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Hierarchical Mentoring: a strategy to improve boys' education

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Abstract:

The Boys' Education Lighthouse School Project, Stage Two (BELS2) is a large-scale, national project funded by the Department of Science and Educational Training (DEST). This paper discusses the Eden cluster's involvement in BELS2 and focuses on its implementation of a hierarchical mentoring strategy to improve the learning engagement and social behaviours of targeted Year 5/6 from the cluster primary schools. Three voices are used in the paper, each representing a different layer of involvement in the project. These voices allow different perspectives to emerge that hopefully provide a more authentic and critical analysis of the project's delivery and outcomes. The project is in its final stages of completion, therefore the analysis is incomplete and discussion should be considered as a work in progress.

Introduction

This paper presents three perspectives on the participation of one cluster in the Boys' Education Lighthouse School project, stage two (BELS2) to enact government policy of achieving improved learning outcomes for boys through school-based projects. These school-based projects implement productive learning strategies that are matched to the specific needs of boys within their school setting. The strategies adopted by the BELS2 clusters can be categorized into four key themes: literacy, numeracy, gender role models, and learning styles. In our paper, we discuss the Eden Cluster's involvement in BELS2 from the positioning of: the cluster node manager; the cluster consultant; and the cluster leader. We believe, the juxtaposition of these discrete voices provides a more realistic and critical appraisal of the cluster's achievements. During the two-year implementation period we have shared our perceptions of the project's evolution: the frustration points, the tensions, the successes and the celebrations. Through the telling of our experiences we reveal the insights that we have gained into the processes and structures that underpin the BELS2 project from our different levels of engagement.

The Eden cluster is situated on the far south coast of New South Wales. However, its closeness to the Victorian border has situated it within the Victorian node. The cluster consists of one secondary co-educational government school, four government co-educational primary schools

and one Catholic co-educational primary school. The cluster's *Hierarchical Mentoring Program* evolved from concern expressed by the Lighthouse School, Eden Marine High School (EMHS), for boys' negative behaviours and their failure to cope with classroom demands. School records revealed that boys comprised 75% of school sanctions and 67% of school suspensions. Furthermore, the school's Conduct Disorder Program was filled exclusively with boys.

In response to these concerns, Mike Maxworthy, an industrial arts teacher at Eden Marine High School (EMHS), created a mentoring program for at risk students that involved hands-on repair of push bikes under the tutelage, supervision and guidance of retired men from the local community. What quickly became apparent through anecdotal evidence provided by both the men and the boys were the beneficial relationships that developed between the mentors and the mentees during the two-hour bike repair sessions, as the men assisted the boys to develop the skills and knowledge required for effective bike repairs. Bonds that were formed during the sessions extended into out-of-school family visits and activities. In 2004, as part of BELS2, Mike extended the project to include the boys who had been mentored themselves during the previous years. They were asked to work alongside the adult men in co-mentoring targeted Year 5/6 boys in the cluster primary schools for the pilot phase in 2004.

The adult mentors all identified that the boys from EMHS were not fulfilling the role of mentors satisfactorily. The primary reason for this was their lack of maturity, which appeared to account for the boys' difficulty in transitioning from the role of receiving support to the role of offering support within a mentoring relationship. The gap between the primary school boy and the high school boy was not large enough, and both boys had emotional needs that required attention. Consequently, it was observed that the primary school boy related to the high school boy more as an equal rather than as a mentor. In the case of the pilot, the older high school boy was not old enough or emotionally stable enough to satisfy the mentoring required. In fact, the adult mentors suspected that some of the high school boys harboured jealousy and resentment towards the primary school boys because they had to share their adult mentor. They were in fact competing for the attention of the adult mentor. Hence Year 10 volunteers were recruited to provide the second tier of the hierarchical mentoring in 2005.

