

The Peaceful People Program Significantly Improves Behavior for Elementary Children

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Introduction

As universal level violence prevention programs grow in popularity at the elementary level, it is imperative that we learn more about those programs that are successful in addressing violent behavior and its associated problems. Funding agencies are demanding that schools choose programs with demonstrated success as schools move toward more evidence-based practice.

This report shows the results of a comprehensive evaluation of one such program—the *Peaceful People* Program. Within this report there is sufficient evidence to support this program’s inclusion among those having demonstrated success. According to the materials for the program:

Peaceful People, a comprehensive youth development and violence prevention program, is a service of PRL (Peaceful Resolutions for Living, Inc.). Peaceful People uses an integrated character and conflict resolution education curricula and provides a series of activity based classroom lesson plans which empowers facilitators/teachers to make meaningful connections for students between the skills that are needed for character development and the academic foundations in which they learn most effectively.

Method

Students in 6 elementary schools within the Utica City School District (48 % of students are minority and 75.7% receive free or reduced lunch, and 65-87% live below the federal poverty line) participated in this study. Grades 4-6 were targeted because their literacy levels were thought to be higher, thus making them better able to understand and complete the survey.

A modified version of the Student Behavior Checklist (Meier, McDougal, and Bardos, 2002) was administered to elementary students (n=1067) using scripted instructions in six elementary schools in the Utica City School District the week preceding the first day of the Peaceful People program. Of these students, 843 were in the experimental classrooms (those who received the full six week Peaceful People program) and 224 were in the comparison classrooms (which received no program). In the experimental classrooms Peaceful People trainers presented the same 45 minute lessons (6 of 18 available lessons) once per week over the next six weeks. The same survey was administered in the week following the final lesson (after 6 weeks and 6 sessions of the program). At post-test there were 1018 students with 803 in the experimental group and 215 in the control

group. The scale was a 3-point scale (1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often) and students were asked to rate their perceptions on a variety of behaviors and feelings

Results

Significant differences pre- to post-test for experimental group

Students in the experimental group were compared before and after the Peaceful People program. There were statistically significant reductions pre- to post- on the following variables:

- Risky behavior
- Arguing
- Fighting
- Feelings about hurting oneself

There was a statistically significant increase in:

- One's ability to control one's temper

Significant differences between experimental and control groups at post-test

Between experimental and control groups at post-test (with no significant differences at pre-test) there were significant differences for the following variables:

- Arguing
- Fighting
- Ability to control one's temper
- Being well behaved
- Thinking of others (empathy)

There were significant differences in the following variables between the experimental and control groups at post-test on the following variables (however the groups were significantly different at pre-test as well):

- Thoughts of hurting oneself
- Being prepared
- Being responsible
- Cooperating
- Speaking up for oneself

Discussion/Implications

The Peaceful People program clearly has a positive impact on elementary school children. This positive impact is demonstrated above by comparing those students who had the 6-week program to those who did not through the use of pre- and post-testing. Consistently factors such as fighting, controlling one's temper, and arguing were significantly improved for the experimental groups. Also other behaviors such as cooperating with others, thinking of others' feelings (empathy), and speaking up for one's self (assertion) were also improved for the Peaceful People students.

The Peaceful People program has demonstrated its effectiveness in meeting its stated objectives of improving cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. It has also had an impact in reducing violent behaviors such as fighting and arguing. In addition there are clear emotional benefits such as reductions for students who have thoughts of hurting themselves. Elementary schools seeking to address problem behavior or even simply prevent problems down the road should seriously consider this program with demonstrated success.

For more information about the evaluation and program materials please contact Lura Lunkenheimer at lgramet@aol.com