



AN EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PEER

MESSAGE IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL

ABSTRACT OF A REPORT BY DONNA DAVIS FOR MISA

Peer massage is a growing practice in UK Primary Schools, currently taking place at around 1,000 establishments. MISA wanted to evaluate its effectiveness in a quantifiable way, by testing the effects of short regular massage sessions in the classroom on children's behaviour and wellbeing.

Four classes at a Worcestershire Primary School took part in the study over six weeks in the summer term 2010. Two Year 1 and two Year 6 classes participated with one class in each age group assigned to receive instruction and practice in peer massage, whilst the other received none.

Donna Davis, a qualified peer massage instructor, visited both the Year 1 and 6 Intervention classes weekly, leading sessions in peer massage with the children and their teacher. A variety of massage techniques were introduced in accordance with MISA's peer massage programme. In between these instructional sessions, teachers initiated further short, regular peer massage sessions as part of everyday classroom routine in order to put into practice what had been learnt.

A standard measurement tool (Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) was applied to pupils in all four classes both before and after the six weeks of the study, in order to obtain quantitative data for comparison. Pupils received scores for behavioural difficulties (emotional symptoms, conducts problems, hyperactivity/inattention, and peer relationships) and behavioural strengths (pro-social behaviour). These data were also further processed to produce pupil profiles rated as normal, borderline or abnormal. Qualitative feedback was obtained through semi-structured teacher interviews, and written comments from pupils and parents.

The combined scores for both years showed a striking improvement of 54% in relation to difficulties, and 6% for pro-social behaviour in the Intervention classes, which contrasts with deteriorations in the Control classes of -7% and -11% for the same attributes. This would suggest that peer massage contributed substantially to the overall behaviour and wellbeing of those children who received it.

When the year group scores are broken down, there is an even more dramatic improvement apparent for the Year 1 Intervention class, where improvements of 64% for difficulties and 9% for strengths were recorded. Furthermore the consequences of not receiving peer massage showed up more strongly in the Year 1 Control group, suggesting that the early introduction of peer massage is especially desirable.

Particular benefits were observed in the Year 1 Intervention class in relation to hyperactivity/inattention. Initially eight pupils presented as 'abnormal' in this area but after six weeks of peer massage this had reduced to two. This group also showed



marked improvement in Emotional Difficulties, where the number of children presenting abnormal profiles reduced from six to zero.

The qualitative comments received from teachers, parents and pupils in the Intervention groups were overwhelmingly positive, suggesting an extremely favourable perception of peer massage.

Several recommendations would be desirable for similar studies in the future; keeping the project away from the end of the academic year and all the associated disruption to normal timetables and routines, a higher degree of standardisation of practice sessions across the year groups, and a greater number of study participants (this study had 111 across the four classes).

Donna Davis, October 2010

If you would like to contact Donna about her work please do so via admin@misa.org.uk