



Connected Self

Connection Inspiration Innovation

Elizabeth Vale Rock & Water Program

Term 1 - 2009

Program Overview and Qualitative Evaluation



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Elizabeth Vale Rock & Water Program

Program Summary and Qualitative Evaluation

REASON FOR EVALUATION

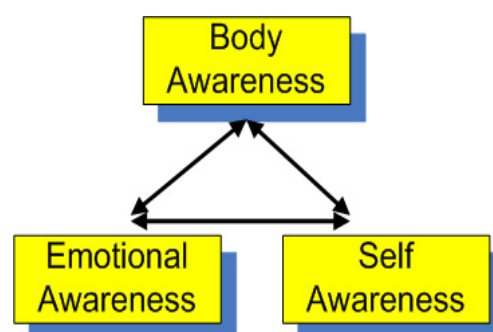
A whole school approach to the Rock & Water program was conducted by Connected Self program facilitator, Tim Brenton, for the New Arrival Program (NAP) students of Elizabeth Vale primary school. This evaluation reviews the program, summarises the qualitative evaluation and provides recommendations for future programming. The evaluation has had contributions from Tim Brenton (program facilitator), Andrew Cenuich (program reviewer) and Ivan Raymond (psychologist).

PROGRAM CONTEXT

"Rock and Water" is a manual-based program that was developed by the Dutch educationalist, Freerk Ykema (2002; 2003). Ykema initially developed the program for boys aged from 10 to 18 in response to his perception that traditional educational programs were unable to support boys in key aspects of their development. Such areas included: (1) verbal and emotional expression, (2) emotional regulation, (3) self-management of impulse driven tendencies and (4) the ability to respond to and manage aggressive tendencies in both themselves and others.

Ykema (2002; 2003) designed the Rock and Water program upon a psychophysical intervention framework, with a number of existential and transpersonal philosophies built into the program (for detailed overview see Ykema, 2002). In other words, Ykema developed the program to support young people develop body awareness (e.g., the ability to control one's physical state, i.e. breath), which in turn, provides the platform for young people to develop emotional awareness (e.g., as emotions are expressed through the body). The program also provides physical exercises, group activities and role-plays to foster the development of self-awareness (e.g., the ability to link together one's environment, emotions and thoughts). In summary:

"The building-blocks of the Rock and Water program are self-control, self-reflection and self-confidence. Building on to this foundation, it is possible to pay attention to the themes of safety, assertiveness, communication and finding their own way (the inner compass) that connects them to others (solidarity) and gives them direction (spirituality)." (Ykema, 2003, p. 9)



An important component of the Rock and Water program are the symbolic references. For instance, "rock" represents a rigid and uncompromising approach to life, while "water" symbolises flexibility, communication and cooperation. The program teaches the consequences, both positive and negative, of approaching the world in either a "rock" or "water" manner.

Connected Self practitioners have designed and delivered the Rock and Water program for groups of young people within the South Australian alternative care system since 2002. The program had previously undergone continuous development and evolution as it attempted to match the learning and therapeutic needs of complex client groups (for a detailed overview of this evolution process see Raymond, 2006)

Initial evaluations of the Rock and Water program for guardianship clients were undertaken in 2005 (Raymond, 2005a; 2005b). These qualitative or descriptive research methodologies found that both clients and youth workers reported a range of positive outcomes from the program. A number of key performance indicators provided preliminary support for the efficacy of the program (e.g., high rate of program completion and attendance); however, apart from this, questions remained regarding the generalisability and longevity of the program outcomes.

A more systematic and robust qualitative evaluation of a Rock and Water program delivered to male and female young guardianship clients was conducted by Raymond and Simpson (2007). The quantitative results remained inconclusive and the authors were unable to indicate the degree program outcomes led to long-term behavioural changes, or, the degree the outcomes were generalised to other settings. Despite this, the qualitative findings replicated the previous evaluations and the authors concluded that Rock and Water represents a "program with a purpose".

"In summary, two important features of this and the previous Rock and Water program evaluations are noted. First, young people share a very positive regard for the Rock and Water program and this would appear linked to the high program completion and participation rate. Traditionally, young people residing in alternative care present with high rates of program drop-out and report very negative evaluations towards schools and programming in general. Second, the evaluation showed that young people and youth workers reported an overwhelming sense of "connectedness" to the Rock and Water program and to both youth workers and participants associated with the program. It would appear that the Rock and Water program provides the opportunity for children to experience fun and playful interactions with both peers and adults. Such activities remain a fundamental development task for male and female young people who have experienced backgrounds of abuse and trauma (Hughes, 1997; Perry; 2004). It is through these positive adult interactions and experiences, facilitated by fun and playfulness, that young people are provided alternative examples of adult-child interactions that challenge their earlier negative relationship

experiences. This provides a foundation for young people to reconstruct their experiences of trauma and abuse” (Raymond & Simpson, 2007, p. 12).

Connected Self has undertaken ongoing evaluation of the Rock & Water program delivered to students within DECS, Families SA and a range of non-government youth agencies. A recent qualitative program evaluation was conducted by Connected Self psychologist, Ivan Raymond, for male and female groups of Indigenous and non-indigenous young people (for further information, see Raymond (2008)). On the balance of evaluations conducted by Connected Self, there is strong evidence that Rock & Water program continues to be positively regarded by young people, teachers, youth practitioners and all stakeholders associated with the program. Overall, the outcomes achieved with Rock & Water are diverse and specific to the student and context. In summary, there is strong support that the program can assist teachers, youth practitioners and schools target specific social-emotional developmental needs of their students, and by doing so, achieve improvements in behavioural functioning and student wellbeing.

ELIZABETH VALE PROGRAM

Program Aims

The proposal was developed in respect to the following broad aims:

- To increase the capacity of the Elizabeth Vale Primary School to respond to the diverse needs of their students, in particular, students who have trouble mixing and communicating with other children from diverse backgrounds.
- To deliver the Rock & Water program with a whole school approach to students from Grades 3 to 7, from 'New Arrival Program' classes.

Expected Outcomes

For Elizabeth Vale Primary School

- For the Rock & Water program to be utilized as a “connection” program for new arrival students of Elizabeth Vale Primary.
- To increase the schools capacity to build meaningful relationships with students with complex needs.
- To provide a safe program for new students.
- To teach appropriate social skills and classroom strategies to assist learning.
- To provide a language to challenge and manage student behaviour.
- To provide a structured and common approach to the management of children and young people with complex needs.

- To foster school solidarity.

For Elizabeth Vale Primary School Students

- To provide opportunities for young people to experience secure attachment relationships with key adult figures.
- For young people to experience the program environment as a “safe place”.
- For young people to learn and then practice a range of verbal and non-verbal self-protective behaviours.
- To increase the self-esteem and self-efficacy of the young people.
- To improve the young people’s body-, emotional- and self-awareness, and by doing so, improve their ability to regulate their emotions and behaviours.
- To teach and then support young people implement more adaptive social and problem solving skills.
- For young people to learn and practice relaxation exercises and to experience a state of inner calm (this may be a foreign state for some young people).
- For young people to complete a program and to achieve success, and for this to be used as a positive narrative that can lay the foundation for future positive outcomes.
- For young people to experience a sense of a positive school community.
- To connect different cultural groups around a common activity (e.g., Rock & Water, physical activity) and provide structure and boundaries within this relationship development process.