Sally's Perspective

As the Victorian node manager, I monitor the participation of the thirteen Victorian clusters in the BELS2 project. Nationally, the project comprises 50 clusters spread over 350 schools. In this role, I am very much the *outsider* looking in (Schön, 1991) on the projects, and aware that it is the *insiders* who provide the critical information. As Eisner (1998 p. 3) acknowledges, it is the voice of the teachers, those 'who know the tradition, understand the history, are familiar with the genres, and can see what those settings and practices consist of that are most likely to have something useful to say about them.' Burney (2004) refers to *insider* teacher knowledge and experience as craft knowledge, which when shared collaboratively has the capacity to transform learning and teaching. This consciousness of the limited way in which I am able to comment on the project's development and outcomes, necessitates that my perspective be juxtaposed with those of Affrica Taylor, the cluster consultant, and Mike Maxworthy, the cluster leader.

An added consideration with the Eden cluster is the tyranny of distance, as this has meant very limited opportunities to observe the project in action. Proximity of some clusters to my work place, the University of Melbourne, is logistically an advantage with regard to maintaining a connectedness and closeness to the clusters' school-based projects. My awareness of this issue, however, enforced a more concerted effort to keep the communication lines open. E-mails and phone conversations with the cluster consultant and cluster leader provided an effective barometer of the project's implementation at different points in time.

Cycles of personal development

In the initial stages of setting up the structures for the projects, low frustration points were widely experienced – and no less so with the Eden Cluster. The written reports required by DEST for the release of funding proved to be particularly problematic. Four reports, known as Your Cluster Plans (YCPs), were required for each year of the project's duration. Initially, each cluster needed to provide an evidence-base for adopting the particular strategy/strategies it was implementing. In YCP2, the cluster was required to complete an evaluation matrix to:

- define the improvement goals it was targeting;
- identify milestones and monitoring that would be undertaken;

- establish base-line evidence for measuring any improvement in the boys' learning or behaviours;
- document the evidence that would be gathered and the monitoring processes; and
- outline the analysis strategies for assessing the impact of the project.

This process, which is linked to evidence-based practice, is somewhat onerous and time consuming. By virtue of also wearing the consultant's hat for one cluster, and my role in supporting the cluster to complete the evaluation matrix in YCP2, I was sensitised to this issue.

Coming across Mason's (2002) cycles of personal development (see Figure 1), helped me to understand the emotional processes that Mike and others were undergoing as they responded to DEST's requirement by 'grumbling' and 'gripping', to the point where Mike wondered whether he wanted to continue with his commitment to the project.

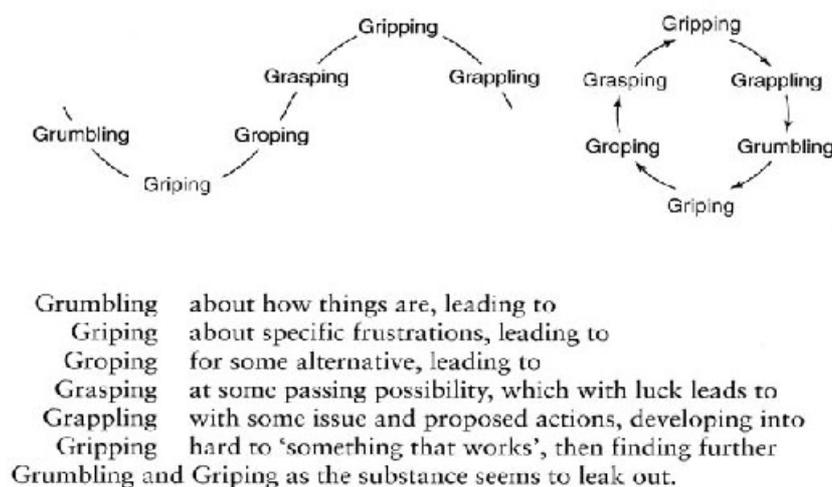


Figure 1: Cycles of personal development

It was the lure of the first major release of funds that encouraged Mike to grapple with the requirements. In this period he was guided, supported and encouraged by Affrica in her role as consultant, and this enabled the cluster to complete the first reporting milestone. As Mike shared his uncertainties and concerns, I was reminded that attention must be paid to the 'situatedness' (Collins & Duguid, 1989) of learning within school settings; how the values, beliefs and attitudes,

feelings and opinions, in addition to, workloads, work place expectations, and leadership roles impact on processes and outcomes. My communication with Mike over this challenging period mid-way through 2004 heightened my awareness of the importance of acknowledging the challenges confronting participants, and of affirming the work they are undertaking (Mason, 2002). I also needed to remind myself that Mike's cluster role in BELS2 was just one small aspect of his larger role within the school. Yet completion of this stage marked a turning point for Mike, who conceded the need to be accountable. In recognizing the value in identifying the project goals, the base-line data and the monitoring processes, a shift to 'gripping' and 'grasping' the project expectations occurred.

