### Introduction

There is little question that early socialization practices at home and in the community strongly influence the social behaviors students exhibit at school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruner, 1996). Family life may differ greatly depending on various cultural and economic conditions of parents and primary caregivers. Currently, many children enter school with aggressive and defensive behaviors as a norm for interpersonal relationships (Dryfoos. 1994). School personnel realize the importance of helping the children learn new norms of social and academic cooperation that are crucial to success in school and work communities. In addition, students benefit from characteristics like interpersonal respect and academic striving that contribute to effective educational environments as well as the students' future success in the work world. The purpose of this chapter is to review various violence prevention strategies that counselors, teachers, and researchers have used with students from various cultural backgrounds who often engage in inappropriate public expression of frustration and anger, particularly at school. A relatively new group counseling strategy entitled Branch Out, developed by Molly Foote and used with groups in schools and other educational and counseling centers, will be introduced as a violence prevention strategy. Branch Out is focused on developing interpersonal empathy and open communications among participants. It is readily integrated into whole class curricula, large and small group programs. The strategy is of particular interest to counselors who seek to create positive group dynamics and a climate of openness to interpersonal and cultural differences within a school. Branch Out is also an effective strategy for family counselors and those working in residential and drop-in centers for youths of all ages.

In contemporary schools in the U. S., as many as twenty-five percent of students, and a greater number in some communities, require intensive assistance to meet basic physical and safety needs before attention is given to educational programs (Dryfoos, 1994). Those who enter school, or any other organization, feeling insecure and distressed, tend to focus on their social-emotional needs rather than the academic curricula (Bowlby, 1988; Kozol, 2000). When large numbers of students normalize and engage in aggressive behavior, faculty members are pressed to maintain social order and safety within the school. Therefore, violence prevention and intervention programs based on reality therapy, rational emotive behavior therapy, and other theories that enhance effective interpersonal behavior, have been implemented in schools, particularly those with a record of student violence (Blair, 1999; Plunkett, Radmacher, & Moll-Phanara, (2000).

### **Domestic and Community Conditions Contributing to Violence**

Behavior is learned, and the earliest lessons occur at home (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Dual income and single parent households often count on school personnel to provide essential socialization skills to their children given the limited time they have for parenting responsibilities (Phillips-Hershey & Kanagy, 1996; Pudney & Whitehouse, 1996). In many contemporary families, parents' involvement with work and social activities outside the home effects the quantity and quality of attention given to their children. This often leaves

children physically and emotionally distant, with weakened bonding and attachment relationships, and lowered self-esteem and personal confidence (Bowlby, 1988). Furthermore, many children experience domestic violence and, in turn, demonstrate anxious and violent behavior toward household members and those within their peers groups (Rapee, 1997). Unfortunately, the behavior modeled in the home, the first learning context of a child, is often personally and socially harmful.

When infants and toddlers are enrolled in day care centers where staff do not satisfy their developmental need for interactive play and reinforcement of positive communication skills, they may be unprepared to meet teacher expectations when they enter school. In addition, infants and children often spend many hours each day viewing television and videos that display and normalize aggressive acts that are, in turn, replicated in children's social interactions (Bruner, 1996). Children often learn negative behaviors before developing the ability to think analytically about the consequences of their actions. In effect, they experiment with aggressive behavior as a strategy for getting their way in a dispute, and integrate such behavior into their repertoire when it produces desired results. They feel empowered against the anxieties and fears they cannot manage in other aspects of their lives (Bandura, 1986).

When a large percentage of students feel they must compete with their peers for attention and gain physical dominance to feel safe, violence becomes a daily part of school (Kozol, 2000; Pudney & Whitehouse, 1996). A common definition of school violence found in the literature is the intentional use of behaviors or threats to inflict physical and or verbal pain or harm on others (Howard, Flora, & Griffin, 1999). Even the threat of violence can result in heightened stress levels that detract from educational progress in schools (Blom, Cheney, & Snoddy, 1986; DiGiuseppe & Bernard, 1990). In a recent national survey, 71% of students in grades 6 through 12 reported that physical assaults and robbery were not uncommon at school (Myrick, 1997). Despite common use of metal detectors, security cameras, and police patrols on school grounds, many students are hyper-vigilant and unable to concentrate on their academic programs.

