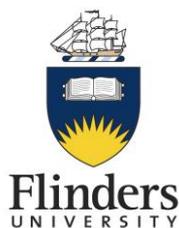


FLINDERS UNIVERSITY
ADELAIDE • AUSTRALIA



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

Discussion

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



ISBN 978 1 920966 21 8

Copyright © Jill Beattie, Performance Enhancement Consultancy

This work is copyright. You may download, display, print, and reproduce the material in unaltered form only (retaining this notice) for your personal, non-commercial use or use within your own organisation. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights, or comments on this publication, should be made via email to Dr Jill Beattie, Performance Enhancement Consultancy ~ jbeatti@bigpond.net.au

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>

Chapter 10

Discussion

This study addressed an area of urgent concern, that is, how to improve the social and emotional wellbeing of primary school children. The pre-test / post-test design included data that were obtained from a variety of informants, using a number of different data collection methods. This triangulation of data ^[20-22] provided access to a multiplicity and diversity of perspectives and data for analysis.

Results from the study show that the Journey Program was successful in improving the social and emotional wellbeing of the majority of participant primary school children. In addition, the children were provided with social and emotional support and learnt to apply the Journeywork tools when dealing with daily life events and the emotions that arise from these.

The most significant findings relate to the impact of the number of Journeywork sessions attended on the emotional wellbeing of the children. Results from both emotional wellbeing measures (the *Emotional Wellbeing Questionnaire* and the VAS), show a statistically significant relationship between the number of Journey sessions attended and improvement in emotional wellbeing. For example, from baseline to Time 1, when more sessions were attended by the children, the relationship was a strong negative correlation ($r = -.655$) indicating that as the total number of sessions increased over time, the children's total emotional wellbeing score decreased significantly (emotional wellbeing improved). This relationship was weaker and not statistically significant at the Time 2 interval, where the mean number of Journeywork sessions attended was decreasing. Analysis of the VAS showed that the number of sessions attended by the children was statistically significant to their before and after mean VAS emotion scores at Time 1 ($r_{\text{before}} = -.555, p = .005; r_{\text{after}} = -.538, p = .007$), indicating there was a strong correlation between the number of sessions attended and the mean VAS scores. As the number of sessions increased, the children's mean VAS scores decreased significantly, indicating that they felt happier following Journeywork sessions. At the Time 2 interval, the number of sessions attended by the children was less and found to not be statistically significant to the mean VAS before and after scores, and the correlations were very weak ($r_{\text{before}} = .038, p = .859; r_{\text{after}} = .014, p = .947$). These findings provide evidence of statistical significance to support the conduct of regular Journeywork in improving children's emotional wellbeing over time.

Results from key informants (the children, parents, teachers, principal and practitioners) indicated that the children learnt to use the tools from their participation in the Journey sessions and emotional and behavioural changes were observed, increasing their resilience in challenging situations. As reported by the Principal, for some of the children this resilience fluctuated dramatically from time to time. As with any wellbeing program, sustained changes may take some time, yet for other children, changes may be integrated and sustained soon after learning new skills ^[12]. There are a number of children who experienced almost immediate results from participation in Journey sessions. As an example, one child was experiencing psychomotor problems in achieving a pen licence, and following an individual session with a practitioner, rapid results were achieved as this child achieved the pen licence competency soon after Journeywork dealing with this issue. It is important to acknowledge that as the mind is subjected to change, resistance

may occur; this is normal, and as evidenced above, with regular sessions there was an increase in emotional wellbeing.

Journeywork was shown to assist children in achieving the social and emotional competencies as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), that is, self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management and relationship skills ^[25, 70]. The parents found their children to be more open, loving, caring and focussed. Overall, the parents reported their children were happier, with increased confidence and courage to express their feelings. The children reported the following: feeling safer, improved self-acceptance and trust, decreased anger, worry and fear, and increased understanding that emotion can affect the body (self-awareness); they reported being more caring toward others and increased patience (social awareness); there was increased courage to forgive (responsible decision making); less fighting, more able to share concerns, and letting go of grief (self-management); children reported increased kindness and ability to work with others (relationship skills). While some of these learnings and changes were reported by only one or two children, they are indicative of the changes that can occur with Journeywork.

It is unfortunate that raw academic scores were not available for analysis because the results of the South African studies showed a dramatic improvement in raw scores following one year of Journeywork ^[19]. In the study reported here, analysis of the overall results from 2008 (prior to Journeywork) and 2009 (following Journeywork) found academic progress to be “at the expected standard”, with no overall changes in results.

The results of this study provide Australian research evidence to support previous studies ^[19], anecdotal ^[10, 15] and evaluation evidence from those who have conducted Journeywork in primary schools ^[16, 17] and are of statistical and practical significance in supporting regular Journeywork being introduced into schools.

As identified in previous studies ^[68], identifying statistically significant group (population) changes over time when introducing emotional wellbeing interventions is problematic, thus it is also important to consider the practical implications of change experienced by individual participants, acknowledging that with larger sample sizes significant changes may be detected more readily. Thus, a larger study may confirm the findings presented here.

Journeywork, while drawing on techniques such as mindfulness, introspection, guided imagery and forgiveness that have been practised for many years, provides a working, practical, user-friendly model and tools for enhancing the wellbeing of children and adults. These tools can be, and have been taught to children, parents, school teachers, and health professionals including general practitioners, nurses, and psychologists ^[10, 71]. Journeywork can be integrated into daily life at home and at school as issues and emotions arise. In addition, Journey programs would be suitable for inclusion in the *KidsMatter Programs Guide* making it more accessible to those schools who wish to implement wellbeing programs in their schools. The issue raised by the Principal remains; schools accessing the resources to continue with this and other wellbeing programs.