Proposals For How Schools Can Effectively Deal With Violence

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

This thesis will reflect on possible causes of school violence as well as explain what can be done to decrease the staggering statistics of violent crime. I will first look at the Creation of a Democratic Classroom Community, including specific advice about the roles and responsibilities of teachers and administrators, then how children can (and should) practice this democracy through Involvement in the Larger Community. Next, I will introduce the concept of Active Communication and The Utilization of Effective Programs. Here I will not only discuss how to educate the school's staff and children, but parents as well. A call for society to re-examine its values will be my unifying proposal. It is of vital importance to start dealing with the violence issue as quickly as possible in order to be a more proactive rather than reactive society. (Curcio, 32)
PROPOSALS FOR HOW SCHOOLS CAN EFFECTIVELY DEAL WITH VIOLENCE

The Problem in Its Setting

Every two days, 25 children - an entire classroom - are killed by guns.
(Merina 1994, 4)

An African cab driver recently told William J. Bennett, former Secretary of Education, that he will be returning to his homeland as soon as he has completed his graduate work in the U.S. He does not want his daughter to be an "easy target" for young men or his son to grow up in a country where he may fall prey to violence at the hands of other young males. "It is more civilized where I come from," he said (Bennett 1993, 197).

NEA's president Keith Geiger related a worried mother's concern over her seven-year-old son's attitude toward violence in his March 1994 NEA Today editorial, "He doesn't empathize when people are battered, beaten or bruised. He doesn't feel their hurt. He's not shocked when violence results in death" (2).

When asked to create newspaper headlines using their spelling words, 27 out of 28 third grade students in a Richmond, Indiana, school chose violent themes. When asked to write stories about one of their headlines, the vast majority of the students' writing ended in death.

Ours is a violent world filled with numbing statistics: children under 18 are 244% more likely to be killed by guns today than they were in 1986, the average child has watched 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school (Adler 1993, 44), and approximately one in five high school students now carries a firearm, knife, razor, club, or
other weapon regularly, often to school (Shores 1993, 4A). We are members of a society that prizes violence. This can easily be seen through the sporting events we attend (and the overwhelming amount of money we pay professional athletes who model fighting and yelling to their young fans), the kinds of television programs and movies we choose to view, the type of music to which we allow our children to listen, and the news stories we decide to publish.

Precautions taken by parents show how this violent world is robbing children of their innocence. Not only do homes and cars have alarms, but people, too. After a burglary in their Del Mar, California, home, Roger and Lisa Cole put alarms on their entire family, even their babysitter. Many parents keep their children "leashed" when going to public places such as the mall or amusement parks in order to tug them away from potential molesters. (Adler 1994, 44) Julie O'Connor, a mother of a five-year-old in Canoga Park, California, where children have been warned to be on guard against a serial attacker known as the "Valley Molester," says, "I can't imagine having to be a child in this kind of world." Her son "once fled the yard at the sight of nothing more sinister than a car coming down the street" (Adler 1994, 45).

Experts agree that school violence is a product of the society in which we live. In many ways, schools are a reflection of the outside world, and the rages, frustrations, and inequities the students see and feel in that world spill over into the schoolyard. (David 1980, 6)
Schools must learn how to effectively deal with violence so that tomorrow's society will be better than today's.

Creation of a Democratic Classroom Community

The first step in dealing with the violence issue is to create a mini-democracy within the classroom where children learn to trust, respect, and help one another in their "society". Children will soon be playing a larger role in our democratic society, so why not give them a chance to practice positive citizenship now? Irvin Block, author of Violence in America, feels "violence most often originates among people who feel they have little or no stake in the society in which they function" (Berger 1974, 13). Students should be involved in the creation of classroom rules as well as consequences in the event that those rules are broken.

