Positive RELATIONSHIPS, POSITIVE Learning

Action Research Report 2008

INTERNATIONAL BOYS' SCHOOLS COALITION

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Teachers as Researchers?

DI LAYCOCK BARKER COLLEGE, HORNSBY, NSW, AUSTRALIA

2007–2008 IBSC Action Research Coordinator

Teacher as researcher? Whilst many of us may not fit the image of a bespectacled individual in a white lab coat conducting statistical analysis, chances are we could easily fill the shoes of an action researcher. In fact, we're probably already conducting *informal* action research on a regular basis. Whenever we prepare for a class, implement our ideas, reflect on the effectiveness of the lesson and then plan how we would improve the lesson next time around, consciously or not, we are following the commonly acknowledged cyclical format that characterises action research.

But is it enough to follow the action research cycle in one's head? Is what we only *think* is working well sufficient reason to change our practice and is it enough to convince our colleagues to follow suit? Is it ethical to gamble with our students' learning on the basis of intuition? If we've answered in the negative, then we need to consider how to move our intuitive good teaching to intentional informed practice that can be shared with others. One way to do this is by formalising the reflective process so as to provide valid and reliable evidence on which to base change.

Action research, according to Sagor (2000, online) "is a disciplined process of inquiry conducted *by* and *for* those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the *actor* in improving and/or refining his or her action." Whether that actor is the individual teacher, a group of teachers, or the staff of a whole school, the primary objective of action research is the same—to develop reflective practice and effect positive changes in learning and teaching that will result in improved outcomes for all involved in the educational process.

Making the move to evidence-based practice can be amazingly rewarding. Sagor (ibid) for instance, suggests that "when teachers have convincing evidence that their work has made a real difference in their students' lives, the countless hours and endless efforts of teaching seem worthwhile". In the process of undertaking action research teachers become learners and inevitably improve their professional disposition as they continually develop mastery of their craft. But the benefits of that learning also have the potential to extend beyond individual enrichment.

When groups of teachers participate in action research, "collaboratively studying their practice will not only contribute to the achievement of the shared goal but will have a powerful impact on team building and program development" (ibid). Take this research to the next level where action research is embedded in the practice of the whole school community; where the organisation

frames "the giving and receiving of information as a responsibility" (Fullan 2004, p.126) and the whole organisation is "better off" through its "strengthened capacity to access and leverage hidden knowledge" (ibid, p.115).

Imagine the power of action research when it is extended beyond individual schools through a unique program such as the International Boys' Schools Coalition's *Action Research in Boys' Schools.* Now entering its fifth cycle, this initiative will, by mid 2010, have directly enhanced the professional lives of the fifty-four educators who have conducted action research projects under its banner. And whilst the primary benefit of the research will certainly have been to those directly "touched" by the research, we must also consider the ripple effect where the findings of these projects have been disseminated through presentations and publications to influence the practice of colleagues around the globe.

The reports that follow present the findings of the action research projects undertaken by the six members of the 2007–2008 IBSC Action Research Team. It was my privilege to work with these consummate professionals and walk beside them on their research journey. Their reports offer "eloquent proof that educators from all our global regions can collaborate and learn from one another—enriching both their professional lives and the quality of education for their students" (IBSC 2008, online).

This introduction is based on an article by the author published as *'Teachers as researchers',* info@aslansw, Nov. 2007, pp. 13–14.

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A Leadership Program for Grade 2 Boys: Building Caring Relationships

THOMAS BABITS UPPER CANADA COLLEGE, TORONTO, CANADA

Thomas Babits is Director of Primary at Upper Canada College. Formerly Head of Physical and Health Education and Coordinator of Guidance, Tom has a special interest in promoting an emotionally connected school culture.

Abstract

Does a leadership program for Grade 2 boys translate to improved interpersonal relationships, and also enhance student learning? For this action research project, a new leadership program was intentionally introduced to build relationships between Kindergarten and Grade 2 boys, resulting in positive playground play patterns, a reduction in conflict, and an increase in observable caring behaviours. The program ran twice weekly for four weeks in Physical Education. By partnering with Kindergarten students, Grade 2 boys were given the responsibility to help teach the younger boys perform movement skill exercises. It was hoped that the program would strengthen the learning in Physical Education and contribute to other initiatives that promote a culture of caring. The findings indicate that the program did achieve these objectives.

Research Rationale

Playground issues are a mainstay in many schools. In this less structured setting, children test their ability to manage their relationships: to integrate, separate, cope with not having their way, make new friends, or deal with the unkind actions of a trusted one. Throughout, conflicts occur. Thus, conflict resolution often becomes another important social skill to be learned. Teachers believe that powerful learning occurs on the playground. Do schools adequately prepare students to take effective advantage of this learning opportunity? Furthermore, do we encourage them to test their ability to behave in a caring way? Are they set up for success in this environment?

The ability to identify with the feelings and perspectives of others is empathy. It is comprised of the following stages: awareness of self, understanding of emotions, ability to attribute emotions to others, and take the perspective of the other person. These stages are critical for positive socialization (Hoffman 2000). Goleman (1995) supports the view that empathy is one of the most important aspects of social development as it provides the cornerstone of managing relationships and fostering productive interdependence.

This high priority on developing empathy is especially important for boys. According to Adam Cox (2006), we often and unwittingly thwart the development of empathy in boys. For example, we may equate expressions of emotions or empathy with weakness; encourage boys to act out our own underlying aggression; perpetuate the myth of the iconoclastic hero and a negative stereotype of "sensitive" men; and stress action at the expense of reflection. I do not believe this is what we want. According to Gordon (2005), "the idea that independence represents strength and interdependence is a weak distant cousin is deeply flawed." Furthermore, "…the closeness of the connections we build through interdependence is ultimately the strength of the community." The Search Institute's (online) "40 Developmental Assets" are qualities essential to raising caring, responsible citizens. They are comprised of twenty external assets and twenty internal assets. The internal assets are competencies, values, and self-perceptions that young people have. The external assets are based on interdependence — positive relationships young people have in their lives. Clearly, promoting the development of empathy in boys ought to be an important priority in schools.

Ways to promote the development of empathy include:

1. Sharing stories

2. Role modeling

3. Avoiding anti-empathy messages such as valuing conquests and individualism that is too strong to be socialized

4. Encouraging identification with the feelings of others

5. Verbalizing approval of good character traits

6. Emphasizing the importance of acting on feelings of empathy

Schools can do much of the above as well as provide planned opportunities for boys to exercise empathy. For example:

1. Community service initiatives

2. Peer tutoring

3. Teaching the language of emotions

4. Sharing circle rituals

Helping the elderly, the young, the disadvantaged, or the ill is one of the most powerful ways to give the empathy muscle a workout. Schools inherently provide an opportunity for students to help younger students. Vertically integrated programs also allow for the practice of leadership, an important skill set and perhaps the ultimate application of emotional intelligence. The benefits of vertically integrated initiatives are naturally and tacitly acknowledged; but competing for limited instructional time, they are not designed often enough with these social-emotional outcomes in mind.

At Upper Canada College we have developed many of the types of programs outlined above. The question is: do they effectively promote the culture of caring that we strive for? It is important to consider what a school with empathetic boys might look like. An empathetic person not only understands emotions and can communicate emotionally (emotional literacy), but also cares

(Gordon 2005). Caring actions can be viewed as reflecting empathy. Earlier stages of empathy may also be reflected by an awareness of the perspectives of others. While students can demonstrate what is expected of them in class, I would argue that an empathetic community of young boys would show caring and awareness of others in less structured settings. The playground during recess time is an excellent example of this.

Research Question

Does a leadership program for Grade 2 boys translate to improved interpersonal relationships in unstructured settings, and also enhance student learning?

Research Approach

Action research is an intervention in personal practice to encourage improvement for oneself and others. "People do action research when they want to investigate what is happening in their particular situation and try to improve it" (McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 2003). The goal of action research is to gain insight within a specific school context and on educational practices in general, in order to promote more effective practices. In such a way, it makes tacit knowledge explicit and can contribute to a wider body of knowledge (ibid).

Research Context

The research was conducted at the Upper Canada College Preparatory School (UCC), an independent boys' school in Toronto, Canada. At UCC, there is one class or form for each of Senior Kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2. These grades share the same timetable. They have recess at the same time and occasionally get together for special events and activities. Although we have some structured ongoing vertical integration with older students (such as reading buddies with Grade 5 boys), there is no program intentionally designed to foster mentoring relationships among these youngest grades. There is no leadership program for this age group. The intent of the project was to improve this situation.

Research Plan

As a teacher on leave from UCC this past year, the research program I chose provided the mutual benefit of enhancing an existing program and providing an age-appropriate, authentic leadership experience for Grade 2 boys. A movement skills circuit was developed with two Physical Education teachers. Under their direction, the Grade 2 boys were given the responsibility to lead boys in Kindergarten through the circuit. They conducted two, forty-minute sessions per week for four weeks (eight sessions). It was thought that this would have a positive impact on engagement for both grade levels, and thus enhance student learning.

The movement skills circuit consisted of the following stations:

- Bean bag balance shuttle run
- Leap frog
- Ladder hopping

- Slalom jumping
- Crab walking
- Ball throwing and catching
- Jumping jacks
- Wobble board balancing

Grade 2 boys were introduced to the unit and practiced it twice prior to joining the Kindergarten boys. During the second of these orientation classes, teachers facilitated a discussion about leadership and responsibility so that the Grade 2 boys would understand their role with the Kindergarten boys.

Throughout these classes, each Grade 2 boy was paired with a Kindergarten boy for that hour. Teachers were asked to conduct these classes as they would normally. As a result, the activities were modified slightly in order to maintain a challenge, correct unforeseen problems, and maintain interest.

PROJECT TIMELINE

November 16th	Project proposal completed
Early December	Approval from school Head Work out details of program with PE Dept.
January 9–16th	Obtain permission from parents
January 21–23rd	Pre-program data collection Rehearsal classes with Grade 2
January 30–31st	Week 1
February 7–8th	Week 2
February 14–15th	Week 3
February 21–22nd	Week 4
February 27–28th	Post-program data collection

Data Collection

In order to assess the immediate impact of this project on both Kindergarten and Grade 2 boys, multiple measures were used. The following data collection tools were employed:

- Focus groups of three or four boys from each grade were conducted to discuss their relationships with boys from the other grade, and their perceptions of any concerns. These focus group interviews were videotaped.
- Teachers of Grade 1 and Grade 2 boys were surveyed regarding their relationships and interactions between the grade levels during recess and hallway interactions.
- PE classes were videotaped.

- Pre-program and post-program drawings and descriptions of their own playground play were completed by the boys in their homeroom, and were collected for analysis.

- Post-program student feedback was collected using a reflection page.

- The teachers of the program wrote post-program reflections.

DATA GATHERING SCHEDULE:

Pre-program	Focus Group Discussions, Teacher surveys, Video-taping of Kindergarten boys, Playground Pictures
Week 1	Video-taping of Kindergarten and Grade 2 boys working together
Week 2	Video-taping of Kindergarten and Grade 2 boys working together
Week 3	Video-taping of Kindergarten and Grade 2 boys working together
Week 4	Video-taping of Kindergarten and Grade 2 boys working together
Post-program	Focus Group Discussions, Teacher surveys, Playground Pictures, Student Reflections, Teacher Reflections

To ensure confidentiality, the following procedures were observed:

- No student names were used during data collection and in reporting.

- A letter was sent to parents informing them of the study and process, and requesting permission for their son's participation.

- Further permission was sought from the school and from parents to use the research findings, including visual images, for educational purposes in publications and presentations.

Research Findings

To assess the impact of the program, different types of data from the four groups of participants were gathered and analyzed. The four groups of informants were:

- Kindergarten boys (N = 17)

- Grade 2 boys (N = 18)

- Teachers of the program (N = 2)

- Teachers surveyed who do supervision duty (N = 10)

STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON THE PROGRAM

Following the unit, each student completed a reflection for their portfolios and for Student-led Conferences. In response to each question, boys could choose: 'Yes, a little', 'Yes, a lot' or 'No, I don't/didn't'. I also produced a DVD that they were able to show their parents for visual reference to the unit. The responses to these questions were analyzed to get a sense of their enjoyment and perceived learning from the unit.
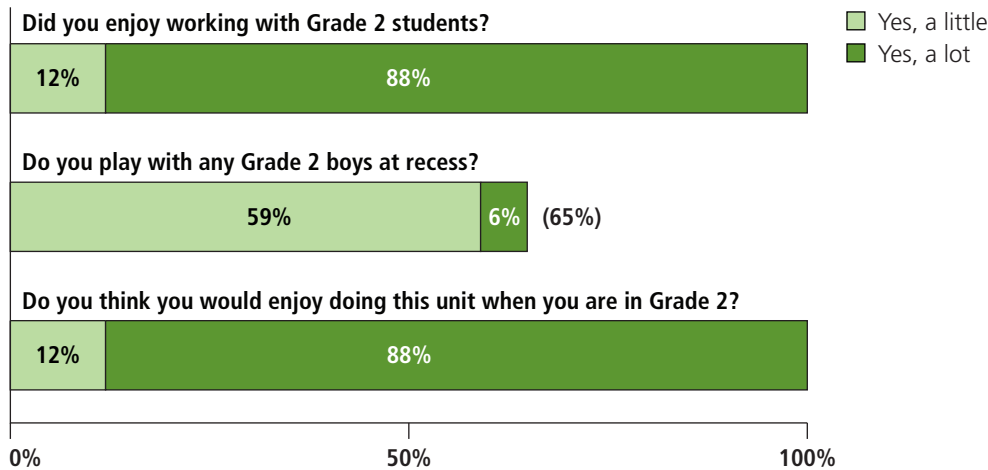
Overall, both the Kindergarten and Grade 2 boys were very positive about the unit.

Kindergarten Boys

As shown in the figure below, the Kindergarten boys reported the following:

- All Kindergarten boys enjoyed working with their older peers. In fact, most (88%) indicated that they enjoyed it a lot.

- 65% played with Grade 2 boys during recess.

- All would enjoy teaching the unit when they would be in Grade 2.

SK Student Reflection

Did you enjoy working with Grade 2 students?

☐ Yes, a little
■ Yes, a lot

12%	88%

Do you play with any Grade 2 boys at recess?

59%	6%	(65%)

Do you think you would enjoy doing this unit when you are in Grade 2?

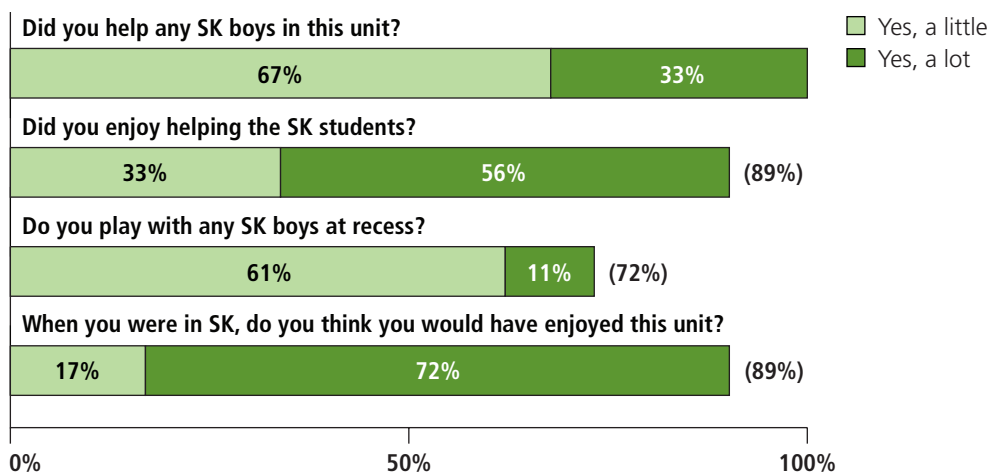| 12%	88%

0%   50%   100%

Grade 2 Boys

The following findings were extracted from Grade 2 boys' reflections:

- All boys had helped Kindergarten boys in the unit, and 33% reported having done so a lot.

- Many enjoyed (59% a lot and 33% a little) helping the younger boys.

- 72% reported playing with Kindergarten boys during recess.

- 89% think they would have enjoyed this unit when they were in Kindergarten.

Grade 2 Student Reflection

Did you help any SK boys in this unit?

☐ Yes, a little
■ Yes, a lot

67%	33%

Did you enjoy helping the SK students?

33%	56%	(89%)

Do you play with any SK boys at recess?

61%	11%	(72%)

When you were in SK, do you think you would have enjoyed this unit?

| 17%	72%	(89%)

0%   50%   100%

STUDENT PLAYGROUND PICTURES

Immediately prior to and immediately following the unit, boys were asked to draw their own grade and the other grade playing in the playground. They were also asked to write a brief statement about what was happening in their pictures. The playground pictures were coded according to whether boys were in conflict, playing in parallel, or playing together.

