precursors (i.e., teacher and student behaviors, events or actions) that lead to school violence and respond appropriately?
6. In order to deal with possible school violence, what training and areas of knowledge or content should pre-service teachers be exposed to and proficient in before becoming a teacher (i.e., conflict resolution/management, character education, etc.)?

Please feel free to add additional comments based on your on insights, expertise, or experiences.

Appendix B

The Teacher Behavior Assessment Instrument

Teacher Self-Assessment (Part I)

Classroom Management:

1. How were my class rules determined?
2. How do I ensure that the class rules are
 - ... understood by all students.
 - ... enforced fairly and consistently.
3. How aware am I of what is going on in my classroom
 - ...during instruction?
 - ...during cooperative learning activities?
 - ...during individual work?
 - ...during other activities?
4. How organized and prepared am I for each class and lesson?
5. How flexible am I
 - ...when plans have to change?
 - ...when one method of instruction is not working?
6. Would my students say that my class has a positive environment? What steps do I take to ensure a positive classroom environment?

Attitudes and Behaviors:

1. In what ways to I model appropriate behavior?
2. In difficult situations, how likely am I to maintain control of
 - ...my tone of voice?
 - ...my choice of words?
 - ...my anger?
 - ...my frustration?
3. What steps do I take to build appropriate personal relationships with my students? What are some barriers that keep me from having appropriate personal relationships with all of my students?
4. How do I show respect for my students?
5. In what ways to I demonstrate a positive attitude toward my students?
6. How likely am I to admit my mistakes and apologize to students for them?
7. How likely am I to give a students fresh start? How likely am I to bring up past negative behaviors?
8. How do I communicate to my students the belief that they all can learn? What steps do I take to help them all learn?

Skills and Knowledge:

1. What am I communicating to my students through my verbal communication?
2. What am I communicating to my students through my nonverbal communication?
3. How well do I listen to my students?
4. What verbal and nonverbal messages am I receiving from my students
 - ...while I'm teaching?
 - ... during class discussions?
 - ...during conversations with them?
 - ... at other times in class?
5. How confident am I managing conflict
 - ...between myself and students?
 - ...between students?
5. How confident am I in recognizing the warning signs of

- ...alcohol and/or drug use?
 - ...gang involvement?
 - ...depression or suicidal tendencies?
 - ...potentially violent behavior?
- Overall, how do students in my school describe me?

Student Evaluations (Part II)

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
I understand all of the class rules	A	D	N
My teacher enforces the rules fairly and consistently.	A	D	N
I feel comfortable telling my teacher when I don't understand my schoolwork.	A	D	N
My teacher cares about me personally.	A	D	N
My teacher believes that I can learn.	A	D	N
I respect my teacher.	A	D	N
My teacher respects me.	A	D	N
My teacher cares about how I am doing in class.	A	D	N
My teacher explains lessons so that I can learn.	A	D	N
My teacher is encouraging and supportive.	A	D	N
I would feel comfortable coming to my teacher with a personal problem.	A	D	N
My teacher is prepared for class.	A	D	N
My teacher does not bring up my past mistakes.	A	D	N
My teacher can tell when I'm upset or having a bad day.	A	D	N
My teacher likes kids.	A	D	N

Peer Evaluation (Part III)

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
This teacher is aware of what is going on in the school.	A	D	N
This teacher seeks help when needed.	A	D	N
I hear students say positive things about this teacher.	A	D	N
This teacher cares about students personally.	A	D	N
This teacher believes all students can learn.	A	D	N
This teacher respects students.	A	D	N
This teacher respects other teachers.	A	D	N
This teacher is willing to help other teachers.	A	D	N
This teacher is professional.	A	D	N
This teacher's classroom is welcoming.	A	D	N
This teacher models appropriate behavior.	A	D	N
This teacher does not gossip about students.	A	D	N
This teacher is not afraid to admit mistakes and apologize for them.	A	D	N
This teacher seeks opportunities for professional growth and development.	A	D	N
This teacher contributes to the overall positive school climate.	A	D	N
This teacher is a team player.	A	D	N
This teacher is willing to adapt to change.	A	D	N
This teacher likes kids.	A	D	N
This teacher is a team player.	A	D	N
This teacher is willing to adapt to change.	A	D	N