

“Is it Just Another *Flavor of the Month?*”: Elementary School Teachers’

Attitudes, Perceptions and Practices towards Non-Violence Curriculum: Second Step

Judith Ableser Ph.D

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to investigate, understand and interpret elementary teachers’ attitudes, perceptions and practices towards non-violence curriculum in general, and the use of the Second Step program. The study was based in a post-structural paradigm, aimed at understanding and interpreting natural events that occurred in a social context, rather than proving or making claims of universal truths. The main focus of the study was to understand the extent to which the Second Step project had an influence in the attitudes and practices of classroom teachers.

The methods involved interviewing and observing classroom teachers throughout the school year and administering a pre and post-test questionnaire. In this project, consultants from an outside agency implemented the Second Step curriculum in a number of kindergarten through third-grade classes in a large, urban public school district serving predominantly low-income African American students. The instruction consisted of lessons lasting approximately ½-hour, two times a week from mid-October, 2001 through May, 2002. The teachers did not directly implement the program, but were to remain in the classroom during the lessons, observing and assisting the consultant.

This project did not follow the recommended practice in a number of key implementation areas as outlined by the Committee for Children. Instruction was not provided by the teachers, teachers did not receive training and feedback and did not have access to the materials, and limited transfer of training occurred.

There was a range of attitudes and perceptions of the teachers involved in this project. Some of the teachers were initially resistant to the use of the program. Teachers’ comments included, “just more stuff to do” and “one more flavor of the month”. Teachers felt that they had limited understanding of, or involvement with the program. They believed that the students “enjoyed” the lessons but were not able to apply or use the skills in real-life situations. In addition, teachers expressed concerns that, “although the pictures show diverse children, the message in the curriculum is “white and middle class”.

The observed practices of the teachers did not necessarily correlate with their attitudes and perceived practices involving non-violence curriculum and Second Step. The teachers did not transfer the training, and there was limited evidence of non-violence practices that promoted social and emotional competence occurring in the classrooms.

In conclusion, this study did not implement the program as intended. The program was seen as a “separate and isolated” component of the school curriculum and did not match the needs and style of the school or community culture. This study demonstrates the complexities and difficulties of implementing new curriculum that strive towards educational reform practices.

**“Is it Just Another *Flavor of the Month*?”: Elementary Teachers’ Attitudes,
Perceptions and Practices towards Non-Violence Curriculum: Second Step**

Judith Ableser, Ph.D.

Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly, UNESCO and UNICEF proclaimed 2001-2010, The International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for Children of the World. This came in response to the following appeal by the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates to the United Nations:

“... Too many children live in a “culture of violence.” We wish to reduce their suffering. We believe that each child can discover that violence is not inevitable. We can offer hope, by beginning to create and build a new Culture of Non-violence. For this reason, we address this solemn appeal to all Heads of State, for the United Nations General Assembly to declare: That non-violence be taught at every level in our societies during this decade, to make the children of the world aware of the real, practical meaning and benefits of non-violence in their daily lives, in order to reduce the violence, and subsequent suffering, perpetrated against them and humanity in general...
With Deepest respect, The Nobel Peace Prize Laureates” (Beale, 2001)

Increasing numbers of schools are implementing non-violence and violence prevention programs to help prevent and intervene with violence and to assist in the development of children’s social competency (Frey, Hirshstein & Guzzo, 2000; Hinitz & Stomfay-Stitz, 1998; Jackson, 1997; Girard & Koch, 1996; Groves & Mazur, 1995; Levin, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Bodine, Crawford, & Schrupf, 1994, Parry, 1993; Dodd, 1993; Deutsch, 1991). Although these programs are endorsed (U.S. Department of Justice and Education, 1998; Jackson, 1997; N.A.E.Y.C., 1997; Levin, 1994), comprehensive research has been limited. Are schools implementing specific curricula based on sound research and theory or are they being purchased and implemented because of slick marketing and attractive packaging?

The purpose of this study was to investigate, understand and interpret elementary teachers' attitudes, perceptions and practices towards non-violence curriculum in general, the Second Step program, and the particular way in which it was implemented in this project. The main focus of the study was to understand the extent to which the Second Step project had an influence on the attitudes and practices of classroom teachers. Three central research questions were examined. First, how was the program implemented? Second, what were the teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward non-violence curriculum and this program, and to what extent did these attitudes change or evolve throughout the year? Finally, what were teachers' practices relating to non-violence curriculum, and to what extent did these change over the year?

Findings in violence-prevention research studies tend to make over-generalized claims about a particular curriculum without examining the social context, specific learning situation or implementation model. For example, Grossman, Neckerman, Koepsell, Lui, Asher, Beland, Frey & Rivera (1997) stated that Second Step, a widely used violence-prevention program, was effective in reducing aggressive behaviors and increasing prosocial behaviors in students. They did not, however, investigate the way in which Second Step was being implemented. Is it the content and structure of the curriculum alone that determines its effectiveness or do factors and variables affecting teachers such as attitudes, commitment, prior training and experience and implementation approach have an influence on the effectiveness of a program?

