

Berry Street Education Model School Case Studies

1. Doveton College Early Years to Year 9 School

2. Doonside High School

3. St Patrick's Primary School

4. Traralgon College

5. All Saints Catholic Primary School



Why Trauma Aware Teaching?

Thadd Rimmer, Doveton College, Victoria

Trauma-aware teaching is a set of strategies, developed through research, being used within our classrooms, our school and our community. Trauma-aware teaching is used to provide safe, inclusive and positive learning environments, and to build strong and real relationships. This enables all staff to work with all students, especially those with traumatic backgrounds, to improve their learning outcomes and teach our students to deal with stressful situations both in and out of the classrooms. (Doveton College definition, 2017)

The challenge for the Doveton community in 2011 was the amalgamation of 5 schools. Across these 5 schools there were over 50 languages spoken, a very high transiency rate (30%) and many students with a background of trauma. The school amalgamation occurred in 2012, when we opened the doors for the first time as Doveton College.

From the beginning student engagement was an issue and attempts at managing disruptive behaviour through the issuing of consequences was not effective. We had 30% of the student taking up 90% of our time. Very few teachers in the school felt that they had the tools necessary to engage the students, or in some cases, to even keep them in the learning space. We needed staff professional development to build our ability to understand and teach all of our students.

It was an uphill climb those first few years; we weren't achieving the academic targets that we wanted, absences were high and student behaviour was challenging. I was fortunate to start teaching at Doveton College in 2013 and I so have seen first-hand the positive impact that the implementation of the trauma-aware practice of the Berry Street Education Model (BSEM) has brought to our entire College community academically, socially and emotionally.

Culture change

In 2015 the culture at Doveton College began to shift. Some people were initially sceptical; however, most teachers were open to seeking the help needed to reach our trickiest students. After each BSEM Professional Learning session, we began to see more and more staff buy-in. Our teachers language was changing from "I don't know how to deal with some of these kids", to asking "what strategies do I need to engage all students in the lesson?".

When implementing trauma-aware strategies into all classrooms, we looked at the following key factors: building a common language, building stronger relationships, creating predictable routines and shifting the mindset of teachers and students. In 2019 we are embedding these strategies in everything we do. Every staff member has a trauma-aware goal in their Profession Development Plan (PDP). Every student has a Focus Plan, and everyone is accountable for their part. Throughout our 4-year journey we have seen increases in



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Curriculum and Classroom Strategies

attendance, student staying in class, student engaged in lessons, calm and orderly learning environments, increase in staff retention and happier students and staff.

Common Language - 'Track the Speaker'

The phrase 'Track the Speaker' is an integral part of our daily classroom interactions, year level assemblies, whole school assemblies and staff meetings and was our building block to launch common language in all classrooms. Any teacher in the school can walk into any class from Prep through to Year 9, use this phrase and get all students present centred and grounded. Through the years, it has morphed into different phrases such as 'tracking me please' and 'tracking the board please'. We have a section in our Casual Relief Teacher (CRT's) induction manual informing them about this language and the structures and routines in place. Sharing the common language often helps CRTs maintain the consistency and expectations in their classes, creating a better learning environment for all.

At Doveton College, we know it is imperative to be consistent in our communication with all members of the College community. With so many different languages spoken by our families, the different kinds of trauma they have experienced and with high numbers of student turnover throughout the year, all staff must deliver a clear message to all students and deliver it quickly. We pride ourselves on how quickly new students pick up on the language and use it with ease.

We Will Always Be Learning and seeking to improve.

Creating expectations while building strong relationships

One of our staff mottos since 2015 has been, 'what you walk by is what you accept' (see below). This motto put the accountability for every student in the school onto every staff member. Being a Prep- Year 9 school has advantages and disadvantages. The biggest disadvantage is having secondary teachers who have never worked with primary students and primary teachers who have never worked with secondary students. Teachers, who have no relationships with the opposite, found it difficult to deal with unfamiliar students and tended to pass behaviour problems onto the classroom teacher or ignore the behaviour all together. Not now. We ask all staff to take ownership of all students in the school. Prep teachers walking by a Year 8 student behaving poorly, will try to address the behaviour using unconditional positive regard. Turning a blind eye is not acceptable. We know that within the Circle of Security, our students are looking for a secure base. They are looking for us to set boundaries and limits that provide a safe and secure learning environment.

