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What is LRE?

Maintaining our democracy is not an easy task. Through education, individuals learn to be effective, law-abiding, active, participating citizens. Law-related education (LRE) helps to develop young citizens who can sustain, preserve, and foster our free, democratic society. As noted in *Toward Safer and Better Schools*, a publication of the National School Boards Association, LRE "has demonstrated promise in preventing delinquency by fostering social responsibility, personal commitment for the public good, and effective participation."

LRE is content. Students learn about the foundations of a free, democratic society such as freedom, authority, justice, privacy, and equality. Students study things that interest them such as rights and responsibilities, contracts, juvenile law, the police, and the courts.

LRE is action. Students are actively involved in their own learning. They participate in a variety of activities such as conducting mock trials, studying court cases, visiting courtrooms, and riding along with police.

LRE is people. Students and their teachers work with the community. Lawyers, judges, juvenile officers, police officers, legislators and other law-related professionals work hand-in-hand with teachers and students to bring the law to life.

Using Law-Related Education as an Intervention with "High-Risk" Youth

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During these times of scarce resources, policymakers are increasingly devoting more attention to areas where they feel they can make the greatest impact. Many local and state policy discussions are focusing on the relationship of "high-risk" youth, crime, and drug abuse. Policymakers as well as social service program directors are particularly interested in the factors contributing to the likelihood that a young person will abuse alcohol or other drugs, and engage in delinquent behavior. We have known for some time that there is a significant correlation between these two behaviors. What is perhaps ironic is that we are back to exploring what types of programs are most effective. In the last ten years, we have learned more about addiction and criminal behavior than in any other period in our history. While this may leave room for optimism, it certainly offers an opportunity for innovation in developing effective programming.

The roots of law-related education can be traced to the 1970s and the national emphasis on preventing crime and delinquency. A similar rationale followed LRE into the 1980s as law-focused curriculum made a successful contribution to the national drug prevention campaign. And now in the 90s, we are experimenting with the basic notion that LRE may have positive influences on high risk populations, including juvenile delinquents. These phases in the evolution of LRE demonstrate how the study of law has an intrinsic role in addressing the anti-social patterns of young people.

LRE presents many opportunities for LRE program innovation with programmatic applications outside the traditional K-12 classroom. Taking LRE into juvenile correctional facilities may be the most unique challenge to date. The purpose of this article is to briefly outline a rationale for why LRE can be an ef-

fective program in facilities serving delinquent youth. The rationale is based on our knowledge about delinquent youth, correctional education, and organizational dynamics. Within this context, the following themes will be explored:

1. How can LRE have impact on the high-risk child?
2. Would LRE be welcomed by facility staff?

Many other questions will need to be answered as we proceed with this national effort. However, continuation of this initiative rests on a preliminary understanding of these two basic issues.

High-Risk Behavior and Delinquency

The term "high-risk youth" made its way into policy and program jargon in the 1980s. The phrase has been especially popularized by state and federal priorities relating to alcohol and drug abuse. In fact, various federal offices have listed criteria which define "high-risk" that are clearly based on recent research on substance abuse among adolescents. Hawkins, Lishner and Catalano (1985) identified 11 factors which increase the probability that a child might abuse alcohol and other drugs, or engage in delinquent behavior. These risk factors include having a family history of alcohol and other drug use, family management problems, parental use and approval of drug use, and early first use of drugs. Bry, McKeon and Pandina (1982), Kandel (1984) and others have found that many of these factors appear in a combined pattern which increases the likelihood that the child will engage in using or abusing behavior and thus, delinquency. Empirical research has been helpful in identifying contributors to delinquent behavior.

The profile of juveniles held in many juvenile correctional facilities provides ample evidence that certain risk factors significantly correlate with various types of behaviors. It is important to understand that young people who enter the juvenile justice system—especially those in institutions, shelters, and group homes—share a clustering of these risk characteristics. These children are considered "high-risk" by virtue of their presence in the juvenile justice system.