Kindergarten Boys

■ Prior to the program, 20% of Kindergarten boys drew pictures in which there was conflict with Grade 2 students, and about half drew pictures that demonstrated positive interaction.

■ There was a dramatic difference in the pictures drawn post-program. 94% drew pictures that demonstrated positive interaction, while none drew pictures in which they were in conflict with Grade 2 boys.

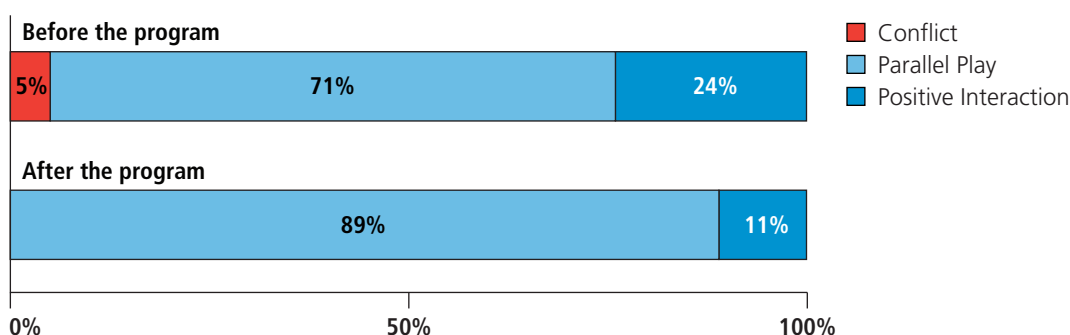**SK Drawings and Descriptions of Recess Play**
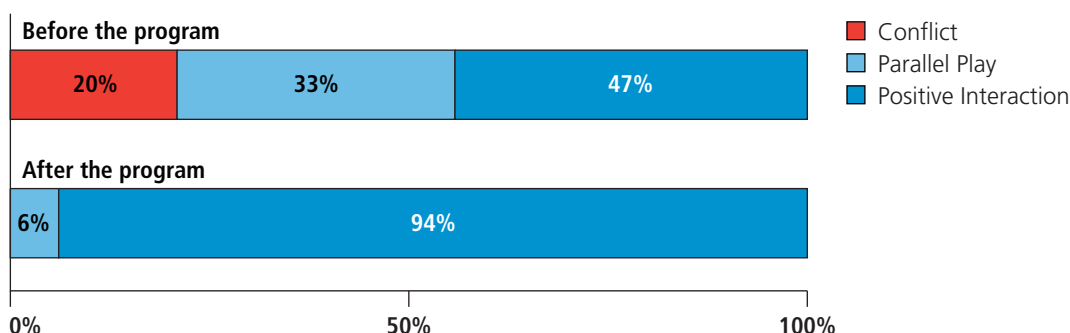
Grade 2 Boys

The Grade 2 drawings demonstrated a different pattern.

■ While there was a slight decline in positive interactions (24% to 11%) when comparing pre-unit drawings with post-unit drawings, there was an increase from 71% to 89% in parallel play.

Grade 2 Drawings and Descriptions of Recess Play

In analyzing these drawings, it seemed that there was a difference in these parallel play drawings. Some depicted the Kindergarten boys playing an entirely different activity. For example, "The SK's are playing tag and me and (my friend) are playing yo-gi-oh." Others depicted the same play or game. For example, "The grade 2s made a fort and were making a shelter for it. The SK's are also making a fort". I decided to further investigate the parallel play pictures (pre-program N = 12, post-program N = 16).

- Interestingly, all of the pre-program parallel play drawings were of Kindergarten boys playing something entirely different.

- 31% of post-program parallel play drawings were of Kindergarten boys playing the same game or activity. The results can be seen in the figure below:

**Grade 2 Parallel Play Pictures**
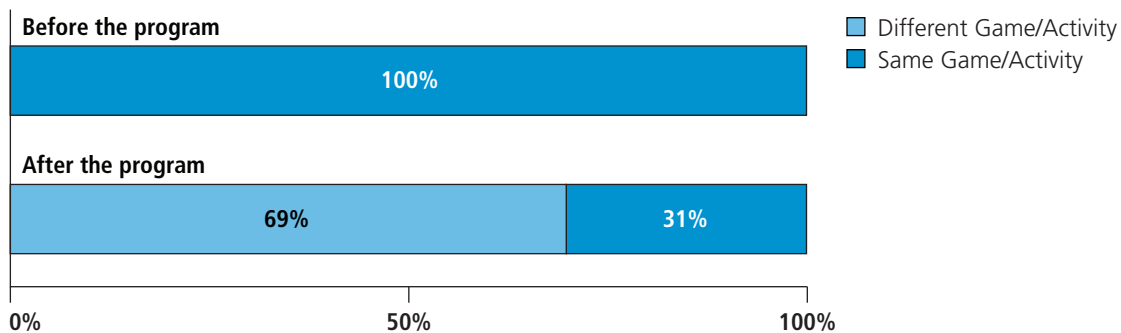
TEACHERS' PRE- AND POST-SURVEYS ABOUT BOYS' PLAYGROUND BEHAVIOURS

Teacher surveys were conducted anonymously by a third-party, web-based survey. All teachers who had supervisory responsibilities on the playground were surveyed. There were ten respondents pre-program, and six respondents post-program. The decline in post-program respondents was likely due to the fact that teachers were writing their second term reports at the time the request was made.

Teachers' Observation of Kindergarten Boys

- There was no difference between pre-program and post-program results with respect to how well boys played with boys in their own grade or with older boys.

- Clearly, Kindergarten boys were perceived as playing better with boys in their own grade.

Teacher Surveys: How Well SK Students Play with Others
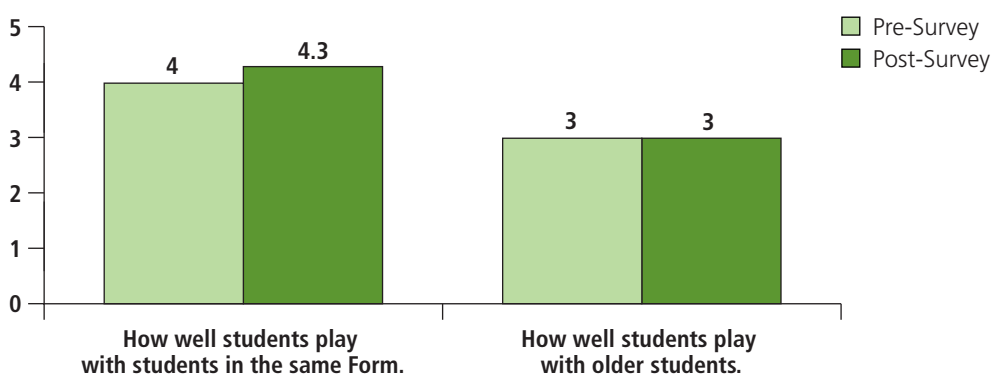
- Teachers reported a statistically significant ($P < 0.05$) increase in the Kindergarten boys' attempts to play with Grade 2 boys, and a slight improvement in how well they interpret the social cues of older students.

Teacher Surveys: How Well SK Students Interact with Older Students
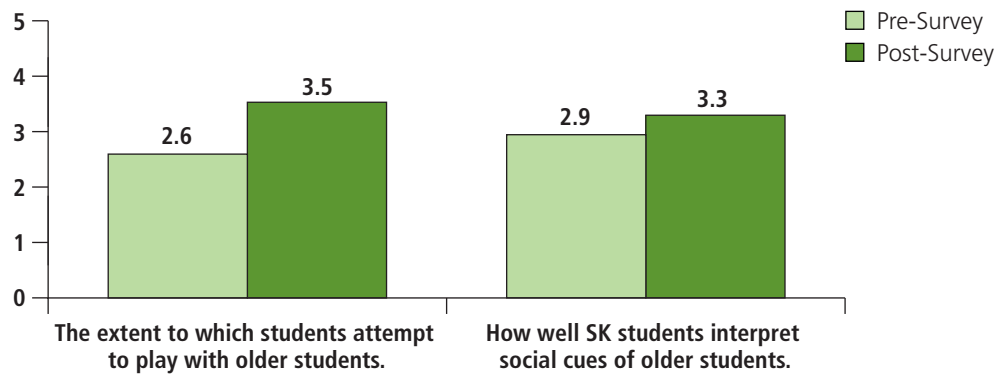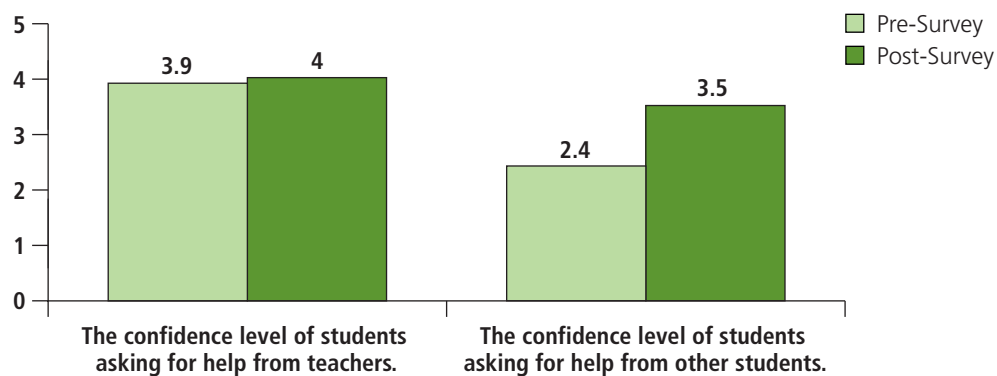

- The Kindergarten boys' confidence in asking for help from teachers was reported as high (3.9 and 4) both before and after the program.

- There was a dramatic ($P < 0.05$) increase in their confidence in asking for help from older students.

Teacher Surveys: SK Students' Confidence Level in Asking for Help

- There was an increase in Kindergarten boys' effectiveness at resolving conflicts.

- Their overall comfort and confidence on the playground was reported as high and did not change after the program.

Teacher Surveys: Resolving Conflicts and Comfort Level for SKs
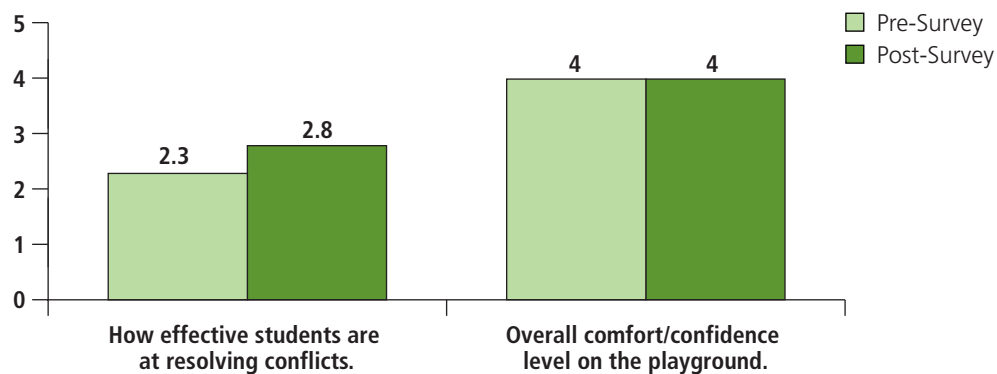
Teachers' Observation of Grade 2 Boys

■ Grade 2 boys played well with students from their grade, and better than with younger students. There was no change after the program.

■ Teacher's reports were remarkably similar to their reports of Kindergarten boys on these questions.

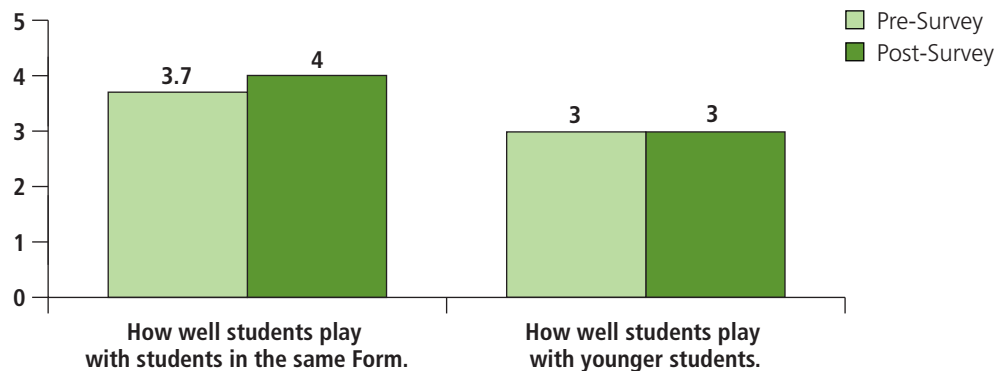**Teacher Surveys: How Well Grade 2 Students Play wIth Others**

■ Grade 2 boys showed an increase in terms of the extent to which they attempted to play with younger students and how well they tolerated the behaviour of younger boys.

■ The changes were very similar in magnitude to that observed with Kindergarten boys.

Teacher Surveys: How Well Grade 2 Students Interact with Older Students
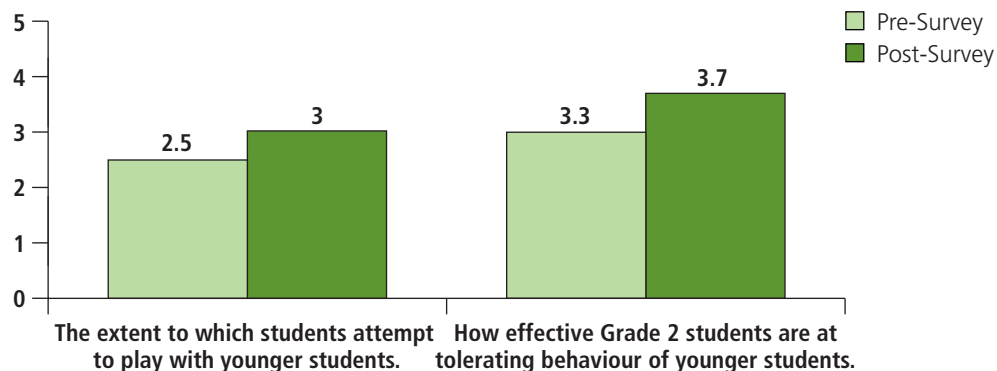
■ Grade 2 boys were regarded as being very confident in asking for help from teachers. This did not change following the program.

■ The confidence of students in asking for help from other students increased following the program (3.2 to 3.8). This pattern was identical, if not quite as dramatic, as the increase seen in Kindergarten boys. However their level of confidence prior to the program was significantly lower (2.4 vs. 3.2) than the Grade 2s.

Teacher Surveys: Grade 2 Students' Confidence Level in Asking for Help
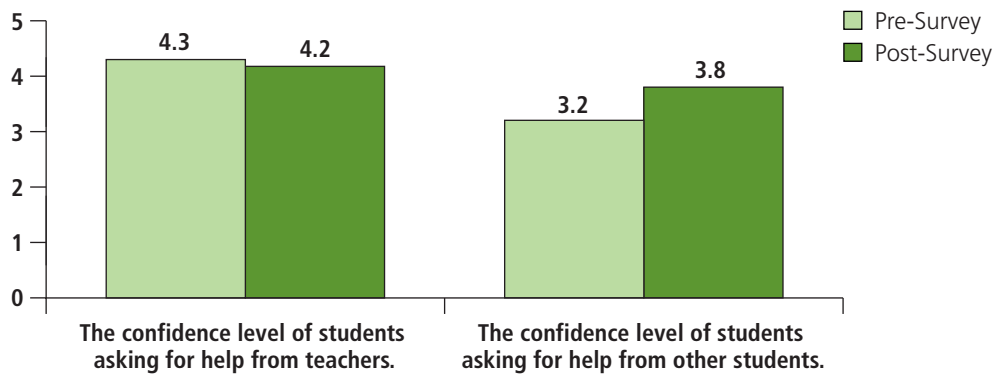
- There was a slight increase in Grade 2 boys' effectiveness at resolving conflicts and their overall comfort and confidence level on the playground.
- The comfort/confidence level following the program was remarkable, with a very high mean score of 4.8.