The common language we are building makes this interaction easier for all staff. The students hear the same message from all staff in the school. The trauma-aware strategies our staff were use are consistent across the College and reinforced in all classrooms. A by-product of this is it encourages all teachers to communicate with all students in the school. This Has led to better teacher-student relationships and just as importantly improved staff wellbeing. Any staff who are unsure about this practice, have quickly seen the benefits and jumped on board. We are continually increasing our expectations of staff and students.



BERRY STREET EDUCATION MODEL



Curriculum and Classroom Strategies

Note

‘The standard you walk by is the standard you accept’ were the words of Lieutenant General David Morrison, Australian Army Chief when he was addressing members of the army about allegations of inappropriate behaviour. It is a powerful speech and is readily accessible online by entering the Lieutenant General’s name into your search engine.

Our Journey

This is just a small snippet of our journey. We are proud of the work we have done as a College and we know the trauma-aware teaching has been fundamental to the success we have experienced in recent years. While we have been on this journey for four years, we are still learning and improving our practices. We know there are parts of the model we do really well, and we know there are parts of the model we need to get better at. We will always be learning and seeking to improve.

Author

Thadd Rimer is the Assistant Principal at Doveton College. He has led the implementation of Berry Street Education Model at Doveton since 2017. He can be contacted at rimer.richard.t@edumail.vic.gov.au

Doonside Technology High School



By Brendan Bailey, Senior Trainer of the Berry Street Education Model

There are industrial estates to the east and west, and the suburb is ringed by the M7 freeway. In the western suburbs of Sydney – wedged between Blacktown and Rooty Hill – sits Doonside Technology High School. Put simply, it's in a tough part of town. But it's at Doonside that the Berry Street Education Model (BSEM) has led to some incredible outcomes. In conversation with Brendan Bailey from the Berry Street team, Doonside's Principal Donna Loughran and Head of Wellbeing, Paul Karbon explain how.

Doonside's involvement with the BSEM program began when Donna and Paul saw Berry Street's Tom Brunzell speak at the 2016 Doing School Differently conference in Melbourne. "We were blown away," Paul recalls, "it seemed to be exactly what we were looking for."

Donna agrees, "The model focuses on both wellbeing and academic achievements, and this really appealed to me as Principal and Paul as Head of Wellbeing. We liked how the model has this two-pronged approach." Doonside are halfway through applying the program to their school. They see the two-year implementation timeline as a considerable benefit. Doonside has taken the opportunity of the long timeline to re-evaluate the way they support both the wellbeing of their students and their discipline structures, so they can align them with BSEM's way of thinking. They've also introduced a positive education subject called Life Education, where Year 7 to 10 students learn about how to improve their resilience, develop a growth mindset and build on their emotional intelligence.

The model is already delivering huge benefits to the wellbeing and academic success of Doonside students. In the first year, Doonside has seen improvements in:

BERRY STREET EDUCATION MODEL

Curriculum and Classroom Strategies



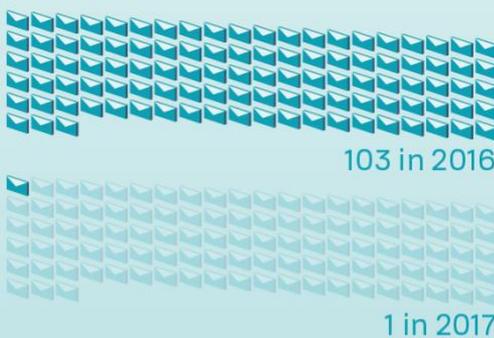
Results 2016-2017 at Doonside Technology High School

Behaviour



Letters of Concern sent

When a student is struggling across the board (academically and behaviourally) Doonside send the family a letter of concern.



Academic Achievement

Percentage of students who achieved minimum NAPLAN standards:



While it's clear that student academic achievements and behaviour is already improving, Paul believes that the greatest benefits have actually been to the teachers.

"We needed to take it slow and steady. The model is based on a lot of information about why kids 'act out', or retreat inwards, in response to their previous life experiences, and we needed time to unpack it. What we've found is that the Berry Street training we did as part of model has given the teachers the extra skills to properly understand, and work with, our 'toughest' kids."

"It gave them the confidence to provide students with structure and routine, which we now know, is vital for helping create a classroom where they feel safe and supported. It's so empowering for our teachers to realise that the kids who used to challenge them the most actually had unmet needs, and by doing things a bit differently they can engage them and really help them focus on learning."