Evidence-based practice

Davies (1999) suggests that the purpose of evidence-based practice is to use existing evidence from worldwide research and literature, and to establish sound evidence where existing evidence is lacking or is questionable, uncertain or weak. To this end clusters are required to collect data systematically as a means of verifying the effectiveness of the strategies that they are implementing. BELS2 identifies four key characteristics of evidence-based practice, as demonstrated in Figure 2. What exactly counts as evidence, however, is a contentious issue. Moreover, as Norris and Robinson (2001) have pointed out, it is the quality of the evidence that is problematic, claiming that a distinction needs to be made between strong and weak evidence. Bearing this in mind, the BELS2 project encourages teachers to draw on the following resources:

- current research on boys' education which is available on the National Quality Schooling Framework (NQS) website;
- teachers' experience and expertise in the classroom;
- knowledge of the needs of the cohort of boys being targeted; and

the internal and external resources available to the project (Thompson, Imms & Godinho, 2005)

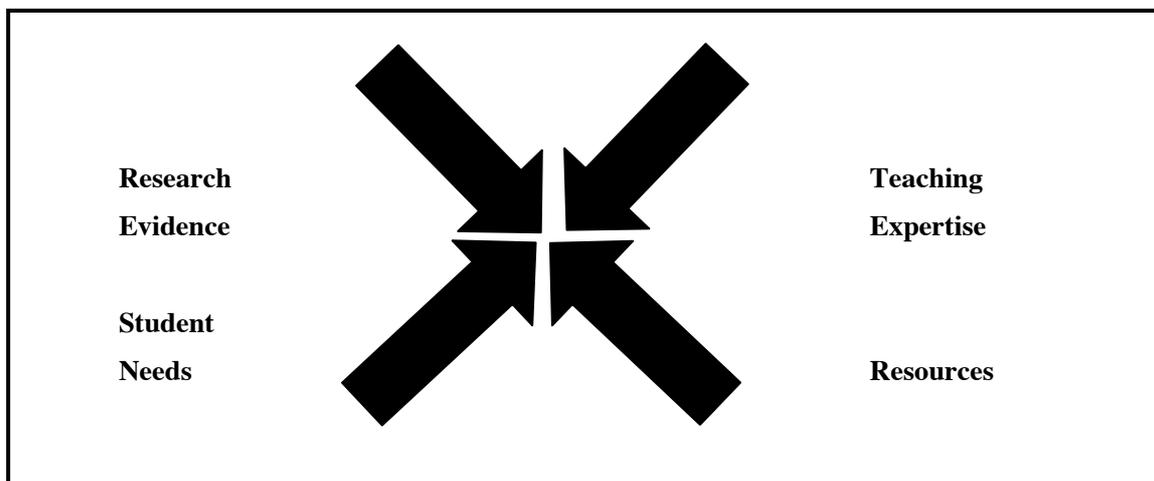


Figure 2 Evidence-based practice of the BELS2 project

There is a considerable body of literature that identifies the importance of male role models in achieving more positive learning and behavioural outcomes for boys (Biddulph, 1997; Connell, 2000; Lingard et. al., 2002; Commonwealth of Australia, 2002). This evidence, plus Mike's experience of using retirees from the community to mentor secondary boys underpin Eden's hierarchical mentoring strategy. The term 'evidence-informed practice' which is preferred by Hargreaves (1998), rather than 'evidence-based practice', may be more apt since relevant research informs rather than displaces the judgement of teachers. This is particularly pertinent to Mike's knowledge of the boys' needs, his connectedness to the local community, and his prior experience of the mentoring structure.

