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Introduction

The Berry Street Education Model (BSEM) is an educational initiative that, by linking the research fields of positive education and traumatology, seeks to improve the capacity of schools to engage vulnerable or disadvantaged young people and help them achieve their personal, social and academic potential.

Initially developed to inform teaching at the four campuses of the Berry Street school (a facility established in 2003 to cater for the particular needs of young people affected by trauma), since 2015 the BSEM has been adopted by a growing number of mainstream primary and secondary schools across the country. Implicit in this action have been (a) concern at the significant number of school students that have been exposed to trauma, and/or are disengaged from standard teaching regimes, and (b) recognition that the Model has relevance for all students. At the start of 2019, over 1000 mainstream schools throughout Australia had opted to take on the BSEM as a whole-school approach to developing their students’ social competence.

A hallmark of the implementation of the BSEM in schools has been independent research into its impact. Implementation has been monitored through ongoing research and evaluation initiatives, including an in-depth examination of its first pilot deliveries (Stokes & Turnbull, 2016), an evaluation of the BSEM teacher Alumni program, an individual evaluation project for Collingwood College, the Yarra Communities that Care project (2017), an evaluation project for two primary schools within Darebin and a three-year longitudinal study (2016 to 2018 inclusive) involving three schools. Data collection and analysis has focused on evaluating the effectiveness of embedding the Model within mainstream classroom practice and the impact on students’ engagement, wellbeing and academic achievement. While each of the projects has engaged with children and young people to hear their reflections on the Model, this feedback has been reported as part, rather than the central focus, of the evaluations. This report privileges the voices of young people and their perspectives on the BSEM.

Project description

The ‘Young People’s Voices, Young People’s Lives’ Project (YPVYPL) is a 12-month study that documents and examines the impact of the BSEM on four cohorts of young people in four Victorian schools.

In drawing primarily on the voices of young people to better understand the relevance of the BSEM in their lives and learning, YPVYPL represents a significant development in the research agenda. While previous evaluations of in-school deliveries of the BSEM have supplemented teacher and school leadership interview data with a range of student responses and observations, it is recognised that more intensive research with young people themselves has the potential (a) to enrich and enhance evidence collated to date on the positive impacts of the Model, and (b) to yield new knowledge as to the usefulness and relevance of the BSEM in young people’s lives. By focusing specifically on the perspective of students, the YPVYPL project will add to the body of evidence examining the BSEM as it is being delivered in mainstream schools.
Project objective and desired outcomes

The key objective of this project is:

*To ascertain directly from students how the Berry Street Education Model is impacting on their learning and lives.*

It is anticipated that findings from the study will:

1. Enhance Berry Street’s understanding of:
   i. the ways young people learn and identify effective strategies for teaching resilience;
   ii. which BSEM strategies are most relevant to students;
   iii. which BSEM strategies students practise across their life domains;
   iv. how BSEM strategies increase students’ ability to self-regulate;
   v. how BSEM strategies assist students to form relationships within and outside school;
   vi. how BSEM strategies enhance the success of upper secondary students securing work placements; and
   vii. whether BSEM has an impact on identity formation.

2. Ensure student voices inform and influence the future design of BSEM training and resources and the implementation of the Model by teachers across Victoria.

Project design

The evaluation employed a qualitative research design to address three key research questions:

- How are young people learning BSEM strategies?
- How are young people applying BSEM strategies to their classroom learning?
- How are young people practising BSEM strategies in their lives beyond the classroom and at home?

Data was collected from four schools (two primary, one P-9 and one secondary) via:

- Focus groups of up to 10 students from Years 4-11; and
- Interviews with school leadership, the school’s BSEM co-ordinator and relevant classroom teachers.

Interviews and the focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed by the research team. Each school was visited twice over a 12 month period.
Berry Street is the largest independent child and welfare organisation in Victoria. Since 2003 its wide range of services and activities has expanded to include direct provision of alternative education for young people who are affected by experiencing or witnessing trauma. There are currently four Berry Street School campuses, each of which emerged out of concerns at the inability of local mainstream settings to adequately meet the complex educational and therapeutic needs of these young people. Teaching at each Berry Street campus is framed by the organisation’s own model of education. The BSEM draws on extensive international research that has included systematic review, analysis and comparison of such programs and philosophies as the Sanctuary Model, USA (Bloom, 1995), and the Calmer Classrooms, Australia (Downey, 2007) approach.

Most existing (or traditional) models take a two-tier healing approach to learning, focusing primarily on repairing the student (i.e. fixing self-regulatory and relational abilities), and progressing from a deficit perspective (e.g. what deficiencies or developmental struggles does this student face?) (Brunzell, Waters & Stokes 2015c). The BSEM seeks to take the healing approach a step further by adopting a ‘strengths’ perspective (e.g. what strengths does this student have to build upon for future success?). The Model proposes three tiers of therapeutic learning and growth. It builds on (or extends) the focus of previous practice on repairing the student’s regulatory abilities (Tier 1) and repairing the student’s disrupted attachments (Tier 2), by adding a third domain: increasing the young person’s psychological resources in order to promote post-traumatic growth (Tier 3). It is argued that by focusing on healing while simultaneously providing pathways towards post-traumatic growth, the BSEM expands the possibilities of teaching and learning and makes a unique contribution that bridges research from the fields of traumatology and positive education.

Berry Street likewise argues that the Model has strong cross-sectoral potential, believing that its impact within specialist settings is replicable and it can be applied effectively in mainstream schools. Almost 40% of American school students can be defined as being trauma-affected, based on them having been exposed to some sort of traumatic stressor. The majority of these students are in mainstream schools (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2014). While there is no equivalent Australian data, studies suggest that between 57-75% of Australians will experience some form of trauma during their lifetime (Mills et al., 2011) and that particular groups of children have more commonly experienced trauma (Bendall et al., 2018), including children and young people in out-of-home care (Child Family Community Australia, September 2018) and those from indigenous (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019) and refugee backgrounds (Bryant et al., 2018; Miller, Ziaian, & Esterman, 2018). These findings have clear and disturbing implications for the Australian educational community.

Teachers in both mainstream and specialist settings increasingly confront challenges in educating students who present with a range of trauma symptoms and behaviours that include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), peer bullying, school refusal, conduct and oppositional-defiance disorders, distracted or aggressive behaviour, limited attentional capacities, poor emotional regulation, attachment difficulties and poor relationships with peers. There is a growing need for educational approaches that address effectively the complex needs of the increasing proportion of students who are struggling in 21st century classrooms.
Design of the Berry Street Education Model (BSEM)

The design of the BSEM draws on neuro-scientific findings in contending that the child’s biological and developmental responses to trauma need to be addressed before they are ‘ready’ to build relationships and engage with learning content. Emphasis on repairing the dysregulated stress response in trauma-affected students draws on the understanding that (a) self-regulation is a core developmental ability for children, and (b) by strengthening emotional control and impulse management, regulatory capacities are crucial to the child’s healthy development (Bath, 2008). Educational and therapeutic strategies aimed at addressing the dysregulated stress response and building regulatory capacities involve the creation of environments within which young people can explore self-regulation and co-regulation, identify negative emotions and learn to manage their behaviour. Such environments support young people through classroom activities that have both physical and emotional foci. Physical regulation activities seek to align the body through sensory integration and rely heavily on rhythm, repetition and routine. Emotional regulation activities aim to help the young person identify, acknowledge, label, understand and work with difficult feelings; build the capacity to communicate those feelings to others; link internal thoughts to external stimuli; acquire and practise strategies for de-escalating emotions, and learn how to return to a comfortable state after arousal. In order to support students to develop these capacities, the BSEM guides teachers in developing a trauma-informed lens through which to view and understand their students’ behaviours and needs. It also provides a developmental curriculum to assist students to learn skills to build networks of support, feel confident as learners, and manage difficult and challenging emotions. Underpinning the Model is the importance of building both in-the-moment self-regulation and resources and capacities over time (Brunzell et al., 2015b).

