

Creating Persistently Peaceful Homes, Classrooms, Schools and Communities: Theory, Strategies, Science, and Results

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Summary of Paper for Persistently Safe Schools Conference

How can we create persistently peaceful homes, classrooms, schools and communities? Peace is much more than safety. Peacefulness includes lack of aggression and violence. Peacefulness also embraces health and productivity. Persistent, that is long lasting and sustainable, peacefulness must happen in many places: homes, classrooms, schools and multiple community settings to achieve the vision. It must happen often.

At present, there is little to guide the creation of such a vision. Existing violence prevention practices do not address the developmental, ecological, cognitive, cultural, evolutionary or polygenic antecedents in an organic way that might be sustainable, flexible and powerful in producing peaceability. As scientists, practitioners and citizens, we speak presently of programs for bullyproofing, dating violence, substance abuse, and so forth. We speak about evidence-best programs, typically listed by federal agencies.

Consider, however, there are no formal curriculum or best practice programs that create aggression and violence in our society. For example, what is the peer-reviewed program that “turns on” the **MAO-A gene allele** that precipitates lifetime risk for the cycle of violence in the very famous New Zealand Child Development study (Caspi et al., 2002)? Or, what best-practice did first-grade teachers learn that guaranteed that children, randomly assigned to in his or her classroom, would have double the odds of committing acts of violence and delinquency a decade later (Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Ialongo, 1998)? What evidence-based school program produced dramatically adverse odds for randomly assigned poor secondary students in London (Rutter, 1981)? The answer for all of these questions, is none. Rather, the documented adverse aggression and violence effects were the result of daily “habits,” which are profoundly simple, toxic, and modifiable. Often, these daily habits look benign, but are not when examined through the lens of epidemiological methods.

This paper presents a cogent theory, developmentally anchored, of evidence-based kernels or “behavioral vaccines” that foster persistently peaceful homes, classrooms, schools and communities. The paper ties together diverse arenas of literature—psychological, medical, anthropological, and even polygenetics—for a coherent, testable theory of fostering peaceability in practical ways in homes, classrooms, schools and communities. This paper builds upon a series of prior peer-reviewed publications.

The paper draws specific data examples, from controlled experiments, in homes, classrooms, schools, communities and even whole states conducted by the first author and other colleagues. The paper also presents example, low-cost or no-cost strategies that can, based on prior research, result in persistent peaceability. None of the strategies are curricular in nature, yet they have robust underpinnings from risk and protective

factor literature and other totems of the science of violence prevention. The paper lays out clear policy, practice and scientific implications. The paper provides for a coherent way for schools and communities to measure more easily the impact of these strategies in producing persistent peaceability.

Note: the presentation of this paper will be organized in more of a workshop methodology to assure that the theoretical and data lessons are experiential as well as verbal.

Selected References (no references are cited from the work of the first author)

Caspi, A., McClay, J., Moffitt, T. E., Mill, J., Martin, J., Craig, I. W., et al. (2002). Role of genotype in the cycle of violence in maltreated children.[see comment]. *Science*, 297(5582), 851-854.

Kellam, S. G., Ling, X., Merisca, R., Brown, C. H., & Ialongo, N. (1998). The effect of the level of aggression in the first grade classroom on the course and malleability of aggressive behavior into middle school.[erratum appears in 2000 Winter;12(1):107]. *Development & Psychopathology*, 10(2), 165-185.

Rutter, M. (1981). School influences on children's behavior and development: The 1979 Kenneth Blackfan lecture, Children's Hospital Medical Center, Boston. *Annual Progress in Child Psychiatry & Child Development*, 170-197.