Handbook

Curriculum Infusion of Real Life Issues

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Curriculum Infusion of Real Life Issues

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Table of Contents

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Background

Overview

Every generation of school aged students has confronted real life issues. The term "real life issues" is meant to describe pressing life problems and concerns affecting students' daily lives. Examples of real life issues include substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, and tobacco), violence, bullying, and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. The impact of life issues on students is often profound. Life issues can be difficult to resolve, consequential, enduring, and life altering. The Curriculum Infusion of Real Life Issues Model (CIRLI) provides a method for teachers to integrate study of real life issues and evidence based prevention strategies that address these issues into classes across the K-12 curriculum. CIRLI supports student abilities to cope with these problems in a positive manner. It makes classes more relevant to students by addressing their real world concerns and connects teachers more closely to the students and communities where they work. CIRLI involves all levels of the school community. K-12 administrators are needed to encourage development of CIRLI programs in their schools; counselors may base school wide prevention programming on the CIRLI model. The model is applicable to all

real life issues that students confront and incorporates consideration of environmental influences, cultural diversity, social justice, and evidence based prevention strategies into the design and delivery of innovative curriculum. CIRLI is designed to positively impact k-12 students from all backgrounds. It is an especially important educational strategy for reaching students from low income and minority communities many of whom are not succeeding in school. Research indicates that the top reason drop-outs give for their disaffection from school is the uninteresting curriculum (*Bridgeland et. al. 2008*). CIRLI presents life issues curriculum that engages at risk students, providing the context for developing student skills in research, analysis, writing and oral presentations. CIRLI's emphasis on social-emotional learning can build resilience and prevention in response to life issues that often stifle educational and personal development.

The CIRLI Model may be envisioned as the interaction between three main components, Assessment, Integration, and Service Learning, to foster student engagement, pro-social norms, and academic growth and achievement (Figure 1).
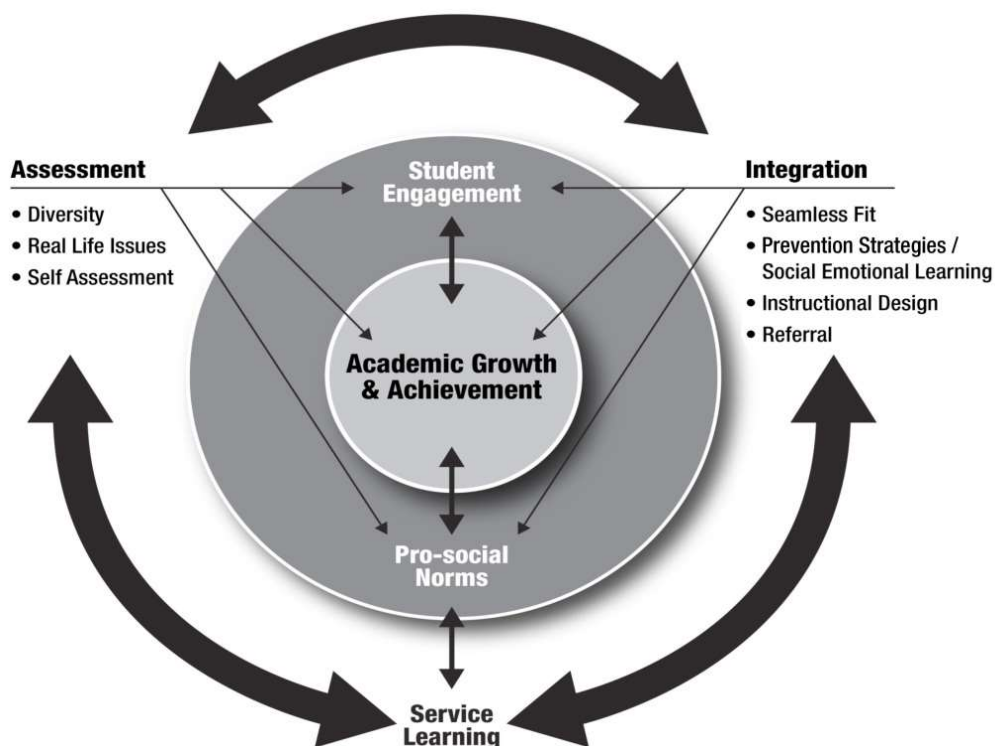
Assessment is the first component of the CIRLI methodology which begins with assessments of <u>Classroom Diversity</u> and student <u>Real Life Issues</u>, and is followed by <u>Self Assessment</u> by teachers and other school staff members.