Adding to the problem is sensationalized media coverage of those who commit violent acts at school. Grief stricken victims and witnesses are often forgotten when new headlines capture public attention. Support for millions of students and faculty who experience on-going verbal taunts and bullying pales when compared to concern over high profile crimes (Bosworth, Espelage, DuBay, Dahlberg, & Daytner, 1996). To some degree interpersonal violence like verbal taunts or name calling has been tolerated in schools while attention is focused on preventing physical assaults. However, hurt feelings contribute to the possible build up of anger and resentment that may lead to physical violence, as was the case at Columbine High School in Colorado.

A national statistic that reflects the seriousness of violence among U.S. youths is that homicide is the second most frequent cause of death for persons aged 15 through 34 (Kelder, Orpinas, McAlister, Frankowski, Parcel, & Friday, 1996). Displays of physical and emotional hostility usually precede acts of homicide. When students use guns and knives to inflict harm on those they perceive as opponents, schools have to make violence intervention and prevention their top priority even if academic excellence is compromised.

# **Commonly Used Violence Intervention and Preventive Strategies**

School counselors are commonly engaged in programs to help students gain awareness of their feelings and use socially appropriate self-management skills in interpersonal relationships. Counselors work with teachers, parents, and community agencies to develop systemic support particularly for students with pressing needs (Baker, 2000; Myrick, 1997). However, the prevalence of high student-to-counselor ratios often means that many students receive less help than is needed, especially in times of crisis (Baker, 2000; Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Therefore, effective group counseling is an essential way to support all students and promote positive school outcomes (Ivey, Pedersen, & Ivey, 2001; Nugent, 2000).

A relatively new group counseling strategy, entitled Branch Out, is now used by counselors, and teacher-counselor teams in schools in the Northwest corner of mainland U. S. Designed by a school counselor with the input of several colleagues, Branch Out is highly interactive and encourages students to be attentive to their thoughts and feelings and those of others. The research reviewed below indicates that a strategy like Branch Out is needed to encourage relationship networks within schools and communities that help children to value themselves and their peers (Blom et al., 1986; Ivey et al., 2001).

Branch Out employs behavioral and cognitive counseling methods that usually produce observable (and measurable) outcomes (Corey & Corey, 2002; Ivey et al., 2001). When counselors use psycho-educational group strategies, they can teach students skills designed to prevent stress accumulation and impulsive outbursts (Bosworth et al., 1996; Glasser, 2000; Kelder et al., 1996). The behavioral dynamics facilitated by the group leader of Branch Out include member-to-member communication, expressed empathy, and respect for personal differences.

Research on violence prevention indicates that counselor outreach directed toward interpersonal understanding and group problem solving does work (Glasser, 2000). Many students who experience unhappiness and alienation due to family problems and other hardships beyond their control, do benefit from counseling (Glasser, 2000; Ivey et al., 2001; Sandhu, 2000). Group sessions that are integrated into whole class activities as well as selected smaller groups, increase counselor outreach (Baker, 2000; Myrick 1997).

In Bandura's (1986) assessment, self-efficacious persons choose appropriate behavior that is respectful of themselves and others even when strong emotions complicate relationships. However, many school children lack positive role models of interpersonal respectfulness. This is when teacher and counselor input and reinforcement can help them develop social skills and learn appropriate responses to others (Bandura, 1986). Group counseling affords immediate opportunities to model and reinforce appropriate behavior. This is a primary intervention strategy for preventing school violence.

