



# Research Report Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center

July, 2013

## Advisory Curriculum Pilot Outcomes<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In Massachusetts, many Middle and High Schools are being encouraged by accrediting agencies to construct and utilize *Advisory* programs. These programs are designed to encourage regular meetings between small groups of students and a faculty or staff member. Advisory Periods tend to be characterized by smaller adult-to-student ratios, and shorter periods of time. While they may offer many potential benefits, several logistical challenges remain. One of these is helping faculty and staff make productive and *meaningful* use of a short period of time with students. To help address that challenge, Dr. Elizabeth Englander and the faculty and students at the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center compiled a Bullying and Cyberbullying Advisory Curriculum, intended for use with grades 6 through 12. It is composed of 19 short Lesson Plans, designed specifically to be viable inside a 20 minute period of time.

The Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center and Dr. Elizabeth Englander have produced and studied research-based Curricula in the past. These include a High School Cyberskills Curriculum and a K-5 Bullying and Cyberbullying Curriculum. These have been (and continue to be) requested and downloaded, free of charge, by hundreds of schools in Massachusetts and across the United States and Canada.

### Constructing the Curriculum

The first step in constructing the curriculum consisted of identifying content to include. The MARC Team considered concepts and challenges that students frequently bring to our attention, both anecdotally in the field and systematically in the research lab, and ultimately decided upon the 19 issues that have emerged most consistently across different schools and settings. The procedures considered included both didactic and interactive, discussion-based techniques. Because the material dealt with social and emotional learning, and because peer-led learning approaches have historically been so successful in these areas, the process decided

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upon by the MARC team was not to provide students with a great deal of didactic information; rather, this Curriculum presents an issue or controversy accompanied by a small amount of factual information, which is used as a springboard for peer-to-peer class discussions between students on that topic.

While the team at MARC did successfully identify concrete learning outcomes which would be desirable (e.g., understanding how Internet Protocol addresses work), we felt that the best use of very limited time periods would be to stimulate discussions and interactions between students, both raising awareness and (hopefully) knowledge.

To achieve our primary goal of encouraging interactive discussions, led but not dominated by the Advisory teacher, we drew upon the high-status peer model that characterizes a great deal of the student programming we produce in MARC. We decided to use high-status peers (college students) to demonstrate the Lesson Plan concepts through the use of videos. The videos had to be, by design, extremely brief in order to reserve most of the Advisory Period for discussion. Although they vary in length, almost all are between 30 and 60 seconds. One difficulty this presented was that for some settings, obtaining and setting up video equipment is labor-intensive, which can be frustrating for a very short video. It may be helpful to remember that the video is designed to achieve both didactic learning and (perhaps more importantly) the impact of modeling by high-status peers.

Dr. Elizabeth Englander wrote brief scripts addressing each issue. MARC students vetted the scripts for plausibility and accuracy and then we recorded and edited brief video interactions. Teacher Discussion Guides and Instructions were written to accompany the videos.

Appendix A lists the 19 concepts that the Curriculum covers.

## **Pilot Study**

The Pilot study was conducted between April and June, 2013. Schools and faculty volunteered to participate. They were required to adhere to the pilot protocol for each lesson plan, but could choose which lesson plans to present. Faculty were surveyed before and after the entire Pilot and after each Lesson Plan. Students in the courses were surveyed informally at the end of the Lesson Plan, with faculty recording their answers.

Sixty-seven schools/faculty members initially volunteered for the project and completed the pre-Pilot survey. However, only 48 completed Lesson Plans and recorded all required data. This represents an attrition rate of 28%, which is not unusual for a survey pilot. Adults participating in the pilot were asked individually

unique data which were not personal identifiers (e.g., the house number where they lived, but not the street, or town). These pieces of numerical data were combined using an algorithm which produced a unique personal identification number for each participant. In this way we were able to match up pre- and post-test individual answers without having to collect identifying data and keeping the Pilot study anonymous.

Ultimately, the 19 Lesson Plans were administered to 123 classes in Massachusetts. About two-fifths (42%) of participants tested only one lesson plan. Another 13% tested four lesson plans each. Smaller percentages taught between 2 and 19 lesson plans. On average, six and a half classes tested each Lesson Plan. The range was 4 classes to 17 classes.

Although this was promoted as a Curriculum for use during Advisory Periods, in fact, 29% of the lesson plans were conducted during regular classroom periods. The remaining 71% were conducted during an Advisory Period. Twenty-five participants signed up for the Advisory Curriculum despite the fact that their schools had not yet begun an Advisory Program. Their participation may have reflected a general need for high-quality research-based curricula, or, they may have been planning ahead for future Advisory programs.