The Berry Street training team provides teachers with (a) intensive and on-going professional development, and (b) detailed advice on structuring the teaching day, in the form of a suite of printed curriculum guides (Brunzell 2015b).

Figure 1: The Berry Street Education Model (Brunzell et al., 2015b)

The BSEM is an approach to pedagogy that can be used consistently in the classroom and throughout the whole school. It provides a way to teach the content of any subject area while addressing the social and emotional learning needs of the students in the process. The Model comprises five domains: BODY, STAMINA, ENGAGEMENT and CHARACTER, all anchored by RELATIONSHIP. Each domain contains a cluster of focus areas within which are located sets of teaching and intervention strategies and recommendations (See Figure 2). Identification of the foci was guided by international research (Brunzell, Stokes & Waters 2016). Application of the BSEM is developmental or sequential, with teachers and students progressing from the domain of BODY through to the domain of CHARACTER.
The BSEM curriculum contains over 100 classroom strategies and recommendations. Each has been designed as a Strategy, a Brainbreak or a Lesson Plan. The Model has been developed in this way to enable teachers to adapt the components to their own classroom context. Strategies within the Model are defined as teacher-centred approaches for strengthening students’ self-regulation or relationships and as teacher behaviours that are integrated with pedagogical approaches. Brainbreaks are short-burst regulatory activities to ready students’ brains for learning. They are flexible and can be interwoven into the classes at any time. Containing options such as mindfulness and emotion/humour activities, Brainbreaks promote both self-awareness through checking current emotional, physical and psychological states, and self-regulation through cultivating flexible, resilient and open mindsets. Lesson Plans, as the name suggests, provide detailed sequences for teaching specific skills and strategies. Within each lesson there are several core learning intentions supported by a collection of activities. Teachers are able to select lesson components to suit the needs and capacities of their students. These activities can also be integrated into other curriculum areas to support students’ learning. Each lesson plan contains: Background information (outlining the reasons for the activity); Lesson aims/objectives; A list of materials; An estimate of session duration (e.g. 20 minutes); A description of the activity, and materials such as worksheets.
The domain of **BODY** (as detailed in Figure 2) provides an example. Classroom practice and planning are framed by four inter-connected focus areas: **De-escalation**, **Present. Centred. Grounded.**, **Mindfulness**, and **Self-Regulation**.

Defined by Brunzell et al. (2016) as a suite of interventions and strategies that instil a strong self-regulatory student capacity, the focus area of **De-escalation** is typically addressed through class discussion, the creation and use of de-escalation maps, and the collaborative design of individual safety plans that (a) identify strategies to be employed by the student at times of emotional arousal (e.g. going for a walk, listening to music on headphones, taking time out with another staff member), and (b) provide teachers with knowledge about the student’s stressors, triggers and environmental variables. In focusing on De-escalation, the teacher proactively creates a calm, routine and predictable environment, consistently monitors and identifies aroused stress states, and implements interventions to maintain optimal states.

Effective learning cannot take place when a student’s mind is wandering or ruminating and therefore not present to learning (Brunzell et al., 2015b). The focus area of **Present. Centred. Grounded.** guides teachers in helping students to be ‘present’ to classroom learning. Being centred and present is underpinned by the technique of physical mindfulness that brings a student back into themselves in preparation to undertake a task successfully. Within the lessons, students are taught centring activities such as Breathing and Stretching to assist them to be ready to learn.

The area of **Self-Regulation** offers classroom content around the topic of stress and provides students with (a) the means of identifying their own stress responses, (b) information on the effects of stress on the body, (c) opportunities to reflect on experiencing stress, (d) different coping strategies (both in school and outside), and (e) the means of identifying readiness for learning. One lesson within the domain guides students in creating a ‘Ready to Learn’ chart in which they plot their emotional states in relation to readiness to learn. They can then identify those activities, such as mindfulness and/or Brainbreaks that may assist them in shifting their emotions toward learning readiness.

A sub-area within **Self-Regulation** is **Rhythm**. This focus articulates research findings that trauma and chronic stress impact negatively on the body’s capacity to regulate such basic functions as blood pressure, heart rate or body temperature. Rhythm and repetition have been shown to rebuild the neurological pathways of self-regulation (Brunzell et al., 2015b, p. 70). Rhythm activities involve teachers recording students’ heart rates (as a rhythmic form of body regulation) or using rhythm in Brainbreaks, or as a form of triage (Brunzell et al., 2016). Popular examples of rhythm-related Brainbreaks include Silent Ball, Brain Gym and call and response games.

The focus area **Mindfulness** centres on the students’ awareness of their physical self and responses, specifically breathing, noticing and listening. Mindfulness crosses over to other foci such as rhythm and self-regulation. Teaching activities within these lessons include focusing attention on a single point, listening to classroom sounds, visualising colours or emotions, and visualising a favourite location.

As noted above, systematic utilisation of the BSEM in class builds on the foundations laid by the introductory activities within the **BODY** domain. Subsequent progress by teachers through the BSEM domains of **RELATIONSHIP**, **STAMINA**, **ENGAGEMENT** and **CHARACTER** articulates and addresses the other two tiers of Berry Street’s approach to trauma-informed pedagogy, i.e. repairing disrupted attachments and increasing psychological resources. While there is insufficient space here to enable a detailed summary of the post **BODY** domain sequences, the following examples provide some insights into the rationale behind specific teacher practices.

Within the **RELATIONSHIP** domain, for instance, BSEM frames classroom practice and planning around such focus areas as **Attachment**, **Empathy and Zen Mind**, **Whole School Relationships** and **Unconditional Positive Regard**. Implementation of attachment-based strategies seeks to create a strong class environment centred on comfort, safety, consistency, trust, worthiness and belonging. The area of **Whole School Relationships** embraces shared responsibility for the student within a consistent and closely aligned whole school context. (Implicit in the concept is the importance of peer and supervisory support for the teacher.) Developing
Unconditional Positive Regard encompasses being able (a) to maintain a vision of the child’s wholeness that can separate the student from their behaviour, and (b) to recall the disrupted pathways of the child’s development and, as a result, attempt to build capacity where particular developmental milestones have been missed. The RELATIONSHIP domain is the BSEM’s ‘anchor’. Brunzell (2014) notes that, “the relational milieu of the classroom is the primary location of relational intervention” (p.50) while Brunzell, Waters and Stokes (2015c) argue:

“A relationally based classroom is predicated on the belief that struggling students will put forth their best efforts for teachers they like, respect, and believe will be present for them at times when they are not at their best” (p.6).

Activity within the STAMINA domain focuses on developing or building emotional intelligence, personal resilience, frustration tolerance and the capacity to self-regulate. Focus areas include Resiliency (i.e. employing ‘biological, psychological and social resources to overcome adversity’ or reconceptualising failure as ‘an opportunity for new learning’), Emotional Intelligence (i.e. perceiving emotions; understanding, appraising and identifying emotions and how they change over time; managing emotions) and a Growth Mindset (embracing opportunities to grow, and to make and learn from mistakes). Encouragement of a growth mindset (as opposed to a fixed mindset) is a BSEM strategy aimed at building the student’s stamina for learning (Brunzell 2014, pp. pp.27-30).

Describing engagement within the ENGAGEMENT domain as “a complex interaction of behavioural, affective and cognitive motivations and competencies” (Brunzell et al., 2015a, p. 5) highlights the imperative of providing learning experiences that trigger interest, have a purpose and are relevant, relate to the students’ own ambitions and vocational goals, and fall within the students’ competencies. Responding to research evidence linking positive thinking/positive emotions to improved attention and enhanced growth, health and overall wellbeing, teachers typically positively prime their classes, i.e. employ such engagement activities as transitioning into lessons with positive hooks (short-burst attention-grabbing activities). Other engagement strategies include short ‘fun breaks’, or fun stories and scenarios.

