

What Works Clearinghouse



Facing History and Ourselves

Program description *Facing History and Ourselves* aims to promote core character education values and to help middle and high school students develop moral reasoning skills. Students examine historical events, in particular the events that led to World War II and the Holocaust. Teachers participate in professional development

seminars and apply the content and approaches to their own teaching or school program. *Facing History and Ourselves* also includes schoolwide components (such as guest speakers and videos), an optional part of the program evaluated.

Research One study of *Facing History and Ourselves* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations. The study, which included approximately 350 middle school students attending school in the northeast, examined results on

students' behavior and knowledge, attitudes, and values. The program implementation evaluated in this study did not include schoolwide components.¹

Effectiveness *Facing History and Ourselves* was found to have no discernible effects on behavior and knowledge, attitudes, and values.

	Behavior	Knowledge, attitudes, and values	Academic achievement
Rating of effectiveness	No discernible effects	No discernible effects	Not reported
Improvement index²	Average: +8 percentile points Range: +8 percentile points	Average: +4 percentile points Range: -7 to +17 percentile points	Not reported

1. The evidence presented in this report is based on the available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.
 2. These numbers show the average and the range of improvement indices for all findings across the study.

Additional program information

Developer and contact

Facing History and Ourselves. National office: 16 Hurd Road, Brookline, MA 02445. Web: www.facinghistory.org. Email: info@facing.org. Telephone: 617-232-1595. Fax: 617-232-0281.

Scope of use

Facing History and Ourselves was developed from 1977 to 1981 with Federal funds that supported efforts to improve secondary education through the teaching of history and ethics. According to the program developer, *Facing History and Ourselves* currently reaches more than one million students nationally and internationally. Information is not available on the demographics of students, schools, or districts using the intervention. The *Facing History and Ourselves* program may have changed since the study was conducted. The WWC recommends asking the developer for information about the most current version of this curriculum and taking into account that student demographics and school context may affect outcomes.

Teaching

Facing History and Ourselves begins with self-reflection on questions about identity, group membership, and obligations to others. The curriculum for each course includes class discussions about readings from the *Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book: Holocaust and Human Behavior* (FHAO National Foundation, 1994), films with *Facing History and Ourselves* study guides, guest speakers (such as Armenian, Cambodian, and Holocaust survivors), literature, and journal writing.

The typical unit is 4–8 weeks or a semester. Typically, the teacher introduces students to a framework and vocabulary for understanding human behavior and individual decision-making

in society. The curriculum encourages the teacher to engage students in discussions about how individual and group identities are formed and the social and cultural factors that influence individual decisions. The teacher tries to foster critical thinking and moral decision-making by guiding students' in-depth examinations of a case study of pre-war Germany and the Holocaust and reflections on the connections between that history and their own lives.

The developer provides curriculum training for teachers through presentations, introductory workshops, and the World Wide Web. A Summer Institute provides an intensive five- or six-day seminar focusing on issues related to identity, violence, bigotry, power, and conformity. Teachers explore ways to apply the content and approaches to their own teaching or school program. The developer also provides follow-up classroom support to teachers during the school year in person, by phone and email, and on the website, as well as through major conferences, seminars, and online discussions. Support resources include lists of guest speakers, videos, a lending library, and technical assistance.

Cost

Facing History and Ourselves has several resource books and study guides. Chapters may be downloaded from the website without charge, and complete copies may be purchased for \$15–25 each depending on the quantity. Introductory workshops and one-day conferences for teachers have registration fees ranging from \$35 to \$250. Online courses, which run for eight weeks, are available for \$300. The FHAO Summer Institute costs \$650 for commuting participants and \$900 for resident participants, who also receive room and board.

Research Eight studies reviewed by WWC investigated the effects of the *Facing History and Ourselves* program. One study (Schultz, Barr, & Selman, 2001) was a quasi-experimental design that met WWC evidence standards with reservations. The other seven studies did not meet WWC evidence screens.

