

Using social and emotional education (MYTERN) to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students.

ACTION RESEARCH

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Definition of Terms:

Middle School: In the Australian context, Middle School refers to a section of the school containing students from Year 5 to Year 9 (age 10-15) (NSW Department of Education, 2010).

SEL: Social and emotional learning (CASEL, 2017).

MYTERN: Take emotional responsibility now (Foster, 2016).

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DECLARATION

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Signature of student:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Barry". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Abstract:

This action research report focuses on an emotional intelligence program entitled “MYTERN” that was developed and taught by Dr. Jane foster. The purpose of this program was to teach social and emotional competencies to Year 8 students to influence their emotional intelligence. This program had an experiential orientation: participation by students and the educator who incorporated emotional intelligence knowledge and pedagogy into a Christian Education classroom. Action research was conducted to determine the degree to which the program achieved its purpose and “as a means of professional development and a useful approach for generating actionable knowledge pertinent to a field of activity and changing the educational setting for the better” (Friedman, Razer, & Skyes, 2004 in Moghaddam, 2007, p.228). In particular, this study was interested in how the MYTERN program can be used to influence the four key areas of emotional intelligence as outlined by Goleman (1996): self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and relationship-management. (Mills, 2000)

This Action Research trialed various approaches within a Christian Education class in order to uncover the impact to the teaching and learning environment. This study adopted a qualitative approach and collected data through student observations and field notes, classroom discussion and through using a MYTERN pre and post self-evaluation survey. By utilising a qualitative approach this study acknowledged that meaning and understanding are socially constructed, and can be influenced by context and perspective (Creswell, 2014). Due to the time limitations of the study it would operate as a single site study, utilising one Year 8 class, which would limit the application of results to the selected sites’ context. Conclusions that were drawn from this study would inform the researcher’s professional practice.

1 Research Question:

Employing the ability to perceive, control, express and evaluate emotions is critical to a holistic, 21st Century Education. In his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman (1996) suggested that EQ (or emotional intelligence quotient) is more important than IQ and the ability to understand and express emotions plays a pivotal role in how people fare in life.

Goleman (2008) asserts that emotional intelligence is variable, flexible and can be learned and developed. My research question is: How do I use social and emotional education (MYTERN) to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students?

The research was conducted at an independent Christian P-9 school in regional Victoria in a small country town with a population of 11,700 (Live In Victoria, 2016). A Year 8 class was observed, ranging in ages from 13-14. Seven lessons from the MYTERN program were implemented as part of the Christian Education Program.

2 Introduction:

Evidence is building to support the infusion of social and emotional skill development in the Middle School classrooms. Chung and McBride (2015) assert the transition from childhood to adolescence can be a tumultuous time as students encounter the stress and confusion of puberty, social networks and increasing expectations.

With research indicating a growing need to include social and emotional learning in the curriculum, schools are in an excellent position to become more involved in the promotion of wellbeing. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has captured international attention as evidenced by several large-scale and high profile programs being implemented in Australia (see www.kidsmatter.edu.au), the USA (see www.casel.org) and several European nations. Adolescents in Year 8 are at a crucial developmental stage during which the acquisition of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills could be particularly beneficial and supportive to their ability to lead healthy lives. With the idea that emotional intelligence can be learned and developed, it could play a valuable role in helping adolescent children navigate their way through what can be a stressful time for youth. Some research has indicated that “school-based prevention programming- based on coordinated social, emotional and academic learning- should be fundamental to K-12 education” (Greenberg, et al., 2003). Additionally, growing bodies of empirical evidence suggest “social and emotional competencies, such as self-regulation, responsible decision making and goal-setting can enhance education efforts aimed at addressing academic abilities” (Chung, 2015, p.192). Though evidence is

supporting the integration of social and emotional skill development in the classroom (Bierman et al., 2010; Harlacher & Merrell, 2010; Kimer, Sandellm & Bremberg, 2008; McKnown, Gumbiner, Russo, & Lipton, 2009; Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004 in Chung, 2015, p.192), little has been written about the implementation of social and emotional programs for Middle School students. Furthermore, Bird & Markle (2012 in Chung, 2015, pg. 192) suggest that current research studies fail to address the practical ways to implement these strategies in an everyday school setting.

“Teaching and learning in schools have strong social, emotional, and academic components” (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004 in Durlak, et al., 2011). Middle School students need to be adequately equipped to make good decisions, understand their emotions and become responsible for their choices as the “perceived lack of individual personal responsibility is credited with a growing number of society’s ills” (Mergler and Patton, 2007, p.57). In the adolescent period, students seek to discover their sense of self in the world, who they are, who they want to be and it is largely important that they are given the skills to be able to successfully navigate their emotions. Elias (1997 in Durlak et al., 2011) affirms that emotions and relationships effect what we learn in school, so schools and families must make a concerted effort to address these aspects of the educational process to benefit all students.

This study examined the relationship between a social-emotional learning program (MYTERN) and the four dimensions of emotional intelligence as outlined by Goleman (1998); Self –Awareness, Self-Management, Social- Awareness and Relationship- Management. The problem addressed in the study was the lack of research focused on the development of emotional intelligence at a Middle School level.

2.1 A note on MYTERN

Dr. Jane Foster birthed the concept of MYTERN after having observed the increasing prevalence of mental health problems over her 30 year teaching career. This in effect fired a passion within her to equip not only students, but all members of society with proactive strategies to help manage their own day to day stressors.

Dr. Jane Foster created and subsequently refined a strategy (MYTERN) that teaches individuals how to become responsible for their responses to people and circumstance; taking control of their own emotional state. Based on neuroscience, and through adopting a salutogenic perspective, the aim of the strategy was not to seek ways to eliminate stress from the individuals’ lives, but to help strengthen and create health whilst still being under everyday stress (Foster, 2016).

The school in the study decided to adopt the program because the Principal was concerned with the increasing number of students presenting with anxiety and mental health issues. To all staff the principal stated:

“I wanted to see the community have a common approach (language) to follow and to support our student’s (but also parents and staff) to take responsibility for the way they react to challenges that occur in their lives. The practical, easy to follow metaphor of the road was something I felt everyone could identify with in some way. After meeting with Dr. Jane Foster the creator, hearing about the background to MYTERN and seeing the way that it connected with our Christian ethos, I was convinced it was a good fit for us”.

