

# **EXAMINING A GLOBAL PASTORAL CARE PROGRAM TO CREATE SAFER SCHOOL COMMUNITIES.**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In a world that is constantly changing, where violence still occurs at significantly high levels both locally and globally, there is a need for the school system to actually show that it can make a difference in the ways that it approaches the pastoral care of our students. Safe schools allow students to achieve academically, whilst their emotional and social needs are being met. This sense of safety is especially important in an international context with the cultural mix of students, including the increasing number of international students attending schools. Schools must support the pastoral care of all students. It is about the total workplace of the school and its community as well as about the students.

This paper examines a global pastoral care and violence prevention process called PeaceBuilders. PeaceBuilders focuses on giving adults and children resilience tools so that they are able to bounce back from adversity and create safe and peaceful environments in which to learn. PeaceBuilders is a global program that is being implemented in schools in Australia and overseas. This paper will examine a preliminary survey conducted as part of a larger research project that compares the perceptions of teachers in the United States and Australia to the PeaceBuilders program.

## **WHAT IS PEACEBUILDERS?**

PeaceBuilders is violence prevention, culture-shift process that focuses on the belief that resilience and coping skills can be developed in schools and their communities by introducing specific principles and strategies and by creating a consistency of approach and language. A scientifically researched program, PeaceBuilders attempts to change the characteristics settings that trigger aggressive, hostile behaviour, while increasing the daily frequency and salience of both live and symbolic prosocial models (Flannery & et al., 2003). PeaceBuilders also aims to reward prosocial behaviour whilst providing strategies to avoid the accidental reinforcement of negative behaviours (Flannery & et al., 2003). The strategies of PeaceBuilders are geared towards creating a positive climate and culture throughout a school community. Research conducted in the United States (US) has shown that PeaceBuilders has decreased visits to the school nurse, reduced fights, injuries, accidents and vandalism, decreased absenteeism of students and teachers, increased prosocial behaviours, social competence and academic performance (Elliot, 1998; Embry, 1997; Embry, Flannery, Vazsonyi, Powell, & Atha, 1996; Flannery & et al., 2003; Vosskuhler & Issman, 2002).

PeaceBuilders began in the US in the early 1990s as a violence prevention program. PeaceBuilders draws on resilience research to support the strategies used in the program. While finding a universal definition of resilience is difficult, there is general agreement amongst researchers that resilience concerns successfully coping with, or overcoming risk and adversity, or the development of competence in the face of severe stress and hardship (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Krovetz, 1999; Masten, 2001; Werner, 1989). Research has found that "resilience to adversity depends as much upon the characteristics of the important contexts in which children develop (e.g., family, school, community) as upon the characteristics of the children themselves" (Doll & Lyon, 1998 p.356). This has implications for schools as it can be suggested that schools can provide protective environments for students and help develop

skills such as problem solving, negotiation and collaboration, that will support resilience. Table one outlines individual and contextual characteristics of resilient children and youth.

<b>Individual</b>	<b>Contextual</b>
<p>Good intellectual ability</p> <p>Language competence</p> <p>Positive temperament or easy going disposition</p> <p>Positive social orientation including close peer friendships</p> <p>High self efficacy, self confidence, and self esteem</p> <p>Achievement orientation with high expectations</p> <p>Resilient belief systems, faith</p> <p>Higher rate of engagement in productive activities</p>	<p><b>Family related</b></p> <p>Close, affectionate relationship with at least one parent or caregiver</p> <p>Effective parenting (characterized by warmth, structure and high expectations)</p> <p>Access to warm relationships and guidance from other extended family members</p> <p><b>School or community related</b></p> <p>Access to and relationships with positive adult role models in a variety of extramarital contexts, including schools</p> <p>Connections with at least one or a variety of prosocial organizations</p> <p>Access to responsive, high quality schools</p>

Table 1. Summary of individual and contextual characteristics of resilient children and youth (Doll & Lyon, 1998 p.354).

PeaceBuilders suggests, based on the research available, that school environments can be altered to promote resilience (Heartsprings Inc, 2001). Heartsprings (2001 p.15) outlines the following ways that PeaceBuilders can build resilience:

- Provide extensive positive role models instead of negative ones
- Reduce negative cues or threatening stimuli
- Show positive behavior in many ways to assure generalization of behavior
- Model coping actions (seeking help and problem solving)
- Provide frequent opportunities to discuss and correct knowledge and actions
- Provide high rates of positive feedback for imitation
- Include many cues, prompts, or tools that facilitate generalization across time, people, behaviors, and settings.

