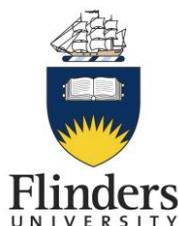


FLINDERS UNIVERSITY
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Flinders Human Behaviour & Health Research Unit

Releasing Children's Shining Potential

**Improving the social and emotional wellbeing of
primary school children through Journeywork**

Journey into Schools Report
August 2010

**Results: Key Informant Voice on the Impact of the
Journey Program on Child Emotional Wellbeing and Behaviour**

Jill Beattie
Suzanne Dowd
Susan Leeder-Morale
Cecile George
Jan Henderson
Amanda Carne



ISBN 978 1 920966 21 8

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How to Cite this Reference:

Beattie J, Carne A, Dowd S, Leeder-Morale S, George C, Henderson J. (August, 2010). *Releasing children's shining potential. Improving the social and emotional wellbeing of primary school children through Journeywork. Journey into Schools Report.* Flinders Human Behaviour and Health Research Unit, Flinders University of South Australia and *Jill Beattie Performance Enhancement Consultancy*, Victoria. Website: <http://www.emotional-wellbeing.com.au>

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Chapter 6

Results: Key Informant Voice on the Impact of the Journey Program on Child Emotional Wellbeing and Behaviour

Was very reserved - having a hard time as younger sibling has been very ill; now more loving and coping better with this since Journey – more loving with little brother – writing little poems now about brother to get well (Parent).

6.1 Parent group interview

The parent group interview took place in the school library, after-hours, and was conducted mid-way through Term 3 after the children had completed 11 Journey sessions. Nine parents attended, representing 8 families. Three of the four practitioners were present as well as the researcher.

After introductions, the following questions were asked of the parents.

1. How are your children going? Are they any different?
2. What was your expectation from consenting for your child to participate in the program?

All of the parents were encouraged to participate by initially asking the question and waiting for volunteers to respond, then inviting those who had not yet responded, to do so if they wished.

Following the group interview the parents were provided with the opportunity to discuss their child individually with the practitioner most familiar with their child. The parents took this opportunity to discuss private concerns about how their child was responding to the Journey sessions.

While the parents were waiting to have an individual consultation with a practitioner about their child, a feedback sheet was given to them to complete if they wished, entitled *Journey into Schools: Feedback*. Three of the parents provided written feedback.

The results below are the combined results from analysis of the group interview and the written feedback.

6.1.1 Observed changes in children

Parents reported a number of changes in the wellbeing and behaviour of their children as a result of the child's attendance in the Journey sessions. The changes are discussed below in no particular order, and listed in Table 16, along with examples of the parent's responses. The number (%) of responses in Table 16 reflects more than one response given by each parent.

- More open.

- More loving, caring and coping better.
- Happier.
- Increased confidence and courage to express feelings.
- More focussed.
- Letting go.
- Feeling more comfortable with teacher.
- Sharing what happens in Journey sessions.
- Doesn't share what happens during Journey sessions.
- Support for the Journey program.

The majority of parents reported that their children were happier, more confident, more open, loving and caring since attending Journey sessions. They communicated more with their parents; shared what they were doing in Journey sessions, and expressed their feelings through more cuddling and verbally expressing their love. Three of the parents however, reported that their children did not share what happened during Journey sessions, and one parent reported that their child still seemed very quiet. One parent reported that her child was able to finally share their grief and let go of their grandfather who had died recently. Another parent reported that her child was now liking and feeling more comfortable with her teacher. All of the parents supported the Journey Program.