The juvenile courts hear cases involving neglect, abuse as well as delinquency. Yet, cases involving delinquency constitute only a portion of the total number of youth involved. According to the 1990 National Center for Juvenile Justice profile of system-involved youth, over 1.1 million cases involving a delinquent offense in 1987 were processed in state court systems. It was estimated that this represents only 4.4 percent of youth at risk. Most of these cases were referred to community-based programs, while others are placed in state juvenile institutions. Margolis (1988) estimates that over 450,000 adolescents are held in correctional facilities each year. This overall pattern of case disposition in our juvenile justice system is important to understanding at what points

in the system LRE may be applicable to the needs of program staff as well as helping us to understand how many young people could potentially gain from the use of LRE as an intervention.

The theoretical basis for identifying these risk factors is based on what is known in the medical field as the public health model. Once we know which elements in a person's environment contribute to dysfunctional behavior, we can target those factors in hopes of ameliorating their effects. This approach can be applied both in the field of delinquency *prevention* and delinquency *intervention* (the focus of programming after a child has engaged in delinquent behavior). Again, the purpose for understanding risk factors is to programmatically target these factors and directly affect their influence in hopes of preventing anti-social behavior, or, in the case of the delinquent, stemming further anti-social behavior.

LRE and High-Risk Youth

Given our understanding of high-risk indicators, why do we believe that LRE could have any impact on a delinquent child? The answer to that question is associated with risk factors such as little or no commitment to learning, lack of bonding to pro-social norms, or poor social skills. LRE has the potential of addressing these risk factors in a more interactive and cooperative teaching style and to focus on teaching about law and related civic concepts.

A number of curriculum programs begin with the assumption that students need to participate in order to benefit from the learning process. Any teacher who has attended an LRE training session will quickly note that LRE is highly interactive and cooperative. Early evaluations of LRE in public schools found that students thought LRE was fun and indicated an improvement in attitudes towards school, the teacher and school work (Hunter and Johnson 1986). Anecdotally, those working in LRE can verify this. Teachers working with the Iowa program, for example, consistently underscore the importance of how LRE is welcomed by students and, for many, sparks further interest in social studies. Through the interactive learning approach, LRE can improve student attitudes and commitment to learning and school. Teachers also comment on how LRE's content contributes to student understanding of law and legal processes. In many ways, the study of law reaches the goals that Massiah-Jackson (1989) outlined as important in reaching high risk youth:

1. To understand and appreciate an ordered society;
2. To understand American values;
3. To heighten awareness of essential legal concepts; and
4. To recognize the role of legal processes in our lives.

LRE's content directly addresses these goals. More importantly, by studying law students become aware of the more formalized norms within our culture. Law is the most literal expression of social expectations. If students and citizens are expected to follow society's norms, these expectations must be well articulated and understood.

Both content and pedagogy are important to imparting social skills to students. The various cooperative learning approaches used in LRE lessons teach students important skills about communication, critical thinking skills, decisionmaking, cooperation, teamwork and leadership. The interactions that take place in small group sessions are exercises in social interaction. Moreover, by studying rules, the role of law in society, and the nature of advocacy, students learn about social skills used in a society governed by law. For example, students working on LRE conflict resolution lessons learn to identify the importance of rules and the significance of skills such as listening, recognizing when someone else is angry, or knowing when unique situations lead to disputes not covered by the rules. In many ways, LRE combines the value of experience with content in the learning process.

LRE as Correctional Education

A growing number of correctional researchers and educators are currently reporting that delinquents can benefit from programming that has a cognitively-oriented focus. Ross, Fabiano and Ross have concluded that treatment is more successful when the correctional program includes "some technique which would influence the offender's thinking" (1988:45). This cognitive approach to criminal behavior is apparently contributing in a growing way to effective interventions with juvenile populations (Arbuthnot and Gordon 1988). Many of these experiences are being studied as a result of an increasing emphasis on correctional education. These findings have several important implications for the use of LRE in correctional settings.

First, we can easily argue that a curriculum-based program structured around the study of law involves essential cognitive functions. Interestingly, there are important parallels between many LRE curriculum objectives and what Gehring has identified as the "specific processes or cognitive-moral processes that are associated with democracy" (1988:66):

1. Basic academic skills including problem solving, reasoning and self-awareness that are "enhanced when learned in conjunction with social responsibility;"
2. Breaking down issues of social concern into manageable problem solving components;
3. Synthesis of information from the community or society to create solutions and alternative outcomes;

4. The improvement of skills such as goal setting, planning and outcome analysis in participatory decisionmaking environments;
5. Tolerance and empathy which are essential to community participation and individual growth;
6. Democratic institutions that promote integration and assimilation of community culture and societal norms, as well as analysis of why these norms exist.

