



WELL BEHAVED Vs WELL BEING

"You're quite right Mr Hatter. I do live in a topsy turvy world. It seems as if I have to do something wrong first, in order to learn from that what not to do. And then, by not doing what I'm not supposed to do, perhaps I'll be right. But I'd rather be right the first time, wouldn't you?" (Alice)

An excerpt from *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll.

When I was a child my mum often told me to "be good".

I tried my best, well most of the time. If someone asked me, "How are you?" I would say, "Good".

My mum would quickly correct me, "Well!" "When someone asks how you are, you should say, 'Well', not 'good'!"

I was confused, I thought she told me to be good!

What is the difference between 'being good' and 'being well'?

I decided to ask some children.

By far the most common answers I received

were, "'good' is to behave and 'well' is being happy." Ah, there is a difference.

When I asked children what 'being happy' meant they said, "You know, when everything is going ok."

When I asked what 'to behave' means, children said things like, "To be nice and don't be naughty."

We all want children to behave well, especially in our schools. Most schools have a 'Managing Student Behaviour Policy'. Responsibility falls on the principal and the school community to create and maintain a safe and positive learning environment as well as develop effective strategies to manage student behaviour.

Whilst many approaches appear to be proactive, in the main they are reactive. Generally, educators would agree that a compliant child is easier to teach, but a compliant child doesn't guarantee being a good learner, neither does it guarantee a 'well' or 'happy' child. This sentiment could be driven by the false notion that well behaved children learn better.

Unfortunately, our schools could be grabbing the wrong end of the stick. It is possible that we could be starting from the wrong point? While many schools have proactive programs for social and emotional well being, often the desired outcome is to create 'good' not necessarily 'well' children. Like in Alice's encounter with the Mad Matter, we do live in a topsy turvy world. We tend to be more reactive. Policies that tend to tilt more to reactive and punitive approaches overlook the importance of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).

SEL programs generally come under the Managing Student Behaviour umbrella. It should be the other way around! SEL is often plonked in 'Health Ed' time slots, which often comes in a poor last in long list of priorities in the school curriculum. My experience of this was when an administrator told me that I couldn't conduct a SEL program in a morning slot because this time is dedicated to

important core subjects, literacy and numeracy. "The morning is when children's minds are at their learning best!" She said.

Schools are often pushed politically to be infatuated with literacy and numeracy, not the whole child. It is no good having a child who can read, write and do sums but can't relate well with others. The famous educationalist Maria Montessori believed this;

"One test of the correctness of educational procedure is the happiness of the child. If education is always to be conceived along the same antiquated lines of a mere transmission of knowledge, there is little to be hoped from it in the bettering of man's future. For what is the use of transmitting knowledge if the individual's total development lags behind?"

Numeracy and Literacy are two very important pillars in our educational system, but are they the most important? The emphasis on "NAPLAN" and being in the top 5 nations for literacy and numeracy would make us think so. Could it be that we think these are the most important skills in getting a job? And are we worried that our children won't get a "good" job with a high pay packet?

The formula is flawed. Behave well, learn well, get paid well.

When we ignore the social and emotional well being skills in our education we do so at our society's peril. Aleisha M. Clarke & Professor Margaret M. Barry from the Health Promotion Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway suggest;

"Although some educators argue against implementing this type of holistic programming because it takes valuable time away from core academic material, our findings suggest that SEL programming not only does not detract from academic performance but actually increases students' performance on standardised tests and grades".

There is a case for NASEL? (A National Assessment for Social and Emotional Learning in children). We should be testing children's well being not just their literacy and numeracy.

There is growing international evidence showing links between social and emotional well being, behaviour and academic achievement. In 2008, J. W. Payton and colleagues undertook a comprehensive assessment of SEL programs in schools. The review looked at 317 studies involving over 300,000 children age 5-13 years. The report (found on CASEL website) concluded that SEL programs are intimately linked to improving children's academic performance.

Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence was onto something when he said;

"If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, the no matter how smart you are, you won't get far.

Dr. Maurice Elias, a leading child psychologist, researcher and expert on SEL from Rutgers University, explains the dangers of omitting SEL programs from our schools. He explains that many of the problems in our schools are the result of social and emotional malfunction and debilitation from which too many children have suffered and continue to bear the consequences. Elias emphasises;

"Protestations that this must be outside of and separate from traditional schooling are misinformed, harmful and may doom us to continued frustration in our academic mission and the need for Herculean efforts in behavioural damage control and repair. The roster of social casualties will grow ever larger."

Other research has shown that children who have emotional stress in their lives don't learn well. Children with behavioural problems most often come to school stressed, with an array of painful and distressing feelings and often struggle to behave, let alone learn. When a child's behaviour goes awry there always is a reason why.

Today's educators have a renewed perspective on what common sense always suggested: when schools attend systematically to students' social and emotional skills, the academic achievement of children increases, the incidence of problem behaviours decreases, and the quality of the relationships surrounding each child improves. And, students become the productive, responsible, contributing members of society that we all want.

Quote From Promoting Social and Emotional Learning by Maurice J. Elias, Joseph E. Zins, Roger P. Weissberg, Karin S. Frey, Mark T. Greenberg, Norris M. Haynes, Rachael Kessler, Mary E. Schwab-Stone and Timothy P. Shriver.

SEL should not just be restricted to programs, it should filter through all that we do in our schools. It should touch all of our processes and our systems that create a positive environment. It should nurture all of the nutrients for social and emotional well being for all in the school community.

SEL could be the missing piece, not to get children to behave well, but for children to be well. Children can be made to behave well, there are two basic crude methods; Fear of punishment or expectation of reward. Neither creates well being!

"If people are good only because they fear punishment, and hope for reward, then we are a sorry lot indeed."
Albert Einstein

'Well behaved' does not necessarily contribute to 'well being', but 'well being' can certainly make a world of difference to a child's behaviour and their ability to learn.

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