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Article 56

Increasing Accountability in School-Led Anger Management Groups: A Push for Equity

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Instances of students with anger problems have increased in recent years, which affect the equity of educational achievement and social-behavioral adjustment for these students (Twemlow, Sacco, & Fonagy, 2008). National models, such as the American School Counselor Association's (2005), emphasize scholastic achievement and success for all, but due to demands on educators' time and disruptions from students, these ideals have not materialized. The U.S. Department of Education (2000) indicated that due to lack of community involvement and equity, violence and bullying in schools substantially increased during the previous ten years. As a result, many schools began to implement remediation strategies, such as anger management groups, in an attempt to stop aggressive behaviors (Deffenbacher, Lynch, Oetting, & Kemper, 1996; Galambos & Leadbeater, 2000; Grunbaum et al., 2004).

In addition to reducing anger, the purpose of anger management groups was to assist schools in identifying and supporting students that exhibit disruptive behaviors in academic settings (Kellner, Bry, & Salvador, 2008). According to Sullivan (2000), disruptive behaviors such as violence and bullying lead to students failing to perform to their full academic potential. Academic hardships affect not only students, but also the scholastic environment of the school (Goodland, 1997). For example, repeated failures to obtain national standards labels a school as substandard, and results in a loss of academic funding (Dahir & Stone, 2009). With valuable time allocated for behavioral problems instead of scholastic issues, students and staff within the school environment suffer academically and professionally (Frey et al., 2005).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) has affected accountability in schools, holding administrative staff responsible for yearly academic progression. According to Dahir and Stone (2009), NCLB states that every aspect of the school

environment, encompassing students, parents, teachers, principals, and community is responsible for scholastic achievement. With such a strong emphasis on accountability, anger management groups have grown in popularity with school officials (Newman, Horne, & Bartolomucci, 2000). The attractiveness of anger management groups is that they make schools appear proactive in stopping problem behaviors and refocusing on academics. As anger management groups grow, however, research has indicated mixed findings on anger management curricula (Newman et al., 2000).

A 20 year meta-analysis conducted by Cooper, Lutenbacher, and Faccia (2000) concluded that only 15 studies indicated a reduction in aggression with children and adolescents. Conversely, Newman et al. (2000) found that anger management groups were effective in reducing aggressive behaviors in children. Orpinas, Horne, and Staniszewski (2003) indicate that anger management groups are more beneficial for children than adolescents. In this age of accountability, ambiguous results do not benefit schools whose educational livelihood relies on empirical evidence (Swanson, 2004). Current research seeks to redefine anger management curricula in order to gain consistent results (Kellner et al., 2008). This modern form of anger management utilizes social cognitive theory (SCT) principles involving the entire school environment (Orpinas & Horne, 2004).

Anger management groups historically dealt with offenders, while neglecting the effect of the environment on behavior (Serin, Gobeil, & Peterson, 2009). Students, teachers, and principals that are part of the environment were largely ignored (Lorion, 2000). As accountability has increased due to NCLB, neglecting the environment in which behavior occurs is detrimental to the academic success of schools (Schmoozer, 2006). By not dealing with the environment, a social milieu is created in which students fear for their safety, and the fear extends into the classroom, affecting academic achievement (Lorion, 2000). An example of this trepidation is a student who becomes reluctant to speak out against aggressive acts and cannot concentrate in class (Ward & Dockerill, 1999). In order to remedy indirect victimization, current anger management research states a holistic approach, involving aggressive students, peers, teachers and administrative staff, needs implementation (Kellner et al., 2008).

Involving others increases the effectiveness of anger management in its ability to assist youth (Leff, Power, Manz, Costigan, & Nabors, 2001). Deffenbacher et al., (1996) state that teachers, principals, and peers alike frequently misunderstand angry students. When youth are ostracized by people within their environment, they act out and become angry students fulfilling the negative expectations of others (Rosenthal, 1985). Orpinas and Horne (2004) suggest that modifying the school environment involving peers, teachers, and administrators are important factors in reducing aggression. Orpinas and Horne further state that student aggression is not an isolated event and appears in a social context. Similar to NCLB, anger management curricula needs to hold all entities within the school community accountable for aggression in schools (Finn & Willert, 2006). School communities need to articulate a social message to young people that emotional and social support is available within their environment (Bandura, 1989).