Measuring the impact of the project

School councillor pre and post interviews, absentee data and sanction sheets provided the base-line for measuring the strategy's impact on the targeted boys. From an outsider's perspective, and being distanced from the project in action, my meaning-making and judgements about the project's impact were based on reading the YCP reports, monthly BELS2 reporting processes for consultants, and personal communication with Affrica and Mike. These sources alerted me to some tensions and concerns about the 'authenticity' of the data collection processes. I endorsed Affrica's expression of concern, particularly if it was to be argued that the cluster was engaging in research processes, given that teacher participants had not been trained in research methods and the development of a research plan had not been a project requirement.

The degree to which the projects can be identified as practitioner research is debatable. Lather (2004) and Davies (1999), among others (Elliot, 2001; Willinsky, 2001), argue that the emphasis on positivity and cognitive science to provide answers to research questions do not take into account the complexity of the personal, social or cultural world of teachers and students, or of the thinking processes that inform their pedagogy. A recent visit to see the project in action made me more conscious of their claim, and of Atkinson's (2000) assertion that research into role theory plays in determining teachers' daily actions, whether they are aware of it or not, must also be considered.

After observing the bicycle repair workshop in action, I commented to Mike and Don, the adult male mentor, that the conversational topics that raised during the session, often involved very personal situations. Both Mike and Don mentioned that the bike repairs provided a diversion as the boys unfolded the concerns, or issues they were trying to address. They attributed several key factors to this openness and willingness to share their stories: the closeness of another person in a safe, supportive environment; not having to make eye-contact; and some form of physical distraction so that the focus was not directly on them. Their observations supported Atkinson's (2000) claim that teachers' unconscious or tacit theorising informs their practice. Speaking to Don after his session, he noted that many of the boys he works with harbour macho images of how they should behave as a male and speak disparagingly about women. Don believes that through his conversation and actions he subtly counters these stereotypical images and the discriminatory ways in which boys talk about females. In my brief encounter with the project in action, I felt convinced about its value but it raised a number of questions including: How do we legitimately measure the impact that the mentoring sessions are having on the lives of these young boys in terms of the project's matrix? Is this research *per se*? What were the measurable outcomes for the Year 10 boys?

The third question was particularly relevant on two counts. In one observation I noted that the Year 10 boy was more 'needy' of the adult male mentor than the primary school boy, and to some degree competing for his attention. Perhaps this was a one off situation, but as this scenario was observed in the pilot study with the Year 7 boys, close monitoring of the recruitment of Year 10 boys is essential.

The opportunity to interview twelve Year 10 mentors was an unexpected outcome of my cluster visit. It was listening to the boys talk about what they had learnt from their participation in the project that made me think of the ancillary outcomes for the project, which YCP4 addresses. These boys were overwhelming positive about their involvement in the EMHS project and identified the following learning outcomes:

- recognizing that school was not such a bad place after all;
- developing bike repair skills;
- valuing the friendships they formed with the adult men mentors and the young boys;
- learning about themselves – the good feeling it gave them when assisting the younger boys;
- understanding what it meant to be a role models and having to modify their language and actions accordingly; and
- acquiring communication skills - sustaining conversation and asking questions that opened up talk with the younger boys.

While complaining about ‘the theory’ part - the reflective journal entries and helping the younger boys prepare a PowerPoint presentation about the workshop to show their peers – the Year 10 boys acknowledged the sense of pride they felt when Year 5/6 boys presented their PowerPoints to their peers. The spin off benefits for the Year 10 boys has been an ancillary outcome of the project – although my suggestion that they might consider teaching as a career was met with eye rolling and incredulity that I would make such a suggestion!

Concluding comment

Seeing the project in action made me realise the responsibilities invested in Mike as cluster leader. These responsibilities include: coordination of the adult mentors, the Year 10 mentors, and the Year 5/6 students; purchasing equipment for the workshops; picking up and arranging storage of donated bike parts; transporting workshop equipment between school sites; liaising with school teachers to ensure the Year 10 boys were making up work missed during their workshop time; communicating with the primary schools about the boys’ participation; rescheduling workshops when an adult mentor cancelled a session; and ensuring the mentors completed their observation log after each session. How realistic is it in such circumstances to be accountable for data collection that is consistent with rigorous research? From my perspective,

the project has intrinsic value regardless of its achievement in simply measurable impacts of the strategy. If measuring achievement of goals is an expectation from a research basis, I would advocate William and Lee's (2001) notion of establishing a partnership whereby researchers and practitioners engage in joint researchers and co-creators of new knowledge - a model of development and research which is potentially transformative. The BELS2 model of each cluster being allocated a consultant is a definite move in this direction, however, the time allocation for consultants is insufficient to enact a committed research partnership – something to address in the future.

