



Social and emotional health programmes in primary schools: Do they work?

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ANSWER

In general, they seem to!!!

Or, at least, the ones this study reviewed did!!!

Introductory Activity

- People Scavenger hunt
 - From the Bounce Back program
 - From the unit titled Humour
 - From level 2 – middle primary
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Abstract

- This presentation describes and evaluates two social and emotional health programs used in Tasmanian primary schools. This is an extremely important area as there is an abundance of research that expresses the importance of schools supporting the mental health of their students (Hunter Institute of Mental Health, 2006).
 - In Tasmania, there are two programs which are used by a majority of schools and teachers, these are: Program Achieve; and the BOUNCE BACK! Resilience Program.
 - In conjunction with 4th year students I teach at the University of Tasmania, I evaluated the use of these programs.
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Background Literature

- This issue arose amidst concern that although, in Tasmania, schools are implementing mental health programs in the primary school years there is little assessment of the success of such programs.
 - This is an extremely important area as there is an abundance of research that expresses the importance of schools supporting the mental health of their students (Hunter Institute of Mental Health, 2006).
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Background Literature

- An investigation in 2007 that examined the health of young Australians reported mental health as a significant area of concern for young people, finding that in 2003 mental health problems accounted for 50% of disease in young people aged between 12 to 24 years (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007).
 - Current trends indicate a steady increase in social and emotional problems with over 10% of the world's adult population suffering from a social and emotional illness (Parham, 2005).
 - Internationally, up to 14% of 4 to 16 year olds have a social and emotional health problem (Sawyer et al., 2000) and in Australia 5-14% of the youth are suffering from depression or anxiety (Neil & Christensen, 2007).
 - The World Health Organisation (2001) has recognised that if this trend continues, by the year 2020 social and emotional health problems, such as depression, will be the highest cause of disability and illness worldwide.
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What is Mental Health or Social & Emotional Wellbeing?

- Mental health is explained as the capacity to show feelings, thoughts, behaviours and emotions in a positive way. Commonly, mental health is referred to and often used interchangeably as social and emotional wellbeing (Hunter Institute for Mental Health, 2007).

Why SEW programs?

- As students are remaining in school settings for longer periods of time, the school environment has been identified as an agent of developmental change (Lynch et al., 2004).
- Schools also have the ability to reach not only the students but also their parents and the wider community who will benefit (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000).

Links to the NZ curriculum

- Your HPE learning area states 4 key concepts, 3 of which link directly to social & emotional wellbeing:
 - **Attitudes and values** – a positive, responsible attitude on the part of students to their own well being; respect, care, and concern for other people and the environment; and a sense of social justice.
 - The **socio-ecological perspective** – a way of viewing and understanding the interrelationships that exist between the individual, others, and society.
 - **Health promotion** – a process that helps to develop and maintain supportive

NZ Health Education

- In health education, students develop their ~~understanding of the factors that influence the health of~~ individuals, groups, and society: lifestyle, economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental factors.
- Students develop competencies for mental wellness, reproductive health and positive sexuality, and safety management, and they develop understandings of nutritional needs. Students build resilience through strengthening their personal identity and sense of self-worth, through managing change and loss, and through engaging in processes for responsible decision making. They learn to demonstrate empathy, and they develop skills that enhance relationships.
- Students use these skills and understandings to take critical action to promote personal, interpersonal, and societal well-being.

Program Achieve



- *Program Achieve*, derived from the You Can Do It! education framework, was developed by Professor Michael E. Bernard.
- The main aim of You Can Do It! Education and *Program Achieve* "is to support communities, schools, and homes in a collective effort to optimise the social, emotional and academic development of all young people".
- *Program Achieve* focuses on increasing the students' social and emotional health through a school based curriculum.
- The *Program Achieve* curriculum is based around the five foundations: confidence; persistence; organisation; getting along; and emotional resilience. Together, these form a positive mindset for developing social and emotional wellbeing and academic performance (Bernard, 2006).
- The impact of this program on students' social and emotional wellbeing is yet to be determined.