**HOW DOES PEACEBUILDERS WORK?**

“PeaceBuilders aims to change the way children perceive, think about and act upon their physical and interpersonal environment. It is based on the premise that violence and anti-social behaviour can be reduced through early intervention by increasing children’s resilience and reinforcing positive behaviours. In addition, altering the school environment to emphasise rewards and praise for desirable behaviour can reduce bullying and aggressive behaviour” (Gant & Grabosky, 2000 p.38).

PeaceBuilders is based on six principles, which provide the basic framework that is used to assist schools in achieving program goals.

- **Praise People** recognises that individuals respond positively to praise and should always look for ways to acknowledge, encourage and compliment others.

- **Give Up Put Downs** recognises that physical, verbal and non-verbal bullying is unacceptable in a PeaceBuilders culture.
- **Seek Wise People** recognises that all people, adults and children alike, have wisdom to share.
- **Notice Hurts that I Have Caused** recognises that it is imperative that individuals notice behaviours that hurt another person.
- **Right Wrongs** recognises that individuals must make amends for hurts caused and modify behaviour accordingly.
- **Help Others** recognises that PeaceBuilders must always try to help others.

These principles are used to guide school policy and programs as well as support learning in the classroom. PeaceBuilders comes with tools and resources to support schools to implement the program, including extensive and ongoing professional development and training. Schools are responsible for using the tools that work for their community, modify others that are suitable and exclude those that will not work.

Peace Builders has a number of positive features. These include:

- The focus is on all participants in the school community – PeaceBuilders expects change to occur in both teachers and students
- The framework is adaptable to different cultures and cultural groups. The program tools are provided and training given to school communities but the implementation is controlled by the school and its community
- The shared language and meaning provide a consistency of approach and allow participants in the process to understand each other.
- The program is introduced in three waves over three years. The program is established in a school, and then extended into school families and finally reaches the wider community.

## **PEACEBUILDERS AS AN INTERNATIONAL CARE PROGRAM**

The aim of PeaceBuilders is to change a school culture to one that is pro-social and positive in its approach to student and staff care. It is a global program being implemented in Australia and overseas. PeaceBuilders endeavours to be a program that is applicable to any culture in which it is implemented. It is considered to be a framework that allows schools and their communities to adapt the way in which it is put into practice. In order to discuss cross-cultural applicability, it is important to define culture for the purpose of this paper.

Defining the term culture and more explicitly, school culture, however, can be a complex process. Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952) conducted an extensive review of the term culture, looking at its history and varied definitions. Their study found 164 different (though closely-related) definitions of culture in the anthropological, sociological and psychological literature going back to the 1700s. The complex definition they devised based on this research is that

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional...ideas and specifically their attached values; cultural systems may on the one hand be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action (Kroeber & Kluckhorn, 1952 p.181).

Whilst there are many noted authors who have discussed culture, from Edward Tylor and Matthew Arnold in the late 1800s, to Raymond Williams, this paper will use Hofstede to define culture. Hofstede (2001 p.9) defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another”.

Hofstede (2001) goes on to explain that by mind he is referring to thinking, feeling and acting with consequences for beliefs, attitudes and skills. This definition is a good general one for PeaceBuilders as it does aim to affect a school community's thinking feeling and acting which will in turn lead to consequences for their beliefs, attitudes and skills.

A school culture is a distinct entity that is developed over time by the members of its community. It usually has a dominant and generally understood culture and many sub-cultures that include groups who identify with one another through such stratifications as class, race, ethnicity, religion, family and many of the other groups contained in society. This idea of a dominant culture is supported by Escobar-Ortloff & Ortloff (2003 p.255) who note that "schools have their own culture, which usually represents the culture of a dominant society". Busher (2001 p.76) notes that school cultures "are dynamic and created through the interactions of people. They are a nexus of shared norms and values that express how people make sense of the organization in which they work and the other people with whom they work". Owens (2004) asserts that the culture of a school develops over time and is shaped by values and beliefs; traditions and rituals; history; stories and myths; heroes and heroines; and behaviour norms. Donnelly (2000 p.137) cites Torrington and Weightman when defining school culture "[School] culture is the characteristic spirit and belief of a [school], demonstrated for example in the norms and values which are generally held about how people should treat each other". PeaceBuilders aims to affect interactions and create shared norms and values that are pro-social.

