



Initial Report on the Active Inclusion Programme

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Initial Report on Rangeville State School Active Inclusion Programme

The Rangeville Active Inclusion Programme has now been running for a number of years with funding support from the Queensland Government. Due to the success of this programme many students are now involved in sports such as swimming, tennis, cricket, soccer, rugby, futsal, table tennis, little athletics, karate, AFL, basketball and PCYC. Community members lead and facilitate the service which seeks to support and engage students (and their families) who might otherwise be at risk of disengagement from learning for a number of reasons. The designer and key facilitator of the programme, Elizabeth Laverty (Liz), has worked in partnership with researchers from the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Dr Lindy Abawi and Dr Karen Spence, to evaluate the programme from a number of perspectives including parents, students, and staff.

Programme Aims

The goals of the programme have been to use sport as a tool to:

1. raise student self-esteem,
2. build peer respect,
3. improve attitudes towards schooling,
4. introduce positive role models
5. improve integration
6. establish the skills and habits of an active healthy lifestyle.

Recruitment into the programme occurs via: facilitator recruitment on advice from parents or teachers; personal observation and follow up; and, direct parent contact based on the reputation of the programme. At other times a parent might seek support from the facilitator for their child to become engaged in the programme. Student participants come from one or more of the following 'at risk' groupings:

- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
- Special Needs
- Disadvantaged or
- Disengaged

Programme Description

There are three components to the programme:

1. **school active camps** to support students whose parents may not have been able to find the money to send them on camp; to support students to develop positive relationships with their peers; and, to develop independent and co-operative behaviour skills
2. **swimming lessons** to make students safe in and around water; to develop a joy for recreational swimming (many children from other countries were afraid of the water or unsafe near water); and, to promote water safety understandings in parents

3. **club sport** to support parents and students by paying for registration at a sporting club; to provide equipment which otherwise might be unaffordable; and, to organise transport to and from events

The Role of the Coordinator

The coordinator (Liz) has been an essential component to the effectiveness of the programme. In many ways it was because she is also a school parent that she has been able to advertise and support other parents at a personal level. External funding assisted with the financing of her role, although she also does many hours above and beyond the hours provided. She found many barriers that needed to be overcome in order for students to benefit from this initiative. Her main task has been to overcome all the barriers that the target group experienced in accessing the options available e.g. for the club sport option parents had to access vouchers online which required them to be able to

- * read
- * speak English
- * have access to a computer
- * have access to the internet
- * be able to navigate the internet
- * have access to transport
- * have the confidence and motivation to get their child into the sport & various venues.

This proved an overwhelming and in fact impossible task for many families so the facilitator would fill out forms where necessary, organise maps, print out the season draw, arrange for car-pooling or community supported transport and make contact with clubs and coaches to explain each student's context so they could receive special care. Over 120 students have participated within the programme to date.

After the initial success of the programme, Liz applied for money to continue the programme and also co-wrote a successful application to the Gaming Licence Community Benefit Fund to upgrade the school cricket nets. This was a priority, as the old nets did not meet Australian Standards and the school has a large population of Sri Lankan children, who are very keen cricketers. These nets were due for completion early in 2015.

Liz also established a second clothing pool for sporting goods at the school to equip students with their sporting requirements. She says "I have lost count of how many students have benefitted from this-well in excess of 20. I have distributed tennis racquets, football boots, shin pads, various sport uniforms."

The research methodology

A case study approach was adopted to determine the effectiveness of the **Active Inclusion Programme**. The lived experience of a sample range of participants (parents, students and teachers) either involved in the programme or who had knowledge of the programme were approached by the facilitator (with permission from the school Principal) to participate in a number of focus group discussions with USQ researchers or USQ research assistants. The

facilitator was also interviewed for her insights and for background information regarding the establishment of the programme. Data from 5 current students, 1 past student, 5 parents (English and Second Language speakers), 5 teachers and the facilitator were digitally recorded.