Bandura (1997) states that social and emotional support in the form of social evaluations influences people's personal perception of themselves. Pullis (1994) suggested that social evaluations direct youths' behaviors towards positive or negative outcomes. Bandura (2008) affirms that for many youths, positive role models do not

exist. As a result, some young people model their behaviors on negative influences, and solely pay attention to negative social evaluations of themselves. Numerous other studies have indicated that social evaluations influence youth substantially (Bandura, 1986, 1989; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Rosenthal, 1985). Similar to NCLB (2002), these studies state that not only are students accountable for their behaviors, but the entire school community.

In anger management curricula, accountability is not even, as an emphasis on individuals, rather than environmental factors is a focal point (Kellner, 2001; Shek & Wai, 2008). Recent studies (Dwivedi & Gupta, 2000; Finn & Willert, 2006; Serin et al., 2009) have suggested several revisions to anger management curricula. The modifications recommended by the researchers involve environmental considerations (e.g., social accountability for peers, teachers, and family), stopping reliance on high control behavioral strategies, and integrating prosocial skill building, such as leadership development, with aggressive students.

According to Kellner et al. (2008), very few studies have explored the effect of accountability on aggressive behaviors. Furthermore, Kellner et al. state that research needs to look at how angry students can generalize positive behaviors outside of anger management sessions. Finn and Willert (2006) claim that there is a dearth in research that investigates the impact of accountability and leadership development. Dwivedi and Gupta (2000) support students taking leadership roles in the classroom and in the community to increase accountability and generalization. Specifically, researchers have emphasized the need to develop a simple to implement group that integrates accountability with leadership development (Kellner et al., 2008). This study advocates for the integration of accountability and leadership skill development into anger management curricula. The primary purpose of this article is to address the urgent call by researchers to expand the traditional methods used by school-led anger management programs. The study described in this article may serve as a pragmatic model that supports students, schools, and communities. Thus, the intent of this study was twofold: (a) to investigate the effect of leadership development as a potential change agent in reducing aggressive behaviors in children at school, and (b) to involve administrative staff and peers in anger management groups in order to increase accountability.

Method

Participants

This study implemented a leadership development program in four elementary schools across a large southeastern city. Participants were chosen from behavioral referrals, teacher recommendations, and conduct reports. The 32 youths referred to this program displayed a myriad of aggressive and socially maladaptive behaviors. These behaviors included the following: (a) fighting, (b) provoking altercations between peers, (c) refusing to abide to school protocols, and (d) verbally attacking peers and school staff. The group members ranged from 9 to 11 years of age, in the 4th and 5th grade, and were of various ethnicities and religions. Participants consisted of 20 males (65%) and 12 females (35%). Out of this total, 59% (19) identified as Black, 32% (10) identified as Caucasian, 6% (2) identified as Mixed Race, and 3% (1) identified as Other.

Procedure

Self-report questionnaires were administered before and after the group intervention and were given to participants and administrative staff over a 12-week period. The questionnaires had participants rank themselves according to their perceived leadership and anger management skills. The intervention trained participants in a manualized anger management program called “Empowering the Angry Child through Positive Leadership” (EACPL). EACPL is a 12-session program that systematically integrates leadership training with behavioral strategies and activities. In EACPL, participants were trained by an outside consultant in psycho-educational activities, conceptualizations of behavioral triggers and cues, and problem solving techniques. There were four groups, consisting of eight members each from four participating schools. Three of the schools had a 100% percent completion rate, while one had a 75% completion rate.

A quasi-experimental design was chosen for this study, as the participants were selected without random assignment. However, as Heppner, Wampold, and Kivlighan (2008) noted, quasi-experimental designs are effective in investigating relationships in practical settings such as schools because of feasibility. Lambie (2009) suggests caution when interpreting results from quasi-experimental designs because participants occur naturally without randomization (Lambie, 2009).

The leadership training component differentiated this study from other anger management curricula. The outside consultant told school staff to label the group as a leadership development cohort, and not as an anger management program. Before induction into the program, teachers and school counselors informed potential participants of their selection to be a member of the group, based on observed leadership potential. In addition, school staff stated that the group was a privilege, with only a few chosen. They further stated to participants that administrative staff would have only a small part in the group, but that they would provide substantial social support to students throughout. According to White, Bandura, and Bero (2009) prefacing groups with positive connotations increases buy in and credibility of interventions. In addition, having administrative staff involved socially increases accountability and awareness (Orpinas & Horne, 2004).