Although many teachers are observant and sensitive to the emotional needs of their students, they cannot offer counseling services for individuals or groups in the classroom (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). There are potential conflicts when one person attempts dual roles of instructor and counselor. Although most teachers have group facilitation skills, they are not trained as counselors. However, counselors and teachers can co-facilitate

group work, especially through whole classroom sessions that enhance student communications and problem solving (Gysbers, 1990).

### **Selected Violence Prevention Strategies**

Following is a brief review of selected violence prevention programs that were used with student groups. Most of the programs were introduced and conducted by researchers from outside the schools. Guerra, Huesmann, Tolan, Van Acker, and Eron, (1995) examined the behavior of elementary (first, second, and fourth grade) African-American, Hispanic, and Anglo children over a two year period to see how exposure to economic and interpersonal stresses influenced levels of behavioral violence in school. They found that children who considered violent behavior as normal acted more aggressively than children who regarded violence as unacceptable. Generally, students who experienced severe poverty at home acted more violently than those who were not exposed to such poverty.

During the second year of the study, researchers assessed student behaviors to see if levels of violence persisted among those who participated in groups that sought to reduce violence (Guerra et al., 1995). The lack of continuity between school and community expectations was a common weakness of this program and of others reviewed. Another factor contributing to limited results was the brief duration of the programs considering the kind of behaviors the researchers tried to change. In Glasser's view (1992), behavior changes are made by taking manageable initial steps and consistently reinforcing the progress students make toward chosen goals.

Kelder et al. (1996) attempted to reduce taunts, threats, fights, and weapon carrying in a large, urban K-12 school district in Texas. The overall goal was to increase positive social behaviors in schools throughout the district. A "Health Promotion Council" was established in each participating school. It designed activities to increase positive social behaviors among students.

Council representatives delivered group instruction in Second Step, a skill based curriculum designed to increase social competence and anger management skills (Kelder et al., 1996). Peer mediation and peer helping programs addressed a range of behaviors from bullying to substance abuse. While the multi-faceted program was successfully implemented, long-term effects are unknown due to its short duration.

White (1995) discovered an area of youth violence that has been relatively unexplored by researchers, the battering of women as young as 15 by their male companions. Co-existing conditions included economic poverty, lack of adult support and guidance, and lack of personal safety in the community. Boredom, feeling neglected or maligned by others, substance abuse, and lack of educational opportunities were also factors that contributed to abusive dating relationships (White, 1995). Because the problem was relatively unknown, there was little or no support for the women or the perpetrators of the violence.

Whaley (1992) found that African-American inner-city male youths often experience personal and cultural identity conflicts, poverty, and physical and mental health problems. The youths exhibited low tolerance for frustration, and were expected to have difficulty

transitioning into young adulthood. In structured groups, the students received information about African-American culture to dispel common, negative stereotypes. Relaxation exercises and positive self-statements were also introduced and practiced in groups (Whaley, 1992).

Long and Soble (1999) conducted a six-week creative arts and health education program with 30 sixth grade students in an urban school. The researchers spent two weeks planning and discussing specific goals and activities with school personnel before beginning the program. They asked students to express their feelings about violence through art and encouraged open discussions about violence in their lives. Benefits to students were increased communication about situation that disturbed them. The research team and school personnel also developed strategies that allowed for program continuity.

Howard et al. (1999) conducted a review of research published between 1993 and 1997 that focused on school-based violence prevention programs. They estimated that nationally more than 5,000 schools adopted one or more of approximately 300 programs. Group processes like conflict resolution and Second Step were among the most commonly used (Howard et al., 1999).

Elementary school interventions were seen as the most effective, given that young children were open to new behavioral models (Howard et al., 1999). Some schools also offered parent training to encourage teacher and parent collaboration in reinforcing new behaviors. The middle, junior, and senior high programs were primarily classroom-based curricula. In addition, substance use and abuse was also discussed in groups due to the frequent co-existence of violence and substance abuse (Howard et al., 1999). An obstacle to preventing violence among older students was the strong influence of peers who engaged in crime for economic gains. Violence for them was a survival tactic.