Questions were semi-structured allowing for participants to take the conversation in various directions whilst remaining true to a core set of topics of importance to the answering of the research question which was ***“In what ways has the Active Inclusion Programme impacted student outcomes?”*** Recordings were transcribed, analysed and interpreted based upon identifying themes. Within the findings that follow themes are supported by short extracts from the transcribed interviews and participant respondents are identified by a coding system:

Participant Codes

- T1 – Teacher 1
- P1 – Parent 1
- S1 – Student 1

Of these participants one student had special learning needs, one student was now at secondary school and came from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) family, two students had identified special learning needs, two came from a low socio-economic background, whilst one was from another CALD family.

Findings

Originally data analysis was conducted according to the perspectives of the group being interviewed. Data was grouped within that according to emergent themes coded as Emergent Theme 1 or ET1 etc. As the data analysis continued it became apparent that there were many recurring themes that bridged the various perspectives. These are collated as Combined Themes (Table 1).

Students ranged in age between 8 and 13. One past student returned to join the focus group to speak of his experiences. The parents of students interviewed were also involved in the parent focus group. Teachers who had had students who had participated in the programme either in the current year or in the past volunteered to share their insights.

Student lived experience

ET1 Self-efficacy developed - Students grew in confidence since their involvement in the programme. Students did not hesitate in confidently speaking about their ability. Teachers reinforced this.

“What position are you?”

“Goal Keeper.” (S4)

“Are you good?”

“Yep.” (S4)

“I think they’ve got to feel success. If they’ve got a problem they often develop a sense of frustration and feeling of being a failure.” (T1)

The Sports Programme has helped these kids gain confidence and feel success.” (T2)

ET2 Widening student engagement – the students involved in the sports programme were those who had already exhibited ‘at risk’ behaviours of disengaging from learning. The programme appears to have been instrumental in halting this trend and re-engaging students in school as a whole.

“Do you think playing this helps you here with your school work?”

“Yes.” (S4)

“Why?”

“I feel more confident about doing stuff – it helps me with me my concentration” (S4)

“What’s the best thing about coming to school?”

“Playing soccer.” (S5)

“On a scale of 1 – 10...your sport and being part of that group of kids playing sport, where do you put it?”

“Nine” (S2 & 3)

ET3 Developing student leadership – leadership and commitment to others became an offshoot from feelings of self-efficacy and the Year 8 boy spoke about wanting to be a role model.

“I want to keep playing – help other kids” (S6)

“I’d really like to be a coach one day and to help kids feel happy about themselves” (S4)

ET4 Improved outcomes both social and academic –

“You get to play games and compete in competitions and things. Though it doesn’t always have to be competition mum says.” (S4)

“Helps me with me my concentration” (S2)

“You get to meet new people that you haven’t met before – make new friends” (S5)

“I was in grade 2 when I came. I could not speak English very well but I made friends joining into a soccer game” (S5)

Parent lived experience

ET1 Self-efficacy developed – parents saw the changes in their child’s behaviour and willingness to ‘have-a-go’.

“He’s happier now – more confident. He plays better with others too. Even his little brother has benefited.” (P5)

ET2 Widening student engagement – parents noted that the positive attitude towards the sports they were engaged in had a flow on effect into general school engagement.

“It made a massive difference to ..[S2].. It was hard before - he just didn't want to go to school but now he's keen.” (P2)

ET4 Improved outcomes including physical, social, emotional and academic – parents spoke about the benefits of the programme. They mainly concentrated on what they saw to be the social benefits but also how this played out on improved engagement in learning.

“It's the social side of things that's great [] finds it hard to make friends [he's Asperger's]...people think he's weird...he's a left of centre personality and sees the world differently to most people. Going to soccer – he's in a mixed team of boys and girls. Since he's been playing soccer there would be at least six kids who would ring the house and see what he is doing after school or on the weekends.

It's really good – his confidence has been boosted a lot – and his coordination is improving. He had sort of soft muscles and had to go to physio a lot, his coordination was really bad. With him doing physical activity he doesn't have as many 'episodes' as he used to, other people call these his tantrums, where is all over the place and can't sit down or think straight – he's had far less, he's more in control of himself. It's also about his anxiety and we haven't had that this year.