## **Sample**

By the end of the pilot, the final study sample consisted of 48 faculty and staff teaching 123 classes. Most (82%) of the faculty sample were females (this is not unusual in a sample of educators, as education remains a female-dominated profession). Almost two-thirds (64%) identified themselves as classroom teachers in the school, and 18% were counseling staff. Other categories with much lower rates of representation included administrators, aides, community educators, school resource officers, secretaries, librarians, and substitute teachers.

Faculty were asked if they had volunteered to test the Curriculum, and 46% reported that they had. The other 54% were assigned the pilot study lesson plans after another individual in the school (typically an administrator) had signed up to participate in the pilot.

Overall, the sample tended to be somewhat more experienced in teaching bullying and cyberbullying prevention material. Only about one third had never taught such material; approximately another third had done so, at some time in the last few years. The final third taught such materials regularly (within the current academic year). Only 5% of the sample reported that they had only taught about bullying and cyberbullying in the more distant past (not within the last few years).

## **Variables Studied**

Students who participated were asked if, during the video and/or the discussion, new factual information was learned. Faculty were asked their impression of student learning, and their impression of student engagement and stimulation of discussion during the Pilot periods. Faculty were also asked if they were recommend each Lesson Plan they tested to other faculty. The data resulting from these two sources (students and faculty) and the multiple questions were then analyzed to examine patterns suggesting stronger or weaker Lesson Plans.

The length of the Advisory Periods varied significantly between schools. Six schools had Advisory Periods of 12 minutes or shorter. Thirteen schools had advisory periods of 20 to 25 minutes; 7 had periods of 30 to 35 minutes; 4 had periods of 40 to 45 minutes, and 4 additional schools had advisory periods of 50 minutes or longer. The variability in Advisory Periods is a significant challenge during curriculum development. The decision was made to target 20 minute periods, and those with longer Advisory periods could utilize more than one lesson plan if time permitted. Because the nature of the Curriculum so strongly emphasizes peer-to-peer discussions, there is a certain amount of time flexibility built into the lessons. Nevertheless, it is recognized that Advisory Periods of less than 15 minutes will have difficulty utilizing this (or any) Curriculum.

## **Results**

To examine how well the adults leading the Advisory sessions understood the concepts presented in the Curriculum, teachers were asked to rate the clarity of the topic for each video and discussion guide. It could be argued that adult comprehension is not, strictly speaking, completely necessary in this curriculum, as the adult simply has to show the video and then (using the Teacher's Guide) pose one or two discussion-stimulating questions. The questions can be read verbatim if necessary. However, the MARC team universally felt that adult comprehension could contribute substantially to the class discussions and so opted to measure it.

Overall, teachers rated the clarity of the lesson plans as a 4.15 out of a possible 5 points (83%). There were some differences between Lesson Plans, however. LP18, LP15, and LP 16 were rated the most understandable. LP12 and LP13 were rated the least. The range was 72% to 83%.

Lesson Number	Was the point of the lesson clear?
LP1	4.059
LP2	4.154
LP3	4.375
LP4	4.111
L15	4.143
LP6	4
LP7	4.167
LP8	4
LP9	4
LP10	4.2
LP11	4
LP12	3.833
LP13	3.6
LP14	4
LP15	4.75
LP16	4.5
LP17	4
LP18	4.75
LP19	4.25

To roughly measure efficacy, both students and teachers were asked if the students had learned something new during the lesson plan. In addition, teachers were asked how engaged the students were, and if the lesson plan had stimulated a vigorous discussion between students. Both students and teachers used a five-point rating system.

Across all lesson plans, the curriculum scored highest for engagement and discussion. (73%). The average scores for increased understanding and learning were lower (60.4% by the student ratings, and 45% by the teacher's ratings).

### **Average scores for Teacher's Ratings**

How many increased their understanding of the concept during the discussion?	3.02
Was the point of the LP a new concept for students?	2.24
How engaged were the students?	3.64
Did the LP stimulate discussion?	3.63

Of course, these numbers reflect *average* scores across all lesson plans, and it was not surprising to find that different lesson plans were rated quite differently. Even during production, MARC students responded differently to different lesson plans as they were being conceptualized and video-recorded. Taking into account both student ratings and teacher ratings permitted certain lesson plans to consistently emerge as more successful. The lesson plans were separated into three tiers: those that were the most highly rated in at least three constructs; those that were generally highly rated, but may have been highly rated in fewer than three constructs or scored generally high but slightly lower scores; and those that fell below these two groups.

### **Tier One: Highest-Rated Lesson Plans**

L3	Misunderstandings frequently happen when someone is joking or being sarcastic. This is especially true with digital communications.
L10	Talking to friends and adults about bullying problems doesn't always fix the problem, but support can still be very helpful.
L11	When you're mad, talk instead of text (texting can escalate your feelings).
L15	Bullying gets more digital as kids get older.
L17	Social networks aren't interested in keeping your information private - they actually want you to reveal your information (so it can be sold).
L18	Can you keep a copy of a Snapchat photo?
L19	Your IP address reveals your physical location, even if you believe you're anonymous or untraceable.