Within this general educational framework, both correctional staff and teachers in our schools share a common goal: the preparation of adolescents for good citizenship. These aspects of cognitive-based correctional programs are fundamentally reflected in the goals listed by Judge Massiah-Jackson (1989). Moreover, many of the objectives identified in this list are found in basic LRE curriculum programs.

Second, LRE's content focuses specifically on society's normative expectations. Law is the expression of how social order is created and guides the behavior of those under its jurisdiction. Our society is especially reliant upon these formalized rules. As a result, young people must be taught about rules, the rulemaking process and the dynamics of applying rules and law. This is the essence of what LRE teaches. LRE's content begins with these themes and then broadens to include the history of law in our society, the discussion of various specifics of the legal process, or the bringing about of a greater understanding for decision making in the law-related context. High-risk youth—like all youth—need to be aware of these particular aspects of law in our society.

Third, LRE can contribute to the development of social skills which are needed in a law-based society. As previously mentioned, LRE's interactive learning processes develop essential social skills. The delinquent child may not have refined these skills or had the opportunity to develop them to a level with which they are comfortable or that is appropriate to their environment (Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw and Klein 1980). Allowing students to practice these skills is an important part of the LRE classroom activity. As many of the high risk factors identified in the research are related to poor social skill development, LRE should be considered as an intervention which targets these factors.

What Impact Does LRE Have on Institutional Environments?

The State Training School for Boys at Eldora, Iowa, initiated a comprehensive LRE program in 1985. The training school is a secure facility which handles adjudicated delinquent boys 14 or older. The population is characterized by diversity in learning ability, severity of offense and social skills. When students are admitted, an individual care plan is prepared for them and they are assigned to a cottage staffed by youth counselors. The LRE program has been im-

plemented in this clinical component of the facility.

The two evaluations of the training school's LRE program have revealed significant findings about the program's processes and outcomes. The process evaluation explored what elements were important to successful program implementation, and considered issues such as staff receptivity, administrative support and training. The first outcome evaluation was completed only recently in an attempt to assess what impact the curriculum program had on students held at the facility. Results from these studies provide a preliminary understanding of LRE's impact on the total institutional environment.

Implementation of LRE

In many ways, successful implementation of LRE in a juvenile justice setting parallels what is known about successful implementation in the schools (Buzzell 1988). The Iowa program began with development of an LRE advisory committee which included representatives from all departments of the institution. A great deal of thought was devoted to where the LRE curriculum would best fit into the institution's programmatic structure. The most success has been realized in the clinical department with the cottage staff who participated in curriculum design and taught the 18 weeks of lessons and activities. It is important to note that upon initial review of the curriculum, staff at the training school believed that this approach is a suitable intervention for this population and was responsible for the successful implementation of the LRE program. Additional curriculum materials were used in the training school's educational component. Students would thus encounter LRE curriculum in both their cottage activities and their classes.

Interviews with staff helped identify significant outcomes of the curriculum being used in the cottages. This information was supplemented with data reported in staff log books and a questionnaire. Several important themes relevant to successful implementation were identified. One of the most commonly reported positive experiences associated with the project was a high level of staff involvement and interest. The survey revealed that interest in the materials and the activities generated a renewed enthusiasm for the working with the students. Many staff reported an increased interest in law and requested additional reading materials and resources.

The process evaluation revealed that training and professional development were critical to overall program implementation. In addition, staff reported professional benefits from the LRE training which was initiated at the campus in cooperation with the Iowa Center for LRE (ICLRE). A training module was included when the project was initiated in 1985. Staff from the National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law (NICEL) as well as a trainer from the ICLRE conducted separate workshops on campus twice a year for four years. Since 1989, training school staff

have been attended the annual LRE Summer Institute at Drake University in addition to other workshops held throughout the year. A certification program has now been implemented in order to encourage facility staff to complete training in LRE.

