



Enhancing Social Responsibility and Prosocial Leadership to Prevent Aggression, Peer Victimization, and Emotional Problems in Elementary School Children

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“Linkages from intervention program components to risk or protective factors to desired outcomes across time are rarely specified and tested”



Figure 1 Photo by Cade Martin, Dawn Arlotta, USDCDCP. Public Domain

Use your WITS: Why Should We Bother With “Why”?

We often know that an intervention works, but rarely do we test *why* the intervention works. Leadbeater and colleagues (2016) challenge this gap within community-based research. Prevention concepts can be complex and mutually reinforcing (e.g., self-esteem and positive peer feedback).

Ideally, prevention programs build multiple capacities to improve outcomes. While a necessary and worthy endeavor, these multiple capacities can complicate analysis and leave us knowing that an intervention works but wondering **how** and **why** it works.

Many prevention efforts seek to reduce children's "deficits" or to detect and punish bullying behaviors. Leadbeater and colleagues take a more positive developmental focus by enhancing children's ability to meet expectations of social responsibility clear and by helping all children learn and use their leadership (prosocial) skills. They evaluate the [WITS Program](#) (Walk Away, Ignore, Talk it Out, Seek Help), which provides student, parents, and school administrators a common language to encourage prosocial behavior. Through the program, participants are encouraged to “use your WITS to promote helping and caring and strategies to solve peer conflicts.”

Highlights

We know that early interventions work, but we often don't know why.

We can untangle complicated relationships to improve dissemination and effectiveness.

Interventions can increase social responsibility & prosocial leadership.

When outcomes improve, the intervention is a success and serves as a model for others. Yet we are still left wondering what exactly worked and why. Leadbeater and colleagues argue that there is a need for theoretical research as well as evaluation at each intervention stage before scaling-up successful programs.

Methods

The study sampled student's grades 1-4 (at baseline) in 16 rural Canadian schools in 2011. Longitudinal structural equation modelling (SEM) measured change in five waves over a two-year time period.

Study Results

- Social responsibility and prosocial leadership are closely related.
- Close adherence and integration of WITS in the classroom is associated with children's use of WITS terminology and actions. In other words, the children are responsive to the intervention.
- The children's responsiveness is positively related to their prosocial leadership and social responsibility after an academic year of WITS intervention.
- Greater social responsibility is associated with declines in aggression and victimization.
- Higher prosocial leadership is associated with declines in emotional problems.

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Enhancing protective factors related to child competencies and teacher expectations can make programs more effective.

DATA SNAPSHOT

The impact of increasing protective factors is cumulative; child behavior and teacher expectations are mutually reinforcing.



Figure 2 [Group of Friends Smiling](#). Was a Bee, 2010, (Flickr), via Wikimedia Commons. Used under [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License](#).

What Does This Mean For?

Community Professionals- Boosting protective factors can be useful in outcome-oriented projects.

Community Psychologists- Evaluating intervention outcomes is necessary but not sufficient. Knowing *why* something works can increase the effectiveness of the intervention.

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