The Current Program

A whole school approach to Rock & Water was implemented across grade levels three to seven for the new arrival students of Elizabeth Vale primary school. The new-arrival classes participated in eight lessons of the Rock & Water program and were delivered in term one over week’s two to nine. Program facilitator, Tim Brenton, delivered six sessions one-day a week over an eight week period.

Tim also made himself available during recess and lunch periods in a mentoring role for all students participating in the program.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Participation Rates (Section Written by Tim Brenton)

Across the six classes who participated in the program, there was a medium to high level of participation. Approximately 6 teachers and 90 students participated in the program. As a program facilitator, I write with confidence that the participation rate was at a high level considering the dynamic and complex needs of many of the new arrival students. There were

instances of young people sitting out but the number of students participating was far greater than the numbers sitting out. Interestingly, I found the older classes (grades six and seven) with the highest number of young people choosing to sit out. Contributing factors may have been that older students were more self-conscious in front of their peers, especially considering the mixed-sex nature of groups within the program.

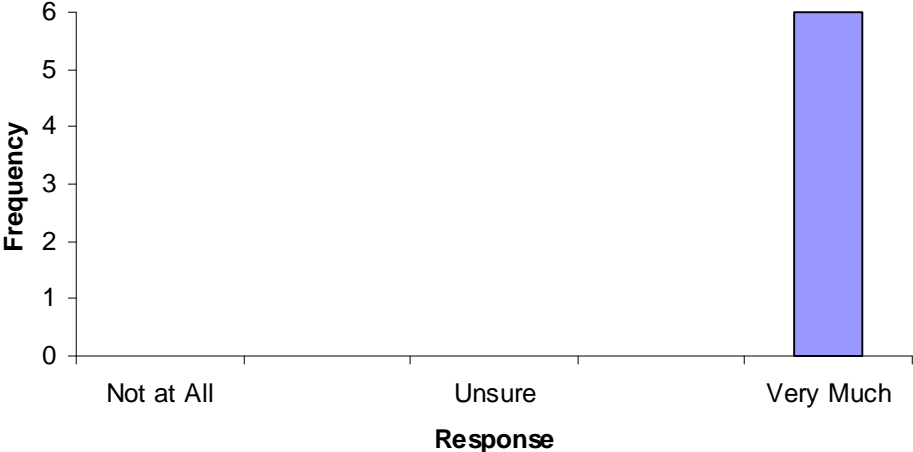
Unfortunately, contrary to the aims of the program, there were some instances of young people feeling unsafe in the program due to the unpredictable behaviours of certain students and this impacted on their participation levels. This remains an area of future development.

Teacher/Counselor Qualitative Data

The teachers who attended the program were asked to rate their experiences of the Rock & Water program through a program evaluation.

In the first section of the program evaluation teachers answered fourteen questions which asked them to rate on a five-point Likert scale, from "not at all" to "very much", the degree they agreed with items relating to the program. Respondents also had the option of providing "any further comments or observations" for each question. The frequency of teacher responses and 'further comments or observations' (without alteration) are as follows:

The Rock & Water program "connected" with the students of your class.



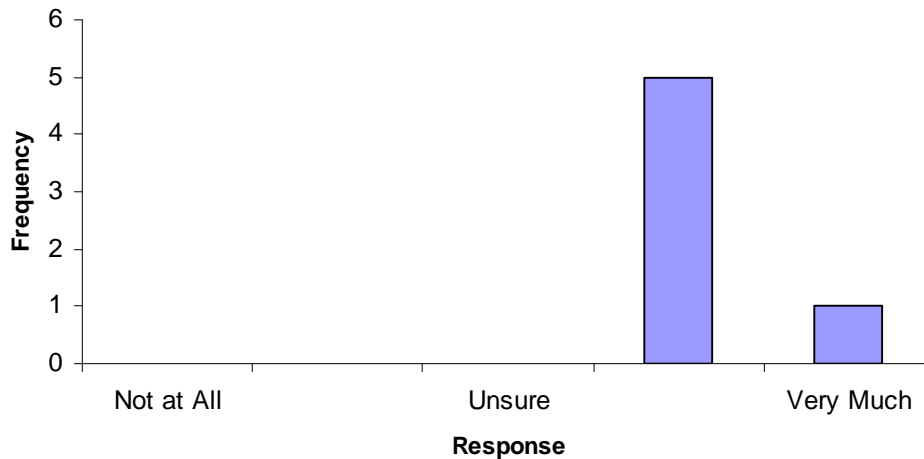
Further Comments or Observations

1. –
2. They loved it and understood the purpose of their learning
3. The kids use the terms "rock" and "water", to describe feeling and behaviour in the classroom and yard.
4. Students were always engaged and had a sense of ownership with in each lesson; and a sense of self. I could see the students really thinking about the concepts discussed.

5. With the exception of 1 child at certain times.

6. -

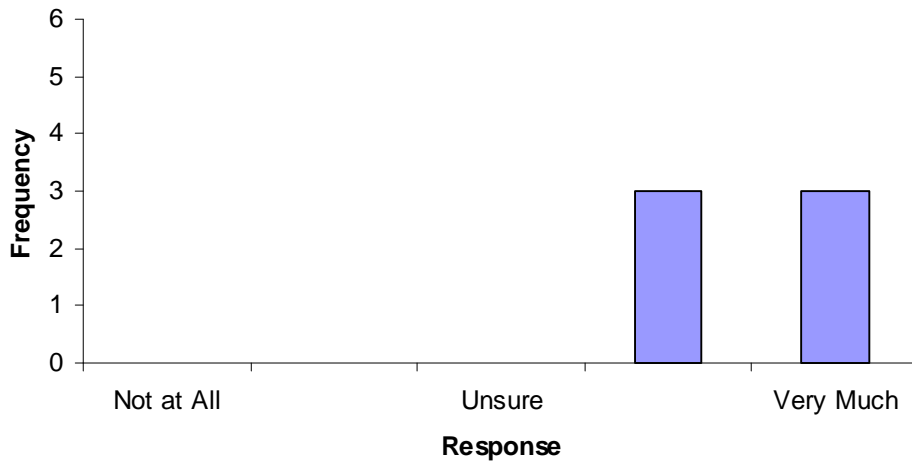
Within the Rock & Water program, the relationship/s with your more complex student/s improved.



Further Comments or Observations

1. We practiced applying skills in classroom situations.
2. Generally, yes
3. It has enabled me to identify my own "rock"-like attitude at times and to become more calm & predictable for students.
4. I would say the relationships between students in the class did improve in a way that they felt safe to learn with other students they would not normally learn and play with. There was only one student who had issues each week. However, his ability to come around was more likely towards the final weeks of the program. The program had helped him to form an more trusting relationship with another student in the class.
5. -
6. The breathing technique works really well with one particular student.

