

Abstract of Dissertation

THE PEACE RUG<sup>®</sup>:  
ITS EFFECTIVENESS AND VALUE AS A  
CONFLICT RESOLUTION TOOL

by

Dr. Helen Brown McIntosh

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness, value, and other effects of a new conflict resolution curriculum called The Peace Rug in addressing the national problem of school violence. This curriculum is designed for a victim of either non-physical or physical bullying to ask his or her bully to come to The Peace Rug in the classroom. There the student or adult participants engage in a special dialogue leading to agreements, reconciliation, and better communication. The literature suggested some factors that contribute to school violence as that of children feeling disconnected from family and friends, and also not being able to find one's voice when bullied by others. The Peace Rug was designed to better connect students and teachers, as well as to provide both a place and scripted words to use in order to find one's voice when intimidated in any way. The phenomenon under study has not been studied previously.

The heterogeneous sample for this qualitative study consisted of 60 students and 26 teachers from an elementary school in Northwest Georgia. This was a convenience or purposive sampling in order to primarily secure taped interviews of both students and teachers to better determine their experience with The Peace Rug with as much depth and detail as possible.

An initial lesson about how to use The Peace Rug was taught in each of thirty-two classrooms in the fall of 2002. Then in January of 2003, informed consent letters about this study were given to the students and teachers at the school. The researcher conducted the student and teacher semi-structured interviews as time permitted in February and March of 2003. The results will help to answer the research questions.

The summary of findings from many sources would indicate that The Peace Rug was very effective and had great value as a conflict resolution tool. This curriculum produced the desired efficacy and was considered important and useful to this sample... Concerning the extent the 60 students used The Peace Rug, 88% (n=53) of the sample said that they used The Peace Rug. More specifically, 37% used it for several or more years; 8% used it a lot; 38% used it in their classroom; 5% used it this year; 6% have seen it used; and 5% have not used it to date. Moreover, all 26 teachers expressed there was student use of The Peace Rug in their classrooms.

Other percentages were: 81% expressed it was used a lot or frequently; 12% expressed use at home; and 8% expressed use for multiple years. Findings concerning experiences and common themes discovered by students include: 83% experienced changes in self, others, or the problem; 53% experienced a change of mood; 43% expressed they were friends again; 33% expressed feelings used at The Peace Rug; 33% indicated knowledge of the process in their narrative; 22% asked their bully to stop; 18% used the words “It worked” or “Things are better;” 17% said they used it at home; 10% felt shy or scared at first; and 8% discussed less fighting now.

The summary of the findings concerning the teachers’ description of their own experiences and the experiences of their students is: 100% made reference to the problem(s) or conflict(s) resolved; 100% made reference to students solving the problem instead of the teacher; 100% made reference to The Peace Rug as being a positive experience; 100% made reference to The Peace Rug as teaching a life skill (conflict resolution, communication, friendship, responsibility, respect, empathy, compassion, and self-control); 73% said students knew how to use The Peace Rug; 50% made reference to use of The Peace Rug in homes; and 23% referenced the reduction of incidences of conflict.

## **EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER FOUR AND FIVE**

### CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

#### Restatement of Purpose

The focus of this research study was to determine the effectiveness of The Peace Rug and to investigate its value within an educational context. The researcher considered the participants' frequency of use of The Peace Rug and the quality of their experiences concerning The Peace Rug to demonstrate its effectiveness and value as a conflict resolution tool. The results of the data collection and analysis of data are presented in the following discussions that focus on each of the four research questions:

1. To what extent have the students used The Peace Rug?
2. Have the students reported experiences with The Peace Rug that indicate possible effectiveness and value as a conflict resolution tool?
3. To what extent do the teachers see frequency of use of The Peace Rug by their students?
4. How do the teachers describe their own experiences and the experiences of their students concerning the Peace Rug including any possible changes that took place?

Each table to follow in this chapter consists of either paraphrased or direct quotations given by students and teachers, rather than the researcher's interpretation of such comments. This procedure is used to maintain the integrity of the data and to reduce the likelihood of researcher bias.

### Findings on Research Question One

Research Question One states: “To what extent have the students used The Peace Rug?” According to the summary of specific student responses, The Peace Rug has a high frequency of use. A summary of responses or narrative answers from students is that 88% (n=53) of the students in the sample (n=60) had used The Peace Rug.

