

LRE at the Elementary Level

Joseph, H. (1980). *The Development of a Curriculum Model for the Teaching of Law-Related Education for the Sixth Grade*. Doctoral Dissertation. Temple University.

Joseph developed and field-tested a curriculum in law and legal concepts for sixth-graders. One urban and one suburban classroom participated in an eight-week unit focusing on the concepts of liberty, justice, and equality. In addition, the curriculum model also included experiential teaching strategies for exploring the three LRE concepts. These strategies included mock trials, simulations, case study analysis, and role playing. The study concluded that a LRE curriculum can be developed for sixth-graders that incorporates knowledge building, value analysis, and moral and legal reasoning skills—sixth-graders can conceptualize the ideas of liberty, justice, and equality. Further, Joseph recommended that social studies educators examine utilizing LRE strategies and content to improve traditional civics instruction and that they explore the possible advantages of introducing LRE curriculum and instruction in the elementary grades.

Jacobson, M., and S. Palonsky. (1981). "Effects of a Law-Related Education Program." *Elementary School Journal*. 82: 49-57.

This study analyzed the impact of a carefully developed and regularly implemented program of LRE instruction for fifth- and sixth-grade students. Their study was designed to test three hypotheses: (1) significant positive change in student attitudes toward the law would occur when students were exposed to an LRE program as compared with control group students; (2) knowledge of the law and legal concepts would be significantly enhanced for students exposed to the LRE program; and (3) the change in attitude would be positively correlated with changes in knowledge. The researchers discovered that gains in legal concepts (knowledge) favored the LRE students. They also reported changes in the desired direction in fifth- and sixth-grade students' attitudes toward the law, legal processes, crime, criminals, and punishment. Jacobson and Palonsky nevertheless found virtually no association between knowledge of legal concepts and positive attitudes among LRE students. They concluded that the students who learned the most about the law were not necessarily those who developed more favorable attitudes toward the law.

Picard, R. (1984). *The Effects of Justice Education on the Attitudes and Knowledge of Elementary School Children Regarding the Justice System*. Doctoral Dissertation. Temple University.

The purpose of Picard's study was to evaluate the Justice Education Teaching Strategies (JETS), an elementary LRE program developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The research question was: can a six-week JETS program significantly increase knowledge of the justice system and effect positive changes in student attitudes toward the justice system. Two classes at each of grades 4-6 comprised the experimental groups included in the study, while one class at each grade level served as control groups. The teachers in the experimental group received two hours of inservice training on the JETS materials. Based on pre- and posttests of knowledge and attitudes, the JETS program significantly increased the students' knowledge of the justice system and their attitudes toward that system compared to the control groups.

Van Decar, P. (1984). *The Effect of Law-Related Education on Students' Attitudes and Knowledge About Authority and the Legal System*. Doctoral Dissertation. Vanderbilt University, George Peabody College for Teachers.

Van Decar's doctoral research produced findings similar to the Jacobson and Palonsky study cited above. Van Decar found that LRE increased students' knowledge of authority and the legal system, their sense of efficacy, and their ability to critically examine legal issues from a variety of perspectives. Sixth- and ninth-grade students exposed to LRE were more likely than comparison students to hold authorities accountable to standards of responsible conduct, to stress positive rather than prohibitive functions of the legal system, and to have conceptions of active citizen participation and their own roles within the legal system.

Markowitz, A. (1986). *The Impact of Law-Related Education on Elementary School Children in Reducing Delinquent Behavior*. Doctoral Dissertation. Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

Markowitz's doctoral research tried to determine whether increased knowledge of the law can have a positive impact on the social attitudes and behavior patterns of children in grades 2, 3, and 4. There was some indication of a positive impact on children's attitudes toward authority and justice in the second grade. Fourth-graders showed some improvement of behavior, but without corresponding changes in their attitudes. Traditional didactic teachers seemed to yield greater knowledge gains while non-traditional teachers appeared to foster improved student attitudes and behaviors.

Esfondari, Mahtash. (1998). "Assessment of Citizenship/Law-Related Education on Violent and Antisocial Behavior." In *Compendium of Research Supporting Law-Related Education, Part II: Alternative Conceptions/Applications of Law-Related Education*. Boulder, CO: Social Science Education Consortium.