Table 1: Findings from the parent group interview and written feedback

Themes	Example Statements	Number (%) n=8 Children represented
Observed changes in children		
More open	Our child expresses more openly and regularly on their own accord. More open generally. More open. Big change, particularly since the death of her grandpa recently – she now speaks to me about it. We have cuddles and remembering those moments together.	5 (62.5)
More loving, caring and coping better	... she has become more loving, very caring, and she feels better in herself. We have noticed a more caring and loving side more than usual. ... we have cuddles; More cuddly. [Child's name] is now more cuddly: saying: "I love you" more. Was very reserved – having a hard time as younger sibling has been very ill; now more loving and coping better with this since Journey – more loving with little brother – writing little poems now about brother to get well.	6 (75)
Happier	... She seems to be more happy ...	3 (37.5)
Increased confidence and courage to express feelings	I have noticed very clear changes in her confidence level and courage to express her own feelings. She seems to be more happy and focussed and shows more assertiveness which she did not have in the past. I have noticed a difference with my child that she is more confident.	3 (37.5)
More focussed	She seems to be more happy and focussed	1 (12.5)
Letting go	Big change, particularly since the death of her grandpa recently ... she let it go. It was incredible. She cried and cried and cried and I just let her do it.	1 (12.5)
Feeling more comfortable with teacher	Liking and feeling more comfortable with her teacher.	1 (12.5)
Sharing what happens in Journey sessions	... tells me about Journey sessions; Shares what happens in Journey sessions; Talks about Journey sessions.	5 (62.5)
Doesn't share what happens during Journey sessions.	[These parents were both a bit worried reporting that their child] ... doesn't share what happens in Journey sessions; Doesn't discuss much about Journey; more independent.	3 (37.5)
Support for the Journey program	I feel the Journey Program is very effective for my daughter. Our child's feedback has been fantastic. Your program is doing wonders and we hope it will continue to be taught and allow other children the opportunity to go through their amazing journey. I would like to say that my experience with the Journey has been great. ... Thank you for your wonderful work.	8 (100)

6.1.2 Parent's expectations

In response to the question about their expectations of allowing their children to participate in the Journey Program, the parents all agreed that they “just wanted happier children”, and one parent wanted their child to be a “shining diamond”; wishing for their child to “grow”.

6.1.3 Parent's concerns

Parents were given the opportunity to ask questions of the practitioners. The following questions were raised:

1. What is being instilled into my child?
2. Will the program continue?
3. You know a lot about us? How open are the kids?

In response to the question: “What is being instilled into my child?” the practitioner explained the classroom journey process and referred to the Parent and Child Information Sheets (Appendices 9 and 10) and parent letters (Appendix 15) that were sent out in the first 5 weeks of the program as useful resources for the parents to return to.

The practitioners were unable to answer the question: “Will the program continue” and the parents were referred to the Principal and Wellbeing Coordinator for further information.

Parents appeared concerned that their children would raise private family matters during Journey sessions. This was evidenced by the double question: “You know a lot about us? How open are the kids?”

The practitioners explained that they are not aware of the child's issue during group sessions and during individual sessions the children do not go into detail about what goes on at home. Examples were given of the types of issues children did raise e.g. that they are fighting with siblings, and that they don't like it when their parents fight.

Following the practitioners' answers to this concern, the researcher asked: “How are you feeling now?” All of the parents indicated that were more comfortable.

6.2 Teacher group and telephone interviews

The teacher group interview was conducted mid-way through Term 3 after the children had completed 11 Journey sessions. All of the available teachers in the school who were at the staff meeting participated in the group interview. The individual teacher telephone interviews were conducted with three of the four classroom teachers who had children attending the Journey session and were conducted at the end of the school year. The fourth teacher was unavailable.

Overall, the teachers reported that they had received positive comments from the parents of those children who were attending the Journey sessions, and that the “kids really enjoyed” attending the sessions. The findings presented below are the combined results from the group and three individual interviews.

6.2.1 Difficult to observe individual behaviour changes in a classroom of many children

An important finding during the group interview was that the class teachers of those children who were attending the Journey Program reported that it was difficult to complete the *Emotional Behaviour Questionnaire for Teachers*. They explained that this was because they only had 5 or 6 children out of larger class ranging from 20 to 28 children. Thus, focusing their attention on only a few was problematic when they had so many other children to observe and support. Consequently, a decision was made to discontinue attempting to complete the *Emotional Behaviour Questionnaire for Teachers*.

During individual telephone interviews (at the end of the year), even though the teachers were more aware of those children attending Journey sessions, they once again reported that it was difficult to tell if any behavioural changes had occurred in the children attending Journey sessions because there were so many other children to support. Teacher One had 5 children attending Journey sessions out of 20 students (25%); Teacher Two had 7 out of 27 (26%); and Teacher Three had 5 out of 28 (18%) children attending Journey sessions. Comments included:

They seemed all right. It was difficult to tell with so many in the classroom. I didn't really notice heaps of a difference.

Children who have anger and stress problems are difficult to see...couldn't really tell in the classroom situation.

Can't measure any difference.

Having it in one class would be better; you would notice a difference.

6.2.2 Conduct future Journey sessions with the whole class

Classroom teachers preferred the Journey sessions to be conducted with the whole class rather than with just a few (more emotionally challenged) children from each class. This finding confirmed the original intention of the research team, which was to conduct the study with either, a Year 3, or a Year 4 class. It was on the advice of the school that the research team proceeded to conduct the Program with children who were from four different classes.