The CHARACTER domain draws on the work of Petersen and Seligman (2012), specifically the Values in Action (VIA) classification of 24 signature character strengths and their six corresponding virtues with the understanding that explicit teaching about character strengths (i.e. positive traits manifested in thoughts, feelings, and behaviours) has been demonstrated to impact positively on both school performance and student wellbeing (Shoshani & Slone, 2013). The domain focuses on what is ‘right’ within the young person and the group. Teaching strategies and activities within the domain are aimed at helping students to identify and practise their personal strengths, articulate their personal values, develop understanding of themselves and others (in the context of community), develop tolerance and respect for others’ strengths, and employ strengths and values for future pathways. Teacher strategies include positive ‘breaks’, storytelling, ‘strengths spotting’, ‘strengths assessment’ activities, and applying/modelling resilient mindsets to small adversities in day-to-day classroom management. Exploration of personal strengths and values within the context of the values/strengths of others culminates in reflection in the Gratitude and Hope themes.
Engaging with children and young people as key informants

Children and young people can provide valuable insights into their lives. It is only in the last two decades however, that children and young people have started to be recognised as key informants in research seeking to understand their perspectives and needs.

A significant catalyst for this shift has been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Under the Convention, children are recognised as rights holders. The rights within the Convention are understood broadly as the right to provision to meet their needs, protection from harm, and participation in matters affecting their lives (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Alongside the enshrining of rights as a driver for engaging meaningfully with children and young people has been the evolution of interdisciplinary childhood studies, particularly the 'new' sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 2005; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). This area of study has generated a robust body of child-centred research into a broad range of areas impacting children’s lives, including education (Powell, Graham, Fitzgerald, Thomas, & White, 2018; Stokes & Turnbull, 2016), health (Cahill & Coffey, 2013; Morris, Humphreys, & Hegarty, 2015) and urban planning (Baroutsis, McGregor, & Mills, 2016; Freeman & Tranter, 2012). Significantly, it has also produced extensive research into ways to support children and young people’s active participation (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015; Powell & Smith, 2009; Smith, 2011).

The shift toward seeking children’s and young people’s views to better understand their needs is also reflected in recent policy initiatives such Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership) and The Gonski Report (Gonski et al., 2018). These initiatives have created an environment of accountability and performance, requiring evidence of what assists students in their educational needs, including wellbeing education (Simmons et al., 2015), as Soutter argues, students are still largely an untapped resource in the evaluation of wellbeing education (Soutter, 2011). Incorporating the voice of children and young people can, however, present a challenge to researchers, as responses may not sit comfortably with the prevailing policy and practice imperatives. Such responses, if listened to and acted upon can, however, be a potent catalyst for empowering young people and transforming policy and practice to better meet the needs of those they are designed to support.

Within the BSEM evaluation cycle there has been a recognition of the importance of eliciting feedback from students. From the initial pilot project through to the evaluation of the current roll-out into a growing number of schools across Victoria, every stage of evaluation has included the feedback of students. Researchers have invited students from Grade 4 upwards to share with them their knowledge of the content and skills learnt in the BSEM program and to reflect on the ways in which these are impacting their lives within and outside of school. While these projects have provided Berry Street and its key stakeholders and supporters with robust evidence of the BSEM outcomes (including changes to teacher practice, school culture and student attainment), there is a place for focusing more deeply on children’s perceptions of the program to better understand, and thereby ensure, the relevance of the BSEM to their lives and learning. We know that the voices of young people are integral to the creation of new knowledge. This report privileges young people’s lived experience to better understand BSEM’s relevance and usefulness in their own learning and lives and to inform future BSEM training and implementation.
Presentation and Analysis of Data

Data was collected from four schools (two primary, one P-9 and one secondary) via:

- Focus groups of up to 10 students from Years 4-11; and
- Interviews with school leadership, the school’s BSEM co-ordinator and relevant classroom teachers.

Interviews and the focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed by the research team. Each school was visited twice over a 12 month period.

Across the four schools, five leaders and ten teachers were interviewed, and 59 students participated in the focus groups. For a breakdown of participants from each school see Table 1 below.

Table 1: The Berry Street Education Model (Brunzell et al., 2015b)

<table>
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<th>Curran Primary School</th>
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<th>Ross P-9 College</th>
<th>Simich Secondary College</th>
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<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
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</table>
Three common concerns underpinned the decision of each of the four schools to participate in the BSEM program. Each school recognised that:

1. Mainstream teaching approaches and pedagogies were failing to meet the needs of significant numbers of students;
2. Student populations were confronting diverse and complex challenges; and
3. Teachers were facing significant professional and personal challenges in dealing with the diversity of student need.

While there was a shared rationale for choosing the BSEM, each school within the project presents a distinct implementation picture. Each is at a different stage in the journey and this is reflected in the ways in which the students understand and talk about their experiences of the program.

All four schools participated in the professional development provided by the Berry Street training team and have been implementing the Model for more than twelve months. Some schools are at the start of the journey, others have been implementing the Model for a number of years. The four schools are also at different stages in delivery of the Domains: one school has covered all the Domains twice, while another has covered two Domains and will be addressing a third and fourth in 2019.

The three primary settings have implemented the program organisationally in similar ways, allocating a set time each week to spend on a particular facet of the BSEM program.

“All year levels do the same area/module at same time, most lessons are drawn from the manual, but younger students will also be using picture books, charts etc.” (Wellbeing teacher, Gemert PS).

“We spend roughly one session per week all year”, with “direct education required at Foundation level becom[ing] less formalised with older students” (Wellbeing teacher, Gemert PS).

“All domains covered. Individual lessons at primary” (BSEM leader, Ross College).

“Termly implementation throughout the school. All teachers have copies (book available in the interview) and everyone in the school has a plan for their class” (Wellbeing Leader, Curran PS).

The learnings from the specific lessons have then been utilised more broadly within other curriculum areas such as Stamina in reading and Positive Growth Mindset in Physical Education and Maths.

Each school has included the BSEM in their strategic plans, trained all staff, including most non-teaching staff, encouraged a whole school approach, and used the shared language provided by the BSEM. Support of the leadership team was seen universally as crucial in supporting implementation.

In the secondary level of the P-9 setting, the BSEM informing the teachers’ pedagogical approach and use of shared language was the priority, as time pressure on the curriculum precluded specific teaching of the BSEM domains. In the other secondary setting, the BSEM was being gradually rolled out across the school, beginning in 2018 with a pilot program at Years 7 and 10, addressing one Domain per semester. In 2019, the BSEM is being implemented at this school in Years 7, 8 and 10, with weekly formal lessons in Advisory Group time. BSEM strategies and approaches are used by all staff across all levels and within all subject areas of the school.

As time progresses and schools become more confident in delivery, they report making adaptations to the program. The schools use the overarching values of the BSEM and incorporate other programs as they see fit:

“We will add other things in 2019. Berry St is the foundation, all that language of ‘ready to learn.’ It’s all about the terminology that we use” (Wellbeing teacher, Gemert PS).

As is to be expected, the stage each school is at in the implementation of BSEM informs the findings within this report, as do other variables, including the different, diverse and complex challenges faced by the student population in each setting, previous whole school approaches and programs that were in place, and the extent to which developing positive relationships between staff and students had already been a focus.

To illustrate the uniqueness of the settings, details of each school’s community and educational contexts and descriptions of the roll-out of the Model are provided below.
**Curran Primary School**

Curran Primary School is located in a north-eastern suburb of metropolitan Melbourne. In 2018, the school had an enrolment of 612, and a staff of 38 teachers and 12 support staff. The school population is relatively affluent with an ICSEA value of 1055 (average 1000) with a spread of 12% bottom, 29% lower middle, 34% upper middle and 26% top.