Kashani, Jones, Bumby, and Thomas, (1999) identified problematic social and environmental conditions much like those found by Howard et al. (1999). In addition, biological factors like low resting heart rates, and low levels of serotonin were common among aggressive youths. Limited problem solving skills and low abstract reasoning abilities were also common among students who engaged in violent behavior.

### Common Research Findings

Clearly, students who behaved violently at school faced long-standing and pervasive problems linked to poverty, unsafe homes and neighborhoods, and limited self-efficacy. Those referred to the juvenile justice system or psychiatric clinics often had conduct and depressive disorders, parent-child relational problems, or attention deficit/hyper-activity disorder. Multi-systemic therapy (MST), including outreach to youth groups, parents, and school staff, was found to be more effective than individualized treatment (Kashani et al., 1999).

Kashani et al. (1999) presented a summary of recommendations for violence prevention that included the following: reduced media violence, including detailed and repeated news reports on violent crimes; increased school and community action-oriented recreational alternatives; controlled access to firearms, drugs, and alcohol; and increased

community vigilance of youths. They also recommended that schools implement validated prevention programs, and avoid student suspensions that reduce class attendance and increase unsupervised time. McCay and Keyes (2001) found that students do not compartmentalize what they learn at home and in the community. Therefore, if students experience socially acceptable behavior at home, they are likely to demonstrate similar behavior at school. If home models are negative, school behavior will be similar in nature.

### **Social Inclusion and Exclusion**

When students' lack of social skills is compounded by low academic achievement, they often feel frustrated and seek recognition and empowerment through anti-social or violent behavior (Dreikurs, Grunwald, and Pepper, 1971). A reliable predictor of students' ability to comply with school standards is the consistency between home and school behavior models and reinforcements (Bandura, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruner, 1996). When students try to adapt to unfamiliar values and standards, they typically resort to trial and error learning (Kozol, 2000). For example, the cultural values of many Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans, reward those who listen carefully and observe others rather than seeking attention for themselves (Sue & Sue, 1999). Students from noncompetitive cultures may feel uncomfortable drawing attention to themselves by speaking up in class discussions or answering questions posed by teachers. At the same time, they observe how teachers often focus much of their attention on those students who are highly verbal and self-assured.

Teachers may not realize that cultural values motivate students who resist competition and feel socially isolated when this norm prevails. Counselors who are culturally aware and competent as group facilitators may help students and faculty acknowledge their similarities and differences through individual and group discussions. These sessions of cultural sharing are reminiscent of the strategies Parsons (1909) used to prepare immigrant students for school and vocational success. The effects of poverty and social alienation on immigrant students at the turn of the twentieth century are similar to conditions experienced by many contemporary immigrants as well as students who are members of identified "minority groups". Although their families may have been in the U.S. for several generations, many culturally diverse students feel marginally welcomed at school.

### **Branch Out: Group Counseling in Schools**

Counselors need group strategies that students find comfortable, engaging, and respectful of cultural and interpersonal similarities and differences, however, they are not widely available (Glasser, 2000; Rogers, 1961; Tyler, 1969). Branch Out was designed to address five areas of social development that are central to getting along at school: personal empowerment, pro-social skills, career awareness, diversity appreciation, and community building. A cloth tree (the trunk and branches are sewn on a large fleece blanket and placed on the floor with students gathered around) is used as a symbol of

vitality, diversity, flexibility, and beauty. The counselor helps students articulate how the activity title suggests the growth they can experience when they share ideas and feelings. Students are given a generous supply of brightly colored felt leafs they can place on the tree as they exchange ideas and feelings, reflecting their way of "branching out".

As a warm-up activity, students and the counselor, (teachers and parents may join as well) explore their personal characteristics that keep them balanced and stable in difficult or stormy times, as the root systems strengthen storm lashed trees. The counselor asks participants to identify these characteristics and give examples of their use at home and school. Students go around the circle sharing what they want to say. When someone makes an observation with which others agree, they place a leaf on the tree and tell the person specifically why they did so. They are also encouraged to ask questions or seek more information if they do not understand what others have said. This introductory activity may be used several times to reinforce social skills like taking turns, listening, speaking, agreeing, and disagreeing appropriately.

