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PREVENTING VIOLENCE AMONG GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

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Abstract

The school and the family have great roles to play in preventing violence among gifted and talented students. This paper discusses ways through which parents and teachers of gifted children could help to promote children's emotional well-being and prevent violence in times of trouble. Among others, this can be achieved through helping the children develop necessary skills to manage their feelings, to confront unpleasant or adverse realities, and to acquire greater emotional stability. Especially stress that may be a significant cause of violent behaviour among gifted learners.

Introduction

The World Health Organisation (2010) defined violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation, but acknowledges that the inclusion of “the use of power” in its definition expand on the conventional meaning of the word. This definition associates intentionality with the committing of the act itself, irrespective of the outcome it produces (Stith, 2004). Generally, though anything that is turbulent or excited in an injurious, damaging or destructive way, or presenting risk accordingly, may be described as violent or occurring violently even if not signifying violence (by a person against a person).

Globally, violence takes the lives of more than 1.6 million people annually (Ford, 2011). Just over 50% due to suicide, some due to homicide, war or some other form of conflict. In Africa, out of every 100,000 people, each year an estimated 60.9 die a violent death. Statistics show that gunfire kills ten children a day in the United States. Corlin, past president of the American Medical Association said; “The United States leads the world in the rate at which its children die from fire arms.” He concluded. “Gun violence is a threat to the public health of our country”. For each single death due to violence, there are dozens of hospitalizations, hundreds of emergency department visits, and thousands of doctors' appointments. Furthermore, violence often has lifelong consequences for victims physical and mental health and social functioning and can slow economic and social development.

It must be stressed however, that violence in many forms is preventable. According to Fein (2009), evidence shows strong relationships between levels of violence and potentially modifiable factors such as concentrated poverty, income

and gender inequality, the harmful use of alcohol, and the absence of safe, stable and murdering relationships between children and parents. Scientific research shows that strategies addressing the underlying causes of violence can be effective in preventing violence. In this paper emphasis would be on how manifestation of violent behaviour could be prevented among the gifted and talented students.

Typology of Violence

The World Report on Violence and Health (WRVH), (2004), gave a typology of violence that, while not uniformly accepted, can be a useful way to understand the contexts in which violence occurs and the interactions between types of violence. This typology distinguishes four modes in which violence may be inflicted: physical; sexual; and psychological attack, and deprivation. It further divides the general definition of violence into three sub-types according to the victim-perpetrator relationship. They are:

i. *Self-directed violence*: This refers to violence in which the perpetration and the victim are the same individual and is subdivided into self-abuse and suicide. The later includes suicidal thoughts, attempted suicides- also called para suicide or deliberate self-injury in some countries- and completed suicides. Self-abuse, in contrast, includes acts such as self-mutilation.

ii. *Collective violence*: Collective violence refers to violence committed by larger group of individuals and can be subdivided into social, political and economic violence. Unlike the other two broad categories, the sub categories of collective violence suggest possible motives for violence committed by larger groups of individuals or by states. Collective violence that is committed to a particular social agenda includes, for example, crimes of hate committed by organized groups, terrorist acts and mob violence. Political violence includes war and related violent conflicts, state violence and similar acts carried out by larger groups. Economic violence includes attacks by larger groups motivated by economic gain such as attacks carried out with the purpose of disrupting economic activity, denying access to essential services, or creating economic division and fragmentation. Clearly, acts committed by larger groups can have multiple motives.

iii. *Interpersonal violence*: Interpersonal violence is divided into two subcategories: Family and intimate partner violence- that is, violence largely between family members and intimate partners, usually, though not exclusively, taking place in the home. The second category according to Vossekul (2007) is community violence. This is a violence between individuals who are unrelated, and who may or may not know each other, generally taking place outside the home. The former group includes forms of violence such as child abuse, intimate partner violence and abuse of the elderly. The later includes youth violence, random acts of violence, rape or sexual assault by strangers, and violence in institutional settings such as schools, workplaces, prisons and nursing homes. When interpersonal violence occurs in families, its psychological consequences can affect parents, children, and their relationship in the short- and long-terms.

Causes of Violence

According to Wilson (2008), there are three major causes of violence: biological, sociological and psychological causes.