The Schultz, Barr, and Selman study included 346 eighth-grade students in the northeast with varied socioeconomic

characteristics. Outcomes for students in 14 social studies and language arts classes using the *Facing History and Ourselves* curriculum were compared with those for students in 8 classrooms that did not use the curriculum. The study focused on *Facing History and Ourselves* as implemented in classrooms rather than as a schoolwide intervention.

Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of character education addresses student outcomes in three domains: behavior; knowledge, attitudes, and values; and academic achievement.

Behavior. *Facing History and Ourselves* students reported less fighting than students in the comparison group, but this difference was neither statistically significant (as calculated by the WWC) nor large enough to be considered substantively important using WWC criteria.²

Knowledge, attitudes, and values. The study reported differences favoring the program for three of seven outcomes (both measures of relationship maturity and the single measure of racism), one of which (a measure of relationship maturity) was reported to be statistically significant. The study also reported differences favoring the comparison group on the remaining four

outcomes (civic attitudes and participation, ethnic identity, and two measures of moral reasoning). The differences between the intervention and comparison conditions on all seven outcomes (as calculated by the WWC) were neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important.³

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates interventions as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings (as calculated by the WWC), the size of the differences between participants in the intervention condition and the comparison conditions, and the consistency of the findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

The WWC found *Facing History and Ourselves* to have no discernible effects on behavior or on knowledge, attitudes, and values

Improvement index

For each outcome domain, the WWC computed an improvement index based on the average effect size (see the [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is based entirely on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, study design, or analysis. The improvement index can take

on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting favorable results. The average improvement index for the behavior domain is +8 percentile points. The average improvement index for the knowledge, attitudes, and values domain is +4 percentile points, with a range of -7 to +17 percentile points across findings.

Summary

The reviewed study reported no impacts in the behavior domain. When the WWC aggregated all seven outcomes in the knowledge, attitudes, and values domain, the overall effect was neither statis-

3. The level of statistical significance was calculated by the WWC and where necessary, corrects for clustering within classrooms or schools, and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation see the [WWC Tutorial on Mismatch](#). See the [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate statistical significance. In the case of the *Facing History and Ourselves* report, corrections for clustering and multiple comparisons were needed.

(continued) tically significant nor large enough to be substantively important. So the WWC rated the program as having no discernible effects in the behavior domain or in the knowledge, attitudes, and values

domain. Character education, an evolving field, is beginning to establish a research base. The evidence presented in this report is limited and may change as new research emerges.

References **Met WWC evidence standards with reservations**

Schultz, H. L., Barr, D. J., & Selman, R. L. (2001). The value of a developmental approach to evaluating character development programmes: An ongoing study of Facing History and Ourselves. *Journal of Moral Education*, 30, 3–25.

Did not meet WWC evidence screens

Beyer, F. S., & Presseisen, B. Z. (1995). *Facing History and Ourselves: Initial evaluation of inner city middle school implementation*. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Better Schools.⁴

Brabeck, M., & Kenny, M. (1994). Human rights education through the “Facing History and Ourselves” program. *Journal of Moral Education*, 23, 333–347.⁵

Fine, M. (1993). Collaborative innovations: Documentation of the Facing History and Ourselves program. *Teachers College Record*, 94, 771–790.⁶

Presseisen, B. Z., & Beyer, F. S. (1994, April). *Facing History and Ourselves: An instructional tool for constructivist theory*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.⁶

Sleeper, M., Strom, M. S., & Zabierek, H. C. (1990). Facing History and Ourselves. *Educational Leadership*, 48, 84–86.⁶

Strom, M. S. (2003). A work in progress. In S. Totten (Ed.), *Working to make a difference: The personal and pedagogical stories of Holocaust educators across the globe* (pp. 107–123). New York: Lexington Books.⁶

Tollefson, T., Barr, T. J., & Strom, M. S. (n.d.) *Facing History and Ourselves*. (Available from Facing History and Ourselves, 16 Hurd Road, Brookline, MA 02445)⁶

For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC Facing History and Ourselves Technical Appendices](#).

4. Did not meet WWC evidence screens because study did not use a valid or reliable outcome measure.

5. Did not meet WWC evidence screens because study did not use a comparison group.

6. Did not meet WWC evidence screens because study did not use a quantitative design to assess student outcomes.