Impact on Students

In order to assess the curriculum's impact on students, the ICLRE is conducting an analysis of student attitudes and behaviors. The evaluation is divided into two components. The first portion involved testing students over the curriculum period. Five tests were administered every five weeks to allow for tracking of changes in student attitudes toward the law as well as shifts in knowledge about law and the legal process. The second portion of the evaluation is a qualitative assessment of the program. Data on changes in student behavior were collected through interviews with facility staff.

Based on interviews with those teaching LRE in the cottages, a variety of changes in student behavior have been observed. The staff reported that LRE has influenced the students in the following ways:

1. Students are more aware of what "triggers" conflict and confrontation. This new awareness has been especially noticeable in the cottages where students live together.
2. There is an improved understanding of the legal process and legal terminology. Staff are hearing students use terms like "the process" or "mediate" in their daily interactions and in discussions with staff.
3. Students appear to have a greater sense of self-awareness about what makes them angry and recognize acceptable ways to express that anger.
4. Students have a greater appreciation for and understanding of rules governing the institution and cottages and are "taking ownership" of the guidelines governing expectations.
5. Communications between staff and students are improving. Staff indicate that the interactive learning activities used in the lessons encourage a greater sense of trust and cooperation between the staff and students.

This qualitative assessment of the program has highlighted some of the important aspects of the program in general. Students are apparently using some of the social skills taught in the curriculum itself (e.g., conflict resolution, communication skills). In addition, students are expressing to staff what might be considered more prosocial statements about rules in our society. These findings suggest that LRE can influence certain factors which put children at-risk for certain behaviors. The results collected in this analysis indicate that factors such as ineffective social bonding, poor interactive skills, or lack of interest in learning may be ameliorated to some extent by participation in the curriculum. Moreover, it appears that when students are given the skills to improve self-awareness (e.g., what are my triggers for conflict,

what makes me angry, etc.) they take some responsibility in social interactions. The exercises in rulemaking also help students to focus on goal setting and planning in the context of institutional decisionmaking. This was confirmed by staff reports of greater "ownership" of cottage activities. These preliminary results indicate that from an evaluative perspective, the risk-factor model and the introduction of socio-moral frameworks in a cognitive context offer a strong conceptual basis for revealing the intervention potential of LRE curriculum. Further empirical study will enhance our overall understanding of the nature of the changes reported here.

Summary

Given the experiences of the Iowa State Training School's LRE program, it appears that LRE curriculum has the potential of making a positive contribution to programming for delinquent, or high-risk, youth. Preliminary results from the program indicate that LRE is a welcome alternative in this type of institutional setting. Staff at many of these institutions frequently hear about programs which claim to be "model" interventions. The problem with encountering these repeated claims is that it raises skepticism on the part of program planners with the result that few innovations actually take place. It appears that the study of law and the use of interactive learning uniquely motivate those working with young people. In many ways, this special mix of content and teaching style has generated interest among teachers throughout the country. For staff working in institutions, the benefits may be even more pronounced.

The use of LRE as an intervention with high-risk populations is perhaps equally significant. Staff using the materials have expressed a variety of positive comments on how the curriculum influences students. In many ways, these preliminary findings support continued use of LRE in the juvenile justice setting. For example, students applying newfound conflict resolution skills are clearly ameliorating the risk factor of engaging in anti-social behavior such as aggression.

Increased understanding of rules and the role they play in the institution and society improves the students' sense of belonging in a larger social context. Themes of democratic decisionmaking also become meaningful to students once they are encouraged to engage in case studies or work together in writing the rules for their cottage. The linkages identified in this preliminary evaluation give rise to optimism that LRE has an important role to play as an intervention with high-risk youth populations.

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LRE in a Detention Setting

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Providing an appropriate educational experience in a juvenile detention facility is a challenging task. Youth housed in these facilities are considered the failures both of society and the educational process. Most are learning deficient and/or learning disabled; many with average or above ability have learning deficiencies caused by irregular attendance in school, enrollment in school districts with inadequate educational programs and/or inappropriate learning environments. Those with learning disabilities have

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