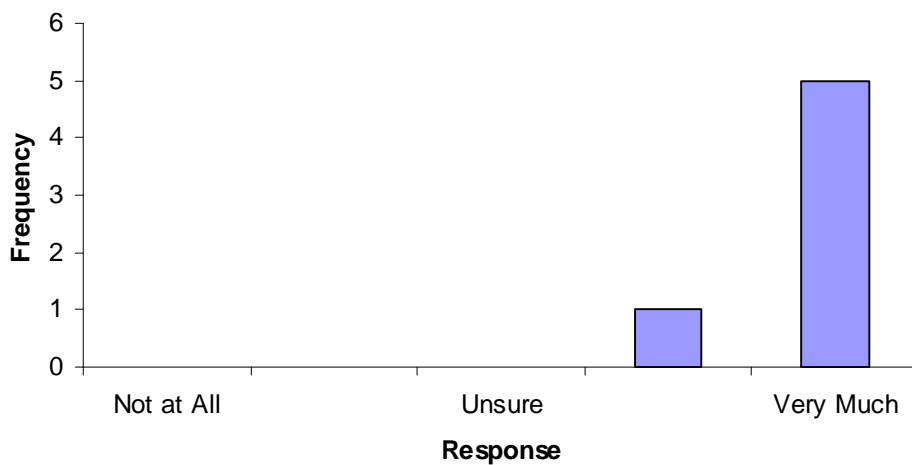
Do you believe the Rock & Water program was a safe program for your students?



Further Comments or Observations

1. Very safe, well monitored & structured
2. They felt safe in Tim's presence. The activities were safe because they were closely monitored and rules were clear.
3. Girls were made to feel comfortable even when participating alongside boys.
4. Students really connected with Tim and were engaged in the different activities. They were able to build this sense of trust over a number of sessions and having Tim playing with students in the yard increased students awareness of him and the importance of the program.
5. -
6. -

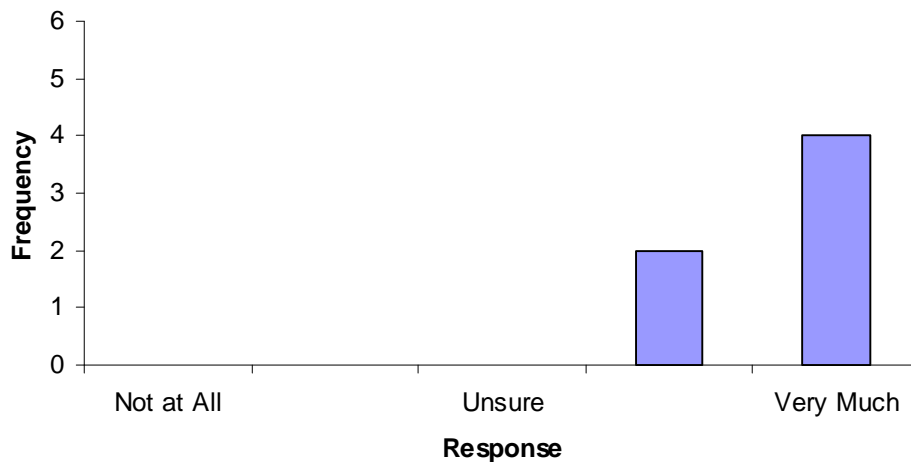
Do you believe the program taught appropriate social skills to your students?



Further Comments or Observations

1. That water can be more effective than rock. You can still “win” being water.
2. They regularly use the language in the classroom.
3. Only a shame some students missed the final session!
4. Students had a strong idea of what the water and rock concept symbolized. The activity where students walk away from other trying to distract them really helped the students to visualize what they need to do in the circumstances.
5. Yes they learnt how to say no to people encroaching on their personal space etc.
6. -

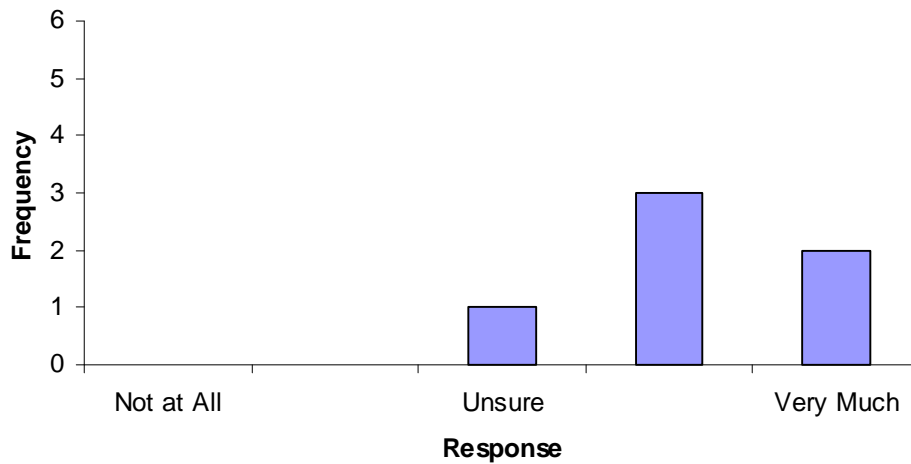
From a teaching perspective, the program provided new classroom strategies to assist learning.



Further Comments or Observations

1. -
2. It provided a language to use in the classroom
3. (refer to first question)
4. Loved the concept of deep breathing to calm. Students really benefit from the breaths after lunch and also now know why they are doing it and what it does for the body.
5. The relaxation, calming effect is a strategy I would use.
6. We refer to people as being ‘good water people’ instead of ‘good boy/good girl’ etc.

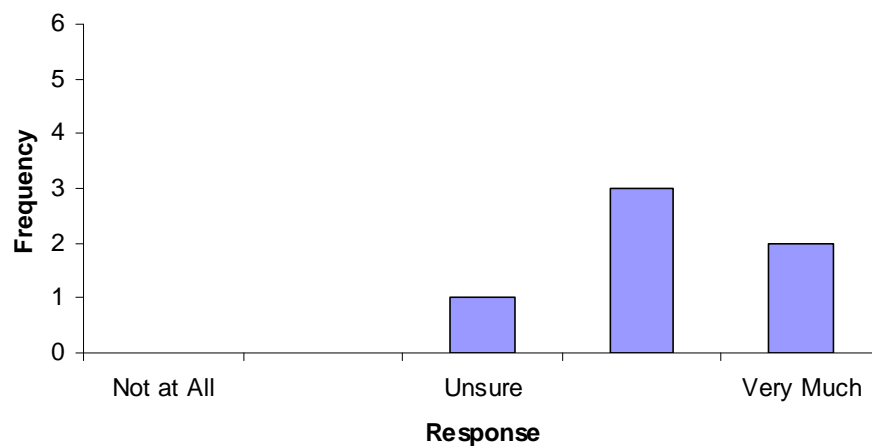
Did Rock & Water provide you with a new language to challenge and manage student behaviour?