Teacher Surveys: Resolving Conflicts and Comfort Level for Grade 2s
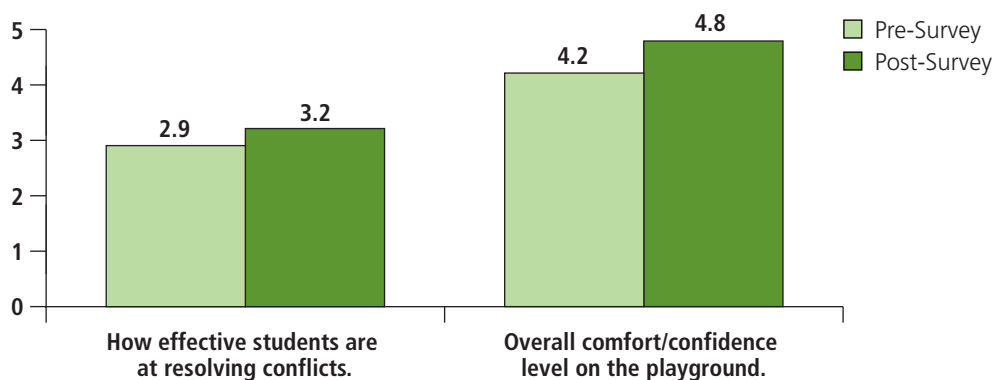
TEACHER REFLECTIONS

The two Physical Education teachers who taught the unit were asked to reflect on their experience and respond to a few questions. The reflections were overwhelmingly positive. Additional professional conversations occurred as a result of the project.

The following was reported about the benefits of the program for Kindergarten boys:

- There was increased engagement in the Physical Education program.
- They formed relationships with the Grade 2 boys.
- Their confidence with Grade 2 boys increased.

The following was reported about the benefits of the program for Grade 2 boys:

- Their confidence increased.
- They rose to the leadership challenge, and did a very good job.
- One teacher reported: "I'm not sure how many leadership experiences the average 7 year old has had! And they certainly rose to it in many cases".

One of the teachers reported that this project was very refreshing because he had not examined his practice in quite such a critical way, especially with respect to social interaction and engagement. The following three comments indicate some of the ways in which this experience will impact on their teaching in the future:

- "It has illustrated the value of mixing boys from different grades, I will be considering ways this can be utilized in the coming years, e.g., something with the 3s and 4s around recess games."

- "I learned a lot about my Grade 2 boys. I realized that some of the more "quiet" boys were very good leaders with the younger boys."

- "At its peak (sessions 3-5?), the class essentially ran itself. It opened my eyes to the value of such integration and will certainly affect the way I see running the program in the future."

VIDEO TAPING

The video taping of the actual lessons confirmed the observations and reflections of the teachers that the boys were well engaged. In addition, the student reflections reported a very high degree of enjoyment by both the Kindergarten and Grade 2 boys, and 100% of Grade 2 boys reported that they helped the Kindergarten boys during the program.

Conclusions

From the body of evidence presented in this action research project the following conclusions can be drawn about the impact of the leadership program for Grade 2 boys:

1. There was a very high degree of engagement and enjoyment of working together with the older/younger boys.

2. Student perceptions of playing with older/younger boys showed fewer conflicts.

3. Kindergarten boys indicated more positive interactions with Grade 2 boys.

4. Kindergarten boys may emulate Grade 2 boys in the playground more often.

5. There was a pattern of improved social skills in both Kindergarten boys and Grade 2 boys. This impact may be greater for Kindergarten boys.

6. There was a pattern of improved social interactions on the playground between older and younger students. This impact may be greater for Kindergarten boys.

7. There was an overwhelmingly positive impact on the teachers involved in the action research project.

WHAT WAS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

The goal of action research is to make a positive impact on professional practice. In considering how this has extended us as professionals, we reflected on the learning:

ABOUT BOYS

When trying to build relationships among boys, it is advisable to consider that face-to-face, direct communication can sometimes be challenging. That is not to say that developing this ability is not

important. Rather, if the first priority is to develop a relationship, then this can be facilitated by carefully selecting situations that allow for shoulder-to-shoulder interaction (Sax 2005). Give them something to do together. For this reason, programs that engage boys physically can be ideal situations in which to implement such relationship-building programs.

The Physical Education Department intends to use the model of this program at various age levels on a regular basis, when possible. Shorter programs, perhaps several times a year, fit well with the Physical Education Program units. It is seen as an effective way to introduce younger students to a new unit, and to consolidate learning for older boys. The programs may consist of one to four lessons.

ABOUT A LEADERSHIP UNIT FOR GRADE 2

Upper Canada College has over 1100 students from Kindergarten through to Grade 12. Of those, our youngest three grades have only fifty-two students. When thinking about leadership in our school, it is easy to forget these youngsters. For the Physical Education teachers, the success of this project has illuminated what a leadership program for our youngest students could be.

ABOUT CONDUCTING ACTION RESEARCH

Should we conduct another action research project looking at relationships, collecting direct evidence from the playground would also be a key part of the data collection methodology. While the evidence collected in this project was useful, it was indirect. I could see videotaping on the playground as a useful way to do this.

Larger sample sizes would have added statistical power to the findings. Identical projects at multiple sites would achieve this. However, in addition to the logistical challenges, taking the project out of the context of one school would substantially alter the research premise. That would not be action research, but perhaps a larger study. Alternatively, a project working with older boys would work well at Upper Canada College, and provide larger numbers of participants due to the increasing enrollment at higher grades.

In launching into this project, I was somewhat concerned about the 'buy-in' I would need to execute a successful project. I am indebted to the two Physical Education teachers for their assistance. It was somewhat more work for them to oblige my requests and collaborate with me on the project. In fact, I was struck by the degree to which they enjoyed and valued being a part of this project. They are keen to do more of this sort of project in the future. To me this is a tremendous benefit of action research: professional practice is reinvigorated, and growth of the teacher as learner and reflective practitioner fostered.

Overall, I believe that the results support the implicit knowledge that vertically integrated programs designed to build relationships amongst boys have the positive social benefit of increased awareness of others, social confidence, and fewer conflicts. According to Cox (2003, p.80), developing empathy "provides the energy and motivation to cross the communication divide." It was thought that by working together in class, an increase in empathy would be reflected during unstructured times, when students are playing in the same space and there is no explicit expectation to show caring. There they are free to play with whomever they would like and to do whatever they would like. In addition, it would seem to me that while it is important that boys

demonstrate what is expected of them in class, a real increase in empathy would be internalized and would therefore translate to such a non-classroom setting. These observable and self-assessed behavioural changes may reflect increased empathy. For these reasons, this project has deepened my conviction to find ways to implement vertically integrated programs.

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Appendix 1

KINDERGARTEN DRAWING: PRE-PROGRAM

Playground Pictures Worksheet

Draw a picture of SK and Form 2 students in the playground.

Tell me about what is happening in your picture.

I'm gaurding the racks and stiks. and the F2's are Trying to steal them.

Appendix 1

GRADE 2 DRAWING: PRE-PROGRAM

Playground Pictures Worksheet

Draw a picture of SK and Form 2 students in the playground.

Tell me about what is happening in your picture.

The sK's are braKeing our snow mountin. We worked relly hard to make it and they broke it.

Appendix 1

KINDERGARTEN DRAWING: POST-PROGRAM

Playground Pictures Worksheet

Draw a picture of SK and Form 2 students in the playground.

Tell me about what is happening in your picture.

This is me kicking the ball really high. The big one is a Form 2 who is playing with me.

Appendix 1

GRADE 2 DRAWING: POST-PROGRAM

Playground Pictures Worksheet

Draw a picture of SK and Form 2 students in the playground.

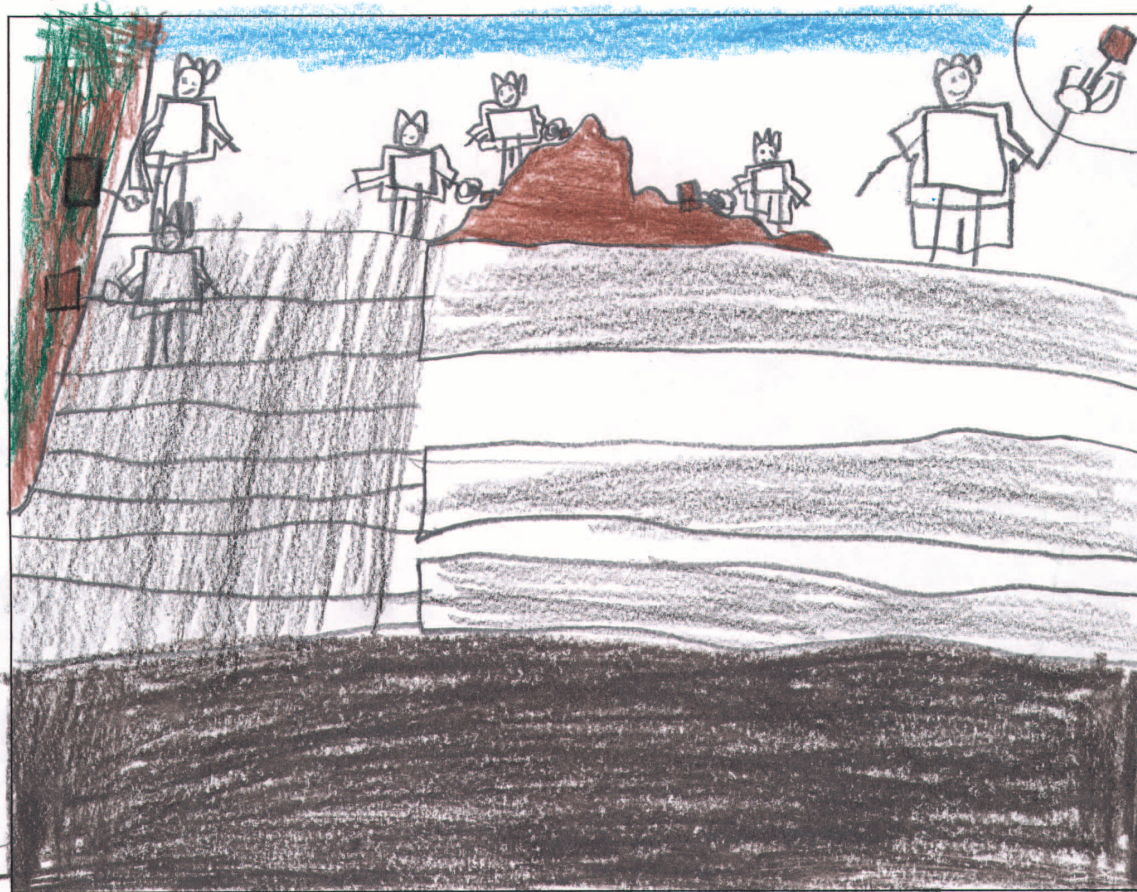

Tell me about what is happening in your picture.

At recess I play with the sk's we blid
really big Sownman it is really
fun.

Appendix 2

FACULTY QUESTIONNAIRE

Please reflect on your observations of Grade 2 & SK student interactions.

Which of the choices below most accurately describes most of your experience this winter with SK and Grade 2 students, when they are together:

___ **1.** Primarily playground duty.

___ **2.** Varied or other.

Respond to the following questions with a 1 being low and a 5 being high.

On average or overall

___ **1.** How would you rate the confidence of SK students in asking for help from teachers?

___ **2.** How would you rate the confidence of SK students in asking for help from other students?

___ **3.** What extent do SK students attempt to play with older students?

___ **4.** How well do SK students play with each other?

___ **5.** How well do SK students play with older students on the playground?

___ **6.** How well do SK students interpret social cues of older students?

___ **7.** How effective are SK students at resolving conflict?

___ **8.** Overall, how would you rate the comfort/confidence level of SK students on the playground?

___ **9.** How would you rate the confidence of Grade 2 students in asking for help from teachers?

___ **10.** How would you rate the confidence of Grade 2 students in asking for help from other students?

___ **11.** What extent do Grade 2 students attempt to play with younger students?

___ **12.** How well do Grade 2 students play with each other?

___ **13.** How well do Grade 2 students play with younger students on the playground?

___ **14.** How effective are Grade 2 students at tolerating behaviour of younger students?

___ **15.** How effective are Grade 2 students at resolving conflict?

___ **16.** Overall, how would you rate the comfort/confidence level of SK students on the playground?

___ **17.** Is there anything else you have observed in how SK, F1 and Grade 2 students relate either on the playground or anywhere else?

The Power of Peers:
The Impact of School Leaders Teaching Younger Boys to Resolve Conflicts Peacefully

JAN HANWAY STUART HALL FOR BOYS, SAN FRANCISCO, USA

Jan Hanway is a K–8 school counselor at Stuart Hall for Boys. Her focus is on addressing the social and emotional needs of the boys and also on assisting staff to be supportive of these needs.

Abstract

Any counselor or psychologist in an all-boys' school is keenly aware that boys' social interactions undergo a drastic change somewhere between the second half of third grade and the first half of fourth grade. The boys become concerned about their acceptance or lack of acceptance among their peers and compete to move up the ladder of the social hierarchy. Conflicts naturally increase due to this concern and competition. Sometimes popularity is obtained at the expense of the feelings of others. Because of this shift in social interactions, social skills lessons are often introduced in the third and fourth grades. The counselor or school psychologist is brought into the classroom for discussions about such topics as what makes a good friend, how to control anger and conflict resolution. The action research project discussed in this report looks at the impact of thirteen and fourteen-year-old boys who are school leaders teaching these social skills to younger boys.

Introduction

Two themes emerged from my survey of the relevant literature. The first is the success of peer tutoring programs. Research on the benefits of peer tutoring is extensive. The positive aspects are numerous: it benefits the tutor as well as the tutee; it is collaborative; it increases the building of community; it builds a sense of responsibility in the tutor; and it establishes a new culture in a school. "Peer tutoring enhances the following: a child's sense of fairness and self-esteem, his ability to be empathetic, the mastery of symbolic expression, his communication skills and the development of creative and critical thinking" (Kalkowski 1995).

The other theme in the literature is a call to action for more programs that develop the emotional intelligence (EQ) of students. "The term 'emotional intelligence' was first introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990)" (Ross, Powell and Elias 2002). They defined emotional intelligence as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and

actions" (ibid). Daniel Goleman popularized the concept of EQ in his 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ.*

Although the importance of developing these skills in elementary schools has been established, "the affective needs of children are not given adequate attention, even though they are a precondition to academic engagement" (Osterman 2000). "Children need a sense of stability and security in order to develop their fullest potential" (Vieno, Perkins, Smith and Santinello 2005; Garbarino 1995).

At Stuart Hall for Boys, we do attempt to address the affective needs of boys. The Peer Leader Program, established in the fall of 2007, is designed to have peer leaders mediate conflicts between middle school age boys. These seventh and eighth grade boys also put on assemblies where they research and discuss such topics as bullying, social isolation, exclusion, and the hurtfulness of name-calling.

In surveying the literature, I found only one article, *Helping youth become change agents in their schools* (Tiven 2008), that describes a program such as ours. The author concludes that these programs can have an effect on the student body at large. They can help shape the culture of the school, work on building community and promote character-building and social competence. I was unable to find any articles on peer leaders teaching social skills; however, I am aware of one such program and it was the inspiration for this action research project. The Fenn School in Connecticut uses peer mediators to teach fourth through eighth grade boys conflict resolution skills. It is my hope this action research project will add to the slim body of research that studies similar peer leadership programs

Research Context

Stuart Hall for Boys is an independent, single-sex, K-8 school in San Francisco, California. The age group studied in this research project is nine and ten-year-old boys currently in the fourth grade at Stuart Hall. This particular fourth grade is small, with only thirty-one boys compared to the usual forty boys per grade level. A fourth grade group was selected over a third grade one because the literature suggests that the "formation of cliques starts in the fourth grade. Five types of kids take hold in the fourth grade: popular kids, accepted kids, rejected kids, controversial kids and neglected kids" (Gault 2008). I decided that the project might therefore have more of an impact on this age group. The question asked in this research project is: *In what ways does a program teaching conflict resolution, taught by peer leaders, help younger boys respond to conflict in more positive ways?*

Data Collection

Five instruments were used to assess the impact of *The Peer Leaders Teaching Project,* the name I gave to the action research project. They were: pre-project and post-project interviews with the teachers, six parents and six fourth grade boys; a focus group; a questionnaire; observations; and journal entries. In the project design, the Counselor would teach Peer Leaders the curriculum that she had formerly taught. There would then be a total of four lessons taught to each class in the fourth grade. The boys would go into the classroom and teach in pairs.

A focus group of two lead teachers, their teaching assistant, the Headmaster, the Dean and five parents was used to help me characterize the fourth grade boys to be studied and to help define the

social dynamics of this particular group. According to the members of the focus group, this class has a social dynamic that makes conflict resolution difficult to achieve. "These boys have always liked to form clubs or groups," said one parent. "Administrators have squelched the clubs but they keep doing it." One of the teachers commented, "It is hard for this group to work as a team in class." Another said that, "these boys, as a whole, seem to react impulsively, without a lot of regard for the feelings of others." The two lead teachers have close to ten years teaching experience each.

