

Gender Issues in the Implementation and Evaluation of a Violence-Prevention Curriculum

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After two years of a three-year evaluation of a violence-prevention program implemented in two elementary schools, it appears that the program may produce a decline in conflict-events and offer students, as well as teachers, options for conflict resolution. But the prescribed resolution skills and strategies may be most effective in decreasing forms of conflict most common among male students; the more covert, less physical behaviour typical of conflict involving female students may be more difficult for observers to detect and less likely to be targeted for resolution through program strategies. Consequently, male students may appear responsible for an inordinate number of conflicts, whereas female peers may be engaging in conflicts that observers neither detect nor mediate.

D'après l'évaluation, au bout de la deuxième année, d'un programme de trois ans visant à prévenir la violence dans deux écoles primaires, il semble que ce programme peut réduire le nombre de situations conflictuelles et offrir aux élèves ainsi qu'aux enseignants des options en matière de résolution de conflits. Toutefois, les compétences et stratégies prônées réussissent peut-être mieux à diminuer les types de conflits les plus courants chez les élèves de sexe masculin; les comportements plus secrets, moins physiques, qui sont typiques des conflits mettant en jeu des filles, peuvent être plus difficiles à déceler et donc moins susceptibles de faire l'objet de stratégies de résolution. Les élèves de sexe masculin peuvent ainsi sembler responsables d'un nombre excessif de conflits alors que leurs pairs de sexe féminin sont peut-être engagées dans des conflits que les observateurs ne voient pas et ne cherchent pas à régler.

To provide more students with effective conflict-resolution strategies and skills, many elementary schools are implementing resolution models such as *Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum* (Committee for Children, 1992a, 1992b). A three-year study in two Winnipeg elementary schools is generating evidence that adoption of the *Second Step* curriculum may lead to a decline in student conflicts and provide students and teachers with new options for dealing with conflicts. However, another finding of the study is that male and female students tend to engage in dissimilar forms of conflict. There are also indications that unless conflict resolution strategies and skills prescribed by the *Second Step* curriculum are used meticulously, teachers may be more likely to focus attention and instruction on the types of conflicts most frequently engaged in by male students. Furthermore, it is evident from this study that any assessment of *Second Step's* efficacy in reducing conflict must recognize both overt and covert forms of conflict.

RESEARCH ON CONFLICT AND GENDER DIFFERENCES

Currently, there appears to be little published research on the value of conflict resolution models for identifying gender-specific conflict or for providing methods to attend to these conflicts. However, there is a detailed literature describing differences in how male and female children tend to experience and exhibit conflict during social interactions.

In their comprehensive review of literature written between 1966 and 1973 on the topic of gender differences, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) offer research evidence that boys engaged in more hitting and insulting behaviours than did girls, that they returned insults with more retaliatory force, and that they were also more likely than girls to take part in rough play. Ehrhardt (cited in Miedzian, 1991) explained that biologically based differences may account for boys' general tendency to be more rough-and-tumble, physically active, and self-assertive. In reporting the conduct of males and females during interpersonal communication, Pearson (1985) described male behaviour as characterized by gestures of dominance such as grappling, playfully hitting, uttering threats of physical consequences, and establishing territory through exaggerated gestures or maintaining physical distances between one another. Wilson (1988)—in a study of 208 children, ages 2 to 5—reported that “male dyads were involved in 63.2 percent of . . . social intrusion/annoyance . . . conflicts . . . [and that] 26.3 percent involved male/female dyads. Female dyads only engaged in 10.5 percent of [these] conflicts” (p. 21). In the same study, Wilson concluded that, although “aggressive actions varied among . . . different age groups” (p. 26), 65% of aggression strategies in targeted actions were used by male children and 35% by female children. She also found that boys are more inclined to engage in boisterous physical activity most likely to attract observers' attention.

