

Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)

Student Survey Grades 9 - 12

During the month of September 2013, nearly 500 American Paradigm high school students from First Philadelphia and Tacony Academy Charter School participated in the Alternatives to Violence Project experiential workshops (AVP). AVP is an association of community-based groups that offer experiential workshops in self-affirmation, cooperation, communication and conflict resolution as means to reduce violence. The participating students were from grades 9 through 12 from Tacony Academy High School, and grade 9 students from First Philadelphia Charter School.

The week following the AVP workshops, students completed an electronic survey. The purpose of the survey was to assess students' experiences and gains from participating in AVP workshops. A total of 181 students completed the electronic survey: 50.0% from First Philadelphia Charter School and 50.0% from Tacony Academy Charter School; the majority of students attended ninth grade (61.1%), 8.0% were from tenth grade, 9.7% were from eleventh grade, and 21.1% attended twelfth grade. The majority were female (59.1%), 40.9% were male. About half of the sample was composed of African-American students (48.8%), followed by Hispanic (27.4%), Caucasian (20.8%), and Asian (3.0%) students.

The AVP Experience

A section of the survey prompted students to indicate to what extent their participation in the Alternatives to Violence Project workshops allowed for opportunities to share their experiences and foster a sense of community. Students responded to a 4-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. The percentages below correspond to the number of students who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, and the means correspond to the average of students' responses for the items.

During the AVP workshop:	Percentages (endorsing "Agree" or "Strongly agree")	<i>M (SD)</i> Scale range 1 to 4
I felt respected	86.4%	3.11 (0.78)
I laughed and had fun	84.8%	3.11 (0.85)
I felt comfortable asking questions	84.7%	3.02 (0.78)
I felt that I was part of a community	80.6%	2.94 (0.74)
I felt safe sharing my comments or talking about my experiences	81.3%	2.91 (0.78)

I talked about myself openly and honestly	74.1%	2.87 (0.82)
I developed closer bonds with other students	72.2%	2.83 (0.87)
I developed closer bonds with my teacher(s)	69.8%	2.79 (0.84)
I made new friends	66.1%	2.79 (0.89)

A section of the survey prompted students to indicate what they learned from their participation in AVP. A summary of the students' responses is presented below.

Through my participation in the AVP workshop I learned:	Percentages (endorsing “Agree” or “Strongly agree”)	<i>M (SD)</i> Scale range 1 to 4
Not to put others down	90.3%	3.16 (0.70)
To think more positively about myself	87.4%	3.15 (0.78)
Not to put myself down	86.0%	3.13 (0.78)
To wait for my turn to speak rather than interrupting before the other person is finished	86.3%	3.04 (0.71)
To think before reacting	82.0%	3.03 (0.81)
To recognize the emotions and feeling of others	87.3%	3.03 (0.69)
To pay close attention when I am listening to other people talk	83.8%	3.03 (0.78)
To work with others in order to find solutions to problems	84.2%	3.02 (0.74)
To try to understand deeply the speaker's experiences and feelings	85.1%	3.01 (0.72)
To handle my own emotions and feelings better	84.8%	3.01 (0.69)
To figure out non-violent solutions to problems	84.1%	3.00 (0.71)
To “feel for” the person I am listening to	82.1%	2.99 (0.70)
To try new ways to transform violence into positive behavior	84.7%	2.98 (0.74)
To recognize and express my own feelings and emotions	80.6%	2.98 (0.78)
To put myself in another person's shoes	78.1%	2.98 (0.76)
To remain calm and respectful even when I disagree with someone	80.6%	2.96 (0.77)
To expect the best from others	79.0%	2.93 (0.81)

To keep cool when someone says something that pushes my buttons.	72.8%	2.78 (0.82)
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Traditionally, AVP workshops are planned with groups composed of a maximum of 20 participants. Given the large number of participating students, workshops in grades 10 through 12 included more than 20 participants while workshops for 9th graders were smaller with approximately 15 students. A section of the survey was created to gauge students' perceptions about the size of the workshops; 76.7% of students indicated the workshop was "just the right size," while 12.3% indicated the number of participants was too small, and 11.0% indicated it was too big. Most students (83.0%) reported having enough time to share their experiences and ideas during the AVP workshops. When comparing students' responses among grades, no statistically significant differences were detected.

Students were also prompted to indicate whether or not they felt that what they had learned in the workshop was important for their school and for their lives. Below is a summary of their Yes/No responses:

	Yes	No
Is AVP important for this to be a good school and if so should it continue?	70.8%	29.2%
Is AVP important for making your life better?	72.0%	28.0%
Would you like to continue taking more workshops?	48.1%	51.9%

Open-ended responses:

The last section of the survey prompted students to reflect on the most important thing they may have gained from their participation in the workshops, to explain what Transforming Power¹ means to them, and to indicate whether or not they would use Transforming Power in their everyday lives.

When responding to the most important gain from participating in AVP workshops, students' most common response was "recognizing their emotions before reacting." Other gains listed were: caring for others, improving their listening and communication skills, trying new ways to solve problems, becoming more confident and affirming themselves; and forming closer

¹ "Transforming Power," the central philosophy of AVP, is based on pillars that include respect for self, caring for others, expecting the best, thinking before reacting, and searching for creative nonviolent solutions.

relationships and friendships. Some students did not provide a response or reported not learning much.

Below are some examples of students' reflections:

- The most important thing I gained through my participation during the AVP workshop was learning to think before reacting and not to look down on myself or others.
- The most important thing that I have gained from participating in the AVP workshop was to be careful of what I say and to think before I react.
- I learned how to handle things without violence, to listen to others, and to keep my head up high and to just love me and others instead of putting them/us down.
- The most important thing I learned from the workshop is that we need to try and stop the violence going on in our world to be able to live without people thinking oh I have to watch my back because they [are] going to jump me or bully me and that's not a good thing.
- The most important thing that I gained from my participation in the AVP workshop was that everything doesn't have to be about violence; you can work things out instead of fighting and arguing.

When prompted to define what Transforming Power meant to them, students described it as a way to turn violence into something "positive," as an ability to recognize their feelings and emotions and to think before reacting. For other students, Transforming Power was the ability to listen and communicate with others, to work as a team, to respect themselves and care for others.

Examples of students' reflections:

- Transforming power to me means to transform violence into kindness and make schools and other places better.
- Transforming Power to me means that there always is a nonviolent way, and that we should think before reacting, because sometimes our reactions can cause problems.
- The most important Transforming Power to me is the ""RESPECT YOURSELF"" because you can learn self-respect and won't become a trouble-maker. Transforming Power to me means a lesson in life to make your life better.
- It means to not let little things get to you and be in control of your own emotions.
- Transforming means the ability to make a nonviolent choice.
- To me, Transforming power means to think before your actual reaction. For example, if someone wanted to fight you, it would be your choice to either walk away from it or fight. It's your option. Choose it wisely.

Although most students reported positive gains from participating in the AVP workshops, only 50.5% out of 109 students who responded to the item reported that they would use Transforming Power in their everyday lives. The remaining students indicated that they would not use it (35.8%) or were unsure (13.8%).