Consistent disciplinary measures should prevail (e.g. whether it is the principal's daughter or a boy from a dysfunctional family, one or the other should not "be let off the hook" if he/she has broken a rule). Children can sense quickly, and often rebel against, policies which they feel are "unfair". Michael Berger, in his booklet, Violence in the Schools: Causes and Remedies, mentions a poll of 10,000 junior high school students in Michigan, where 74% of the children did not feel that teachers treated all pupils alike. Berger believes that this "fairness" issue as well as the custom where "pupils are almost always presumed guilty until proven innocent when their accusers
are adults" could serve as leading causes of school violence. In addition, he sees that students are beginning to question why there are so few ways to punish a disobedient teacher or administrator. (1974, 12)

Role playing and simulations are essential components to an innovative classroom. Teachers may want to have students enact a court scene with a jury, attorneys, defendants, plaintiffs, etc... concerning a key issue facing the classroom, school, or larger community (obviously, personal examples should not be used where a child or children are liable to feel alienated, unduly chastised, etc...). "Things that could happen" using fictitious characters would probably work best. However, using a real-life case such as the one where popular rap music star, Snoop Doggy Dogg's, album, "Doggystyle," hit the top of the charts the week after he was indicted for murder, are important as children make real-life decisions (in this case, to what music they wish to listen).

Children should be involved in higher-level thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making. Practicing these skills will increase their ability to generate thoughtful and worthwhile solutions while weighing pros and cons, always considering others' needs as well as their own. (e.g. If a child is offered drugs, it is important to know why they do not want to take them, not just how to say, "No!")

Ample, cooperative learning activities should be offered wherein children learn to work effectively with others. It is
essential that children have a feeling of "team" and "group". Often, a child may join a gang because he/she feels alienated from others and wants to "belong" somewhere. (Leshan 1981, 35) Teachers should change groups often, and will probably want to split up cliques for at least part of the time. If a teacher sees that two or more children have the potential to be aggressive toward one another, he/she may want to put them in the same group so that they can learn to work well together in a stable environment.

It is essential that teachers model trust and honesty. They should show both care and concern, and should never make false accusations or unfounded claims to anyone, whether a child or fellow staffer, about anything. Teachers should constantly be working with other teachers and parents to discuss school-related problems while generating methods to counteract these problems.

Children often lash back at teachers who give them poor marks. For example, in Austin, Texas, a thirteen-year-old boy (who happened to be the son of a former White House press officer) shot and killed his teacher because he had received a failing grade. (David 1980, 4) Life-long learning, rather than grades, should be promoted in the classroom. Alternative methods of assessment, such as portfolios, should be used. A teacher should never fail a child who has put forth good effort. Competitive practices should be avoided, unless a child is positively competing against him/herself, especially when working with a particularly hostile or aggressive group of children. Not
all forms of competition are bad, but this strategy is best used when each and every child has a chance to "win" or feel important.

Teachers should motivate children to take care of their school, themselves, and others. Many activities in self-appreciation, as well as in working with others (as mentioned previously), should be provided. Each and every child should know that he/she is an important, integral, and unique part of the classroom. Scott Pennigton, possibly inspired by Stephen King's book Rage, turned to the rest of his class, after shooting both his Honors English teacher and the custodian who ran in to help, "Do you like me now? What's the matter, cat got your tongues? Normally you people can't stop talking" (Buckley 1993, 42).

It is essential to make the classroom/school a secure haven for children. Andrea Aboud, 10, told a Newsweek reporter, "I like being at school where there's people everywhere. I like that safe feeling where you don't have to go down the hall and be scared of somebody popping out and taking you" (Gordon 1994, 45). After Polly Klaus was kidnapped from her bedroom in nearby Petaluma, California, Andrea has often been fearful of going into her kitchen or dark bedroom by herself. She has been given strict advice by her mother about strangers, "I don't care if they have a weapon--don't go with them. Kick, scream, break things, go for the crotch, the eyeballs ... anything" (Gordon 1994, 45).
Teachers should be allowed to deal with pertinent issues and not just curriculum guidelines in the classroom. How can a child concentrate on long division and Benjamin Franklin when he/she is planning for his/her funeral? Such is the case with Jessica Bradford, 11, who has heard gunfire on the way to the grocery store, has seen a body lying on the playground, knows five people who have been killed, and who wants to wear her sixth grade prom dress to her funeral if she dies before the big event (Brown 1993, 9). Jessica, who lives in Washington D.C., states, "Most 11-year-olds think about their funerals all the time" (Brown, 9). Indeed, the reporter who interviewed Jessica (and 35 other young people and the adults who work with them) says that most young children have dictated to friends and relatives how they want to be buried, what they want to wear, and what songs they want played. Some even mention what they want their mourners to wear and wish their "floral arrangements to spell out the names of their favorite brands of clothing" (Brown, 9).