The school has a record of performing strongly on AusVELS and NAPLAN and has “always rated pretty high” *(Principal, Curran PS)* on the Student Satisfaction Survey. It also enjoys vigorous parental interest and involvement (fifteen parents competed for two School Council vacancies at the last election), although the Principal highlights a need to change some parents’ thinking about education:

“A lot of our parents have ‘made it’ in a trade or working in a family business and they don’t see [going on to complete Year 12] as all that important … They don’t realise how much times have changed” *(Principal, Curran PS)*.

The primary challenge confronting the school has been identified as “maintaining the quality … good teaching for good results” *(Principal, Curran PS)*. Introduction of the BSEM in 2016 was one of a number of strategies intended to address that challenge.

While the number of Curran students who are trauma-affected is described as “not significant” *(Principal, Curran PS)*, staff acknowledge that:

“We certainly have kids from broken homes and special needs families … we’re lucky that our students are generally very compliant and engaged so that [in some cases] you have to drill down before you find that things might not be as good as they appear” *(Principal, Curran PS)*.

The BSEM guidelines form the basis for the school’s wellbeing policy and program.

“When the Program began, it wasn’t a typical fit with the BSEM model, we don’t really have extreme cases here, but we could see the program benefits in its general values. We could see how it develops students anyway, towards making them more grounded’ … and ‘we were unique in jumping on so quickly” *(Wellbeing teacher, Curran PS)*.

The school developed a detailed term-by-term, 5-year implementation plan (2019 will be year 4 of this plan) for delivery of BSEM throughout the school. All teachers have copies of the plan for use in their class. A school leader noted:

“The school has a young but consistent staff, and all are confident in using the documents and book provided as guidelines for the program” *(Wellbeing teacher, Curran PS)*.

The BSEM program is actively taught to all students at some point in their schooling, with direct instruction at Foundation level becoming less formalised with older students:

“In the Junior School one hour per week is timetabled for teaching the program, in the senior school Positive Ed is the background to everything” *(Wellbeing teacher, Curran PS)*.

The school’s Wellbeing Guidelines specify one Domain focus for each term, but all domains are in the background and BSEM language is used throughout.

Staff training includes Masterclasses run by the Berry Street training team; two are scheduled for 2019. Masterclasses for teachers will be offered to non-teaching staff in 2019 and in-house training will be provided for them, “as they frequently encounter student issues” *(Wellbeing teacher, Curran PS)*.

Visual signs of the school’s commitment to the BSEM program include a School Hall display of its values, underneath which each year level has its current Positive Education program focus areas for the year. This is changed each term. Reinforcement of the focus is provided at weekly assemblies. ‘Wellbeing Wednesdays’ have been initiated, with activities running in the library or outside under the trees at lunchtime. And a Valet Service has been introduced, whereby Year 5 students in high visibility vests meet and greet younger students daily as they arrive at school.

The school wellbeing leader commented that, “both teachers and students are on board” and she hears “positive talk all day.” The “parent community love it. It makes their kids happy, and they want their kids to be happy, so they can flourish” *(Wellbeing teacher, Curran PS)*.

**Gemert Primary School**

Gemert Primary School has an enrolment of 296 students in 11 multi-age composite classes. Class sizes average 22 in the Junior school and 28-29 in the upper years. A staff of 33 includes 19 (EFT) teachers.

Established in 1955, Gemert is located in a traditionally low socio-economic northern suburb of Melbourne. The school has a 1027 ICSEA value (average 1000) with a spread across the quartiles (24% low, 27% low medium, 30% medium, 19% high). The students are a diverse cultural mix (including Nepalese, Sri Lankan, Vietnamese and Middle Eastern [Iraqi – Chaldean]), with 80% of students with LOTE. There is a strong representation of what the Principal describes as the “working poor.” At the same time, enrolments are increasingly reflecting gentrification of the area, as the district “… takes off in terms of real estate … We’re close to rail, the airport and the City … Pockets of the area are becoming quite affluent” *(Leader, Gemert PS)*.

While the school population is characteristically ‘very transient’, with an estimated 25% of the student population moving in or out each year, there are general indications that ‘we lose kids’ because the families have moved out of the area rather than due to any discontent with the school. Gemert’s strong focus on wellbeing and strong family ethos underlines its growing reputation for providing a ‘fresh start’ for “kids who have dipped out elsewhere … We’re seen as a place for a new start” *(Leader, Gemert PS)*.

While 10% of the enrolment currently meet the criteria for Disability funding, an almost equal number of children reportedly fall within the ‘grey area’ of unfunded special need on the basis of behaviour and the effects of trauma.
A team of the Principal, Assistant Principal and Wellbeing leader has been the driver of the BSEM program, which has seen all staff trained over the last eighteen months, and the BSEM curriculum has now been implemented across the school for two years. “All the children have done each Domain twice” (Wellbeing teacher, Gemert PS).

The school intends to continue using the BSEM but will add other programs in 2019. “Berry St is the foundation, … all that language of ready to learn,” (Wellbeing teacher, Gemert PS) and there is a safety plan in place for all children. In Week 2 of every new year students fill in a plan, identifying “what makes them anxious or stressed or angry or out of the green zone … and then what helps them” (Wellbeing teacher, Gemert PS). Levels of behaviour mean that some students access their safety plans every lesson, while most do so every two weeks. This process is revisited once a term.

The school operates one SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) session per week for all classes throughout the year. In the classroom, the BSEM activities are modified for the juniors; the manuals are used as a guide, but visuals, such as picture books and charts, are added. All year levels do the same BSEM area/module at same time. The school’s enquiry focus is on Wellbeing one year, alternating with Relationships in the second year.

“If it’s a Wellbeing year, then classes have more of this kind of lesson in Term 1” (Wellbeing teacher, Gemert PS).

The Wellbeing teacher comments that the training provided by the Berry Street training team has been very effective. They are “sensational presenters” who “walk the talk” on their training days: “They start with a circle, give us brainbreaks, start with a connection and humour.” She feels that “staff responded better to (this) outside source. The trainers come back every term across twelve months, providing accountability for staff.” In 2019, “the Learning support officers have done the training and some CRTs, but probably not the office staff” (Wellbeing teacher, Gemert PS).

Ross College

In 2019, Ross College has an enrolment of 752 in classes from Prep to Year 9; an additional 130 children attend the school’s Early Years Centre. The school population is 61% LOTE and 7% indigenous and has an ICSEA value of 901 (average 1000) with a spread of 65% bottom, 23% lower middle, 10% upper middle and 2% in the top level. The College is a relatively new setting, having opened in 2012.

Describing itself as a ‘birth to Year 9 community learning centre’, Ross College was established to meet the needs of children and young people within a district that has been identified by Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) as at the lowest quintile. The School has a ‘wraparound’ service ethos articulated through active liaison with community agencies, a local hospital and Maternal & Child Health services. The school has faced a number of challenges over its short lifetime, as staff have needed to “think outside the square” (Principal, Ross College) given the particular needs of many of the students.

The school has had four years involvement with the BSEM, completing two years training in one year. All staff, teaching and non-teaching, have been trained, a Masterclass is planned for 2019, and a train-the-trainer model will be used for new staff. The school’s wellbeing teams and care teams are also aligned with the Berry St language.

The professional development plan for each term always contains components of BSEM, including sessions on curriculum days, as BSEM is “alive and growing” (BSEM Leader, Ross College) at the school. All students have now covered all Domains and the BSEM is implemented across the whole school. In years F-6 there are BSEM-specific lessons, in Years 7-9 it’s part of every subject: “It’s all about the terminology that we use” (Principal, Ross College). For example, ‘Track the speaker’ is used across the school, including in assemblies. At Primary level every student has a focus plan, at Secondary level there is a focus plan for each year level.