At Doonside they're starting to develop a common language for discussing students, which is really improving the culture of our school.

"Teachers are no longer saying that this student is 'a difficult student'," Donna says. "They're now saying that this student has some unmet needs and that they're 'escalated' in behaviour. Words matter, and that changes the quality of the interaction that a teacher will have with that student."

Donna and Paul have noticed significant differences in the students themselves also.

"They can articulate their concerns better by verbalising their feelings and can tell us when they're having difficulty self-regulating their behaviour," Donna says.

"The kids seem settled and the teachers are better equipped to talk to students about what has stopped their learning in the past. Kids now see teachers as there to help them."



BERRY STREET EDUCATION MODEL

Curriculum and Classroom Strategies

“In fact, the kids can talk about things out of their control and can even unpack previous blockers in their own engagement in school. It’s a far more productive conversation and it has almost put a stop to repeat suspensions.”

Staff at Doonside are now working to ensure that the themes and strategies in BSEM are passed on to new staff.

“I wish they were teaching this in university teaching courses,” Paul says. But the vision at Doonside is not limited to their own school. “There is a real need for this at all schools. A lot of schools have good community connections and excellent wellbeing support. But the holistic view of BSEM and its combination of wellbeing and academics, is what gives it strength.”

Trauma Aware Practice - in a Catholic Primary School

Cassie Thompson, St Patrick's Primary School. Kilmore

At St Patrick's Primary School, we have 560 students enrolled in 21 classes. The school is located just over 60 minutes north of Melbourne's city centre and is one of four schools located in the area. Kilmore shows a low level of engagement in education with only 12% of people ages 15 and over having finished year 12, and almost 1/3 of our families are either separated, divorced or widowed (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

Like many teachers I was grappling with the ongoing challenges of how to engage and support students experiencing anger, disengagement and rapidly escalating response to stimuli. Looking back, I now realise that I had already begun using some trauma informed strategies into our class, but I was not aware of any trauma models or the full range of strategies available to me.

Getting Started

I first stumbled upon this gold mine three years ago while trying to support a particular student who was struggling to regulate his emotions. This resulted in a lot of time spent outside the classroom. The constant disruption had created a crack in the class culture that I desperately needed to fix. I knew I wasn't alone as I'd met others who were also experiencing this problem. I took the issue to my Principal who enrolled the wellbeing leader and myself in professional learning sessions on trauma-aware practice. We attended four professional learning days and from the first session there was excitement, and a determination to implement this model into our school. We initially trialled the new strategies inside my classroom to gather data and develop a plan that we could take to the rest of the school's staff.

Throughout 2017, staffroom discussions piqued interest among teachers, and some began trailing the strategies that we had learned in the professional development sessions. These strategies included implementing brain breaks and a morning routine including positive touch and a positive greeting for all students. The wellbeing leader and I also ran several staff meetings in 2017 to explain trauma-aware practice. It was decided that all teaching staff would spend the rest of the year experimenting with various strategies within their roles. This aligned with our 2017 school goal of creating CALM classrooms.

All Students can and will learn with a teacher that believes in them.

The next steps

The Leadership Team allocated a significant portion of the school's professional learning budget to enable all school staff to undertake four-day training program onsite in 2018 and 2019. The learning explored the five dimensions; of Body, Relationship, Engagement, Stamina and Character. After each session we set and implemented whole school expectations and goals. This holistic school community approach proved successful in generating a consistent language about the ways we support students to promote success at our school, including tracking the speaker, dysregulation, co-regulation and brain breaks. The excitement among the school community was palpable.



BERRY STREET EDUCATION MODEL

Curriculum and Classroom Strategies

One of the significant goals set by both leaders and teachers was for all students to end up with a customised focus plan which contained strategies to help them regulate themselves for learning. These were to be available for use throughout the school day. When creating the focus plans, the Wellbeing and Learning Diversity teams collaborated, creating customised version informed by trauma-aware practice strategies.

In our school's version, we combined the Zones of Regulation with the original focus on underlying principles. This proved to be a lengthy process, which is still not yet fully realised. The logic behind combining the two areas relates to the current use of specialist services within the school. Occupational Therapists, Psychologists and Speech Pathologists previously used the language present in the Zones of Regulations when they spoke to students. Not wanting to create confusion, we decided to use standardised language relating emotions that all staff, students and visiting services could utilise. Brendan, a Year Five student explains the Zones of regulations as, 'Ways that we say what we're feeling so we can work out how to get back to being ready to learn'.

