

# Measuring Boys' Psycho-social Skills Development Following their Participation in the *Rock and Water Program*

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As a School Counsellor, I was recently involved as part of a team in the introduction implementation and evaluation of the *Rock and Water Program* at a Western Sydney / Regional NSW secondary school. The team included teachers, School Counsellors and local youth workers. Some very interesting results emerged from the evaluation of the Program, which offer some encouraging support for its potential not just with small groups, but also as a whole school orientation program for new students coming into the school at the Year 7 level.

As part of my Masters degree I decided to study the *Rock and Water Program (R&WP)*. The foundations skills of the *R&WP* are listed by its author, Freerk Ykema as self-control, self reflection and self confidence. I was interested in examining the development of these psycho-social skills and was also eager to investigate self respect and general social skill development.

This study examined the development of psychosocial skills for a small group of junior boys after participating in the *R&WP*. The psycho-social skills measured included the three foundations skills of the *R&WP*: self-control, self reflection and self confidence. Also investigated were self respect and general social skills. Several assessments were conducted one of which was the ASEBA (pre and post implementation). Multi cross informants were used. Results showed positive outcomes post intervention and suggestions for future study are explored.

Over the past decade, quantitative research studies, and commissioned reports all highlight educational concerns for boys (Nagel, 2005 ; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002). One of the areas most prominent is considered to be boys' social outcomes and these intersect with their academic and behaviour at school.

Current literature suggests that effective social and emotional learning can lead to school success and better outcomes for boys (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, (2004) (Goleman, 1995). Social emotional learning (SEL) includes the competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management and relationship management (Zins, et al, 2004). Self-control or social competency programs were found to be effective in improving outcomes for boys (Zins, et al, 2004).

The *R&WP* approach as personal development for boys aims "to assist boys to break the bonds of stereotypical masculine cultures and behaviours such as the development of emotional intelligence to build more caring, confident and resilient young people" (Australian Government DEST, 2003, p.16). The *R&WP* was designed to harness the significance of physical movement as a catalyst for psycho-social teachings. Ykema (2002, p.1) states the Program's orientation with young males is on "physical skills are taught first of all, so that from there, a transfer could be made to skills that are more mentally and socially orientated".

Within the *R&WP* are three foundation skills. These include self control, which is controlling and focusing one's own energy; self reflection, which is evaluating and thinking about one's own actions and their impacts; and lastly self confidence, which

is the self knowledge in being capable of adjusting one's own behaviour. This area is also linked tightly to the goal of self respect (Ykema, 2002).

The participants in this study consisted of twelve Year 7 junior boys between the ages of 12 to 13 years. Students were invited to participate following their identification by teachers on the basis of one or more of the following: being bullies, victims, having low self esteem, having behavioural issues or difficulties adapting to high school. The evaluation instruments used were surveys, feedback questionnaires, interviews, and the *Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA)*, a psychological standardised assessment.

All twelve Year 7 boys were enrolled for two school terms in the *R&WP*, which comprised one group session per week, a total of 18 sessions. The ASEBA standardised test was applied at the beginning prior to the *Rock and Water* intervention program over three cross-informant perspectives. The TRF was given to teachers to complete on their student. The CBCL was mailed home to parents / carers to complete and return. The YSR was administered in a large group with one on one assistance where required.

### **Skill Development**

This study found that with this small cohort, psycho- social skills did increase after the implementation of the *R&WP* for most of the students involved. As evaluated on the instruments used, 75% (9) of the students scored less social problems following their participation in the Program. For more than half the students, their own self-reports also suggested less social problems post implementation. Over half also reported their self confidence had increased, and the same was found for their reported self respect. Over half also reported their self control had increased post intervention. All participants reported practicing self reflection and some of the students reported that they had changed some of their original attitudes.

**Table 1**

*Youth Self Report responses on ASEBA Social Problems, Pre and Post Intervention*

	<b>Pre</b>	<b>Post</b>
Clinical range	5	3
Borderline- clinical range	1	2
Non clinical range(normal range)	4	7
Missed data	2	0

### **Practical Applications**

The initial findings of this small intervention study are positive. McGlennon (2004, p.18) warns "that no stand-alone program is likely to achieve significant and lasting results unless it serves to complement a learning program and environment, which shares consistent values and goals". Similar advice was also given by Carosi and Tindale (in Browne and Fletcher, 1995, p.37) who suggest the strategic value of a whole school approach to program interventions. The possibility of this occurring has major implications for the continued running of the *R&WP* at this school.

In summary, one of the outcomes from the 2007 initiative was that the entire 2008 Year 7 group was inducted into *R&WP* along with peer support students. The school then plans to continue this approach for each new year 7 intake in subsequent years, with the view towards shifting the wider school culture. This signifies the intent of implementing a whole school approach, as well as providing a larger population on which the *R&WP* can be more comprehensively evaluated.

It is also planned to implement the *R&WP* into primary schools by training teachers as part of secondary school transition programs. *Rock and Water* activities also need to be offered as something beyond a sport option. The Program may be able to be offered during lunch times, which minimize some boys missing out on the sports activities they particularly enjoy. Out of school hours could be another option, for older students for example that are trying to fit in their studies.

In 2008, the recommendations from this study were implemented at this school. On the basis of this small study in one school, it seems that significant changes are possible for better social outcomes for boys. Some better social outcomes for boys are possible through the use of the *R&WP*, which provides structured experiences in social emotional learning, positive role modeling as well giving the opportunity for the boys' to have an active voice and reflect on their masculine identity, and all within a safe environment. The value of using a whole school approach with this program, also provide an opportunity for a larger future study.

### **References**

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