

Evidence Base

James Cook University

“The Peer Support Program fosters the development of effective group work skills, values mutual respect, kindness and tolerance and celebrates the ‘uniqueness’ of each individual.... Peer Support contributes to a safe and supportive school environment.”

Principal involved in the VEGPS project,
TEACH Cluster, Townsville

Research

A study of 7 state (government) schools in the Townsville district who identify themselves as the TEACH cluster (Teachers and Educators Around Castle Hill) implemented the Peer Support Program in their schools to support Values Education and Quality Teaching practices.

The schools ranged in size from 120 students to 600 students, with varying Indigenous populations (from 8% to 80%). The schools also varied in their resource levels, economic base and school facilities.

The schools believed their work with the Peer Support Program represented one of a number of ways in which schools actively engage with the teaching of values. Students lived and experienced the values within the Peer Support Program and beyond their school sites.

The research comprised observation sessions and interviews with students and teachers in each school site about a range of aspects of the Program.

The initial case study was carried out, then a further 2 findings were noted and observed. These 2 further observed findings were related to the need for holistic and integrated implementation of the Peer Support Program. 3 key points were observed during the second phase of the study:

- the briefing of the Peer Leaders to conduct a Peer Support session
- the facilitation of the session by the Peer Leaders
- the debriefing of the Peer Leaders following the session.

Initial Case Study Findings

The Peer Support Program engaged students in reflection on the actual and desirable qualities in relationships and behaviour. This led to transformations of their behaviour in a range of ways. Students in the intervention school indicated they were likely to report bullying behaviours to a greater range of people such as a friends, teachers, parents or other adults.

Staff and students also claimed the Peer Support Program had a noticeable impact on the quality of life within their school.

Teachers felt the Peer Support Program was already having a visible effect on student behaviour and relationships in the playground. They saw the Peer Leaders as increasingly displaying care of the younger students, and taking higher levels of responsibility for their peers. Younger students were described by both students and staff as showing respect for their Peer Leaders. There were also demonstrated examples of caring and considerate behaviour eg leaders were attentive to difficulties faced by some students and intervened in low key but effective ways to encourage or prompt students.

There were also observations of the Peer Support Program contributing positively to whole school activities and overall organisation. The Program promoted cross age interaction, resulting in a more harmonious school environment.

Findings from specific observation of Peer Leaders conducting a session:

- Evidence of high level of engagement and general cooperation throughout sessions
- Evidence of leadership by Peer Leaders
- Thorough preparation and good presentations
- Ability to handle difficulties which arose and deal with disturbances in a low key, unobtrusive and non confrontational manner.