

Introduction

The aim of this research was to bring the boys together in small group situations and develop core links in trust, friendliness, and most importantly, in learning how to care for each other. The skill of being able to 'live with others' needs to be taught, modelled and practised, as it does not necessarily come naturally to boys. Teaching boys to interact in a positive manner with each other, building caring and positive relationships is essential for them to go on and have productive, positive lives, in meaningful relationships with others.

The Research Question

How might the introduction of vertical tutor groups foster caring between boys in Years 4 to 6?

To care is to "feel concern or interest; attach importance to something". (Oxford Dictionary, 2010)

Research Context

Christ Church Grammar School (CCGS) is a Pre-Primary to Year 12 Anglican school for boys, located in Claremont, a high socio-economic suburb of Perth, Western Australia. New boys entering Year 4 are integrated with 50 existing boys who have already been exposed to the Character Education programme at the school. It is a time for the existing and new boys to develop improved skills and character strengths and when Year 4 boys can become separated and excluded from the Year 5 and 6 cohorts.



Participants

Five boys from each of the year groups 4, 5 and 6 were chosen, all from the same House grouping. These boys were selectively chosen as they had either experienced social problems within the last six months or they were seen as someone to look up to by their peers, i.e. boys from both sides of the social continuum.

The Research Action

The vertical tutor group operated one to two times per week for nine weeks. Participants were grouped to ensure that the three different year group levels were mixed and boys were forced to interact with different year levels. We played games, talked about our likes and dislikes, and wrote reflections.

Data Collection

Record of conversations
Observations
Photographs
Questioning
Reflections



Data Analysis

The data collected were carefully reviewed and categories and themes surfaced. The boys' voices emerged and highlighted their feelings over the course of the research.

Key Findings and Discussion

- Boys in these vertical tutor groups, given the right opportunities and assistance, can grow to care for boys outside their immediate cohort.
- Incorporating a vertical tutor group system into the school encourages boys to develop and maintain relationships with boys they would otherwise not know.
- Confidence was the key outcome reported for the majority of participants.
- Acting with care and interest towards other boys was self-rewarding for the group members.
- Younger boys felt increasingly secure and able to interact in a safe environment with, or in close proximity to, the older boys.

"I enjoy playing on the oval now as I know a lot of the older boys. If our ball gets kicked into their game, I'm not scared to get it back, the boys even pass it back to me and smile."

"I am more confident to talk to other boys now thanks to the vertical tutor group."

"It was great being in the vertical tutor group. The older boys showed a lot of responsibility and tolerance to us younger boys. We did fun activities and went on fun outings together. I really got to know boys I would never normally play with and who I used to be scared of. They were nice and they cared about me. It was probably the best thing ever!"

"I have noticed a huge change in class. He is not as worried when things are not going well and bounces back a lot quicker, rather than staying upset for a whole lesson when something/someone has upset him." (from a teacher)



"It felt really good to care about someone else."

Conclusions

The research clearly indicated that incorporating a vertical tutor group system into the school encourages boys to develop and maintain relationships with boys they would otherwise not know. These positive outcomes are reason enough to implement vertical tutor groups into CCGS on a larger scale. As the future project develops and expands to include younger boys, the challenge will be to adopt activities that relate to the age of the boys as well as targeting the specific outcomes being pursued.



Key Readings

Mayeroff, M. (1971). *On Caring* (1st U.S. ed.). New York: Harper & Row.

McNiff, J., (2010) *Action Research for Professional Development: Concise advice for new action researchers* (3rd ed.). <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/ar-booklet.asp>

Noddings, N., (1995). Teaching Themes of Care Character 14(2), 1-7. Retrieved from <http://www.bu.edu/education/caec>

Stringer, E. T. (2013). *Action Research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications

Further Information

The full report of this project and an online copy of this poster are available at <http://www.theibsc.org/>.
Researcher's Email: mhodges@ccgs.wa.edu.au