In a study of 217 adolescents, McDowell (1990) reported that “females tend to integrate arguments and offer tradeoffs to reach solutions while males tend to assert their opinions forcefully and prefer to assume control or dominate in arguments” (p. 8). Also discussing gender differences in communication, Corsaro and Eder (1990) described boys as more inclined to engage peers in ritual insulting. In a 1986 report on conflict situations involving 24 school children, ages 5 to 7, Miller, Danaher, and Forbes (1986) concluded that, although their kinds of conduct overlapped, “girls were more likely than boys to engage in behaviour which defused or mitigated the conflictual quality of . . . interaction . . . [while] boys were more apt to engage in heavy-handed behaviour . . . [and] start a conflict episode with a heavy-handed tactic” (p. 546). Goodwin (1990) relied on “tactical uses of stories” to make an ethnographic inquiry into dispute-resolution methods used by a group of 16 children, ages 9 to 14. Through a process of “conversation analysis” of stories written by children, she found that “boys compare one another in contests of verbal repartee” (p. 36) and “deal directly with an offender” (p. 53). Goodwin concluded that “boys' arguments

display an orientation toward social differentiation and principles of hierarchy . . . [however,] within he-said-she-said disputes, girls display a form of organization based on what has been called ‘exclusiveness’” (p. 55). Elaborating on this concept of exclusiveness, she noted the following:

In contrast with boys, girls do not generally utilize direct methods in evaluating one another. They seldom give one another bald commands or insults . . . rather than directly confronting one another with complaints about inappropriate behaviour, girls characteristically discuss their grievances about someone in that party’s absence. (p. 43)

Goodwin also suggested that, rather than dealing directly with disputants as boys may, “girls learn that absent parties have been talking about them behind their backs, and then commit themselves to future confrontations with such individuals” (p. 43).

Pearson, Turner, and Todd-Mancillas (1991) cited research which indicated that when communicating, females use fewer gestures than men, and that males use gestures which are more obvious, such as sweeping hand and arm movements. They also referred to studies concluding that women more frequently exhibit closed body positions than do men, who “rely on more open body positions” (p. 140) when communicating. Contrasting the paralinguistic styles of females and males, Pearson et al. refer to research evidence that females speak more softly than males during conversation.

What this brief review suggests is that during social interactions, males and females tend to exhibit behaviours linked—in part—to gender. Male behaviour is ordinarily more overt, physical, aggressive, boisterous, and observable. In contrast, female interactions tend to be less physical, more intimate, less demonstrative or boisterous, and more difficult to interpret through observation. It may be reasonable to suppose, then, that gender differences in the resolution of conflict should be a primary focus in such a program as *Second Step*, which proposes to offer guidance in the identification, prevention, and reduction of conflict amongst children. However, the *Second Step* curriculum guides allude but infrequently and briefly to gender differences.

In the Introduction to the *Second Step* curriculum, the program designers acknowledge one distinction between male and female conflict-behaviour when they make the general observation that “most little girls learn to be empathic, many little boys learn not to be empathic” (Committee for Children, 1992b, p. 3). “Young females,” they suggest, “may be oversocialized not only to understand but to take responsibility for the feelings of others. On the other hand, specific aspects of cultural training for boys teach them to close off awareness of their own felt experience and that of others.” There are few other direct references in the *Second Step* curriculum to gender-differences in conflict, and the resolution strategies to be imparted to students appear neither to describe nor to take into consideration the gender differences other researchers have identified.

If, as the literature cited suggests, conflict engaged in by males is more overt and easily detected, male students might wrongly appear to teachers to be involved in a disproportionate number of conflicts compared to female students. It is possible, too, that male students would most often be identified as needing remediation of conflict issues, and that an inordinate share of *Second Step* instruction would be devoted to more-overt conflict. When subtler conflict occurs in female interactions, it may be less likely to be identified by teachers or to be focussed upon during instruction of *Second Step* lessons. To note these concerns is not to imply that the *Second Step* program is without utility in the resolution of conflict or without potential for dealing with both overt and covert forms of conflict if teachers are carefully prompted by the program, and through training, to give appropriate emphasis to both types of conflict during instruction.