In later sessions, again using the tree as the centering place, students are asked to think and share about six areas of their social and academic activities. These are home life, school, abilities and interests, work, feelings, and favorite things. Students pass a large, brightly colored felt leaf around the circle to the beat of a drum that the counselor plays. When the drum stops, the person holding the leaf chooses one of the six categories. For each category there is a stack of printed cards, each containing a question the student reads out loud and then answers. For example, in the "school" category, some questions are: "If you could change anything about school, what would you change?" "What part of your school day do you like most?" "Is there anything about school that you dislike?" "What is something you learned a lot about at school?"

The topic area students choose, and the insight they gain through the questions, answers, and discussions, keeps them motivated and interested in the group. If a student cannot or wishes not to answer a question, another card can be drawn, or the student can choose to pass. The counselor carefully observes the verbal and non-verbal responses of the group members and the topic areas they select. All students in the group can respond to each question as long as they listen to each other and do not interrupt. This openness encourages member to member interactions.

The counselor facilitates discussion and spontaneous questions, or offers specific examples that deepen the insights of the students. For example, if a student says he or she would like to eliminate the teasing that happens at school, the counselor can facilitate a group discussion on how teasing is done, what purpose it might serve for the teaser, and the consequences of being teased. Students could role-play various teasing situations and practice communication skills they are willing to use in response to the examples. Students can express their feelings, gain insight into what it is like to tease another, and develop a problem solving mentality that would be helpful in a range of situations. The counselor facilitates this interaction by acknowledging students who are eager or reticent to speak, and reinforces those who want to support positive and constructive interpersonal communications at school.

As students put more leaves on the tree they gain a visual sense of how much they have shared. Gradually, the bare branches are filled with brilliant colors representative of their communication. When the group time is nearly up, the counselor can close the activity by asking each student to share something he or she learned about one of the members or about herself or himself. As each person shares, additional leaves are placed on the tree. To celebrate their session, all the students take hold of the edge of the blanket, raise it off the floor, and then snap it in the air so the leaves flutter about them. The counselor can remind the students that their words are like leaves, they are all around them in their relationships at school, home, and in the community.

Depending on the counselor's goal for the session, a Branch Out group can be small, if students need frequent and direct interactions with the group, or it can be large, a way to increase the range and diversity of student contacts. If the counselor thinks a session needs to focus on particular areas, specific questions can be selected or inserted as topics for the day. For example, questions like: "How do you feel if a friend ignores you when you try to talk about something that is important to you?" "If someone makes fun of you because of a mistake you made, how would you feel? What would you say to the person?" "If a new student enrolls in your school and does not speak English very well, how do you think he/she feels?" "Have you ever been in a situation where it was difficult to make yourself understood to others?" "What can you do to help a new student feel welcome at school?"

The counselor can consult with teachers or parents who may have suggestions for topics that students could discuss in their Branch Out sessions. It is also helpful to invite students to write questions they want to discuss in the group. This is an alternative way to encourage those who hesitate to bring up sensitive issues or topics. While all students in the group are informed of the behavioral norms expected of them, the counselor and students agree to raise the point if someone's behavior prevents others from participating fully. When the group norms are clearly stated and reinforced, it is more difficult for passive or aggressive students to behave in a contrary manner.

Branch Out can be particularly helpful to groups of students who speak English as a second language. Questions can be written in the students' first language. A counselor or counselor aid who speaks that language, can develop salient questions and provide translations as needed. This can help members of the group discuss issues or concerns that might not be addressed when group counseling is conducted in English and the group members include both English speaking and English as a second language students.