The models and implementation of violence-prevention and non-violence curriculum range from a "subject-approach" to an "integrated-infused model." "The Second Step Program" (Committee for Children, 1999) is a "subject-approach" packaged

curriculum kit that includes a resource/teachers' guide, lesson cards, scripted discussion and role-play, puppets and tapes for younger children, and suggestions of ways to apply or transfer the skills taught into opportunities in the classroom. The objectives are to teach empathy, impulse control and anger management. Each kit contains approximately 52 lessons of ½ hour in length. It is recommended that the lessons be done two times a week. Kits are available for pre-kindergarten through ninth grade. Each kit provides lessons for two or three grades. In addition to the lessons and activities there is a parent component and a peer-mediation component for the older grades. The Committee for Children provides training workshops and consultation for schools using their product.

At the other end of the continuum is the integrated and infused curriculum referred to as the Peaceable Classroom (Levin, 1994; Bodine et al., 1994). These programs are based on a constructivist model. Lessons and skills of non-violence are taught and then infused into the general curricula and the overall classroom management to create a comprehensive, holistic peaceable classroom culture. Authentic, daily living situations provide opportunities for teachable moments to reinforce the skills and concepts taught. Peaceable Schools (Aber, Brown & Henrich, 1999; Aber, Brown, Chaudry, Jones & Sample, 1996; Lantieri & Patti, 1996) extends the program throughout the entire school or district.

Although there may be a continuum from the "Subject-Approach" to the "Integrated Approach," there is also a very wide variation in implementation within programs. For example, some classes may instruct lessons more frequently. Some programs use specialists or consultants rather than the classroom teacher to implement

the program. Some schools and districts select to teach the program to a target group of students in a pullout or resource-room setting.

Factors such as prior training, background and experience of teachers, their commitment and belief in a curriculum, their attitudes and perceptions towards non-violence curriculum in general and towards the specific program in particular may influence how any given program is going to be implemented, and ultimately, its overall effectiveness. Studies have shown that programs are implemented in various ways demonstrate differing results (Aber et al., 1999, 1998, 1996; Frey et al., 1997; Grossman et al., 1997; Powell, 1995). The more frequent the program is used the more effective it is (Aber et al., 1999; Frey et al., 1997; Grossman et al., 1997). Teacher's attitudes, commitment, involvement and training in the program affect the results (Aber et al., 1999, 1998, 1996; Frey et al., 1997). It is, therefore, critical to evaluate any specific program by examining and understanding not only the curriculum content itself, but the teachers' attitudes, perceptions and practices regarding the program and way in which it is being implemented.

Based on previous studies, gaps in understanding of the implementation of non-violence programs and questions remain and need further exploration and investigation. To date, the vast majority of studies have used a positivist approach, centering on quantitative data. In addition, previous studies have overlooked the importance and relevance of the cultural milieu of the school and the ethnic, social class and race of the community in light of the specific curriculum being implemented. A post-structuralist model, that interprets the data from a naturalistic and social context, is needed to provide a richer grasp and deeper understanding of the complexities and details of such programs.

The studies to date, have not isolated or identified variations in implementation of different curricula. For example, no study has looked at consultants implementing the program or looked at differences among teacher practices. Only one study focused on teachers' attitudes towards the program (Frey et al., 1997), yet several suggest that attitudes and practices of teachers are important components in understanding the impact on children's behaviors and the effectiveness of programs (Aber et al., 1998, 1996; Frey et al., 1997; DeVries, 1991). Similarly, the studies did not look at how, or the extent to which, the programs and curricula influenced teacher practices. Research addressing teacher attitudes and practices are, therefore, needed and would add to the existing body of knowledge.

This study, therefore, aims at narrowing some of the previous gaps in understanding of the implementation of non-violence curricula by investigating teachers' attitudes, perceptions and practices towards non-violence curriculum in general, the Second Step curriculum in particular, and the program model of having consultants implement the direct instruction to students.

Methodology

The study was based in a post-structural paradigm, aimed at understanding and interpreting natural events that occurred in a social context, rather than proving or making claims of universal truths (Denzin & Lincoln, 1988). Using a primarily ethnographic approach, qualitative data in the form of observations, interviews and artifacts were gathered. In addition, a pre-test and post-test survey was administered and quantitative data analyzed statistically.

This study investigated kindergarten through 3rd grade teachers from three schools in a large urban public school district who were part of the “Second Step Project” implemented during the 2001-2002 school year. The project was co-coordinated and supervised by the Office of Guidance: Safe and Drug Free Schools of the school district and a Peace Institute that was affiliated with a large university. The schools served predominately low-income African American students. One school had a more diverse range of student backgrounds including a significant Muslim population. The majority of classrooms utilized a “team-teaching” approach involving two experienced and qualified teachers per group. There was a mix of African American and White teachers and consultants.

The project utilized part-time, contracted consultants to implement the Second Step program in elementary schools. A different consultant was used at each school to implement the curriculum. In addition, there was a separate consultant expected to provide training for parents and staff at each school. The consultants implemented the curriculum lessons from the Second Step kit, for approximately ½ hour, on an average of two times a week throughout the duration of the project. Teachers did not directly implement the instruction, but were expected to reinforce, apply and extend the curriculum within the general classroom on an ongoing basis. Teachers were to remain in the classroom during instruction in order to become familiar with the content, scope and sequence of the curriculum.