Peace Builders began in the United States in 1995. To this date around 600 schools have used or are using PeaceBuilders in their schools and wider communities. PeaceBuilders was introduced into Australia in 1997. At present there are 46 schools in Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and the Northern Territory using the program. There is a mix of private and public schools, Catholic and State as well as ten indigenous schools. The United Kingdom is also beginning to use the program. The program has the ability to cover all primary and secondary year levels and has been introduced schools with this range of students.

## **Method and subjects**

This paper outlines initial results of a preliminary survey into the effect of PeaceBuilders on the culture of schools. In order to investigate the cross-cultural applicability of PeaceBuilders, a random sample of 30 teachers in Australia (n=15) and the United States (n=15) were surveyed. The survey consisted of nineteen questions that were rated using a Likert scale that had five values from strongly disagree to strongly agree. There were also three questions that provided anecdotal information. The nineteen questions asked were in 3 main categories:

- The philosophy of PeaceBuilders;
- Implementation of the program; and
- Impact on school culture.

Philosophical questions focused on understanding of the PeaceBuilders program from the perspectives of staff and students. Implementation questions focused on the ease with which PeaceBuilders becomes part of the school and classroom program, including adapting the process to cultural differences and student need. The school culture questions focused on change noted by teachers to the culture of the school. General questions requiring written responses were also asked and included positive stories and ways that PeaceBuilders has been adapted to suit specific cultural needs.

## **Results**

To compare the answers from teachers, questions were placed into the three nominated categories. Answers were inputted into SPSS for Windows and cross-tabulations showing percentage results were calculated. Table two shows the results of the survey questions administered.