1) Classroom Diversity: Assessment of classroom diversity helps to bring a greater awareness of the intersection and complexity of diversity in our world as it unfolds in today's classrooms. Diversity and cultural awareness provide the necessary context for understanding the real life issues students confront and for developing effective instructional strategies to address them. The CIRLI method requires each teacher to analyze the diversity of his/her class by race, ethnicity (including language and religion), socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, age and developmental status, exceptionality, and other diversity factors (geography, student subcultures, etc.).

2) Real Life Issues: The CIRLI model asks that teachers understand the prevalence and importance of the real life issues affecting the lives of their students as well as the social and environmental factors that contribute to real life issues that impact K-12 students and their families.

3) Self Assessment: The CIRLI method calls on teachers to examine their own attitudes and perceptions of students and communities and their attitudes and behaviors related to the real life issues that students face.

Integration, the second component of CIRLI, includes the sub-components of <u>Seamless Fit</u>, <u>Prevention Strategies / Social Emotional Learning</u>, <u>Instructional Design</u>, and <u>Referral</u>.

 1) Seamless Fit is the teacher's ability to achieve the normal curriculum goals set forth by the school and the state with the inclusion of relevant information regarding specific real life issues skillfully woven in. A teacher might offer examples, illustrate concepts, or provide curriculum activities including thematic units relevant to a real life issue.

2) Prevention Strategies / Social Emotional Learning include five evidence based strategies that effectively guide students toward healthy and positive resolutions of real life issues. These five strategies are: a) Engaging students in community prevention; b) Promoting pro-social norms; c) Correcting misperceptions of norms; d) Increasing perceptions of personal risk, and, e) Developing or enhancing life skills. Mandated Illinois Social Emotional Learning strategies overlap with these five prevention strategies. Prevention strategies and social emotional learning are designed to help students develop awareness and management of their emotions, demonstrate responsible decision making and behaviors to achieve school and life success, set and achieve important personal and academic goals, and use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.

3) Instructional Design includes considerations such as active learning methodologies and sensitivity to diverse learning styles.

4) Teachers and school leaders should have a working knowledge of school and community resources to effect appropriate referrals for professional intervention and treatment if necessary.

Service Learning, the third component, provides methods and models to integrate learning from school and community service into classroom curriculum. Effective service learning strengthens both academic and social emotional learning as students work to alleviate the problems studied in class.

> Assessment, Integration, and Service Learning are described in greater detail in the remainder of this handbook.

I. ASSESSMENT

A. Diversity

Accreditation by the National Council on Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) requires that knowledge and skills related to diversity be effectively taught to prospective teachers. Employing the CIRLI Method greatly contributes to meeting the NCATE Diversity standard. The CIRLI website (www.neiu.edu/~k12pac/) includes articles describing how knowledge of diversity (e.g., exceptionality, gender, etc.) provides understanding of the real life issues students confront and enhances the design and implementation of behavioral prevention strategies and real life issues curriculum. The CIRLI method asks that each teacher analyze the diversity of his/her class by:

- Race
- Ethnicity (including language and religion)
- Socio-economic status
- Gender
- Sexual Orientation
- Age and Developmental Status
- Exceptionality
- Other (geography, family constellation, subcultures, academic ability, etc.)

The CIRLI method also asks that teachers and future teachers understand the real life issues their k-12 students confront in the context of historical, social and environmental factors, including social injustices, that impact diverse groups, and use this understanding in their choices of instructional and prevention strategies. (Page 14)

Study of diversity provides meaningful generalizations about groups that support effective teaching and prevention. In understanding what is thematic about group life, care must be taken not to stereotype; there are always variations and individual differences.