Further Comments or Observations

1. Developed Tim's language with students
2. (as in question above)
3. (refer to question 1)
4. The concepts of rock and water people can be used in the c/room, which I have implemented. However, I have found that the term 'rock' has a negative connotation and that the students haven't quiet understood that it's ok to be a rock sometimes given the context.
5. Yes within certain contexts.
6. -

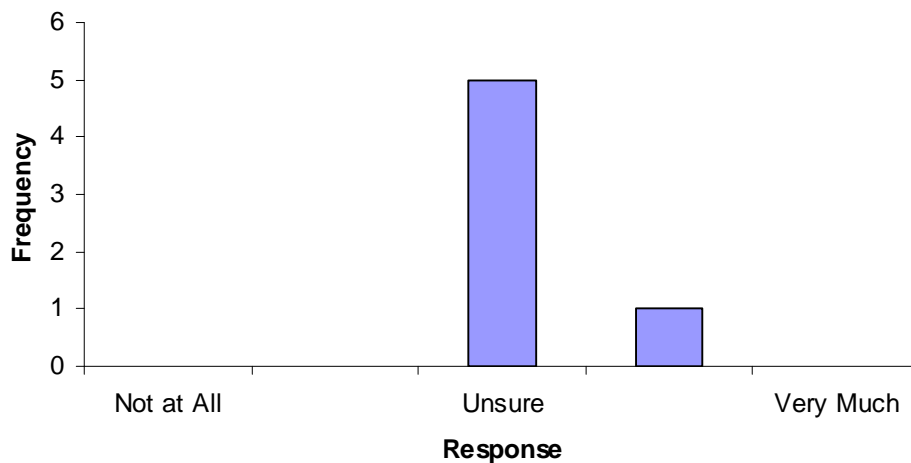
Do you agree the program provided a structured and common approach to the management of children and young people with complex needs?



Further Comments or Observations

1. -
2. -
3. -
4. Developed a continued sense of trust. E.g. asking for permission to touch. Activities and ideas were simple and engaged yet informative. Each lesson revisited concepts and build on from current knowledge.
5. Yes rock & Water connected with all the children and their different needs except for one child at times and this could be related to other issues.
6. -

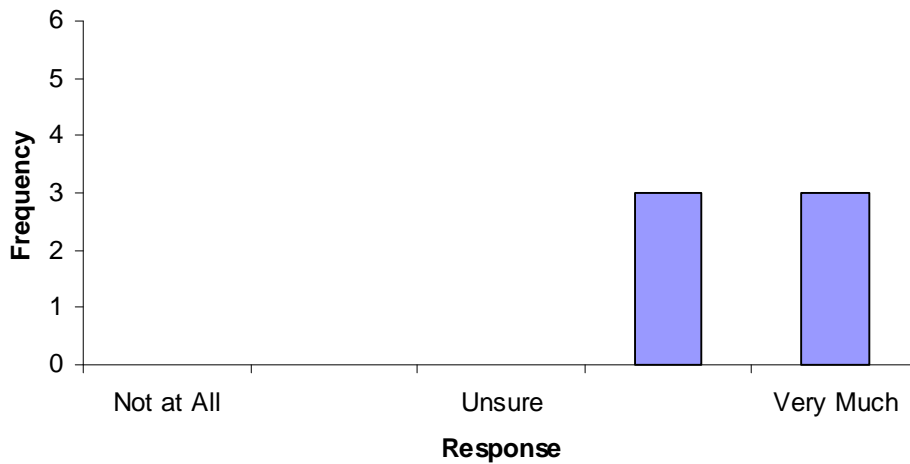
Did the program bring the school closer together (foster solidarity)?



Further Comments or Observations

1. The rest of the school (mainstream) did not participate only NAP.
2. If it was the whole school it would foster solidarity a lot more
3. -
4. Gave the students ideas about how to manage conflict situations. Not sure if there was a direct link to mainstream and the connection of learning together? I guess at recess students are now beginning to play soccer together including all cultures.
5. -
6. -

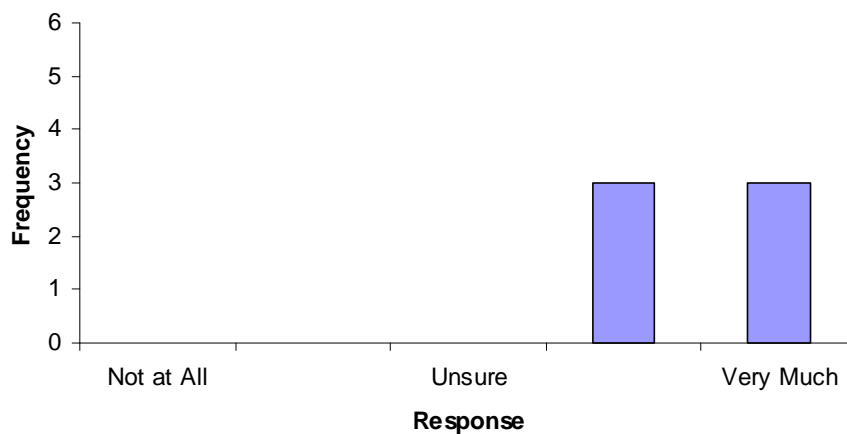
Did the students of your class learn and then practice a range of (new) verbal and non-verbal self-protective behaviours.



Further Comments or Observations

1. -
2. -
3. -
4. It is evident that some of my boy students are calmer now and are able to walk away, then come back to talk once they are calm. One student in particular I think really benefited from this program in a sense that he takes more responsibility for his actions. He really demonstrated that he was listening and could articulate the ideas behind each concept.
5. -
6. -

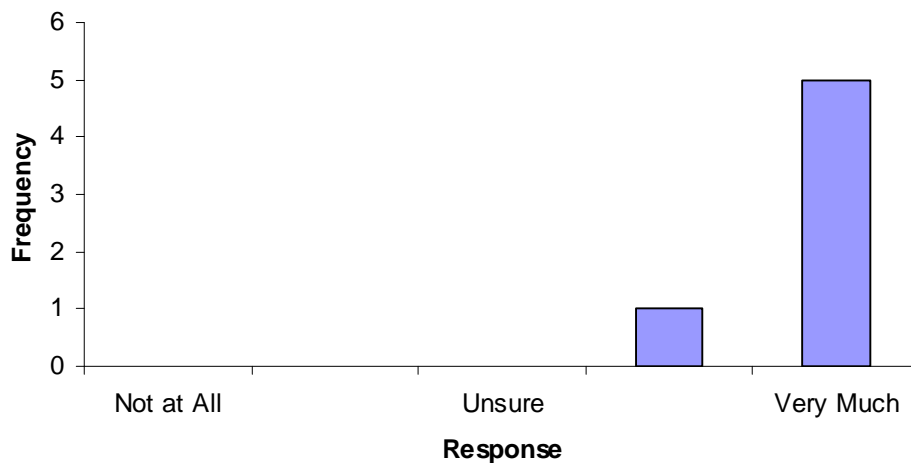
Did you feel supported by the facilitator to teach and implement more adaptive social and problem solving skills to your students?



