

The Forgiving Child: The Impact of Forgiveness Education on Excessive Anger  
for Elementary-Aged Children in Milwaukee's Central City

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Abstract

Research has shown that exposure to negative environmental conditions such as poverty and violence can have adverse influence on young children. Forgiveness education programs are designed to ameliorate this deleterious impact on young children by targeting excessive anger that can arise from deep hurt. Therefore, this series of studies examined the impact of three classroom forgiveness education programs for elementary aged students in Milwaukee's central city. Forgiveness education is a classroom program based on the Enright Process Model of Forgiveness (Enright, 2001) and targets anger and related variables such as depression which often affect children in urban, impoverished communities. Participants for this suite of studies were first, third, and fifth grade students in Catholic and public charter schools. Analysis of the data revealed a significant decrease in anger for the first and fifth grade experimental group when compared to the control group. In third grade, both the experimental and control group decreased in anger. No significant between group differences were detected for depression. The design implementation, significant findings, qualitative components, and implications for forgiveness education programs are discussed.

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Children in many urban communities across our country are negatively affected by chronic poverty and violence (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Overstreet & Braun, 2000). Sustained exposure to violence puts these children at risk for increased mental health problems such as anger, depression, anxiety, and others (Buckner, Beardslee, and Bassuk, 2004; Pynoos, Steinberg, & Goenjian, 1996). Many schools offer special programs or services for their students to address mental health issues (See Gansle, 2005). However, many of these programs have been criticized for being more reactive than preventative, for addressing anger and violence when they occur rather than reducing or eliminating them (Edwards, 2001; Smith & Sandhu, 2004).

One promising alternative to existing programs may be innovative forgiveness education programs that directly address underlying anger and depression associated with deep personal hurt, and incorporate foundational principals of interpersonal forgiveness with developmentally appropriate educational activities. These forgiveness programs represent an important addition to the traditional model of mental health services by training and empowering the classroom teachers to provide the forgiveness education programs to their students in their normal classroom. Recent research on this method of forgiveness intervention has demonstrated that developmentally appropriate forgiveness education programs effectively ameliorate negative mental health variables such as anger and depression for young children (ages 5-7) in violent and impoverished communities (Enright, Knutson Enright, Holter, Baskin, & Knutson, 2007).

Research has shown that children in impoverished communities are at great risk for experiencing direct and indirect violence, and the longer these children are exposed to poverty and violence the greater their risk for mental health problems (Bolger, Patterson, Thompson, & Kupersmidt, 1995; Samaan, 2000). The children who live and attend school in Milwaukee's central-city are beleaguered by increasing levels of poverty and violence that consequently endanger their personal mental health and successful development. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effectiveness of a forgiveness education program on mental health variables for elementary-aged children (ages 5-12) with extended exposure to poverty and community violence in Milwaukee's central-city.

### *Poverty and Violence*

Many children living in impoverished urban communities are negatively impacted by poverty and violence in two significant ways: 1.) they often experience increased exposure to violence (direct and indirect violence), and 2.) they often lack sufficient social support and resources needed to successfully process their experience of violence (Osofsky, 1995; Overstreet, 2000). The combination of these two conditions contributes to a "persistent and pervasive perception of danger" that can put children at risk for increased mental health problems in childhood and throughout their life (Buckner, Beardslee, and Bassuk, 2004, p. 420; Pynoos, Steinberg, & Goenjian, 1996).

Several studies suggest that children from impoverished communities have more emotional health problems than children from higher socioeconomic strata, including internalizing problems (such as anger, anxiety, or depression) and externalizing problems such as antisocial behavior (Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2006). A recent study by Buckner, Beardslee, and Bassuk (2004) revealed that exposure to violence was the greatest predictor of both internalizing and externalizing mental health problems among

children. Furthermore, these disadvantages increase the longer the child remains in poverty (Bolger, Patterson, Thompson, & Kupersmidt, 1995; Samaan, 2000).

Longitudinal research in Australia and the United States has found that poverty in the first five years of life negatively affects emotional health in adolescence (Spence, Najman, Bor, O'Callaghan, & Williams, 2002), and that compromised mental health in adolescence is linked to negative mental and physical health in adulthood (Kazdin, 1987; Weissman et al., 1999).