B. <u>Real Life Issues</u>

A high percentage of schools throughout the United States are impacted by real life issues such as bullying, social ostracism and substance abuse. Nationally, approximately 24 percent of high school seniors have had five or more drinks in a row within the last two weeks. (Monitoring the Future, 2012) CIRLI asks teachers to identify problems students confront and assess the prevalence and relative importance of the issues impacting their students' lives. These issues may be identified in a variety of ways including:

- Talking with students and observing their interaction
- Discussions with parents about issues affecting students
- Discussions with school counselors and teachers who are close to students
- Reviewing the number and distribution of school disciplinary cases
- Reviewing results of available community or school based surveys of drug and alcohol use and other school and community problems
- Contacting personnel in community agencies, organizations, hospitals, health departments, police departments, and religious institutions including organizations that provide services in problem areas like substance abuse.

We live in a society where individuals are held responsible for their own behaviors, including problem behaviors like substance abuse, bullying, social ostracism, sexually transmitted diseases and violence. Individual responsibility is important, but individuals exist in communities and wider cultures that strongly influence them. The CIRLI method calls for understanding these social influences and seeing their effects on students. Both social influences and individual decision-making may be addressed through the Real Life Issues curriculum.

Teachers need to be aware of the strength and impact of these and other influences on their students. In designing CIRLI classes and strategies to encourage healthy behaviors and decision-making, these social influences may be explored. For example, as part of a social science class students may critically examine the role of alcohol advertising directed at youth and develop a school wide anti-alcohol media campaign. CIRLI can also provide opportunities for students to consider the negative effects of heavy drinking, violence, bullying, social ostracism, sexually transmitted diseases and other real life issues in their own community and encourage healthy choices.

Understanding real life issues that students confront also includes developing sensitivity to how historic and continuing social injustices in society impact diverse populations by virtue of their identities. For example:

- Students with exceptionalities are stigmatized because of their disabilities;
- Gay and lesbian students are bullied and victims of violence at far higher rates than other students because of their sexual orientation;

10

- Sexual assault of female students (most often after heavy drinking) occurs in the context of the continuing unequal treatment of women in the society;
- People of color experience consequences of the historic and continuing effects of the injustice of racism in U. S. society, including the all too frequent stigma of reduced expectations for learning;
- Low income children experience ostracism and shame on the basis of the low socio-economic position they are born into in U. S. society.

Unjust treatment of diverse groups is demoralizing and interferes with learning. CIRLI provides the opportunity for teachers, counselors and administrators to take stock of their classroom and school environments in light of these issues to ensure that an equitable environment of care and learning is provided for all. Curriculum that acknowledges and tries to understand the realities of social injustice and the struggles waged to overcome them can also encourage student engagement, build resilience, promote positive decision making, and enhance self image and self worth.

C. <u>Self Assessment</u>

An assessment of classroom diversity begins with a teacher's ability to examine his or her own attitudes and dispositions. Students are adept at picking up both verbal and non-verbal cues that indicate how teachers really feel about them, their capacity to learn, and the issues that are being addressed. Teachers need to reflect upon and challenge personal attitudes and beliefs, a process that may encourage similar behaviors among students. Below are a few suggestions to help teachers reflect on their own experiences and attitudes towards real life issues such as substance abuse, bullying, and sexually transmitted disease and towards teaching diverse student populations. Teachers can recall the behavior of significant adults in relationship to these life problems and think about the kinds of responses from important adults, including teachers, that were (or would have been) most helpful when they were students.

- Bullying and social ostracism by definition involve power. An imbalance of power is inherent in the student/teacher relationship. Candidates and teachers can reflect upon memories or literature in which teachers bullied or ostracized students (or created an environment where this could occur) and ways that they can safeguard against this in their teaching.

11

- Future and current teachers may assess their attitudes towards students who display problem behaviors. Are such students "written off" or is there a belief that they can learn? How is the belief demonstrated and expressed? What memories or readings can be drawn upon to support the belief that individuals can and do overcome problem behaviors or situations?

- Candidates and teachers may also reflect on their attitudes towards communities that are different from those to which they are accustomed, including communities that are different by race, ethnicity and SES. Are they comfortable with such differences? Do they regard diversity as the opportunity to learn about other cultures and teach in the context of respect for such differences? (Gollnick and Chinn, 2002). Does their teaching include minority or alternative perspectives regarding history and current events, real life issues, or other controversial topics?

