

## Executive Summary

### **Impact Assessment Study of Citizenship/Law-Related Education on Violent and Antisocial Behavior Year One Evaluation Bell Gardens Intermediate School**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This report summarizes the quantitative and qualitative results of year one, 1995-96, of the impact assessment study sponsored by Youth for Justice: National Coordinated Law-Related Education Program.\* The purpose of the two-year study is to assess whether citizenship/law-related education, when properly implemented, can prevent certain types of violent and anti-social behavior in upper elementary and middle school students.

The intervention includes a number of citizenship/law-related instructional materials designed for upper elementary and middle school instruction. The materials developed by the Center for Civic Education and the Constitutional Rights Foundation include: *Violence in the Schools: Developing Prevention Plans; Foundations of Democracy: Authority, Privacy, Responsibility, and Justice; We the People... ; Of Codes and Crowns; It's Yours: The Bill of Rights; City Youth;* and *Active Citizenship Today*. These materials are the basis for the intervention curriculum designed by the Center for Civic Education and the Constitutional Rights Foundation.

The curriculum design integrates these citizenship/law-related instructional materials with the existing social studies curriculum for fifth and sixth grades at Bell Gardens Intermediate School, Montebello Unified School District, Montebello, California. The goals of the curriculum are (1) to develop understanding about issues of authority, justice, community, violence, the role of law and public institutions in resolving conflict; (2) to increase cognitive and social skills; and, (3) to develop more positive attitudes toward law, authority, school, prosocial behavior, and the community.

As a result of the findings reported in this summary and "lessons learned" during year one, the recommendations listed on pp. 7-8 are being implemented in year two of the study.

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## THE STUDY GROUP

The experimental group included two fifth- and two sixth-grade self-contained classes at Bell Gardens Intermediate School. The school principal also designated a self-contained, "at risk" class to participate in the study and to address particular problems of truancy and potential gang-related activities. The "at risk" group also received additional services from community agencies such as juvenile probation.

The control group included one fifth grade, one sixth grade, and one "at risk" group from Suva Intermediate School, also located in the Montebello district. The fifth and sixth grades at Suva Intermediate were also self-contained classrooms. The teachers followed a regular social studies curriculum similar to Bell Gardens Intermediate but without the citizenship/law-related education component.

Bell Gardens Intermediate and Suva Intermediate follow a year-round schedule of classes. The student populations at both schools are similar in terms of ethnicity (approximately 98 percent Latino/Hispanic), socio-economic status, language spoken at home (approximately 27 percent classified as limited English proficient), and parental levels of education.

One hundred and fifty subjects participated in the study, including sixty fifth graders, seventy-two sixth graders, and eighteen "at risk" students. The experimental group included forty-one fifth graders, forty-seven sixth graders, and ten "at risk." The control group included nineteen fifth graders, twenty-five sixth graders, and eight "at risk" students.

## THE EVALUATION

The experimental subjects in fifth and sixth grades were exposed to the intervention between October 1995 and June 1996. The "at risk" group received the intervention for one semester, January through June 1996. Evaluation of the intervention included both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

The quantitative measure included pretesting and posttesting the attitudes of the subjects in both the experimental and control groups. The attitude survey incorporated ten clusters of four to six questions each. The ten clusters are authority, bonding to teachers, prosocial behavior, locus of control, cooperation, self control, conflict resolution, positive outlook, attitude toward school and community. The data collected from the survey was analyzed separately by cluster. Factorial analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) comparing group (experimental vs. control) and gender (boys vs. girls) was conducted on the pretest and posttest data. Pretest scores were treated as covariates and posttest scores were treated as the dependent variables. This analysis was conducted separately for the fifth grade, sixth grade, and the "at risk" subjects.

ANCOVA results indicate that in year one the intervention had a positive and significant effect on attitudes toward authority, prosocial behavior, self control, cooperation, and attitudes toward community. The results are reported in the section that follows.

The intervention, however, did not affect the other five clusters: bonding to teachers, locus of control, conflict resolution, positive outlook, and attitude toward school. This could be due to the following considerations: (1) because of the special needs of English as a second language subjects, the intervention took longer to implement than expected; (2) the needed to integrate the intervention with the existing social studies curriculum consumed time; (3) some clusters such as conflict resolution were not adequately addressed in the intervention; and, (4) some attributes like locus of control usually take longer than one year to change.

The qualitative measures included numerous classroom observations, focus group discussions with students and teachers, student interviews, teacher interviews, and parent interviews. The classroom observations and students' self reports indicate that the subject developed a more positive attitude toward cooperation, authority, responsibility, and community.

The evaluation was conducted by Mahtash Esfandari, Ph.D., University of California at Los Angeles, Graduate School of Education.