Affrica's Perspective

When I took on the job as the BELS2 Eden cluster consultant, the boys' bike mentoring program at Eden Marine High School was already well established, respected and regarded throughout the local district. Everyone knew of it as Mike's initiative and his ongoing project: or to put it in the vernacular of one local cluster member - as 'Mike's on bikes'. Mike's self-referencing as the program's 'driver' is very apt. I consider the fact that this is very much *Mike's* program and moreover that he had been successfully running it before it became a BELS2 research project, to be particularly significant. For this program owes its genesis and its continuation to Mike, not to BELS. It is first and foremost Mike's ongoing affair and only incidentally a research project.

Accordingly, my consultancy position as a BELS2 associate has been somewhat akin to an interloper. I have only briefly dropped in and out of this very male-identified regional domain in which coal-face practice is privileged and where the men and the boys, as Mike puts it, like to 'get their hands dirty'. Each time I have been very aware of myself as an outsider on a number of levels: a non-local; an urban woman; an academic; and one with a background in gender theory. Despite Mike's personal warmth and inclusive hosting, I think he would agree that we have both been challenged by this 'cross-cultural' encounter. While Mike has been steadfastly dedicated to making a success out of the program on the ground, it has been my job to support the program's transition into a research project. This has involved supervising the research process from a distance and facilitating its evaluation by cluster participants at the end of each phase. For a number of reasons additional to my multiple cultural outsider status, I consider that I have been only partially successful in facilitating and overseeing the research component.

To begin with, as Sally has suggested, although the BELS consultancy allowance has hinted at the *potential* of academic/school collaboration, it has not provided sufficient funds for the development of the kind of real partnership that would support a fully functional practitioner research project. We have just not had enough time to work through the different perspectives, skill bases and experiences to build the kind of working relationship that generates its own ‘co-created knowledges’ (William & Lee, 2001). I am left feeling that given more time we could have better synthesised Mike’s knowledge of local human resources, school procedures and the logistics of running a bike maintenance workshop with my knowledge of research design, implementation and analysis and gender studies. In an ideal world, such an intersection of skills and understandings could have produced a much firmer basis for a more rigorous piece of practitioner-research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Parson & Brown, 2002).

There are other factors specific to this project that mitigate against its optimal functioning as a piece of research. Beyond the undeniable anecdotal evidence of the success of the program, which comes from all of those involved – this is definitely a feel-good program - the hard data (from the first round at least – the final round has not yet been collated and analysed) has been patchy. On most accounts positive behavioural changes have been observed and recorded by mentee teachers and attributed to the participation of the mentee boys in the program. It is undeniable that positive relations have developed between some of the mentors and the boys. However there are some gaps and inconsistencies in the evidence base of these observations and some of the variables (such as the irregular attendance of one or two of the mentors) that have not been clearly documented and factored into the analysis. This is reflective of a lack of research training and experience within the cluster. Moreover, the geographical dispersal of the feeder schools makes regular data collection support and supervision difficult. While all the cluster participants whole- heartedly support the *program*, some have maintained a lingering ambivalence about being involved in *research* per se. This has been expressed in terms of enthusiastic verbal support of the work Mike is doing, but pockets of teacher resistance in filling out the required observation sheets. The unevenness and erratic nature of data collection across the cluster makes analysis difficult and has increased the pressure on Mike to pull together the requisite measurable evidence-based outcomes that he cannot fully control.