The MYTERN program has been adopted as the school health and well-being program at Christian College. It is a proactive and preventative intervention program designed to create emotional fitness, increasing the resilience and well-being of secondary students (Foster, 2016, P.3) MYTERN adopts a salutogenic perspective and is based on a simple skill that is practiced and reinforced daily “via the everyday use of a school-wide common language and daily MYTERN message delivered via the App” (Foster, 2016, p.3). For the purposes of this research, the MYTERN secondary school’s manual was used to teach the seven lessons outlined to a group of 21 Year 8 students. This program was embedded into the Year 8 Christian Education program, so there was no disruption to the curriculum. These lessons were designed specifically to reinforce the skills embedded in the MYTERN program and based around the metaphor that “you are the driver, only you have control of the steering wheel, all the roads that you drive down represent your thoughts and emotions and you are in charge of your own steering wheel” (Foster, 2016, p.3) The MYTERN program advocates that we are in control of all our emotions and that all of our feelings and emotions are our own choice and responsibility. Reeves (2004, in Mergler et al., 2007, pg. 58) asserts that society is beginning to wonder why people seem reluctant to take responsibility for their actions and highlighted a need to recapture and interweave a personally responsible agenda into society.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational reformer John Dewey asserted that failing to address and make sure of the social nature of schools leads to a failure in education as schools are fundamentally social places (Dewey, 1964). Shaw (2009) suggests that the inclusion of social and emotional learning is crucial to meet the needs of the 21st century students.

This literature review encompassed several different yet related topics. For the research component, the researcher looked at how they can use the program MYTERN to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students. Relevant literature was reviewed and included experiential education, social and emotional learning programs in Middle Schools and the Personal and Social Capability as outlined in the Australian Curriculum.

This Literature review begins with defining social and emotional learning, often referred to as SEL programs and emotional intelligence which provides a starting point for this chapter.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs can be defined as being programs that are specifically designed to increase the understanding, knowledge and skills in the areas of self-awareness, interpersonal effectiveness, emotional management, adaptability and stress management (Brown, 2013, p. 10).

There have been three major models and theories of emotional intelligence that have emerged over the past two decades (Bar-On, 1997 in Brown 2013; Goleman, 1999 and Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Whilst each definition differs slightly, Brown (2013, p.14) asserts “emotional intelligence can be globally described as a set of abilities and behaviors which an individual uses to understand and manage his/her own feelings and emotions as well as understand and manage the feelings and emotions of others”.

The domain of social and emotional learning (SEL) is not new, despite changes of definitions and understanding over the past century. Since then, many researchers and educators including Gardner (1989), Mayer & Salovey (1997) and Goleman (1996, 2008), have researched emotional intelligence, each contributing to current understandings of this area. However, this study has chosen to base its research from Goleman’s (1996) model of emotional intelligence and competencies as his work has been particularly significant to educational discourse and social intelligence. Furthermore, Goleman, along with others founded the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and has been regarded as the world’s leading organisation in the area of personal and social learning. Their framework is used in social curriculum in Australia in programs such as KidsMatter, MindMatters and Response Ability.

Table 1 outlines Goleman's 1998 model of emotional competencies.

Table 1:

Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Competencies

Self- Awareness	Emotional Self-awareness
	Accurate Self-Assessment
	Self-Confidence
Self-Management	Emotional Self-Control
	Transparency (Trustworthiness)
	Adaptability
	Achievement Orientation
	Initiative
	Optimism
	Social Awareness
Organisational Awareness	
Service Orientation	
Relationship Management	Conflict Management
	Building Bonds
	Teamwork and Collaboration
	Leadership
	Influence
	Change catalyst

3.1 Social and Emotional Learning

Research has indicated that there is a growing need to include social and emotional learning in schools alongside of academics to improve the emotional intelligence and character education of students (Elias, 2013, Shields, 2011 & Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Adolescents in Year 8 are at a crucial developmental stage during which the acquisition of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills could be particularly beneficial and supportive to their ability to lead healthy lives. Adolescence is a time, perhaps more so than any other time, where young people are creating their identity and making assessments about who they want to be and how they will act in the world (Mergler, 2007, p.57). If schools are responsible for preparing students to lead successful lives; schools are required to teach interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to students in addition to academia (Goleman, 2008; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). The movement towards social and emotional learning has led to many models being developed and used in schools and organisations to develop student character (Elias, 2013). According to Brown (2013, p.10), Social and Emotional Learning Programs (SEL) are “organised programs that are specifically designed to increase the understanding, knowledge and skills in the areas of self-awareness, interpersonal effectiveness, emotional management, adaptability and stress management”. Schools can implement SEL through free standing lessons on social and emotional topics and skills or by infusing SEL through all curriculum areas, which is preferential in a Middle School environment, as students are constantly moving from class to class.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2003 in Ashdown & Bernard, 2011, p.397) have revealed five competencies that are essential for young people’s well-being: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills and social awareness. Self-awareness refers to the ability to understand the relationship between thoughts and emotions as well as being able to accurately assess ones’ own emotions. Regulating your emotions and behaviours are an important component of self-management. Being able to understand emotions and others perspectives is crucial to social-awareness. Relationship-management refers to the ability to interact and work with people, resolve conflict and build connections with others. Responsible decision making refers to understanding the relationship between choices and consequences.

Hacker (in Mergler and Patton 2007, pg. 58) contends that active choosing and accepting responsibility for one’s choices are behaviours that must develop in adolescents, as adolescents are cognitively capable of more sophisticated reasoning. As schools recognise the need to incorporate SEL into their curriculum, educators can make greater inroads into teaching those important skills that contribute to a successful and more holistic education.

3.2 Adolescent Neurological Development

Steinberg (2011, p.42) contends that “other than the first three years of life, no period is characterised by more brain changes than adolescence”. Advancements in technology have allowed neuroscientists to establish that the human brain has reached its full size by the age of 10, however, different areas of the brain continue to develop throughout adolescence and into early adulthood (Steinberg, 2011, p.43). This is particularly true of the prefrontal cortex, located directly behind the forehead and is responsible for rational and sophisticated thinking that allows humans to regulate emotions, plan, and problem solve, reflect and communicate (Steinberg, 2011, p.45). It is important that adolescents are afforded the opportunity to practice things like anticipating the consequences of their actions and regulating their own behavior as this “may stimulate the maturation of brain systems and enable more mature self-regulation” (Steinberg, 2011, p.46). These elements are all critical to learning.

In contrast to the brain's frontal lobes, the limbic system, otherwise known as the emotional center, is believed to be fully mature by the age of 12 (Steinberg, 2011). Scientists now know that during early adolescence more so than any other period of time, the reward center of the brain is heightened by huge squirts of the chemical dopamine, which results in the feeling of elated pleasure (Steinberg, 2011). This feel good chemical may encourage risky behaviours in early adolescence as they reach towards experiences that stimulate the dopamine high. Furthermore, the pathways that connect the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system are not strong in adolescence and thus, teenagers can find it difficult to use good decision making skills that influence good thinking skills and good behaviours. This evidences the need for Middle Schools to educate students on how emotions influence their thinking and behaviour. By doing so, this will have helped to deepen the neurological pathways between the prefrontal cortex and limbic system; allowing adolescents the opportunity to practice good decision making skills.