Further Comments or Observations

1. Very Good
2. -
3. -
4. We talked about how students were behaving during the program and how I thought it was linking in the classroom. My students are lively and quick to react to things they feel are unjust and I think the program helped them to think about how they were reacting and what they could do to calm and be more flexible like a water person.
5. -
6. -

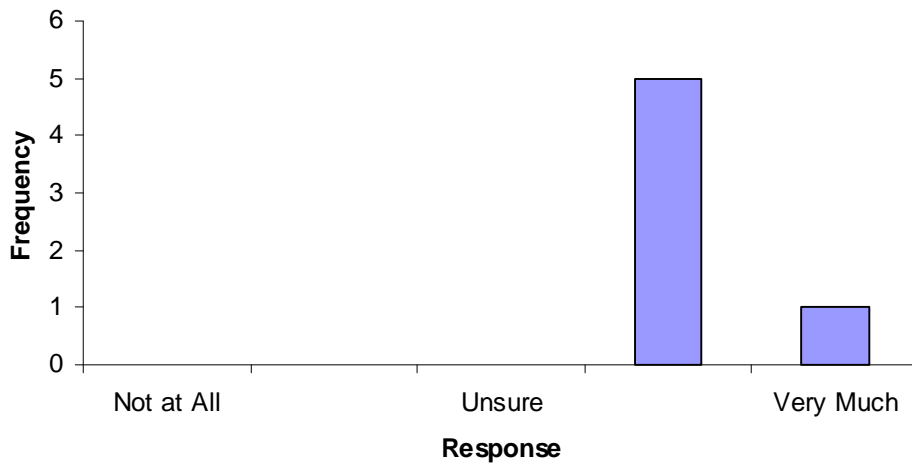
Did Rock & Water provide new strategies to teach young people calmness and relaxation strategies?



Further Comments or Observations

1. I liked the eye pillows and breathing techniques taught.
2. -
3. -
4. Yes, loved the relaxation method using the eye pillows, students were at times silly but it really relaxed the students who needed it most and I was surprised that they were so successful. Deep breathing. Idea that looser muscles calm walking and breathing makes it easier to learn, and play.
5. -
6. -

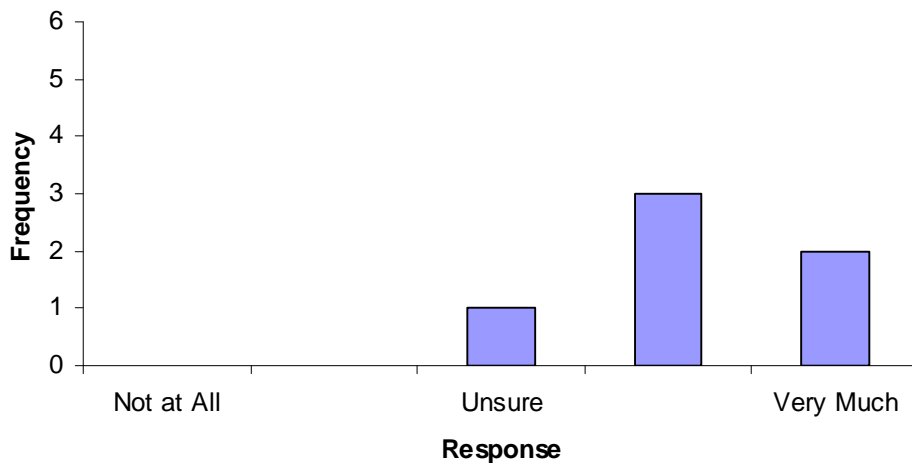
As the teacher of a classroom, I saw a positive change with complex students due to the Rock & Water program.



Further Comments or Observations

1. Most except for 1 obvious student with high trauma levels.
2. Because we had common language to use
3. -
4. Students are able to express their feelings in a clearer way. They have proactive strategies to cope with their emotions, which is helping them to walk away and calm. Can relax a lot quicker than they could initially.
5. They enjoyed rock & water and understood the objectives of the lessons
6. -

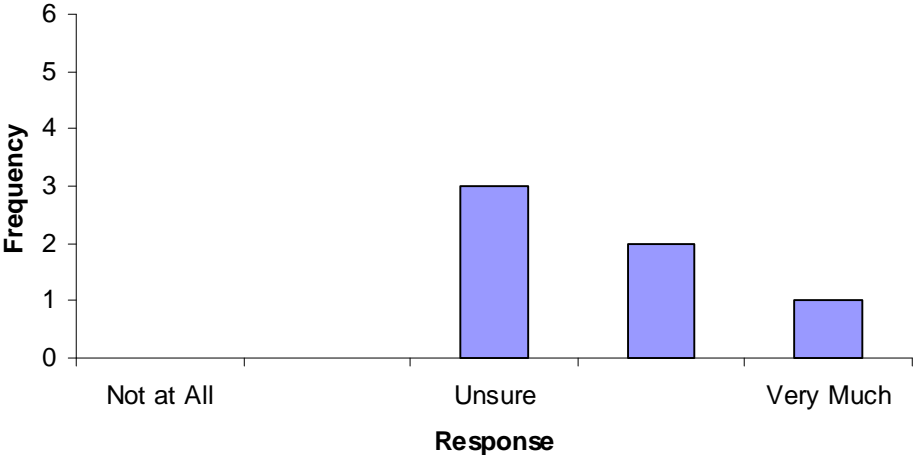
Did Rock & Water assist with your students learning?



Further Comments or Observations

1. We are doing a unit of work next term that will build on these learnings about Respect, problem solving, etc.
2. -
3. -
4. They are calmer which gives them more time for learning. They have increased social skills and are learning together more effectively and in a calmer and more respectful way.
5. -
6. -

Do you agree Rock & Water should be a part of the school curriculum? E.g. 15 minutes each day.

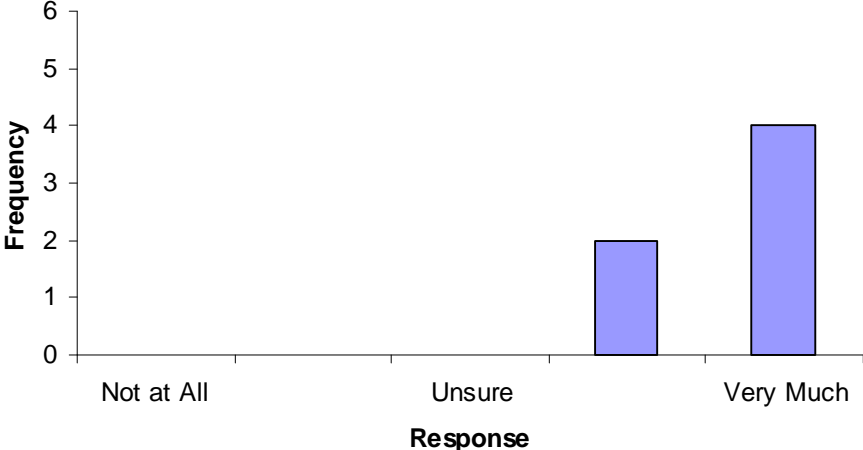


Further Comments or Observations

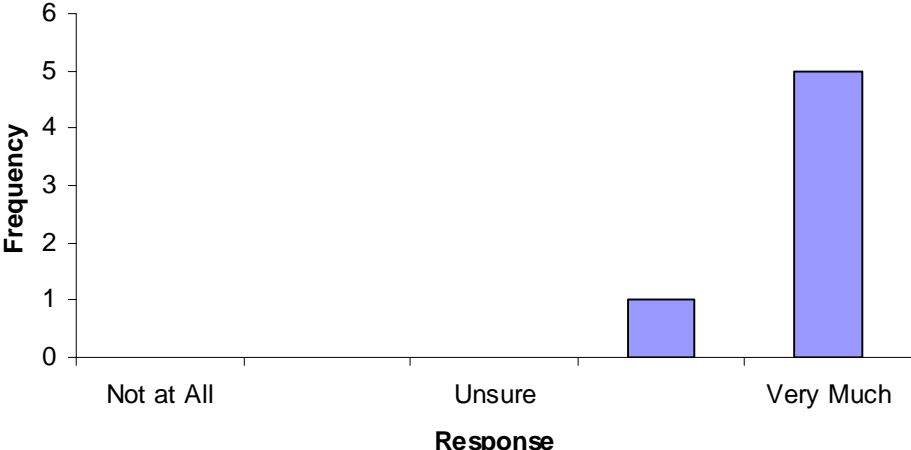
1. It could only help our school
2. It will be because they have learnt the skills. However, it will need to be maintained regularly – not sure how regularly.
3. -
4. I agree, particularly after break times. I found the importance of remaining calm, deep breathing and relaxation so beneficial to students who get uptight easily. They cannot concentrate until they are calm and the r & w time would give students a chance to relax and think
5. -
6. Yes, definitely some aspects of the program.