Jettie Tisdale is the principal of Longfellow Elementary School in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where two children were gunned down outside the school building in January of 1993 and where bulletproof windows were installed on one side of the school because "so many bullets were flying at Longfellow from the P.T. Barnum housing projects next door" (Toch 1993, 34). Tisdale said, "We couldn't concentrate on reading, writing, and arithmetic until we dealt with these problems" (Toch, 34). Students at Longfellow "...didn't want to go to class, they
couldn't eat or sleep, they burst out crying" (Toch, 34).
Indeed, in a society where drug and alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery, and assault are seen as the top disciplinary problems for teachers in the 1990's, in comparison to talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, cutting in line, violating the dress code, and littering in the 1940's (Toch, 34), meeting every single curriculum guideline may have to wait.

**Involvement in the Larger Community**

Schools should strive to get all children involved in some sort of community work, whether it is visiting (and learning from) the elderly, working with handicapped individuals, volunteering at a charitable organization, or cleaning up parks, streets, and neighborhoods. Each child should be given a task which requires responsibility, some type of leadership, and accountability. Children should feel "needed". If a child plays a major role in cleaning up society, he/she will probably be less likely to "mess it up" (e.g. through vandalism). If one feels that he/she is a significant part of another person's life, he/she will probably learn to place more value on human life.

After children have had experience with various facets of community life (including media coverage of violent crime), they may want to start a "community crusade" against violence. For instance, they could work with local newspapers and television stations to take reports of outlandish, sensationalized forms of
violence off the air/ headlines (such as the horrible story of how Ms. Bobbitt cut off her husband's penis).

Jim Williams, who is the mayor's press secretary in Chicago, spent 15 years as a writer, producer, and reporter for WGN-Channel 9 before moving to city hall. He realizes that the media must cover crime, but says, "My quarrel is with their very strong emphasis on crime" (Sullivan 1993, 2). He said that several years ago, his station was the one that led the market to shift the tone of news reporting to the sensational. As a result, Williams says a lot of people see Chicago as a "crime-infested jungle... I know so many people who tell me they're afraid to go out their doors at any time of day. It was the incessant sensational crime coverage that did a lot of damage" (Sullivan, 2).

Children Now, a children's advocacy group, invited several television, radio, and print journalists to Stanford University in order to discuss the connection between the media's portrayal of violence and violent behavior in children. Sixty-one percent of the youths, ages 11-16, polled felt that "their image is being tainted in news portrayals of them," since, when they see children their age on the news, they are usually involved in crimes, drugs, or violence. (Cvengros 1994, 1) Many of the media reporters present at the Stanford assembly feel that it's "not the message that's the problem," since even the children polled acknowledged, "if it wasn't for the news media, people would do a lot less to help kids in trouble or fight violence against
children," but, rather, the fact that parents are not monitoring what their children are watching, let alone discussing disturbing information with them. (Cvengros, 1, 4) People such as ABC executive producer Pat Roddy are taking some initial steps in community responsibility, limiting "news images to those not offensive to 'a 9-year-old'" (Cvengros, 1).