- A working knowledge of the diversity of the classroom is critical if classes are to command the student's attention and be perceived as relevant. Teachers might begin by reflecting upon their own cultural identity and values and how they have informed personal perspectives and choices. To deepen this exercise, try asking yourself the following questions:
    - What significant adults were particularly sensitive or insensitive to your culture, gender, values, or perspectives; and how did those adults impact your learning and attitudes about yourself.
    - How does the experience with this influential adult affect your teaching today?
    - Are your interactions with students of different races, ethnicities, languages, religions, genders, sexual orientations, ages, exceptionalities, or other backgrounds supportive or discouraging?

Future and in-service teachers may also consider the historic and current injustices that have been experienced by the diverse populations represented in their classrooms.

Effective teachers understand that every student is an individual with the capacity to learn

12

and grow in ways that are unique. Self assessment provides the opportunity for teachers to reflect on the strong social and environmental factors that may have influenced them in the past. In the same way social and environmental factors influence their students today, often discouraging them and interfering with students reaching their potential.

II: INTEGRATION

A. <u>Seamless Fit</u> refers to incorporating real life issues into k-12 classes consistent with class learning objectives and learning standards set by the State Board of Education. There are many ways that this can be achieved. For example:

- Studying the physiology of drugs or of HIV/AIDS can be readily incorporated into high school and middle school science classes.
- Learning about the destructive impact of bullying, social ostracism and substance abuse can be integrated into middle and high school social science classes.
- Computing, analyzing, or graphing survey data on bullying and substance abuse can be easily infused into the curriculum of middle and high school math courses.
- Reading about and discussing the negative effects of substance abuse, violence, bullying and social ostracism, strengthening decision making skills in relation to these problems and role playing mediation, disengagement and resistance skills can be readily integrated into the curriculum of elementary and middle school language arts, health and social studies classes.

More in-depth examples of lessons and lesson plans that seamlessly fit real life issues into k-12 classes are available on the NDCI website (www.neiu.edu/~k12pac).

B. <u>Evidence-Based Prevention Strategies.</u> CIRLI seeks to encourage student resilience and healthy decision-making. Current research identifies five prevention strategies that are most likely to have a positive impact on students*(see footnote on page 24). In developing prevention curricula it is critically important to incorporate one or more of the following <u>five</u> evidence-based strategies:

1. <u>Engaging students in community prevention efforts</u>

- Students may be encouraged to participate in community anti-drug, anti smoking or anti-violence coalitions at the national, local and school-wide levels.

- Students may be encouraged to participate in national campaigns/programs to provide more resources to and promote justice for low income areas and communities of color.

- Through service learning students may volunteer to work with community agencies and organizations engaged in treatment and prevention of drugs, violence or high-risk sexual behavior. Through such participation they will address real life issues at the community level. In the process students may question and challenge their own at-risk behavior. They will align themselves with "pro-social" groups and individuals--associations that research indicates reduce the risk that individuals will engage in problem behavior.

2. <u>Promoting pro-social norms</u>

Teachers can provide positive role models and reinforce pro-social behavior (Biglan et. al., 2004). School administrators can provide clear and enforced policies that promote lower levels of problem behavior (e.g. substance use and bullying) by students.

- Students may be encouraged to align with pro-social norms through participation in school based conflict resolution and peer mediation activities.

- They may be encouraged to be involved in school wide prevention campaigns targeting drugs, violence, bullying, social ostracism or risky sexual behaviors.

- In language arts and social science classes students may read, discuss, write about and role play pro-social alternatives to problem behavior.

3. <u>Correcting misperceptions of norms</u>

Research shows that students generally exaggerate the use of drugs by peers, and, in their drinking and drug using behavior conform to the overestimated levels (Perkins and Wechsler, 1996). Affected by the media, students also exaggerate the extent of violence in the society. Because behavior of young people is significantly affected by the desire to

fit the expectations of their age group (Cosaro and Elder, 1990), research indicates that correcting the misperceived (exaggerated) norm reduces the problem behavior.

- In math classes students can create graphs and tables comparing (mis)perceptions of norms to actual levels of at risk behavior; in social science classes they may examine and probe the harmful effects of the misperceptions.

4. <u>Increasing perceptions of personal risk</u>

Young people often believe that harm can only come to others. As they study the risks from use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, from group and individual violence and from at risk sexual practices, research indicates that they become more aware of their personal risks and many will begin to alter their behavior (Bachman, Johnston and O'Malley, 1998).