From my viewpoint, this local school and community based project has been characterised by an underlying low-level resistance to the additional pressures and requirements of being part of an externally funded research project. In part, this resistance was based on a lack of anticipation of DEST paperwork requirements, which were perceived to be ‘over the top’ at times. But in addition to this, there was a large amount of cultural adaptation to be made. For the boys’ mentoring program already had its own established culture before joining BELS2, and to a large extent the new BELS research cultures were antithetical to it. The boys’ mentoring program culture was expressed through an identity that first and foremost prided itself on being practical and hands on. It was about doing, and then anecdotally affirming its positive achievements through serial verbal testimonials. The detailed analytical and written requirements of formal research were definitely not a part of this existing culture, and at times read as an unreasonable imposition. I do not think that the reframing of the program as a formal research project was ever fully achieved, although I strongly agree with Sally that this does not necessarily refute the intrinsic value of this program. In my opinion, it is just a different sort of beast.

In addition to being a BELS consultant, mid way through the project I also took on the role of its ‘critical friend’. In this role I set out to trouble the basic assumptions of the research – to ask a series of question that would unsettle the ‘taken-for-granted’ nature of its premises and thereby sharpen its strategic approach. I am sure that Mike wished that he had never asked me to do this job, as the kinds of complexities that I wanted to inject into the program were quite firmly, although very politely, resisted as well. My major concern with the design of this program has always been about the unified and essentialist notions of masculinity that underpin it. I wanted to pay much more attention to the differences between the boys who were entering the program, and to match their specific gender-related needs with appropriately chosen mentors. In particular, I have worried that those who do not fit the standard ‘real Aussie boy’ mould of ‘white, straight and blokey’ boys have not been well catered for in this program. This is a concern shared by the school counsellor who has confirmed that the hegemonic masculine culture in this particular local region is decidedly macho, risk taking, misogynist and homophobic (as the mentor’s cited comments also indicate).

I find the assumptions that ‘all boys like... and ‘all boys need ...’ to be quite problematic, and want to ask instead ‘which boys need what?’. In attending to the differences between boys, and to

the hierarchal attitudes that boys and men themselves hold towards these differences, I would suggest that the intersections of gender with race, ethnicity, social class, sexuality etc need more careful consideration. Ideally these differences should be catered for in the matching of mentees and mentors.

Accommodation for these kinds of complex layerings in any future mentoring programs would demand a more deliberately strategic approach and much more detailed selection procedures than has been possible in this project. Responsibility for the selection of boys in BELS2 project was dispersed across the full range of feeder schools and ended up being rather ad hoc. Selection of boy mentees and boy and adult mentors would need to be much more rigorous and strategic. A larger pool of mentors would be needed to successfully match these boys and men. While I recognise that the project's logistical and practical limits have to date foreclosed on such possibilities I hope that a consideration of diverse masculinities (for instance see Connell 1995; Epstein and Johnson 1998; Martino and Meyenn 2001; Mills 2001; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003) will be taken up by this program as it evolves into the future.

Ironically, I suspect that without the BELS structural demands and levels of accountability, Mike will have more opportunity to control the variables related to the selection of mentees and mentors, to address these kind of complexities and to fine tune his excellent mentoring program. The success of the program has never been bound by its participation in BELS, although hopefully there have been some useful learnings through this research process which will inform future programs. As Mike and Sally have both implied, the outcomes have in many ways exceeded those framed by the matrix. There have been many spins offs. The year 10 mentoring boys have obviously benefited greatly, although the program did not set out to measure their behavioural or attitudinal changes. Similarly, many of the retiree mentors have also expressed the firm conviction that they have gained a lot from their participation.

Perhaps arguably the greatest achievement of the project has been Mike's ability to constructively spotlight the needs of boys in this community and to bring schools and community members together to collectively address these needs in a positive way. This kind of community-building is fundamental to the design and the spirit of Mike's work and provides a solid foundation for spawning other boys mentoring programs in the Eden area. Mike's overarching commitment to

the welfare of boys and to his local community drives this program. The underlying resistance to being fully appropriated into BELS that I have noted has also been this program's source of strength. It remains a staunchly *local* and *grass-roots* model of community self-help.