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### Findings on Research Question Two

Research Question Two: “Have the students reported experiences with The Peace Rug that indicate possible effectiveness and value as a conflict resolution tool?” ... there was a very clear and predominant theme that using The Peace Rug changed both the participants as well as the problem. Fifty out of the 53 students who described experiences on The Peace Rug said there was a change in the problem, the other person, or changes in themselves. These positive changes were experienced at school and at many of the students’ homes. A second prevalent theme was that a dramatic change of mood occurred from feeling bad about a conflict to feeling good after resolving the conflict using The Peace Rug. Another dominant theme derived from the student narratives was that friendships were restored due to The Peace Rug and The Peace Rug Process.

Students repeatedly revealed that, “We are friends again!” This was one of the desired effects, that of feeling connected. Students shared their feelings of hurt and sadness freely when using the dialogue of The Peace Rug and also displayed a sound knowledge of the whole process. The victims of bullying usually initiated going to The Peace Rug. They seemed to have a very clear and strong sensitivity to disrespect and also the compelling courage to take their perpetrators to The Peace Rug. Another theme was the familiar response, “It worked!” or “Things are better!” Additionally, students used the process not only at school and but also in their homes. A further theme was that students felt shy or scared at first use, but felt good after their initial and following experiences on The Peace Rug. A last theme discovered in the student narratives was that less fighting occurred after using The Peace Rug. Students made comments such as “I don’t want to fight anymore.”

Skills that the students continued to illustrate in their narratives went beyond success in only conflict resolution skills. A summary of other skills described by students in discovery were communication skills, problem solving, empathy, compassion, respect, a change of attitude and mood, harmony in the midst of cultural diversity, forgiveness, civility, and self-respect. Therefore, the students seemed to suggest in all of these themes that The Peace Rug is both effective and valuable. They considered The Peace Rug very successful at resolving conflicts and they regard the process with high esteem.

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Research Question #2: *Have the students reported experiences with The Peace Rug that indicate possible effectiveness and value as a conflict resolution tool?*

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Categories% of Students (n=60)

Students who had used The Peace Rug 88% (n=53)

Student recognized change in self, 83% (n=50)

others, and/or the problem(s):

self45% (n=27)

other person50% (n=30)

problem57% (n=34)

Student said "I felt good/happy"(change of mood) 53% (n=32)

when using The Peace Rug

Talked about sharing feelings (hurt, sadness) 33% (n=20)

when using dialogue on The Peace Rug

Student made reference to specific language used on 33% (n=20)

The Peace Rug (knowledge of process)

Student asked bully to stop 22% (n=13)

Student said the actual words “It worked” or 18% (n=11)

“Things are better”

Student said used it at home 17% (n=10)

Student felt shy/scared at first 10% (n=6)

Less fighting now (“I don’t want to fight anymore.”) 8% (n=5)

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### Discussion on How Teachers Describe Their Own Experiences and the Experiences of Their Students Concerning The Peace Rug, Including Any Possible Changes That Took Place

The narrative statements given by the teachers suggest that they felt that their own experiences and their students’ experiences related to The Peace Rug were extremely effective and valuable ones. More specifically, many of the teachers described their thoughts about The Peace Rug and their personal experiences with The Peace Rug as follows: “I love it,” “great idea,” “wonderful idea,” “a wonderful thing,” “successful,” “definitely works,” “so simple,” “very effective and useful,” “profound impact,” “world of difference,” “wonderful technique,” “great experience,” “very impressed by it,” “pleased with it,” and “it has changed my life at home and at school.”

#### Reference to Problem or Conflict Resolved

**One hundred percent (100%)** of all of the teachers (n=26) indicated that The Peace Rug handled the problems or conflicts which arose. Teachers said that they believe The Peace Rug specifically takes care of overt conflicts as well as tattling.

#### Reference to Students Solving the Problem and Not Teacher Solving the Conflict

**One hundred percent (100%)** of all of the teachers (n=26) indicated that the students resolved their own conflicts and became friends. Peace replaced problems, producing smiling faces.

Teachers like being able to have more time to teach and not having to be involved in or be mediator for every conflict. The students completely assumed the responsibility of trying to solve their own problems instead of the teacher.

*Reference to The Peace Rug® As Being a Positive Experience*

**One hundred percent (100%)** of all of the teachers (n=26) indicated that use of The Peace Rug was a very positive experience. Teachers expressed a change in their classrooms' climate and revealed that the students have become more helpful, cooperative, and encouraging with each other since the use of The Peace Rug; and are going out of their way to be friends.