- Effective use of this strategy involves linking personal risks with student aspirations. For example, student athletes could learn about the negative impact of smoking and drinking on athletic performance; students with aspirations to higher education could learn about the negative correlation between drinking and grades; or young women could learn about the increased risks of sexual assault if they are intoxicated or associating with intoxicated individuals.

5. <u>Developing or enhancing life skills</u>

Students who have weak decision making skills and have difficulty standing up to peers are more likely to engage in at risk behaviors.

- In language arts and social science classes, students may be encouraged to develop social skills including interpersonal communication and refusal skills; this strategy includes role playing as students learn effective ways to handle peers. Students may also learn to disengage from and attempt to resolve conflict.
- Students can be taught how to avoid situations involving high risk sexual behavior.
- Students can learn methods to deflate, stand in opposition to, and seek support in the context of bullying and social ostracism.

While all five evidence-based prevention strategies can be effectively adapted for use with all populations, classroom diversity should be taken into account in selecting strategies that may be especially appropriate. For example:

- A class with high achieving students may respond especially well to the strategy of increasing perceptions of personal risk. These students need to be shown that behaviors like substance abuse put their future achievement in jeopardy.
- If the students' culture emphasizes the value of belonging to the group - to family and peers - an especially promising evidence-based strategy may be to engage groups of students in "pro-social" activity and align individual students with pro-social groups.
- Where the community has a strong history of engagement in social justice movements, teaching strategies that stress damage to the community - for example the oppressive effects of drugs, violence or HIV/AIDS - and that attempt to engage students in community prevention may be especially effective.

We recommend incorporating the State of Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Standards that overlap with the five prevention strategies. These include:

- Assisting children to develop awareness and management of their emotions;
- Setting and achieving important personal and academic goals;
- Using social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships; and,
- Demonstrating decision-making and responsible behaviors to achieve school and life success.

C. Instructional Design

Effective integration of real life issues content into k-12 classes involves the students as active learners engaged in critically analyzing problems. Instructional methodologies that promote active student learning are widely recommended by educators for general k-12 education but are essential for effective prevention education (Botvin, et. al., 1995). Examples of active learning methodologies include brainstorming, behavior modeling,

case studies, coaching, critiques, debates, demonstrations, discussions, drills, field trips, games, instruments, interviews, panel discussions, reading, reflection, role plays, simulations, skits, study guides, and visualizations.

In addition, effective integration of real life issues involves adopting instructional strategies that consider diversity and differences. For example:

- Some students with exceptionalities require instructional practices that are explicit, systematic and incorporate frequent opportunities for review.
- High achievers do especially well on individual projects, research papers/essays but may need assistance to work effectively in groups, including groups with peers who are not at the same academic level.
- Students from cultures where the individual sees him/herself as part of the group and weighs his behavior in terms of its effect on the group may learn best through group projects and assignments. They may need assistance in completing individual assignments.
- Individuals from cultures where students are expected to show deference to authority and not confront others may do badly in exercises that call for assertiveness. Students from cultures that value confrontation as openness and honesty may do very well with such exercises/instructional methods.
- Minority populations, female students and students with exceptionalities - like all students - should always be equitably treated and, as appropriate, included in projects and leadership positions in class projects and presentations.

D. Referral

When real life issues are integrated into classes, students may disclose personal and family issues in the context of class discussion or privately confide to teachers about these issues. A disclosure by a student may imply both a significant level of need and a significant level of trust in the teacher. In such cases, teachers need to honor this trust by taking care to empathically support the student and protect their privacy. A disclosure made during class provides the opportunity for a teacher to model a supportive response to students.

Sometimes the problems that a student might disclose are beyond a teacher's area of expertise. Teachers should be prepared to refer students who would benefit from professional support or from a more objective appraisal of the problem. Teachers need to know the school or district counselor, social workers, or psychologist and should have contact information for community agencies that address common youth problems like substance abuse and mental health, emotional, or behavioral problems. The NDCI website (www.neiu.edu/~k12pac) provides more detailed discussion of appropriate responses to students who self disclose.