The second instrument was a questionnaire called "Responses to Conflict" that all thirty-one students were asked to complete at the start of the *Peer Leaders Teaching Project.* They were asked to place a check mark by the responses they thought are most typically used by fourth graders when they are in a conflict. All thirty-one students also filled out the same questionnaire one week after the completion of the project.

The teachers and I recorded our observations of social interactions on the playground before, during and after the project. I observed the students during teacher-led discussions on similar topics discussed by the Peer Leaders as well as during the Peer Leader lessons.

Seventeen pre-project interviews and fifteen post-project interviews were conducted by the School Counselor, a Counseling Intern, and me. Six boys were randomly selected to be interviewed. The six parents interviewed were parents of each of the six boys selected. Finally, the two lead teachers and their teaching assistant were interviewed. The other two people interviewed pre-project were the Headmaster and the Dean. It was decided they would not be interviewed post-project because they do not have day-to-day interactions with the boys.

The final instrument used was the reading of the boys' journal entries. After each Peer Leader lesson, the students were asked by the teacher to write in their journal about the lesson.

Research Plan

The design of the study was created once I settled on an action research question. Because there are eight Peer Leaders, they were sent into the classrooms to teach in pairs: two pairs of seventh graders and two pairs of eighth graders. Thus, there were four lessons in total. Role-play was used in each lesson as a means of reinforcing the lesson.

The first pair of seventh grade Peer Leaders talked about name-calling and teasing. They read a book to the students by Max Lucado, *You Are Special,* that emphasizes the importance of healthy self-esteem. The seventh grade boys then taught strategies for handling teasing such as making a joke out of it, agreeing with the teaser, and questioning why the teaser cared so much to keep bringing it up.

The second pair of seventh grade Peer Leaders focused on conflict resolution and taught the concepts of "conflict escalator" and "anger thermometer". They then listed ways to calm down when angry.

The third lesson was taught by a pair of eighth grade Peer Leaders, one of whom is the student body president. They concentrated on taming your temper by understanding your "triggers" and knowing the warning signs of your anger coming on. They taught the three main responses to conflict: soft, hard and collaborative.

The final pair of eighth grade Peer Leaders taught the Conflict Resolution Formula and the concept of "I" messages. A fifth lesson, added midway through the project, had all eight Peer Leaders go into each classroom and review the material previously taught.

Response to the Lessons

During the teacher-led discussions on topics similar to those discussed by the Peer Leaders, attention began to wane around ten minutes into the discussion. In comparison, during the Peer Leaders' lessons, the boys were attentive, engaged and well-behaved throughout each thirty-minute lesson. While listening to *You Are Special,* the younger boys moved in close to the Peer Leaders, paid attention and even applauded the story.

During the second lesson, many of the boys shared examples of what they do to calm down. Again they paid attention and were engaged during the entire thirty minutes. The lesson conducted by the student body president and his eighth grade partner was particularly impressive. This pair instinctively knew how to speak the fourth graders' language and how to involve them in the lesson. The younger boys followed their direction and volunteered to write on the board; they even shared some personal feelings in front of their peers.

The final pair was also very dynamic. In reviewing the previous lesson, it was clear that the fourth graders had understood the material. In the second class taught by the final pair, one boy was reading a book and three boys were acting silly off to the side of the room. I attribute this to the fact that the lesson took place during the last period of the day. This was the only time during the ten lessons taught that inattentiveness was observed.

Discussion of Results

Two main discoveries came out of the project. First, peer leaders teaching younger boys is a positive strategy. The younger boys looked up to them; the lessons were fun; and they were deemed useful. The Peer Leaders spoke the younger boys' language and made the new social skills vocabulary "cool". Secondly, this project was a big step toward creating a new culture in the school. There was a shift from "adults only" emphasizing positive social interactions to boys promoting these new behaviors.

The journals confirmed what I had observed during the Peer Leader lessons. Out of a total of eighty-two journal entries made throughout the project, there were only two negative comments. The others used words like "fun" and "cool" to describe their experience. They thought the Peer Leaders did a good job and said it was helpful. The fourth graders seemed to like it more and more with each lesson. They stated that the older boys should come more often. A few even suggested they replace the regular teachers! More importantly, the boys appeared to understand the concepts taught by the Peer Leaders.

In summary, the journals indicated the success of the lessons for four main reasons: (i) their problems are not impossible to resolve because the older boys had been through it too and had survived; (ii) they felt the Peer Leaders were just like them, only a few years older; (iii) the Peer Leaders made it fun ("They knew what we would like"); and (iv) the fourth graders respected the older boys. (Appendix)

The interviews, observations and the journal entries were the instruments that yielded the most information. These three instruments indicated a shift in the ability of the fourth graders to resolve conflicts in a more positive manner more often than was the case before the project began.

The fourth instrument, the focus group, was not designed to measure change but rather to help define the problem. The other instrument, the "Responses to Change" questionnaire did not indicate a shift in a more positive direction. The responses to the questionnaire remained virtually the same. The response checked most often was, "raise your voice" (77%). This was followed by, "complain to another boy" and "tell an adult "(both at 54%). These results could be due to the fact that the questionnaire was given too soon after the completion of the project, or because it measured the boys' perceptions of what other boys do rather than asking them about their own responses.

In contrast, the boys' journal entries indicated a lot of change taking place. During the boys' final journal entries, twenty out of twenty-six students (five boys were absent or had not finished the assignment) reported they had tried using some of the strategies taught by the Peer Leaders. The strategies most often tried were the following: "I" messages, walking away from the conflict and counting backwards from 20 to calm down, and agreeing with or making a joke out of a teasing comment. One of the six boys who had not tried a strategy suggested that the other boys might laugh at him if he did.

Observations of social interactions on the playground showed marked improvement in how well the boys got along once the project was underway. In post-project interviews, the teachers noticed a shift from boys shouting at each other to using more "I feel" statements. One lead teacher said, "The number of conflicts has decreased and the ability to resolve conflict has increased." She felt that the most significant change was, "There is less tension after recess, which leads to a more positive classroom environment."

The six boys interviewed confirmed the teachers' observations. All six noticed a shift in the way the fourth graders were handling conflicts now. They said that there was less yelling and tattling, and that more boys were trying to talk things out and compromise. They also noticed fewer conflicts since the Peer Leaders came to their classrooms. One said, "It's going well! There are fewer fights." Three of the six stated they are hearing more "I" messages being used. Five of the six parents interviewed had noticed changes in the way their sons now handled conflicts. They reported that the boys were using at home what the Peer leaders had taught them at school. One father said his son had reported to him that the number of conflicts had gone "way down." Another parent said, "There is much less exclusion going on." All six parents felt the social dynamics of the fourth graders had improved. One mother said, "The Peer Leaders Project did the trick."

An unintended offshoot of the project was that it inspired the fourth grade boys to want to teach the younger kids what they had learned from the Peer Leaders. I decided to initiate a fourth grade version of the *Peer Leaders Teaching Program* called Junior Leaders. Six boys from this class are currently teaching kindergartners and first graders how to resolve conflicts.

Finally, to make the program more successful, I have learned that I need to get parents more involved. Next year, at each K–5 parent grade level meeting, I will teach the parents the strategies and the new vocabulary their boys are learning and using in school to resolve their differences. Secondly, to make it more successful, the Peer Leaders will go into the classrooms more often and

throughout the entire school year. In addition, we will listen to recommendations made by the focus group once the members have read this report.

Changing the culture of the school is a long-term, cumulative process. It is clear from the results of this research that we have laid down an important first building block.

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Appendix

JOURNAL ENTRIES FROM FOURTH GRADE BOYS

Visit #1, 10-24-07

"When the Peer Leaders came in today I realized how it hurt X when I called him a name."

"The Peer Leaders really help. It's also fun when they come in."

"They read a story that told us it does not matter what other people think about you. It just matters what you think of yourself."

Visit #2, 11-05-07

"I learned to handle my anger different."

"I learned how to handle my anger in better ways. I learned how to calm down. I learned how to solve problems peacefully and with respect."

"This was interesting because they listed a lot of things that are helpful for conflicts."

"I like how they presented."

Visit #3, 12-10-07

"Some of the strategies they told me worked out very good at home and at school."

"I think the Peer Leaders are as helpful as the teachers."

"I think the Peer Leaders should come in a lot more because they teach us a lot."

"I learned a lot of things from the Peer Leaders but most I learned how to count down from 20, take 3 deep breaths, and play sports when you are really angry."

"People have different spots (in their bodies) that tell you if you are getting mad."

"I think it is fun to be around the Peer Leaders because they know what to do, what to teach and how to do stuff."

"I like that the Peer Leaders come in every month. Just in general I'd like them to come in so it doesn't make us feel like the problem is impossible because they are closer to our age!"

"They give us strategies they have collected each year and they have actually been a kid before."

"I think they are fun to be around because they are just like us kids, boys, and are only a couple of grades over us."

"I like the ways these guys teach us because their not all serious and boring. They're humerus."

Visit #4, 1-29-08

"That sort of thing ("I" messages) could come in handy at recess."

"Today I learned how to use "I" messages. So now I can resolve conflicts."

"I think I'm going to be better because of what the Peer Leaders said."

"Note to self: follow anger calm down steps."

"An "I" message is saying stuff that is how you feel not telling the other person how he should feel."

"I think they did a wonderful job."

"I learned a lot today and I will remember these tips for the rest of my life."

"The Peer Leaders give way better advice now than they did in the beginning of the year. Now they talk more about useful things, like "I" messages and stuff."

Jan's Reflection

Although it was a lot of work on top of my regular job, I have nothing but positive things to say about my experience conducting an action research project. Looking back on it and seeing all I learned and gained from the experience, I highly recommend that the IBSC continue these yearly projects.

It was rewarding to come together with people in education from all over the world. Having to work cooperatively toward a common goal allowed me to know new people on a deeper level than would have been the case if I had just attended the conference. Because there is an umbrella question, participants work with people who have a similar specialty and care about the same issues. At the same time, each person brings his/her own perspective and his/her wealth of experience to the table.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of an action research project is the opportunity to get to know teachers, students and parents on a different level than I normally would, especially through the use of interviews and focus groups. The focus group was particularly useful. I was able to gather ideas about the problem and possible solutions from a variety of viewpoints. Administrators, teachers and parents came together to share their observations and suggestions.

I was energized about my work through the action research project process. It helped me establish goals for the future. The project and its results, I believe, will help me accomplish my goals in a more effective manner. The work of the peer leaders will have a more long-range, pervasive effect than the work I was doing alone. Finally the action research project will lend more credibility to the work because the ideas are now backed by research.

Peer Mentoring:
A Program for Guided Transition
from the Junior to Senior School

CATHERINE LAMONT TRINITY GRAMMAR SCHOOL, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Cathy Lamont is Assistant Head of Year 7 at Trinity Grammar School. As organiser of the school's Peer Support program for Year 7, Cathy is particularly interested in reflecting on and evaluating the involvement of Year 10 boys in the program and how it has an impact on boys' academic, social and emotional well-being.

Research Question

Can a guided transition program for primary students entering their first year of senior school assist with their learning?*

* In the Australian school context boys enter senior school at Year 7 and are around 12 to 13 years of age.

Introduction and Context

The introduction of peer support programs to ease the transition of students into senior school is not a new initiative as many variations of such programs are evident in numerous Australian schools. Educational institutions such as the *Peer Support Foundation* and the *Catholic Education Commission* have been established solely to support such programs by providing training for teachers and resource materials for schools. These well-established institutions exist on the basis that much research has already been undertaken. This supports the fact that peer support intervention has been successful in helping students bridge the difficult transition to the first year of senior school, as well as providing benefit for older senior school students who lead the program.

Given the substantial body of research already conducted in this area, my focus was to evaluate a peer support program which already existed in my school. The aim of my action research project was to tailor the existing transition program, its infrastructure and its desired outcomes, so that it might better meet the needs of boys in the 21st century.

To achieve this goal I undertook the following steps:

1. Critically reviewed the existing Peer Support Program established at Trinity in 1996

2. Analysed the changing demands placed on Year 7 boys and consequently their needs

3. Established new goals for the program and tested these out on our current Year 7 students

4. Surveyed students and teachers to establish if the program meets their needs for a successful transition into senior school

5. Consolidated the program so that the transition and induction of Year 7s into the senior school is firmly entrenched in the school calendar, timetable and operational procedures

6. Established resources and procedures that would enable any staff to oversee the program

7. Looked to the future and built into the new program a degree of flexibility which would enable further improvements

Procedures undertaken:

1. **The critical review stage of this research involved consultation with the primary stakeholders in this program:**

   ■ The Assistant Headmaster who oversees leadership training and programs

   ■ Year 10 boys (who are carefully selected by a panel) being trained as mentors. We have two mentors looking after five to seven Year 7 boys.

   ■ Year 7 boys who have experienced the peer support program as it existed in the school

   ■ Year 7 Form teachers and the Head of Year 7

   ■ Other staff at Trinity affected by disruptions to their classes

   The result of this intensive verbal investigation was as follows:

   ■ There was overwhelming support for the program from both staff and boys (see survey results in *Appendix 1)*.

   ■ Staff identified areas that need to be addressed by such a program.

   ■ Appropriate training and sustained feedback for the Year 10s who were assuming leadership roles was deemed to be inadequate in terms of time allocated and the type of training activities.

   ■ A stronger link between the Year 10 mentors and the Year 7 boys was needed in the school's House system.

   ■ The training resources, procedures and mentoring sessions needed to be embedded so that the staff running the peer mentoring program were not continually "reinventing the wheel".

   Action taken as a result of this investigation:

   ■ Training of the year 10 boys has been extended to two full days and one follow-up half day. These training sessions are conducted by Year 12 prefects who have themselves completed intensive leadership training.

   ■ Resources specific to this program have now been placed on the school's Intranet so that they are accessible at all times.

   ■ Year 10 mentors are now aligned with Year 7 boys who are in the same House and often in the same House family.

- Year 10 mentors now meet the Year 7 boys on Orientation Day (at the end of the year the prior to starting) and greet the Year 7s on their first day of the new school year.

2. **Time did not permit me to fully analyse the changing needs of Year 7 boys since 1996, when peer support was reintroduced. However, the following observations were made by Year 7 Form teachers and the Head of Year 7:**

- When the program started over ten years ago the emphasis was on building confidence amongst the Year 7 boys, fostering friendships and preventing anti-social behaviour. Current Year 7s often come to our school with a high degree of confidence, many having already participated in a peer support program.

- The most persistent concern expressed by Year 7 Form teachers was that present-day "bubble wrapped" Year 7s lack organisational skills and were easily overwhelmed and stressed by the increased demands of the Senior School.

- The demands of Trinity have grown over the years because of increased numbers of boys and staff, as well as an ever-expanding curriculum. In particular, the school calendar is crowded with numerous events. New students also have to cope with the reality that Trinity is a laptop school, and is heavily committed to Saturday sport. Geographically the school has acquired more buildings and hence greatly expanded the physical size of the school. We are situated at the junction of two busy roads which boys have to constantly cross at traffic lights.

- In the first few weeks of school, the Head of Year 7 and I as Deputy Head of Year 7 were often dealing with lost students, tearful students and students refusing to come to school.

- Early transition interviews with Year 7 parents raised many concerns about how their sons were not coping at school and were struggling to meet the school's expectations. Homework in particular was mentioned repeatedly.

Action taken as result of this investigation:

- The role of the peer support leader was changed to **peer mentor**, and a new direction was taken in defining what their role and responsibilities would be.

- Peer mentors would assume the role of "teacher" as well as friend and guide for the Year 7 boys through a series of mentoring sessions which would cover areas deemed essential for their survival during those first frantic and bewildering weeks in senior school. These sessions included: finding classrooms, deciphering teacher and subject codes, finding their way around our school, managing school diaries, learning how to organise computer files, taking care of lockers and learning how to work lock codes. Not forgetting of course that through these sessions peer mentors were able to deal with issues new students might have, and to alert the teachers about cases of bullying or other major problems.

- Peer mentors would meet with Year 7 boys once a week throughout Term 1 and then throughout the year as deemed necessary, or simply for social or sporting events.

- Homework Club was established on Monday at the end of the school day, giving the Year 10 Mentors an added opportunity to help Year 7 boys with the management of their homework. It was also another opportunity to deal with any concerns the Year 7s might have.

The new goals set out in this change of approach to an existing program also conveniently went hand-in-hand with an added dimension. Year 7 boys were traditionally inducted into our school through a special ceremony in the first couple of weeks of school. Many boys going to this ceremony were clearly not familiar with the senior staff or with the school's illustrious history and traditions. This observation gave rise to another opportunity for the peer mentors.

Action taken as a result of this observation:

- Peer mentors now take the Year 7 boys through a guided tour of the school and highlight all the important people, events, motto, history and traditions. To coincide with the Induction ceremony, the mentors test the knowledge of the Year 7 boys at the end of these sessions.

