

NEWS FROM MICHAEL BERNARD August 2022

Hi

As we scratch our heads trying to develop effective and easy-to-implement strategies for students with achievement, emotional and behaviour problems, one strategy that needs consideration is strengthening students' social-emotional capabilities.

For those who know my work, you will know that my interest in supporting wellbeing and addressing mental health issues is in part helping young people become aware of negative attitudes and how they impact their thinking, feeling and behaviour. And that by changing these negative attitudes to positive attitudes, they empower themselves to deal with stressful events so that they feel less anxious and down.

My work as an educational psychologist working directly with students of all ages validated this idea that ***things are neither good nor bad, but thinking makes it so***, and by changing thinking, students change the way they react to and cope with stressful events.

Today YCDI! Education and its' central curricula, *Program Achieve*, continues to be a well-known preventative mental health and wellbeing program designed for all students. As many of you will know, YCDI! is well known for its success in teaching five key social and emotional skills: Confidence, Organisation, Persistence, Getting Along and Resilience.

If you are working with one or more students with mental health challenges, you can find many specific lessons and activities in Program Achieve which would suit their particular needs of self-awareness and self-regulation. We also offer other programs for mental health practitioners and classroom teachers to use with students referred for or identified with special needs.

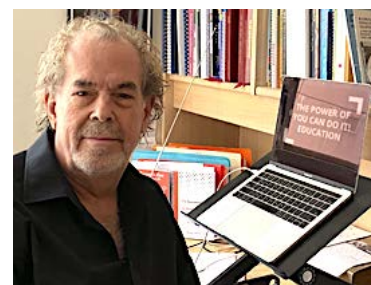
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Discovery 1: Students with behavioural challenges improve within 3 months when their social and emotional skills needed for learning and achievement are strengthened

I made what I believe is an important discovery about most students with behaviour problems, especially those who disrupt classroom teaching and learning. The discovery came about as I developed a range of surveys to measure primary and secondary students' social and emotional skills. I asked teachers to help refine the surveys by completing surveys on all students in their class and indicating the extent to which each student was experiencing learning, emotional and behaviour problems.

Most disruptive students experience learning challenges and difficulties demonstrating under-achievement and poor class grades, but this is NOT the discovery.

What I learnt was not only do many students marked high in behaviour problems show delays in a range of getting along skills (conflict resolution, friendship making) as you would expect, but they also **showed significant delays in a range of social and emotional skills** necessary for classroom engagement, motivation and learning. Specifically skills like work confidence, persistence, organisation (goal setting, time management) and teamwork.

What was interesting is I found that when teachers strengthen the social and emotional learning skills of students who demonstrated various anti-social behaviours, **within three months, their learning and achievement improved significantly**. Additionally, their anti-social teasing and bullying behaviour decreased significantly.

As a result of this learning, I advocated for the need to include social and emotional learning assessment and intervention skills in individualised behaviour management and education plans. I spent some time with Case Managers ensuring they had the knowledge and tools to incorporate social and emotional learning in their work. I also conducted intensive professional development sessions with teachers to equip them with ways to communicate (expect, reinforce) these skills to students. I also met with the parents of these students, who were available and interested in participating. All this work paid off.



To help everyone who works with the teachers and parents of students identified with persistent behaviour problems (e.g., Case Managers, Social Workers, Psychologists, Special Educators, Counsellors, and Assistant Principals), I wrote the program: **[Coaching Teachers and Parents to Build Social-Emotional Strengths of Students with Achievement, Behaviour and Mental Health Issues](#)** and it is available as an online resource.

The program provides you with surveys that teachers and parents can complete that will provide a snapshot of a student's SEL strengths and weaknesses, steps for meeting with teachers and parents, and a variety of tools you can provide them to accelerate the development of key social and emotional skills (personal and social capabilities). Click the link below to learn more and how to purchase.