While many strategies have been explored and implemented by staff the one that has had the most traction is morning circle. Students such as Emmerson, a Year five student, insist on it, stating that, 'Morning circle allows for us to get in a good mood for learning'. This positive morning routine has now led to trauma-aware protocols and procedures being included in our induction process for new teachers and emerging teachers. I love watching the way this has gradually become part of what we do at St Patrick's.

What has stuck and impeded our vision

We have had some setbacks and we needed to iron out some kinks. One challenge is staff turnover as new staff need to be upskilled. New Families have joined our community and these children need to learn the new approach. The organic nature of the classroom means that the strategies require revising and reimplementing of strategies. Not all staff share the same positive experience of the change. To support all staff, we have set our expectations on three basic principles; Brain Breaks every 20-30 minutes, morning circle each day and focus plans for all students. We have also extended the amount of time to have these practices embedded in our daily teaching practices.

In summary:

Trauma-aware teaching has allowed me to put into practice real strategies that support what I have always known; all students can and will learn with a teacher that believes in them, and that time spent on teaching skills such as how to regulate their emotions and allowing time to find their strengths will return ten-fold in student data.

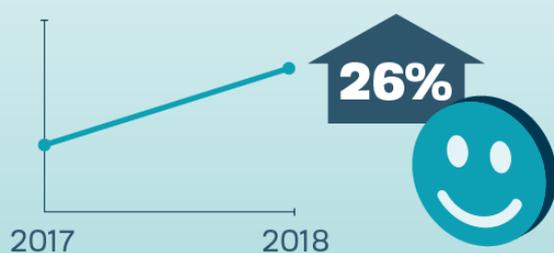
Author

Cassie Thompson is a classroom teacher, Theraplay Practitioner and Assistant Wellbeing Leader at St Patricks primary school, Kilmore. She has taught junior primary for the majority of her 11-year career and is currently completing her Master of Education: Student Wellbeing at Australian Catholic University. Cassie can be reached at cthompson@spkilmore.catholic.edu.au

Traralgon College

Results of students in the 2018 BSEM pilot group using an adapted Victorian Department of Education Attitudes to School Survey:

YEAR 7



YEAR 10



Interview by Jack Greig, Senior Trainer of the Berry Street Education Model

Located in the Latrobe Valley, Traralgon College is a multi-campus high school with approximately 960 students.

Keita Matsumoto is a teacher and the Berry Street Education Model (BSEM) Leader at Traralgon College. He is an alumnus of the Teach for Australia program and in 2018 was a finalist in the Australian Education Awards in recognition of his work across the Latrobe Valley.

In this interview, Keita reflects on the impact generated at Traralgon College through early BSEM implementation initiatives.

Jack Greig: Keita, how did you go about setting up for implementation? Because getting started can often be the most challenging part.

Keita Matsumoto: When we were looking to set up for BSEM at Traralgon College we were broadly looking at three areas.

1. The first area was the people that would form the BSEM pilot team;
2. The second area was the strategy and the operations that we'd like to put in place;

3. The third area was really thinking about the skills and capabilities that are needed.

When we look at the first bucket, which is the people... my principal and I were looking for three main things:

1. Good foundations in classroom management;
2. Commitment to the vision of trauma-informed practice and what that means for our students, and;
3. Representation from all levels of the teaching hierarchy. We were looking for people ranging from Leading Teachers to early career teachers to ensure that BSEM had representation across the school.

This was a vital and important step that set us up for implementing the strategy, which started with looking at what year levels we wanted to focus on. We decided to focus heavily on key year levels in our first year of implementation. Traralgon College exists on a two-campus system: we have Years 7, 8, 9 as junior and Years 10, 11, 12 as senior. We picked out Year 7 at junior and year 10 at senior because they are the youngest cohorts at each campus. Our thinking behind that was as implementation continues over the years it will enable us to familiarise students with trauma-informed practice as soon as they enter the Traralgon College system.

Another important part of the strategy was to think closely about time allocation. We budgeted a hundred minutes a fortnight for pilot team members. When you break that down it comes to 30 minutes for observation every fortnight and then 30 minutes to analyse the footage and prepare for coaching conversations. Then we had about 30 to 40 minutes of coaching conversations once a fortnight. For those five BSEM pilot team members that equates to about five periods a week, which is 0.2 FTE load.