Biological Causes

Many biological factors have been nominated as candidates for causes of violence. Hormones like testosterone, transmitters in the brain like serotonin, and blood abnormalities like hypoglycemia are only a few that have been mentioned. Biological factors do not have to be hereditary. They could be caused by a head injury, poor nutrition, or environmental events, such as exposure to lead paint.

Fortunately, the National Academy of Sciences (2004), just reviewed hundreds of studies on the relationship between biology and violence, and it came to one clear bottom-line conclusion: "No patterns precise enough to be considered reliable biological markers for violent behaviour have yet been identified." The National Academy of sciences found many promising leads that should be vigorously pursued by researchers, but so far, it could point to nothing as a proven, or even close to proven biological risk factor for future violence.

Sociological Causes

Two problems keep us from knowing which factor really matters as a cause of violence and which is irrelevant. One problem is that each factor relates not only to violence but to other sociological factors as well. Poverty and race, for example, are related not just to violence but also to each other. If poverty is taken into account, the effect of race on violence decreases drastically, and in some studies, disappears entirely.

The second problems are that it is sometimes hard to tell which came first, the sociological factor or the violence. This could be referred to as "cause and effect" problem. It is true, that violence does not cause people to be male or to be young. But it is not clear whether unemployment leads people to commit violent acts or whether, for at least some people, their violent acts lead employers not want to hire them. It is also possible that, at least for some people, a third factor- like an "impulsive" temperament- causes them both to be violent and to be unlikely to keep a steady job.

Psychological Causes

It is an established fact that while man' aggressive children go on to be law-abiding adults, aggression at age eight significantly predicts, violent convictions well into the thirties, in every culture in which it has been studied (Monahan, 2010). Most children who have been physically abused by their parents go on to be perfectly normal adults. Yet, physical abuse doubles the risk that a boy will have convictions for violent crime as an adult.

According to Mulvey (2006), failure of a child in school is one of the most enduring correlates of later violence. Four out of five violent offenders in prison never finished high school. According to him, the more changes of placement a foster child experiences while growing up, the more likely that child will later be arrested for a violent crime.

Some School Practices that Contribute to the Development of Antisocial Behaviour and Potential for Violence among Gifted Students

Many school practices may unintentionally contribute to the development of antisocial behaviour and potential for violence (Wilson, 2008). For example, the over emphasis on detecting and changing individual child or youth characteristics that predict violence or disruption may cause schools to overlook many important variables. These include, among others:

1. Ineffective instruction that results in academic failure.
2. Inconsistent and punitive classroom and behaviour management practices.
3. Lack of opportunity to learn and practice prosocial interpersonal and self-management skills.
4. Unclear rules and expectations regarding appropriate behaviour
5. Failure to effectively correct rule violations and reward adherence to them.
6. Failure to individualise instruction and support to adapt to individual differences (e.g ethnic and cultural differences, gender, disability).
7. Failure to assist students from at risk (e.g poverty, racial/ethnic minority members) backgrounds to bond with the schooling process.
8. Disagreement and inconsistency of implementation among staff members.
9. Lack of meaningful administrator involvement, leadership and support.

The aforementioned harmful school practices are all amenable to change in a positive, proactive manner. Schools can serve as an ideal setting to organize efforts against the increasing problems of children and youth who display antisocial behaviour (Mayer, 2005).

How stress could lead to violent behaviour among gifted students and how to prevent it

In everybody's life without an exception, stress is predominant. It can be even more intense for the gifted because of the nature of giftedness. Specifically, gifted individuals have the tendency to be more sensitive, more intense, more introspective, and more emotional. Growing up gifted is a qualitatively different experience. This can manifest itself in the complex way a gifted individual "feels" and reacts when confronted with stressful situations. It has been established that when a gifted child undergoes too much stressful situation, it leads to manifestation of violent behaviour (Mendaglio, 2005).

According to Baum and Nicols (2003), the top five stressors, of all adolescents and teens are school, family issues, relationships, time management,

and expectations. Also on the list are stressors such as peer pressure, popularity, money issues, responsibilities, competition, self-doubt, wanting to fit in and worrying about safety and violence. As if these are not enough issues, for the typical teen to be concerned with, there are additional issues that, because of the nature of giftedness, can cause added stress in gifted adolescences and teens: They are: overexcitabilities, asynchrony, higher expectations because of higher capability, lack of academic challenge, over scheduling themselves because they are good at so many things, perfectionism, difficulty finding true peers, and extreme concerns about justness and fairness. So, in addition to the typical stressors that all adolescents and teens experience, gifted individually have in common an additional set of potential stress inducers. Consequently, on a continuum of stress inducers for all adolescents and teens, stress levels for the gifted have the potential to be higher, simply because there are more potential stress inducers.