#### RESULTS OF THE FIFTH GRADE INTERVENTION

Based on classroom observations, the dynamics of the two experimental fifth grade classes were different. Therefore, the data collected on the fifth grade subjects was analyzed according to the teacher involved. Teacher #1 carefully implemented the intervention curriculum and the recommended instructional techniques. Teacher #2 was less careful in maintaining the integrity of the intervention. Analysis of the data shows that the intervention had the following positive results:

- **Impact on self control.** *The significant group effect  $F(1,49) = 4.60, P < .01$  indicated that the intervention had a positive impact on the self control of fifth grade students taught by teacher # 1. The students taught by this teacher exhibited significantly higher self control than the students taught by teacher # 2 ( $P < .05$ ) and the control group ( $P < .05$ ).*
- **Gender differences on prosocial behavior and self control.** *The gender effect was significant for prosocial behavior  $F(1,48) = 4.404, P < .041$  and self control  $F(1,50) = 4.29, P < .043$ . After adjusting for preexisting differences, the fifth-grade girls exhibited a more negative attitude toward anti-social behaviors such as fighting, taking things that belong to someone else, and a more positive attitude toward prosocial behaviors such as being fair, trying not to get into trouble with the law, and obeying rules. The fifth-grade girls also exhibited a more positive attitude toward self control than the boys.*
- **Impact on law and authority by gender and teacher.** *For the fifth-grade students the interaction effect between gender and group was significant with respect to law and authority  $F(1,52) = 3.23, P < .048$ . In the control group there was not much difference between the attitude of the girls and boys toward law and authority. In the case of teacher #1, the intervention had a more positive impact on the attitude of the girls toward law and authority. In the case of teacher # 2 the intervention had a more positive impact on the attitude of boys toward law and authority.*

## RESULTS OF THE SIXTH GRADE INTERVENTION

Based on classroom observations, both sixth grade classes functioned well throughout the study. There were observable differences, however, in the dynamics of the two experimental groups. Teacher #3 emphasized the cognitive aspects of the instruction. Teacher #4 emphasized both cognitive and affective aspects. Due to these differences, the data collected on the sixth grade subjects was analyzed separately by teacher. Analysis of the data shows that the intervention had the following positive results:

- **Impact on community** *The significant group effect indicated that the intervention had a positive impact on the attitude of the sixth graders toward community ( $F(1,63) = 5.32, P < .007$ ). The students taught by both teacher #3 and #4 exhibited a more positive attitude toward the community than the control group ( $P < .05$ ). The students taught by teachers #3 and #4 exhibited similar attitudes toward the community.*
- **Impact on community by gender.** *The significant interaction effect associated with community ( $F = 3.96, P < .024$ ) indicates that in the control group there is a statistically significant difference between the attitude of sixth-grade boys and that of sixth-grade girls toward the community. In the experimental groups the boys' and girls' perceptions regarding how they could improve their community did not differ. Whereas, in the experimental groups the gender gap between the attitude of the boys and girls toward the community was almost one fifth of the gender gap in the control group (gap of 3 compared to 15). The boys in the control class perceived that they could play a more active role in the community than the girls. Whereas, the boys and girls who participated in the intervention perceived that they could play an equally active role in improving their community. Thus, it can be concluded that the intervention has helped teach the young boys and girls that they can play an equally important role in their community.*
- **Impact on prosocial behavior.** *The significant group effect indicated that the intervention had a positive impact on prosocial behavior  $F(1,64) = 3.40, P < .039$ . After adjusting for the preexisting differences, the students taught by teacher #4 exhibited a more positive attitude toward prosocial behavior than the students taught by teacher #3 ( $P < .05$ ) and the control group ( $P < .05$ ).*
- **Impact on cooperation by gender.** *The significant interaction effect ( $F = 7.002, P < .002$ ) associated with cooperation indicated that in the control group there was a statistically significant difference ( $P < .05$ ) between the attitude of the boys and girls toward cooperation with the boys exhibiting a more positive attitude toward cooperation. Whereas, in the experimental groups the boys' and girls' attitudes toward cooperation did not differ significantly. The gap in the attitude of the boys and girls toward cooperation was almost three to four times larger in the control than in the experimental group. Thus, it can be concluded that the gender gap between the attitude of the sixth-grade boys and girls toward cooperation was much less in the students that had been exposed to the intervention.*

## **RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE MEASURES FOR FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADES**

During interviews and focus group discussions, the fifth and sixth grade subjects were asked questions related to knowledge acquisition, skills, and attitudes. Reported below are some typical responses offered by the subjects.

### Fifth grade responses:

- We learned that in order to prevent violence you should:
  - treat other people the way you want to be treated
  - if you see someone with a gun, go to the principal, they can be expelled
  - walk away, ignore
  - walk with your friends.
- A dress code is good because some kids dress like gang members and they can get hurt.
- We learned that authority is the permission to use power.
- The stories made us think about how we could stop the bad things that happen.
- Seventh and eighth graders do some of the bad things; they think they can do what they want, they are using power without authority.
- We are in school to work together.
- My cousin wanted to join a gang, she changed her mind after I talked to her.
- Students who have studied about violence could speak to lower grades and kindergarten students.