The data collection techniques included pre-and-post-test questionnaires. Twenty-six teachers responded to the questionnaires and eleven teachers were observed and interviewed approximately six times each throughout the year. Each observation lasted

one to two hours and was followed up with interviews. Observation and interview protocols were developed and used based on the conceptual framework to guide and focus the investigators research. Classroom observations occurred during regular teaching time and during the consultants' implementation of the Second Step lessons. Each consultant was interviewed two to three times throughout the year. In addition, artifacts including the "Second Step Curriculum", the "Kit" and "Teachers' Manual" and other school curriculum were reviewed and analyzed.

In contrast to quantitative data collection techniques and analysis that attempt to demonstrate statistical significance using large sample sizes and methods establishing internal and external validity and reliability, qualitative research concerns itself with providing evidence of worthwhile significance and trustworthiness. It is possible for results in quantitative studies to be statistically significant without being particularly important or relevant. Conversely, it is possible to have results that are worthwhile without satisfying conditions of statistical significance. Trustworthiness is the degree and extent to which the researcher can make claims of understanding and interpretation in a given situation. Four criteria are used to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In this study, collecting data over a full school year and observing for long periods of time increased the study's credibility. Examples of triangulation included observing teachers on several different occasions; checking and confirming what was seen, as well as what was not seen ("silences") through follow-up interviews and the questionnaire responses. Observation of the teachers allowed the investigator to validate the teachers' perceptions of what they did in their actual practice. Finally, interviewing

the consultants and asking them to describe the teachers' attitudes and practices were additional methods for triangulation.

Examples of transferability included probing participants in interviews by asking them to give other situations when certain practices may occur. By observing a variety of teachers on several different occasions patterns of similarity and contrast were noted. Dependability was established by interviewing and observing teachers three to six times. Questionnaires were administered at two different times. In addition to patterns of similarity being demonstrated through consistency and replication of methods, the process of change in teachers' attitudes and practices was documented.

Finally, confirmability must be established with the goal to ensure neutrality. Field notes, journals, interview transcripts, raw data and questionnaires were reviewed and audited. By adhering to these methods, triangulation, credibility, transferability and dependability were ensured and trustworthiness for this study established.

A distinction between the objectivity and neutrality of positivist and post-structuralist research must be stated. In the later, although it is critical to insure the data is collected following procedures of trustworthiness, it is also understood that there are, and should be, interpretations that reflect the personal and subjective views of the researcher. The researcher is entangled on both sides of the research, by having the expertise in the field and having the relationship with the informants and participants. A different investigator, may be drawn to different evidence or interpretations. That is the very nature of this genre of research.

Findings

Implementation of Curriculum:

This project did not follow the recommended practice as outlined by the Committee for Children (1992, 1999) in a number of key implementation areas. First, the program indicates that the classroom teacher should instruct the lessons. This project used consultants to implement instruction. Second, the manual prescribes specific training workshops provided by the Committee for Children. This project did not provide such training, nor did the consultants train the teachers in the way in which they had initially intended. The teachers, in fact, had no access to the training materials, the teachers' guide or the actual curriculum. The three main objectives of the Second Step curriculum are empathy training, impulse control and anger management, however, this was not clearly and systematically conveyed to the teachers. Third, the manual recommends that the instructor carefully follow the lessons. These consultants moved beyond the Second Step curriculum using other resources such as Peace Education.

Attitudes and Perceptions:

There was a range of attitudes and perceptions of the teachers involved in this project. At the end of the program, approximately two-thirds of teachers felt that the program had some positive effect. They felt that students enjoyed the lessons, and could recall and recite the steps, but did not apply and transfer the skills into their own life experiences. The teachers did not feel that they, themselves, were very knowledgeable about the Second Step program. They indicated that the lack of training, limited feedback, and poor communication between the consultants and themselves, and the fact

that they had no access to the materials, limited their understanding of the program and prevented them from being able to integrate the skills and transfer the training.

A number of teachers had some initial resistance to the program based on the fact that the teachers were not involved in the decision-making, planning or organizing of the project. Comments included:

I see this as just another *flavor of the month*. Downtown hears about these programs and they want to get on the bandwagon. So suddenly, out of the blue we have to use it. Or in this case we have to watch it being used. It is more of the same-old-same-old. We've had to do things in the past and we will have to do things in the future."

Another teacher commented, at the beginning of the program:

It is *just more stuff* that we are being told to do. No one discusses it with us, no one explains it to us, no one asks us. Administration just tells us that it is happening. Many teachers feel resistant to it, but I don't know how up-front they are going to be about it. It doesn't matter how good a program may be, this one may be very good and valid, but teachers resent when it is just more stuff added to an already overcrowded schedule.

Another teacher commented: "Again, the powers-that-be tell us to use it, the principal buys into it and we get stuck with it." Numerous teachers indicated that they had difficulty being told to use a program without having any say, input or decision-making. Another teacher said, "this is the third year with the third different program. Can't administration select something and stick with it?"

More than a dozen references were made to the term *more stuff*. One principal, from a school that was planning to use the program and then declined, said that, "my teachers just don't have time for more stuff. They are so busy trying to improve our state test scores, the thought of adding more is just not realistic." Teachers stated that they felt "pressured and overwhelmed with all *this stuff*." "I am bogged down." "I don't

have time for *this stuff*.” The training consultant concurred that, during the initial orientation, the teachers seemed to be resistant to having to do something else.