Baum and Nicols (2003), identified five areas in which stress manifests itself outwardly in stressed out kids:

1. Physiological-headaches, stomach aches, nervousness, insomnia
2. Emotional-excessive crying, lashing out, hostility, anger, violence.
3. Relational-Conflicts, with family and friends, withdrawal from others.
4. Mental- anxiety, panic, confusion, feeling threatened or frightened, apathy.
5. Spiritual- submission, no way out, helplessness.

Virtually everyone, has, at some point or another, personally experienced some of the above manifestations of stress. Experienced in moderation these are manageable and even expected. However, too much of any of these feelings, especially over an extended period of time, can be a problem. Extreme symptoms of stress can lead to condition such as ulcers, nervous twitches, hair loss, migraines, relationship failures, drug abuse, heart disorders, weight problems, eating disorders, depression, and suicide. As concerned educators and parents of adolescents and teens, we certainly do not want their symptoms of stress to escalate and become extreme, to the point of severe health disorders, dependence on medication, substance abuse, or desolation. This is why children must be taught to manage and control their stress in order to prevent it from becoming overwhelming and a painful burden for them.

How to Manage and Prevent Stress

The following useful suggestions could be used to manage and at the same time prevent stressful situations:

1. Incorporate humor wherever you can in your life. Be able to laugh at yourself.
2. Get adequate sleep. The exact amount varies among individuals.
3. Make time for your hobbies and passions. They recharge your batteries and make life more meaningful.

4. Spend time with people who boost your energy levels rather than drain your energy levels. Try to avoid spending a lot of time with people who will like to exhaust your energy.
5. Take care of your body with good nutrition and regular exercise.
6. Use positive self-talk. Why should someone believe in you if you do not first believe in yourself?
7. Help others. Volunteer your time to help those less fortunate or those who can benefit from your presence.
8. Reach out for help when you need it. Surround yourself with people who provide you with a genuine support system.
9. Schedule time for relaxation. It may feel like a guilty pleasure, but your mind and body need these occasions in order to refuel (Parsons, 2007).

How to Prevent Violent Behaviour among Gifted Students

The strategies that could be used to prevent violent behaviour among gifted learners have been divided into two areas of focus for parents and teachers (Galtung, 2009). This is presented as such for purposes of reference simplicity, and we encourage flexible application of these recommendations in the context of home and school.

Ways Parents can help to Prevent Violent Behaviour among Gifted Students

According to Galtung (2009), parents can do the following:

1. Really listen, to gifted children's questions. Pay attention to their words, hear what they are asking, and be attuned to what they are not asking (but might want to know). Show genuine interest in their concerns.
2. Value their opinions.
3. Consider issues sensitively, one at a time. Be honest, and respond with only as much detail as the child is able to handle. Children's cognitive levels differ with age, development and personal experience.
4. Provide resources that are suited to a child's level of understanding. Stress that by offering assistance, especially if the gifted child is keen to learn more.
5. Help gifted children focus on what they can do to help a situation. For example, participating in hurricane readiness or relief efforts, or local fund raising initiatives. This kind of involvement, when age-appropriate, can prevent children from becoming fixated on finding solutions that are beyond their capacity due to age and expertise.
6. Emphasise the joys, reason, and goodness within the world.
7. Emphasise the resilience of people.
8. Discuss the importance of tolerance and relationship-building. There are many resources available in print and online, and educators and librarians