A school leader comments that there was “initially some (staff) resistance, especially from secondary (time factor). We haven’t named it (the BSEM) as an add on … we integrate it into everything that we do. It’s a set of tools and strategies and ways of thinking that’s the foundation of what we do. It’s even used in interviews for new staff” (Principal, Ross College).

Two parent volunteer sessions have been held about BSEM, so parents “know what is happening” (Principal, Ross College). The school struggles to get parents to attend information nights, but teachers have their own focus plans on the walls in their classrooms and will tell parents about them at “meet and greets” (Principal, Ross College). The Principal comments, “There are still some suspensions, but last year I didn’t have a single argument over a suspension.” Her message to parents is that “We need you to trust that we have the best interests of the kids at heart” (Principal, Ross College).

Since implementing BSEM, changes in teacher and student behaviour have been noted. For teachers the big difference is that “kids are not returned to class till they’re ready to learn; teachers know that now, regardless of why they were sent out” (BSEM Leader, Ross College). And, the BSEM “is improving our pedagogy; we now keep our best teachers” (Principal, Ross College). The Student Attitude to School survey data has been re-organised to link to the BSEM domains, and “the most recent … data has been extraordinary! It’s reflective of something that’s going on in the school; we would suggest it’s largely reflective of the Berry St approaches” (BSEM Leader, Ross College). Also, attendance is now at or above the state mean.
Simich Secondary College

Simich Secondary College, in the Gippsland region, is a dual-campus school with an enrolment of 960 students. There has been strong growth in student numbers in 2019 (from 917 in 2016). The area has faced, and continues to face, many challenges, especially in terms of the local economy and the availability of work. East campus provides education for students in Years 7-9, with a co-ordinating team at each year level. West campus provides education for those in Years 10-12, with three sub schools and staff teams at Year 10, VCE and VCAL. The school uses the Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) model in conjunction with the values of respect, resilience and responsibility. Connections between the school and the community are augmented by the Broadening Horizons program at Year 9, the CreatIF program at Year 10, and VCAL. These programs also assist students to learn about future employment pathways.

The school has an ICSEA value of 941 (average 1000) with a spread of 54% bottom, 29% lower middle, 14% upper middle and 3% in the top quartile. It is largely mono-cultural, with Indigenous students forming 3% of the student population and LOTE students 4%.

There are 85 teaching staff (75 EFT) and 40 non-teaching staff (33 EFT). One challenge the school faces is retaining teachers; each year there are “a number of staff who leave and new staff who arrive” (Principal, Simich SC). The BSEM pilot was put in place in response to data, pressure from the Regional education office, and the desire from school leadership “to show to the school that the (BSEM) model could work for our students, our school, our teachers” (Wellbeing leader, Simich SC). In the initial pilot year, a team of 6 teachers implemented the Body and Relationship Domains at Years 7 and 10, and was given time to plan, collect and share data. The data from the pilot was convincing, being “better for males in particular, a 30% difference in some areas. BSEM reaches our male students much stronger than it does our female students” (Wellbeing leader, Simich SC). The school has now grouped questions on the Student Attitudes to School Survey along BSEM lines to track and evaluate implementation.

Recent changes to the Principal class team have meant a renewed focus on teacher/student relationships. For the Principal, the impetus to adopt the BSEM was “to change staff capacity to engage with kids in a more positive effective manner” (Principal, Simich SC). All teachers have now been trained:

“Staff ‘buy in’ is quite strong but there is a lot of change fatigue at the school. All staff implement the BSEM strategies – maintenance, ancillary staff, teachers” (Wellbeing leader, Simich SC).

The Principal’s role has been to “model it, attend the training, lead by example, allocate time in various meetings and provide staff (with time and resources)” (Principal, Simich SC).

The BSEM school leader provides observations and feedback to teachers, using video of a lesson to discuss the strategies applied, and works with the leaders responsible for each year level. In 2019, BSEM is being implemented across Years 7, 8 and 10 and the BSEM leader has a time allowance to co-ordinate the program. The domains of Body and Relationship were trialled in 2018, Stamina and one other domain will be added 2019. An Advisory (Home Group) class operates across the school for 58 minutes once a week and half of this time is given to BSEM strategies, SEL and wellbeing. Two full professional learning days are allocated to the BSEM each year, so teams can develop material to use with their classes/Advisory. A bank of ‘do now’ and brain break activities has been developed. A guide book describes how the BSEM works in the College; for example, entry routines, brainbreaks, strategies and tips, restorative conversations and information about the physical placement of the teacher in the classroom.

The focus is on working within the classroom, on engaging with students and supporting staff ‘buy in’ to the “new way” (Principal, Simich SC) of relating to students. Some improvement in VCE and NAPLAN results and student attendance has been noted. The Principal views 2019 as “a transition period” (Principal, Simich SC).

In summary, all staff from the four participant schools highlighted the ways in which the strategies were used across all the curriculum areas. Illustrative of this was the shared language derived from the BSEM that students and school staff used in all areas of the school.

“The shared language is probably the most powerful and significant difference … amongst staff and the kids” (Principal, Simich SC).

“All that language of ‘ready to learn’. It’s all about the terminology that we use” (Wellbeing leader, Simich SC).

“It’s throughout the school, they know the language, and the school’s just got a really lovely feel about it. It’s accountability for the students: ‘What are your strategies? Your Plan A and Plan B?’ The kids value it; sometimes it can be all about the academic, which is important, but we need to make rounded, healthy children who can cope” (Teacher, Simich SC).
The findings and discussion in this report focus on three areas:

- How young people are learning BSEM strategies;
- How young people are applying BSEM strategies to their classroom learning; and
- How young people are practising BSEM strategies in their lives beyond the classroom and at home.

Young people in the focus groups were asked range of questions about the ways they learn, about which BSEM strategies are effective for learning resilience, which strategies are most relevant, those strategies that are practised across their life domains, how BSEM strategies increase their ability to self-regulate, how BSEM strategies assist them to form relationships within and outside school, and, how BSEM strategies enhance the success of work placements. Their responses to these questions form the basis for addressing the three areas.

How are young people learning BSEM strategies?

Students were invited to share their preferred ways of learning in relation to BSEM and more broadly. There were many styles mentioned, from listening to an explanation, to reading and writing “I like writing things down” (Year 5 student, Curran PS), taking notes, “when I take notes I remember more” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS), researching topics via the internet, and ‘doing’. The latter, or “hands on” (Year 8 student, Simich SC) was the most frequently cited. One student explained:

“If someone explains something I sometimes get a bit lost when they explain. And I learn better if I actually, like, do it, learning while I’m doing it” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

“Fun activities” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS) that engaged students were seen to increase learning.

Students provided a range of learning styles they believe optimise engagement, including visual and auditory approaches and relating tasks to students’ areas of interest:

“I really like seeing it visually – I like seeing things written on the board and talked about, not just reading how to do it” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

“I work well with music” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

“In primary school we did a major project, incorporating it with some of our interests. Incorporate it into the task” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

They also noted those times when the pedagogical approaches used were less effective:

“It’s (BSEM) good but we’ve done (it) over and over of the same content, worksheet after worksheet, survey after survey. It’s got really boring” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

An overload of information was seen as confusing:

“I like finding ways to learn but not getting too many examples or I’ll forget why I’m doing it” (Year 5 student, Curran PS).

Students suggested ways to ensure BSEM held their interest and attention:

“Spicing it up so it’s not all the same” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

“What they’re trying to do is good but try to give the information in different ways” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

Secondary students spoke of their desire for increased agency in their own learning and a need to recognise and allow for different learning styles:

“Take a lot more student input, not written, verbally asking, actually take it into consideration” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

“Tell us what we need to learn but let us learn it in our own way; they want us to do it the same way” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

One student felt that their teachers did not always adapt the learning to students’ needs:

“They don’t really focus on the student, tailor it to what we really need” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

Another student expressed a desire for teachers to work collaboratively with them:

“Work with us to get through everything, not just give us something to do” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

Students also spoke of the impact of BSEM on their teachers’ approaches within the classroom and how it impacted their behaviours:
“I’ve seen our teacher – if someone is stressed, they move them, deal with them and talk to them” (Year 7 student, Simich SC).