I could read their body language. They were saying, here we go again; more stuff to do. I had to totally reframe what I was planning to say and try to show them what they could gain from it. I really had to sell the program. If the teachers don’t buy into it, it is never going to work.

As the year progressed, the teachers appeared to be somewhat more accepting of the program. They did, however, continue to voice concerns. The dominant reaction was that the program was too separate and isolated from the general curriculum. The teachers commented that time limitations, lack of consistency and continuity, lack of training and feedback, poor communication, and no planning time to integrate the lessons into the curriculum creates a program that remains separate and removed.

Two of the consultants stressed that the program could be so much more effective if it was infused into the entire curriculum. Their comments included:

There is no connection, communication or carry-over between what we do and the class in general because we do not provide any training or feedback. I think the teachers see it as separate because we are implementing it as a separate piece. Because we are not part of the true school staff, we will always be seen as an outsider and so will the program. At least if we could work with the staff, meet with them, plan with them, provide feedback we could begin to develop a relationship and perhaps be seen as more of an integral part of the program. The message is, however, that we are separate.

The teachers further supported this belief. Teachers stated that the program is:

“Seen as a separate component. “They come, they do and they go. We don’t know what they are going to do. And many times don’t even know when they are coming in.” “There is no communication or involvement with us. I would like to plan things but I don’t have any planning time or the resources to use so that I could integrate the stuff.” “She does her stuff and I do mine. There is no crossover.” “It is just too fragmented.” “It does not seem to have any connection to what we are doing.” Another teacher commented, “I feel like we just have a tid-bit of the program. It’s not a whole thing, just a piece of a thing.”

Both teachers and consultants agree that the program should become more integrated and infused. One teacher expressed it beautifully by stating:

We need to infuse it with the whole program. Right now we just have the crumbs. It would be better if we had the whole cracker. That way she could be the cheese on top of the cracker to offer more but we could have the whole piece. As it is we just get a few crumbs. At least when kids go to science class, we know the curriculum and can reinforce it in our class, but we don't have a curriculum for this. It should be part of what we do.

Another central concern that was raised by a number of teachers, and confirmed by the consultants, was that some of the language and the situations did not relate to the cultural experiences or developmental levels of the children. The term "empathy" was considered to be too abstract. One teacher said "some of the terms that are used just aren't in these children's life experience. I remember the consultant telling the children to "settle down" and "try not to be noticed." The kids don't get it. It is not language that they use." Several teachers expressed concern that some of the curriculum is not culturally relevant. One teacher stated firmly "They claim that the program is for diverse populations. The pictures show African American kids and Asian kids, but let's face it, the message is pure white middle-class." Another teacher supported that by saying " This is a good example of a program with a hidden agenda; a middle-class agenda that promotes middle-class values. But what if your kids don't live in a middle class world? I don't see this program actually addressing and dealing with cultural differences."

Another teacher said:

One lesson was about teaching children not to interrupt their mom when she is on the phone. It said to "wait for a pause" and then politely speak up. Come on, no way. In their families, you just don't interrupt your momma when she is on the phone. You just don't unless the house is burning down. Kids are taught not to do that. At home they learn the exact opposite. What mixed message is that if the program says one thing and their parents say something else?

Another teacher indicated that many of her students come from a Muslim background where it is not acceptable for woman to “speak their minds, express herself or confront issues.” She stated “how are we to handle that?” Finally, a teacher said,

This is all nice and good, but it just doesn’t relate to my kids. The home life that my students come from is one in which they learn from an early age that it is survival of the fittest. Being polite and saying thank you or let’s discuss it, isn’t going to get you your way, its going to get you beat up. Let’s be real here. To survive, these kids have to be tough. How does this program address that?

Practices:

The observed practices of the teachers did not necessarily correlate with their attitudes and perceived practices involving non-violence curriculum and Second Step. The teachers stated that they supported a democratic classroom that promoted and taught social skills and a non-violence curriculum, yet this was not readily observed. The overall structure of the schools did not facilitate such an approach. The classes were taught using traditional whole-group, teacher-directed, academic-based lessons. In all but one class, the management and discipline was based on an authority model rather than a democratic model. In two cases, teachers did not promote a sense of trust and safety, but instead used humiliation and intimidation as a means to achieve order and compliance. All but one teacher used discipline, punishment and teacher control to resolve children’s conflicts and to deal with inappropriate behaviors. The only teacher who had attended the Second Step training during the previous summer, and the one who had requested using the program, was the only teacher who used guidance, problem-solving and conflict-resolution steps as outlined in the Second Step program.

Most of the teachers were not involved with the Second Step lessons during the consultants’ time in the classroom. Many were involved in other activities, including at

times being out of the classroom during the lessons. There was limited transfer of training and integration of the Second Step objectives into the ongoing curriculum or in real-life situations of the children.

Near the end of the year, it was observed that one teacher observed part of the lesson and then attempted to reinforce and practice the concepts with the children immediately after the consultant left.