Sample activity from Program Achieve

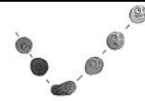
- Don't think negatively
 - Linked to the Confidence Foundation
 - For students aged 10 years+

Bounce Back



- The impact of the BOUNCE BACK! Resilience Program, on students' social and emotional wellbeing is also yet to be determined.
- The BOUNCE BACK! Resilience Program is a program designed to help students develop greater resilience through helping them develop coping skills (McGrath & Noble, 2003).
- The program is centred on the acronym BOUNCE BACK:
 - Bad times don't last long and don't have to spoil other parts of your life;
 - Other people can support you if you talk to them;
 - Unnecessary worry makes things worse;
 - Nobody is perfect;
 - Calculate your own "fair blame" and what is due to others or bad luck;
 - Everybody experiences bad times, not just you;
 - Be positive, no matter how small the positives are, and find the laughter;
 - Accept what you can't change;
 - Control your feelings and actions by controlling your thinking;
 - Keep things in perspective (McGrath & Noble, 2003).

Bounce Back



- 4 books:
 - Teacher's handbook
 - Teacher's resource book: level 1 – lower primary (5-7 yrs)
 - Teacher's resource book: level 2 – middle primary (8-10 yrs)
 - Teacher's resource book: level 3 – upper primary (11-14 yrs)

- 10 units:

Core values	Elasticity
People bouncing back	Courage
The bright side	Emotions
Relationships	Humour
Bullying	Success

Sample Activity from Bounce Back

- Cross-Offs
 - From the unit titled – relationships
 - From level 2 – middle primary

This research

- Research is needed to ascertain whether any of the so-called social and emotional learning programs (Program Achieve and Bounce Back) are effective in enhancing students' social and emotional health and reducing the chances of social and emotional health problems.
- The appropriate age for the implementation of social and emotional learning programs also requires more research.
- If the programs are shown to have positive effects then they could help to justify the importance of the need for extended social and emotional learning programs within the wider school community and also other school communities.

Method: Program Achieve

- A small scale survey design, focused on one Tasmanian primary school located in a low socioeconomic area, was selected for this study. The school had selected *Program Achieve* to be implemented as part of their curriculum in the 2008 school year due to the growing concern for their students' wellbeing.
- The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Social and Emotional Wellbeing questionnaire was selected and administered to both students and their teachers prior to, and after the implementation of *Program Achieve*.
- The students' social and emotional wellbeing was assessed as a whole group and also between the different grades to determine which age group benefited most from the implementation of the social and emotional learning program.

Results: Program Achieve

- It was found that, overall, students had high levels (60% - 84%) of social and emotional wellbeing prior to the implementation of the program. However, when compared to previous research, the number of students with low social and emotional wellbeing was still considered high (14%-40%).
- When comparing pre- and post-test results a small increase was noted in the students' overall level of social and emotional wellbeing (see Figure 1). However, statistically this was not considered to be significant.
- Pre- and post-test results also found that no particular grade showed statistically significantly more improvement. However, as seen in Figure 2 both Prép (8.1%) and Grade 5/6 (7.1%) students showed the most improvement.

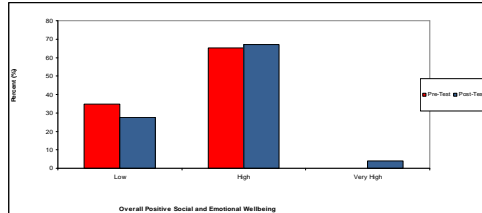


Figure 1. Comparison of the level of students' social and emotional wellbeing pre- and post-tests

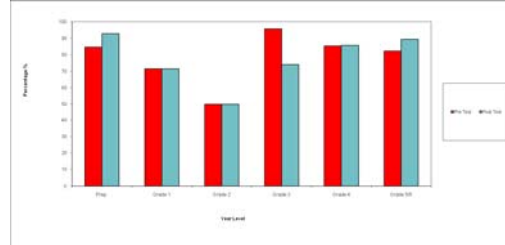


Figure 2. Percentage of teachers reporting students' with high or very high social-emotional wellbeing

Discussion: Program Achieve

- The findings from this component of the study showed that a higher percentage of children had lower social and emotional wellbeing than previous studies. As social and emotional problems are thought to be on the rise, this supported previous research which had indicated that between 11-15% of 4 to 16 year olds are suffering from a social and emotional problem (Parham, 2005; Sawyer et al., 2000).
- Additional findings showed either a very small or no change were reported when a short period of time was involved with the implementation of a social and emotional learning intervention. Past research on social and emotional wellbeing has concluded that a slight increase in any one area from social and emotional learning is enough evidence for the continued implementation of social and emotional learning programs in schools (Greenburg et al., 2003). The slight increase noted from this research, indicates that this social and emotional wellbeing program, *Program Achieve*, may have the ability to increase social and emotional wellbeing.
- On the basis of this study alone it is difficult to be certain which age group gained more from the social and emotional learning program, yet there are similarities between the results from this study and previous research. Previous research indicated the need for social and emotional learning programs to be implemented as early as possible in preschool and childcare centres to ensure a healthy start (Hunter Institute of Mental Health, 2006). The social and emotional wellbeing of the Prep students from this study showed the greatest improvement.