III: SERVICE LEARNING

Service Learning is a teaching strategy that connects classroom curriculum with service projects. Service learning engages students in projects that serve the community while building academic, social and civic skills. The majority of high schools in the country offer community service programs that are not connected to classroom study and academic development. Linking the two may be challenging, but as students work with others to address community problems, service learning becomes an effective antidote to the widely shared sense that nothing can be done about the problems that may pervade their communities. These problems all too often discourage personal and academic development.

Educational research and more than twenty years of experience of Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) Network for Dissemination of Curriculum Infusion indicate that study of real life issues effectively engages students in the learning process. A national survey of high school drop outs (*Bridgeland, et al. 2008*) found that the top reason given for leaving school early was the perception that the curriculum was uninteresting. Seventy-four percent of African-American, seventy percent of Latino and sixty-four percent of all students surveyed indicated that service learning could have a major impact on reducing the school drop-out rate. Service learning has great potential to engage marginalized youth, those who are socially vulnerable and economically disadvantaged, who may not

have previously participated in community activities. The findings of an aggregate sample of more than 217,000 U. S. middle and high school students noted that principals in high-poverty, urban and majority nonwhite schools were more likely to report service-learning's impact on student attendance, engagement and academic achievement as very positive. Students with higher levels of service/service-learning reported high grades, attendance, and other academic success outcomes, and students with low SES with service/service learning scored better on most academic success variables than their peers with low SES who did not participate in service or service-learning (Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeier, & Boston, 2006).

CURRICULUM- BASED SERVIC LEARNING EXAMPLES

In each example that follows class time would be dedicated to building academic skills through assignments that may call upon students to research, analyze, write, organize and deliver oral presentations in relation to the real life issues that are the focus of their service-learning projects. Classes would also incorporate evidence based prevention strategies and social-emotional learning.

Project One - Building a garden that provides both an aesthetically pleasing community space and addresses a lack of fresh produce in the neighborhood. This project involves several subject areas.

> ***Math****: Students look into funding for the project from local environmental organizations (e.g., Greencorps) and utilize math concepts to develop a multi-year budget for building and expansion of the garden, buying plants and seeds, and selling vegetables, fruits, and flowers to community residents. Geometry is utilized to lay out a grid of a garden space or an existing garden and students work in groups to design a three dimensional plan for the garden. Students research and compare the number of stores selling fresh produce or the number of fast food outlets in their community and other communities and graph their findings. Students select from a list of trigger questions on a weekly basis to reflect upon their experiences, successes, and failures in moving the project forward and regular feedback is provided to students from teachers and community mentors. The math teacher works with other teachers to extend learning to other subject areas.*

Science: Science (Botany) class students research climatically appropriate vegetables, fruits, and flowers and learn when to plant and how to care for them while developing manuals for future students.

Social Studies If the school does not have an appropriate piece of property, students work with local aldermen or other City officials to lobby for a small park or with local businesses to lease an unused area. They explore the concept of food deserts, the socio-economic reasons they exist, and community responses to them.

Language Arts Students write or develop presentations about the project for school and community newspapers or audiences. Students involved in the school garden/food desert project develop presentations and community advocacy programs about healthy eating, gardening, and food deserts that they deliver to middle school students, community groups, or legislators as part of their service learning hours.

Project Two - Violence and bullying prevention integrated into Social Studies Classes

Social Studies - The project might begin with students working with a community violence prevention organization like CeaseFire or BUILD. Students attend presentations by community organizations, participate in leafleting campaigns or neighborhood marches, survey community residents, lobby city or state legislators, or write letters to community newspapers. They study current events related to class, race, and gender to reflect upon their community experiences as well as brainstorm more effective ways to address problems of bullying and violence in the community.

History - A World History class explores international events during World War II and the Cold War through the prism of bullying. Students review a definition of bullying and the typical roles (bully, victim, bystanders) that are involved in bullying and discuss whether or not key events (e.g., Russia invading Poland) were examples of international bullying. If so, how does it fit the bullying definition, which countries played which roles, and what were the short and long term effects of international bullying? Students then discuss questions related to local community examples of bullying. Students may bring up the subject of local gangs that have carved out territory, how they bully and how they intimidate other groups and individuals to ally with them. Who are the bystanders, and what are the short and long term

effects on students and the community? Students could also explore examples of statesmen that arose from either the bullying, victim, or bystander nations that attempted to intervene in longstanding feuds that resulted from examples of international bullying. One example might be President Carter acting as moderator during the Camp David Accords. Students could then discuss how they might become better statesmen in their school and community and develop plans to implement strategies agreed upon. Students could research, write and develop presentations on their experiences and findings and work with their teacher and local prevention mentors to deliver education about bullying and violence prevention to other youth in the community.