Branch Out has also been used in family counseling sessions when parents and children need to improve communication skills and interpersonal understanding. The practice of selecting topics for questions and discussions places everyone at a similar level of power or influence in the session. Children and parents listen to each other's answers, ask questions openly, and receive additional feedback or clarifying questions from the counselor. Honest discussions about relationships among family members or sharing feelings about changes that are taking place are encouraged through the questions. In some families where communications have been strained or limited, parents and children can develop new awareness and insights that help build closer relationships.

In some undergraduate and graduate psychology classes at Western Washington University, Branch Out has been used to help students become oriented to group counseling. Usually, undergraduate students find it meaningful to hear the variance in their peers' answers to questions. Graduate students use Branch Out in their school counseling internships and find it an effective way to initiate communication among students who are hesitant to interact. It also is a way for counselors and teachers to introduce whole classroom discussions about the connections between school and community life, as well as future plans for vocations or careers. While many innovations are possible, the tree and growth symbols remain consistent. For example, students may draw their personal trees, including their strengths as represented by a root system, and branches that represent how they wish to learn and grow in the future. Similarly, in family counseling, the tree can be identified as the symbol of the family, with roots reflecting traditions and influences of previous generations, and branches reflecting the growth realized by each family member.

Since Branch Out has a detailed facilitator's guide, it can be incorporated into whole classroom activities that compliment academic programs in communication, language arts, career/vocational guidance sessions. Personal tree designs can be refined in art classes, or tree mandalas can be created in clay, painted, and made into pieces of jewelry. The counselor can use the resources of the school to enhance students' feelings of personal pride and community belonging. Another advantage of Branch Out is that counselors and students can conduct their sessions outdoors when weather permits. This break in routine can be refreshing and relaxing for participants.

### **Results of Branch Out**

In schools that use Branch Out it is possible to create common themes across grade levels. For example, when using the tree as a symbol of human life, the importance of strong roots can be translated into knowing about family origins and sharing what students believe to be important aspects of her or his personal history. Students can identify ways they give and receive nourishment within their family and school environment. Discussing the relationships between school life and future careers can also benefit students in psycho-educational programs.

Students who participate in Branch Out indicate their interest and enjoyment by asking their counselors for continued use. They learn interactively and respond at a level as challenging as they wish to make it. An example of a student's answer to a question about "feelings" illustrates the poignancy of a simple inquiry. The question about "feelings" read, "What is something you are afraid of?" Without hesitation, the student responded, "I am afraid of my step-dad."

Other students immediately spoke up to discuss feelings about relationships. This question allowed group members to discuss fears or doubts about family relationships and share their various coping strategies when in difficult situations. Furthermore, the counselor was able to identify students who might benefit from group and possibly individual sessions that focused on family problems. One additional benefit is that students come to realize they are not the only people who are dealing with challenges and fears.

Following are some of the comments students (the names are not those of the actual students) and others have made about their experiences with Branch Out.

"Andrea", a seventh grader, indicated that Branch Out is her favorite group activity. She liked hearing everyone's stories. She has learned to feel comfortable about saying what she really thinks, even if others do not agree with her. She realized it is possible to be honest and still be accepted by peers who expressed differing perspectives (personal communication, May, 1999).

"David", a high school junior, participated in Branch Out as a member of an orientation group for new students. He found himself gaining more comfort when group members expressed support for each other. The counselor encouraged students to be open and honest in their group in an effort to develop new friends. David realized that everyone was looking for acceptance and Branch Out helped them find it. At the end of the first session, students requested a weekly group that would include any new students who came to the school (personal communication, September, 2000).

Sicangu Lakota, (personal communication, June, 2000) a cultural consultant stated, "The Branch Out group was provokingly symbolic for me. The circle of humanity, which thoughtfully enclosed and gradually nourished a once leafless tree to radiant health, returned my thoughts to my own Lakota Nation. In particular, a spiritual man named Black Elk who, looking toward our future, said the sacred hoop of the people would be mended and the tree of life, in the center, would bloom and blossom again. I thought this as I added, in turn, a red leaf to our group's budding tree."