Evaluation was also critical. We were looking at what we wanted to track, how we we're going to track it, and why. We ended up with the refined version of the Victorian Department of Education's Attitudes to School Survey because it is a valuable feedback tool that aligns the concepts from Body and Relationship days and secondly, it is an important data set for the school.

The third area included skills and capabilities. We were looking at how to get team members to skill up as fast as possible. We used a mixture of growth coaching and classroom filming to make sure that we had observations to pick apart what was happening in the classroom. Personally, as BSEM leader, it was also important for me to make sure that I was getting the professional learning that I needed to support my team. That's where Teach for Australia's Teach to Lead program has been vital in my development as a middle leader. The program taught me a lot of the skills around what it means to manage implementation, coaching, personnel leadership and a lot of the hard and soft skills that come with team management.

Evaluation was also critical. We are looking at what we wanted to track, how we were going to track it and why



BERRY STREET EDUCATION MODEL

Curriculum and Classroom Strategies

JG: There's some sophisticated planning I can hear going into getting started in the first few months of implementation. I'm really interested in how you measured the early success and impact of your work. How did you decide on what data you were going to collect?

KM: When you take a step back in terms of measuring the impact of our early work... We were mainly looking at two comparisons for both males and females. And the first comparison was taking the 2017 *Attitudes to School Survey* results and comparing that with a baseline at Year 10 and Year 7. We wanted to see whether there was any growth between the two separate cohorts. The second comparison was taking a term one baseline from Year 7 and 10 and seeing whether implementing BSEM in terms 2 and 3 had a significant difference in pilot classrooms compared to the general cohort.

When deciding what specifically to track, there were two important decision-making factors. The first important factor was that the data would provide meaningful information from students in terms of our classroom practices while being relevant to the content we were covering in Body and Relationship.

The second was that the data had to be relevant to the school's strategic priorities. We wanted to select data sets that are used by the department to assess the school's performance, as this would ensure that the BSEM pilot team was delivering on key strategic priorities with contribution to overall school performance. As a result, we settled on a refined 19 question version of the Attitudes to School Survey.

After one semester, our BSEM students are outperforming their general cohort by a factor of about 20 percent

Our priority in collecting the results was to get an accurate picture of the students' perceptions. When looking at the whole cohort it was important for us to set a day and time for all the students to complete the survey because this ensured that feedback was collected in a consistent context. In terms of pilot classrooms, we were asking the students the same questions, but the pilot teachers specifically explained to students that this time the questions were about their experience in that particular classroom regarding that specific teacher's practice. By doing that we could distinguish between students' general experience during Year 7 and Year 10 and a student's specific experience within the BSEM pilot classroom.

JG: Now you've got the data, can you share more about what it's telling you? How have you communicated success to the leadership team and to broader school staff?

KM: The data is very positive. What we saw was that on average Year 10 pilot students outperformed the 2017 Year 10 cohort by 24 percent and the pilot Year 7s outperformed the 2017 Year 7s by an average of 26 per cent. When we compare within the 2018 cohort, Year 10 pilot students outperformed their cohort by about 24 percent and Year 7 outperformed their cohort by a measure of 14 percent. After one semester, our BSEM students are outperforming their general cohort by a factor of about 20 per cent.

To share and build on this success we were broadly looking at communicating with four groups of stakeholders. First and foremost was the BSEM pilot team. Our first step was to feedback to the team our impact and celebrate the outcome. And when we were doing that it was important for me to highlight how this data was a result of each of our persistence throughout implementation. I found that objective data is an incredibly powerful way to communicate the impact that we're having.



BERRY STREET EDUCATION MODEL

Curriculum and Classroom Strategies

The second group that we were looking at was leadership. When I approached the principals about the data this conversation specifically focused on the efficacy of BSEM for our pilot students and then to highlight the potential school-wide benefit with a more systematic rollout beyond the pilot team. Our mandate this year has really been around showing that BSEM can work within our context and we believe that this data has done that for us.