One of the main reasons identified that led to children from a number of classes attending the Journey sessions was gaining parental consent. For example, one of the teachers reported that: *You couldn't do it in only one class because we did not have the support of all parents in one class; it's difficult to get the parent's backing.* This teacher added that: *The amount of backing you did get from the parents was good for this school. For example, when we have play nights etcetera, we have difficulty getting parents to come.*

A number of advantages were reported to support conducting Journey sessions with a whole class:

- The teacher would be able to observe behaviour changes in the classroom as a whole

- A mix of children from one class would provide role models of resilience for the more emotionally challenged children
- Scheduling lessons for all of the children would be easier because they would all be doing the same lessons, including Journeywork.

The main disadvantage of having only some children attend the Journey Program was difficulty for the teachers in planning lessons to ensure that no child missed out on important work. This was confirmed succinctly by one of the teachers:

By having some of the children out of the classroom it was difficult to plan what I was teaching and I had to leave anything important to all children were there otherwise they would have missed out; would have had to catch up.

6.2.3 Conflicting teacher priorities and workload

While the teachers supported wellbeing programs being implemented in their school, and the school was implementing some activities already, they reported that they “had a lot on” which prevented them from meeting with the practitioners to learn about and discuss the Journey Program. This was confirmed during the recruitment period, where scheduling information sessions for teachers were unsuccessful. In addition, the practitioners offered individual time for the teachers to experience Journeywork; however, this was also unsuccessful. One of the teachers reported: *We have to do a lot of professional development anyway; this would be one more thing.*

Consequently, the teachers found it difficult to know how to support the practitioners and the children in applying Journeywork. As highlighted by the teachers:

I didn't know what was going on. I only vaguely understood what it was all about, so it was difficult to know how to support you and the program

I didn't have the language to follow through with things like the diamonds and the balloons etcetera.

6.2.4 Children differed in their motivations to attend Journey sessions

Questions arose throughout the study as to the various reasons why children chose to attend the Journey sessions. Both the practitioners and the teachers were aware that in some instances children wished to attend the Journey session, but they had a competing school commitment such as compulsory attendance at drama practise prior to impending play night.

One of the teachers voiced the concern of others, that she felt that for some of the children

... motivation for attending were not always pure. For example, if they didn't want to go to a particular class, they wanted to go to Journey, and if they wanted to go, for example to PE, they wouldn't go to Journey.

These findings highlight the recurring theme that having children from different classes, and as well as competing school commitments, makes attending wellbeing sessions (and indeed, other class sessions) a scheduling challenge for teachers and schools.

6.3 Principal interview

The aims of the interview with the Principal were to:

- seek his perspective of how the children participating in the Journey Program were going
- seek his perspective on engagement of the teachers and parents
- provide an opportunity to discuss sustainability of the Journey Program within his school.

6.3.1 Change in child behaviour fluctuated

The Principal reported that the behaviour of some of the children had improved, however this fluctuated dramatically from time to time.

6.3.2 Conflicting teacher priorities and workload

The Principal echoed the view of the teachers that there was little time to fully learn about what the Journey Program was providing. In response, the practitioner was able to explain various strategies used in the Journey Program that teachers could also be taught to use on a daily basis. The practitioner offered staff education sessions. In addition, *KidsMatter* and how this government framework could fit into his school wellbeing program were discussed. This was particularly pertinent as the Principal was due to attend a *KidsMatter* information day in the near future. However, as the time approached, conflicting priorities prevented the Principal from attending the *KidsMatter* information day at that time.

6.3.3 People and funds needed to further implement wellbeing programs

Regarding sustainability, the Principal was unsure at the time of the interview how the school was going to progress their wellbeing strategy. The Wellbeing Coordinator was on extended leave and further discussion with staff was pending. In addition, the Principal was investigating how he would fund further wellbeing programs. The Principal concluded however, that *if a program works, you do it*.

6.4 Chapter summary

Results from key informant interviews indicated that the parents found their children to be more open, loving, caring and focussed. The parents reported that overall, their children were happier, with increased confidence and courage to express their feelings. The teachers and Principal expressed conflicting priorities in learning about and supporting Journeywork as their workload included a range of areas requiring their attention. In addition, the teachers found it difficult to specifically observe the participating children in the classroom and school yard as they had so many other children to also support and keep safe. Consequently, the teachers would have preferred that Journeywork be conducted in one classroom-group, whilst also recognising that parental consent can prevent this. The Principal reported that while the behaviour of some of the children had

improved, this fluctuated dramatically from time to time. In addition, the Principal was unsure how he would access the resources to continue with this and other wellbeing programs.