### *Anger and Depression*

The injustices of poverty – such as increased exposure to violence and diminished social support – play a role in increasing a child's anger (Brody, McBride Murry, Kim, & Brown, 2002; Eamon, 2002) and depressive symptoms (Gross, 1998). Recent research demonstrates the link between children's anger and negative outcomes such as poor academic progress, poor interpersonal relationships, and substance abuse (Deffenbacher, Lynch, Oetting, & Kemper, 1996; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Fryxell & Smith, 2000; Furlong & Smith, 1998; Lipman et al., 2006). Goodwin's (2006) research demonstrates the comorbidity of anger and depression in that certain strategies children may use to cope with anger – such as smoking, arguing, and drinking alcohol – are statistically significantly associated with feelings of depression.

### *School Programs: Anger and Violence Reduction*

Because of the insight into the deleterious effects of anger on children, especially those from impoverished and violent environments, psychologists and educators have taken a renewed interest in anger-reduction programs within school settings. It is unfortunate, however, that the *call* for anger reduction in schools is more consistent in the

published literature than actual programs to reduce it. Relatively few programs designed to help students with their anger actually do so (Gansle, 2005; Lipman et al., 2006). Furthermore, many of these programs are designed to provide mechanisms for dealing with expressions of anger only after they occur, and are therefore more reactive than preventative (Edwards, 2001; Smith & Sandhu, 2004).

### *The Case of Central-City Milwaukee*

Milwaukee, Wisconsin has witnessed both economic decline and increased poverty and violence over the past several decades which has disproportionately affected residents in the inner-city or central-city. Decreased population, industrialization, and income levels have precipitated increased poverty levels in the central districts (Levine, 2002). Consequently, many children in Milwaukee's central-city are in great need. A recent report published by the Milwaukee Public School System stated that 77% of all elementary school students in the district qualify for free or reduced lunch and that this percentage has increased 7% over the past decade (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2006). The overwhelming message expressed through these many statistics is that, like other impoverished inner-city communities, the elevated crime and poverty levels in Milwaukee put children at risk for mental health issues, academic failure, and developmental set-backs. It should be mentioned that many children in Milwaukee's central-city are resilient, have sufficient (even excellent) support structures, enjoy healthy development, and experience success on many levels. However, the literature and statistics indicate that the average child growing up in this at-risk environment is statistically more likely to experience the negative individual and interpersonal consequences of chronic poverty and violence. Many of these children are currently

participating in the forgiveness education programs at various schools throughout center-city Milwaukee.

*Interpersonal Forgiveness: Definition, Research, and Education*

Interpersonal forgiveness is an ancient concept that has only recently received attention and acclaim in the social sciences. There is not a consensus definition among forgiveness researchers, yet most would agree that forgiveness entails at least the relinquishing of negative emotions (anger and resentment). Some also assert that these negative emotions be replaced with positive expressions of benevolence and love. Enright (2001) provides a comprehensive definition of forgiveness that reflects this duality:

When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive when we overcome the resentment toward the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we as forgivers realize that the offender does not necessarily have a right to such gifts (p. 25).

Given Enright's (2001) definition, forgiveness includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral components and is embedded within a process model (See Figure 1). The forgiving person moves at his or her own pace through different developmental guideposts, often revisiting some and sometimes skipping others. Recent meta-analysis of forgiveness interventions confirmed that process oriented therapy for groups (overall effect size = 0.83,  $p < .05$ ) and individuals (overall effect size = 1.66,  $p < .05$ ) outperformed decision-based therapy (overall effect size = -.04) for forgiveness effect size (Baskin & Enright, 2004).

Forgiveness education and therapy has a long history of success across a variety of adult populations and instances of deep hurt (Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995; Coyle & Enright, 1997; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Hebl & Enright, 1993; Lin et al., 2004; McCollough & Worthington, 1995; Reed & Enright, 2006). Forgiveness education programs for children are self-contained curricula based on the Enright definition and process model of forgiveness, and have been implemented in first through third grade classrooms in Madison, WI and Belfast, Northern Ireland (Enright, 2001; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, Enright and The Human Development Study Group, 1991; Enright, et al., 2007). The concept of unconditional human dignity is central to each of the forgiveness curricula and is the understanding that all people have value and worth that is not advanced or diminished by personal characteristics. This understanding is based on the Piagetian concept of identity – that something non-essential (athletic ability) added to something essential (personhood) does not alter the essential component. Interpersonal forgiveness challenges individuals to grasp this theoretical principal of inherent worth and to enact it.

