

## Formal Assessment of Peace Literacy Curriculum

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Our curriculum has been developed by a diverse team of educational professionals and is being used by educators in K-12 and higher education classrooms across the US and Canada. We have collected encouraging informal feedback from these educators about the benefits for students and teachers alike. We are now gathering **formal** assessment data on the effectiveness of our Peace Literacy curriculum.

**We completed our first formal curricular assessment of student progress in basic Peace Literacy competency in Jan. 2020.**

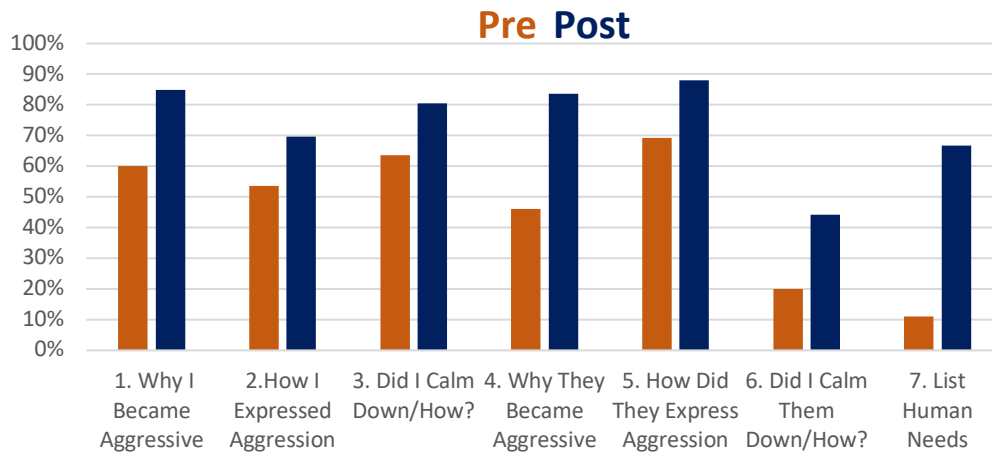
### Methods:

- In April 2019, the instructional team for a mandatory 9<sup>th</sup>-grade health class in the Corvallis, Oregon school district chose Peace Literacy learning outcomes to focus on in the coming year.
- The instructional team is responsible for approximately 450 students across 16 health classes.
- We gave the instructional team a two-day “Train-the Trainers” workshop in Peace Literacy at the end of Sept. 2019, using material they had chosen in April that was focused primarily on aggression, its relationship to distress, and its anatomy.
- We developed a pre- and post-survey for their students under the supervision of the OSU Institutional Review Board.
- Our sample consisted of approximately 60 students from two of the health classes who took the survey both before and after they received 3.50 hours of Peace Literacy instruction from their teachers, focused on the aggression material from the workshop.
- Student respondents were asked in an anonymous, online, open-ended, survey format first to describe a time when they had behaved aggressively, then to describe a time when someone behaved aggressively towards them, followed by a set of questions for each description.
- Two researchers coded the responses independently, and without knowing whether the responses were from the pre- or post-condition.

### Preliminary Results:

- The results of the survey were very positive across the board (see figure 1).
- Sample from Q4: Why do you think they behaved aggressively?
  - Typical answers from the pre-survey that showed the threshold for competency in Peace Literacy had not been met included: “He was mad.” “He just wanted revenge.”
  - Typical answers from the post-survey that showed the threshold for competency in Peace Literacy had now been met included: “I think he was having a hard time at work.” “She was sad and frustrated.”

**Figure 1.**  
 % of Students Who Met Threshold for Peace Literacy  
 Competency | Corvallis 9th Grade Health Classes, Fall 2019



The health class curriculum on aggression was drawn from Peace Literacy Lesson Plan 1 (available at [peaceliteracy.org](http://peaceliteracy.org)). Respondents met the threshold for Peace Literacy competency (in either the pre or post condition) if their response to the survey questions had the following characteristics as outlined in the curriculum:

**1. “Why Did You Become Aggressive?”**

Response focused on their own distress, such as their physical discomfort, e.g., hunger, but especially emotional discomfort, (frustration, fear, embarrassment, or disrespect); rather than focusing on the behavior of other people, or some other external locus.

**2. “How Did You Express Your Aggression?”**

Response highlighted more systemic *categories* of behavior such as social, physical, passive, and/or posturing or warning aggression, rather than naming particular acts such as punching or kicking (particular acts of social aggression such as yelling counted).

**3. “Were You Able to Calm Yourself Down? How? What Techniques Might You Use in the Future?”**

Response reported genuine success, and/or suggestions for future successes involving elements such as listening with empathy, depersonalizing the conflict, giving the benefit of the doubt, and/or keeping things in perspective.