“I think our teachers understand … [maybe] some more than others … some are like us – can see when you’re mad and they don’t point it out in front of the class. [I’ve learned] how to stay out of trouble … We didn’t do the techniques [before]. If you were in trouble you got suspended that was it” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

Overall, students noted that they learned best when activities were varied and incorporated a recognition of different learning styles. They expressed a desire for teachers to consult with them to tailor the learning to students’ needs. A collaborative teaching approach was seen as more supportive than a teacher-centred mode of delivery.

In all the focus groups students were able to recall and name many BSEM strategies. They were able to describe how the strategies were being used and to reflect on the ways in which these different strategies helped them understand themselves and others, develop positive relationships and be ready and motivated to learn. This demonstrates that many of the approaches being used by schools and teachers in the implementation of the BSEM were resonating with the students in the learning and utilising of skills and enhancing their ability to interact positively with others, to be ‘learning ready’ and able to persist in the face of challenges.

The following section will detail students’ knowledge and understanding of their BSEM learning and how they are making use of the strategies in their classrooms.

How are young people applying BSEM strategies to their classroom learning?

Students were asked to describe any BSEM strategies and terms that they had learned about in their classrooms. Researchers provided students with the names of the strategies and terms that had been presented in their school context. Students from the school that had been implementing the program for four years were able to freely name a large number of these and talk eloquently and in detail about how they applied them to their behaviour regulation and management. They described the many ways in which using different BSEM strategies enabled them to learn, to understand and empathise with their peers, to build relationships and manage learning and social challenges. Students from schools that were in the early stages of rolling out the BSEM were able to name and talk about those strategies taught to date and their applications. It was evident that some students at the secondary level had greater knowledge than others … some are like us – can see when you’re mad and they don’t point it out in front of the class. [I’ve learned] how to stay out of trouble … We didn’t do the techniques [before]. If you were in trouble you got suspended that was it” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

Brainbreaks

Many students across primary and secondary settings commented that using brainbreaks was their most frequently employed BSEM strategy. It was clear from the students’ descriptions of the brainbreaks they used that their teachers had taught and regularly utilised a range of techniques within lessons. It was also clear that brainbreaks were seen as a valuable strategy by most of the students.

“It’s like when you’re doing a lot of work, overloaded with work, you just take a break, do anything – stretch, do brain gym – e.g. mind your steps, just keep on wriggling your fingers” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

“We do brainbreaks between each session” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

They spoke of how the strategy helped them both manage feelings and/or behaviours and refocus on tasks.

“Brainbreaks get you focussed if you’re overheated” (Year 5 student, Gemert PS).

“It (brainbreaks) takes your mind off what you’re stressed about cos you’re physically doing something” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

“(Brainbreaks) calm me down and focus me on what I have to do or am doing” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

“I like Brainbreaks – a lot of people might have things going on that takes up space in their head – crowded in their brain” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

“It worked really well for me – I get distracted really easily” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

“Brainbreaks are really, really fun – we can zone out of the work for a while” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

Students noted that it was important to ensure that the type of activities used by teachers as brainbreaks were varied:

“Different teachers do different things; some teachers do the same activity over and over others mix it up; some are more fun than others” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

Year 11 students appreciated teachers who were flexible, allowing the students to elect to use brainbreaks as needed:

“A lot of students didn’t participate, they were on a roll (with their work)” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

Timing and understanding student needs were also an important consideration for students in assessing the value of brainbreaks:

“I felt it was pointless (done in the middle of a SAC)” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

“Brainbreaks is where you have your mind refreshed. I don’t necessarily like ‘em that much because when I’m on task and have a brain break, I just forget what I’m doing” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).
In relation to ensuring the strategy is of value to the students, a school leader highlighted the need for targeted brainbreaks to be strategically placed and connected with an element of the lesson.

“Two years ago, brainbreaks used to last 30 minutes; not now. Staff now link brainbreaks to the lesson” (BSEM leader, Ross College).

Focus (safety) plans/de-escalation charts

Focus plans and de-escalation charts were cited in all of the focus groups. Students spoke of how they assisted them to manage their emotions, including anger, when the behaviour of others caused them distress.

“Focus plans … can help when I’m stressed out, (trying to deal with) things that might make me upset, like people talking behind my back” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

“At the beginning of the year we had to write down some strategies to de-escalate when we’re mad or sad – like get a drink, go outside … I think it’s important to have one of those because if you don’t and you get annoyed, one day you won’t really know what to do. Some people don’t use them, but I do” (Year 6 student, Curran).

One student noted that the de-escalation chart provided a useful reference point for others in the class to identify when someone was in a heightened emotional state. This, the student observed, then enabled both the teacher and peers to respond sensitively, increasing the student’s capacity to calm down.

“It’s really annoying when I’m stressed or angry and people don’t know, so then they can make me angrier sometimes … and then if they see on my (de-escalation) chart that I’m angry or I’m stressed … then it makes me feel better because I can like calm down” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

The student observed that, “a lot of people (within their class) use them” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

Reinforcing the power of a shared language used within the charts to name emotional states, one student commented:

“They ask, ‘what zone are you in?’” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

Students at both the primary and the secondary levels emphasised the role that teachers and peers can play in helping them to de-escalate, including the use of humour:

“If you’re angry, the teachers or your friends make you calm down or have a laugh” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

“It helps the teacher to see how to approach you; in my class it worked really well – for teacher and students” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

Character strengths

Students were asked to share their thoughts on the phrase character strengths. They spoke of the universality of strengths, recognising that there were cases where students may need help in identifying their own character strengths. A common emphasis was the role they play in helping people to feel good about themselves:

“Everyone has character strengths and it makes people feel happy about themselves” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

Trustworthiness was identified as an important strength:

“Being trustworthy (is an important strength) – cos if you’re not or can’t keep a secret or listen to them” (Year 5 student, Gemert PS).

Character strengths were seen as central by many students in navigating their social relationships:

“I form relationships using my Character Strengths and by being friendly and showing interest in the people I meet” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

They provided some students with a way to maintain their sense of self as they worked to develop friendships:

“You want to go with people who accept you as you are, and not with you changing just to be with people, be with people who like what you like” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

“If you want someone to be your friend for being who you are not, you’re pushed to do things you don’t want to do” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

Resilience

Resilience was understood by the students to be an individual attribute that enabled them to persist in the face of challenges. These challenges related both to school work and to peer relationships. Thinking about academic challenges, students defined resilience as:

“Being able to try again even if you fail like one, two, three, a hundred times. You have to be able to stand up and think I can do this if I try even harder” (Year 6 student, Ross PS).

“If something’s hard and you don’t really get it you keep on trying to do what you have to do, you don’t say you can’t do it, you say you can” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

In one school, the word perseverance was used by students interchangeably with resilience:

“Perseverance means there’s no point giving up – even if you’re not good at it if you keep on trying, you’ll learn it” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

According to many students, personal resilience required the capacity to resist others’ negative reactions:

“If I stuff it up, don’t worry about it or what other people think” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

“Never give up, don’t listen to them (negative people)” (Year 6 student, Ross College).
Another student spoke of resilience as:

“Asking more for help” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

Resilience was believed by some students to be important in the face of social rejection:

“Say you’re not accepted, keep trying, keep going” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

One student summed it up:

“Three words – keeping on going – brush things off – and keep on going” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

Fixed and growth mindsets

Not all students had been exposed to the terms fixed and positive growth mindsets as this was dependent upon the school’s stage of implementation. Those who had, most particularly the students from the school in the fourth year of delivery, were able to define the concept and describe its application to a range of situations.