### *The Current Study*

The current forgiveness study examines whether a developmentally appropriate forgiveness education curriculum can be successfully implemented in violent and impoverished communities in Milwaukee, Wisconsin by teachers who have a considerable number of high need and at-risk students. A series of three independent educational interventions are presented and examine the effectiveness of the sequence of forgiveness curricula on mental health variables for elementary-aged children (study 1 – first grade, study 2 – third grade, and study 3 – fifth grade). Given the past success of forgiveness therapy across a variety of contexts, and the recent success of forgiveness

education programs in Belfast, Northern Ireland, it is hypothesized that children who participate in the forgiveness education intervention will 1. demonstrate decreased anger compared to children who do not participate and 2. demonstrate decreased depression compared to children who do not participate.

### Study 1

The first study is an evaluation of forgiveness education programs for first grade students attending Catholic and public charter schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This study is a replication of the study conducted by Enright et al. (2007) in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

### Method

#### *Participants*

The sample of first grade students from Milwaukee, WI consisted of 119 students from ten classrooms. The experimental group consisted of 75 students (35 females, 40 males), and the control group consisted of 44 students (23 females, 21 males). The modal age was seven years.

#### *Instruments*

The Beck Anger Inventory for Youth (BANI-Y) was used as the exclusive measure in the first study (Beck, Beck, & Jolly, 2001). It is considered an excellent measure of the affect and cognitions of anger and anger-related behavior. The twenty item scale is designed for children as young as six years of age and reports a high internal consistency of .91 (Beck, Beck, & Jolly, 2001).

#### *Research Design*

The ten classrooms were randomly assigned to either the forgiveness intervention (experimental) or wait-list control (no treatment) condition through the use of a table of

random numbers. All participants were tested prior to the intervention (pretest) and again approximately one month after the intervention (delayed posttest). Teachers in the experimental classrooms attended a training workshop during which time they studied the definition and process of forgiveness, participated in their own forgiveness experience, and reviewed materials in the *Adventure of Forgiveness* curriculum guide (Knutson & Enright, 2002). Teachers in the control condition did not receive any training or materials until after the study had been completed.

### *Forgiveness Intervention*

The *Adventure of Forgiveness* curriculum was used for study one and consists of 17 sessions, with each session designed for the approximate length of a standard class (approx. 45 minutes), and utilizes the genius of Dr. Seuss' stories (i.e., *Horton Hears a Who*) to provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for the students to explore the foundational concepts of interpersonal forgiveness (Knutson & Enright, 2002) This is done largely through three main components within the curriculum: 1. introduction of forgiveness components (inherent worth, kindness, respect, generosity, and benevolence, 2. exploration of forgiveness components through stories such as *Horton Hears a Who*, and 3. application of (trying out) forgiveness components in real life. It should be noted that at no time during the program are children forced to forgive. It is always a choice. Furthermore, teachers take special care to distinguish between forgiveness and reconciliation – the children are not required to repair a relationship or continue to associate with others who may have hurt them.

### Results and Discussion

Given our directional hypothesis, a one-tailed t-test analysis was conducted on gain scores between the experimental and control conditions. Table 1 indicates that the

experimental group demonstrated a statistically significant decrease in anger compared to the control condition ( $t = 1.95$ ;  $p < .05$ ) with a small-to-medium effect size ( $d = .37$ ) by Cohen's criteria (1988). The children in the forgiveness condition at the pretest evaluation were excessively angry (close to the moderately excessively angry category). They went down in anger so that they were at the lower end of mildly excessively angry at the follow-up testing. On the other hand, the children in the control group became angrier as time passed.

The results indicate that a forgiveness education program for first grade students does, on average, successfully reduce levels of anger compared to students who do not participate in the program. Furthermore, these data replicate the findings for first grade students in Belfast, Northern Ireland presented by Enright et al. (2007). As has been noted elsewhere (Enright et al., 2007), this is particularly encouraging considering that the children spend most of the time learning *about* forgiveness rather than forgiving someone for deeply unfair treatment. They only practice forgiving someone at the end of the curriculum, and only if they choose to do so.