Once this was established, the outside consultant worked with the group over the 12 week period to operationally define what the participants’ ideal of being a leader was. The consultant then had the group conceptualize individual strengths with an emphasis on collaboration between members. The consultant had participants understand that for effective leadership, there has to be some form of cooperation and understanding others. Ongoing with the leadership training, participants learned games and activities that focused on behavioral transformation and recognition of triggers and cues. After learning games, each participant practiced leadership skills by teaching other members in the group the same activities. Participants were told by the outside consultant and school staff that they were the instructors, and the goal was to fine-tune their leadership skills. The adults were merely present as a social support mechanism. Participants were informed that teachers would support the group by allowing access to classrooms and teaching their peers lessons.

EACPL as a Treatment

EACPL is a manualized treatment based upon the theoretical orientation of social cognitive theory (SCT). SCT incorporates environment, behaviors, and interpersonal factors and how each affects one another in a reciprocal nature (Bandura, 1986). EACPL's leadership utilizes the agentic perspective of SCT, separated into four distinct modules. The units comprising the agentic perspective are as follows: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. EACPL's manualized 12-week program incorporates the four modules of the agentic perspective, systematically devoting an average of 3 sessions per component.

In the first module, intentionality begins. The outside consultant has the participants construct personal and group goals. These goals comprise strategies for acquiring goals. Since strategies involve other group members, participants must intentionally negotiate and accommodate self-interests to begin the process of accomplishing personal and group goals. The initial stages of leadership development begin as participants practice leading activities with one another. The goal of the leadership is to learn how to negotiate with others through difficulty and obtain goals. For example, difficulty may occur when a participant leads an activity, but another may have wanted to lead. Since both cannot lead simultaneously, the external consultant allows participants to negotiate possibilities (i.e., co-leadership) together.

In the second module, forethought begins in this session. In EACPL, forethought is more than thinking about future events. The external consultant has group members develop objectives and predict the probable effects of their behaviors on events. Through symbolic representation, future events come into fruition through participants' influence, current behavior, and strategies. In the second module, intentionality and forethought combine to support directive and focused behavior. Forethought assists in guiding and motivating group members' behaviors anticipatorily in order to accomplish goals and objectives (Bandura, 2008). The objective of leadership is to understand how intentionality and forethought synthesize to lead others, plan strategies, and problem solve.

In the third module, self-reactiveness begins. Self-reactiveness entails more than participants actively planning and predicting possibilities. The external consultant has the participants self-regulate in order to accomplish goals and objectives. This module involves participants creating specific strategies and regulating the execution of the strategy systematically (Bandura, 2008). Self-reactiveness encompasses developing methods to circumvent stress-provoking situations and regulating behaviors in order to follow the method successively. Being able to systemically focus, set goals, and direct others in following specific courses of action are fundamental in this module.

In the fourth module, self-reflectiveness begins. In this module, participants do more than actively strategize plans. Group members predict possibilities, self-regulate, and examine their behavioral performance (Bandura, 2008). Through self-reflectiveness, participants focus on self-efficacy, the validity of decisions made, and how to make corrective adjustments to methods that are not working. Self-reflectiveness entails working with others and developing skills in avoiding stress-provoking situations. In addition, self-reflectiveness gives participants ideals on what to do when conflict is unavoidable (Bandura, 2005).

Instrumentation

The instrument utilized for this study was an organization-developed construct designed by the institution that begun EACPL. Variables used to examine the constructs included perceived Anger Management Skills (pre- and post-test), and perceived Leadership Development Skills (pre- and post-test). The instrument used a 10 item, Likert-style assessment that conceptualized negative behavioral themes in the following terms: (a) "I call people names," (b) "I encourage others to fight," (c) "I make threats to hit or hurt another person," (d) "I hit back when someone hits me first," and (e) "I push, shove, slap, or kick others." The leadership component entailed thematic patterns such as: (a) "I calm myself down when angry," (b) "I walk away when confronted," (c) "I help someone else stay out of fights," (d) "I help other people solve problems," and (e) "I give people compliments." Participants rank themselves from "Never" (1), to "Some of the time" (2), to "Most of the time" (3), to "Always" (4).