Let's try to act this stuff out. I always see you guys fighting over who gets to stand in line. So I need two helpers to act this out." She selected Tina and Jerome. "Okay, Jerome, you pretend to cut in line. Now, Tina what can you say?" She responded with "Why did you take a cut?" Teacher Elm continued, "That's good, but what else can you say? Tell him how you feel." Tina said, "I could say that it makes me angry when you take a cut. Please move away." "Excellent," replied the teacher. She continued to role-play and have the students recall and restate the appropriate steps. She then asked the children to put away their work and come up to the circle.

Almost immediately, one boy hit another girl. Teacher Elm said, "Now wait a minute, I can't believe what I have just seen. Just this very minute we were talking about using our words and telling each other how we feel and not fighting, and then immediately the two of you go at it with each other. I can't believe this. Why did you do that?" The boy responded, "Because she pushed me." "But didn't we just practice that, didn't we just say that we should use our words. Now go to time-out."

In interviewing the teacher, she stated that this was a perfect example how the children were able to recall and restate what they are supposed to do, but that they could not actually apply it to their own situation. This was one of the few observed situations where the teacher reinforced and followed each step of Second Step involving empathy, impulse control and anger management. She began by having the children recall that they needed to identify their feelings, then she reviewed that they needed to calm down, and finally that they needed to select an appropriate solution to the problem. However, just as the children were able to recall and identify the steps, but not able to apply it in a real life situation, neither could this teacher. Immediately after reviewing the steps, when

the two children hit each other, the teacher did not apply the steps and engage the children in their own problem solving, she just reverted to the traditional authoritarian discipline technique of using time-out. This example clearly illustrates the dilemmas teachers face when trying to change long-standing classroom practices. Even when they approach a conflict they are not consistently, if at all, modeling, transferring or applying the steps into their practices.

Central Themes for Discussion

Separate and Isolated:

One of the central focuses of this research was to investigate the implementation model used within this project. These original categories ranged from a “subject or add-on” approach to an “integrated or infused” model. Research suggests that the more effective approach occurs when programs are more integrated and comprehensive (Aber et al., 1999; Kreidler, 1984; Levin, 1994). It was assumed that this Second Step project would fall under the category of a “subject or add-on” model. A new category emerged, one that had not originally been considered. The way in which this particular project implemented the Second Step and non-violence curriculum was, in fact, as a “separate and isolated” approach. The lessons were separate and isolated from the ongoing curriculum; consultants were separate and isolated from classroom teachers; the schedule of instruction was separate and isolated from the daily routine; the project coordination was separate and isolated from the school at large. The teachers commented that they did not fully understand the program, and that there was very limited communication between the teacher and consultant. They had no access to the materials or training and were not always informed if, or when, the consultants were coming, nor did they know

what topics or lessons were going to be taught. The consultants agreed that they did not feel as though they were part of the school team but remained as “outsiders.” They were not an integral part of the school, nor did they develop any substantial rapport and connection with the teachers or the students with whom they were working.

One must be cautious when reading and interpreting studies that refers to Second Step or any other curriculum as an “add-on or subject” model. Simply because it was designed in that manner, does not necessarily mean that it was, in fact, implemented as such. Cooper, Lutenbacher & Faccia (2000), Aber et al. (1996), and Powell (1995) point out that the specific nature of program implementation must be addressed when studying such programs.

Perhaps the message that the teachers and the students perceived from this “separate and isolated” approach is that it was not to be taken as seriously or considered as important as academic learning. Children saw it as a time to “fool around” and teachers used it as a time to do “other work.” Although this study focused on non-violence curriculum, one might wonder if teaching any subject by an “outside” person in a “separate and isolated” manner, such as art or music, may have the same response.

In many ways, it was not just the curriculum that was “separate and isolated,” it appeared as though the culture and climate of each school facilitated a compartmentalization of activities, roles, responsibilities and routines. There were other anger management and conflict resolution programs occurring in the same schools without any connection to or collaboration with the program studied. Most classes had two teachers and the subjects were divided between each of them, resulting in each teacher teaching only half of the time. Academic-subjects were taught in isolation, there

did not appear to be cross-curricular integration. The teachers did not team-teach but divided their teaching responsibilities. The teachers may have perceived themselves as working in a team-teaching situation, however, there was little evidence of team-teaching, collaboration or co-operation between teachers or between teachers and consultants of the sort usually considered team-teaching.

By micromanaging a system and keeping things “separate and isolated,” each member may not take ownership or responsibility for the overall functioning of the program. For example, the teachers were used to teaching their own separate subjects and did not teach collaboratively with their partner. Although they stated they would like to integrate the Second Step curriculum into their program, there is little reason to believe they would do so since they did not integrate the subjects they already split between them. Overall, teachers did not feel that they had any responsibility for this program. Similarly, because there was to be an additional training consultant to provide staff training, the other consultants felt that training teachers was not expected of them.