“One of my boys was really in with the wrong crowd, was doing the wrong thing at school, wouldn't sit still – ever since he started karate he's got a lot more focus more passion. It's changed the way he is – he's got more confidence in himself to make better decisions in everything that he does.” (P3)

“For Karate the grading is important and they have to do good at home and do good at class, not just at karate, to go up a grade.” (P4)

“When we came my daughter was okay but my son was shy. The programme helped my children find friends and get used to Australia – very different in Sri Lanka” (P5)

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ET5 Parents feel supported – parents felt supported by the school and more connected because of this support. They also appeared to feel more successful as parents and a wider circle of friends.

“We couldn’t pay for our daughter to go to camp because we had a big medical expense earlier and we just could not afford camp. Then one of the teachers said that they would sort it out and they did. That was a big thing for us – and for our daughter. Then the lady who helped us with the funding said it also included sport and we just jumped at that.” (P3)

“We’ve got 4 kids and it is hard for us to find the money for all of them to do the things they want because if we do something for one we need to do it for the others. That’s the beauty of this programme because my daughter got involved the whole family was able to get involved.”(P4)

“Being a parent and seeing your child achieving has a big impact on parents and how they react to things – the parents and the children. It’s when you see the progress that makes you want to keep going and your kids keep going. You feel good.” (P4)

“As parents we sit together and talk – it helps with culture and feel part of it. So we integrate now – it’s good we have this culture now and our other culture.” (P6)

“As a parent it gives me the opportunity to meet other parents and this is good for us well – good to have a chat with other parents – and to understand some of things going on here. To get some knowledge that we wouldn’t otherwise get. It’s a good chance for me as well.” (P5)

Staff lived experience

ET1 Self-efficacy developed – teachers easily identified how students gained confidence as an off-shoot of being involved in the programme.

“For some of those children it’s their chance to shine in that little group. They’re the king pin in that group.” (T2)

“That’s probably what counts to self-esteem too – kids don’t like to feel different. But at Rangeville they seem happy...and with Liz working with them the children realise there’s no stigma.” (T3)

ET2 Widening student engagement – teachers could see a distinct change in behaviour and help to support the students in the programme in their own ways.

“I do that just in my own time [organise futsal at lunch] whenever I have those spare lunches and whenever I don’t have duty, I run a game. The kids in the programme love it and other kids see how well they can play and join in too.” (T5)

“If they have a bit of success, the confidence goes up and that just flows over to their academic, socially and everything.” (T4)

ET3 Developing student leadership – a change in student attitude also results in a change in how these students interact as part of a team. Initial leadership skills are developed.

“It’s so good to see kids who were pretty difficult step up. Instead of bullying they are helping other kids and teaching them how to kick or whatever.” (T1)

“I had [S6] last year and now that he is at secondary school I know that he has stepped up in his club and is actually a member of the organising committee.” (T2)

ET4 Improved outcomes both social and academic – teachers could see a link between engagement in the programme and generally improved commitment to in class learning.

“The sport side was great and the off-shoots of this were that his academic level lifted. I also praise his teacher from last year who made the environment so supportive.” (T5)

“They’ve never experienced that sort of thing in their life and to go with a little bit of encouragement just to go that little bit further and set goals for themselves and then another goal and then another goal and to achieve. That’s just magic.” (T2)

“Week 1 we had swimming at the start of the year and she was drowning in the shallow end. We put her in the programme and she went to Milne Bay and had lessons...with the whole family took the opportunity. Well at the end of the year we did swimming again and she swam in the swimming carnival and did a whole length.” (T4)

ET5 Parents feel supported – sometimes cultural differences impact on the ability or willingness of parents to connect with teachers but over time this changes

“Mum actually was making the effort and making sure he got to every game...Dad’s now a lot better towards me too and will talk to me and is watching every futsal game. I think they feel that we care.” (T4)

I would try and connect with mum every couple of weeks. Just to let her know how [S1] was going. Since he joined the soccer group his coordination has improved, he is less volatile and more focused. His mum is so grateful and spends a great deal of time now in class helping and supporting. (T3)

Facilitator lived experience

ET1 Self-efficacy developed – families that had been a part of the programme have gained the confidence and the commitment to the underpinning programme concepts that they no longer need the support.