The third was more of a question of how to communicate this to the broader Year 7 and year 10 teaching teams in a way that will be conducive to supporting implementation long term. The framing of the message was incredibly important here. We spent a whole lot of time considering this and decided that we would focus on the idea that the data was not a comparison, but it was objective feedback from our students about the benefits that come with trauma-informed practice in their classroom. What's more, we used that meeting with the cohort team as a springboard to trial cohort-wide de-escalating entry routines at both Year 7 and Year 10. We chose that strategy because we thought it was the most powerful routine to achieve a strong start in each class. Then we followed it up by working on cohort-wide brain breaks. At the end of this year we plan to show this data to the whole school and on Friday we have a team planning day where we're currently working through how the messaging will go when we get up there. Our plan is to create a summary presentation where we communicate our impact for 2018.

I found that objective data is an incredibly powerful way to communicate the impact that we are having

JG: Can you share more about what's next for the implementation initiative, from the data you've got and from where the energy and interest is lying in the school?

KM: Our implicit mandate this year was to demonstrate that BSEM is effective for our students and our context. The pilot team have done an incredible job with this and now have strong data to demonstrate the efficacy of BSEM. This data is vital to get the staff and leadership on board for the next phase of implementation. In 2019 our priority will be to move from a pilot to school-wide practice, and really this means two things.

The first thing is we need an active stake in leadership meetings because this is the way decisions roll out across our school. So being aware of the political and the leadership structure is important for us when we spread to school-wide practice. We also feel that working at that level will allow the BSEM team to be more fluidly embedded within the key organisational priorities that are set at the school and as a result, we're hoping to get a lot more insight as to how to support the other priorities that are taking place. The second category is how to provide professional development for our staff in a wider reaching manner. This year a lot of the professional development has been focused on the five pilot team members, so aside from the whole-school BSEM days, the intensive coaching has been limited to five people. So next year we're thinking about expanding observations and coaching support to the concept of a 'BSEM learning stream' where staff can have access to in-house professional development. In practice this is going to be less time-intensive but it's going to be regular enough that we can keep in touch and make sure that BSEM practice is at the forefront of minds.

JG: What are some of your personal reflections and insights from Traralgon College's journey to introduce BSEM, given the process so far?



BERRY STREET EDUCATION MODEL

Curriculum and Classroom Strategies

KM: My insights fall into two broad areas. The first being about teams and managing teams. The second is around implementation – let's start there. I think that it's critical to be clear on your goals and to closely track your metrics. It enables the pilot team to gauge their progress as we're doing the work and it allows us to course correct where necessary... but more importantly it also allows us to celebrate the wins when we have them.

Secondly, these metrics allow the pilot team to communicate with key stakeholders the efficacy of BSEM and the contribution of the work taking place. This is vital because you want to make sure that people know that the hard work, they are putting in is paying off. Without these metrics it's hard to communicate that to colleagues and leaders.

And thirdly, I think it enables us to understand the team's direct contribution to overall school improvement. This has really helped to maintain the momentum and reinforce the belief in the importance of our work.

the earlier the pilot team can visit a model school where BSEM is really working, the better clarity they will have around what will be in store for implementation over the year

My final reflections are more about teams. One thing that I really took away from the start of the year was that a shared experiential understanding of what's possible is catalytic for team motivation. The earlier the pilot team can visit a model school where BSEM is really working, the better clarity they will have around what will be in store for implementation over the year. I think that doing so creates a vision that the team can work towards. It's critical for the team to see and feel what's possible because the content, especially in the Body domain, can be abstract if teachers haven't engaged with it before. But if you go into a school environment where it's living and it's working, it really makes the abstract more concrete and it clarifies what the team is working towards. My hot tip would be as early in the implementation phase as possible, visit a model school!

Another thing I have reflected on is that my job as a leader here is to be present and very much in and amongst the team as we do our work day-in and day-out. I think that sounds obvious, but it is a powerful takeaway and unless the situation calls for it my default position is to maintain the dynamic of just being another team member – thinking and working through implementation challenges side-by-side. In fact, I'm coached by two of my team members just as I work with and coach each of them. I find that this dynamic works well because it builds the camaraderie. There isn't really a hierarchy here. We're just a cohesive unit working at the same level and that has had a strong contribution to the way we interact and the culture that we've developed.

JG: Thank you for sharing your experiences and learnings from implementing BSEM at Traralgon College.



Using Mindfulness to Engage Trauma Impacted Learners

Melissa Ann Canil, All Saints Catholic Primary School

A child's ability to engage in their learning is directly affected by their state of calm. Mindfulness is one way to maintain a state of calm and improve engagement in student learning.