THE SECOND STEP CURRICULUM

Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum (Committee for Children, 1992a, 1992b) is detailed on the reverse side of poster-sized photographs and in two teachers' guides, *Second Step, Grades 1–3* (Committee for Children, 1992a), and *Second Step, Grades 4–5* (Committee for Children, 1992b). The guides' common purpose is expressed in this curriculum objective:

Second Step is a curriculum designed to reduce impulsive and aggressive behaviour in children and increase their level of social competence through empathy training, interpersonal cognitive problem solving, behavioral social skill training and anger management. (Committee for Children, 1992b, p. 1)

According to the *Second Step, Grades 1–3* guide, the first step in implementing the curriculum is the training of teachers by Committee-for-Children trainers or other educators adept in the program's use. The guide recommends that teachers be "the primary presenters," with school counsellors "playing a key supporting role" (Committee for Children, 1992a, p. 11). Both curriculum guides advise teachers on the program's logistical implementation, including setting up classrooms, leading groups, and teaching lessons. However, the guides do not include instruction that would assist teachers in developing the skills necessary to identify subtler, more covert forms of conflict. Information on the frequency of covert conflict may be of particular value for teachers when they are deciding about the emphasis to give this type of conflict during *Second Step* lessons; therefore, the ability to detect covert conflict appears to be a skill teachers require if *Second Step* is to be utilized optimally.

In Grades 1–3, instruction of *Second Step* may be scheduled into specific days and periods or "opportune moments" during classes, and the program may be taught at the rate of one lesson per day to one lesson per week, depending "on the grade level and . . . review needed" (Committee for Children, 1992a, p. 21).

In Grades 4–5, it is suggested that teachers sequentially integrate the 40-minute lessons into the regular social studies or health curricula for periods of three to six months; however, the developers point out that the Grade 4–5 program “can be adapted easily by school counsellors and therapists for use with individuals or small groups” (Committee for Children, 1992b, p. 5).

The instructional focus of *Second Step* at both levels is segmented into three units. The first unit in Grades 1–3, “Empathy Training,” includes lessons on recognizing feelings, applying fairness rules, and sending “I” messages. In Grades 4 and 5 the emphasis is on identifying and communicating feelings, listening actively, and accepting differences. The second unit in Grades 1–3, “Impulse Control,” is divided into lessons on problem-solving, “joining in,” and interrupting politely (Committee for Children, 1992a, p. 35). At the Grade 4–5 level the unit is divided into recognizing impulses, identifying problems, choosing solutions, and taking responsibility. “Anger Management,” the third unit, focusses in Grades 1–3 on behaviours such as “keeping out of a fight,” “dealing with . . . teasing [and] criticism,” and accepting consequences (Committee for Children, 1992a, pp. 48, 49). In Grades 4–5, this unit deals with anger triggers, relaxation, being left out, and making and responding to a complaint.

The curriculum guides offer a sequence of methods for instructing each lesson with emphasis on the following activities, varied according to Grade level:

1. Story and Discussion: using prepared stories, posters, and photographs to generate discussion of conflict scenarios and solutions to conflict.
2. Modelling: using an adult to role-play skills that can be used in the resolution of conflict.
3. Student Role Plays: inviting students to play out conflict scenarios and strategies for resolution.
4. Reinforcement: using positive reinforcement when children use “prosocial skills” during and after the lesson.
5. Transfer of Training: alerting students to opportunities for using the prosocial skills at school and also at home.