Empowerment:

The role of empowerment, and how it relates to control and authority, is the second emerging theme from this research. Research has found that when teachers feel a stronger commitment and involvement with a non-violence program, they use it more frequently, and state that it is more effective (Aber et al., 1996; Frey et al. 1997; Powell, 1995; Thorsen-Spano, 1996). The initial teacher reaction towards the Second Step project included resistance and negativity because they felt that they had no voice or involvement in the decision to implement the Second Step program. They felt, as in previous times, that those in power and authority unilaterally selected a new program to

implement without discussion, communication, needs assessment, or requests from staff to use the program. The district approved of the program and the principals adopted it. This top-down decision-making model is a clear example of what Fullan (1993) warns as a threat to, and failure in, educational reform. After citing several studies documenting the failure of top-down mandated reforms of the 1980's and 90's, he states: "Top-down reform strategies have virtually no chance of reaching the core problems." Glickman, Allen and Lunsford (1992) found that schools that were effective in implementing reform practices involved all the faculty working collaboratively to make school-based decisions and organized time for planning, developing and revising their programs. In order for schools to become responsive, renewing institutions, teachers must be purposefully engaged in the process (Goodlad, 1990).

According to Fullan (1999, 1993) the initial resistance toward the Second Step project is not, in and of itself, a bad thing. In fact, it is a normal reaction to change. Frey et al. (1997) also found that teachers initially were resistant to the program but were more accepting the longer it was implemented. Change is a complex, non-linear, uncertain process that takes considerable time to actualize. It creates anxieties, difficulties and fears; it is this tension and conflict that is essential for any successful growth process. He states, "ownership comes through the learning that arises from full engagement in problem-solving...ownership is stronger in the middle of a successful change process than at the beginning, and still stronger at the end" (Fullan, 1993, p.31).

One critical component of creating successful change, ownership and empowerment in educational reform, is through professional learning and staff development (Lieberman, Darling-Hammond & Zuckerman, 1991; Cox & deFrees, 1991;

Fullan, 1997, 1993). Fullan (1993) cites Nias, Southworth & Campbell (1992) that teachers see that professional learning is the key to the development of the curriculum and the way to improve the quality of education.

Staff Development:

The third theme that emerged from this study was the absence of staff development and its effect on the overall success of the program. Earlier studies on non-violence curricula found that teachers were more supportive of, and involved in, the non-violence programs and programs were found to be more effective when more training was provided (Aber et al., 1996; Frey et al., 1997; Grossman et al., 1997; Powell, 1995). An integral part of the Second Step program is staff training and development provided through workshops and outlined in the teacher's manual and other materials (Committee for Children, 1992). Without adequate training, communication and feedback, teachers involved in the Second Step project, gained only limited knowledge of the program and had poor understandings of how to transfer and apply the concepts into their own practices. In addition, because no effective orientation or awareness training was provided, the teachers did not have an opportunity to learn the importance and value of non-violence curriculum. The fact that the one teacher who did attend the initial training, and was more aware of and supported the program, was the only teacher observed who frequently transferred the training and applied the skills, illustrates the effect and importance of such training and of such attitudes and beliefs.

Fullan (1993) stresses that you cannot mandate change; it must evolve over time through acquiring new skills, behaviors and beliefs through professional learning opportunities. Understanding and ownership cannot be mastered prior to learning

something new. In order for teachers to put their beliefs into action they must not only “learn what” but “learn how,” through ongoing staff development (Nias et al., 1992). In addition to formal training sessions, if teachers are to facilitate curriculum development, they need to be able to work together in teams for discussion, feedback and decision-making; they need to have organizational time to plan and reflect, and have resources and materials available (Nias et al., 1992). The teachers in this study did not have these opportunities for growth.

Mismatched Curriculum:

The final theme that emerged from this study pertained to the dichotomy between the social and cultural context of the schools and the “hidden” values represented in the Second Step curriculum. Some teachers felt that the program was teaching white middle-class values and practices and did not address the needs of diverse students. As one teacher said, “Even though the pictures show black kids and diversity, the message is white and middle-class.”

According to proponents of progressive constructivist education, schools should be based in a culture of a democratic community (Bodine & Crawford, 1999; Gutmann, 1997; DeVries & Zan; 1994; Levin, 1994; Kriedler, 1984). Children should learn how to think, not what to think, based on the democratic principles of our society (Gutman, 1997). But the findings indicate that these schools do not practice democratic principles nor do they encourage shared-decision making. Most of the situations observed presented schools, classrooms and teachers that endorsed conservative moralism (Gutmann, 1997), heteronomous morality (DeVries, 1991) or authoritarian practices. Furthermore, teachers stated that in order for these children to survive they must learn to

respect and comply with authority. Two of the observed teachers, insisted that respectful behavior involved total compliance, silence and obedience. Perhaps one reason that the teachers did not transfer the learning to real-life situations is that the situations used in Second Step are not representative of the real-life experiences of the children and teachers. This is frequently observed by African American teachers of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1990; Delpit, 1988) and not unique to this urban setting. Can one curriculum fit all?

Sorte & Doescher (1999) stated that it is critical to match the curriculum with the philosophical and belief system of the teachers and school. These schools predominantly used a traditional back-to-basics, academic model based on whole-group instructional techniques, rote learning of isolated facts and transmission of low-level thinking skills. The classroom and school culture promoted a heteronomous morality or conservative moralism in which the students were taught to obey, comply and respect those in authority through teacher-control and strict discipline and punishment practices. These schools, as a whole, did not apply a progressive constructivist approach or facilitate democratic practices that facilitate social and emotional competencies.