- can work with you to find those that best fit the individual and situation at hand.
9. Be sure to take stock of your own feelings before attempting to address children's concerns. This will help to ensure that you are and will remain calm.
 10. Encourage gifted children to play. They should continue to be active and to maintain balance in their lives. They may need to be sure that if they have fun, it does not mean they lack sensitivity to the misfortune of others.
 11. Help children to appreciate the value of self-expression in the form of art, music, or journal or poetry writing. These can be wonderful outlets for conveying feelings, and also serve as springboards for discussion.
 12. Try to have conversations about matters that are anxiety provoking only at those times, when every one is relatively relaxed. Choose a comfortable space, and ample time for open dialogue and respectful listening.
 13. When children are deeply troubled and cannot be calmed, consider consulting with a professional who has some expertise in working with those who are highly intelligent or sensitive, and who had experience in providing psychological services.
 14. Maintain a sense of constancy, with continued nurturing and ongoing attention to daily routines.
 15. Respect the fact that sometimes children do not want to share their ideas. A warm hug or a few quiet moments can be very comforting, too.
 16. Help children steer clear of excessive exposure to conflict, violence, or human suffering on television or in the media. Acknowledge that there are troubles in the world but explain that it is not constructive to focus on it too much.
 17. Help gifted children find ways to make wise choices in their efforts to contribute to the community through religious, recreational, or character education programmes that may be offered in the neighborhood. Positive action and opportunities to connect with others serves the greater good and strengthens society.
 18. Fortify family ties and reinforce friendships. During times of trouble, a strong social support system can make a big difference to a child.

Ways Teachers can help to Prevent Violent Behaviour among Gifted Students

Teachers should do the following:

1. Listen patiently to children and ask them what they want to learn more about, and what concerns or uncertainties they might have. Incorporate this as may be fitting into classroom discussion times, and infuse it delicately into the instructional framework.
2. Ensure that children actually feel that they are being listened to.

3. Encourage children to express their feelings, concerns and ideas for solutions in a variety of ways.
4. Help them to brainstorm together and recognize accomplishment and thoughtfulness. Teach them how to create concept maps, design group responses, support one another's choice, and work collaboratively on relevant tasks.
5. Explain the connections between real-world and curriculum-based learning.
6. Break problems down into smaller components or steps. Find out what children already know about a concern or situation, how they acquired the information, and whether it is accurate. Determine what they still want to know. Deal with matters one aspect at a time. Both during and after any learning, help children reflect on what they have come to know, and how that makes them feel. Be alert to any emotional ups and downs that present themselves (sadness, discouragement, relief, and other emotions).
7. Consider how aspects of troubling circumstances are being productively addressed. For example focus on the many ways in which hurricane relief management and response processes have improved as a result of past devastation.. Show children how to think in positive ways.
8. Build confidence and positive expectations by enabling children to work at their individual levels of understanding, and by modeling good coping and problem solving skills.
9. Help children realize and accept their limitations, including recognizing that they cannot be expected to fix major or global problems. They can, however, take on some leadership roles and take responsibility for and pride in their involvement in helpful school-wide or classroom oriented initiatives. Assist them in setting productive and reasonable goals about what they can and cannot do about certain circumstances.
10. Stay attuned to the world of children. This includes what is happening in their online venues, in the music they listen to, on the playground, in the hallways, at the movies and so on.
11. Try to maintain a sense of humour- even when times are troubling.
12. Security and predictability matter. Be trustworthy. Be available when you say you will be and beyond then, too.
13. Find resources that personalize and give voice to those who have been affected by unsettling events (such as hurricanes, tsunamis, street violence, etc.) Help children appreciate and understand some of the many true stories that have been told, and to focus on the strengths and courage conveyed. Consider setting up communication networks with children and classrooms in communities in other locales so as to offer support and encouragement.
14. Select literature that builds understandings of persistence, bravery, and ways to confront challenge, suffering or loss.
15. Respect, accept and, most importantly, value curiosity-driven learning.

16. Discuss government policies and plans, volunteerism, good citizenship and social activist projects. Point out ways in which people can and do contribute to society, embark on new beginnings and make a difference to others (and particularly those in need). There are lots of organizations to contact as well and useful information can be accessed from agencies responsible for tracking weather patterns, institutes that environmental strategies, associations that deal with disaster preparedness, health centres, youth groups, businesses, psychological service providers, and charitable organizations such as UNICEF, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and many others.
17. Keep explanations clear and be mindful of the child's intellectual ability and emotional competence. Better to be brief than boring.
18. Be particularly sensitive to children who have previously experienced a traumatic event, who have a history of emotional problems, who lack friends with whom to share ideas, or who show signs of undue stress. (This includes sleeplessness, eating disorders, mood swings, academic decline, a change in activity level, substance abuse, or behaviour that is markedly out of step in relation to age peers.) If anxiety interferes with a child's daily functioning then professional consultation might be warranted. Parent-teacher communication is especially important.
19. Help build emotional intelligence among all members of the school community. Consider it a part of the curriculum and program (and advocate for such programming) accordingly. Educators who model and teach good coping skills send positive messages that help affirm a child's sense of self.
20. Network and communicate regularly with others in children's lives, such as parents and extra-curricular instructors. Find out about resources, community-based and online support groups guidance services, and other possible avenues for the provision of comfort and support (Galtung, 2009).