*Reference to The Peace Rug Experience As Teaching a Life Skill (conflict resolution, communication, responsibility, respect, empathy and compassion, self-control)*

**One hundred percent (100%)** of the teachers (n=26) indicated that The Peace Rug taught life skills. A very strong theme was that The Peace Rug taught personal responsibility; taught the students to talk things out and to express themselves instead of fighting; and it taught diplomacy, empathy, and respect for others. Teachers reported that The Peace Rug taught students to communicate well with other students and also adults, as well as teaching them to learn to listen.

As a result of using The Peace Rug, students learned problem-solving skills to use for the rest of their lives. Teachers said these life skills can be used with family, friends, children, or adults, both at school and in their homes.

### Findings on Research Question Three

Research Question Three: “To what extent do the teachers see frequency of use of The Peace Rug by their students?” The term “teachers” includes both classroom teachers as well as teacher aides, known also as paraprofessional staff members.

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Research Question #3: *To what extent do the teachers see frequency of use of The Peace Rug by their students?*

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Categories% of Teachers (n=26)

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“used it”100% (n=26)

“used it a lot or frequently”\* 81% (n=21)

used at home also” \*\* 12% (n=7)

“used for multiple years”\*\*\* 8% (n=5)

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\* More than these 21 could have used it a lot or frequently, but frequency was not indicated in the other narratives.

\*\* Other teachers in the study could also have had students who used it at home, but these are the only ones who indicated that information in open-ended questioning.

\*\*\* 2 to 4 years

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### Findings on Research Question Four

Research Question Four: “How do the teachers describe their own experiences and the experiences of their students concerning The Peace Rug, including any possible changes that took place?” The narrative and direct responses from teachers are compiled ...(in appendices).

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Research Question #4: *How do the teachers describe their own experiences and the experiences of their students concerning The Peace Rug, including any possible changes that took place?*

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Categories% of Teachers (n=26)

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Reference to problem or conflict resolved	100% (n=26)
Reference to students solving the problem and not teacher solving the conflict	100% (n=26)
Reference to The Peace Rug as being a positive experience	100% (n=26)
Reference to The Peace Rug experience as teaching a life skill (conflict resolution, communication, responsibility, respect, empathy and compassion, self-control)	100% (n=26)
Reference that students knew how to use*	73% (n=19)
Reference to use of The Peace Rug at/in home of student or teacher	50% (n=13)
Reduction of incidences of conflict**	23% (n=6)

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\* This was implied in every narrative but specifically stated in these.

\*\* This was implied in many other narratives, but specifically stated in these.

## Summary of Findings

...The summary of the findings is that use of The Peace Rug is both extremely effective and has great value in resolving conflicts. Its effectiveness or competency to accomplish the desired effect or purpose was described as such in most of the student and teacher narratives. The value of The Peace Rug for both student and teacher samples is reflected in its usefulness, regard, and importance to them.

...Concerning experiences, students told of dramatic changes in themselves, other students, and the problem itself. There was a change of mood from being disturbed about the problem to one of happiness. They were friends again and were able to share their feelings with each other. Students said they knew what to say and were learning to confront their bullies and ask them to stop. Many said, "It worked!" or "Things are better." Numerous students began using The Peace Rug at home. Even though some were initially shy about using it, they are confident now. There is less fighting and less of a desire to fight.

All 26 teachers said that their experiences with The Peace Rug addressed and solved problems and conflicts in the classroom. All teachers indicated that the students were resolving the conflicts and not the teachers. Moreover, it was described as a positive experience, meeting the need for students to assume the responsibility for resolving and eliminating their conflicts in a simple and easy way. Other positive changes included the teachers' noticing that students were becoming better friends, feeling more empowered, learning new language skills, improving the general climate of the classroom, reducing incidences of conflict, and providing a safe place for connections and courage to take place in school and at home.

A strong conclusion is that both students and teachers in this study indicated that The Peace Rug is both effective and of value as a conflict resolution tool. Much additional data was discovered and gathered, but its true legacy is its continued use in the lives of these children and adults over time. Every day since the data was gathered and analyzed the researcher has been told countless stories of phenomenal life changes as a result of using The Peace Rug. Conflicts abound in the world outside this school; but inside this school, there is a place where conflicts are handled routinely and powerfully, one at a time.