



SWOVA'S PEACE KIDS PROGRAM

2016-2017 PROGRAM EVALUATION

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The Peace Kids Program

The SWOVA Community Development and Research Society (SWOVA) is a registered Canadian charity located on Salt Spring Island, B.C. The organization's mission is to *'empower youth to have healthy and respectful relationships education and skill building programs and as a result, develop leaders of tomorrow'*. Through SWOVA, several programs are offered to children and youth with the goal of supporting the organization's mission. The focus of this evaluation report is one of the SWOVA programs: Peace Kids.

The development of the Peace Kids program resulted from requests for an elementary curriculum that focused on respectful relationships.¹ Peace Kids is a 12-session (4 sessions per grade) anti-bullying program intended to be delivered over three years to children in grades 4, 5, and 6. It is facilitated by two SWOVA facilitators who go into the classroom to work with students. Teachers who have the program are provided with a Peace Kids manual in order to learn about the program and to extend the learning into their classroom. The program focuses on supporting students to further their development in the following areas:

- Empathy
- Accepting difference
- Belonging and connectedness
- Care, kindness, tolerance and appreciation of self and others
- Qualities of leadership
- Conflict resolution
- Critical thinking
- Actively listening
- Self-expression/dealing with emotions
- Cooperation
- Awareness of gender equality
- Awareness about violence and the various forms of bullying

The curriculum and facilitation strategy for Peace Kids was first piloted in 2013-2014 to approximately 200 grades 4, 5 and 6 students in six schools. Results from the evaluation indicated strong support for the program by teachers as well as suggestions for program improvement. The program was again delivered in 2015-2016 to approximately 250 students from grades 3 to 8, the majority of which were in grades 4 and 5.

Evaluation for the first two offerings of the program focused on teacher input via a pre- and post-survey during the pilot year and post-survey only during the second year. In addition, the program facilitators were interviewed for both delivery years.

The current year focused on gathering evaluative data from teachers and students in the 7 classrooms in which the program was offered. These classrooms included students in grades 3 to 8, with the majority in

¹ Note that SWOVA has offered the 'Respectful Relationships' program for several years. Respectful Relationships targets high school youth.

grades 4 to 6. Note that the large student age range stemmed from one classroom that was located in a small community and included students from grades 3 to 8.

Peace Kids Program Implementation

Peace Kids was delivered to approximately 175 students in 7 classrooms in the spring of 2017. One classroom suspended the program part way through due to some program concerns as well as repetition of the curriculum as the class had participated in the previous year.² Of the 6 classes that completed the program:

- 3 classrooms received curriculum over four sessions
- 2 classrooms received the curriculum over three sessions
- 1 classroom received the curriculum in a half-day session

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation focused on perspectives of school staff and students through the completion of post-program surveys. Student questions elicited responses that highlighted knowledge gained from the program as well as overall satisfaction, and suggestions to improve the program. School staff commented on overall ease of program integration, perceived effectiveness of the program as well as suggestions for future content. **A request by SWOVA to create tools that are short and require minimal time to complete was incorporated into the evaluation. This suggestion resulted from past years in which school staff found the evaluation to be too time-consuming. Given the brevity of tools, the evaluation is limited in its' scope and provides more general feedback.**

School District approval was sought in order to undertake the evaluation. The evaluation included:

- **Online post-survey for teachers (Appendix A):** A link was sent to school staff after the conclusion of the program. School staff received a total of three email reminders inviting them to complete the online survey.
- **Paper-based post-survey for students (Appendix B):** A short survey was administered to students after they completed the program. The survey was administered by one of the facilitators, with the exception of one case in which surveys were mailed and the teacher administered the survey using a script.
- **Facilitator interview (Appendix C):** Facilitators were interviewed separately after the conclusion of the program.

Peace Kids 2016-2017 Evaluation Participants

In total, 157 youth (approximately 52% female; 86% were in grades 4 to 6) from 7 classrooms and 7 school staff, representing 5 classrooms, completed a post-survey. Note that the teacher of the class that did not complete the program did not complete a survey. Both facilitators participated in an interview exploring aspects of the program.

² Note that as the classroom had participated in half of the program, both students and their teacher were invited to complete a survey. Student feedback is included but school staff feedback was not provided. A brief conversation with the teacher indicated some concerns about the program by parents but details were not provided as the teacher preferred that parents be contacted for feedback. Parental feedback was not part of the evaluation.

School Staff Feedback

School staff were invited to respond to a series of questions about their experience with the Peace Kids program. Results are as follows.

Ease of Program Integration: 3 school staff found the program ‘*very easy*’ to integrate and 4 of the school staff indicated the program was ‘*somewhat easy*’ to integrate into their existing classroom routine. One individual commented:

“The timing and dates were totally up to me, so of course it was easy.”