- The Induction ceremony now takes place after five weeks of school, giving the boys sufficient time to appreciate the significance of the ceremony. Peer mentors act as ushers and waiters at this event.

Survey Results

Evidence collected through surveys support the conclusion that the change in the emphasis of the program, while not meeting all of its desired outcomes, has certainly provided some initiatives which are supported by staff and students alike. Surveys revealed:

- Fewer numbers of distressed students recorded.

- No school avoiders noted this year.

- Fewer concerns directed to the Head of Year particularly in relation to homework.

- At the end of this semester every student has achieved a satisfactory pass rate. This was certainly a change from previous years.

- The Form teachers were very appreciative of help given by mentors on Orientation day and the Year 7s first day of the school year. Many commented on how these days went more smoothly than in the past.

- Parents who had older boys at the school commented on how their current Year 7 son had settled in faster and was more positive about coming to school.

- Year 7 boys enjoyed their mentoring sessions and mixed with ease with senior boys at our school. They often commented on how great it was that these older boys would talk to them and play games with them.

Implications for Future Practice

As with any program, time to adequately resource, organise, supervise and evaluate is scarce in a busy school. To help maintain the momentum, I am currently seeking out a couple of Year 10 boys who will create resources around which we can build a solid set of peer mentoring activities. One of the hurdles with boys in particular is that they often rush through activities and are keen to get to the "play" part of the session. A portfolio of good resources will not only help the mentors plan their activities; it will hopefully bring about some degree of uniformity across various groups.

Flexibility has to be built into the program so that new issues can be addressed quickly. The mentoring sessions must cater for the needs of Year 7 boys while at the same time be a rewarding experience for Year 10 boys who may be taking on their first leadership role.

Continuity of this program can only be ensured if it is embedded in the culture of the school. To date Trinity has given wonderful support as it promotes itself as a school giving boys many leadership opportunities throughout their school years. I have found no shortage of applicants when I call for mentor applications as many boys have happy memories of peer leaders who guided them when they started at Trinity. Throughout the school we have numerous activities which involve older boys mentoring younger ones.

A desired outcome still to happen is to give official recognition to the mentoring program by permanently timetabling mentoring sessions for the duration of Term 1. Currently I arrange the session times and in so doing the boys involved miss a timetabled lesson.

Conclusion

To answer unreservedly the question, "Can a guided transition program for primary students entering their first year of senior school assist with their learning?", I would need to monitor these current Year 7 boys throughout the next five years and try to measure whether their academic results are better than those of students from previous years.

While I cannot prove emphatically that a guided transition program does assist with boys' learning, I can say that research will support my claim that boys who are happy and positive about themselves and school will enjoy success – whether in the classroom, on the football field or in the playground. I believe our current Year 7s have settled in very well because we have lightened some of their stress in adjusting to senior school by providing them with a mentor...an older boy who "knows the ropes".

"The habits and practices of encouragement are easily learnt."

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Appendix 1

YEAR 7 SURVEY RESULTS 2007

(Vertical scale = number of students)

How useful were the Mentors in giving you advice about the school?
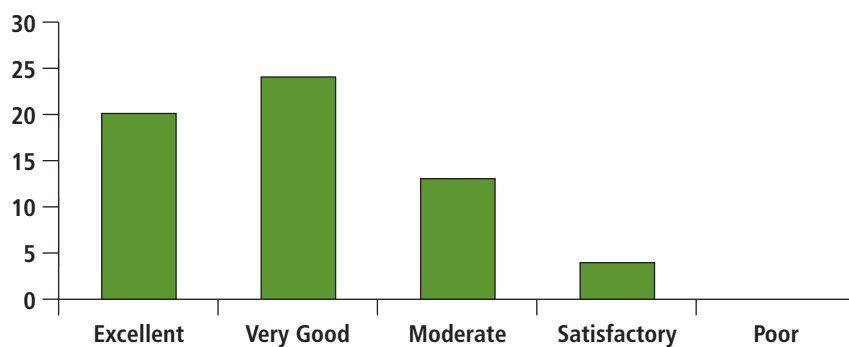
How useful were the mentoring sessions in helping you adjust to the expectations of Senior School in terms of behaviour?
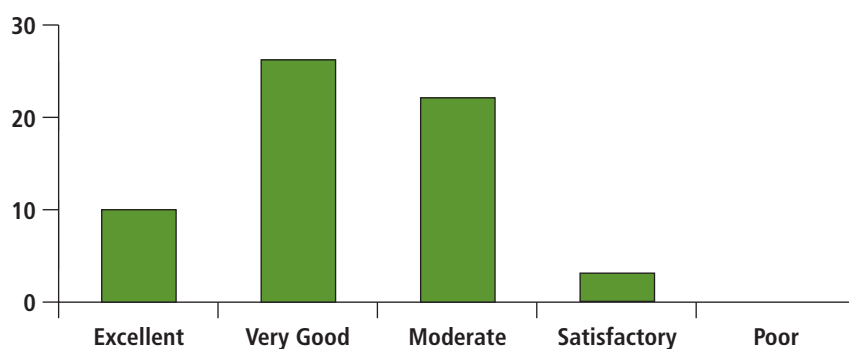
How useful were the mentoring sessions in terms of you being welcomed into the Senior School?
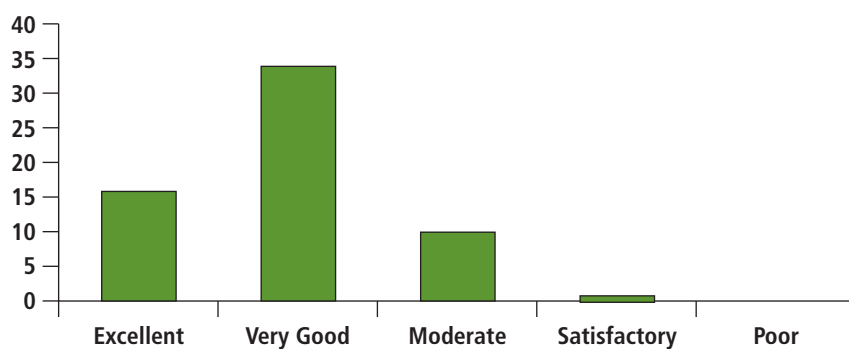
How useful were the mentoring sessions in helping you get organised with your locker/diary/sports equipment?
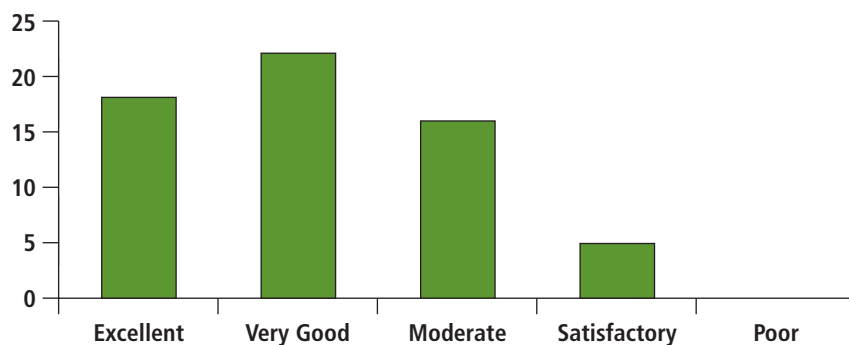
How useful were the mentoring sessions in terms of meaningful help such as showing you around the school?
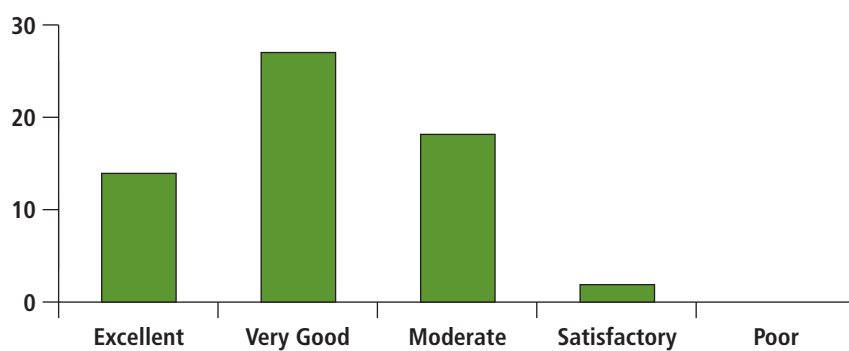
How useful were the Mentors in getting you involved in House activities and other school related activities?
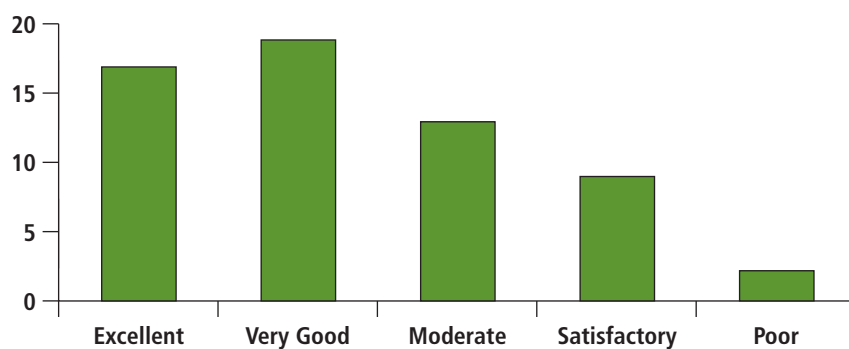
Did the mentoring sessions provide me with opportunities to raise concerns I might have about teachers/other students/bullying?
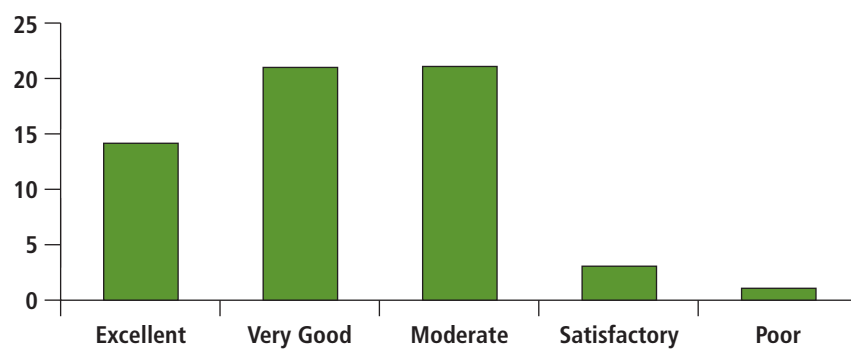
Did the Mentors act in a responsible way?
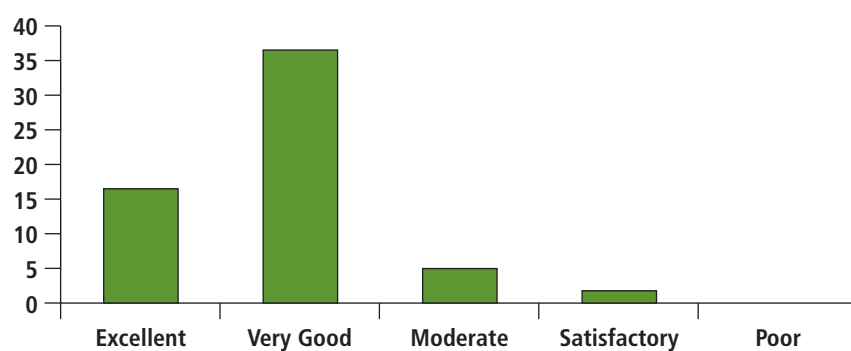
Cathy's Reflection

When initially confronted with the reality of the challenge for which I had happily volunteered, I was daunted by the task of completing a research action project. I doubted my ability to accommodate in my busy school schedule the research necessary to review and upgrade a well established program at my school.

These doubts were quickly allayed when I met my research team in Boston and Di Laycock, our leader. I soon came to grasp the fundamental principles of what an action research project involved. Once I appreciated that this was a "work in progress" I felt more comfortable about embarking on this project.

Upon my return to Trinity I set about identifying the steps I would need to undertake to address the aim of my project, which was to see if a "guided transition program from a junior school into a senior school would assist boys with their learning."

The real benefit of undertaking this project then became apparent. To be able to evaluate, reflect and discuss with fellow staff members a well-established program was immeasurably refreshing, challenging and rewarding. To open oneself up to other colleagues opens doors to new ideas and new directions. From these stimulating discussions I was able to establish new goals and outcomes for the peer mentoring program. While I may not have achieved all these goals, the benefits of the changes that were made were certainly identifiable.

Reading professional material with a focus was also invigorating and I had wonderful support in this area from our Library staff.

To achieve the outcomes I set had down, I relied on the support of a number of key staff members and students. We all felt empowered by this collaborative effort and I am very much indebted to these people. It certainly has led to a stronger sense of community and common purpose.

Finally, I would highly recommend that professionals undertake an action research project as my experience proved yet again that it is the lessons you learn on "the journey" that are most rewarding. Life is "a work in progress" and to take time out to reflect, review and instigate change was indeed a privilege. I will now continue this practice of "revisiting" different areas of my professional life.

Taking Bullying Out of the Classroom

MARGOT LONG ST JOHN'S PREPARATORY SCHOOL, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

Margot Long is Deputy Headmistress at St John's Preparatory School. She teaches English, History and Life Orientation. Margot's interest lies in the development of a formalized 'Boys in Need' program to assist boys with problems ranging from handwriting, organisational skills and reading difficulties, to concentration issues, and social and emotional problems. She has published several readers and textbooks to support the English curriculum.

Introduction

Bullying in schools is not a new phenomenon—and finding workable, lasting solutions to the problem is not an easy task. However, the consequences of bullying, both for bully and bullied, are too great to be ignored. Many schools are making a concerted effort to address the issue and have set up codes of conduct and disciplinary procedures to deal with incidents that may occur. Nevertheless, bullying at schools persists as an ongoing problem.

For the purposes of this paper, bullying is defined as a deliberate action by a student or group of students who set out to upset another student, again and again. It may include name-calling, teasing, threats, hurting physically, intimidation, extortion, damaging property and belongings, spreading horrible rumours and stories, and deliberate exclusion from games and activities.

A possible reason for the continuing problem, suggests Sue Redelinghuys, "is that bullying is endemic in any society where people compete for recognition and resources… and although schools have cracked down on the more obvious manifestations of bullying—the physical fisticuffs, and verbal name calling—so the bullying has become more subtle, less public, more difficult to control and more devastating in its effects" (2007, p. 70).

Findings from the IQAA *(Independent Quality Assurance Association)* evaluation, administered at St John's Preparatory School in 2007 and revealed by questionnaires completed by boys, parents and teachers, showed that bullying is a problem in the school. To address this issue, an action research project was undertaken to establish: *How can the inclusion of an intensive program on bullying improve boys' understanding of the problem and reduce incidences of bullying?*

The aim of this project was to raise awareness about the problem of bullying in the classroom and in the school; to teach better ways of dealing with conflict and issues of self-esteem; and to improve the learning experience for boys who would benefit from working in a safe, encouraging and supportive environment.

The Literature Review

The literature review was used mainly to compare findings and statistics regarding bullying in schools and to examine different types of approaches that have been implemented successfully in schools.

The statistics were of interest. In the UK, a national bullying survey (Carnell 2006) revealed that many children were suffering at the hands of classroom bullies. Of the 4772 pupils who completed this survey, 69% complained that they had been bullied. In our research group at St John's, this figure correlated with the boys' classroom questionnaire response: of the seventy-eight boys participating in our survey, 63% said they had been bullied in some way during the course of the current school term.

An examination of the literature indicated that successfully implemented programs had the following components in common:

■ **A clear definition of bullying and a no-bullying policy**

To combat bullying, schools need to create a safe, positive environment through a clear no-bullying policy. This policy should provide for "an integrated and positive response to bullying" (Krige 2000, p.18). It should also outline clear consequences for inappropriate behaviour and for "failing to comply with the standards set out in the policy" (ibid, p.19). The policy should be widely communicated to parents, teachers and pupils.

■ **Reporting strategies**

Reporting strategies must be in place. Mosley (2006, p.25) stresses the importance of "treating reports of bullying seriously and making your follow-up and feedback clear." Appropriate response is critical to a child's confidence that there will be a change for the better.

■ **Help for bullies and for victims**

Beane (1999, pp.77–112 and pp.115–143) outlines the importance of helping both bully and victim by teaching them the necessary social skills to manage difficult situations. Both parties need help if the problem is to be addressed effectively and with lasting consequences.