The second section of the program questionnaire consisted of ten questions in which staff were asked to rate on a five point Likert scale, from "not at all" to "very much", the degree they agreed with items relating to the program.

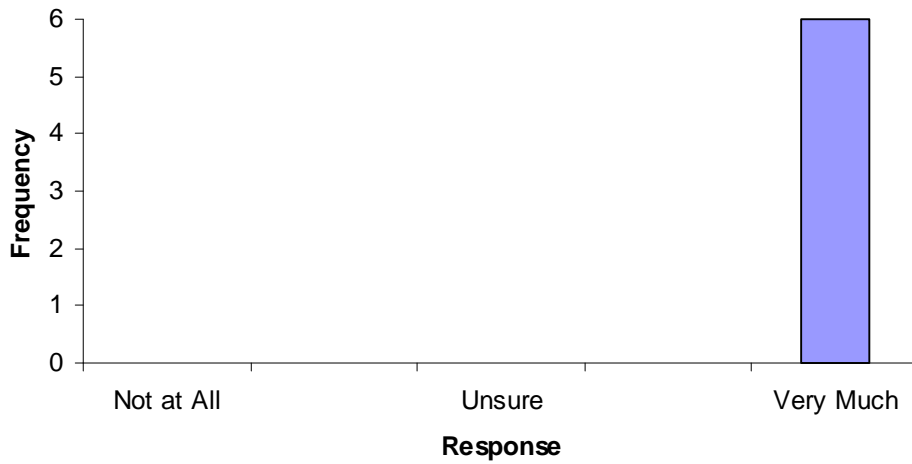
1. Rock & Water was a successful program



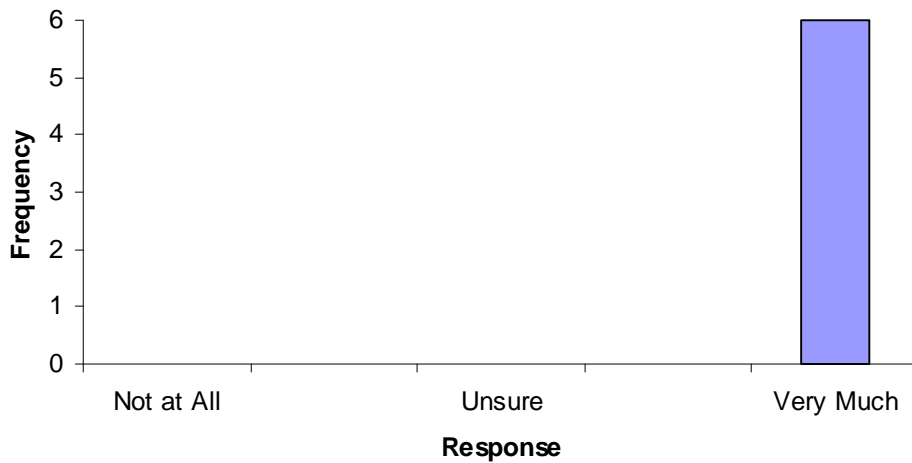
2. The facilitator acted professionally throughout the program



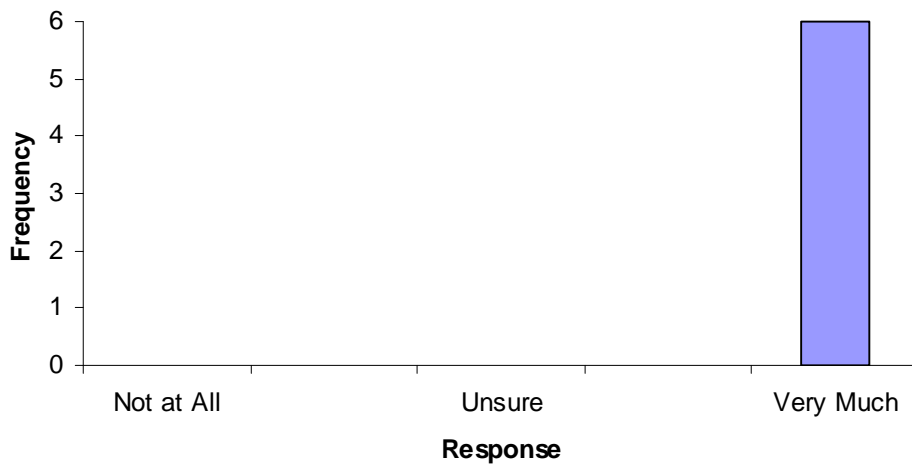
3. The young people who attended Rock & Water benefited from the program



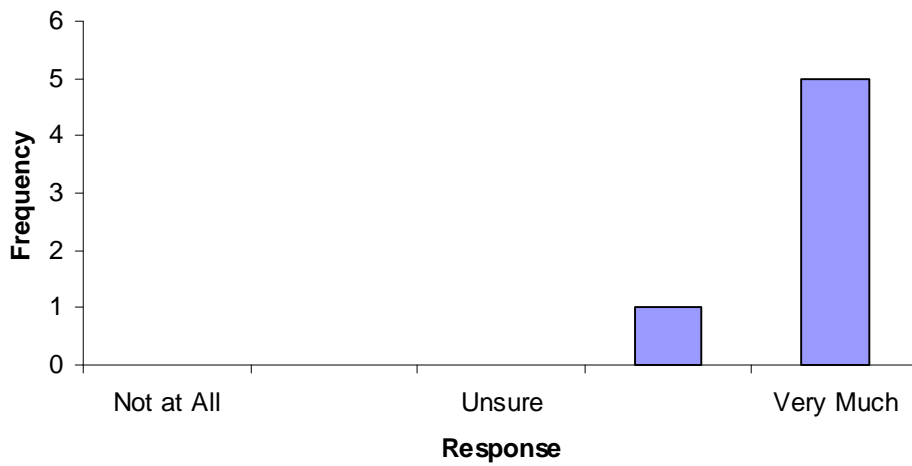
4. The facilitator was able to develop positive and trusting relations with the participants