3.3 Emotion and Cognition

Parker (2004) asserts that cognitive abilities are an important predictor of success in pre-university education. Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) maintain that as neuroscience progresses, there is increased evidence of the relationship between emotion and cognition. Furthermore, neurological evidence proposes that “the aspects of cognition that we recruit most heavily in schools, namely learning, attention, memory, decision making, and social functioning, are both profoundly affected by and subsumed within the process of emotion” (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007, p.3). Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) further highlight that whilst one can obtain knowledge cognitively, it is through emotion that the knowledge is transferred to real life scenarios. From the

evidence we can conclude that emotions and thoughts are entwined and have influence over one another. If we want to produce students that are emotionally intelligent, our education system cannot continue to separate emotion and cognition as this hinders student's ability to apply knowledge outside of the classroom. Of great importance to educators is their work to prepare students who can successfully navigate their own emotions and thought patterns to make choices that will allow them to be skilled, informed and ethical global citizens.

3.4 Experiential Education

Experiential education is a philosophy of education that underpins education as an experience. Some of the central voices that have articulated the philosophy of experiential education include John Dewey, Maria Montessori and Kurt Hahn. Whilst it is difficult to get one consistent definition of Experiential Education, the Association for Experiential Education (1994, p.1 in Itin, 1999, p.91) states "experiential education is a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill and value from direct experience followed by reflection, leading, learning and growth". This definition is imperative to experiential education as it involves the need for direct experience, reflection and growth.

3.5 Theorists of Experiential Education

There are many theorists who have contributed to the philosophy of experiential education, however, this study reviewed the theories that related inherently to social and emotional learning and the school environment. This study reviewed educational theories that underpinned the importance of social and emotional education and support the education of socially responsible global citizens. For this reason, the work of John Dewey, Kurt Hahn and Maria Montessori were examined.

3.6 John Dewey

John Dewey (1859-1952) was an innovative thinker and educator whose ideas and philosophies have lasted far beyond his time. His view of education emphasizes the need to learn by doing and that students learn best through a hands on approach (Dewey, 1964). Dewey advocated for students constructing their own paths for learning through interacting with their environment by exposing them to both primary and secondary experiences. Primary experiences are essentially sensory interactions with the world that can be direct and even messy that ultimately build knowledge. Secondary experiences involve reflecting upon the primary experience and making connections. Dewey believed that true learning occurs by applying the sensory knowledge gathered in the primary experience to reflecting in the secondary experience. The process of reflecting is key to the

philosophy of experiential education. If schools could afford their students the opportunity to experience both primary and secondary learning experiences, schools could move away from fact teacher based, rote learning styles and towards an interdisciplinary approach of collaboration and critical thinking (Shaw, 2009). These components contribute to the development of 21st century skills that are critical to education today.

3.7 Kurt Hahn (1886-1974)

If Dewey's ideologies represent the progressive education movement in the United States, then Kurt Hahn's work represent education ideology in the United Kingdom. Kraft (1986, p.15, in Itin, 1999, p.92) states "no discussion of the theory of experiential education would be complete without some recognition been given to Kurt Hahn, the founder of the Outward Bound Movement". In the creation of these programs, Kahn drew inspiration from the great thinkers Dewey and Plato (citizen development, service to the community). Hahn was deeply influenced by Plato's thoughts and viewed concern and compassion for others, the act of taking responsibility for one's actions and the pursuit of truth as a major aspect of his programs (Itin, 1999). Kahn went on to establish some of the most successful experientially based schools in the world, namely the Outward Bound schools, Salem schools, Gordonstound schools and the United World colleges (Van Oord, 2010). Hahn put the emotional aspect of schooling at the center of his educational philosophy and deeply believed that helping and saving others enabled a release of emotions that can help to change opinions, habits and prejudices (Hahn, 1965). Furthermore, Kahn added "the passion for saving unleashes dynamics of the human soul which are much more powerful than war" (Hahn, 1962 in Itin, 1999, p.93).

In contrast to other experiential advocates such as Montessori, Dewey and Piaget, Hahn was not concerned about the growth of children from kindergarten to primary school. However, along with Prince Max von Badden (1867-1929), whom he established a relationship with during World War 1, was deeply concerned with the moral development of German adolescents and their diminishing ethical responsibility and felt that "youths should get to know their strengths and discover their grand passion" (Knoll, 2011, p. 151). Kahn established that there were six different factors of social decline and deterioration in modern youth. These were; fitness, initiative and enterprise, memory and imagination, skill and care, self-discipline and compassion (Knoll, 2011). Although these declines were identified for youth a century ago, modern research would suggest these issues exist for adolescents today. Recently, a study conducted by Kelley, Kelley and Pate (2015) reported the prevalence of obesity in children ages 2-19 in the USA, defined by their body mass index (BMI) was at 31.8%. Ogden (in Kelley, et al., 2015) reported that worldwide, the prevalence of obese and overweight adolescents in 2013 was at 23%. To combat the issue, exercise has been suggested for

the prevention and treatment of overweight and obese children aged 13-18 (Kelley, et al., 2015). It is evident that Hahn's educational ideologies are still relevant to modern education. As an antidote to the six declines of modern youth, Hahn created an educational program that was heavily rooted in experiential learning. The educational program comprised of four major components that revolved around social and practical activities; fitness training, expeditions (journey's, walks, adventures), project work (cognitive component) and service to the community (with the commitment and belief that 'you are needed') (James, 1990). All components of the program overlap and intensify each other to deliberately create a strong experiential learning experience. With the financial support of Prince Max, Hahn could use these principles to establish the first Salem school in 1920 (James, 1990).

As the principal of the school of Salem, Hahn established seven laws to govern the school based on the six declines of modern youth and the four antidotes to this problem that he identified. Hahn created *The Seven Laws of Salem* (listed below) which were an intrinsic part of the Salem school culture, however, they were also fundamentally important to all the other schools he went on to establish.

- 1: Students should be afforded the opportunity of self-discovery.
- 2: Make children meet with triumph and defeat.
- 3: Give the children the opportunity for self-effacement in the common cause.
- 4: Provide periods of silence (Hahn's version of self-reflection).
- 5: Train the imagination.
- 6: Make games important but not predominant.
- 7: Free the sons of the wealthy and powerful from the enervating sense of privilege (Van Oord, 2010, p. 259).