Both curriculum guides are accompanied by a videotape, less than 20 minutes long, intended to be shown to students concurrently with instruction based on the guides. *Second Step Grades 1–3* (Beland, 1992) and *Second Step Grades 4–5* (Beland, 1989) are videos composed of a series of still photographs depicting boys and girls involved in social interactions. The photographs are animated by dialogue between male and female children, in which conflict issues from the *Second Step* lessons are “acted out.” Interspersed within this dialogue are an adult female’s comments on salient points in the video. This narration is linked also to the lessons detailed in the relevant curriculum guide. However, neither the videotapes nor the curriculum guides broach the matter of gender differences in conflict; nor do they suggest a process that would equip teachers to identify less obvious interactions, such as “being left out” or quiet criticism, so that the

frequency of these conflicts could be used as a basis for teachers to appropriately emphasize these issues during instruction.

FIELD-BASED IMPLEMENTATION OF "SECOND STEP"

The purpose of introducing the program into the two study schools was to provide students with a common vocabulary and a structured procedure not only for avoiding interpersonal conflict, but also for successfully mediating conflict. The skills students developed through direct and indirect exposure to the *Second Step* program were intended to promote healthy social development in individuals and to enhance the broader school environment.

In Fall 1993, two school counsellors, two administrators, and a consultant from one Winnipeg public-school division introduced the *Second Step* curriculum into the two elementary schools, which had enrollments in Grades 1 to 6 of approximately 225 and 450 students.

During the first year of the three-year implementation process, the program was introduced into two Grade 2 classes and two Grade 4 classes in the smaller school, and into three Grade 2 classes and three Grade 4 classes in the larger school. In the smaller setting, eight classroom teachers or specialists (in music, physical education, and library operations) and one administrator were trained by the school counsellor to familiarize the 74 Grades 2 and 4 students with *Second Step* methods. In the larger school, nine teachers and one administrator were similarly trained to instruct 129 students in Grades 2 and 4 according to the *Second Step* curriculum. In retrospect, it was at this stage of the program's implementation that teachers would have benefited most from training to identify less visible, less physical, and more-covert forms of interaction more characteristic of conflict involving females. At that time, the teachers might also have been cautioned that they might be prone to emphasize *Second Step* lessons dealing with conspicuous forms of conflict, such as aggression, physical confrontation, and bullying, which are more characteristic of conflict involving males. Of equal value to the trainers and teachers would have been guidance from *Second Step*'s developers on a way to teach children about gender differences in conflict without stereotyping boys and girls as engaging in certain forms of behaviour solely because of their gender. However, because the training session for the counsellors did not deal with these issues, and because clear guidance on these matters was not provided in the *Second Step* guides, the teachers began the program implementation and lesson instruction without this preparation.

In the second year of implementation, the program was expanded in both schools to include teachers and students in Grades 1 and 3. During this phase, in the smaller school three more teachers were trained and the number of student participants rose to 154. In the larger school, seven more classroom teachers and

specialists were trained, and the number of students involved in the program increased to 260. On average, during this two-year implementation period 57% of the study population was male and 43% female.

The training of teachers, as well as the instruction of children, was again done in accordance with the guidance and materials provided by the *Second Step* curriculum for Grades 1–3 and 4–5. Thus, again, little attention was given during the training of teachers to a process for detecting subtle forms of conflict, such as “being left out,” nor were the teachers alerted to the importance of giving equal emphasis to these forms of conflict during lesson instruction.

To monitor whether the program was being properly followed, and to assess the impact *Second Step* was having on students, the program was evaluated while it was being implemented. This evaluative component was conceived and developed apart from the *Second Step* guides by program participants in collaboration with one divisional and two external consultants. A critical flaw in the evaluation plan was that, similar to the teacher-training, it, too, focussed upon the more overt forms of conflict.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

In November 1993, data were collected across five consecutive days by teachers and administrators interacting with the Grade 2 and Grade 4 students being taught the *Second Step* Program in the two study schools. During these five days, participating teachers and administrators used a data-recording instrument developed by two consultants to record observable conflicts in all settings for all students. The data collection instrument indicated the gender of the student(s) involved in each conflict, the teacher response to the conflict, and the type of conflict. Each conflict was categorized as one or more of the following: (a) play-related, (b) rule-breaking, (c) verbal misbehaviour, (d) a property offense, (e) a physical confrontation, and (f) defiance toward staff. The basis for selecting these categories was the expectation, shared by the teachers and consultants, that these overt forms of conflict should be targeted for identification and reduction through *Second Step* because they had been, and would continue to be, the most frequent and serious forms of conflict in both schools.