Mike's Perspective

As cluster leader, I have looked critically and reflectively on what I perceive to be some of the project's strengths, the associated limitations and the opportunities that it has created for the boys. I have not limited my discussion to how the project has fulfilled the evaluation matrix goals but looked more broadly at the impact of the hierarchical mentoring strategy.

The Strengths

Commitments to a common task - A key strength of the projects is each person is focussed on the same task, i.e. the repair/renovation of the bike. All activities can be traced back to the ultimate goal of finishing of the bike. This requires **mutual participation**- all participants are involved. They each participate and "get their hands dirty". All men have hands on involvement and this further reinforces the involvement, and the commitment of each person to the task.

Closeness of association is an underpinning goal of the strategy that is recognized by and common to all participants. Therefore there are many situations where both/all are involved in the same task, ensuring this closeness. A physical awareness and presence of the other person is common, and senses of smell and touch are intrinsic to the program. Boys are exposed to a closeness of another person in a positive, interactive way and this is often something that the boys have not previously experienced.

Boys' attraction towards machines that move- there appears to be an attraction of boys towards movement and machines that produce motion. The motivation is there because the outcome is a test ride of a machine that they have produced. **All** Stage 3 boys are beside themselves with excitement and anticipation of testing their bike. Salivation has not been observed but I suspect that it is internal.

Willingness of Year 10 boys to be involved and fulfil their mentor role- an unexpected outcome but it has been extremely refreshing to see boys who have exhibited little social

awareness or consciousness volunteer to perform as mentors. There is a culture developing within the school and acting as a mentor is deemed to be “cool”. Why I don’t know but I try and reinforce this aspect. Acknowledgement of the Year 10 boys’ involvement is very public with whole school presentations. All Year 10 boys willingly stand in front of the school and receive accolades and kudos (this is an unusual reaction for most boys do not want public recognition). I build upon this in with certification of their involvement. Indeed one boy did offer the opinion that the documentation that they receive does look good in their CV.

Incorporation of ICT eases boys into literacy components- boys are exposed to literacy without them knowing it – ‘literacy by stealth’. I reinforce the idea that keeping a journal assists boys with their PowerPoints. All stage 3 boys readily accept this. Their journals are not that flash but they willingly do their entries and accept it as a necessary part of the program.

Reinforcement of charity/goodwill aspect- extremely important. Exposure to charitable acts internalises the feel good that is associated with the act. All boys willingly accept that they are doing something for somebody else. It makes them feel good (endorphins?). Wherever possible, this aspect of the program is reinforced. All letters/ publications that are received are produced and distributed to all boys. The whole school is also exposed to this and it further reinforces the nobility of the program. Boys take a lot of pride in talking about where their bike is going.

Extension of network includes direct associations with charities – Boys choose the charities that their Many boys have received direct acknowledgement from the charity to which their bike was donated. This has personalised their involvement particularly when their name features in the lettered reply.

Enhancement of self image and esteem is also very important. The boys are proud of their achievement. Every boy finishes his bike. They are beaming when it is finished and this must build upon self-image and esteem. Many of the boys sent to me are not very capable and able. They appear not to notice that mainly the others rebuild the bike. They all look upon it as their bike. Perhaps it is because they chose the bike? There is reinforcement that it is their bike and that they have done a wonderful job.

Reinforcement of teamwork and sharing – there is a bonding and an informal team organization. This is usually dominated and directed by the adult mentor but it is very much determined by the group dynamics. Some of the men are layback others are more autocratic. Each man has his own style and I do not interfere with this. It is often discussed between us and I offer suggestions, but it is left to the man and the Year 10 boy to work together. My observations are that the man and the Year 10 boy have many outside of session discussion re the best way to deal with a situation, always focussing on what is best for the stage 3 boy. There has never been an instance where jealousy or resentment has been an issue. Yet this was a major factor in the pilot study.

Community input and acknowledgement (bike donations and favourable media exposure) – huge exposure locally. I am constantly receiving donations from the community. The critical mass appears to have been reached for the school is now well known for the program. Indeed, last weekend 8 bikes were donated. The stockpile is ever increasing. The police regularly donate unclaimed bikes and the program is embraced by all within the community and seen as a good thing.

