Improving Emotional Intelligence in Schools – The Research Project  
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Emotional Intelligence, Victimization and Bullying
The media is increasingly reporting that the incidence of peer violence, bullying and exclusion in schools is increasing. Research into schoolyard bullying has highlighted not only the undesirable prevalence of bullying behaviours but also the adverse short and longer-term consequences associated with bullying. Being a target of bullying has been found to have negative impacts upon social and emotional wellbeing, academic performance and success later in life. Currently most school based interventions for bullying target offenders after the incidence. It could be argued that more preventative interventions could also be effective in reducing bullying and anti-social behaviours in children. Although there have been many suggestions that the development of emotional competencies in school aged children would be beneficial for creating more positive school environments that might reduce bullying and anti-social behaviours, there are very few examples of scientific investigations to support such claims. In an attempt to address the recent trend of negative interpersonal interactions between students, a number of socio-emotional training programmes have been developed for use in schools. Introduced to Australia by the Teacher Learning Network, the Four Rooms of Change in Schools is one such program. The program itself was first conceptualised by Claes Janssen in Sweden.

The Four Rooms of Change in Schools is a method which aims to develop student socio-emotional skills by teaching them how to identify, express and manage their feelings. Distinct from one-off lessons, the method is designed to be integrated into everyday classroom functioning. It aims to enhance student vocabularies associated with emotions, facilitate discussion in relation to everyday emotional states. It also aims to increase student awareness of their own emotions and that of their peers as well as reduce bullying behaviours through increasing student empathic abilities. Each of these abilities can be understood by the construct of Emotional Intelligence. As Swinburne University is actively engaged in assisting schools assess and develop emotional intelligence in children throughout the world, we were approached to design an appropriate evaluation using the framework of Emotional Intelligence for the Four Rooms of Change pilot project undertaken in Melbourne. Given this was the first time the method has been used with an Australian sample, it was an important opportunity to scientifically assess the effectiveness of implementing this method in classrooms.

About the Project
The project was centred around a series of self-report questionnaires that students of participating schools completed on two occasions throughout 2011. The questionnaires were specifically designed to measure the emotional intelligence of students, as well as various types of peer-relations. We were particularly interested in understanding whether the Four Rooms of Change intervention changed the incidence of bullying behaviours, peer victimisation and pro-social behaviours. Based on the theory by which the program was developed we hypothesised that relative to a control group, children in the Four Rooms of Change intervention group would show significant benefits in these variables over the time of the intervention. Using questionnaires designed by Swinburne researchers for use with young and adolescent students, the emotional intelligence variables measured included; emotion regulation, understanding of emotions, recognising emotions and also the abilities associated with emotional management and control.
Students, with parental consent to take part in the project, were asked to complete the first questionnaire in school hours, guided by the classroom teacher. This process enabled the research team to get an idea of the social and emotional competencies of the students prior to taking part in the Four Rooms of Change program. An important feature of the study was that not all students who participated in the research project used the Four Rooms of Change in their classroom during the course of the year. The students comprised a control group for comparisons with the intervention group. Including classrooms that did not use the Four Rooms of Change project enabled us to investigate if students developed social and emotional competencies at a more rapid rate using the program, or if it was just a function of normal childhood development. At the end of the school year, identical questionnaires were completed by students once again, in both groups, in order to measure social and emotional development throughout the year.

The preliminary findings of the ability based emotional intelligence competencies using the Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test in younger students showed a significant increase in groups of students that used the Four Rooms of Change. This increase was not present for the control group (data for experimental group only shown here).

**Figure 1: A profile of the research group in the Victorian Schools Project 2011**

**Figure 2: Understanding and Analysing Emotion (SUEI-EY)**

Results showed a significant increase in the groups of students that used the Four Rooms of Change. This increase was not present for the control group.
What has the pilot project shown us?