### Study 2

The second study is an evaluation of forgiveness education programs for third grade students attending Catholic and public charter schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This study is also a replication of the study conducted by Enright et al. (2007) in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Given the advanced cognitive abilities of third grade students, this study includes a developmentally more sophisticated curriculum guide and an additional dependant measure.

## Method

### *Participants*

The sample of third grade students from Milwaukee, WI consisted of 78 students from ten classrooms. The experimental group consisted of 36 students (23 females, 13 males), and the control group consisted of 42 students (22 females, 20 males). The discrepancy in sample size on the results table is due to participants failing to successfully complete certain instruments. The modal age was nine years.

### *Instruments*

In addition to the BANI-Y used in study one, study two employed the Beck Depression Inventory for Youth (BDI-Y). The Beck Depression Inventory for Youth, a popular measure in assessing children's depression, was designed specifically to assess levels of depression syndromes and disorders (Beck, Beck, & Jolly, 2001). It includes an assessment of child's negative thoughts toward themselves, their world, and their future, consistent with Beck's well known model of depression. The twenty item instrument is scored on a 0 (never) to 3 (always) scale yielding a score range from 0 to 60.

### *Research Design*

The ten classrooms were randomly assigned to either the forgiveness intervention (experimental) or wait-list control (no treatment) condition through the same randomization technique describe in study one. All participants were tested in the same pre- and posttest format as describe in study one. Finally, all teachers were provided instruction and training in the same manner as described in study one.

### *Forgiveness Intervention*

*The Joy of Forgiveness* was used as the third grade forgiveness curriculum and consists of 15 lessons (Knutson & Enright, 2005). Again, developmentally appropriate stories such as *The Velveteen Rabbit* and *Rising above the Storm Clouds* were used to illustrate the three main components of the curriculum: 1. examine the definition of forgiveness and inherent worth, 2. explore the role of benevolence and compassion in forgiveness, and 3. practice forgiving someone who was hurtful or unfair.

### Results and Discussion

As in study one, a one-tailed t-test analysis was conducted on gain scores between the experimental and control conditions. Table 1 indicates that there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control conditions in either anger or depression. However, secondary analysis of the data revealed that both the experimental and control conditions demonstrated significant within-group decreases in anger (EXP  $t = -2.39$ ,  $p < .05$ ; CON  $t = -1.73$ ,  $p < .05$ ). From a clinical standpoint, the students in the experimental group began the intervention above the cut-off (55) for excessive anger and went below that threshold at the one-month follow-up. Students in the control group were already below the clinical threshold for excessive anger at pretest and decreased at the one-month follow-up.

The secondary analysis does point to the interesting possibility that the forgiveness interventions are having an effect outside of the experimental classroom. The possibility of this inter-group effect will be addressed in greater detail in the general discussion.

### Study 3

The third study is an evaluation of forgiveness education programs for fifth grade students attending Catholic and public charter schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This study extends beyond the findings reported in Enright, et al. (2007) and provides again a more sophisticated version of the forgiveness education curriculum.

### Method

#### *Participants*

The sample of fifth grade students from Milwaukee, WI consisted of 79 students from eight classrooms. The experimental group consisted of 40 students (20 females, 20 males), and the control group consisted of 39 students (23 females, 16 males). The discrepancy in sample size on the results table is due to participants failing to successfully complete certain instruments. Furthermore, the overall sample was reduced significantly when a teacher from an experimental classroom unexpectedly departed the school for personal reasons. No permanent substitute was identified in time for them to receive training and continue the forgiveness program. Therefore, the experimental and control classrooms from that school were eliminated from analysis ( $n = 47$ ). The modal age was eleven years.

#### *Instruments*

This study implemented the same measures as were used in study two: BANI-Y and BDI-Y.

#### *Research Design*

The eight classrooms were randomly assigned to either the forgiveness intervention (experimental) or wait-list control (no treatment) condition through the same

randomization technique describe in study one. All participants were tested in the same pre- and posttest format as describe in study one. Finally, all teachers were provided instruction and training in the same manner as described in study one.