Hahn had a major influence on experiential education. The invention of the experiential therapy and of the social services is Hahn's contribution to educational theory. Hahn concluded that education should not be authoritarian, nor should it be laissez fair, but rather advocated, "give the children the possibility to discover themselves...assign them tasks which are important enough, let them experience triumph and defeat...provide periods of silence...train the imagination" (Hahn, 1930, p.151 in Knoll, 2011). In his schools, arrogance and lack of commitment were strongly condemned, whereas virtues of justice, solidarity and the courage to stand up for one's beliefs were held in high esteem (James, 1990). Furthermore, Hahn believed that "education is not merely the transmission of

facts but the education of the entire person for participation in a democratic society (Hahn, 1957 in Itin, 1999, p.92).

3.8 Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori's (1870-1952) ideas of education were ahead of her time and central to fundamental philosophy of experiential education. She sensed that children learn and grow from the inside out naturally, and that children should be afforded the opportunity to learn of their own accord, naturally (Hainstock, 1997, p. 20). This supports the emotional components of self-reliance and self-management. Central to the experiential education philosophy is Montessori's idea that learning is an active process by where the student learns through interacting with their environment and gains knowledge and meaning through those interactions. Montessori reasons that children have an inner knowing that prompts them to have certain experiences at certain times and that they naturally work with enthusiasm (Hainstock, 1997). Her approach does not abandon the role of the teacher all together but advocates that teachers must find activities that are intrinsically meaningful to the students and allow the student to learn on their own, perhaps through play (Hainstock, 1997). The Montessori Method ultimately allows learners to be active participants in their own education, encouraging creative and critical thinking.

Various studies have proved the effectiveness of the Montessori Method in academic and social contexts in preparing students for later success. In their study, Lillard and Else-Quest (2006, in Kayili and Ari, 2011) compared the academic and social skills of students educated in the Montessori Method and traditional method. The study revealed that the students that were educated in the Montessori Method exhibited better social skills (Kayili and Ari, 2011). Additionally, Kocyigit (in Kayili and Ali, 2011, p.2018) found that whilst academically children were on an even playing field, students who were educated in the Montessori Method scored higher in their social skills scores compared to those that were in the control group. Experiential education relates directly to the Montessori Method, particularly in relation to her view that true learning comes from within the students experience and is a process of discovering and reflecting (Montessori, 1967). The Montessori Method encourages students to develop their potential as human beings by being independent learners, creative and critical thinkers as well as socially and morally responsible global citizens.

3.9 Why experiential education important to this thesis

Firstly, experiential education is important to this project because of its innate link to social and emotional learning. Dewey maintained that schools should be a social hub for students, a form of

community where students are “encouraged to be self-reflective and directed towards instilling reflectivity, inquiry and a capacity for moral judiciousness” (Dewey, 1964 in Lovat & Toomey, 2007, p.6). Dewey maintains that students do not learn from experience, but from the reflection of the experience, which is central to the experiential education philosophy. Furthermore, he believes that education should take a hands on approach as he states “give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; learning naturally results” (Dewey, 1964, p. 87). Dewey advocates that education is a social process, so if schools embrace the social aspects of education by instilling ways of learning that encourage social and emotional learning, it will ultimately be producing students that are successful, independent and can think critically.

3.9.1 Social and Emotional Learning Programs from Kindergarten to Year 12

The findings of a study by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymniki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011, p.405) incorporating 270, 034 kindergarten through to high schools students on social and emotional learning programs were compelling. Researchers completed a meta-analysis of 213 schools and found that, when compared to a control group, students who had experienced a social-emotional learning intervention were academically stronger, showed fewer disciplinary problems, displayed lower levels of stress, higher levels of socio-emotional skills and attitudes, and exhibited positive social behaviours.

Further to this, in 2007 the United Kingdom launched a social and emotional learning program entitled the Secondary SEAL program. The Secondary SEAL program followed on from the primary Seal program and encouraged the social and emotional learning and well-being of all secondary students (Wigelsworth, Humphrey & Lendrum, 2012, p.214). A study conducted by Wigelsworth et al (2012) explored the impact of social and emotional aspects of learning in secondary students and in contrast found that the “secondary SEAL programme failed to impact significantly on the social and emotional skills, mental health difficulties and pro-social behaviour of pupils”. The aim of the study was to examine the impact of the SEAL program to positively influence a range of pupil outcomes, including increased social and emotional skills, better behaviour and reduced mental health difficulties. The study utilised a quantitative, quasi-experimental design with a sample size of 22 schools incorporating 2,360 students. A cohort of pupils completed annual self rated assessments of their social and emotional skills (using the Emotional Literacy Assessment and Intervention instrument) and completed a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire to evaluate their mental health difficulties and pro-social behaviour over a two year period (Wigelsworth, et al., 2012, p.213).

The authors acknowledge that their findings report a far more modest result than previous literature out of England and internationally and emphasise “the null findings reported in this evaluation should not be taken as an indication that the promotion of social and emotional skills is not an important or worthwhile endeavour for schools” (Wigelsworth, et al., 2012, p.235).

Wigelsworth et al., (2012, p. 217) exposes a gap in the literature, explaining there is very little evidence of social and emotional learning programs stemming from secondary education and felt it is very important that more studies are conducted in this setting, given the large differences between primary and secondary schools (e.g. the physical size of the school and number of pupils attending), the stronger emphasis on ability and competition with classmates (Schumaker, 1998 in Wigelsworth et al., 2012, p.217) and a “reduction in the quality of relationships formed with teachers” (Wells, 1996, in Wigelsworth et al., 2012, p.217). Finally, the majority of the published literature in this field of social and emotional learning programs for Middle School students comes from USA by Durlak and colleagues (2011, in Wigelsworth et al., 2012, p.218).

Social Emotional Learning Programs with Middle School Students

A study by Freedman and Jensen (2007, p.69) using the program Self-Science by the non-profit organisation Six Seconds, evidences a curriculum to increase emotional intelligence in youth. The Self-Science program teaches specific skills related to the emotional intelligences of self-awareness, self-management and self direction (Freedman & Jensen, 2007). This program is said to be skills based and includes recognising patterns of behaviour, becoming more aware of multiple feelings, accepting responsibility, and using optimistic thinking. The Self Science curriculum is structured around these three assumptions (Pert, 1997 in Freedman and Jensen, 2007, p.70):

- 1) There is no thinking without feeling- and no feeling without thinking.
- 2) The more conscious you are of experiencing, the greater the potential for self-knowledge.
- 3) The more self-knowledge you gain, the more likely it is that you can respond positively to yourself and others.