While the media took the brunt of criticism for showing violence at the conference, no one dared delve into the underlying issues of increasing violence on the streets, efforts to slow the bloodshed, or how effectively courts and law enforcement deter crimes. Parental responsibility in educating, tempering and reacting to violence was also a major gap in the discussion. (Cvengros, 4)

Indeed, wouldn't it be phenomenal if we "cleaned up the streets" to such an extent that the media had nothing "bad" to report? Cvengros raises a good point when he mentions "parental responsibility in educating, tempering, and reacting to violence" (4). After all, "[p]arents are a child's first teacher, and we need to validate that" (Fredericks 1990, 348). "One of the lessons many schools are learning is that there is a direct correlation between parental involvement and a decrease in violence and crime" (Shores 1993, 4A). The school's staff and parents should work closely with one another in dealing with violence. A positive first step is cutting down on time spent in front of the television unsupervised. OSRAM SYLVANIA ran an advertisement in Newsweek magazine during the Fall of 1993 which had these words overlapping a picture of a young girl with a
blue-tinted face: "AS A NATION, we have abandoned our children to the blue light of a million TV sets. And now we are paying the price." The ad is promoting "Reading Time" while stating that the real crisis facing American Education is not what is happening in our schools, but what is happening in our homes (that is to say, too much time spent in front of the "boob tube" and not enough behind worthwhile children's literature).

A recent study found in Newsweek, conducted by Professor George Gerbner (1993) of the University of Pennsylvania, showed that children's programming contained 32 violent acts per hour while prime time had four. The survey continues with these results:

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Children's Programming</th>
<th>Prime Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>violent characters</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>victims of violence</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>characters who are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>killers or get killed</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>characters who are</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>perpetrators or victims</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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If enough children show that they will not stand to be immersed in so much violence, corporations which control the amount to which they are exposed may start to listen. DIC Entertainment, which is the world's largest independent supplier of children's programming, has teamed up with the National Education Association (NEA) to develop a 12-point code of guidelines intended to help script writers, animators, and
directors to "clean up" children's television. Programs should now include storylines which meet the following criteria:

- enhance children's self-esteem and foster cooperative behavior
- avoid dangerous stunts which could be imitated by children
- show antisocial behavior as unacceptable
- resolve conflict using dialogue, negotiation, and mediation
- avoid gratuitous, graphic, and excessive violence
- avoid mistreatment of animals
- carry the clear message that "crime doesn't pay"
- show supportive adults in family settings and in positions of authority
- avoid demeaning physically or mentally handicapped people
- portray diversity along gender, race, color, age, religion, and class lines
- avoid vulgarity and use words which will enhance children's vocabularies
- support a healthy and clean environment

DIC senior vice president of creative affairs notes, "We hope that others in the industry will join us voluntarily in embracing these principles. And we hope the code will stimulate further dialogue on a very complex subject" (Weiss 1994, 3). In December of 1992, the three major networks signed a letter to Congress which said they agreed to "issue uniform standards restricting the violent content of their programming and promised to eliminate 'depictions of violence' that 'may be used to shock or stimulate the audience" (Medved 1993, 10). Six months later, they agreed to attach a "violence warning" on their most brutal broadcasts and Senator Paul Simon of Illinois demanded that the broadcasters set up and fund an "Advisory Office of Television Violence" (Medved, 11).

Television violence is not the only type of violence which influences young people. Ronald Ray Howard shot and killed a
state trooper who pulled him over for a missing headlight (Howard was also driving a stolen vehicle) after listening to two straight hours (in addition to several years prior to the incident) of "gangsta rap." This is a genre of rap which focuses on drugs, sex, violence, and a hatred for police. One of the songs to which Howard had been listening (on Amuru Shakur's "2pacalypse Now") talked about shooting a policeman. Cadets from the Green Academy in Dayton, Ohio, are setting an excellent example of community involvement by forming a group known as "C.O.P.S." (Cadets Opposing Popular Songs). The committee was featured on several Dayton stations during the 6:00 news after voicing their opinions about violent television and music messages at the Montgomery County Commission Meeting. The "C.O.P.S." group has also spoken at several Dayton elementary schools, showing evidence of how the "Creation of a Democratic Classroom Community" can do wonders to positively effect the outside community. Active communication is key in creating a Democratic Classroom Community. Combined with the utilization of successful, violence-prevention programs, schools can get an edge on the deadly statistics which haunt our society.