At All Saints Catholic Primary School, we have many children who have experienced various levels of trauma throughout their childhood and in their home environment. These children present with social, emotional, academic and behavioural difficulties which affects their ability to engage in learning on a daily basis. We recognise that the most difficult times for our trauma-impacted children is after recess and lunch times. These children find it difficult to settle and engage in learning after play times. Often the traumatised children will feel anxious or emotional about a yard play incident and need assistance to return calmly to their classroom.

We began our Berry Street Journey in 2018 with all staff members at the school undergoing the 4-day Berry Street Education Model (BESM) Training. Our school previously completed the Trauma Sensitive Schools Project, an initiative between Catholic Education SA and Australian Childhood Foundation to increase awareness of how trauma affects a child's ability to engage in learning.

Implementing trauma-aware practice was a natural step for our school as we already had a basic understanding of how trauma affects the growing brain of a child and the trauma-informed teaching strategies complemented what we already did in our classrooms. The biggest takeaway from my work with Berry Street and the Australian Childhood Foundation is that mindfulness works! I never believed it until saw the results in my own classroom. Therefore, this article is to convince every educator reading it that mindfulness can have lasting and significant positive results for children and their ability to engage in learning.

What made trauma-aware practice implementation so easy is that the staff experienced it first and were led through the practical aspects of it during training. We continued to practice the strategies at staff. For example, beginning our staff meetings with the welcome circle and participating in brain breaks throughout our PD sessions. When implementing mindfulness as a whole school, we had to practice it as a staff and feel the benefits of it firsthand before promoting it to our students.

Understanding how the brain works

Part of the BSEM model is learning how our brain works and how trauma can affect the development of a growing brain. It was imperative that our children (and staff) had a comprehensive understanding of brain physiology and mental processes. In particular the Limbic system, which controls the emotions and motivations from deep inside the brain. We educated our children by explicit teaching and various practical activities about three key parts of the brain; the Amygdala, Prefrontal Cortex and the Hippocampus. When the Amygdala is activated, it can trigger reactive behaviour, that often looks like a child lasing out in anger or causing disturbance to the classroom or yard. We call this unmindful behaviour, which is a negative action before mind thinks about it. This is why it was of high importance that children understand what mindful awareness is so that they can consciously process sensory input. Trauma affected children however have



BERRY STREET EDUCATION MODEL

Curriculum and Classroom Strategies

Amygdala which is constantly scanning the environment for threats and can overact at the slightest trigger. By implementing mindfulness, we could purposefully calm this part of the brain therefore bringing the child back into the 'thinking brain'. When the Amygdala of the child is firing, then there is no possible way for them to make it sensible decisions, process sensory input and control impulses.

Impact of mindfulness after play times

We completed some action research on how mindfulness after play times increased the students' engagement in learning. When comparing our data take before and after implementing mindfulness and calming activities, there was clear improvement in the length of time that children could stay engaged.

Here are some of the teacher responses when asked if they had noticed and change in the children's engagement in learning AFTER they had implemented a calming or mindful activity.

- The children approach work with far less apprehension and are calmer.
- They are certainly more responsive to listening and are more likely to follow instructions or listen to other people's ideas and thoughts.
- Yes! They are communicating more about their feelings and taking control of their thoughts/feelings/actions and are more focussed.

The most significant change we noticed after introducing the mindfulness after playtimes was how much calmer and focussed the children were during the lesson. We learn that by giving our children time to calm their minds before commencing a lesson, it allowed the brain to return to an optimal state of learning.

It Takes Time

Mindfulness is not something that is learnt over night. As we all know, trauma affected children do not cope well with new things or change. It took months of practising and routine to finally get my students into the habit of returning after play times and settling into mindfulness. My classes do not go without it now! I found that implementing the BSEM model took time and practice just like mindfulness.

As most educators know, even the best strategies and tools are thrown out the window on some days. I have learnt that when a child is heightened and their Amygdala is firing, there is no hope of engaging in learning until we bring them back into a 'thinking brain'. I have seen many teachers become frustrated and verbally wrestle with a child while they have 'flipped their lid' and this only heightens the child more. I have learnt that it's our job to bring calm to the child's chaos not join their chaos! BSEM has helped our school learn strategies to calm our students and engage them in learning.

Author

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Berry Street Education Model Course Outline