The program was run for one school year and included daily records to be completed by the teacher. It included 311 students in thirteen Year 7 classrooms and found that the emotional intelligence curriculum was a powerful process for increasing student focus, improving teacher/student relationships, improving student learning, enhancing collaborative work, increasing positive verbal statements as well as decreasing negative verbal messages amongst students. The program sought

primarily to produce four outcomes; (a) recognise, understand, communicate and manage feelings; (b) recognise and redirect patterns of behavior; (c) set goals and move toward them; and (d) increase respectful communication, thinking and behaviours. Reuven Bar-On (in Freedman and Jensen, 2003) reviewed the test data and found that the areas that were most improved from this intervention were self-awareness, self-expression, adaptability to change and social problem-solving. However, scores did not improve on the emotional management and control scale as well as the social awareness and relationship scale. From this study, you can draw on the positive effects that social and emotional learning programs have on middle school students, clearly giving them social awareness and relationship skills that they can implement in their daily lives.

In her dissertation, Brown (2013) researched the relationships between the social-emotional learning program IMPACT and Bar-On's five dimensions of emotional intelligence model. The study included participants from 28 middle schools from a southeastern state in the USA. They participated in a 36 hour social and emotional learning program that was facilitated by a public university. The research utilised quantitative methods such as pre and post tests, using the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version (EQ-i:YV).

The findings of Brown's (2013) study revealed that the IMPACT program significantly increased participant's emotional intelligence in four areas: interpersonal, stress management, adaptability and general mood. The study also provided evidence of the effectiveness of a social and emotional learning program that is delivered over a condensed period. Brown (2013, p.76) outlined that this has very practical and positive implications for school administrators, particularly in the Middle School, as scheduling additional electives while delivering required coursework can be impossible. Brown contends in her study that condensed programs can effectively increase emotional intelligence in middle school students and that a condensed delivery approach may also provide financial savings to schools and could possibly be delivered in after school programs or in community programs. Brown recommends further research to be undertaken in this field, as there is little research that focuses on the effectiveness of social emotional learning programs with middle school students. This research project aims to explore how the educator can use the social and emotional program MYTERN to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students. This literature review evidences the need to incorporate social and emotional learning into the middle school curriculum so that students can gain an understanding of themselves, learn to manage their emotions, become socially aware and develop relationship management strategies. The incorporation of social and emotional learning is invaluable to an adolescent student as they begin to transfer into adulthood.

3.9.3 General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum incorporates seven capabilities that evidence a range of skills and attributes that are identified as being critical for young Australians to develop as they prepare to enter an increasingly globalized world. The capabilities reflect the goals set out in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008). These goals state that all young people in Australia should be supported to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. The seven capabilities, as recognised by the Australian Curriculum are: Literacy, Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding (Australiancurriculum.edu.au, 2017). The capability that was explored in this research is the Personal and Social Capability which enables students to form and maintain healthy relationships and prepares them for their potential roles in the community (Australiancurriculum.edu.au, 2017).

The Australian Curriculum acknowledges that the personal and social capability is a crucial foundation for learning and for citizenship. This capability is organised into four interrelated elements including: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and social-management (Australiancurriculum.edu.au, 2017). The Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians (Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008) recognises that the personal and social capability helps students to become successful learners, supporting a sense of self-worth, self-awareness, and personal identity that allows them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing, with a level of hope and optimism. As students learn to identify their own emotions, values and strengths, they are more able to manage their emotions and behaviours and understand those of others. Consequently, this allows students to establish and maintain positive relationships.

The personal and social capability skills in the Australian Curriculum are addressed in all learning areas where there are opportunities to add depth and richness to student learning, with skills being explicitly taught in subjects such as Health and Physical Education. This capability is richly informed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as the Australian Curriculum identifies it to be the world's leading organisation in advancing understandings in the area of personal and social learning (Australiancurriculum.edu.au, 2017). Additionally, this capability was also enriched by the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (Education.gov.au, 2017), and the consequent Values education initiatives in all areas of Australian schooling.

As evidenced in the Australian Curriculum under the personal and social capability, social and emotional learning is crucial to constructing a holistic education that produces successful members of the community. Furthermore, the Australian Curriculum employs a learning continuum that outlines goals under the four umbrellas of self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and social-management that students should be achieving by the end of Year 8 (Level 5). This further validates the need for developing emotional intelligence in Year 8 students as the Australian Curriculum recommends that these skills will assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose for this study was to understand how the social and emotional program MYTERN can influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students, a qualitative approach was adopted. The purpose of qualitative methodology is to produce findings arrived at from real world settings where the “phenomenon of interest unfold naturally” (Patton in Golafshani, 2003, p.600). Furthermore, qualitative researchers seek to add the participant voice to their research and to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena under examination (Patton, 2002). Qualitative researchers take the view that to truly understand the participant view, a method that goes beyond survey research is needed. This qualitative study is ethnographic in nature as the intent is to provide a detailed in depth description of an everyday experience in the classroom.

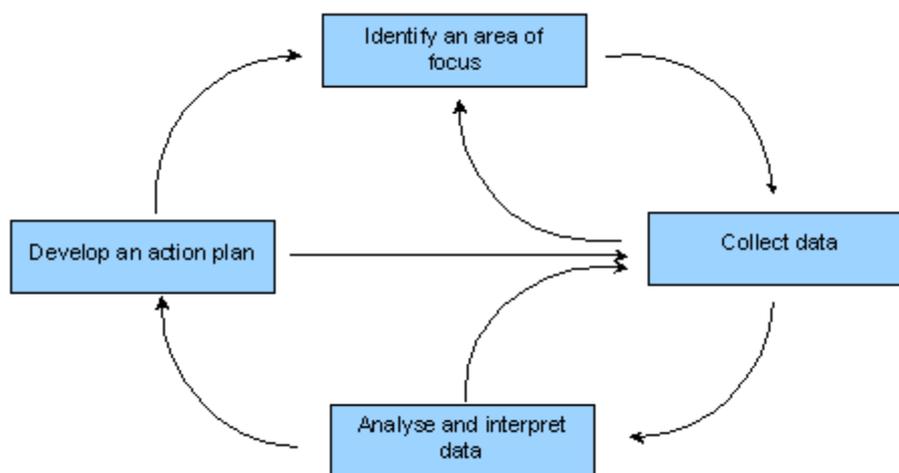
Action research was chosen as the approach to this study as it sought to inform the researcher and improve professional practise. Action research is the term which describes the integration of action (implementing a plan) with research. Brassey (1999 in Briggs, Coleman & Morrison, 2002, p.8) describes educational research as the “critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgement and decisions to improve educational action”. This is the kind of research that should have immediate relevance to teachers and is a method that teachers use “to improve both their practice and their students’ learning outcomes” (NSW Department of Education, 2010). Action research is particularly attractive to educators as they constantly seek to evaluate and improve their practice by reflecting “Do I need to improve anything? If so, what? How do I improve it? Why should I improve it?” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p.7) The aim for action researchers is to “generate living theories about how their learning has improved practice and is informing new practices for themselves and others” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011, p.15). There are two main categories of action research; practical action research and participatory action research. The purpose of participatory action research is to focus on life enhancing changes in communities, organisations and individual lives (Mills, 2000). Practical action research was undertaken for this project as the aim of practical action research is for an individual to focus narrowly on a certain issue in regards to teacher development or student learning (Mills, 2000).