**Active Communication**

Active communication begins by talking with children. It is of vital importance to listen to their fears and frustrations in order to find out how they feel about what is going on around them. How would children deal with various violence issues? As
part of a lesson, have children read various magazines, newspaper articles, or books pertaining to violence (e.g. coverage of the "Beavis and Butthead" incident where a young boy, imitating the two teenage, misfit stars of the show, set a fire which killed his sister in their mobile home) or watch certain films and/or newscasts (e.g. those about war or the Los Angeles riots). (All forms of media should be cleared by the administration first.) After reading or viewing the material, have an open-ended discussion about how children feel concerning various violent acts; if or when violence is OK or necessary; if what we see in the movies is "real"; if something should be done to curb violent acts; solutions to the problem, etc... If children participate in "discovery" learning (where they are allowed to generate their own answers after careful research), they will gain a sense of accountability and greater responsibility for their feelings and actions. An active counseling staff should be on hand to listen to and/or help children who may have various fears of violence and/or violent tendencies. More and more schools are wisely implementing counselors at the elementary level as they feel waiting until Junior or Senior High is too late. (Buckley 1993, 46)

In the 1978 "Conference on School Violence" held at Ball State University, John R. Ban suggested that schools institute a "Student Crisis Center" where children report to their peers (who run the center) various problems such as potentially dangerous rumors, complaints against teachers, problems students have with
other students, threatening incidents, drug peddling, and matters related to school security. It is a place where students (who are overseen by a faculty member) learn to manage "disruptive behavior, fear, hostility, and violence in school" and effectively communicate concerns between classmates and the administration. (Brosio 1978, 4)

Looking at communication in a different light, the school's staff should be able to send messages quickly if a violent act is pending or has taken place. This means that intercoms, hall monitors with portable radios, and panic buttons should be made available. Even surveillance/video observation systems and/or intruder detection devices can be set up in high risk areas. Some schools have even gone so far as to set up "watchmobiles," which are mobile homes in which local families, who live there rent-free, "sit" for the school and report any suspicious people or actions to the police. (David 1980, 12)

There should be an ample number of opportunities for the school's staff, students, and parents to learn about various causes and possible solutions to the violence issue. Teachers and the administration should attend (or give) workshops on how to effectively deal with violence as well as further their education through college and community courses concerning the topic. John R. Ban feels schools should organize a comprehensive in-service program for all school personnel (including teachers, janitors, clerks, and the administration) which focuses on such issues as gangs, personal protection, tension reduction,
discipline, the juvenile legal system, management of aggressive behavior, and drug abuse. He emphasized the creation of an "action-plan" which details the responsibilities of each staff and faculty member in specific incidents of violence or vandalism. (Brosio, 3)

Utilization of Effective Programs

Four thousand students in 16 elementary schools in inner-city Chicago and Urbana, Illinois, are participating in a violence-prevention course while their teachers "are being coached in how to handle classroom misbehavior in a more positive, yet effective, way", and their parents are learning how to "avoid an atmosphere of threats and violence in the family" (Goleman 1993, A12). One program taking place in Seattle, Nashville, Durham, North Carolina, and some rural districts of Pennsylvania offers weekly sessions for parents concerning topics such as how to discipline children effectively, how to spend more enjoyable time with one's offspring, and how to help kids with the challenges of school. (Goleman, A12)

A number of teachers and administrators feel that many of the problems encountered in schools today are the result of too much permissiveness in the home.

Many children, they say, have not been told how to behave, rules have not been laid down, limits have not been set. Respect for authority or property is not a part of their lives. When these children get to school, they often find it extremely difficult to conform to the requirements of group situations. (David 1980, 10)
Whether it stems from the home environment or not, if a school is plagued by violence, or wishes to prevent foreseeable violent occurrences, there should be no doubt in administrators' and teachers' minds that programs or ideas which have proven to be effective elsewhere should be tested at that school. Examples of such programs are listed below.