Assessing Program Effectiveness

Foundations for effective non-violence curricula include (Girard, 1996; Slaby et al, 1995; Levin, 1994; Kreidler, 1984): First, teaching specific skills including effective communication, emotional expression, problem-solving, lateral-thinking and conflict-resolution techniques. Second, practicing and reinforcing the skills through daily living situations. Third, providing guidance rather than discipline based on control and authority. Finally, promoting a democratic community of learners. There was, however,

little evidence of these foundations regularly being practiced in the classrooms or schools observed. This signals, yet again, that the non-violence curriculum was out of step with the culture of the schools in which it was being implemented.

It is unreasonable to “insert” or “plop” down a program addressing these beliefs and practices if the culture does not endorse such practices. Fullan (1997, 1993) states that educational reform is not simply about replacing one curriculum with another, it is about transforming the structure and meaning of the learning organization and the school culture. To strive towards this goal, administrators and teachers need to act together as change agents by acquiring an in-depth understanding, development of skills and a strong commitment to a moral purpose.

Complexities of Reform:

This study illustrated the difficulties and complexities in implementing reform practices involving non-violence curriculum. Even when each and every stakeholder, from the project personnel, to the school district, to the individual consultants and teachers want, and have, the best interest of the students at heart. Yet, meeting the needs and achieving these goals is an arduous task.

The difficulties and problems found within this study can be categorized into three areas: limitations with the Second Step curriculum; problems with the project implementation; and difficulties in introducing educational reform practices. The intent of such a study is to identify and understand the limitations in order to learn from and develop future improved attempts with the goal of providing best practices.

From the observations and interviews in this study, it was apparent that the Second Step curriculum had some limitations. First, although the curriculum includes pictures

of, and situations involving children from diverse backgrounds, teachers and consultants indicated that the language, examples and strategies do not reflect the culture and experiences of these students and consequently students do not relate to or internalize the skills. In some cases, in fact, examples go against the cultural norms and expectations of certain ethnic practices. There may be a hidden curriculum or agenda in certain lessons that does not meet the needs of the ethnic or cultural background of the children or, in fact, with the philosophical beliefs of the faculty and school. The content of the curriculum appears to be mismatched with the population that it aims to serve. This implies that teachers and consultants will probably need to move beyond the scope of the provided curriculum to address additional concepts that are relevant in the social context of the lives of the children. As the findings attest, teachers are a rich source of information about the children, families and communities in which they serve. That they are so often overlooked in planning for non-violence interventions and developing culturally aware curricula is a well documented phenomenon (Foster, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1990; Delpit, 1988). In fact, since there is no evidence that the Second Step curriculum addressed such issues during its development, it seems likely that the teachers may be correct in stating that the curriculum does not promote ways of life that are compatible with the culture.

Second, the lessons and curriculum are largely language based and rely on children using verbal and listening skills that do not engage the children in active learning activities. The younger and more active children had difficulty attending to the lessons for the required time. Attention should be directed to establishing more age appropriate activities within the curriculum.

Based on the conceptual framework, teachers' comments, and analysis of the data, recommendations are provided to assist future implementation of a similar Second Step project. As with any successful educational program, any first time implementation will ultimately evolve and grow, guided by experience, need and professional reflection. The problems with the project implementation involve concrete and logistical factors that can be addressed and improved upon in the future.

First, the project appeared to have limited communication between the project and school leadership. There should be increased communication and collaboration between the project personnel and the school district leadership to ensure an effective exchange of planning, implementation and ongoing evaluation. Teachers' and consultants' ideas and concerns should be voiced and addressed. If training times are arranged, it should be the responsibility of both project and school staff to ensure that it occurs.

A second concern involved the teachers' limited understanding of the curriculum and the way in which the project was being implemented. Teachers and school faculty should receive an initial orientation to the curriculum and ongoing training in ways to integrate and transfer the training and skills. In addition, each class should have access to the curriculum and the Teacher's manual. An initial "awareness training" session could be provided to introduce the teachers to the value and importance of non-violence curriculum, how it will help the students and what benefits they will gain from the program. Next, an orientation of the actual curriculum and how it will be implemented should be provided for the teachers. Ongoing feedback and information sessions could be scheduled between the consultant and the teachers. The consultant who is responsible to implement instruction at each school could be the facilitator of these feedback and

planning sessions. It would, therefore, be beneficial to have consultants who are not only knowledgeable about violence-prevention and conflict resolution, but in addition are skilled in staff development and elementary education.

Due to the limited training and communication, the teachers did not seem to be aware of the importance of their role in transferring the training into the ongoing curriculum. The teachers should be made aware of their roles and responsibility for the program from the outset of the project, including the importance of, and methods for assisting with the lessons and applying the skills into their daily routine. In the schools studied, the non-violence curriculum would have benefited from being a more integral part of the school routine and the curriculum. This could be achieved by developing a partnership between the consultants and teachers by increasing communication, preparation and feedback time between both parties. Consultants could continue to implement the direct instruction, but the teachers could integrate the concepts during classroom time. To accomplish this, teachers need to have access to the curriculum kit, the specific lessons, the teachers' manual and additional resources in order for them to plan and apply the skills into their program.

An alternative model could be to utilize the consultants as trainers and resource specialists for the teachers. In this approach, the teachers would ultimately implement the direct instruction in their own classes. The role of the consultant would be to provide training, strategies, feedback and additional resources for the teachers. This is similar to the model of using a special education specialist to support the classroom teacher by offering guidance and resources.