K. Melton, (personal communication, October, 2000) a school counselor at the American School in Japan stated, "I have used Branch Out for grade three with the focus on listening skills. My partner, Naho Kihucki and I have really enjoyed using it. We plan to use it in a cultural diversity context." Another school counselor, Louis Morgan, stated that Branch Out gives everyone an experience of self-discovery (personal communication, August, 2000).

In many respects, Branch Out helps counselors and teachers understand some of the difficult or angry behavior students display at school. By offering a constructive outlet for worries and tensions, children as young as 5 years can explore issues that would otherwise be hidden or demonstrated in outbursts of frustration and anger.

As an experiential and interactive counseling strategy, Branch Out has a wide range of beneficial uses. It can become a vehicle for creative communication across the K-12 span. Students can practice their assertive communication skills as a way to seek help in potentially dangerous situations. They may role-play situations to rehearse making requests or refusing inappropriate offers from others (McCay & Keyes, 2001). Music and dancing can be incorporated into the groups to expand the range of self expression. For further specific information the web site for Branch Out is www.cultivatingconnections.com

## **Summary and Conclusions**

Clearly, the level of violent behavior exhibited by contemporary youths has a destructive influence on individuals, families, schools, and other social institutions. The research cited

above indicated that many violence prevention programs are implemented for a brief period as experimental projects. The programs are often generated by university researchers who visit schools, introduce their strategies, gather data, and offer little follow-up. Usually, the school staff are minimally engaged, and may not be aware of the program goals or the results obtained. Community members and parents are seldom aware of or involved in the interventions.

Without staff involvement and support, potentially beneficial aspects of the research may not be integrated into counseling services. In contrast, Branch Out is designed for continued use by counselors as part of a K-12 group counseling program. It encourages open communications and shared problem solving among students and between students, faculty, and parents. The benefits of increased awareness of self and others, and interpersonal respect and empathy are obvious in students' behavior in the groups and spontaneous sharing between sessions. The sessions bring students and school professionals together to explore problems before they become overly complicated.

In schools that have used Branch Out, teachers and counselors have forged effective, collaborative relationships. Students at risk of school dropout or suspension have participated in sessions with those who experience academic success. The positive interactions have helped marginal students to change directions and recognize their connections with peers, teachers and counselors.

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### **About the Authors**

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#### **Discussion Questions**

- 1. How is violent behavior in school a reflection of conditions students experience at home and in their neighborhoods? How might a child's family culture influence her or his expression of violence? Do racial/ethnic stereotypes lead to some groups being identified as more violent than others?
- 2. Several examples of violence prevention and intervention programs were reviewed in the chapter. What are some of the strengths and limitations of these examples? How do you think one's level of self-esteem influences the way a person reacts to frustrating or anger provoking situations?
- 3. Considering that students spend most of their school day in classrooms, what are some curricular activities that teachers and counselors might initiate to prevent interpersonal tensions among students?

- 4. Bandura's model of social learning suggests that children discover how to express their feelings toward peers and adults by observing the way adults in their social environment behave toward others. Does popular media serve as a model of social behavior for children? How could educators learn more about the influence media has on children's behavior?
- 5. When researchers study school violence, they often focus on events that have attracted a great deal of public attention such as the shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado. What might be some of the positive and negative consequences of large scale media coverage of such tragic events?
- 6. Among children as well as adults, it is usually more common for males to behave violently than is the case for females. What factors in contemporary U.S. society may influence these gender differences? Based on your personal observations, do you think U.S. males are socialized to express violence more openly than females do?
- 7. The group counseling strategy, Branch Out, was described at some length in the chapter. What do you think might be some of the educational and social advantages of using Branch Out with culturally diverse students? What are some of the advantages of school counselors using group over individual counseling as they seek to prevent violence among school age populations?
- 8. If you were asked to recommend strategies parents, teachers, and counselors might use to prevent violence among children, what would you suggest?