Facilitator Effectiveness: 6 school staff indicated that they found the facilitators to be ‘*very effective*’ in working with their students. One individual indicated that the facilitators were ‘*somewhat effective*’.

“I only sat in a couple sessions. The interactions I observed were very positive.”

“It is great that the facilitators worked so hard to build meaningful relationships with the students. I feel like there could have been more sessions as everyone involved really enjoyed the time it was so nice to have them come in as it really gave time for the conversations to happen which I struggle to get to in my day to day teaching. We definitely need more sessions as we were just getting to some big topics when they had to leave.”

Program Learning Carry Over: 6 of the 7 individuals indicated that they have seen students use some of the learning from the program in the classroom or on the playground.

“More respectful listening and confidence in the classroom.”

Peace Kids Language Use: 6 of the 7 school staff indicated that they use ‘*some*’ of the language that was taught in the Peace Kids program. One school staff member indicated that they use ‘*a lot*’ of the language that was taught in the program.

Program Recommendation to Others: 5 of the 7 school staff indicated that they have recommended the program to others. Further to this, 6 of 7 indicated that they are likely to invite the program into their classroom in future years.

Suggestions for Program Improvements: 4 individuals suggested changes that they think would strengthen the overall program impact. These suggestions included:

- Delivering the program over a longer period of time (e.g., a couple of times a month over the course of the school year; more intensive sessions at the beginning of the year and then monthly sessions). This would allow for students to be able to better integrate learning into their daily lives
- Greater inclusion of practical application of leadership skills
- Attendance at a staff meeting to explain the program to teachers as well as a presentation at a student assembly in order for students to learn more about the program

Program Benefit to Students: School staff commented on the biggest benefits that the program provided to their students. These included:

- Learning about leadership qualities
- Learning about emotion language and emotion recognition

- Developing a common language that can be used to work through social struggles
- Improved communication

“For the students and myself, it allows us to go back and talk about the emotion wheel and try to get a bit deeper. With this class especially, it’s not an easy task as they tend to be very closed and emotionally close, especially when dealing with confrontation.”

“Students are feeling more comfortable to share issues they face.”

Other Topics for Inclusion: School staff were asked to indicate whether there were other topics that they would like to see included in the Peace Kids curriculum. They noted the following:

- Divorce
- Frenemies
- Relationships
- Identity
- How to avoid taking inclusion/exclusion personally
- More in-depth problem-solving skills that can be used during conflict
- Understanding the needs of special learners
- Topics related to bullying

Final Comments

“Thank you. It was really great.”

“Once again, it was a pleasure to work with Christina and David. I truly value their time with the class love the discussions they sparked with the students. I am so glad to have had them in our class again.”

“Christina and David did an excellent job. I have had peace kids in my classroom for three years now and I love how the program promotes confidence building and communication!”

Student Feedback

Students were asked whether they had talked about the program to any adults in their home. **29%** responded that they had talked to an adult. Males were just as likely as females to talk to an adult in their home about the program.

Most Important Learning/Message

Students were asked to comment on the most important thing that they learned in the program. The following are the key messages or strategies that they noted as the most important.

Most Important Thing Learned	Number of Youth		
	Females	Males	Total
Positive friendship strategies (build trust, golden rule)	15	7	22
Leadership	11	5	16
Emotion regulation strategies (e.g., anger management)	5	8	13
Not to bully others	6	4	10
Respect others, everyone is different	4	4	8
Feelings (e.g., all feelings matter, emotion wheel)	5	2	7
Plastic bag video message	3	1	4
How to read body language	1	2	3
'Peace'	3	0	3
Kids can contribute, make a difference	3	0	3
Think about what you say	2	1	3
Gratitude	0	2	2
How to listen	1	1	2

Best Part of Peace Kids

Students were asked to comment on the best part of Peace Kids.

	Number of Youth		
	Females	Males	Total
Games - apples, oranges, bananas	27	30	57
Emotion wheel; talking about emotions	7	9	16
Hearing about others' experiences, sharing	12	3	15
The circle	5	8	13
TED video (plastic bags)	4	3	7
Trust fall	3	2	5
Classroom leadership	4	0	4
Looking at photos of kids' emotions	1	2	3
Learning about peace	1	1	2
Learning how to control my temper	1	1	2
Talking about being nice and kind	2	0	2
Meeting the Peace Kids facilitators	2	0	2
Sitting up straight makes you breathe better	1	0	1
Talking about the future	0	1	1

Program Improvements

Students were asked to suggest ways in which the program could be improved. The most noted suggestions focused on increasing movement and activity in the program.

- More games (suggested by 13 females and 18 males)
- More activity and less sitting (18 females and 18 males)
- Shorter sessions (4 females and 8 males)

Program Rating

Students were asked to rate the program. They were given three options. As can be seen by student ratings, males gave the program more favourable ratings than females.