The principals in each school used a similar but somewhat modified instrument to collect data on students with whom they had disciplinary interactions.

In February 1994, all teachers and administrators involved in the pilot of *Second Step* met with two consultants to formulate an approach to data collection that would ensure more reliability in observations about student conflict as well as teacher responses, and more uniformity in categorizing conflict on the data-collection instrument. A revised instrument was used in late February 1994 to collect data in the same two Grade 2 classes and two Grade 4 classes in the smaller study school, and in the same three Grade 2 classes and three Grade 4

classes in the larger school. The revised instrument, however, included only the more overt forms of conflict described in the literature review as most common amongst boys, and did not provide teachers with an opportunity or a prompt to record incidents of exclusiveness or quiet criticism more characteristic of conflict among girls.

In May 1994, this process of data collection was repeated by the same teachers in each school and also by the principals. Later that month, all 17 participating teachers and the principals in both schools were interviewed by a researcher primarily to collect participants' qualitative assessments of the implementation of the *Second Step* program, and of its effectiveness in reducing or resolving conflict. This interview process, not prescribed by the *Second Step* guides, was designed and conducted by participating staff and external consultants.

In the Fall of 1994, the program was expanded to include teachers and students in Grades 1 and 3 at both schools. Data collection was also expanded to include Grades 1 and 3 teachers and was conducted during the 1994–1995 school year using the revised data-recording instrument and procedure employed in the previous year. Across the 1994 and 1995 school years, a total of six five-day observation and data-collection procedures were performed, in addition to the 1994 interview session with teachers.

Prior to the close of the 1995 school year, a second round of interviews with participating teachers was conducted using two focus groups comprising 12 teachers and the principal in the smaller school, and 16 teachers and the principal in the larger school. Again, the objective of the interviews was to record participants' qualitative assessments of the value of the *Second Step* program in providing students with skills and strategies that would be more effective in the resolution of conflict. Although it was not a point made in the *Second Step* curriculum guides, one question, asked of all participants in both the first-year and the second-year interviews, highlighted the disproportionately high percentage of males involved in conflict during every data-collection period.

RESULTS OF EVALUATION

Based on the six five-day observation and data-collection periods in which teachers and administrators recorded conflict-events with the collection instrument across two years, several trends became apparent. One trend began with the initial implementation of the *Second Step* program, when the total number of conflicts for the study populations in each school began a gradual but steady decline. More specifically, during the first observation and data-collection period using the revised instrument (in February 1994), teachers in the smaller school reported 82 conflicts for 74 students in Grades 2 and 4; in May of that year, 79 conflicts were reported for the same group. In the larger school, the number of

conflicts teachers recorded decreased from 309 in February to 188 in May of the first year. In November of the second (school) year, when the program was expanded to include Grades 1 and 3 in both schools, 137 conflicts were recorded for the study population of 154 students in the smaller school and 381 conflicts for 260 students in the larger school. By May of the second year, the total number of conflicts for Grades 1 to 4 was 88 in the smaller school and 256 in the larger school. It is important to note that this measured decline in conflicts includes only those forms of conflict set out in the data-collection instrument and being focussed on by teachers during instruction of *Second Step* lessons.

Similarly, the average number of conflicts per student in each target group also decreased over the two years. In February of the program's first year, the average number of conflicts per student in the smaller-school study population was 1.8; by May of the second year, that average had decreased to 0.73 conflicts per student. In the larger school, the average declined from 2.4 in February of the first year to 1.0 in May of the second year.