### Sixth grade responses:

- We learned that early man made rules:
  - so people could live better,
  - they did not have problems,
  - to divide responsibilities.
- When there were no rules, people got killed.
- We have to do team work to get things done.
- We can help each other without being ashamed.
- It has changed me in my home. My brother and I share a room. We fought before. Now we share things.

## **Over all attitude of fifth and sixth graders toward the intervention**

At the conclusion of the school year, fifth and sixth grade subjects were surveyed about their attitudes toward the Youth for Justice program. One-hundred percent of the fifth and the sixth-grade students thought that it is a good idea to have other students in the school study the citizenship/law-related instructional materials. Ninety-five percent of the fifth and sixth graders expressed that they enjoyed the Youth for Justice program.

## RESULTS OF THE "AT RISK" INTERVENTION

Due to the small number of subjects (N = 18 in the experimental and control groups) in the "at risk" group, the evaluation of the intervention will not be based on quantitative measures. The results reported below are based on the qualitative measures. Exit interviews with the "at risk" subjects indicated that they:

- felt secure in the citizenship/law-related class.
- enjoyed the fact that everybody knew everybody and they all became friends.
- did not want to become delinquents.

During focus group discussions the "at risk" subjects were asked how things were going in the intervention class. The following were typical responses:

### Positive attitude toward school

- I improved. I used to get Ds and Fs; now I get Cs and Bs. I do my work and I respect the teacher. Before I talked behind the teacher's back and now I do not.
- I was bored in my class; I do better now.
- Now I do more homework. Before I would rip the homework and throw it away.
- I talked back to the teachers before. When they punished me I wanted to get even with them. Now I do not [talk back or want to get even].

### Positive attitude toward community

- If you don't like something about the school, you can talk to the Board about it. Before I would not do this.
- I voted "yes" for school uniforms because it will make the school look better.
- It (attending a school board meeting) was cool; I did something for the school.
- Pollution destroys the community. Picking up papers prevents pollution. Before this class I thought it would be boring to pick up trash.

### Self control

- I learned how to control my behavior. Six months ago I used to get into fights; I do not do that any more. Now I am minding my own business.
- You have to earn respect. I obey my mom and listen to her more than before.
- Before when I got home from school, I would get dressed and go out. Now I stay home after school. Now my mother and I talk.
- I have more friends now. Since they are my friends, I do not need to beat them up.

### Authority

- Respect adults.
- Respect the teacher; you do not talk when the teacher talks.
- Follow directions.
- He (the teacher's aide) disciplines us; his discipline shows that he cares.
- Everyone wants a teacher who lets them do what they want. But when they are unsuccessful in life, they wish they had a more strict teacher.
- The police officer that talked to us helped us.

Prosocial behavior

- I learned good behavior.
- Give others the respect that you want to receive, otherwise, you will not get along in life.
- When you promise something to your friends you raise their hopes, and if you do not keep your word, you hurt them.
- We have learned to get along with our classmates.
- I have learned to stay away from gangs. Being in gangs is too much trouble.

Interviews with parents of the "at risk" subjects indicated that they perceived that the intervention helped their children to develop a more positive attitude toward school; to have greater respect for adults; and to devote more attention to academic achievement. Some parents indicated that the intervention helped improve the relationship between themselves and their children.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are being implemented during year two of the study:

1. Pretesting and posttesting students on areas such as attitude toward school, teachers, or locus of control is not advisable. The citizenship/law-related intervention is not the only factor having an impact on these attributes. Pretesting and posttesting should focus on the attributes that are enhanced by the citizenship/law related instructional materials.
2. Implementation of repeated measures of students' attitudes toward working in cooperative groups and self control are suggested.
3. It was not clear how much time (something like 30%) the teachers devoted to instruction using the citizenship/law-related material. It is suggested that teachers log the classroom time spent implementing the intervention.
4. Due to the small number of "at risk" subjects, the evaluation of the "at risk" group should be based on qualitative and not quantitative methods.
5. Classroom observations indicated that the students' knowledge of vocabulary was being enhanced. It is suggested to pretest and posttest the students on the knowledge component of the material.
6. Due to the large number of fifth and sixth grade classes at Bell Gardens Intermediate, both the experimental and the control groups can be selected from this school. These classes should be matched for instructional effectiveness, students' competency in the English language, and students' overall achievement.
7. The teachers should create a timeline outlining specific dates for implementing citizenship/law-related instruction and activities.
8. The students need to work on doing a culminating activity such as a legislative hearing, a mock trial, or a community project.
9. The "at risk" students seemed to learn much from visits by community members, films, videos, and talking to the adults. It is suggested that more emphasis be placed on the teaching modalities from which these students benefit the most and that these activities be more fully integrated with the lessons.
10. Use the *Violence in the Schools: Developing Prevention Plans* and/or the *Drugs in the Schools: Preventing Substance Abuse* with both the fifth and sixth-grade students.
11. It is suggested that there be follow-up with the "at risk" subjects who participated in year one of the study to gather data on GPA, suspension rates, truancy, and delinquency.