Method: Bounce Back

- The quantitative data was also generated from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Social and Emotional Wellbeing Survey.
- The aim of this survey was to provide information regarding the social and emotional wellbeing of grade 5/6 students attending one Tasmanian primary school located in a low socioeconomic area.
- The BOUNCE BACK program was implemented in one of the grade 5/6 classes over a 10 week period (one 1 hour lesson per week). A comparison of pre- and post-tests was used to determine any effect that the program may have had.
- The qualitative data was collected from a semi-structured class teacher interview.

Results: Bounce Back

- It was found that there was no significant difference when comparing the pre- and post-test survey results in the social and emotional wellbeing of the grade 5/6 class that experienced the BOUNCE BACK! Resilience Program.
- The results did, however, show slight positive changes in most areas of social and emotional wellbeing; these findings were supported by the results from the semi-structured teacher interview as noticeable difference in social and emotional wellbeing competencies was reported.
- The results also showed that there was no significant difference between the pre- and post- social and emotional wellbeing of the two grade 5/6 classes.

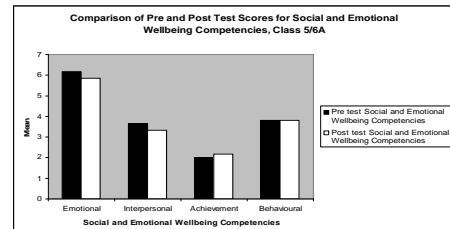


Figure 3. Comparison of pre- and post-test scores for social and emotional wellbeing competencies, class 5/6

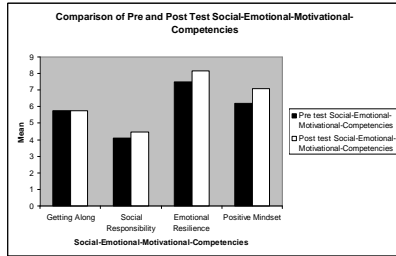


Figure 4. Comparison of pre- and post-test social-emotional-motivational competencies.

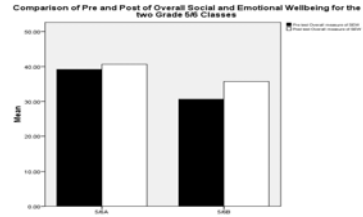


Figure 5. Comparison of pre- and post-test overall social and emotional wellbeing for the 2 grade 5/6 classes

Discussion: Bounce Back

- The results of this second component of the study concluded that the BOUNCE BACK! Resilience Program may have had a positive affect on the social and emotional wellbeing of a class of grade 5/6 students.
- The semi-structured teacher interview data reported that in some specific areas that affect social and emotional wellbeing there was a noticeable difference, for example, students displayed more positive behaviours, they were getting along with other students better and they were showing an understanding and demonstrating what it means to be a resilient individual.
- The results from the survey also supported these findings, however, these results were not statistically significant.
- It cannot, however, be concluded that the BOUNCE BACK! Resilience Program was the direct cause of any of these reported changes. There are many factors including, abuse, lack of warmth and affection, negative relationships, bullying, social exclusion socio-economic disadvantage and poverty that can influence social and emotional wellbeing that were not controllable within the classroom environment and it is possible that any one of these may have influenced any changes that were seen ((Bernard, 2006).

Conclusions

- Overall, it can be concluded that, even from small scale research, increases in the students' overall social and emotional wellbeing can be noticed through use of some social and emotional learning programs: *Program Achieve*; and BOUNCE BACK. In corroboration with previous findings, the increase in students' overall social and emotional wellbeing is regarded as enough evidence to continue with the program in the participating school. The even consistency of results for each grade, which used *Program Achieve*, also justifies the continued implementation of the social and emotional learning program throughout the entire school.
- This study provided an insight into the importance of educators understanding social and emotional wellbeing and social and emotional learning. Every teacher has the responsibility to maintain a safe protective learning environment for their students as well as engaging and providing students with a curriculum that develops life skills for their social and emotional wellbeing.

Any questions?