Results

Parametric statistical procedures were implemented and the differences between variables were determined. Data for parametric procedures were entered into a database and analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 2006). A two-tailed t-test revealed significant findings on the leadership variable of "I walk away when confronted", ($t = 2.53$, $df = 26$, $p = .018$). However, there were no significant differences found on other leadership variables, such as "I calm myself down when angry" ($t = -.417$, $df = 26$, $p = .680$), "I help someone else stay out of fights" ($t = -.449$, $df = 26$, $p = .657$), "I help other people solve problems" ($t = .116$, $df = 27$, $p = .909$), or "I give people compliments" ($t = 1.02$, $df = 26$, $p = .319$).

A two-tailed t-test revealed no significant differences found on anger management variables, such as "I call people names" ($t = -.517$, $df = 26$, $p = .610$), "I encourage others to fight" ($t = -1.27$, $df = 26$, $p = .215$), "I make threats to hit or hurt another person" ($t = -1.51$, $df = 27$, $p = .143$), "I hit back when someone hits me first" ($t = 1.74$, $df = 26$, $p = .094$), and "I push, shove, slap, or kick others" ($t = .124$, $df = 26$, $p = .902$).

Discussion

This study investigated the effect of synthesizing leadership development and accountability as a potential change agent in reducing aggressive behaviors in children. Although the results did not indicate a change in aggressive behavior, the results did indicate change in participants' perception of leadership qualities. Sullivan (2000) suggests an explanation behind the results not indicating a significant change in anger. Sullivan states that youth wish to please adults and undergo the social desirability (SD) effect. SD, operationally defined, is an inclination for participants in a study to present themselves in a more positive light than how one truly perceives oneself (Ganster, Hennessey, & Luthans, 1983). As such, participants rank themselves low on behaviors that they perceive the tester wants. In this study, SD may have been a potential reason for the lack of change in aggression. However, leadership development did increase significantly in this study. Research has suggested that aggressive behaviors are incompatible with prosocial leadership development (Kellner et al., 2008). Stemming

from this, according to current studies (Finn & Willert, 2006; Shek & Wai, 2008) aggression and anger must decrease when there is an increase in leadership.

Bandura (2005) states that involving adults in the school environment assists in the development of leadership through modeling and accountability. Although the results from this study were modest, there was an increase in participants' perception of leadership. According to Zimmerman and Cleary (2006), when adults hold themselves accountable for youths' behaviors, it empowers young people to behave positively. Accountability in this study was evidenced when teachers allowed youth to enter into the classrooms and teach peers the behavioral activities learned. Ramifications stemming from this are that members have a vested stake in the group, as participants are now providers of services that are needed (i.e., leadership roles). Teachers, school counselors, and principals emotionally supported group members in this study. Emotional support was in the form of praising and complimenting positive advancements made behaviorally during the 12-week program. According to Rosenthal (1985), emotional support by adults is a critical factor in improving behavior in youth.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, there are limitations. This study is no exception to that rule. First, a purposeful sampling of students drawn from teacher observations, conduct grades, and behavioral referrals was a limitation. Additionally, data was only taken from schools that wanted to participate. The relatively small sample size ($N = 32$) confines the generalizability and transferability of the findings. Additionally, there are limitations stemming from utilizing a quasi-methodological design, as stated by Lambie (2009). However, a quasi-experimental design may be the most beneficial medium for schools (Heppner et al., 2008). Limitations notwithstanding, this study was one of the first to examine the incorporation of leadership development and accountability into anger management programs.

Implications for Schools

This study's findings have several implications for schools. First, findings suggest that synthesizing leadership development skills and accountability into anger management groups increases prosocial behavior (Bandura, 1997). Secondly, this study suggests that implementation of leadership development and accountability potentially reduces aggression by increasing prosocial behaviors. This is evidenced by having leadership development not focus predominately on the self-regulatory abilities of participants as the only buffer for aggressive acts (Dwivedi & Gupta, 2000), but incorporating individuals in the school environment as a powerful influence as well (Bandura, 2001; Martin, 2004). Thirdly, research states that aggressive students have tremendous influence in schools, as others follow them out of fear or respect (Lorion, 2000; Shek & Wai, 2008). Leadership development and accountability offers to schools a strength-based approach that draws upon the strong points of aggressive children and systematically changes institutions' views of this populace (Kellner et al., 2008; Langdon & Preble, 2008).