The program also appeared to influence how teachers responded to student conflict. Although there were exceptions to this tendency, many teachers relied less upon direct, punitive responses and more upon mediation strategies or referrals of students-in-conflict to student mediators. For instance, in the smaller school, rule clarification by teachers as a response to student conflict declined from 56% in February of the first year to 41% one year later. Severe reprimands as a response decreased from 19% to 7% during the same period and referrals to the principal decreased from 6% to 3%. While the teachers' reliance upon these responses was decreasing, their use of student mediation as a response increased from 0% in February of the first year to 19% in February of the second year.

This pattern was also evident in the responses teachers recorded in the larger school. There, however, teachers' use of student mediation as a response increased from 1% in February of the first year to 28% one year later.

Two other constants emerged from the six five-day observation and data collection periods. One was the tendency for very few students, usually one or two per grade in each school, to be involved in a disproportionately high number of the total conflicts reported. The other was that male students were vastly overrepresented in all categories of conflict at all grade levels in both schools. Although the male study population was consistently about 7% larger than the female in both schools, this discrepancy did not explain why male students typically accounted for 75% to 85% of conflict events recorded during the six reporting periods.

INTERVIEWS

When the high percentage of male students cited in conflict-events was discussed during the 1994 interviews, most of the 17 teachers and two administrators

viewed this phenomenon as the outcome of either negative social influences such as television, movies, and domineering male role-models or males' natural tendency to be more physical and aggressive.

During the 1995 interviews, the teachers and administrators expressed a contrasting view. In 1995, these interviewees agreed amongst themselves that it might be erroneous to conclude that male students are more conflict-prone. Rather, they proposed, male students tend more toward the actions described in the research as overt, boisterous, physical, intrusive, and aggressive. Consequently, as work done by Wilson (1988) predicted, during data-collection the teachers were more inclined to notice these behaviours periods, to record them, and to respond to them with *Second Step* strategies. Furthermore, because the data-collection instrument required teachers to monitor students for these more overt behaviours, they were not only more likely to look for these conflicts, but also to emphasize them during lessons because these appeared to be the most frequently occurring conflicts.

Participants in the 1995 interviews also agreed with one another that conflict between females is more frequently characterized by less-obvious verbal communication and body language. These observations are consistent with the conclusions of Pearson et al. (1991) that females speak more softly than males and are not as inclined to use the sweeping hand gestures and arm movements exhibited more often by males. As noted earlier, McDowell (1990) also found evidence that females are more inclined to "to offer tradeoffs to reach solutions" (p. 8), whereas males "tend to assert their opinions more forcefully" (p. 8). Miller et al. (1986) concluded that females are more prone to defuse conflictual interaction whereas males are more likely to use "heavy-handed tactics" (p. 546).

Consistent with Goodwin's (1990) findings on alliance-formation amongst females and "exclusiveness," the teachers suggested that female students are more inclined than males punitively to exclude one another from groups, play, or social activities outside of school. These behaviours tended to be less obvious to teachers working in fast-paced and demanding circumstances. The teachers suggested, too, that exclusiveness and the formation of cliques are less likely to be reported by students who feel ostracized and do not wish to draw attention to the situation, or who do not view teachers as having the means to improve the problem of exclusiveness.

To summarize, the interviewees believed that the more covert forms of conflict were less likely to be recorded during data collection or to be emphasized during the instruction of *Second Step* lessons. They offered these reasons: (a) neither the *Second Step* training nor the lesson guides prepared them to identify subtler forms of conflict, (b) the data-collection instrument prompted teachers to observe students for characteristically overt forms of behaviour, (c) teachers were inclined to emphasize resolution strategies for frequently detected overt forms of conflict during *Second Step* lessons, and (d) given the infrequent attention to subtler

conflict during lessons as well as a dearth of training for teachers to deal with these conflicts, students involved in more discreet conflict were less likely to discuss it with teachers.