■ **Involvement of all parties when addressing the problem**

Addressing bullying behaviour requires the involvement of parents, teachers, peers and the school psychologist. An *ACER (Australian Council for Educational Research)* program stresses the importance of "training all school staff to identify signs of bullying… to recognize the severity and nature of bullying incidents, and to be trained in problem-solving methods and restorative practices." Potterton (2006, p.11) recognizes that bullying does happen, "but that if you change the climate or atmosphere of a school you can reduce the amount of bullying." Krige (2000, p.18) also stresses the importance of implementing a whole-school no-bullying policy: "A whole-school approach implies an integrated, systematic, proactive and preventative approach confronting bullying on an ongoing basis." Lindsay Gilbert, head of *ChildLine in Partnership with Schools (CHIPS)* in the UK, also focuses on the importance of the role of teachers in eradicating bullying in schools. "The most effective strategies are those that keep bullying on the agenda the whole time and don't just confine efforts to one-off initiatives. Children need to be taught about bullying and actively to build skills, a knowledge base and empathy. Teachers need to make time in lessons, and there should be clear processes in class for dealing with it" (Westcott 2007, p. 14).

Background to the Project

In 2007 detailed questionnaires were completed by parents, boys and teachers of the Prep School as part of the *IQAA (Independent Quality Assurance Association)* inspection. Responses were received from 355 boys, 344 families and thirty staff members, indicating a very high level of participation. 24% of parents felt that their sons were bullied, and 29% of boys and 30% of teachers agreed.

Focus groups were held to discuss the problem of bullying. Discussion included the need for a more extensive policy on bullying, the consequences for failing to comply with the standards set in the policy, and the procedures parents and boys need to follow when reporting incidents. Boys and parents needed to be encouraged to report bullying incidents immediately.

Some boys felt that bullying was of a more subtle, emotional nature rather than physical. This includes "dissing" which often leads to physical fights. It generally takes place away from teacher supervision. Boys were scared of "telling on" as it may lead to further bullying. Some parents were equally reluctant to report the problem—and so the problem intensifies.

Most of the parents said that once reported, bullying was stopped immediately. The response from the school was generally timely and well-handled, and teachers were very approachable. However, one parent felt that very little was done about the bullying incidents she had reported.

The point was made that some boys may spend too much time "annihilating the enemy" on play stations rather than developing appropriate social skills needed in everyday social interactions. It was also suggested that in some cases, parents of this generation tend to be very protective, and act before the child is able to sort out a problem or learn how to cope with conflict. It was at this point that the action research project focusing on *Taking bullying out of the classroom* was implemented.

The Research Approach

An action research approach was used as this model favours investigation and research in the school context: "It is conducted by teachers and for teachers. It is small scale, contextualized, localized, and aimed at discovering, developing, or monitoring changes to practice" (Wallace 2000).

The Research Sample

The research was conducted at St John's Preparatory School, an independent boys' school in Johannesburg, with a student population of 380 boys. Ages range from nine years to thirteen years on average, although for the purposes of this research project, the target group was seventy-eight Grade 5 boys (10–11 years of age). The three classes in this grade were all of equally mixed academic ability.

Grade 5 was chosen based on findings that it was in this grade that the most incidents of bullying are reported, with fewer incidents reported in the next two year groups. Interestingly, Norfleet James (2007, p.127) also emphasises that more children are likely to be bullied in the middle school years: 13.0% of sixth graders reported being bullied in school, compared with 6.7% of ninth graders. The same study noted that boys were far more likely to be bullied than girls, because boys are more likely to be involved in fights.

All the boys in the year group were included in the program to avoid disadvantaging one class over another, and to give the project a meaningful context in the Life Orientation program for the year.

Data Collection

Qualitative and quantitative feedback was obtained from parents, boys, the three class teachers and the school psychologist in the form of interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, reports and video footage.

Interviews were conducted with the school psychologist and the three class teachers before and after the program. Input was also obtained from the Deputy Principal in charge of pastoral care. Video footage of interviews conducted with boys the term after the conclusion of the program and now in Grade 6 was also used to determine longer term results.

With the help of the school psychologist, class teachers and Beane's guidelines (1999, p.17) a detailed questionnaire (Appendix 1) was completed by seventy-five of the Grade 5 boys to establish a foundation for discussion and to clarify their level of understanding of the issues around bullying. The questionnaire allowed for both qualitative responses, in written paragraphs describing incidents and feelings, as well as quantitative responses in the form of True/False questions. In hindsight, there should also have been a "middle" category as some boys felt the need to reply "Both" or "Sometimes" to some of the questions.

Extended written answers to questions covered areas such as "Describe a time when someone's words or behaviour hurt you" and "Describe a time when you saw/heard bullying but didn't do anything about it." The information extracted from these questionnaires formed the basis of the discussion in the next session.

Results

In the questionnaire, the kind of behaviours included in boys' extended written responses in defining and describing bullying incidents included name calling using references to weight and appearance such as "fat boy" and "ugly"; references to academic ability and intelligence such as "idiot" and "moron"; insulting sporting abilities, insulting mothers and calling one another "gay"; "dissing"; pushing, punching, and kicking in corridors; spreading malicious rumours; and ganging up on one other and excluding individuals from certain groups.

Many of the respondents admitted to having witnessed some sort of bullying behaviour or to having been the bully or been bullied at some point in the term. This information was used as the basis for the next lesson in the program where boys were given sheets of red paper to express how they felt when bullied; how they felt when they bullied someone; and how they felt when they ignored a bullying incident. In almost all cases, responses showed distress for each of these situations. As the photographs below indicate, most boys crumpled up or tore their paper, and explained that they felt equally bad about each question, and that bullying affects the bully, the victim and bystanders negatively.

How do I feel when I bully someone?

How do I feel when I'm bullied?

How do I feel when I see someone being bullied and I don't do anything?

In the next session, each class was divided into smaller groups to enable open discussion. Suggestions were put forward as to how to stop bullying, both for bullies and for victims. A chair was allocated to "bullying" in this session as it formed part of the classroom while incidents were occurring.

Bullying is a part of our class

In response to the question, "Bullying is a part of our class: how do we get rid of it?", suggestions included: supporting each other; accepting differences and helping boys who are going through a hard time; stopping name calling and teasing; doing planned activities that encourage interaction with one another; building up self-confidence; learning to apologise for bad behaviour; standing up to the bully or telling the teacher or parents; introducing hard labour/suspension/detentions as consequences for bullying; and having more teachers on duty at break time.

Strategies for getting rid of "bullying" were then discussed and "strengthening" activities undertaken. These included how to report incidents, building inner strength to combat being bullied, and exercising self-control to avoid hurting others.

The final session of the program included a more formal address by the Deputy Head in Charge of Discipline outlining the school's new policy on bullying, ways of reporting incidents, and consequences for boys who continued to be involved in incidents.

A detailed report of this program was sent home to parents and feedback received via email. Interviews were also conducted with class teachers to assess the effectiveness of the program.

Findings

Interestingly, there was an initial sharp increase in the number of reported incidents. This was attributed to the fact that boys were feeling more confident about getting help, although there was clearly an overreaction from some boys too. A further session was needed to stress that not every incident of boisterous interaction could be construed as bullying and to re-define what constitutes bullying.

Feedback from interviews with the three staff members involved provided very useful information. Timing of the course was crucial, and it needed to be put in place earlier in the year to avoid the high level of bullying reached by the final term. The usefulness of each session was analysed and suggestions put in place for follow-up in the next year group. Staff felt their skills for dealing with bullying in their own classrooms had definitely improved.

The course was well received by boys, parents and teachers and it needs to form a permanent part of the Grade 5 Life Orientation program.

Follow-up interviews with the Grade 6 boys revealed that although the program was effective, we also need to teach a further component in the Grade 6 year so that boys understand that this is not a temporary approach to the problem but represents the whole school's attitude. The format of this program is yet to be decided.

Implications for Teaching Practice

It became clear that we needed a staff development program to assist all our staff in dealing with bullying. *A Teacher's Handbook* (Appendix 2) was drawn up giving clear guidelines as to how to respond when bullying is reported; classroom strategies to create the right environment; how to help the bully and how to help the victim; and how to teach conflict resolution skills. This handbook will form the basis of the staff development program planned for this term and will be included in the school's pastoral care program. As reiterated by Potterton (2006, p.11) "The whole school approach recognizes that bullying in schools does happen, but that if you change the climate of atmosphere of a school you can reduce the amount of bullying at the school."

Mosley (2006) stresses the importance of "reviewing your procedures and attitudes regularly to maintain standards necessary for success" and clearly this is needed in terms of the school's approach to bullying. Further review and refinement of the program will present an ongoing challenge and introduce further changes. Clearly then, "accepting change as crucial to remaining an effective teacher" is an important lesson learned through the action research project (McMillan 2006, p. 15).

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Appendix 1

BULLYING QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESULTS

		True	False
1.	Bullying is just teasing.	5 (7%)	68 (93%)
2.	Some people deserve to be bullied.	5 (9%)	67 (91%)
3.	People who complain about bullies are babies.	6 (10%)	66 (90%)
4.	Bullying is a normal part of growing up.	54 (73%)	18 (27%)
5.	Bullies will go away if you ignore them. (6 responses included both options)	53 (73%)	22 (17%)
6.	It's telling tales to tell an adult when you're being bullied. (5 responses included both options)	12 (13%)	64 (87%)
7.	The best way to deal with a bully is by getting even.	6 (11%)	65 (89%)
8.	People who are bullied might hurt for a while, but they'll get over it. (7 responses included both options)	44 (60%)	25 (40%)
9.	I've been bullied at school during the last week.	24 (25%)	48 (65%)
10.	I've been bullied at school this term.	46 (63%)	27 (37%)
11.	I've bullied someone in my class this week.	21 (31%)	51 (69%)
12.	I've bullied someone in my class this term.	42 (58%)	29 (42%)

Appendix 2

TAKING BULLYING OUT OF THE CLASSROOM: A TEACHERS' HANDBOOK
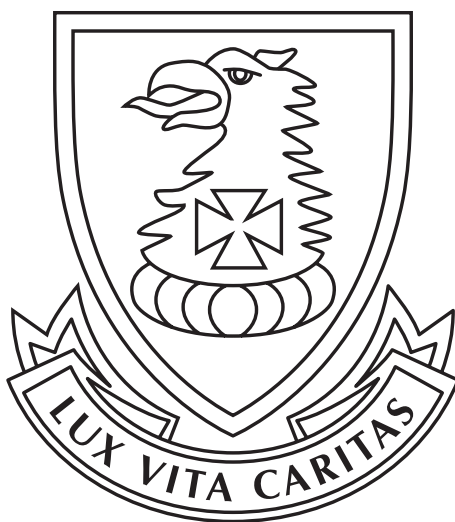
Taking Bullying Out of the Classroom: A Teachers' Handbook

Taking Bullying Out of the Classroom

Bullying is an ongoing problem in schools. Because boys spend much of their time in school, that is where a lot of bullying takes place—usually out of teachers' sight and hearing. Bullying behaviour is not something that just goes away when punishment is meted out—it needs to be unlearned and more appropriate social skills put in place. Boys who exhibit bullying behaviour need to learn better ways of relating to others; and victims of bullying need to learn how to develop their own resilience and skills to avoid being bullied by others.

Bullying is not condoned at St John's in any form. All our boys have the right to feel safe, secure, accepted and valued at school—free from "dissing", insults, violence and all other forms of harassment or intimidation.

The Preparatory School has a clear policy on bullying (found at the end of this document) and teachers should ensure that the boys in their class are familiar with it and have a clear understanding of the consequences of bullying behaviour.

This guide has been created as part of the **Boys in Need Programme,** with exhaustive input and help from Lindsay Lamont, to give teachers the skills to address bullying incidents in their classrooms and equip boys with the necessary skills to change their behaviour.

Other sources used extensively in compiling this guide:

*   *Help! I'm being bullied!* Dr. Emily Lovegrove

*   *A different kind of teacher* Tony Humphreys

*   *The bully free classroom* Allan Beane

*   *Helping children deal with bullying* Jenny Mosley and Helen Sonnet

These titles are all available from the Prep School Library.

Reporting a Bullying Incident

The boy's first action in reporting an incident should be to approach his class teacher or his housemaster. In extreme cases, particularly when there is direct physical bullying, the matter may be dealt with by the Second Master.

Appropriate teacher response is critical if we are to encourage reporting of bullying incidents

*   Allocate **10 minutes** to sit down with the boy and address the incident properly, one on one. If this takes the form of a hurried exchange during break or before class, there is no real opportunity for the boy to express his feelings adequately.

*   Allow ample opportunity for him to tell **his side of the story** without judgment. It is important to see the incident from the boy's point of view so that he feels you have understood and heard what he is saying. Recognize the emotion the boy is experiencing, even if you feel that the incident is trivial.

*   Explain clearly how you're going to **follow up** on the incident to help resolve the issue. In almost all cases, this will involve getting the bully in and giving him the same opportunity

to say what happened. When the first interview includes both boys together, the victim finds it hard to say what is really going on. The boys can be brought in together as part of the follow up.

- The boys must **apologise** to one another and work through the incident with a sense of understanding. Use cues like, "When we say hurtful things, boys can feel sad or hurt. When you said … how do you think it made John feel?"

- It is not effective just to punish the offender or get him into trouble—both boys need to **learn from the experience.** Try to separate content: the bully may be punished for what he did; but he also needs process level input which explains why what he did was wrong in order to amend this behaviour.

- Try not to shout or be overly judgmental. This can result in the bully threatening the victim and escalating the problem. **Appropriate punishment** should be meted out for a first offence. Make a note of the incident and notify the class teacher or housemaster. If a pattern develops, it needs further investigation and may be referred to the Pastoral Care Team and the School Psychologist. Parents may also need to be involved at this point.

Strategies for the Classroom

It's important for the teacher to **model good social skills** in the classroom. Be honest and open with your class—apologise if you have made a mistake or are having a bad day. By normalizing these experiences, we teach them how to help one another feel better. Boys are also very perceptive. They know when a boy is the "teacher's pet" or when a teacher dislikes a boy or doubts his ability. Allan Beane *(The Bully Free Classroom)* has this advice (and a good deal more) about monitoring the messages you send:

1. Greet each boy by name as he enters the classroom. Let him know that you are interested in him and care about him—through your words, body language and actions.

2. Make frequent eye contact with every boy, and make sure that you call on boys equally rather than favouring some. Even though some boys can be more "likeable" than others, make sure they don't become "teacher's pets". If a boy requires special treatment for any reason, make sure the rest of the class understands why.

3. Plan your lessons so that boys can show their strengths rather than their weaknesses. For example, don't set up a poor reader to read aloud; or someone who struggles with Maths to do the problem on the board.

4. Where possible, individualise your teaching strategies and assignments to increase the chances that your boys will succeed.

5. Write positive comments, notes and reports where possible. When a negative comment is unavoidable, try to separate the boy from the behaviour: "I'm disappointed that your Maths homework wasn't finished. What can we do to keep this from happening again?"

6. Examine your own prejudices about things like gender, ethnicity, race, cultural background, intelligence, religion and ability. Do they affect your teaching? Make a deliberate focused effort to check your prejudices, unlearn them and get beyond them.

It's also important for the teacher to have a high self-esteem. Tony Humphreys (A different kind of teacher) stresses again and again that the teacher with high self-esteem produces students with high self-esteem, and that sadly the converse is also true.

How to Help the Bully

- When a boy is bullying others, there are usually **emotional issues** underlying his behaviour. He may be feeling insecure or threatened, or he may be experiencing difficulties at home or in another setting. Sometimes he himself is being bullied by siblings or other adults and he doesn't know other ways to behave. Talking to him or consulting other staff members or parents may help identify the problem.

- Help him notice his behaviour and make him aware of how the other boys perceive his behaviour, in a non-judgmental way. Externalizing the concept of bullying sometimes makes it easier to address, for example calling it **"the bullying behaviour"** rather than "you".

- Try to find opportunities where he is not being a bully, for example, when he is being kind to someone or someone has done something nice for him. **Focus on the positive feelings** arising from this to reinforce positive behaviour.

- **Involve his parents** to help this process. Help them to focus on positive behaviour while also being aware of bullying behaviour. Rather than just punishing him, we need to help him build his social skills.

- Facilitate specific, structured activities like group work where you put him with boys who are better able to interact appropriately with him and can help him **learn the necessary skills** to make positive relationships possible.

- Set clear **boundaries and consequences** for inappropriate actions. For example, say: "If the bullying happens again, you will have to go to detention because it's not okay to hurt people." The consequences should include more than simply saying sorry—the boy should also make amends for his behaviour, e.g. by replacing something he has damaged or by making a positive comment where a negative one has been made.

- **Keep calm** when dealing with a bully. Shouting and threatening may suppress his current behaviour, but it doesn't model positive ways to act. If he does not understand the issues around the incident and why he needs to do things differently, he may simply become angrier, focus on revenge, and continue in the low self-esteem spiral.