Endorsement and support from all staff from all schools within the cluster – Staff within the whole cluster support the program. There has been the withdrawal of two programs that were used to assist children modify their behaviour i.e. Wilderness Program and Behaviour and Attendance Program in Schools (BAPS) – program used to flagship ‘Talk Sense to Yourself’, a self reflective program that focussed upon boys stepping back and analysing their actions. Staff within the cluster recognize that there is a need to influence boys in a positive way and universally support the program.

Limitations associated with the project

Lack of ICT skills both boys and men’s - production of the PowerPoint and journal is dependent upon the skills and knowledge of the men and Year 10 boys. Some are very skilful and consequently the electronic productions reflect this, however, conversely the opposite occurs. I have applied for the men to become part of the CAP (Country Area Program) professional development programs. This application has been accepted by the decision makers and will mean

that the men will become involved in computer technology professional development. The outcome will be the men becoming more skilled and confident with the computer. Indeed the CAP technology consultant figures prominently in the Induction Training for the Year 10 boys. He presents a workshop, focussing upon PowerPoint and this equips the boys with the basic computer skills and knowledge that they need.

Limited number of men involved – a big issue. Further exposure and publicity will assist in the recruitment process. I have talked to many men within the local area about the project. All men show interest and universally agree that the it helps boys. However, few make the commitment. To date 10 men have worked in the project. Ideally 10 men could work per week. This would entail two sessions each day. The logistics associated with co-ordinating would be massive but it is possible. Therefore 40 boys could experience the project each year. I am confident that this would have a significant positive effect upon local boys and their behaviours.

Setting up of infra structure - program needs specialised equipment and a designated area – very important. It takes a lot of work and support to provide a suitable work area. The program could not be successfully undertaken unless there was a suitable venue. The bike room at EMHS has considerable status and is often used by boys outside of mentoring session times. All boys in the program have access to the room in their spare time. Other boys request the use of the room for private restorations and this is granted if the room is not booked. The mentoring boys get priority (this further elevates their status); often the room is used with many boys acting as outside observers. There has never been an instance where the room has been misused or abused. I suspect it is because of the charitable nature of the program.

Cluster teachers' tardiness with observation sheets – This is only a BELS consideration and it will be expanded upon in YCP4 but some of the teachers are not prompt and punctual with their observation sheets. This an issue with regard to the research focus that Affrica has raised.

Co-ordination requires a commitment and belief in the program that is often tested but must not ever waver - a personal statement but for any program to be successful the driver must have absolute belief in the program. I have that belief and often parallel or compare the program to personal life experiences.

Opportunities that have presented

Endless supply of suitable and needing boys- all boys want to be in the program and all boys are better for the experience. EMHS cannot cater for the demand of boys (or parents) who wish to be in the program. I will have to reduce the Year 10 volunteers next year, particularly with the finish of the BELS project and its associated funding. This is unfortunate and will have to be handled very carefully. Boys crave the bike experience and I suspect that it will continue.

Teachers can gain greater knowledge of issues relating the boys and boys' education –

Hierarchical Mentoring has allowed teachers from all schools within the cluster to be exposed to current thinking re boys' education. Affrica's workshop, "What makes a Boy?," was very well received and gave teachers a valuable insight into boys' issues .

Concluding comment

The Eden BELS project has been an unqualified success. During the course of the year 18 bikes were reconditioned and donated to charities. The exposure that the boys had to caring, compassionate and capable men also assisted the boys to repair, modify or change their beliefs, attitudes and values. The measure of this will be determined by the collection, compilation and analysis of the data that has been accumulated during the year. This data will be scrutinised and evaluated by many. However, what the data will not reveal and show is the joy and happiness that the boys experienced whilst they were in the program. This intangible is what makes the boy a better person. Illustration of this was shown to all who attended the finale of the Eden BELS project for 2005, the bike celebration day at Bournda National Park. It was a joy to the heart to witness the pleasure that the boys and men had in working together and experiencing the day. Boys who had not seen their mentors since the beginning of the year quickly adjusted and renewed their friendships. It was obvious that bonds that had been formed were more than a temporary mentoring experience. The influence of the men was powerful and will have a positive affect upon the boys for many years.

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