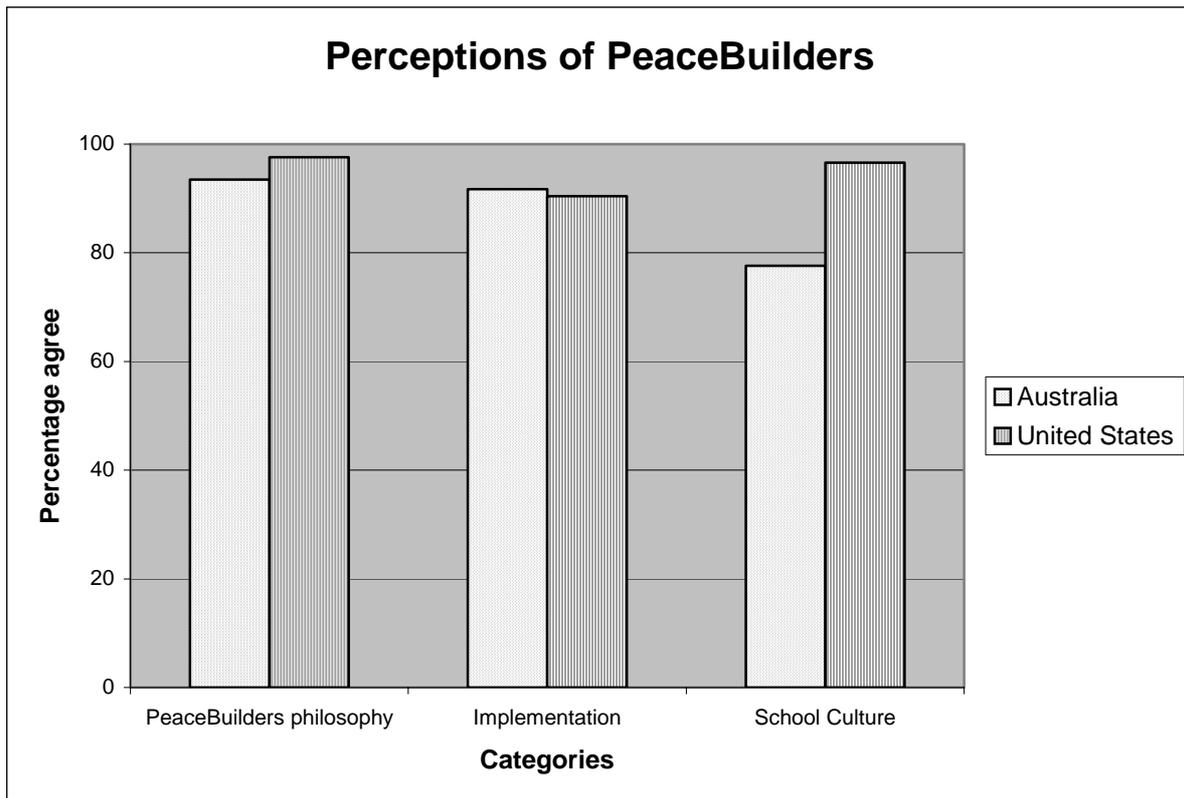


Table 2: Responses from teachers who completed the PeaceBuilders survey

Table two illustrates a high positive response to the three categories investigated in the survey that was conducted. Over 90% of staff surveyed felt that the PeaceBuilders philosophy was easy to understand by both staff and students. This includes a clear understanding of the six main principles used in the program. Examples of stories reported include:

It [PeaceBuilders] is easy to use. We all use a common language. Everyone knows to be a PeaceBuilder is a good thing and even some of the sixth grade students are proud when they are PeaceBuilder of the week. You can reinforce PeaceBuilders no matter what you are doing, recess, reading, Social Studies, etc (Teacher, USA).

Giving staff and students a common language when discussing and building on the ways we treat one another. This is a huge bonus! (Teacher, Australia)

It [PeaceBuilders] gives the students and staff an avenue to address the unspoken expectation that students will learn good behavior choices and how to make them in their lives (Teacher, USA).

The philosophy – the idea to create a climate within a large organisation and community is fantastic. It will take time (Teacher, Australia).

Around 90% of teachers from both Australia and the United States reported that aspects of the implementation were manageable and adaptable to different cultural groups and classes. Examples of stories reported include:

The best thing about PeaceBuilders is that it's school-wide and all students participate in some way. Another positive aspect is that the program allows for a

lot of creativity and customization to fit a school's needs and culture (Teacher, USA).

The children responded to the PeaceBuilders coordinator coming into the classroom to reinforce the PeaceBuilders messages. It has been a good springboard for follow-up in a variety of situations. Having PeaceBuilders throughout the school means there is consistency and all children have clear expectations (Teacher, Australia).

I sometimes modify the vocabulary as well as the example situations to make them more meaningful to the student population that I teach (Teacher, USA).

I think PeaceBuilders is a positive care program. I really enjoy how it changes the children's thinking and perception about dealing with situations. Another positive aspect about PeaceBuilders is its ability to be adaptable to each classroom's dynamics and the needs of the class, individual and teacher (Teacher, Australia).

Teachers were asked questions that related to their perception of how the school culture had changed. This included exploring areas such as whether the school felt safer since the introduction of PeaceBuilders and whether PeaceBuilders had a positive effect on school culture. In this category 78% of Australian teachers reported generally positive change compared with 96% of United States teachers. This difference was surprising given the similarities in the other categories. The questions that produced the most difference between groups included the perception of the school as a safer place and the degree of change in moving towards a more peaceful culture. Anecdotal responses to this category produced the following statements:

PeaceBuilders has many wonderful aspects for the children and me. It allows us to work with the children on a different level. The school has a very different climate to anywhere I've ever worked before and I'm sure that's because of PeaceBuilders (Teacher, Australia).

Our school opened in 1999 with the program. After 6 years, all of our students in our school have been "brought up" with the program. The difference in behavior with our students now, compared to our first few years, is incredible (Teacher, USA).

I have noticed students out in the yard using PeaceBuilders terminology when dealing with difficult sessions, where they were not treated in a respectful manner. I have been extremely impressed at the sense of empowerment that they have gained through this program in which they have learnt to value themselves (Teacher, Australia).

Prior to the implementation of PeaceBuilders, our school was a scary place to be. Many teachers were mean and even vindictive and students were often violent and out of control. After the implementation, our school came together as a community. We held events for families to attend and children were praised for the positive changes they made in their behavior. Our school became a wonderful place to teach (Teacher, USA).

As a guidance/specialist, I have less problems with groups of students coming to my office with complaints of not getting along or she's not my friend anymore. It makes my day a little easier (Teacher, USA).

Another outcome from the results of the study are in the area of resilience. While not specifically asking questions about resilience, it is worth noting some of the comments shared by teachers in this study. These comments reflect the individual and contextual characteristics of resilient children and youth outlined by Doll & Lyon (1998).

#### Individual characteristics:

J & Z were having a disagreement. I asked them to talk to each other about why they had hit each other. They spoke and decided neither of them was very happy. When asked what they could do to make things right they said they would write a PeaceBuilders message to each other (Teacher, Australia).