### **Tier Two: Highly-Rated Lesson Plans:**

L2	Gossip and rumors are fun but it's easy to take it too far.
L4	Posting embarrassing or humiliating photos of other people isn't cool.
L5	Private settings on FB don't make it really private – others may see stuff you post.
L6	It's important to be civil to peers, even if they are not friends.
L7	Texting or posting may feel private or confidential, but it's neither.
L8	Don't go digital when you're upset. You might just make the problem worse.
L9	Kids and parents over-use the term "bullying."
L14	One friendly remark can help a target a lot.

### Remaining (less successful) Lesson Plans:

L1	Bullying affects everyone in the environment – not just the target.
L12	Online, it can be hard to judge sarcasm.
L13	Don't jump to conclusions if a digital message seems angry. Sometimes it's a falsely exaggerated emotion.
L16	It's easy to forget that anything you put online can possibly get around.

### Recommended Lesson Plans

It's interesting that there was less variability in the percentage of teachers recommending each Lesson Plan. There was no Lesson Plan that was entirely rejected, and 11 Lesson Plans were recommended by 80% to 100% of the testing teachers.

Lesson Plan	% recommending
LP1	71%
LP2	77%
LP3	88%
LP4	89%
LP5	71%
LP6	50%
LP7	83%
LP8	80%
LP9	80%
LP10	80%
LP11	83%
LP12	67%
LP13	60%
LP14	80%
LP15	100%
LP16	50%
LP17	75%
LP18	100%
LP19	100%

## **Recommendations**

The variability between different Lesson Plans was greater than the variability between different ratings for the same Lesson Plans. For this reason, it seems prudent to draw different conclusions about the different Lesson Plans. Certain Lesson Plans were consistently rated higher than others (see above). Variables such as experience at teaching bullying and cyberbullying prevention, gender, and school role were not significantly related to the success of any given lesson plan, but this lack of significance was almost certainly due to the low numbers for comparison purposes (e.g., very few adults reported being a substitute teacher, so it would be impossible to statistically compare that role to those of regular classroom teachers). Despite those low numbers, enough data overall exists to suggest which Lesson Plans can be used with more or less confidence.

No Lesson Plan was rated so consistently poorly that it was withdrawn from the Curriculum.

At present the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center considers the data consistent enough to recommend all Tier One and Tier Two Lesson Plans. The remaining Lesson Plans can certainly be used in Advisory and classroom settings, but their efficacy is less well established and the impact of the Lesson Plans may vary more between different settings and different teachers.

As with all Curricula produced by the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center, this Curriculum can be requested, free of charge, on our website.



## Appendix A. Content of the 19 Lesson Plans

<b>L1</b>	Bullying affects everyone in the environment – not just the target.
<b>L2</b>	Gossip and rumors are fun but it's easy to take it too far.
<b>L3</b>	Misunderstandings frequently happen when someone is joking or being sarcastic. This is especially true with digital communications.
<b>L4</b>	Posting embarrassing or humiliating photos of other people isn't cool.
<b>L5</b>	Private settings on FB don't make it really private – others may see stuff you post.
<b>L6</b>	It's important to be civil to peers, even if they are not friends.
<b>L7</b>	Texting or posting may feel private or confidential, but it's neither.
<b>L8</b>	Don't go digital when you're upset. You might just make the problem worse.
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<b>L10</b>	Talking to friends and adults about bullying problems doesn't always fix the problem, but support can still be very helpful.
<b>L11</b>	When you're mad, talk instead of text (texting can escalate your feelings).
<b>L12</b>	Online, it can be hard to judge sarcasm.
<b>L13</b>	Don't jump to conclusions if a digital message seems angry. Sometimes it's a falsely exaggerated emotion.
<b>L14</b>	One friendly remark can help a target a lot.
<b>L15</b>	Bullying gets more digital as kids get older.
<b>L16</b>	It's easy to forget that anything you put online can possibly get around.
<b>L17</b>	Social networks aren't interested in keeping your information private - they actually want you to reveal your information (so it can be sold).
<b>L18</b>	Can you keep a copy of a Snapchat photo? <sup>2</sup>
<b>L19</b>	Your IP address reveals your physical location, even if you believe you're anonymous or untraceable.

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<sup>2</sup> Snapchat is an app where you can send a picture and have it delete itself after a set period of time (e.g., 1 minute). Users tend to use snapchat for photos that they otherwise wouldn't take, believing the app to be completely impervious. (It's not.)