			
Females	31%	46%	23%
Males	42%	49%	9%

Program Recommendation

Students were asked whether they would recommend the program to other students. Again, males were more likely to recommend the program to others.

	Totally!	Not sure	No
Females	26%	47%	27%
Males	35%	50%	15%

The class which was exposed to half of the program provided overall lower ratings of the program. Note that some students in the class indicated that the content was similar to the previous year in which some had participated the program. All other classes had a similar range of ratings for the program.

Facilitators Reflection on Program Implementation

Program Engagement

School staff engagement: Overall, teacher engagement was positive during this past program delivery year. Engagement was described as ‘active’ and ‘supportive’ both during pre-program meetings and program delivery. Facilitators found that schools were very welcoming to the Peace Kids program. This genuine warmth and collaborative spirit was greatly appreciated by SWOVA. Teachers were interested in supporting their students to develop social and emotional skills and inviting the Peace Kids program into the classroom was another avenue to support this learning.

SWOVA has worked to pay attention to being responsive to the needs of schools/classrooms in the areas of flexible scheduling, identifying specific learning needs for classrooms and working to develop an overall good school-community partnership relationship prior to the start of program delivery. By being responsive to existing and emerging needs, the program delivery has been strengthened since the pilot which took place four years ago. Beyond the classroom this year, there was also the engagement of two principals, who sat in for part of the sessions. In the case of the classroom that suspended the program partway through delivery, it was acknowledged that more engagement prior to delivery through a face-to-face meeting may have helped build the relationship and increase overall engagement by the classroom given that the teacher was new to the program. One facilitator did note that even though only half the program was completed, the students responded well to the program.

Student engagement: One facilitator described student engagement by students as varied - from highly engaged to those students whose engagement could be described as ‘cautious’ or ‘resistant’. The other facilitator described overall student engagement as ‘receptive’, ‘energetic’, ‘curious’, and ‘highly intelligent’. From one facilitator’s perspective, it appeared that teachers who had a greater explicit emphasis on the importance of social and emotional learning were more likely to have students who had higher engagement in the program. Further to this, a noted trend was that younger students were more likely to engage without hesitation compared to older students; however, there were exceptions to this trend. As students progress through elementary school or begin middle school, behaviours that mimic the larger societal norms appeared to have begun to take root (e.g., girls feeling silenced). Finally, as the program facilitators do not have pre-existing relationships with the students, having the classroom teacher present during program delivery was seen as a critical factor to increase overall engagement.

Program Actions: Although the program was delivered in a relatively short duration of time, there was some evidence, witnessed by facilitators, that teachers were using particular tools, such as the emotions wheel. In one classroom, the teacher did a regular check-in with youth using a numbered scale (e.g., ‘1’ indicating things are challenging, ‘10’ indicating things are awesome etc.), the teacher was able to integrate vocabulary from the emotions wheel into the check-in to support students to build capacity in their ability to identify and describe emotions.

Further to this, there was also evidence that students were beginning to integrate some of the learning into their day-to-day lives. One facilitator recounted an interaction that occurred in the third session wherein one of the students approached her after the session to talk about some family challenges and how it can be difficult to identify exactly what one is feeling. It appeared overall that even with in the short timeframe of the program, students welcomed a space to see modelling that emphasized the

importance of talking about a wide range of feelings that can be challenging, such as grief, loss, and confusion.

Strengths: From the facilitator perspective, the community-school partnership model which allows for mutual learning is a strength. Facilitators can look for opportunities to enhance and solidify concepts that are pre-existing areas of foci in the classroom. At the same time, facilitators learn more about existing classroom practices and the needs of classrooms that could be supported through the program. With respect to the curriculum, it is an avenue to lay a foundation to enhance their social and emotional knowledge and skills. The curriculum is nimble and allows for adaptations and modifications to meet the learning needs of particular classroom groups. Working with younger students supports ample evidence in the social emotional literature that exposing children to these skills as early as possible strengthens overall success, not only in the area of emotional health but also in the area of academic achievement. Finally, the Peace Kids program is designed to be delivered in three consecutive years. In this way, students are supported to deepen their understanding and integration of concepts and strategies that support their overall social and emotional health using a developmental framework that aims to meet students where they are at in their development.

Challenges: The curriculum is relatively brief and realistically can be seen as a way to plant seeds in the area of social and emotional learning. There is the need to review the curriculum and make updates based on ongoing feedback from schools and students (pending funding) and incorporating the latest best practices research. For example, some of the resources and videos are somewhat outdated and need to be refreshed. Having more resources available to teachers and families that could extend the learning in other contexts would be of benefit. For example, having activities that parents could do with their children to support social and emotional learning. Finally, potentially increasing the number of sessions to allow for more time to explore social and emotional knowledge and strategies, may strengthen the overall impact of the program.