Students in every classroom eagerly write PraiseNotes to one another, not only because one note is read over the public address system each week, but because they genuinely enjoy expressing their positive feelings to each other (Teacher, USA).

Allowing students to verbalise to others how they are feeling which allows them to communicate more freely and understand why they feel that way. It also communicates to the 'bully' how inappropriate their behaviour is and the need for them to 'right the wrong' (Teacher, Australia).

I hear my students praise people often. This brings an instant smile to their faces. I hear: "Wow, that is a really nice picture!" "I like your story a lot." "You are a fast runner" , "\_\_\_\_\_ is so smart" (Teacher, USA).

#### Family related:

Parents have said Peace Coaches (year 6 mediation program) is very positive. Helping to solve problems at home (Teacher, Australia).

At the parent forum parents thought that PeaceBuilders' Peace Coaches was a great idea (Teacher, Australia).

#### School or community related:

A few years ago, our school hosted an End of the Year PeaceBuilders all day celebration. It was wonderful to have the community and the school celebrating together (Teacher, USA).

We put on a Peace Week in January during Martin Luther King's birthday. We designed a PeaceBuilders' Garden and invited teachers and students to have lunch with our principal and myself to enjoy the peaceful surroundings. It's a favourite with everyone (Teacher, USA).

Our students enjoy emailing PraiseNotes to students from other parts of Australia. We have also had some contact with other PeaceBuilders in the United States. The students feel special being part of such a caring community (Teacher, Australia).

## **DISCUSSION**

A school culture is “influenced by values and expectations transmitted and changed by generations of students and teachers through their participation in school settings” (Escobar-Ortloff & Ortloff, 2003 p.256). PeaceBuilders aims to influence the values and expectations transmitted in a school by developing shared meanings and norms within the school culture. Generally results in all categories of this research show that PeaceBuilders has cross-cultural applicability with the teachers surveyed for this research. The schools surveyed come from different parts of the world, have different cultures and sub-cultures and have different community needs, however they have all have found that they understand the PeaceBuilders philosophy and are able to implement the program to suit the social and cultural needs of their students and school. Whilst the results in the school culture category followed a different result pattern to the other two, teachers in Australia and the US did report a positive change in the culture of the school. Anecdotal stories provided as part of the survey also reflected similar themes in each of the three categories and provide some evidence of resilience building attitudes and behaviour. While it can be argued that both groups are predominantly Western cultures and that this may lead to similar results, it needs to be remembered that each community will have its own norms, values and shared meanings that will influence the way that PeaceBuilders is implemented.

This is a small sample preliminary survey and as such results will need to be duplicated with larger groups in order to come to more definite conclusions about PeaceBuilders' applicability as an international care program. However, from the high percentage of similar responses in the categories related to the philosophy and implementation of the program, as well as the common stories told by teachers, it can be hypothesised that a larger scale study may achieve similar results. The third category of questions related to the change in school culture will need to be examined carefully during future research to see if results from both groups become more homogeneous or reflect the preliminary survey. It would also be useful to examine the length of time PeaceBuilders was in each school to investigate whether schools that have been part of the process for a longer period achieve more positive results.

## **CONCLUSION**

This preliminary survey shows encouraging signs that PeaceBuilders can be adapted to suit different cultures and also shifts school culture in a positive way. Anecdotal information from teachers also indicates that the surveyed schools are demonstrating resilience and pro-social behaviours. Further research in this area needs to include larger samples and isolate the distinct cultural needs of schools. Surveying PeaceBuilders schools in other countries would also be beneficial to see whether these preliminary results would transfer to even more diverse school communities.

To finish, here are some words from different sides of the world, different teachers from different cultures:

I have seen students helping other students solve problems on the playground, by saying "that's not the way a PeaceBuilder would act" and then that paves the way to settling the problem (Teacher, USA).

On many occasions students have come up to me whilst on yard duty and they have been listening to me speaking and butted in asking the other child, “is that a PeaceBuilder thing to do?” (Teacher, Australia)

Examples, perhaps, of the power of a global pastoral care program.

**Acknowledgements:**

Thank you to the teachers in both Australia and the United States PeaceBuilders schools for supporting this research and taking time to answer questions. Thank you also to Michelle Molina for helping to distribute the surveys in the USA and to Michael Krupnick and Max Voskuhler for their continued support and patience with all my questions.

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