### *Forgiveness Intervention*

The *Journey toward Forgiveness* was used as the fifth grade curriculum and consists of fifteen lessons (Knutson & Enright, 2006). Stories such as *Summer Wheels* (Bunting, 1992), *I'm Furious* (Crary, 1994), and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe: The Chronicles of Narnia* (Lewis, 2005) provide examples and discussion points for the children to learn that interpersonal conflicts arise in a variety of ways and for many reason, and that they have a wide range of response options to unfair treatment. As in the other curricula, *The Journey Toward Forgiveness* is divided into three main components: 1. definition of forgiveness and how to extend and receive it, 2. appropriate scenarios and methods for expressing forgiveness, and 3. extending forgiveness to school and family communities.

### Results and Discussion

As with the previous two studies, a one-tailed t-test analysis was conducted on gain scores between the experimental and control conditions. Table 1 indicates statistically significant differences between the groups on the anger variable ( $t = 1.71, p < .05$ ) with a medium effect size ( $d = .46$ ) by Cohen's criteria (1988). No between-group differences were observed for depression. The children in the forgiveness condition at the pretest evaluation were in the normal range for anger, but close to the clinical cut-off for excessive anger. They decreased in anger so that they were farther from the clinical cut-off for excessive anger at the one month follow-up test. On the other hand, the

children in the control group, as we found in the first grade study, became angrier as time passed.

In addition to the statistical analysis, case study profiles were assembled for representative members of the experimental condition. Participant name and other identifying information has been changed to preserve anonymity and confidentiality.

*Case Study #1.* Skylar is eleven years old and a fifth grade student at a math and science charter school in Milwaukee, WI. Skylar was assigned to her current fifth grade teacher in part because of her low reading ability. In this particular school, students are grouped according to ability in core subject areas. At pretest, Skylar reported that her classmate was responsible for the deep interpersonal hurt she had experienced. Skylar wrote that this particular classmate “was laught [sic] at me.” The interpersonal hurt Skylar described is classified as verbal, and she reported the severity of the hurt at “Very awful.” Her pretest anger score (36) represents an extremely elevated anger level, and her pretest depression score (43) represents an extremely elevated depression level.

After she and her classmates successfully completed the forgiveness education program, Skylar demonstrated levels of anger (11) and depression (4) that are considered average levels. Furthermore, Skylar improved in her forgiveness toward her classmate.

*Case Study #2.* Diego is ten years old and a fifth grade student at a Catholic elementary school in Milwaukee, WI. The school that Diego attends is in a neighborhood that is known for gang activity. At pretest, Diego reported that his classmate caused a deep interpersonal hurt when she was “calling me names.” Diego reported the severity of this verbal expression as “A little bit awful.” His pretest anger score (38) represents an extremely elevated anger level, and his pretest depression score (23) represents a mildly elevated depression level.

Diego's posttest scores on the primary mental health measures revealed a thirteen point decrease in anger (25) and a five point decrease in depression (18). His posttest anger levels decreased to a mildly elevated level, and his posttest depression levels decreased to below the average level. Finally, his forgiveness toward his classmate improved.

#### *Methodological Note*

It should be noted that the Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (EFI-C; Enright, 2000) was among the original suite of dependant measures for all three iterations of the current study. The instrument requires the participant to identify one person who was very unfair to him or her and to describe one incident of unfairness. The results from the instrument were not included in the analysis because the researchers conducting the assessments reported that many of the children displayed difficulty accurately recalling their experience of interpersonal hurt from pre- to posttest (a span of seven months or more). This lack of recall would have compromised the validity of the instrument for the current educational interventions.

#### General Discussion

The forgiveness education program was designed to elicit significant positive change in key mental health variables for elementary-aged children. Although there was not significant change for depression, the presence of significant anger differences in studies one and three (and significant anger difference from pretest to follow-up in Study 2) are encouraging and are congruent with successful forgiveness education programs conducted in Belfast, Northern Ireland (Enright, et. al., 2007).

*Anger*

Analysis of individual anger levels yielded significant between-group differences in study one and study three. It is not surprising that there was a statistically significant decrease in anger given the structure of the program and the participants' identification with the lessons targeting emotional responses to hurt such as anger. Although the Beck Anger Inventory (BANI) does not target anger toward a specific individual, the following two conditions indicate how general anger levels might be impacted through a forgiveness intervention.