Mills’ (as cited in Cresswell, 2014, pp.612) *dialectic action research spiral* was utilised to fulfill the purposes of this practical action research. This four step model begins with identifying an area of focus where a reconnaissance was completed (gaining insight through self-reflection and activities) (Mills, 2000), reviewing the literature, and writing an action plan. The next step was to collect data, using tools that directly relate to the inquiry, such as completing a pre and post self-assessment survey, student observation and field notes from informal conversations held throughout classroom

lessons. During this step, it was of great importance to address areas of ethics, reliability and validity. The third step involved analysing and interpreting the data by identifying themes, displaying findings, asking good questions and examining consequences. In this step, it was important to analyse the findings and communicate them through informal and formal measures which can lead to further analysis and understanding. The final step in the *dialectic action research spiral* was to take action by deciding what steps need to be taken and how to take them in order to alter and improve practice. This action researched included a time line for data collection, a summary of findings and recommendations for future learning. This method ran in a ‘spiral’ because educational researchers go back and forth between the four steps as illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1:

Mills’ Dialectic Action Research Spiral



4.1 Data Collection:

Student Observations, Anecdotal Records and Field Notes: The primary method of data collection incorporated written observations and field notes, focusing on the words, or terms being used to relate to the SEL concept (MYTERN key terms and language), engagement in the topic and particular task, peer interactions and involvement in classroom discussions. Methods like student observations are dominant in the naturalist (interpretive) paradigm (Golafshani, 2003). Observing various student behaviours and interactions and recording the student’s thoughts and opinions about the content of the MYTERN program allowed the researcher to explore different patterns and themes that occurred within the seven lessons that were taught over the month long data collection period. This helped the researcher to assess the levels of student engagement throughout the various learning activities, such as Role Play and Classroom Circle discussions. The lessons were video recorded so that the

researcher could assess student engagement and reflect upon which teaching strategies were most effective. By reviewing the video footage, the researcher could identify effective teaching strategies that engaged students and improved student learning. Adhering to ethical considerations was an important factor in this research project and the researcher sought to abide by Christian College's Student Photography Policy (2017). The policy enables staff to take video recordings and photographs of students for teacher portfolios and allows parents to opt out of such undertakings if they so desired. The researcher carefully checked the list of students who are not allowed to be filmed and cross checked it to make sure that there was no one in the class on the list that was being filmed. At Christian College, staff occasionally video record their lessons for several different purposes and is a common practice at the school.

MYTERN Self -Assessment Survey: The Year 8 students completed a self- assessment survey that was developed prior to the MYTERN lessons being implemented that can be found in Appendix A. This allowed for students to gauge where their knowledge and skill base was in relation to the terms and concepts used in the MYTERN program. Through the self-assessment survey, the students rated themselves out of 10 prior to the commencement of the program and then gave themselves a rating out of 10 after the final lesson of MYTERN. They were asked to rate themselves on the various concepts of the MYTERN program. This self- assessment scale was a tool that was used to ascertain the effectiveness of the MYTERN program and reflect upon whether it allowed them to develop the skills of MYTERN program effectively and embed the program into their everyday lives. This allowed the researcher to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the MYTERN program so that the researcher can improve future learning outcomes for students by being informed of effective teaching practices that worked.

Informal Conversations: Informal conversations took place with students as part of the seven MYTERN lessons that took place. They were a great way to delve deep into the minds of my students and provided me with the qualitative data that reflected on the student's feelings and experiences of the MYTERN program.

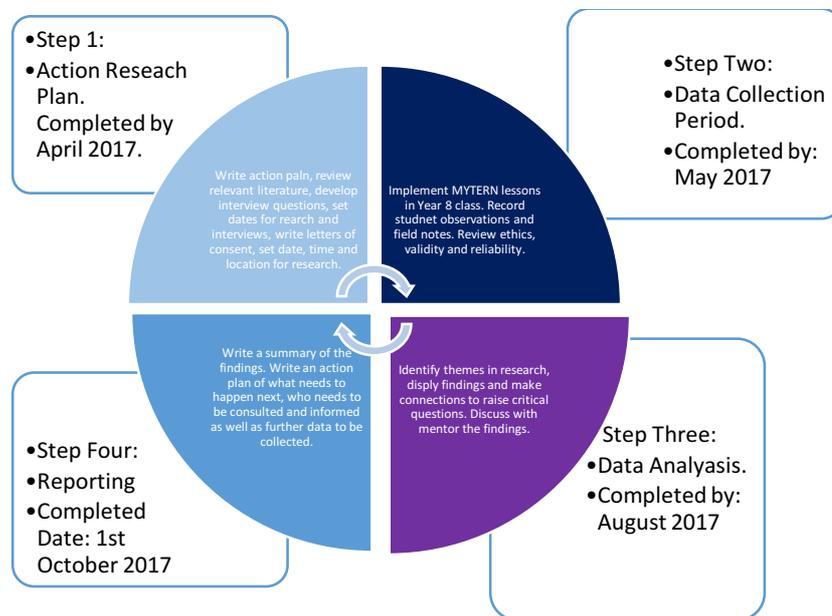
Discussion: Discussion was used to introduce a SEL concept and occurred in pairs, small groups, in circles and as a whole class. Discussion was invaluable to provoke thought about a new concept, pose questions, problem solve and have students talk about how a SEL theme related to them personally and to the life of others. *Didactic Instruction* was also used to provide specific instruction outside of an open discussion, provide definitions and to impart specific information. With the nature of qualitative research, it was important to remain fluid and adaptable. The major strength of observing my Year 8 class was that "the use of group interaction [produces] data that would not be

as easy to access without group interaction” and “one can observe a great deal of interaction in a given time period on a particular topic” (Janesick, 2004, p. 81).

This study aimed at identifying and implementing research based practices from the MYTERN program that could influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students. Figure two shows an outline of how this action research project was conducted in stages.

Figure 2:

Action Research Plan



4.2 Participants and Ethics:

It was important to consider the ethics in relation to working with young people. Blake (2007, p.413) considers the main aim of an ethics clearance is to ensure harm is minimised for all humans involved. As such, a clear guideline for how the research could affect the student involved, will needed to be clearly established.

Due to the nature of this research being action research based in a typical classroom, written consent from the school Principal or Head of Campus, was considered to be an appropriate form of consent and sufficient permission to allow the teacher to trial a new approach to the teaching and learning environment (Appendix B). Fundamentally, classroom action research is a method for finding out what works best in the classroom and can ultimately improve future student learning.