Coaching Teachers and Parents to Build Social-Emotional Strengths of Students with Achievement, Behaviour and Mental Health Issues

Read more about the Coaching Teachers and Parents to Build Social-Emotional Strengths of Students program

Discovery 2: Self-Acceptance is the psychological armour students need to feel worthwhile no matter what

My second discovery took place over 20 years ago. It came from my work in developing a survey I called CASI, *The Child and Adolescent Scale of Irrationality*, which measured the tendency of students to think in extreme and rigid ways, which significantly contributes to their emotional challenges. This work proved to me that some young people, especially those with internalising problems (anxiety, depression), have a powerful tendency to put themselves down and take things personally. This way of thinking reflects an attitude called *Self-Depreciation* and contrasts with the more positive, rational attitude called *Self-Acceptance*. Here is what these two contrasting attitudes look like:

Two girls receive the same text message several times, making negative remarks about how they look. One girl, Carmen, is devastated by the messages; they make her feel anxious and depressed about what her friends will think. The second girl, Alex, reminds herself she is a worthwhile person and confidently replies to the message, telling the sender to stop judging people by their appearance, culture or behaviour.

The emotional impact of receiving bullying text messages is dramatically different between the two girls because of the

unique attitude or mindset they have. Carmen has a self-deprecating mindset and takes the bullying message personally, thinking, “*They think I’m weird, there must be something wrong with me, no one will like me*”. Alex’s attitude of self-acceptance, in contrast, literally protects her. Alex doesn’t rate her self-worth and value based on someone’s offensive comments, thinking, “*I accept myself no what. I am me, and that’s OK.*”

As a result of this discovery, teachers using our YCDI! SEL curricula Program Achieve, are provided with lessons to teach students all about self-acceptance.

With the increasing need to support students with mental health and behavioural issues, I believe strengthening young people’s Self-Acceptance is more important than ever. It led to the YCDI! team creating a new eLearning, **interactive student program all about strengthening self-acceptance**. *Accepting Myself* provides students with a chosen avatar to guide them through interactive learning activities, to help them discover how to feel worthwhile no matter what happens to them.



I would recommend that those of you (psychologists, counsellors) who have a long list of students waiting to see you for mental health issues to make the Accepting Myself program available to complete while they wait. The program provides support materials for you, classroom teachers, parents and a student tool kit. Students tell us that this is a fun, engaging and helpful program.

[Read more about the Accepting Myself program](#)



The Strength of Self-Acceptance

This poster can be used school-wide to remind students of ways to think so they don’t take things personally.

Each poster measures 59cm long and 84cm wide, and is available in packs of 5.

[CLICK HERE to view and purchase.](#)

YCDI! Supports Students with Special Educational Needs

West Coast Secondary Education Support has been a fully immersive You Can Do It! Education school since 2017. As a cornerstone of our Positive Behaviour approach, You Can Do It! Education supports our neuro-diverse learners to develop the skills they need to become Resilient and independent adults through a range of explicit learning opportunities and integrated



whole-school approaches. Many of our students start their school lives with substantial deficits in social communication and self-regulation strategies. This can happen for several reasons, including home and community factors as well as diagnosed disability or trauma considerations.

Our whole school approach to You Can Do It! Education has seen students recognise the skills they need to succeed in their academic and social lives through repeated explicit practice, celebrating our successes, and using a common language, including using visual YCDI! supports throughout the school. Our students have become leaders, hosting their own You Can Do It! assemblies, branching out to workplace learning, and putting their Persistence and Confidence into practice on stage with our You Can Do It! - themed drama performances.

At West Coast, we embrace Self-Acceptance, we don't 'Blow things out of Proportion', and we bring a positive attitude to the challenges we face every day, and our students and staff are thriving because of it!

Tara Murphy
Autism Spectrum Disorder Coordinator
West Coast Secondary Education Support Centre



Join Michael Bernard at this year's
[2022 Positive Schools Conference](#)

As an international thought leader in this area, Michael has been invited to present the keynote:
Self-Acceptance. How to Help Young People Feel Worthwhile No Matter What.

That's a wrap

Feel free to communicate with me (michael@thebernardgroup.com.au) about what's happening at your school with YCDI! including photos and success stories - and difficulties.

Onwards! Michael

Thank you for being part of the YCDI! community. If you know someone who will also enjoy this newsletter please share with an invitation to [subscribe here](#).

Have questions? Get in touch

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