How to Help the Victim

- Identify the **extent** to which the boy is being bullied. Is it a valid incident or is it his perception of the situation? Both situations still require a serious and considered response.

- Identify the **times** when bullying is taking place. Often bullying takes place at break or during unstructured activities, away from teacher supervision. Encourage the boy to plan ahead for those times. Where will he go at break? Who will he play with? You might ask the teacher on playground duty to keep an eye on him for a period of time.

- Work through **possible outcomes** to a bullying incident with the boy. What would he like to see happen eventually? In most cases, he will want to stay friends with or at least be on good terms with the bully even though he may have been unkind. This makes a significant difference to the way in which a problem will be resolved.

- Help the boy identify the skills needed to achieve this desired outcome: Teach him to work at developing **assertiveness skills.** This can include helping him work on his body language and learning how to look assertive: e.g. stand up straight, head up, shoulders

straight, look people in the eye, don't back off when you're talking to someone, speak confidently rather than mumbling or whining, and so on.

- Teach **conflict resolution skills** in your classroom. Conflict is normal and inevitable and not all conflict is harmful or bad. Boys should also realize that conflict doesn't have to end a relationship—people can get along even when they disagree.

Allan Beane *(The Bully Free Classroom)* suggests these eight steps to conflict resolution:

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1. **Cool down.** Don't try to resolve a conflict when you're angry. Take time out and arrange to meet again.

2. **Describe the conflict.** Each person should tell about it in his own words. No put downs allowed! Although each boy may have a different view of the conflict, neither account is "right" or "wrong".

3. **Describe what caused the conflict.** What events led up to it? What happened to turn it into a conflict?

4. **Describe the feelings raised by the conflict.** Honest is important. No blaming allowed!

5. **Listen carefully and respectfully while the other person is talking.** Try to understand his point of view. Don't interrupt.

6. **Brainstorm solutions to the conflict.** All ideas are okay. Affirm each other's ideas. Make a list and then choose one solution to try. Be willing to negotiate and compromise.

7. **Try your solution.** See how it works. Be Patient!

8. **If one solution doesn't get results, try another.** Keep trying!

- Promote **effective group work** in your classroom and spend time discussing ways of interacting positively with one another in a group situation. Allocating specific roles, appointing a group leader or a conflict manager, teaching them that each group member should have a turn at speaking, and discussing how to respond to others in the group, are all useful ways of doing this. Make group work an assessed part of a project to underline how seriously you take it.

- Encourage **random acts of kindness** in your classroom to help create a more positive environment.

- **Affirm yours boys** regularly. Everyone enjoys a compliment—and boys especially enjoy knowing that their teacher thinks well of them. Your comments should be brief, honest, sincere, simple, and specific.

- **Teach boys to affirm each other,** especially when they do well at things. It's so easy for boys to "diss" each other rather than saying "well done"—but this can be a powerful way to learn to appreciate each other's positive qualities.

- The boy should be **referred to the School Psychologist** only when there is a serious problem or a real self-esteem issue. It's important for the boy to develop his own resilience independently in the classroom context.

Margot's Reflection

This is the perfect time to write a short report about the Action Research process: the paper is written and my presentation is polished, so I am feeling very thrilled about everything and relieved that the major stress is over!

I have found the whole action research project the most revitalizing and exciting experience. When I applied I held out little hope that I would secure a place on an international team—and when I heard that I had been accepted, I was beside myself for days!

Attending the 2007 International Boys' Schools Coalition Conference in Boston was a privilege. The talks alone were thought-provoking and inspirational—but meeting and making so many friends and contacts was probably the most valuable part of the Conference. The Action Research Team's first meeting was a little daunting and I remember wondering how on earth we would ever find common ground across four countries with such different age groups, school settings and needs. However, with the committed and positive guidance of Di Laycock, we reworked the topic carefully and each team member came away with a worthwhile project to pursue.

For my own part, the research project has proved invaluable at St John's Preparatory School. Bullying had been a major focus during our IQAA evaluation earlier in the year and this provided an ideal opportunity for me to implement changes to our Life Orientation program and observe the results as part of my Action Research project. The process has grown considerably since then, ranging across year groups and most importantly, forming part of our staff development program.

The success of the process has also been inspirational to other colleagues, and we hope to encourage several teachers to undertake smaller action research projects of their own and to present them to our staff as part of a program encouraging growth and change.

The process has not been without difficulties. Communication, in spite of Di's consistent efforts to get us all to talk regularly, was challenging. I think we all get so wrapped up in our own projects that it's hard to factor in all the other participants all the time. School calendar differences and time zones have also not helped this process. At times, I wondered too whether my research was worthwhile enough to share with everyone else in open forum! Finding time to develop what is now quite an extensive program and to write the report, over and above my own teaching load and duties, also proved challenging. Much midnight oil was burned in the process!

However, I have found this to be the most worthwhile process and I am deeply grateful to the IBSC for allowing me to participate. Thanks must also go to Di Laycock without whose guidance and enthusiasm I am sure I would have given up! I have no doubt that the conference in Toronto will be a thrilling experience: more sharing of ideas, more friends to make and hopefully many more plans to be laid!

Drama for Boys:
Its Role in Social and Emotional Growth

SHEREE NORTH STERLING HALL SCHOOL FOR BOYS, TORONTO, CANADA

Sheree North's 20+ years teaching career includes experience in the primary classroom, special education, and French. She has an M.A. in English from the University of Toronto. Presently teacher-librarian at The Sterling Hall School in Toronto, she is in the process of initiating a drama program at the school. Sheree has published one young adult novel, as well as stories, articles and reviews in various newspapers and magazines.

Introduction

Drama in boys' schools is not usually associated with broad-based participation, particularly at the elementary level. Boys' schools offer an annual play or musical production, where boys with particular flair or interest in Drama perform a scripted work for the school community. The Sterling Hall School, a JK to Grade 8 school for boys, conformed to the convention of the annual school Drama production—and still does—but the school recently implemented a drama program for all boys from Grade 1 to Grade 6. The program grew out of an effort to bring extra vitality to the Library program. The fledgling Library-Drama program, taught for half an hour once a six-day cycle, proved to be popular with the boys. Surveys completed by the boys indicated that they wanted to see the Drama experience extended. However, SHS was already a very busy school with many specialist teachers offering programs in Science, French, Physical Education, Art, and Music. The boys were also taking part in an extensive sports and extra-curricular program. Was there really room for another program? SHS administrators believed that there was. Implementing the Drama program was viewed as a way of adding a third element to the school's thriving Visual Arts and Music curricula. Drama's role as a vehicle for oral language development was also recognized.

This action research study was undertaken as a means of validating the decision to place Drama in the formal SHS curriculum, as well as developing the best drama program possible for elementary school boys. I particularly wanted to explore drama's role in the social and emotional development of boys. I believe that healthy interpersonal relationships contribute to the well-being of the "whole boy" and help provide a solid foundation for academic success. The following questions came to mind: *How can participation in a drama program enhance positive interpersonal relationships for boys? What social and emotional attributes are involved in positive interpersonal relationships? What types of drama really work best for boys?*

The Literature Review

Studies on the influence of Drama on social and emotional development are not extensive. Literature that focuses on Drama's role as a kind of therapy for adolescent victims of racism and classism (Gallagher 2007) is not relevant to this particular study. The importance of Drama for social interaction is occasionally cited but seldom with specifics. "Drama, more than any other classroom subject, requires group co-operation. This occurs in its preparatory stages and in performance. It appears to have a reciprocal effect on relationships in the classroom" (Bolton 1998).

David Booth discusses the role of language as a vehicle for social negotiation.

> The context of drama allows students in role to initiate meaningful talk and wield authority, and they may gain understanding from their own frames of reference free from the language expectations and control of the teacher. As students interact inside role, they can explore the social functions of language that may not arise in the language forms of the traditional classroom. (2005)

Drama is also recognized as a means of self-expression. "Giving boys the help and permission they need to be expressive is a major contribution to their emotional well-being" (Cox 2006).

As I perused the literature, tips about organizing the Drama experience within the classroom were also considered. I discovered several general references to the value of integrating Drama and other parts of the curriculum. *Project Zero* in a Harvard study (2000) notes demonstrable links between experience in Drama and an increase in certain cognitive skills. "Drama not only helped children's verbal skills for the texts enacted; it also helped children's verbal skills when applied to new, non-enacted texts." Gurian and Stevens also discuss the validity of integration.

> For boys there is a special case to be me made for integrating arts and athletics into academic learning. Graphics, visuals, dramatic self-expression and physical movement and athletic exercise all have positive affects on children. Boys need to move their bodies, they need to stimulate their minds. (2005)

Journal writing to reflect on experience also surfaced in the literature. "Getting a boy into keeping a journal is a wonderful thing. We must help boys make a story of their lives…which they won't recognize unless they see it mirrored in a journal" (Gurian 1997).

Research Context

- The study concentrated on the thirty-six boys in two Grade 4 classrooms for a period of five and a half months. All but four of the boys had taken part in surveys the previous spring.

- The boys were timetabled to have their Drama class in the afternoon for one hour every six-day cycle, double the Drama time they had experienced the year before.

- There is no dedicated Drama space in the school so the classes took place in the home classroom and occasionally in the gym.

- Drama was formally evaluated on the report card for both achievement and effort.

- Drama activities allowed students the chance to experience both improvisational and scripted work.

- Co-operation, the ability to negotiate, empathy and self-confidence were the attributes deemed important to social and emotional growth.

- Drama was integrated into the school's existing curriculum. Since the relationship between Drama and social-emotional growth was being explored, I frequently and deliberately integrated Drama with the school's Stewardship program, the existing Character Education initiative. Grade 4 Stewardship themes included a study of ordinary heroes, peer pressure, and decision-making.

- Students were asked to keep a Drama journal that included text and/or visual reflections of their experience. The journals were used monthly and guided by specific prompts.

Data Collection

- A survey of all students in Grade 4 was conducted. Surveys were analyzed for emerging patterns. Surveys included questions about improvisational vs. scripted work, Stewardship themes vs. other themes in the curriculum, group dynamics, personal effort, and self-confidence.

- A follow-up focus group of six boys met to elaborate on their survey answers. Boys with a wide range of answers were chosen to be part of this group.

- Boys were observed working in groups, asked about their interaction, and occasionally photographed.

- Drama journals, both text and visual reflects, were examined for emerging patterns.

- The two Grade 4 classroom teachers were asked their opinion on the relationship between Drama and Stewardship.

Results

ENGAGEMENT IN EXPERIENCE

(When boys or teachers are quoted they are identified by initial.)

According to the survey, thirty of the thirty-six boys felt that they did their best in Drama class. Only two said they could make more effort and four said they were not sure. All the boys in the focus group felt positive about their effort. In the survey sixteen boys claimed they made more effort when evaluated, and the same number said that evaluation did not change their effort. Once again, four said they were not sure. The focus group was evenly divided on the issue of effort and evaluation. "I don't want to fail the class and have it a big thing on my report card." (T.) "You should try your best whether you are marked or not ." (J.)

GROWTH IN SELF-CONFIDENCE

In the survey half the boys reported a growth in their feelings of self-confidence while taking part in Drama. Four said their confidence level did not change, and fourteen were not certain. In the focus group four out of six spoke of a growth in self-confidence. "The more I do Drama, the less nervous I am about talking in front of people." (T.) Two out of four indicated that their confidence did not change because they already felt self-assured. "I'm already confident in front of people." (A.)

GROWTH IN EMPATHY

In their journals, the boys were asked to respond to the following question: "Does playing a role in Drama help you understand how other people think and feel?" The question was rephrased several ways to provide clarification. Four students said they did not think it helped, and five said they did not know. Written answers from nine students did not answer the question at all—e.g., "I think Drama is fun." Half the boys answered "yes," and accompanied their one-word answer with a drawing. In at least half of those drawings, it was difficult to determine what was intended. The clearest drawings labeled the boys taking part in a role they had recently taken on such as detective or suspect.

TYPES OF DRAMA THAT HELP CO-OPERATION AND NEGOTIATION

Drama classes included a mix of improvisational and scripted work. According to the survey, twenty-six boys said they enjoyed improvisational drama more than performing set scripts, but only nineteen felt that it assisted more in their growth in co-operation and negotiation. The focus group was evenly divided in their responses. "You have to co-operate and negotiate more to make sense of a play that is improvised. You learn more from doing that."(J.) "If you are a character in a script that you don't want to be, it's harder to negotiate, but you learn more doing it." (L.)

TYPES OF THEMES THAT HELP CO-OPERATION AND NEGOTIATION

In Drama class the Grade 4 boys explored a variety of themes, including those directly linked to the Stewardship program. When asked if they thought that working with themes that emphasize character education skills helped their ability to co-operate and negotiate, the great majority in both the survey and focus groups felt that the type of theme had little impact. "It doesn't matter, it doesn't help or hurt." (A.) "It doesn't matter. But if you do a bullying theme, it might be horrible for co-operating because people might overact, and then it falls apart." (J.)

 In their Drama journals, the boys commented on the kind of themes that made it easier for them to co-operate and negotiate. The theme seemed of little importance. "It doesn't make a difference whatever scene I'm doing because all scenes are good." (M.) "What I like is being in a play that I like and being in a role that I like."(E.) "I want to do a skit with movement and lots of lines and walking around." (K.) "The type of script doesn't matter. It's who we work with and the size of the group." (C.)

The two Grade 4 teachers also commented on the relationship between Drama class and the Stewardship themes they taught in their classroom. "Every time there is a Drama lesson the boys work on Grade 4 Stewardship lessons like teamwork and decision-making. The physical part of Drama helps with this. The curriculum connection could also be with other themes, not just

Stewardship." (T.) "I can't really delineate whether it is Drama or all the other influences that help with social interaction. Drama is another opportunity for the boys to work actively in groups." (S.)

My personal observations backed up the boys' view that the type of Drama or theme does not seem to be a major factor in their ability to co-operate or negotiate. Most of the boys collaborated well regardless of the type of scenario or theme. Those who generally find social interaction more challenging did also not appear to be affected by the type of Drama or theme.

SIZE OF GROUPS

The boys identified the size of the group as an important factor in their ability to co-operate and negotiate. In the survey, thirty-two boys preferred collaborating in groups of four or less, and twenty-two of those favoured working in partners. The focus group mirrored the survey. "Small groups make it easier to go through lines. You can negotiate what you do in small groups." (L.) "It's easier to stay in role with small groups. It's easier to goof off in bigger groups." (J.) "A group that is too big makes it just too hard. But partners are hard if there's one big star and a small star." (M.)

Reflections in journals also identified the size of the group as a key factor in feeling successful in Drama. "If the group is big then you won't work very well." (N.) "How large the group is affects me because if it is large and some people mess up, I don't feel as good." (W.) "Working in partners is good because it makes me calm. It makes me co-operate." (O.)

From my observations, the size of groups definitely affected the boys' ability to work co-operatively. More teacher intervention to keep the boys "on track" seemed necessary when the groups were composed of four or more members.

STRATEGIES USED TO HELP WITH CO-OPERATION

In their journals the boys were asked about strategies they used to help themselves co-operate, particularly when they were choosing roles in a skit. Almost half indicated they relied on "rock/paper/scissors" as a main strategy. "We did rock, paper, scissors, then we all agreed on our parts. I didn't want the role I got, but I did it. Then we worked together fine." (H.) Other boys suggested additional strategies. "I helped by having a good tone and calming people down." (P.) "I helped because I was reminding people what they were supposed to do and say." (W.) In the focus group, the boys were also asked to suggest general strategies for improving group dynamics. "I say if we don't practise we will mess up, forget our parts, and get lower marks" (L.) "I tell them to slow down and take a few breaths." (J.) "I usually ask for help from the other boys." (R.) "If one person wasn't co-operating, I'd talk to the people in my group to see if we could give him a chance, or tell the teacher to switch the groups." (T.)

WRITING REFLECTIONS IN JOURNALS

When asked in the survey, twenty-eight of the boys said that writing or drawing reflections in a journal sometimes or usually helped them express ideas and feelings about what they had learned. All the boys in the focus group acknowledged the utility of completing reflections. "It kind of helps you know how well you did." (J.) "You can get out what you weren't able to say." (A.) "I don't have to say it in public." (T.) "Different plays make you feel differently. It helps you express something new." (M.) "I don't like to write and it makes it hard, but sometimes it helps." (R.)

Results of Survey of 36 Grade 4 Boys

Question	Response
Do you feel good about the effort you make in Drama?	Yes - 30
Do you make more effort when you are being evaluated?	Yes - 18 Doesn't change effort - 18
Does Drama make you feel more confident?	Yes - 18 Doesn't change confidence – 4
What kind of Drama teaches you more about co-operating and negotiating?	Improvisational - 19 Scripted - 17
Does connecting Drama to a Stewardship theme help with co-operating and negotiating?	Helps somewhat - 6 Theme doesn't matter - 30
Does the size of the group help with co-operating and negotiating?	Prefer groups of four or less - 32 Prefer larger groups - 4
Does writing or drawing Reflections in a journal help you express feelings or ideas about what you have learned?	Usually or sometimes - 28 Rarely or never - 8

THE DISCOVERIES

■ The level of engagement in the drama experience was greater than anticipated. Obtaining good marks was not the only motivating factor in the effort that the boys made.