**4. “Why Do You Think They Became Aggressive?”**

Response focused on situational explanations that highlight the aggressor’s physical or emotional state of distress such as hunger, frustration, fear, embarrassment, or disrespect; rather than focusing on the aggressor’s personality or disposition.

**5. “How Did They Express Their Aggression?”**

Response highlighted more systemic *categories* of behavior such as social, physical, passive, and/or posturing or warning aggression, rather than naming particular acts such as punching or kicking (particular acts of social aggression such as yelling counted).

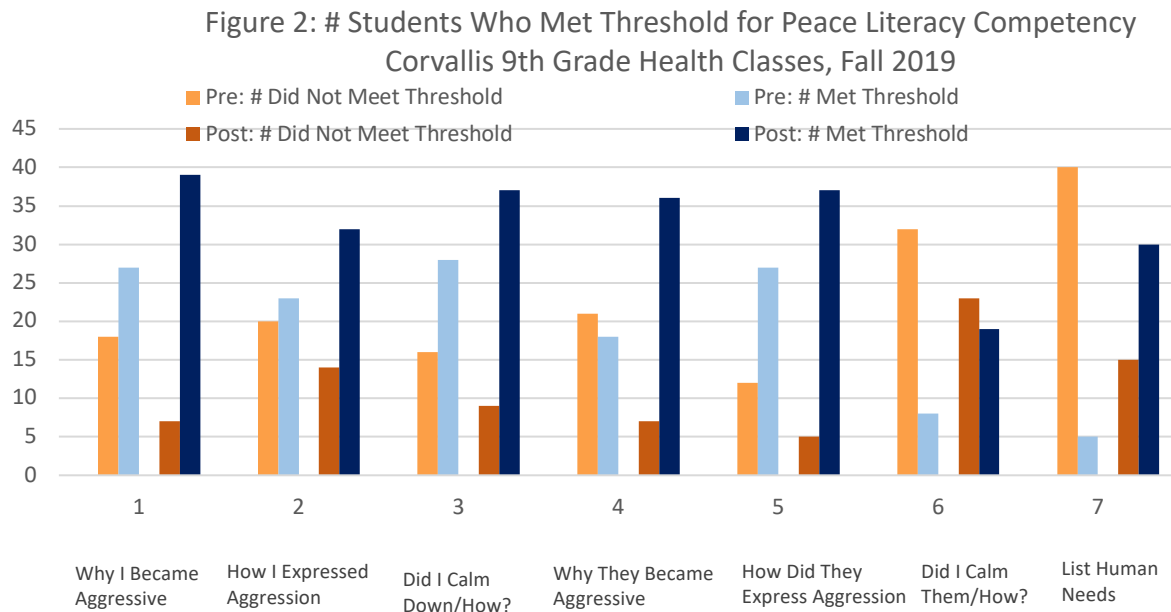
**6. “Were You Able to Calm Them Down? How? What Techniques Might You Use in the Future?”**

Response reported genuine success, and/or suggestions for future successes involving elements such as staying calm, listening and being respectful, and showing care and concern.

**7. “What are Three Things Humans Need For Survival?”**

Response listed two or more non-physical needs (e.g., purpose and meaning, belonging) rather than listing two or more physical needs (e.g., food, shelter).

Many of the students came in with some competency in Peace Literacy before they received any instruction, but as a group they all improved on every measure. **Figure 2** shows the changes in competency before and after the students received Peace Literacy instruction.



**From Colleen Works, Assistant Principal at Corvallis High School:**

“If we could get students and staff alike to recognize that aggression in themselves and others is first and foremost a response to distress, that would be huge.” These results show that we are headed in the right direction.

It’s worth reflecting on the challenges that make these preliminary results so promising:

- If we think peace is a literacy, then it is like math or reading and maybe even harder than math and reading.
- Students are likely to vary in their abilities with peace skills just as they do with their skills in math and reading.
- Unlike math and reading we often model for our kids the *opposite* of peace skills.
- The teachers only got 2 days of a workshop on Peace Literacy - an entirely new subject to most of them (imagine 2 days learning algebra!).
- The teachers presented the material to the students two months after the workshop.
- The students received only 3.5 hours of instruction.

This is just the first step of the analysis of the data from this one study and we also plan future assessments focused on longer-term attitudinal and behavioral changes.

Our curriculum is available for free to educators via our webpage: [www.peaceliteracy.org](http://www.peaceliteracy.org). Comments and questions welcome! Contact **Sharyn Clough** at [Sharyn.clough@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Sharyn.clough@oregonstate.edu).