Fourth, there was a concern about consultants' backgrounds and experiences. Consultants should be skilled in working with young children using age-appropriate instructional techniques and management strategies. In addition, they should have an understanding of and comfort level of working with teachers to provide support and feedback.

Fifth, this project had difficulties in the amount of time and consistency of implementation. In one school, the program was only used for three months. In the future, the project could run and continue throughout the school year. The final concern about the project is that it was done in only a few classes in each school and, hence, was not being implemented consistently by all staff and school personnel. Such programs would have better chances at success if they were used school-wide and training were provided for all staff that interacts with students, such as the lunch aides and assistants. In addition, there may be substantial benefit in providing parent training on an ongoing basis. Consistency, modeling and practice of skills are important for the success of the program if it is the right program for the school's community.

The project lasted just over six months in two schools and three months in one school. Research indicated that the longer the program was implemented the more supportive the teachers were and the more effective it was (Aber et al., 1996; Frey et al., 1997). It is possible that the teachers' attitudes and practices would be different and would change to a greater degree over a longer period.

The final area of concern examined in this study, involves the difficulties and complexities regarding the adoption of new educational reform practices. As previously stated, by its very nature, change is a slow, challenging, evolving process that creates

tension, conflict and stress (Fullan, 1997,1993) and requires a collaborative commitment on the part of all stakeholders. One of the problems faced in this project appears to be that all stakeholders were not equally involved with, or in fact, perhaps not even aware of or in agreement with the goals, purposes and intentions of this new curriculum. Prior to any new program or reform initiative being introduced, all members need to be aware of and “buy-into” the need for, and method toward, change in order to reduce resistance, confusion and chaos. This is achieved only when the leadership works with the faculty in a collaborative manner and involves them in the decision-making process and creation of the plan, rather than using a top-down model of authority (Fullan, 1997,1993). In the settings observed, there was limited collaboration or joint decision-making. It is even questionable who, in fact, made the decisions and held responsibility. It is not clear if the leadership rested with the project personnel, the school principals or the school district.

The second dilemma involves the mismatch or discrepancy between the goals and strategies of the particular curriculum and the culture of the schools and community. Teachers and consultants voiced this concern to the researcher. From the interviews and observations, it appears as though the Second Step curriculum is not culturally aware of the practices of African American children and may require some retooling for future use. In addition, there appears to be a philosophical mismatch between the ideological affiliation of the school district and that of non-violence curriculum.

Finally, no matter how good a curriculum may be, if it is not implemented in an environment and culture that supports, sustains and reinforces what it teaches it can have only limited effect. There needs to be a philosophical and pedagogical match between

any particular curriculum and those who are using it. No content of any curriculum can change the foundations or basic principles of a program. These schools and teachers, for the most part, believed in and supported a back-to-basics traditional approach to academic learning. If they are to move towards a more constructivist approach that supported and encouraged emotional competency and social-skills development, they must first shift their attitudes and belief systems before their practices. This is a much more complex task than implementing a series of lessons two times a week.

Conclusions

This study adds to the existing body of knowledge by gaining further understanding and insight into the manner in which this Second Step project was implemented in three schools, and the teachers' attitudes, perceptions and practices toward non-violence curriculum and the Second Step program. As many attempts to improve schooling, the Second Step project implemented at these three schools was uneven. Teachers took up the curriculum in their own practices in a variety of ways that seemed consistent with their own attitudes about non-violence and about teaching. As a top-down imposition on teachers, the Second Step curriculum did not become then, a "subject approach" or "add-on" program, in which structured lessons were instructed in much the same way as any other content area that were reinforced and practiced throughout the day. In the settings studied, the program became a "separate and isolated component" of school life that had very limited connection to the rest of the school curriculum or students' real-life experiences. Not only was the curriculum content "separate and isolated," but also the entire project was "separate and isolated" from the rest of the school routine. This resulted because outside consultants, instead of classroom teachers, implemented the

program, thus teachers were not involved in the decision-making process to select or use the program. There was little communication informing the teachers of how and when the program was going to be implemented, they received limited training, had no access to the materials, and did not work collaboratively with, or receive any feedback from, the consultants. The program was not done consistently throughout the school, consequently, other support staff, teachers and assistants did not implement the same approach or strategies.

There appeared to be a conflict between the foundations of non-violence curriculum and the practices of the schools as well as a mismatch between racial/ethnic and social class affiliations. Non-violence curriculum is aimed at enhancing the social and emotional competencies of children through a progressive, constructivist approach that supports a democratic community of learners, but, for the most part, the teachers and schools in this study supported traditional back-to-basics academics and were guided by an authoritarian model of discipline. In order for a program to be well received and effective, it must match the philosophical beliefs and school practices (Sorte, 1999).

It is not being suggested that one disregard efforts towards enhancing children's social and emotional competencies in schools that are traditionally based. On the contrary, such programs are a vital component for increasing the probability that these children will become productive, successful and competent citizens. The way in which it is done, however, must move far beyond any simple or single implementation of curricular lessons aimed at only reaching the children; it must involve a process of reform that addresses the teachers and school culture as a whole.

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