During times of trouble, when emotions run high, parents and teachers can help children develop the skills necessary to manage their feelings, to confront unpleasant or adverse realities and to acquire greater emotional stability. In order to support children in better understanding of their world, adults may have to help them come to terms with circumstances that are frightening, confusing, overwhelming, or possibly unrelated to their past experience. By providing a safe and supportive environment and a healthy acceptance of all that is good in life, a calm and ready-to-listen adult can facilitate children's well-being, and help to alleviate the fear, dismay or confusion they may feel. In doing so, it is important to honour and nurture children's sensitivity. Although parents and teachers cannot shelter children from all adversity, they are well positioned to help children learn about the imbalances in the world, to better comprehend their impact, and to find thoughtful ways to strike a comfortable and meaningful balance of their own.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as with many problems in schools, thinking ahead and putting preventive policies in place can make a difference in the amount of violence experienced. The threat and enforcement of physical punishment has been a tried and tested method of preventing some violence among gifted and talented students since civilization began. It is used in various degrees in most countries. The most significant factor for reducing violence among gifted and talented students is the guidance and discipline of children as they mature. The effectiveness of physical punishment at this level is much debated, but if it is used, it should be as a last resort and never done in anger. More important preventive measures are showing children love and understanding which has been described above in various sections of the body of this article. Here are five of the most important recommendations to turn the tide on school violence:

1. **Develop Crisis Prevention Plans:** Students who engage in violent behaviour tend to be bored, frustrated, angry, alienated, or have low self-esteem. These feelings abound in their home, school, and in society as a whole. Schools should have a crisis plan in place as a means for ensuring the safety of gifted students.
Typically, a crisis plan will address a zero-tolerance policy with regards to weapons. If a student is carrying a weapon into school, that student is automatically expelled. Some plans may require students to wear uniforms and implement security measures, including metal detectors and visitor sign-in. More stringent plans require law enforcement officials, such as police, to be present at the school. These plans are important to maintaining a base-level of safety and making students feel comfortable in their school environments.
2. **Develop School-Wide Violence Prevention Policies:** Schools, particularly principals, can ensure that teachers, staff and parents within the school have common goals and that everyone is committed to reaching those goals. They can also ensure that the school is run in a fair, firm and consistent manner: and that high expectations for performance and behaviour exist for all students. Implementation of a curriculum that teaches and promotes the values of kindness, honesty, integrity and respect for fellow students, and everyone else would also lend itself to deterring violence. Schools should also develop security measures that ensure weapons and unwanted individuals are kept out of the school and off school grounds, making the school neutral territory for all who attend.
3. **Educate Teachers on Violence Prevention:** Methods include promotion of classrooms that teach and promote respect and kindness, and in which put downs, teasing and sarcasm are not tolerated. In addition, learning conflict resolution skills so that issues are resolved in win-win outcomes for everyone involved and development of strong classroom management skills is essential.

Teachers should also be provided instruction on constrictive methods of communication in order to help prevent violence.

4. Educate Students on Violence Prevention: Teach students peer-mediation skills so that they can handle problems before they escalate. Allow students to be involved in the decision-making process so that they feel that they have a voice in how to handle offenders. Encourage other students to speak up if they see a peer being treated unfairly or in a violent way.
5. Implement Alternative Schools for Serious Offenders: Segregation of students who have a history of violence by putting them in alternative schools is one approach. This allows for remediation efforts to focus on the violent students without putting others at risk. This should never be a first resort, though. There are no easy answers when it comes to violence in schools. While this list focuses on the education system alone, community efforts must also help to combat this distressing issue. Giving students a safe place to vent their anger or concerns will go a long way toward keeping everyone safer- and that should start in our schools.

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