Implications for Future Research

Future studies may want to research if culture has an effect on leadership development and accountability. For example, if there is a difference between students from Middle Eastern backgrounds as compared to young people of African American descent. In addition, investigation of differences in gender, such as if female, male, or mixed groups have greater effects is paramount. Researchers may also want to study underserved populations such as youth who reside in residential facilities and community centers, to see if leadership development and accountability are effective in these settings. Research may want to conduct longitudinal studies to see if there is a long-term effect in behavior and if academic progression is improved. Since elementary school- aged children were the focal point of this study, future studies may want to see if adolescents also receive similar benefits.

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Table 1.

Group Statistics					
Sessions attended		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Calm myself down	9 sessions	14	2.43	1.016	.272
	12 sessions	15	2.60	1.183	.306
Walk away when confronted	9 sessions	13	2.54	1.127	.312
	12 sessions	15	1.60	.828	.214
Stay out of trouble	9 sessions	13	2.54	1.050	.291
	12 sessions	15	2.73	1.223	.316
Solve problems	9 sessions	14	2.64	.842	.225
	12 sessions	15	2.60	1.121	.289
Give compliments to others	9 sessions	13	2.92	1.038	.288
	12 sessions	15	2.53	.990	.256

Table 2.

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Upper	Lower
Calm myself down	Equal variances assumed	1.154	.292	-.417	27	.680	-.171	.411	1.015	.672
	Equal variances not assumed			-.419	26.828	.678	-.171	.409	1.010	.668
Walk away when confronted	Equal variances assumed	2.726	.111	2.534	26	.018	.938	.370	.177	1.700
	Equal variances not assumed			2.479	21.776	.021	.938	.379	.153	1.724
Stay out of trouble	Equal variances assumed	1.117	.300	-.449	26	.657	-.195	.434	1.088	.698
	Equal variances not assumed			-.454	26.000	.654	-.195	.430	1.078	.688
Solve problems	Equal variances assumed	2.667	.114	.116	27	.909	.043	.370	-.717	.803
	Equal variances not assumed			.117	25.860	.908	.043	.367	-.711	.797
Give compliments to others	Equal variances assumed	.022	.882	1.016	26	.319	.390	.384	-.399	1.178
	Equal variances not assumed			1.012	25.046	.321	.390	.385	-.403	1.183

Table 3.

Group Statistics

	Sessions attended	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Call others names	9 sessions	13	2.15	.376	.104
	12 sessions	15	2.27	.704	.182
Encourage fights	9 sessions	13	1.77	.927	.257
	12 sessions	15	2.33	1.345	.347
Make Threats	9 sessions	14	1.50	.650	.174
	12 sessions	15	2.00	1.069	.276
Hit back when hit first	9 sessions	14	3.14	1.027	.275
	12 sessions	15	3.73	.799	.206
Push others	9 sessions	13	1.77	.832	.231
	12 sessions	15	1.73	.704	.182

Table 4.

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Upper	Lower
Call others names	Equal variances assumed	3.490	.073	-.517	26	.610	-.113	.218	-.561	.336
	Equal variances not assumed			-.539	21.947	.596	-.113	.209	-.547	.322
Encourage fights	Equal variances assumed	5.806	.023	1.271	26	.215	-.564	.444	1.476	.348
	Equal variances not assumed			1.305	24.842	.204	-.564	.432	1.454	.326
Make Threats	Equal variances assumed	1.394	.248	1.508	27	.143	-.500	.332	1.180	.180
	Equal variances not assumed			1.533	23.352	.139	-.500	.326	1.174	.174
Hit back when hit first	Equal variances assumed	8.710	.006	1.735	27	.094	-.590	.340	1.289	.108
	Equal variances not assumed			1.720	24.554	.098	-.590	.343	1.298	.117
Push others	Equal variances assumed	.001	.977	.124	26	.902	.036	.290	-.560	.632
	Equal variances not assumed			.122	23.688	.904	.036	.294	-.571	.643