Esfondari evaluated an upper elementary/ middle school intervention developed by the Center for Civic Education and the Constitutional Rights Foundation-Los Angeles, using their existing materials as the curriculum's foundation. The goals of the intervention, which was tested at an urban intermediate school with a primarily Latino population, were to (1) develop understanding about issues of authority, justice, community, violence, the role of law and public institutions in resolving conflict, (2) increase cognitive and social skills, and (3) develop more positive attitudes toward law, authority, prosocial behavior, and the community. The curriculum featured active learning and a major culminating activity (either a service learning project or a simulated congressional hearing). The curriculum was tested in one fifth- and one sixth-grade class, as well as in a special class of 12 at-risk students; in the two "regular" classrooms, both quantitative and qualitative measures were used; with the at-risk students, only qualitative measures were used. One fifth- and one sixth-grade classroom served as controls.

Results indicated that students in both experimental classrooms showed greater knowledge gains than the students in the control classes. While the quantitative measures did not show improvements in pro-social attitudes among the experimental students, the qualitative measures (focus groups, classroom observations, and teacher interviews) did suggest that the subjects did improve their attitudes toward working in cooperative groups and acting in a pro-social manner (fifth-grade) and toward social studies and rules (sixth-grade). The qualitative measures used with at-risk students indicated that these students perceived that the intervention materials helped them learn more, experience fewer discipline problems at school, have better attendance, and behave better.

Santa Clara County Office of Education. (1998). *Evaluation of the Law-Related Education Program in San Jose Unified School District Fifth Grade Classrooms, 1995-1997*. San Jose, CA: Santa Clara County Office of Education.

Fifth-grade teachers in five elementary schools in San Jose, California, implemented authority, justice, and responsibility materials from the Center for Civic Education's Foundations program. The LRE

program also included community service activities, field trips to sites in the justice system, and the use of community resources. Data were collected through surveys of teachers, classroom observations, knowledge tests, and attitude surveys. Attitudes examined included respect for legitimate authority, respect for divergent points of view, willingness to contribute to the common welfare, belief in own efficacy, and willingness to accept responsibility. Knowledge and attitude tests were administered post-instruction only to LRE students and comparison classes drawn from demographically similar schools.

The post-instruction knowledge tests showed a statistically significant difference favoring the LRE students. For each of the five affective areas, LRE students scored higher than comparison students on the post-instruction attitude surveys; the differences were significant in three areas: respect for legitimate authority, respect for divergent points of view, and willingness to accept responsibility for own actions. Scores on the attitude items generally were correlated with measures of participation in LRE activities (i.e., how many lessons were taught, field trips were made, and community resources participated in the classroom), while scores on the knowledge test were not.

While teachers enjoyed the LRE program and believed it to be effective, four barriers prevented them from participating at a higher level: lack of time, amount of other material that must be covered, scheduling problems, and availability of community resources.

Social Science Education Consortium (1998). "Final Evaluation Report: Violence-prevention Outcomes in Civic Education." In *Compendium of Research Supporting Law-Related Education, Part II: Alternative Conceptions/Applications of Law-Related Education*. Boulder, CO: Social Science Education Consortium.

VOICE is a seven-unit, yearlong law-related education curriculum that uses interactive strategies and community resource persons, integrating conflict resolution skill building and a service project with traditional social studies content. The program, which was developed by the Constitutional Rights Foundation-Chicago and the American Bar Association, aims to influence students' knowledge (e.g., purposes of government, ideals of democracy), skills (e.g., inquiry, decision making, discourse), beliefs (importance of public discourse, commitment to public good), and actions (responsible personal conduct and community participation). The VOICE evaluation was conducted in 11 fifth-grade classes in Chicago and Elgin, Illinois, with many at-risk students enrolled; seven classes in the two cities served as controls. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected.

The quantitative data revealed that VOICE students' knowledge and skill scores showed greater gains than did those of the control students. The quantitative data further showed that the VOICE program has desirable effects on student attitudes, primarily related to the classroom context. Attitudes toward variables outside the classroom proved more resistant to change. The qualitative data tends to support the finding that VOICE students felt very positively about their classmates, the teacher, the curriculum, and resource people who visited their classes. The items designed to assess behavior change showed essentially no change, although principals, when interviewed, indicated that discipline and fighting decreased after the implementation of VOICE. The researchers speculate that ceiling effects and the large number of items on the test may have prevented the program from showing an impact on behavior.