“Fixed mindset is when you say, I can’t do that I’m not going to try; a growth mindset means that you’re going to try” (Year 5 student, Gemert PS).

“When learning something new I won’t say no – I’ll have a growth mindset” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

“Fixed is just giving upon the spot. When you start to struggle. It’s like a mountain, as the mountains get high for you, if you have a fixed mindset you stop. You would say that I’m not going to give up now” (Year 6 student, Ross College).

One student noted the relationship between resilience and growth mindset stating:

“Being resilient is having a growth mindset” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

Some students spoke of the ways in which they used the terms to reflect on and evaluate their own mindsets:

“I used to have a fixed mindset – I’d think ‘this is boring’, but now I see what the teacher gives us is helpful” (Year 6 student, Ross College).

A number of Year 6 students described applying the mantra, ‘I can’t do this – YET’ when faced with new and challenging work and situations.

Ready to learn

In talking about the term ‘ready to learn’, students often detailed the converse, what not ready to learn looked like. They spoke of how they either communicated this to their teachers, or that their teachers were able to observe this through the students’ behaviour. A number of Year 6 students talked about the way they let the teacher know if they were not feeling ready to learn:

“I say I need help, or I might not be the best I can be today” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

“I would tell her privately because I wouldn’t be confident to tell her in front of the class” (Year 5 student, Gemert PS).

“I don’t tell her she just knows, she’ll know by the way I act… She knows what I look like when I’m not ready” (Year 6 student, Ross College).

Some students spoke of a reluctance to share that they were not in a space for learning because they did not wish to expose their home situation:

“I don’t really tell teachers because I don’t want them knowing about my homelife” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

One student noted that it remained common for them to get into trouble when in fact they were not ‘ready to learn’. They stated:

“A lot of the time if you’re not ready to learn you just get in trouble rather than be recognised for being not ready to learn – you get told off” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

Students appreciated the teachers’ efforts in supporting them to be ready to learn, suggesting however that this does not always succeed:

“I think they (teachers) try hard but they don’t really understand us – they think we’re being ungrateful, but it’s hard for them” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).
Some students were aware of the ways in which their fellow students were not yet using the strategies, and this presented challenges:

“There’s some people who don’t want to try. It kind of stops me from doing my best, which I don’t like. I know that some of the things I learn I will always come back to in life” (Year 6 student, Ross College).

Other students observed the alteration in behaviour of some of their peers:

“Two students, they’re now good – their behaviour has changed over the last 2 years” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

“I can tell it helps a lot of people in my class – I see people are a lot calmer and they focus a lot more” (Year 6 student, Ross College).

Students suggested that the way for teachers to know about readiness is to ask the students themselves rather than always rely on students to share this information:

“The teachers just need to ask us how things are going” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

“Check in with everyone, make sure you’re always supporting them rather than say ‘do this’” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

Another student spoke positively about a teacher who did check in with the students:

“She’d check in on people and offer strategies, she’d ask how’re you going” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

Students described being ‘ready to learn’ as organisational and emotional:

“Hav(ing) all your stuff, organisation, in uniform, in class, on time, on task” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

“Being in the right place and mindset, balancing work with talking to others, being right there in the middle of learning, ready to participate” (Year 7 student, Simich SC).

**BSEM strategies and stress**

Some students highlighted the value and perceived impact of BSEM strategies at exam time:

“When I’m really stressed out before an exam, like I always am, I’ll take my mind away from it, listen to some music, take a break from everything” (Year 6 student, Gemert PS).

“With exams, a lot of us get stressed because of the time limit ... the teachers know how you feel. In Semester 1, most of us all got pretty low (marks on a test) ... we’d only just started learning about them (BSEM techniques) ... but then you can see the big jump from where we’ve gone, from the end of first semester to the end of second semester” (Year 7 student, Simich SC).

**How young people are practising BSEM strategies in their lives beyond the classroom and at home.**

Students talked about a wide variety of ways in which they use the BSEM strategies beyond the classroom. In particular, they spoke positively about using the strategies to manage family relationships, friendships and sporting endeavours. Teachers also noted the ways in which students apply the BSEM learning.

There was an awareness on the part of some students of the ways in which the BSEM program was preparing them to manage not only present but future challenges:

“Our teacher does a balance of it all, so I think she prepares us for many different things – learning strategies for the future, like how to deal with bullying or friendship problems in high school and that kind of stuff” (Year 6 student, Ross College).

One teacher observed:

“Students realise that even if they don’t use the strategies now, they’re strategies for life. This isn’t about school, it’s about life” (Wellbeing leader, Curran PS).

Many students articulated the ways in which they use specific BSEM strategies within their lives outside the classroom:

“If I’m angry or feeling low, I’ll use a brainbreak: listen to my favourite song, drink water” (Year 5 student, Gemert PS).

“If you have any siblings ... they could get you mad and being present, centred, grounded can come in” (Year 5 student, Gemert PS).

“I go to the gym, punch a punching bag. Kick the footy – if someone gets me riled up, I’ll put my earphones in, kick a footy, do something till I feel better” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

“I form relationships using my Character Strengths and by being friendly and showing interest in the people I meet” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

“A number of students found the BSEM strategies particularly useful in their approach to their sporting activities outside school:

“Let’s say you’re trying to get into a type of team in your basketball, you may not get in on your first try, but being resilient means you’ll keep on trying and you’ll never give up” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

“I play golf – if I hit a bad shot I think positively. When I’m on the golf course in competition I use my character strengths to make friends. It’s worked; I’ve had friends for two years there” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

“I like Brainbreaks – we do it when I play lacrosse – if we’re exhausted, we have a brainbreak and get re-energised” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).
“I used to play tennis and I was one of those people who get angry when they lose a point. Now I take a deep breath. I was really competitive at tennis and when I relax other kids like me more” (Year 6 student, Curran PS).

“Sport – I had a fixed mindset - but now I give myself positive advice” (Year 6 student, Ross College).

Senior secondary students discussed how the BSEM strategies enhanced the success of work placements:

“I’m managing (not) swearing on a work site and having to move crates that were too heavy - (I’ve) learnt to manage problems on my own. Getting feedback from my employer has been useful” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

“(BSEM) helped me in my placement at the primary school - some kids get frustrated, cry, (they’re) always in your space; you think about needing to keep your cool” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

“In my placement my supervisor almost left me behind after a site visit. I managed the stress by walking, listening to music, telling someone. (The incident) led to an apology, and a change of policy” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

“I’m now more welcoming at work” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

Students reflected more generally on an increasing sense of self-knowledge and self-awareness gained through the BSEM program:

“(It) makes you think, ‘what are the consequences if I do this action?’” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

“You know when you’re getting aggravated. I want to be really independent. I get frustrated. It [BSEM] helps you to deal with that” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).

“The (BSEM) work makes you realise there’s always something you can do in any situation, how you’re feeling about it, you can always do something to help calm you down” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

One student, while acknowledging the benefits of being supported to become more independent and responsible, cautioned that it could leave them feeling overwhelmed in the face of some situations:

“It’s teaching us to be responsible and independent but at the same time it’s leaving us out there on our own” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

Overall impact of the BSEM on students

There was a broad consensus among the students and teachers involved in the study that the BSEM had had positive impacts. One leader commented that many students are now better able to:

“recognise their own emotions so they can catch them before they go beyond their ability to think sensibly” (Wellbeing leader, Simich SC).

Some students spoke of the impact upon their personal behaviour and attitudes:

“(It’s changed) the way I think – I used to think my work was okay but learning these things is really fun. I do more work” (Year 6 student, Ross College).

“(It’s all about) respecting yourself … knowing enough about yourself to know if you’re ready for learning … how to calm yourself down” (Year 7 student, Simich SC).