“There have been some families graduate from the programme-i.e. they no longer need my assistance in accessing a sport and are independent of obtaining their own vouchers or are willing to pay their own way. This is our ultimate goal.”

ET2 Widening student engagement – engagement is a broad concept and the confidence built in one context plays out in others.

“One mother of a boy with Autism said that her son now has fewer tantrums and has actually been invited to have plays with friends, outside of school-something which is new! She credits this to being included in a local soccer team. He is more engaged at school and more engaged socially.”

ET3 Developing student leadership –

“This year we have seen the ‘blossoming’ of students who have continued on the programme from last year. Their sporting skills have developed along with their confidence, and they are no longer overshadowed by the dominant personalities in their class. In fact they have started to stand up for leadership roles.”

ET4 Improved outcomes both social and academic –the programme helped students from culturally diverse backgrounds become a part of Australian society.

“There has been an increase in the number of girls participating, who last year had been prevented by their parents to be involved. As you would know, there is a low participation rate of girls from some cultures. This has not only integrated them & given them confidence it has empowered them to command respect from their peers, (including the boys in the school) because of their ability. This is especially important, as they would otherwise have remained vulnerable girls.”

ET5 Parents feel supported – student involvement sees families start to become involved. Parents then build social relationships with other parents and with school staff enabling them to feel supported and appreciated for what they do to support their children.

“We have seen the greater integration and confidence of entire families, as the parents have been forced to integrate on the sides of the sporting fields. One Indian Sikh boy brings his mother, father, sister and grandfather with him and that’s just to the training sessions!”

Combined themes

When combined these emergent themes had strong impact. In all but two instances they were echoed across each of the various groups and individuals who participated in the study.

Table 1: Combined Themes

Theme	Students	Parents	Staff	Facilitator
<i>Self-efficacy developed</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Widening student engagement</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Developing student leadership</i>	✓		✓	✓
<i>Improved outcomes (social and academic)</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Parents feel supported</i>		✓	✓	✓

Implications

These findings have implications not only for the Rangeville School Community but also for other schools, sporting clubs, education systems and funding bodies. The **benefits** for students and their families are clearly in the realm of **social, emotional, and academic 'success'**. Success in improving 'whole child' outcomes. A programme such as this which has been developed through the passionate commitment of a parent and supported by the school community and broader community is the essence of what schools and schooling should be all about. **Barriers** due to language and cultural differences, personality and intellectual differences and social and economic differences have been **broken down** through the implementation of the Active Inclusion Programme.

The **underpinning concepts** on which programme success are founded focus on establishing and then **proactively addressing community and student needs**. It is about **engagement, acceptance of difference and commitment to shared goals** focused on inclusion across a school community and more broadly. The underpinning leverages of financial support, facilitator commitment and engaging the school and broader community could be equally applied to other collaborative community/school projects with a different foci such as the arts, technologies, and sciences.

Funding is essential in maintaining such projects. Initially more funding is required to 'establish' the project but on-going funding is then needed so that a facilitator is able to ensure that the process of referral, community engagement and communication can be maintained over time. With the success of the Active Inclusion Programme it would be advantageous to carry out more research in school/community projects of a similar style. If the findings from this project are replicated across other contexts than there are strong implications that **this sort of school/community partnership should not be isolated** to one or two schools **but a mandated** part of school and perhaps council or sports club funding.

Conclusion

This programme has significant value in many ways. If it were not to continue it would leave a real hole in this school community.

“I would just not be able to get my kids to things.” (P5)

“We would not be able to afford to have all four of our kids involved in karate – we could not just let only one of our kids do it so they would all have to stop.” (P3)

We would like to leave the concluding words of this report to the facilitator as without her passion and commitment this inspirational programme would not have got underway. Liz was, of course, supported by dedicated teachers and a supportive school Principal.

“There are good people everywhere; we just need to connect these families to the positive aspects of our community.” (Liz Laverty)