The John Muir Elementary School in Seattle has found success in utilizing various exercises which prevent violence while teaching peaceful behavior. Dr. Mark Greenberg, psychologist at the University of Washington and one of the program's designers explains that the "traffic signal" strategy for children whose "feelings are getting out of hand" consists of the following phases: children tell themselves to stop at the red light, wait and take a long, deep breath at the yellow light, then go ahead and state the problem and how they feel about it at the green light. (Goleman 1993, A12) Another method involves classroom mailboxes in which students place their grievances concerning peers. Without mentioning who is involved, the class then discusses the various problems and ways to deal with them, making sure that the class realizes that "all kids have such problems, and everyone needs to learn how to handle them" (Goleman, A12). Greenberg stresses the fact that those running the program spend a lot of time helping students to "use language to identify how they're feeling," because, when they put their feelings into words, "they're much less likely to act it out" (Goleman, A12).

One coordinator of a similar program in New York stated, "Even
more exciting than the decrease in physical violence is the increase in caring among kids" (Goleman, A12).

In Oceanside, California, a highly successful program was started four years ago at Roosevelt Middle School in hopes of curbing the fear of gangs which "mad-dogged" each other regularly. Thanks to the program, entitled "Resolving Conflict Creatively," the school is a "placid oasis" (Toch 1993, 35). The curriculum involves how to listen attentively, deal with anger, and overcome racial stereotypes. Peer mediation is highly acclaimed by those involved with the program. Conflicts are usually "settled within a day by student mediators who are trained to sit classmates down and resolve arguments with words rather than fists" (Toch, 37).

The "Maine Township [Illinois] Task Force Against Gangs" was created by concerned citizens in that suburban area of Chicago after a gang shooting. Their task force is composed of various components, including an extensive neighborhood watch program, periodic rallies and marches against gang violence, and, perhaps most importantly, a youth drop-in center which provides a place for kids "to socialize, play sports and video games, and congregate safely" (Rozek 1993, 1).

"Youth Guidance" is a Chicago organization servicing between 7,000 to 8,000 students in 34 public schools (most of which are located in inner-city communities). The unique, non-profit organization provides social services that range from regular counseling sessions with gang members and families to poetry
writing, art, and drama to help kids deal with their problems. Nancy Johnstone, head of "Youth Guidance," often visits with students while they are participating in the program's creative art activities. She relates, "What gets to me, when I visit some of these programs, is seeing how kids can still be kids. That's still in them. There's all this violence and drugs, but then you see what could be there. And it can be heartbreaking" (Sullivan 1993, 5).

Many school systems are removing lockers, installing metal detectors, requiring see-through back packs, and hiring more security personnel. Alternative schools for violent and disruptive students are opening. Susie Rivet, a pre-K and kindergarten teacher in East Baton Rouge, Louisiana, supports these new schools saying, "This program not only puts [the violent and disruptive students] in a place where they receive treatment, but continues their classroom learning" (Merina 1994, 5). Rivet joined a districtwide antiviolence committee to get guns out the schools after being shocked when her students spoke "frankly" about knowing other children who'd been shot or carried guns. "[W]hen children ages 4, 5, and 6 know the difference between various bullets, you know you have to do something" (Merina, 4).

Houston's Hogg Middle School used to have a bad reputation: 38 arrests were made after a gang fight six years ago, and, five years ago, police reported that half the boys attending Hogg carried weapons. As of February, 1994, fights were down by
twenty-five percent, no guns had been found, and gangs were invisible (if not wiped out). The school found overwhelming success when it instituted a Teen Court ("where student juries sentence wrongdoers"), a student health clinic, parents patrolling the halls, a rule that only see-through backpacks could be used, and peer intervention in fights. The school also makes use of federal drug agents who mentor "kids in danger of joining gangs, dropping out" of school, "or succumbing to problems at home" and a program known as "Karate" (Kick Drugs Out of America), started by actor Chuck Norris, which demands good grades and behavior. Sylvester Valle, an eighth grader at Hogg, says, "One of my friends brought a weapon to school. Some of them got expelled. I probably would have gotten expelled, too. But because of karate, I spend my time training for tournaments instead of on the streets" (Werner 1994, 18).