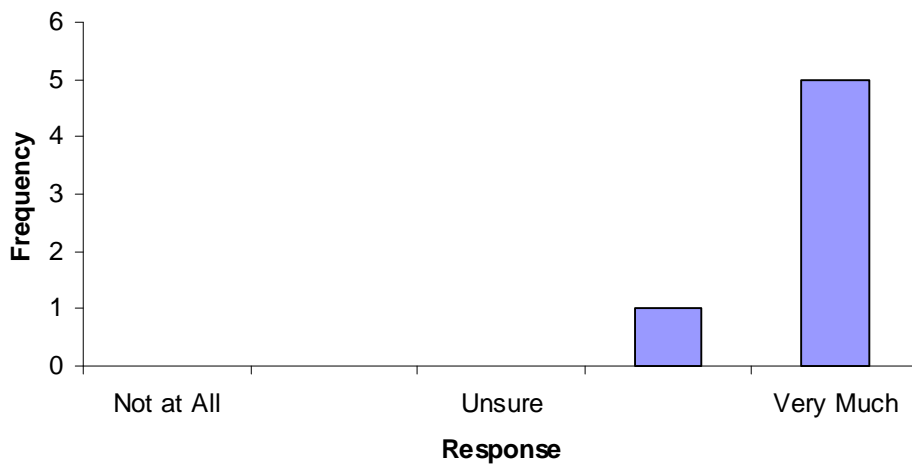
5. The facilitator was a positive role model for the participant group



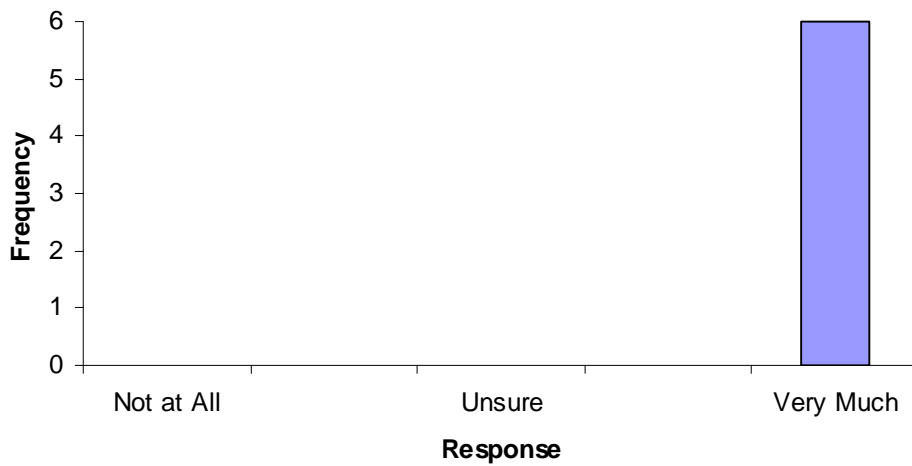
6. The facilitator appropriately managed the behaviour of the group



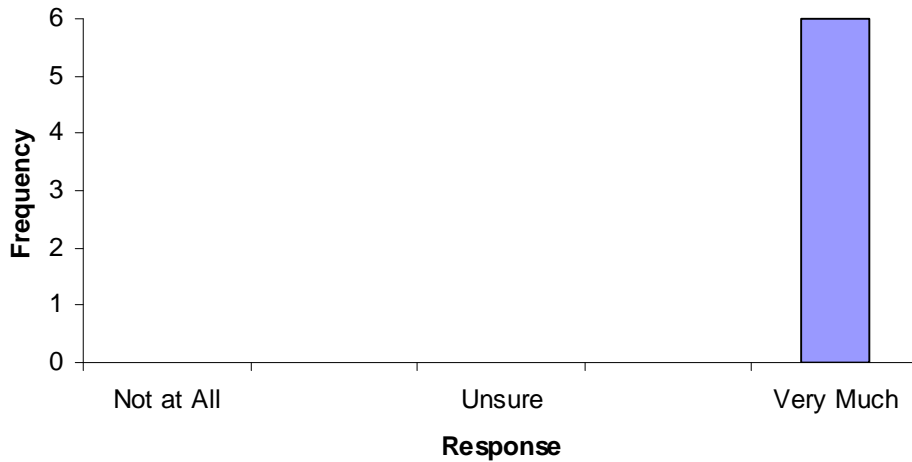
7. The facilitator was able to respond to the changing needs of the participant group



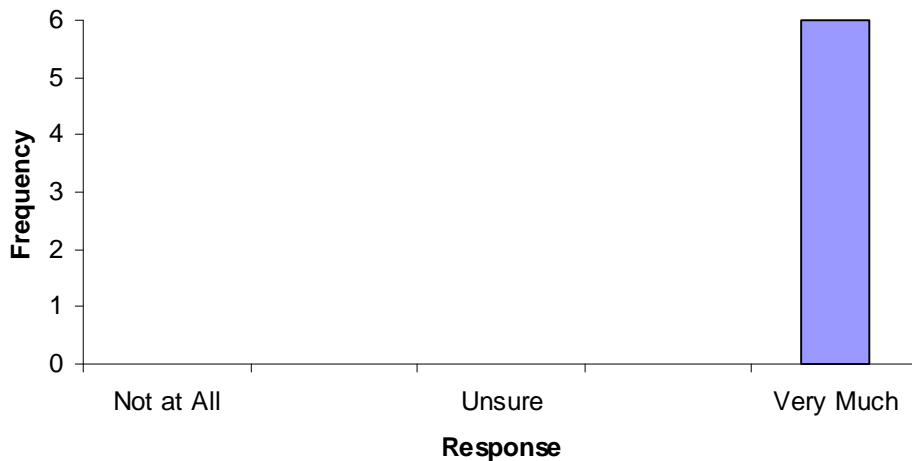
8. I felt that I was able to approach the facilitator if I had any concerns with the program



9. The participants felt safe around the facilitator



10. The facilitator had a sound knowledge of the Rock & Water program



In the final section of the questionnaire teachers completed a number of open-ended questions designed to tap their independent experiences of the program. Responses (without alteration) were as follows:

What were the highlights of the Rock & water program for you?

1. Seeing our students playing games that could have turned ugly but didn't. They were aware of the rules and boundaries set.
2. The bond Tim had with the kids was fantastic – it enabled him to achieve the desired outcomes.
3. Having fun with the students!
4. seeing my difficult students being engaged, they were learning with all students and taking in the concepts. Just listening to the responses the students gave to the concepts discussed and q's asked by Tim.

5. The students were engaged and enjoyed the program. They learnt about positive behaviour and how to response to aggression etc.
6. The strategies that Tim used for relaxation, the language around being a 'rock' and 'water'.

Please list any outcomes (positive/negative) your students gained from Rock & Water.

1. Water techniques to overcome rocks.
2. Self-calming strategies – They use them regularly now.
3. On Friday, a student made a verbal acknowledgement that he would be water after an incident. I was pleasantly surprised!!
4. a sense of belonging, achievement and success of finishing a program. Calmer students, students knowing how to calm.
5. –
6. Being able to identify when they can/need to be rock/water people.

Please list any concerns you had with the delivery, facilitation or conduct of the last program.

1. –
2. –
3. –
4. –
5. –
6. -

In what areas could the Rock & Water program be improved for the future?