The curriculum content did not change, with a focus on the pedagogy as such, students should only see the benefits and be in no harm.

All data collection was integrated into daily classroom activity so that students did not feel they were a part of the research and hence, were in no harm. Throughout the research project, the data collected was carefully stored in a filing cabinet that was locked with a key to ensure no one could access it. Student names were withheld to protect the privacy of the student. The letter to the Head of Campus evidenced all the ethical considerations and outlined the methods used for data collection and the intentions of the research project.

4.3 Data Analysis:

Student Observations, Anecdotal Records and Field Notes: Weekly the researcher read over the student observations, anecdotal and field notes seeking to analyse the observations so as to adjust the direction of the research accordingly. The researcher borrowed tenets of grounded theory to provide “a procedure for developing categories of information, interconnecting the categories, building a “story” that connects the categories, and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, as cited in Creswell, 1998, p.15). By reviewing the qualitative data, the researcher could identify key overall findings and broad themes. These themes were analyzed to tease out meanings and connections that emerged from the observations and field notes.

MYTERN Self -Assessment Survey: The researcher analysed the MYTERN self-assessment scale to assess whether or not the MYTERN program had any influence on the emotional intelligence of the class and where the program was influential and valuable. Also, the downfalls of the program were analysed and from there, lessons and teaching practices were adjusted. From the self-assessment survey, the researcher could gauge whether the students had mastered the concepts being taught to them and could decide if they required further work. This helped guide future instruction in the classroom. To help answer the essential question, ‘How can social and emotional education (MYTERN) be used to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students?’ student engagement levels needed to be compared over the course of the program to understand if after the program students felt that they had gained a greater understanding of their emotional intelligence. By looking at their MYTERN self-assessment survey, the researcher could judge how effective certain areas of the program were.

Informal conversations and classroom discussion: Informal conversations throughout the research and classroom discussion provided the researcher with valuable feedback about students’

knowledge and skillset regarding various aspects of emotional intelligence. It allowed the researcher to see where the students were at and where the MYTERN program could guide them in developing their emotional intelligence. The researcher carefully tracked their attitudes, engagement and looked for themes and connections regarding how the MYTERN program influenced emotional intelligence in Year 8 students. Classroom discussion and the informal conversations the researcher had with the students regarding the MYTERN lessons added depth and student voice to the research and findings.

5 FINDINGS

Over the years, the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) has gained momentum and has rapidly expanded. In the past decade, “SEL has emerged as an umbrella term for a number of concepts including non-cognitive development, character education, 21st century skills, and trauma-informed learning, among others”(Jones, et al., 2017). The researcher sought to use the content of the SEL program MYTERN to influence the four areas of emotional intelligence as outlined by Goleman (1996); self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and relationship-management. These emotional intelligence skills were influenced through specific teaching and learning activities from the MYTERN program. This study trialed different teaching strategies and implemented these in the Year 8 classroom. In the first section of the findings you will find a compilation of lessons that were delivered from the MYTERN program that were used to help students grasp the concepts of emotional intelligence. This section evidenced the ways (teaching strategies) that were used to engage students in the MYTERN program to influence emotional intelligence. The second part of the findings will explore the themes that emerged from the data and how the researcher used MYTERN to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students.

Part One: MYTERN Lessons and Field Notes

Lesson One:

Focus Question: *Do others influence the way we feel?*

Procedure:

Ask students to form in a circle.

Discuss the following statement:

How we feel is influenced by others emotions. True or false.

Write the following questions on the board and ask students to discuss with the person beside them.

Then ask for individual responses.

1: How do you feel when you have a lot of assignments due; you fail a test; you do not like how you look; you do not have enough money; you do not have many friends?

2: How do you feel when you hand in all your assignments; you get a great mark on a test; you love your new outfit; you are given lots of money; you gain some new friends?

Students were then asked to reflect if our emotions are influenced by our circumstances. Students were asked to share their answers with the person beside them.

Students were then questioned:

- 1) *How do we attain and maintain physical fitness?*
- 2) *Is it possible to be emotionally fit? What does that mean?*

Benefits: By addressing the essential question “do others influence the way we feel?” students were encouraged to access emotional skills that allowed them to recognise how different situations make them feel and how to address those feelings in a prosocial way. This lesson enabled the students to grasp the concept that they can become emotionally fit by applying the skill of MYTERN. Students could then gain understanding that MYTERN helps you to gain control of your thoughts and emotions and that you have control over your thoughts. It used the metaphor that students could gain control by taking charge of their steering wheel. This lesson relied heavily upon discussion and it was important that the discussion was collaborative as effective SEL programs “need to implement a set of focused, high-quality, research based teaching strategies for developing students’ SEL skills” (Jones, S., Brush, K., Bailey, R., Brion-Meisels., McIntyre, J., Kahn, J., Nelson, B., & Stickle, L., 2017, p. 19). Whole group discussion was used to introduce the concept of self-awareness and pose questions to the students so that I could get them thinking about the topic and talk about how it related to their own life. The researcher asked the students to sit in a circle in the middle of the room so that they could all be involved fully and witness the body language and facial expressions of the other students. Students at the school were familiar with classroom circles as the school has encouraged teachers to use circles for student learning and understanding over the past five years and teachers have undertaken professional development to support this practice. Students indicated that they found the practice of sitting in a circle effective and that it provided a calm and safe environment to share in. Through the post self-assessment survey, students indicated that the circle built community and enhanced supportive connections with their peers. As the rule of the circle is to have one class member at a time speaking whilst the others are actively listening, this built trust and encouraged authentic dialogue within the group. This lesson worked on the emotional intelligence of self-awareness and allowed the students to practice the skill of accurately assessing their emotions.

Field Notes:

The key intention to these questions was to get students to think of the positive emotions associated with life and to recognise the positive and negative side to emotions. Students were eager to offer their thoughts on this topic and were willing to share their opinions. So eager, the researcher had to remind them a few times of the rules of Classroom Circle time; that only one person can speak at a time. As one of the lessons on this research took place at the end of the day, students were tired,

and needed to be reminded, to remain respectful to other members of the class. Student *engagement* in this discussion was evidenced by their thoughtful tone, body language (head nods) and enthusiasm to answer the questions. It was observed that students did feel they were influenced by others emotions. Student 16 (male) commented, “If my friend suddenly started ignoring me then I would be upset”. Student 19 (male) then commented, “When someone is angry at you, then you become angry at them”. Students were passionate to share their thoughts on this topic and the researcher observed how the students were pondering the concepts that they may not have thought of before. When students were asked, “Is it possible to be emotionally fit?” Student 3 (female) answered, “I really think you can work on being emotionally fit”, whilst Student 20 (male) responded, “I guess it is like being physically fit, you must work on it, it does not just come to you”.