Conclusion

What, then, should be the basis of this "fight" against violence? Are there certain values with which we can build a sure foundation for victory against the degradation of society? The successful programs just mentioned all urge children to re-examine their values and actions. Ought not society as a whole do the same? William J. Bennett believes that "[t]he surrendering of strong beliefs, in our private and public lives, has demoralized society" and that "America's only respectable
form of bigotry is bigotry against religious people" (1994, 202).

Today we must carry on a new struggle for the country we love. We must push hard against an age that is pushing hard against us. If we have full employment and greater economic growth—if we have cities of gold and alabaster—but our children have not learned how to walk in goodness, justice, and mercy, then the American experiment, no matter how gilded, will have failed. Do not surrender. Get mad. Get in the fight. (Bennett, 202)

I feel we could better govern our schools if we first established a uniform and concrete set of values and goals toward which to aspire. This is not to say a "Values Clarification" program should be utilized. In fact, I feel exercises such as the "lifeboat" story are highly detrimental and even promote violence (as children decide who should be saved and who must die in a shipwreck and why). Tom Minnery, Vice President of Public Policy for Focus on the Family, discusses how William Kilpatrick, professor of education at Boston College, takes his students through the lifeboat exercise, but then shows them a clip from the 1958 movie, "A Night to Remember." Kilpatrick believes the problem with the lifeboat exercise is that "the people whose lives are at stake seem distant, one-dimensional, expendable, ho-hum. We sent three people to their deaths and saved the rest. When's recess?" (Minnery 1994, 5). However, the movie (which captures the drama of choosing who should be allowed on the lifeboats and who should be left behind during the sinking of the Titanic) causes "these normally blase college students to behave differently. Many of them cry...What does the movie do that the
exercise doesn’t? Very simply, it moves them deeply and profoundly" (Minnery, 5).

It is important to define "values" if schools and the society at large will be expected to re-examine theirs in the fight against violence. Minnery sums up my feelings when he concludes (after comparing the film to the lifeboat exercise), "...[V]alues are not commodities simply to be 'clarified'; rather, they are vital character traits to be instilled through purposeful modeling and training" (1994, 5). Minnery believes values "can be taught in public schools apart from religious doctrine by exposing children to the great literature (including the Bible) that endures from generation to generation" (1994, 5). Plato’s Symposium has stood the test of time. Within his work, Plato makes it clear that we would not have a concept of "values" on earth unless an eternal and lasting one existed, one which supersedes our time and age (or, in fact, any time and age). Plato considers Beauty as a consistent, absolute value. He discusses what would happen if one was able to see "the Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality... the divine Beauty itself in its one form" (1989 trans., 59).

[I]n that life alone, when he looks at Beauty in the only way that Beauty can be seen-only then will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue (because he’s in touch with no images), but to true virtue (because he’s in touch with the true Beauty) ...if any human being could become immortal, it would be he. (59-60)
Plato did not see Beauty as a relative value, but rather a transcendent, absolute virtue. Chuck Colson (1993) comments in his article, "Kids and Crime: Who's Responsible?" that there are four deadly myths of modern society; one is the relativity of moral values.

When a society abandons its transcendent values, each individual's moral vision becomes purely personal and finally equal. Society becomes merely the sum total of individual preferences, and since no preference is morally preferable, anything that can be dared will be permitted. (11)

Society must start drawing the line on what will be "permitted." We must stop pointing fingers only at the schools and media and begin to shoulder some of our own guilt. Chuck D., the leader of the controversial rap group "Public Enemy," thoughtfully discussed the influence of rap records with violent themes on today's youth, "If a 45-year-old preacher in the neighborhood cannot even get his message on the television, and a 16-year-old rapper can make a record that goes around the world in no time, what do you expect?" (Greene 1993) It is time society re-examined its values. It is at that point when an assessment of the values by which we live can successfully become an integral part of the school curriculum.
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