DISCUSSION

Although implementation of the *Second Step* program into the study schools appears to have generated a number of positive outcomes, the evaluative process practitioners developed within the study context (and apart from the program guides) may have revealed several concerns warranting attention if the program is to be of equal benefit to students of both genders, and if data are to be collected which accurately show the program's impact on all types of conflict.

The assessment reported here suggests that when familiarizing counsellors, classroom teachers, specialists, and administrators with the *Second Step* program, there may be considerable value in making these educators aware that without preventive measures the program could develop with a decided male-focus, because the program guides give little attention or direction to the matter of gender differences in conflict. Implicit in this observation is the need for *Second Step* facilitators to *ensure* the following: (a) that when the various lessons are taught to students, story-lines and scenarios give equal emphasis to the covert forms of conflict more common amongst females without reinforcing the stereotype of certain conflict behaviours being unique to a particular gender; (b) that feelings of isolation, anger, and low self-esteem that may result from exclusionary behaviour are validated; (c) that role modelling includes techniques for responding to "shunning" or to the more covert forms of insulting; and (d) that students are thoughtfully encouraged to use these techniques to deal with actual conflicts involving exclusiveness and other forms of covert conflict.

Again, because the *Second Step* program does not provide explicit guidance, there would seem to be some merit in training teachers to identify covert, exclusionary behaviours—whether between males or females—and to ensure that students are offered *Second Step* strategies for responding to these more discreet forms of conflict.

Lastly, this study provides evidence that any data-collection instrument practitioners use to record conflicts may be flawed if its categorization of conflicts is gender-based. When teachers are limited to descriptions of conflict as play-related, rule-breaking, verbal misbehaviour, physical aggression, property offenses, and defiance, they are not being prompted to observe subtler forms of interaction that may characterize conflict involving females, nor are they as likely to record conflict-events involving the verbal exchanges, body language, or exclusionary behaviours described by those teachers interviewed in 1995 and by the researchers mentioned in the literature review. Moreover, when the data-collection instrument is compromised, as it was in this study, the assessment

results may inappropriately direct teachers' instructional focus toward conflicts that *seem* to occur with greater frequency and urgency.

If, in implementing the *Second Step* model in other schools, the process for identifying, recording, or addressing conflict recognizes primarily those behaviours most common among male students, several difficulties arise. When observers use a data-collection instrument similar to the one relied on in this study, males will be cited as being involved in conflict with far greater frequency than females. Data generated this way would not only reinforce the stereotype of males as more conflict-prone but also draw an inordinate amount of time and effort to the matter of managing conflicts involving males. Conversely, the data may *incorrectly* indicate that (a) female students are involved in fewer conflicts, (b) current strategies for resolving detected conflicts are successful, and (c) less instructional time and effort are needed to develop strategies for detecting and attending to conflict involving female students.

Furthermore, when formal evaluations of the program are undertaken, it is crucial that categorical descriptions of conflict go beyond the more obvious forms such as "physical conflict," "defiance," or "property offenses" to include behaviours such as exclusion, gossip, or low-key insults. Inclusion of these categories would not only prompt educators to monitor students for these behaviours, but might also enhance the program's overall effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

The point of this discussion has not been to describe male students as involved exclusively in certain types of conflicts and female students as involved exclusively in others. Such a view would not only contradict the experiences of all educators and most other people, but might also promote a dysfunctional categorization of human beings and facile notions about conflict resolution.

It would be irresponsible, however, to ignore the reported tendencies for males to engage in conflict characteristically dissimilar from those in which females engage. From the findings reported here, the *Second Step* program, as it was implemented in this instance, appeared to have considerable value for reducing certain conflicts more frequently engaged in by male students but to have neglected both to prepare teachers to identify other forms of conflict and to offer them means through which such conflicts might be resolved without promoting stereotypes about male and female behaviour.

Ideally, future editions of *Second Step* would not only go further to detail and encourage the training necessary for educators to identify disparate forms of conflict, but would also emphasize strategies practitioners could impart to students with confidence that they would be learning life-skills appropriate to their needs, regardless of their gender.

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