■ Drama improved self-confidence more in boys who did not already consider themselves to be self-confident.

■ The boys generally had difficulty responding verbally to questions about how drama helped them understand how others think and feel. For some, drawing was a more effective way to express their opinions.

■ The type of drama (improvisational vs. scripted work) or the theme of the drama experience (Stewardship vs. other themes) was not as important to feelings of accomplishment and the ability to co-operate/negotiate as the amount of physical activity involved and the size of the group. The boys generally preferred small groups and active scenes.

■ Many of the boys presently use simple physical strategies such as "rock/paper/scissors" to negotiate roles, but some are trying out more sophisticated verbal techniques.

■ More boys than expected responded positively to the experience of expressing what they learned in a Drama journal. They liked the option of drawing as well as writing.

Limitations and Recommendations

The study took place in less than six months, about fifteen one-hour classes in total. A longer, more detailed study would certainly provide additional data to analyze. It might also be useful to compare the experience of students who are older, or to track the responses of these Grade 4 students when they are in Grade 7 or 8.

Conclusions

This study did not prove that linking Drama to the school's Stewardship curriculum gave an extra boost to social and emotional development. However, the boys' high level of engagement in Drama and their perceived growth in self-confidence did help validate the program's worth. There is also evidence that Drama contributes to the boys' growing ability to use language to negotiate with others—and to express their thoughts and feelings physically, orally, and through their reflections on their experience.

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Sheree's Reflection Statement

This action research study led me into uncharted territory. Although I have had lots of experience with traditional research, I had little idea about the action research process before embarking on this project. As well, the topic I chose moved me outside my comfort zone. Drama, linked as it is to my longstanding interest in language and literature, was not at all foreign, but I had never deliberately considered the social and emotional impact of learning. The affective domain generally piqued my curiosity less than the academic one.

Then why pursue this particular study? I was at a crossroads in my career, moving from the role of teacher-librarian to Drama teacher. I wanted some kind of personal research to help validate the Drama program, and I have never been averse to risk.

How did it go? It went all too quickly. It seems as if it were only weeks ago that the action research group, under the capable leadership of Di Laycock, met in Boston. Then it was time for the lit review, the data gathering, the analysis, and the final report. Di's gentle reminders kept me on track. As well, I am working at a school where five of my colleagues were also undertaking action research. We met together to share tips and offer encouragement. Nevertheless, time had no mercy. I do wish that there had been more time to observe the boys and to interview them again.

My conclusions are quite tentative; they could not be otherwise. I probably will not carry out another action research study in the near future, but learning about the process was empowering. Teaching is about continuous improvement; we make a program change, we observe, we evaluate.

How Can Programs that Promote Positive Relationships Improve the Learning Experience for Boys?

MARIE PERRY MORETON BAY BOYS' COLLEGE, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

Marie Perry is Director of Teaching & Learning at Moreton Bay Boys' College. She is currently completing her Doctor of Education, focusing on best practice in teaching and learning for boys. Marie works closely with all staff in the school to ensure that the curriculum is highly engaging, challenging and stimulating for boys. She has had several curriculum-based articles published and has co-authored a simulation for gifted and talented students within the mainstream setting.

Research Question

Does the explicit teaching of positive and appropriate verbal communication skills improve the learning of boys in the middle school setting?

Introduction

An all-boys' school environment has its own particular qualities. There has been a great deal of brain research into the ways that boys learn in comparison to how girls learn. This research is beginning to inform how teachers should deliver a lesson within a classroom. I believe there are wider implications. Research on teaching boys encourages hands-on learning, a high level of visual literacy and also a higher level of "short response" types of learning activities that appeal to boys rather than the longer, reflective tasks that appeal to girls.

The changing nature of society and the pressures this has placed upon boys and men lead me to wonder how these have an impact upon learning for boys, particularly in the middle school context where so many boys become disengaged. We, as educators, have put a high level of focus on developing teaching practice to better support the learning needs of boys. I would like to develop a better understanding of providing for the social-emotional needs of boys within the learning setting, in particular verbal communication, and how this affects the middle school setting.

The academic focus is of prime importance. However, determining and considering the relevance of factors that support the social-emotional development of boys in the school setting is also important: What are the relevant factors within the formative years of the school setting? Why are these particularly relevant for boys? How is social-emotional development linked to the other components of learning within a school setting?

Boys in the middle years of schooling have highly particular needs. They are going through a huge amount of physical, emotional and social growth. They typically test their own abilities and the boundaries around them, trying to find how and where they fit in the world. What can we, as educators, do to best cater for them, keep them interested, and develop their love of learning and connectedness to the school? Can the explicit teaching of positive verbal communication work toward achieving this?

Many societal factors have a great impact on male adolescents. One of the most alarming is the steady increase in the rate of suicide by adolescent males. In her study of adolescent males and their families, Volkmar (2005, p.25) reports a direct correlation between suicide attempts by adolescent boys and the rate of negative communication they were exposed to or involved in. She found that the level of verbal negativity corresponded with their perception that a problem or issue could not be worked through. Volkmar also found that negative communication with fathers further increased the risk factors for the adolescent (ibid). Name calling, or "sledging" as it is colloquially called, is seen by many Australians as culturally acceptable—"just the Aussie way and meant as part of a joking camaraderie." What impact, if any, does this cultural acceptance of negative communication as normal behaviour have on the learning of boys?

Context

Moreton Bay Boys College (MBBC) is a Christian independent boys' school catering for students from Preparatory to Year 12. MBBC is a relatively new school, in its fifth year of existence. It was established with one class of Preparatory aged boys and one class of Year 1 boys on the sister college site nearby. The following year it moved to its current location in a bayside suburb of Brisbane, Australia. The current enrollment of the College is approximately 300 students from Preparatory to Year 10 with the first cohort of students due to graduate in 2010.

MBBC was jointly established by the Moreton Bay College (which is owned by the Uniting Church) and the Presbyterian and Methodist Schools Association, and is affiliated with the Uniting Church. All members of the school community are expected to support the Christian ethos of the school. The boys have one Chapel session per week as well as one Religious Education lesson per week.

MBBC aims to provide a seamless curriculum from P–12; however, there are distinct junctures within the school setting which recognise the changing needs of the boys as they develop. These are: P–3; 4–6; middle school 7–9; and senior 10–12. The clientele of the College is middle class, monocultural (predominantly Anglo-Saxon) and supportive of the College.

Although the students are generally very well-mannered, it has been noted that the boys in the middle years of schooling (Years 7–9) had developed a habit of speaking to each other in an increasingly negative manner. A culture was beginning to develop where the boys were constantly making comment about other boys' behaviour and opinions. This had grown quickly to the stage where teachers referred to a climate of negative banter that had reached the level of a running commentary. For a new and growing school, this was of great concern because the right tone within the College needed to be established from the beginning, rather than trying to correct a poor tone in the future.

Staff reported in regular team meetings that this "running commentary" was having an impact on the learning of the boys as well as establishing a negative school climate. The greatest impact upon learning was that many students felt less willing to engage in the lesson for fear of ridicule from other students. Staff felt that they were engaged in a never-ending battle to manage the negative banter which reduced actual teaching time and fostered a poor tone in the learning environment. This type of classroom atmosphere was of concern because the boys in this cohort were generally very well-behaved and cooperative students, and this behaviour was therefore unusual.

Boys were surveyed by staff regarding the negative banter and were asked to comment on their perceptions. The general response indicated that although it was mostly perceived as a joke, many boys felt that it had an impact upon their learning and level of participation. Comments from students included: "we're just joking around"; "that's just how we speak to each other"; and "we always talk this way." In general, the students agreed that the frequency was increasing.

SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

The motto of the College is *fide et integritate*—(to lead) with faith and integrity. The College philosophy is founded on the MBBC 3Rs—the three basic principles of Research, Reason and Relationships. Research—providing the students with a sound academic program and skills for life long learning; Reason—developing deeper thinking and problem solving abilities; and Relationships—developing the necessary skills for boys to be highly effective people throughout their lives. From this, the College developed a slogan, *Soar to new heights,* and adopted the sea eagle as a mascot. The sea eagle was chosen because it is a local bird and, more importantly, because it nurtures its young very closely whilst leading it to independence. The young fly under the wing of the parent eagle until they are independent enough to fly on their own.

The College New Testament bible reading is from Philippians: 4:4–9. This reading is used at important school events and forms the cornerstone of the philosophy of the College. Chapter 4, verse 8 and 9 in particular state: "In conclusion, my brothers, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honorable. Put into practice what you learned and receive from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you" (*Good News Bible,* pp. 269).

The development of a "sledging" culture in the school was obviously at odds with this philosophy and vision. However, whilst the College had a behaviour management policy, the majority of teaching staff in the middle school reported that they felt that the current program put them in the position of "police officer" rather than placing the responsibility back on the boys. The middle school teaching team, in conjunction with the senior executive team of the school, had many meetings to discuss these concerns and to develop and implement a strategy to reverse the negative trend. It was agreed that the onus needed to be placed on the boys to learn to think prior to speaking. *"Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?"* was developed as a result.

"Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?" are the three questions boys were to ask themselves prior to making any comment. The questions were deliberately kept short and simple as research has shown that the most effective way of imparting instructions to boys includes chunking information, repeating it, making eye contact and expecting a response.

IMPLEMENTATION

A middle school meeting was held with all students and staff members present. *"Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?"* was introduced and explained to the boys. All boys were put on notice that there would be a focus on communication skills across the middle school for the remaining term of the year. Before making a comment to another student or about another student, boys were to ask themselves whether what they were about to say was "kind, true and necessary." If any one of these questions received a "no" response, then they were not permitted to make the statement out loud.

All middle school classrooms were also supplied with visual reminders, with these three questions published in banners displayed in every room. Teachers were able to remind boys of the questions by simply pointing towards them. This also aided with consistency amongst staff members. All teachers within the middle school including Form and subject specialist teachers were involved in the decision-making process for the development of this program and were therefore highly committed to implementing it consistently. Staff believed that this was the biggest factor in the possible success of the program as many boys had commented that they knew which teachers were "tougher than others". That is, boys knew when they could push the boundaries of the behaviour management policy, and when it was to be followed strictly and to the letter. The simple concept of these three basic questions eliminated such ambiguity for both boys and staff.

The implementation of *"Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?"* began at the start of the final school term for 2007. This was considered to be a good time to test the effectiveness of the program, particularly in the later stages of the term, when boys had completed their assessment for the year, were looking forward to holidays, and possibly felt more relaxed about expectations.

All middle school boys began the term with an assembly where "*Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?"* was clearly explained to them. They were given the opportunity to seek clarification as well. A two-day period of grace was given during which time they would be given a verbal warning that they had broken *"Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?"*, rather than the full consequence of a formal recording of the infraction. Three infractions of any of the College rules within a week would result in a detention or more serious consequence depending on the nature of the incident. The verbal warnings were very effective in highlighting to the students just how often they were engaging in the negative talk without being fully aware of it. In addition, throughout the term, formal whole school or cohort occasions such as chapel and assembly were used to reinforce positive communication skills.

"Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?" was highlighted through all relevant opportunities. The eldest students within the middle school cohort were also expected to take on a leadership role by acting as appropriate role models as well as reminding other students of the program where necessary. Parents were briefed via the College newsletter as well as through appropriate College functions.

Research Methodology

Action research on the implementation of *"Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?"* was conducted based upon the constructivist paradigm that aims to make meaning of the situation, setting it in context, and relying heavily on the interactions and the findings of those directly involved. The goal of this approach was to generate knowledge production which is carried out in a context of application.

This meant that any problem-solving that takes place does so with a highly relevant perspective.

A mixed methodology approach supported by both quantitative and qualitative data was selected in order to both understand the situation/issue and work towards recommendations that would bring about positive change.

Data collection methods included:

- Narrative—Policy document review, School Newsletters, School Prospectus, Promotional materials, Middle School Student reports

- Interview (pre and post)—Principal, Executive staff, Middle School Boys, Middle School Teaching staff, Middle School Parents

- Survey—All Middle School Boys, Middle School Teaching staff, Middle School Parents

Results

The effectiveness of the program was felt almost immediately. The two-day period of grace highlighted to both staff and students the extent of the pattern of negative communication that had been developing. The boys greatly appreciated the period of grace because many would otherwise have received a detention quite quickly. They reported that two days gave enough warning and was sufficient time for boys of this age to learn a new skill.

Interview and survey results from the teachers quite clearly reflected the improved tone within the classroom from their point of view. All teachers reported that the program was easy to implement and time-effective, and that it reduced their perception of acting as "police officers". An increased feeling of collegiality was reported as one of the biggest gains. Those who had previously perceived that there was inequity in implementing the College's behaviour management policy now reported that they felt this had been greatly reduced. Teachers also reported reduced levels of stress because they were spending far less time dealing with inappropriate behaviour and could now maximise their teaching time.

The majority of data from the students was overwhelmingly in support of the program. Most boys (70%) reported that they felt more comfortable in the classroom and were able to participate in the lesson without fear of ridicule. Only a small percentage (15%) reported that they did not believe there was a problem in the first instance and that their learning environment had stayed the same. Due to this perception, they commented that the program was not necessary; however, the implementation had not caused any adverse effects. Individual interviews with students highlighted that these particular comments and perceptions were from those boys that others had identified as the main perpetrators of negative communication.

Parent perception of the program was overwhelmingly supportive. Although the majority of parents were generally not aware of any difficulties occurring, as parents of teenage boys who were commonly less communicative (compared to their pre-adolescent years), they were supportive of any program that would improve positive communication skills for their sons.

Interestingly, the vast majority of boys welcomed the program (80%) and via survey or one-on-one interview expressed their appreciation for the need of some type of intervention. They clearly

expressed their belief that communication within the group had improved and was now at an acceptable and appropriate standard.

Several boys (40%) commented that they felt the current behaviour management policy was more appropriate for younger students. They stated that older boys knew how to work around this system. The boys expressed that they needed to take more initiative and develop their own levels of responsibility due to their increasing age and maturity levels. These boys also commented that they would like to see harsher consequences for any students who chose to break *"Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary?"* now that they had established a more pleasant and positive environment.

Implications for Practice

The main implication of this research project was the inclusion of the program as a permanent part of the behaviour management policy of the College. Staff have been asked to revisit this with their classes on a regular basis in order to maintain awareness and consistency. The behaviour management policy for the middle and senior schools was also revised and modified based on the feedback from both students and teachers, with a marked increase in the expectations and associated consequences for boys when they reached these junctures. Surprisingly, the boys were the most supportive of this, even though the expectations were higher and the consequences more severe.

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Marie's Reflection

In reflecting upon the previous year, the most beneficial part of being involved in the IBSC Research Team was having the opportunity of working with a group of highly talented colleagues from around the world. The sharing of ideas and resources has been highly valuable. Working on a project such as this has provided a strong focus for professional growth which has in turn been of benefit to all of our schools. It has also had a ripple effect in that the programs we have developed and shared have then been shared even further through our own networks at home.

Being selected as part of the research team was beneficial to my own college as it provided a specific emphasis for research and development that has helped the College and the boys establish and develop a program that has great benefits to the whole school community, both in the short term and the long term.

Having the opportunity to work with colleagues from such a diverse range of backgrounds has been really important in helping us as individuals to think more globally rather than being caught up in our own little pocket of the world. It was a constant reminder that the needs of boys in schools are universal and that we have so much to learn from, and share with, each other. We have built strong collegial relationships around the globe which will be long lasting.

I feel that our research team managed so well as we were managed by the highly efficient and supportive Di Laycock. Di has an enormous passion for action research and education. She also has wonderful 'people skills' and was able to keep us all on track with our responsibilities and time frames in a positive and easy manner. Di's enthusiasm and professionalism were appreciated greatly by all members of the group.

Attending the annual IBSC conferences has also been a highlight for me, as the program has been of a high calibre.

Some of the challenges involved an increased workload on top of an already full workload. In addition, for me personally, I had the additional challenge of having to change an original research focus midway, which then put additional time pressures on me to complete a new project within the given time frame.

Minor difficulties included juggling 'discussion' across so many different time zones and managing to 'keep up' with others when holiday and term times were all different. However, these difficulties were minor and the use of a 'wiki' assisted with this.

Working as part of this team has been a wonderful experience for me, and I thank the IBSC for giving me this opportunity.

office@theibsc.org • www.theibsc.org