First, a significant portion of the forgiveness education program is dedicated to learning what forgiveness is, when forgiveness is an appropriate response, and why forgiveness is a worthwhile response to deep hurt. A key component of an activity within this process is identifying personal responses to deep hurt. The stories and discussion questions challenge students to imagine how certain responses – such as anger – may feel like the right response, but may actually cause more hurt. Given the amount of time spent identifying and uncovering unhealthy responses to interpersonal hurt – responses such as anger, frustration, shame, guilt, etc. – it is not surprising that students were able to recognize and thereby reduce their general levels of anger.

Second, as was evident through teacher feedback and communication, the students seemed particularly engaged in the activities and discussions pertaining to their own anger. As one teacher hypothesized, the students' familiarity and general literacy with regard to anger may stem from first-hand experiences of anger and violence at home and in their neighborhoods. Teachers also reported that their students expressed in several discussions that they were personally struggling or dealing with anger toward someone close to them; in one classroom it was a parent who was absent or had otherwise

abandoned them. The review of literature pertaining to community violence and anger certainly supports the anecdotal evidence provided by the teachers.

### *Depression*

Gain score analysis for the depression variable did not reveal statistically significant, between-group differences in study two or study three. Although related to anger, depression often consists of more subtle expressions of emotional duress that may not be fully understood by children of this age. Given the focus and energy devoted to uncovering anger toward someone who has hurt the student, it is not entirely surprising that depression was not significantly impacted. The children may need more intensive instruction, perhaps by the school counselor or graduate students training to be counselors, for this variable to show consistent improvement with forgiveness education.

### *Limitations*

Chief among the methodological concerns is the use of a quasi-experimental design whereby classrooms were randomly assigned to a specific condition, and the children within those classrooms were individually assessed. Recent research and theoretical articulations by Cook (2005) herald the use of such cluster assignments for educational or social interventions. Cook states that “the hope is that individual change will be greater in size, performance, and generalization if it is achieved through group- rather than individual-level processes” (p.179). It can be surmised, then, that interventions aimed at isolated individuals within the school – removing the angriest children from class to receive a specific program – limit the ability of that program to impact the overall school community and future students in that school. This very philosophy is core to the forgiveness education program through the consultation model in which psychologists work directly with classroom teachers who deliver the program.

Rather than identifying and working with only the angriest or most troubled students – an opportunity not typically afforded in impoverished urban schools – the forgiveness education program seeks to elicit positive individual change within the classroom and through the teaching of the classroom teacher.

Why, then, would we randomly assign at one level and analyze at another, smaller level? The answer to this question is two-fold. Given the structure of school organization, randomly assigning at the school level allows researchers to account for social and demographic realities that would otherwise be difficult to model and control (Cook, 2002). For example, creating a balance of schools, from geographic areas, socioeconomic classes, or conditions that meet the criteria of the project or questions of interest, reduces the potential for differences of individual students within those schools.

There is a strong argument for cluster analysis at the "smallest" or "lowest" level possible (Cook, 2005, p.187). Since the forgiveness education study does not make claims about wholesale change in the school or community, analysis of the individual student is most congruent with our research design and questions of interest. While this broader category of questions regarding school and community impact presents interesting challenges for implementation and analysis, it is not the primary context or question of interest. Therefore, analysis of individuals within these communities yields the answers that are relevant to our questions of interest. Analysis on the school level is an extrapolation of our questions of interest.

Second, it has been hypothesized that significant "intra-unit communication" can impact social science interventions (Cook, 2005, p. 188). That is to say, the research design may be adversely affected if there is communication between experimental and control conditions by both teachers and students. As is often the case with educational

programs that are new, exciting, enjoyable, and effective, teachers are prone to discuss them. In fact, one control teacher indicated to a research assistant that they were excited to finally get the forgiveness curriculum because they had heard so much about it from the third grade teacher. While this is not empirical proof of a significant breach of protocol, it does indicate that there may be some cross-condition sharing of ideas which, in turn, may be incorporated into “control” classrooms.

Furthermore, if the forgiveness programs are indeed as effective as has been demonstrated in the past, then children are likely to share or at least become aware of the key components of forgiveness as they engage each other at recess, during lunch, at home with school friends, etc. There is a potential threat to the research design when students “switch” for math or English from a control to an experimental classroom, or view forgiveness projects and artwork presented in the classrooms or hallways, which happened in the third-grade study reported here.