Students described the broader impact on the interactions and relationships between students and staff:

“It (BSEM) works to improve relationships” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

“For the majority of the students it (BSEM) impacted on them. Respect grew, we grew up, we could see when people are feeling down – don’t ignore it, ask them, try to be there, help if they’re angry. It works for students and teachers. Respect grew more, teacher to student, student to student. Before that everyone had their own group in the classroom” (Year 11 student, Simich SC).
Students in this study have found the BSEM to have a positive impact on their learning and their lives.

Teachers comment on the importance of voice and a shared language between students and adults within the school:

“The way we talk to kids has changed their ability to talk to us. Emotional intelligence has changed too – staff and students can now articulate their feelings … We talk to kids about where the anger sits in them” (BSEM leader, Ross College).

“You’ll hear the language – ‘hey mate you need to de-escalate’; (it’s) having the language so you don’t just say ‘calm down’. (BSEM) has given them the language to hopefully develop better relationships” (Wellbeing leader, Simich SC).

Empowering the students to talk about their lived experience of the BSEM provides valuable insights for better understanding BSEM’s relevance and usefulness in their own learning and lives. Through listening to their thoughts, reflections and comments we know that:

Students can summarise key concepts of the Berry Street Education Model: All students demonstrated a knowledge of the BSEM terms they had learned to date. As to be expected, students from schools where the program had been delivered comprehensively across classes and year levels over a number of years were able recall and define all terms in deeper and more nuanced ways.

Students can articulate the transferable nature of the strategies they are learning to use: A majority of the students articulated the various ways in which they apply the BSEM strategies in their school and broader lives. Upper secondary students noted how the strategies enabled them to manage work situations and deal with exam stress. A recurring application of the strategies was within sporting activities. Secondary and primary students spoke of the ways in which the BSEM learning enabled them to shift negative mindsets, manage disappointment and remain persistent in the face of challenges. The strategies also helped students to regulate their emotions and thereby improve their social and familial relationships. Year 6 students could see the relevance of BSEM strategies in the transition between primary and secondary school. Secondary students spoke in depth about the applicability of the strategies and skills to their evolving part-time work and work experience placements.

Students can provide valuable input into tailoring the program to best meet their needs: Students provided valuable insights into ways in which the BSEM training and program delivery could be enhanced to heighten engagement.

Future iterations of the BSEM delivery could take into consideration a range of teaching methods that students identified:

- Hands-on learning activities.
- Incorporating a range of delivery modes including:
  - Visual
  - Auditory
  - Instructional examples.
- Diversified content to ensure it is not repetitive.

Some secondary students would like greater involvement in developing both content and pedagogy. One student illustrated how this would look; “(t)he teachers aren’t tailoring things to us except for Mr X – he doesn’t just follow the curriculum, he pays attention to what we want to learn” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).

Other students recommended:

- Consult with students about content and delivery and apply this information in meaningful ways.
- Allow for a level of student autonomy in electing how to learn and apply the content.
- Seek student input on their interests and incorporate these into the teaching.
- Check in with and maintain support of students.
- Pilot the program with small groups to refine the delivery to ensure it is delivered in the “right way (because) then it can help a lot” (Year 8 student, Simich SC).
Students can articulate the positive changes they have noted in attitude and behaviour since the roll-out of the BSEM program: Students observed notable changes in both their own and their peers’ behaviour following the introduction of the BSEM. They stated that they and many classmates were calmer and more focused on learning, that they were personally able to better manage negative and angry emotions and gain more enjoyment out of learning and other activities. They attributed these changes to the use of the BSEM strategies that they had been taught and to those teachers who had modified the ways they worked to support students to be learning ready.

“The BSEM has helped us to know how to control our bodies. Be open to different things … I’m more open now. We’ve learned to treat people with more respect and how you want to be treated … Judge everyone how you want to be treated … (We learned) if you’re a bit stressed, just try and calm down. Our teacher taught us to breathe in, breathe out … count backwards … Go outside and have a stretch … We used breathing to calm down for exams. Think positive, you’re going to pass, you’re not going to fail” (Year 7 student, Simich SC).

This report privileges the voices of young people to ensure that future development, training and delivery of the BSEM is continuously tailored to meet the needs of those it is designed to benefit.
References


Appendix
Appendix 1

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**Student Focus Group Questions**

We’d like to start by getting a bit of background:

- What do you like about school?
- Are there things you don’t like about school?
- How do you get on with your teachers?
- How do you get on with other students?
- Do you feel confident or a bit shy in class?
- Do you think some of what you learn at school is important?

1. Can I run a few words or terms by you and see if you can tell me what they mean? (check with the school to see where the students are up to in the model)
   - De-escalation charts? What is the point of the chart?
   - Brainbreaks – Can you each give me an example?
   - What do think is the point of these brainbreaks? What’s your favourite brainbreak?
   - Being Present Centred & Grounded – what does this mean?
   - Mindfulness
   - Resilience? What does this term ‘resilience’ mean to you? How do you think you can best learn to be resilient?
   - Can anyone tell me the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset? For example?
   - Has your teacher talked with you about character strengths - can you each tell me what might be your character strength?

2. How do you let your teacher know if you don’t feel ready for learning?

3. Do you think using some of these activities is helping you at school, making school more enjoyable?

4. Do you have any ideas what you might want to do in the future?

5. Have any of you talked about Brainbreaks or Mood Charts at home? Have you found yourself using breathing exercises to calm down?

6. Can you think of times you might use growth mindset at home or away from school, make yourself ‘present, centred, grounded’, or need to de-escalate?

7. Young people learn in different ways. For example, by reading and writing, by doing, by moving about, by listening, by looking, by making things. How do you think you learn best, that is, what’s your preferred way of learning? (You might have more than one).

8. What does the term ‘resilience’ mean to you? How do you think you can best learn to be resilient? What BSEM strategies help you to do that?

9. Which BSEM strategies do you use most often?

10. In what ways have BSEM strategies increased your ability to self-regulate? For example, to deal with it when you’re feeling stress or anger.

11. How might BSEM strategies help you to form relationships in and out of school? Which ones might help?
Appendix
Appendix 2

Teachers and School Staff questions

Background questions
1. Can I start by asking you your name and your role in the school (e.g. classroom teacher)?
2. To what extent have you been involved in providing BSEM?

School facilitation
1. How is BSEM now being rolled out? Where is the school now up to in the model? Is this different for different Year levels?
2. To what extent does the school timetable and curriculum provide a home for the delivery of BSEM?
3. To what extent were the schools’ leadership team active in supporting BSEM?
4. To what extent is BSEM similar to or different from other programs your school has previously provided?

Professional learning and training
1. How effective was the training (external or in-school) for BSEM in increasing staff (including ancillary staff and relief teachers”) knowledge of effective strategies to use when teaching the BSEM program?

Perceptions about program impact and outcomes
1. Has the provision of BSEM influenced the way students manage their everyday stressors and challenges?
2. Has the provision of BSEM had any impact on the way staff manage their everyday stressors and challenges?
3. In what ways, if any, do you think provision of BSEM has influenced:
   • Student-teacher relationships in this school,
   • Peer relationships in this school,
   • The relationship between the school and the community,
   • Student behaviour,
   • Student attendance,
   • Students’ academic achievement?

Youth Futures questions
1. What BSEM strategies best assist students to become more resilient?
2. In what ways have BSEM strategies increased students at this school’s ability to self-regulate?
3. Which BSEM strategies do you think are most relevant to students at this school?
4. How do BSEM strategies assist students to form relationships at school?
5. How does student voice impact the future implementation of BSEM?
6. How do/how could BSEM strategies enhance the success of work placements for senior students?

Final comments or suggestions
1. What advice would you give a school that was considering whether they should adopt the BSEM program?
2. What advice would you give your own school about BSEM in future?