The study was the first of its kind in Australia to examine the impact of using the Four Rooms of Change on child and adolescent peer victimisation and bullying behaviours and emotional intelligence competencies. The preliminary findings relating to the emotional intelligence competencies of younger students suggested some significant benefits of using the Four Rooms of Change method. The results suggested that the competencies associated with Understanding and Analysing Emotion, developed at a higher rate in the students who took part in the Four Rooms of Change program when compared to students who didn’t use the program. In particular, we found that the primary school students who used the Four Rooms of Change showed more rapid development in their ability to interpret the meanings that emotions convey and also to accurately recognise the meanings that emotions convey. These findings are very promising for the use of the Four Rooms of Change program in a wider range of schools, and we hope to conduct further, larger studies to better understand the impact that this program is having on our children’s social and emotional development. There were fewer improvements in the high school children, perhaps reflecting differences in the social-emotional developments of this age cohort or the fact that the intervention may need to be modified to better suit the needs of older students.

![Figure 3: Ability to Interpret the Meaning Emotions Convey (SUEI-EY)](image)

![Figure 4: Ability to Recognize Likely Transitions Among Emotions](image)
Future Directions
This intervention highlights the need to develop objective measures of social emotional intelligence in children as well as specific interventions to develop these competencies in children. Our previous research has shown that emotional intelligence in adolescents is related to a range of important outcomes such as scholastic success, effective coping strategies, bullying and disruptive behaviours. The results of these studies are not surprising given that there are now hundreds of research studies showing the importance of emotional intelligence in adulthood from leadership effectiveness and job performance to satisfaction with life, relationship success and even clinical disorders. Swinburne is committed to helping schools objectively measure and develop emotional intelligence in children throughout the school lifespan to better prepare them for later life. Schools interested in emotional intelligence are welcome to contact us for more information about measures and services or to collaborate in ongoing and future research studies.

Swinburne University and the A-SUEIT and the SUEIT-EY
Swinburne University has been involved in research on emotional intelligence in Australia for more than a decade. The Adolescent Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test (A-SUEIT) and the Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test – Early Years (SUEIT-EY) are both modifications of the original SUEIT developed in 2001. The Adolescent SUEIT is a self-report questionnaire comprising 57 items which correspond to four sub-scales: Understanding Emotions of Others (UEO) (19 items, ‘I can tell how others feel by the tone of their voice’), Emotional Recognition and Expression (ERE) (10 items, ‘I can tell others how I feel about things’), Emotional Management and Control (EMC) (18 items, ‘I find it hard to think clearly when I am worried about something’) and Emotions Direct Cognition (EDC) (10 items, ‘I use my ‘gut feelings’ when I try to solve problems’). Each item required participants to indicate how they typically thought, felt or acted using a five-point scale, where 1 = ‘very seldom’ and 5 = ‘very often’. A higher subscale score reflected higher proficiency for that particular EI skill set. Past research has indicated that the internal reliability coefficients of the four subscales scores range from $\alpha = .75$ to $\alpha = .85$ (Luebbers, Downey & Stough, 2007).

The A-SUEIT has previously shown high construct validity with other real-life behaviours in adolescents that have been theoretically linked to Emotional Intelligence EI including problem behaviour (Downey, Johnston, Hansen, Birney, & Stough, 2010) and scholastic success (Downey, Mountstephen, Lloyd, Hansen, & Stough, 2008). The 2010 study indicated that the EI dimensions of Emotions Direct Cognition and Emotional Management and Control, significantly predicted the propensity of adolescents to be subjected to peer victimisation. The EI dimension of Understanding the Emotions of Others was found to be negatively related with bullying behaviours. It was concluded that anti-bullying programs in schools could be improved by addressing deficits in EI in adolescents who bully others as well as those who are at a greater risk of being subjected to peer victimisation.

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Justine Lomas is a research assistant at the Emotional Intelligence Research Unit at Swinburne University of Technology. Justine, working under Con Stough’s supervision implemented the research project and maintained communication with the teachers involved. Justine can be contacted at jlomas@swin.edu.au The EI unit at Swinburne can be contacted by phone at 03 9214 4923. The final research report on the project will be completed in early August 2012. This summary has been reproduced with kind permission of the Teachers Learning Network. Enquiries about the final report can be directed to mvictory@tln.org.au.