Opportunities: Future opportunities that would strengthen the overall program include:

- Increasing the number of activities that involve movement or games
- Lengthening the program in order to allow more time for students to practice skills resulting in better integration of knowledge and skills into their daily lives.
- Adjusting curriculum vocabulary based on developmental levels of students.
- Including more scenarios in the curriculum to support learning about different social and emotional skills that meet the learning needs of various developmental levels.
- Including a family component to the program

Conclusions

Overall, Peace Kids was well received by school staff. A small number of school staff saw value in increasing the number of sessions as well as spreading out the sessions across the school year to allow for students to practice skills learned through the program. Students in the program had mixed reviews, but provided important insights as to how the program could be strengthened to increase overall enjoyment and engagement. Specifically, students were clear in the need for more active learning opportunities. Future directions would ideally incorporate school staff and student staff as well as ongoing evaluation to examine the program engagement, implementation successes and challenges, and program outcomes.

Recommendations

1. **Increase curriculum activities that use movement:** Given the age of the students in the program and the strong feedback from students that they would like more active learning opportunities, examining the curriculum for ways that more concepts can be taught through games and activities that require movement may lead to overall higher levels of enjoyment and engagement for students.
2. **Review of curriculum by external expert:** As the program is relatively new, it would be beneficial to have the curriculum reviewed by an external expert who has expertise in social and emotional learning. This review would focus on key programmatic features known to be effective in social and emotional programs for elementary-aged students. This review may shed insight on ways to strengthen Peace Kids at this stage of development. Note that this recommendation was put forth in the pilot year of the program and continues to be recommended.
3. **Align the Peace Kids curriculum with the new BC core competencies:** To increase uptake of the Peace Kids curriculum, explicitly highlight the ways that the program supports the three core competencies (i.e., communication, thinking, personal and social) that are included in the updated BC curriculum.
4. **Implementation Evaluation of the Peace Kid Program:** As the program is implemented in various ways depending on the classroom, prior to the undertaking of a full-scale outcome evaluation, it is strongly recommended that an implementation evaluation be conducted to understand how the content and delivery varies across classrooms. This will help inform the development of an outcome evaluation. A key part of this evaluation would be closely monitoring student engagement in the various curriculum activities to inform additional changes that would strengthen the overall program.
5. **Increase funding for program delivery and outcome evaluation:** In order to conduct a robust evaluation of the Peace Kids program after an external review and implementation evaluation is completed, increased funding would need to be secured to allow for the delivery of the program in potentially different formats (e.g., shorter four session program, longer program that would include booster sessions as per teacher recommendations) as well as an evaluation design that incorporates a pre-post-test methodology for both teachers and students. It is further recommended that parents be engaged in the evaluation through a post-survey to see if they have seen any gains in knowledge and skills targeted by the program. To strengthen the overall evaluation of the program, a comparison group is recommended.

Appendix A: School Staff Survey

How easy was it to integrate the Peace Kids program into your schedule?

- Very easy
- Somewhat easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Somewhat difficult
- Very difficult

How effective were the Peace Kids facilitators in working with the students in your classroom?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Neither effective nor ineffective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Very ineffective

Have you seen students use some of the learning from Peace Kids in the classroom or on the playground?

- Yes
- No

As the teacher, do you continue to use any of the Peace Kids language/teachings in your class?

- Yes, a lot
- Yes, some
- No

Are you likely to invite the Peace Kids program into your classroom in future years?

- Yes
- No

Have you recommended Peace Kids to other teachers?

- Yes
- No

What changes would you recommend to Peace Kids that would increase the effectiveness of the program?

Overall, what have been the biggest benefits to youth as a result of their participation in Peace Kids?

Thinking about the current needs of your students, what other topics would you like to see included in the Peace Kids curriculum?

Final comments

Appendix B: Student Survey

What grade are you in? _____
What is your gender? Female Male _____

1. Have you told any of the adults in your home about what you are learned in Peace Kids?

YES

NO

2. The most important thing I learned in Peace Kids was:

3. The best part of Peace Kids was:

4. I think Peace Kids would be better if:

5. What rating would you give to Peace Kids?



Appendix C: Facilitator Interview

Overall Engagement

1. How would you describe teacher engagement with the program?
2. How would you describe student engagement?

Program Actions

3. What are some resulting actions taken/seen in classrooms as a result of the Peace Kids program?

Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities

4. What were the strengths of the Peace Kids curriculum and delivery model?
5. What are the challenge/limitations with the Peace Kids curriculum and delivery model?
6. What changes would increase the overall effectiveness of the program delivery?