Language Arts - A service learning project on literacy: Students in an English class study literacy attainment strategies. They use these strategies with elementary school students to help children develop literacy skills. Students evaluate their work with elementary pupils and make adjustments for their next visit. Students research, write and deliver in class presentations on literacy strategies and their work with elementary students.

Science – A service learning project on climate change: Students in an Environmental Science classroom learn about climate change and its impact on ecologies around the world. Students then conduct a carbon emissions audit of their school building in partnership with the Alliance for Climate Education and work with school leaders to take appropriate steps to reduce the school's carbon footprint. Students calculate the reduction in carbon emissions and prepare a report for the Local School Council based on research they have done in the class and their service learning experience.

CIRLI classes are courses that are part of the standard curriculum in math, science, social studies and language arts and other areas. What distinguishes these classes is that they:

1. Incorporate study of pressing life issues (for example, substance abuse, bullying, violence, food deserts and at risk sexual activity);

2. Include prevention and social-emotional learning designed to build resilience and healthy behaviors and relationships;

3. Provide students the opportunity to work to reduce and prevent the problems studied in class;

4. Provide a ready context for assignments that increase student academic skills in

reading, writing, research, analysis and speaking per state Common Core learning standards.

The Curriculum Infusion of Real Life Issues makes classes more relevant to students and connects teachers more closely to the lives of the students they teach. It enables teachers to positively impact students' lives by addressing problems that adversely affect students and can damage the learning environment. CIRLI can also be a very effective way to learn and incorporate knowledge of the social environment, cultural diversity and issues of social justice. How CIRLI is implemented - the kinds of class curriculum designed or school wide programs developed - is, of course, left to the creativity of engaged educators.

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* Footnote:

These five prevention strategies respond to three levels of influence on problems of children and adolescents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Flay and Petraitis, 1994).

The first level of influence is the wider **<u>Community</u>**. There are many ways in which the wider community helps produce the problem behavior of young people. For example:

- Research (Currie, 1993) indicates that pressing problems in low income communities may include drug dealing, heavy use of illegal drugs, and gang violence and are largely responses to poverty - to the failure of society to provide sufficient legal opportunity for young people in these neighborhoods.
- A community where there is heavy drinking by adults and parental tolerance of adolescent drinking provides examples and permission that will almost certainly result in high levels of binge drinking by high school students.
- Communities where there is a very heavy focus on achievement, competitive success and status are likely to promote especially high levels of youth competition, cliques and social ostracism.

The second level of influence is **<u>Social Interaction</u>** with significant others including families and peers. Evidence based strategies 2 and 3, building pro-social norms and correcting misperceptions of norms respond to this level of influence. There are many examples of this level of influence.

- A family where a parent has an alcohol or other drug problem is more likely to have children with substance abuse problems than a family without a parent who is abusing drugs.

- Families that lack clear standards against drugs and violence will raise youngsters with more of these problems than families where standards are clear

- Perhaps the greatest single indicator of the likelihood that a youngster will engage in problem behavior is the behavior of the youngster's peers. A strong protective factor against high risk behavior is close association with peers and significant adults, including teachers, who reflect "pro-social norms", that is, they do not engage in and oppose such behavior.

- Most young people want very much to fit in with the expectations of their peers. If they perceive widespread substance use, violence, bullying, cliquishness and high risk sexual behavior they are far more likely to engage in these practices than if they do not perceive such behavior as normative for their age.

The third level of influence is the **<u>Individual</u>.** Evidence based strategies 4 and 5, increasing perception of personal risk and enhancing life skills respond to this level of influence.

- Students who crave approval, have difficulty and lack skills and practice in resisting peer pressure are more likely to be talked into engaging in problem behavior than students who have developed these social skills

- These students also have trouble making decisions and are more likely to decide to engage in problem behavior than students who have developed decision making skills

- Young people who see themselves as personally invulnerable to the negative effects of high-risk behavior are more likely to experience the negative consequences of such behavior than students with a more accurate assessment of personal risks.

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