

Ase Fagerlund

Strength, Joy and Compassion Enhancing Child Well-Being in Finnish Children

Ase Fagerlund^{1*}, Mari Laakso^{1,2}, Anu-Katriina Pesonen², Johan Eriksson^{1,3}

¹Public Health Research, Folkhälsan Research Center, Helsinki, Finland, *e-mail: ase.fagerlund@folkhalsan.fi

²Department of Psychology and Logopedics, Helsinki University, Helsinki, Finland

³Department of General Practice and Primary Health Care, Helsinki University, Helsinki, Finland

Background

This presentation forms part of a larger intervention study on enhancing child well-being through interventions with children, parents and school staff. Here the focus is on the process of the intervention with children.

An important question when designing an intervention aiming at enhancing well-being regards the requirements for attaining lasting change. Meta-analyses from school studies point to better effects from studies lasting a whole school year compared to shorter studies [1]. Better results may also be attained focusing on a broad spectrum of skills [2]. Accordingly, our aim was to develop a broad intervention targeting children's well-being. As change requires time and effort it would have to be an intervention long enough to enable real change and also engaging for both teachers and students. Finally, a change in well-being is not always easy to delineate. Traditional forms of evaluation like questionnaires can pose a challenge for children in reliably describing changes in inner states like mood over a period of time. We thus included a broader than usual set of measures to evaluate the intervention.

Population

10-12 year old middle-school students from southern and western Finland (N=154). All participating schools were randomized into intervention or control classes.

Measurements

- Questionnaires on a broad spectrum of well-being.
- Experience sampling through an app for 6 days, where students rated their mood, flow and coping experiences in real time.
- Physiological measures on heart rate variability (24 hrs). All children received a personal report on stress and recovery.
- Salivary samples of stress hormones (cortisol).

- Focus groups after every intervention theme (n=5).

Intervention

In the intervention schools, the students participated in a well-being class once a week for the whole school year (36 x 45 min). In the control classes students followed the normal curriculum.

The intervention was divided into five different well-being themes:

- A positive me – Working with strengths in me and others
- Positive emotions – Savoring and increasing positive emotions towards self and others
- Positive relationships – Active constructive responding, filling buckets and solving conflicts assertively
- Hope and engagement – Mindset, goals, strategies and problemsolving
- Resilience – Bouncing back from setbacks and learning to better handle adversity

Outcomes

All data is gathered and analyses are under way. Feedback from students (focus groups), parents and staff are overwhelmingly positive. Initial data analyses show positive trends in the results.

Ase Fagerlund, PhD, specialist in child neuropsychology, psychotherapist (CBT) and mindfulness trainer. Ase has a background both in clinical and research work. She has worked with enhancing child well-being first as a school psychologist and clinical neuropsychologist, later with research on disadvantaged children. Ase is now a senior researcher at the Folkhälsan

Research Institute in Helsinki, Finland, leading the intervention project Strength, Joy and Compassion to enhance child well-being.

References

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