

A 'Classroom as Community' Approach to Supporting Student Well-being and Reducing Bullying in Primary Schools

Elspeth MCINNES, Victoria WHITINGTON and Bec NEILL

School of Education, University of South Australia

Australia

Hypothesis

In a trauma informed practice primary school education site, children who are coached to be mindful of their own and others' emotions are more able to manage their responses in social situations, helping them to:

- Make friends & Join in activities
- Engage in learning
- Deal with difficult situations (eg. Bullying)
- Develop self-efficacy & confidence
- Feel a sense of belonging

To support a sense of wellbeing in their education community and at home.



Wellbeing Classroom Approach

<https://www.thewellbeingclassroom.com.au/>

- Classroom teachers coached in trauma informed practice and supported to embed the explicit teaching of social-emotional wellbeing.
- Multiple strategies – emotional literacy (Kimochois <https://www.thewellbeingclassroom.com.au/kimochois-store>), mindfulness, pro-social games – across all curriculum areas.
- Class members taking leadership roles as peer wellbeing agents supported by school wellbeing leader.
- Family Learning Evenings for whole families to come and learn together followed by a community meal.

Why Trauma Informed Education Practice?

(Australian Childhood Foundation 2010)

- **Trauma**, defined as an overwhelming threat to survival and **toxic chronic stress** as continuing circumstances of uncertain survival, triggers survival focused physiologically-based cognitive state.
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences** research = exposure to child psychological, physical, sexual abuse; Parental Death or Separation/Mental Illness/Addiction/Domestic Violence/Criminality (Felitti 1998). Higher exposure – increased vulnerability to poor learning, social and health outcomes over a lifetime.
- Australian data shows at least one in 6 children have experienced a form of abuse and/or exposure to family violence before 15 years of age (AIHW 2019).

Trauma Informed Practices for Educators

(McInnes & Whittington 2015)

- Build trust relationships by spending friendly sharing time with each child included: modelling friendship practices.
- ‘We’re **all** in this together’ ethos of class community and welcome.
- Be Predictable (Routines; Trustworthy; Safe; Communicate).
- Aim to be Calm and publicly model (self-disclose) how to manage feelings (telling others how you are feeling & strategies eg. 10 deep breaths, taking some time away to feel more calm).
- Understand Children’s behaviour is a communication of their state of being (not a personal commentary on educators).
- Planning with students for conscious choices and their consequences, including safety plans for strong emotions (safety cocoon; outdoor nature spot; tactile soothing; someone to talk to).



Attributes of Community

Whittington & McInnes 2017

- **Belonging** = sense of identity, grounded in recognition (of full personhood – not just a label) and acceptance by other members of the community
- Sharing a common bond
- Sharing resources and looking after each other
- Having a (right of) place to be with others

'Classroom as Community' Principles

- **Every class member is valued and accepted as they are.** We all have gifts and strengths as well as challenges and vulnerabilities.
- **We are all responsible for treating others as we would like to be treated (including the teacher).**
- **Everybody has the right to feel safe and respected.**
- **Everybody's feelings have ups and downs - we all need care and support from others when we are struggling with our feelings.**
- **The class is a shared community – not a group of competitive individuals.**

Research site: Public Primary School

N = 366 Students	%
English as Additional Language or Dialect students	61
Students on school card (low income)	49
Students with refugee status	23
Students with a disability	12
Students with an identified trauma background	8
Students who have had Department of Child Protection intervention	5
Students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	3

Research Data Assessing 3 year Impact

- Australian Early Development Census school data comparison 2015-2018 (next slide)
- School NAPLAN results (Standardised literacy and numeracy testing at years 3, 5, 7) 2016-2018.
- School Audit of key indicators: Bullying, Behaviour referral to Principal, Attendance, student wellbeing agent satisfaction, teacher wellbeing satisfaction, EAL parent attendance at family learning events at school and engagement with other family services.
- 2018 School Parent survey (44% response rate)

		2015		2018		Significant change
		n	%	n	%	2015 vs 2018
Physical health and wellbeing	On track	22	52.4	28	70	Significant increase
	At risk	8	19	6	15	No significant change
	Vulnerable	12	28.6	6	15	Significant decrease
Social competence	On track	23	54.8	27	67.5	Significant increase
	At risk	14	33.3	7	17.5	Significant decrease
	Vulnerable	5	11.9	6	15	No significant change
Emotional maturity	On track	23	54.8	26	65	Significant increase
	At risk	13	31	7	17.5	Significant decrease
	Vulnerable	6	14.3	7	17.5	No significant change
Language and cognitive skills (school-based)	On track	27	64.3	28	70	No significant change
	At risk	8	19	6	15	No significant change
	Vulnerable	7	16.7	6	15	No significant change
Communication skills and general knowledge	On track	23	54.8	31	77.5	Significant increase
	At risk	9	21.4	3	7.5	Significant decrease
	Vulnerable	10	23.8	6	15	Significant decrease

NAPLAN STANDARD TESTS YEARS 3, 5 & 7 2014-2018 SCHOOL SUMMARY.

- The school **reading data** for years three and five students indicated a **positive trend over three years**. The year seven student data was less consistent but has been positive over two years and showed improvement on their year three results from 2016.
- The numeracy data indicated a four year trend of improvement in the percentage of years three, five and seven students achieving the SEA. The year three group in particular made significant improvement from 51% to 70%.

School Wellbeing Audit

- **Bullying and harassment incidents decreased** 14% between 2017 and 2018 and halved since 2016.
- Students referred to the principal's office for **problem behaviour decreased 7%** from 2017 to 2018.
- **Student attendance increased** to 91.8% in 2018, up from 89.06% in 2016 and 90.9% in 2017.
- Student wellbeing agents reported **enjoyment and developing knowledge and confidence** as leaders. They identified that students' **learning and mood had improved** in class, with **less bullying** behaviour and **more understanding** of ways to support their own wellbeing and that of others.
- 100% Teaching staff reported **high satisfaction with wellbeing strategies**.
- Parent involvement data 2017-2018 **70% increase** in the number of families with English as an additional language (EALD) **attending family learning events**, and a **50% increase** in the number of EALD families **accessing family support and health services**.

Questions	Yes	No	Could improve	Needs urgent attention	Don't know	No Response
The school respects and celebrates different cultures.	97	1	0	0	2	0
My child likes being at this school.	94	0	4	0	2	0
Teachers at this school expect my child to do their best.	92	0	3	0	4	1
This school looks for ways to improve.	87	1	8	0	4	0
I am satisfied with the overall learning programmes offered at this school.	83	0	10	3	4	0
My child's learning needs are being met at this school.	83	1	9	2	5	0
I know the standard of learning that is expected of my child e.g. reading level.	82	0	14	2	2	0
My child is making good progress at this school.	81	0	15	0	1	3
I can be involved in making decisions about my child's learning.	80	2	11	1	5	1
I am offered regular and frequent opportunities to talk about my child's progress.	79	1	14	0	5	1
There are opportunities for me to develop my own skills in supporting my child's learning.	72	5	18	0	5	0

Conclusions

WBC activities = positive impacts:

- Academic performance
- Student safety
- School's socio-cultural environment
- EALD parent engagement with the school and with health and family support services

Context of school with high levels of cultural and linguistic diversity, plus low incomes, refugee backgrounds and disability.

The next phase of data collection will involve qualitative methods to gain more nuanced understandings of the impacts on children, families and staff.

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