1. Involve all the school at the same time so we all learn the same time.
2. Slightly longer sessions. It sometimes seemed a bit rushed and the kids weren't given enough time to process the skills.
3. Using ESL- friendly language (i.e. simplify, be explicit in instructions, make expected outcomes explicit. Will develop in time.
4. Some more ideas or activities that show children how to develop meaningful friendships with other children e.g. what does it look like. Students learnt problem skills about how to deal with conflict which is great. However I think this could be positively linked to ability to make friends also.
5. Although the facilitator did his best I did feel he could simplify his language a bit more at times.
6. Maybe, just setting rules about the room/boundaries before the program has started.

Please feel free to make any final comments in relation to the last program

1. –
2. It is a great program. The kids really enjoyed it and learnt a lot.
3. Thanks Tim
4. The program was awesome. Students clearly enjoyed the lessons and looked forward to them.
5. –
6. Tim, was very funny, friendly trusting and facilitated the program effectively.

Summary of Qualitative Data (Written by Andrew Cenuich)

Overall the responses provided by teachers/counsellors were very positive. All the responses were at the positive end of the Likert scales, or at worst, were 'unsure' responses. The comments provided for the open-ended questions were also extremely complimentary.

The Likert responses indicated that respondents had high regard for the facilitator's abilities. These include his ability to develop positive and trusting relations with the participants, act as a positive role model, act professionally, manage group behaviour and ensure all participants felt safe throughout the program. Responses related to the Rock & Water program were also very positive. These responses indicated that all respondents thought Rock & Water was a successful program, young people benefited from the program, the program connected with the students, the program had a role in fostering improved relationship/s with students with complex needs, the program taught appropriate skills and provided new strategies to teach young people calmness and relaxation, and the program provided new classroom strategies to assist learning. There was a more measured response to the question, 'Did the program bring the school closer together (foster solidarity)?'. Seeing the whole school did not participate it is understandable that most respondents gave an 'unsure' response.

The 'further comments' section attached to each question gave an additional insight into respondents' feelings about the Rock & Water program. Of particular note was the large number of comments praising the language and metaphors introduced by the Rock & Water program. It was reported that 'the kids use the terms "rock" and "water", to describe feeling and behaviour in the classroom and yard' and 'students are able to express their feelings in a clearer way.' There were also a number of comments complimenting the introduction of relaxation and calmness skills suggesting that these are skills which had worked and which a number of teachers intend to use regularly with their students.

Facilitator Qualitative Observations (Written by Tim Brenton)

As the facilitator of the program, I drew the following observations from the program:

- The level of participation was medium to high compared to other programs I have delivered. There were some instances of young people choosing to sit out and negotiating with young people to join in was a difficult task.
- I believe the students viewed the program as fun. Although there were many life and self-awareness skills integrated into the program, many of the young people participated in the program with a consistent smile on their face.
- Young people felt safe around me. I believe I shared a positive relationship with all of the students who participated. The value of mentoring all young people involved in the program during the recess and lunch periods was also successful. The mentoring provided another layer of safety for the students when they experienced playing a game with me (e.g. soccer) and my strategies, approachability and responses were consistent with my messages within the Rock & Water program.
- The relaxation exercises ("eye pillows") proved to be very successful and provided all participants with strategies to manage and regulate their own emotions. The feedback from the eye pillows was overwhelmingly positive. There were occasions where young people attempted to sabotage the relaxation exercise by talking or making noises but this was only a reflection on where that child was at that time.
- The students of the program grasped the concept of "Rock" versus "Water" and this assisted each student's personal growth and "self-awareness". The concepts provided the teachers and counsellor with an alternative strategy to talk and manage students presenting with complex behaviours. The students who didn't grasp the concepts made a conscious decision to continue with their "survival" behaviours, rather than try new strategies.
- The program provided an opportunity for young people to share games and experiences with other students whom they may have difficulties (situations) with in the past.
- The program enabled the students to view their teachers positively outside the safety of the classroom. The teachers sharing personal stories and experiences within the context of Rock & Water was a highlight for me and the students of each class.
- The language and strategies of the Rock & Water program were transferred back into the classroom. I felt my relationship with the teachers was strong and positive and many of them reported examples of using the language of the program positively in their classroom.
- In certain classes, it was my observation that a number of students improved their relationships with their classroom teacher and their peers.
- The language and verbal cues assisted in the management of the group and getting the young people to "ground themselves". The students consistently responded to my verbal grounding strategy "Feet, Belly, Breath" and this allowed me to gain control of the room in a safe and playful way.

- The 'Rock & Water salute' was very successful and consistent with other approaches such as "stop, think and do". The salute proved a great strategy for certain boys in particular who often find themselves "doing" before "thinking" clearly.
- Traditionally, the classes in grades six and seven experience the program at a deeper level but I sensed the older groups held back a bit more than I am used to.

SUMMARY & FUTURE DIRECTIONS (Section Written by Ivan Raymond)

The Rock & Water program is a "tool" that has demonstrated the ability to target important developmental needs of children and young people; most notably key social and emotional needs that underpin both behavioural functioning and student wellbeing. A feature of the Rock & Water program is that learning occurs in a manner and style (e.g., fun, experiential and action orientated) that increases the child's responsiveness to the learning message. Prior to this evaluation, there has been strong anecdotal and qualitative evaluation support for the application of the program for promoting the social-emotional wellbeing of young people within educational, child protection, juvenile justice and youth support settings.

This evaluation indicates that the Rock & Water program, when delivered in the manner and style as indicated within this report, has the potential to have a significant positive impact on children and young people from new arrival backgrounds. This cohort of children is more likely to have experienced significant instability and possible trauma within their early development. Such instability has the potential to have a negative mediating impact on a child's ability to regulate their emotions and engage in a "stop-think and do" response to emotional triggers. There is an increased risk that they will be functioning from higher levels of stress, fear and arousal (Perry, 2004). Furthermore, the current program was delivered in a manner that fostered play, safety and secure attachment relationship development, and was inclusive of a whole-of-school approach. These aspects are the cornerstone of working with all children and young people, but most importantly, young people with backgrounds of trauma and insecurity. The aspect of play-based learning cannot be overstated (Perry, Hogan & Marlin, 2000). Play is the medium by which children learn a range of social and emotional skills fundamental to their development. It is likely that many new arrival children have missed out on some play-based experiences, therefore, a tool like Rock & Water, when delivered in safe but playful manner, has the potential to increase resilience and student wellbeing. Together, the evaluation indicates that the current program achieved these goals.

While the presented evaluation appears overwhelming positive, there is a need to highlight that there are a number of methodological shortcomings within the evaluation (e.g., was not a pretest-posttest design, non-validated instruments applied) which impact on the degree wide ranging conclusions can be drawn. Furthermore, the degree program outcomes were sustained beyond the intervention period remains unknown. Despite this, considering that new arrival students potentially represent a difficult cohort to engage around key developmental needs, the fact that the program achieved high levels of engagement and a number of key

messages were articulated and repeated by the students, suggests the program's learning principles were generalised beyond the immediate context.

Overall, the evaluation indicates that the Rock & Water program, when delivered in a manner that fosters safe, playful and secure attachment relationships, and is delivered from a "whole-of-school approach", has the potential to be the catalyst for increasing the resilience and wellbeing of new arrival students. While further evaluation is required to articulate the exact nature of these outcomes, there is overwhelming support for the future application of Rock & Water programming for this cohort.

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