This is not to say that students in the control condition receive the same forgiveness experience as students in the experimental condition. In fact, it is likely that this “chatter” would dilute the impact of the intervention in that all students are generally exposed to some components of forgiveness. They might likely know what forgiveness is, what it “looks” like, and how to talk about it from the posters on the wall, the actions of their teachers, and the interactions with their peers. However, all students would not necessarily enjoy the same positive outcomes of forgiveness education – such as is evidenced by the between group anger scores – since they are not fully engaged in the program.

*Conclusion*

The central issue is clear: children exposed to chronic poverty and violence are at risk for deleterious interpersonal and developmental outcomes. Research has shown that forgiveness education programs can have a positive impact on the mental health of children living in violent and impoverished communities (Enright, et. al., 2007). The current suite of studies demonstrates a partial replication of these findings, especially regarding the central variable of excessive anger, and provides suggestions for the improved implementation and assessment of these unique and innovative forgiveness education programs that seek to uplift and empower the forgiving child.

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## Appendix: Table and Figure

Table 1  
*Mean, Standard Deviation, t Statistics, and Effect Size for Dependent Variables*

	<u>Pretest</u>		<u>Delayed Posttest</u>		<u>Gain Score</u>		<u>Gain Score t-test</u>	<u>Cohen's d</u>
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>		
<b><u>Milwaukee 1<sup>st</sup> Grade</u></b>								
Anger (EXP n = 75)	59.91	12.39	57.00	13.16	-2.91	13.48	1.95*	0.37
Anger (CON n = 44)	56.05	13.73	58.43	11.88	2.39	15.62		
<b><u>Milwaukee 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade</u></b>								
Anger (EXP n = 36)	58.39	8.66	54.22	9.99	-4.11	10.11	0.73	
Anger (CON n = 42)	53.55	11.03	52.07	10.51	-2.38	10.77		
Depression (EXP n = 34)	58.62	9.71	55.38	10.35	-3.24	11.05	0.30	
Depression (CON n = 41)	53.05	10.07	50.61	9.04	-2.44	11.50		
<b><u>Milwaukee 5<sup>th</sup> Grade</u></b>								
Anger (EXP n = 40)	54.15	12.63	53.63	11.98	-1.83	11.20	1.71*	0.49
Anger (CON n = 39)	50.84	10.16	52.72	11.78	1.84	7.51		
Depression (EXP n = 39)	50.77	11.65	50.18	11.74	-0.59	11.74	0.35	
Depression (CON n = 39)	46.49	9.92	46.67	9.20	0.18	7.51		

\*  $p < .05$

**Beck T-Scores and Clinical Ranges**

<b>Score</b>	<b>Severity Level</b>
T = 70 +	Extremely Elevated
T = 60-69	Moderately Elevated
T = 55-59	Mildly Elevated
T < 55	Average

Figure 1

*The Phases and Units of Forgiving and the Issues Involved*

UNCOVERING PHASE

1. Examination of psychological defenses and the issues involved
2. Confrontation of anger; the point is to release, not harbor, the anger
3. Admittance of shame, when this is appropriate
4. Awareness of depleted emotional energy
5. Awareness of cognitive rehearsal of the offense
6. Insight that the injured party may be comparing self with the injurer
7. Realization that oneself may be permanently and adversely changed by the injury
8. Insight into a possibly altered “just world” view

DECISION PHASE

9. A change in heart/conversion/new insights that old resolution strategies are not working
10. Willingness to consider forgiveness as an option
11. Commitment to forgive the offender

WORK PHASE

12. Reframing, though role-taking, who the wrongdoer is by viewing him or her in context
13. Empathy and compassion toward the offender
14. Bearing/accepting the pain
15. Giving a moral gift to the offender

DEEPENING PHASE

16. Finding meaning for self and others in the suffering and in the forgiveness process
17. Realization that self has needed others’ forgiveness in the past
18. Insight that one is not alone (universality, support)
19. Realization that self may have new purpose in life because of the injury
20. Awareness of decreased negative affect and, perhaps, increased positive affect, if this begins to emerge, toward the injurer; awareness of internal, emotional release

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