Lesson 2:

Focus Question: *Who is in charge of our emotions?*

Purpose: To introduce them to the emotional intelligence of self-control and self-management through the understanding that feelings are their choice.

Materials: Projector screen, MYTERN Mini Manual.

Procedure:

- 1: Ask the students to sit in their Classroom Circle in a boy- girl order.
- 2: Begin by sharing experiences regarding student’s emotions; whether they felt that they were influenced by others or circumstances since the last lesson. Provide a personal experience.
- 3: Pose the question: Do you agree that we are in charge of our emotions? Why/why not?
- 4: Discuss: Does each emotion have positive benefits, even the tough ones like jealousy and worthlessness? Why/why not?
- 5: Read the chapter ‘Who is in charge of our emotions?’ from the MYTERN Mini Manual and then ask the question: Does each emotion have positive benefits, even the hard emotions like worthlessness and jealousy?
- 6: Now ask the students have their opinions changed? Why/Why not?
- 7: Ask the students to simply observe their own emotions and the emotions of others over the next week.

8: Show the MYTERN slide show of the Yin and Yang, discuss the idea that this represents perfection. Draw them to the slide illustrating destructive patterns and constructive patterns and how MYTERN can help them turn their destructive thinking patterns into constructive thinking patterns.

Benefits: The researcher observed the lesson to be a great way of teaching the students that they are in charge of their emotions. This lesson gave the example that you cannot make someone love you in 2 minutes, as it is their free choice. It also gave the example that someone can quickly influence the emotion of anger, but it is our choice to become angry and that we are in charge of all of our emotions. This lesson powerfully exemplified that no-one has the power to make you feel something, except yourself. It also detailed that all emotions are important and play a powerful role in our life. It exemplified that we need to feel anger sometimes, as it can help define boundaries. That 'negative' emotions such as grief are useful and help us to cope with loss. Students could grasp that no-one feels good all the time and that perfection is a balance between both positive and not so positive emotions. This lesson reinforced the concept that students can turn destructive patterns of thinking into constructive patterns of thinking by practicing the emotional intelligence skills of self-management and emotional self-control. It was observed by the researcher that students found this lesson very exciting, as they began to understand they have the power to feel what they want to feel and to take control of their reactions.

Field Notes: Throughout the lesson the researcher made a few interesting observations. The first being that it was noticed that the students started to grasp and reflect the language used in the MYTERN program. Students started to grasp terms such as: emotional responsibility, self-awareness, green road, red road, TERN (Take Emotional Responsibility Now) and TEP (Take Extreme Precaution). The researcher observed that the students responded well to the teachings modelled, and displayed that they grasped the concepts being taught, especially after completing the reading from the MYTERN Mini Manual. Although these concepts were complex, the researcher used the concept of neuroplasticity and explained it to them in simple terms. The Literature Review section of this thesis emphasized that the teenage brain is still evolving and adolescence is a very important time for brain changes and development. The researcher had the intention for this lesson that students grasped the concept that they are in charge of their emotions and to provide them with a new perspective in their thinking so that they could learn and implement emotional intelligences such as self-awareness and self-control in their everyday life.

Lesson Three: The Skill and metaphor of MYTERN

Purpose: For students to become self-aware by recognising that they are in control of their emotional state.

Materials: Projector

Procedure:

1: Write these statements on the board: Reading and writing are probably two of the most important skills that you acquire. The more you practice them, the better you get.

2: Explain to the students that the skill of MYTERN is just the same, and just as important as a skill to master numeracy and literacy. Read 'The skill of MYTERN' in the mini manual.

3: Ask students if they agree with the statement that MYTERN is just as important as building the skills of reading and writing. Do you agree or disagree?

4: Ask students to explain what a metaphor is. Read out loud the following: The use of a metaphor is well situated to help transform the complex information underpinning MYTERN (i.e. neuroplasticity) into simpler concepts. Adopting the everyday concept of driving enables the metaphor to link unfamiliar concepts (having control of our emotions) to familiar ones (driving, roads and steering wheel) in a unique and creative way, offering students avenues to deepen their understanding.

5: Introduce the metaphor of MYTERN:

"You are the driver, you are responsible for the roads that you drive down, and only you have control over the wheel. You cannot control anyone else's steering wheel. All the roads that you drive down reflect your thoughts and emotions. There are two types of roads that you travel down. Roads that build your health (happy, confident, excited, peaceful, generous, loving etc.). Roads that build your resilience (sad, angry, disappointed, mean, jealous, scared)" (Foster, 2016, p.13).

6: Have the students observe which roads they travel down the most in the next week- the ones that build health or the ones that build resilience. Ask the students to observe the consequences of staying on a red road for longer than they should.

Benefits of the lesson: In this lesson the researcher engaged the students in an authentic dialogue about the skill of MYTERN. This lesson taught the students that they need to work on this skill, just like they would reading and writing, that it takes practice. This lesson delivered the metaphor of MYTERN that introduces complex information into an easy to understand format. This metaphor makes complex concepts easy to grasp and can be related to by students of any age. This lesson introduced the concept that less positive thoughts and feelings do have a positive side and help build resilience. The researcher observed that this was a concept that was largely new to the students. The researcher observed that this lesson allowed students to build the emotional intelligence of self-awareness and accurate self-assessment, which is the basis of the research

question: How do I use social and emotional learning (MYTERN) to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students?

Field Notes: The researcher could see students grasping the concepts taught from MYTERN. The students built upon their understandings from the previous two lessons and student engagement and participation were excellent. The researcher employed a method that enabled all class members to share equally by writing the names of each student on a Popsicle stick and pulling it out of a hat at random. That way, students were accountable to listen and answer when it was their turn. The researcher found with these lessons, some students could dominate whilst other students would sit back and allow others to answer for them. The researcher wanted all the students to have an input into the classroom dialogue. The researcher found that this worked well and was a new way of sharing the classroom. This method of questioning promotes equity in the classroom as each student has a chance to be heard. As the lesson is heavily reliant on discussion as the form of teaching strategy, the researcher thought it was important that students got to speak and relate the concepts taught to their own life so that the lesson content remained interesting. It was the researcher's intention in this program to provide a safe environment for all class members to share in order to influence the emotional intelligence skill of self-awareness. The researcher observed students sharing freely their thoughts and opinions and was asked by Student 18 (male) "when are we doing MYTERN again?" as he was keen to delve further into the program. It was important that students had an opportunity to share from a personal perspective, as this allowed them to reflect on their experiences, which is an integral part of experiential learning, as referred to in the Literature Review section of this project.

Lesson Four: Emotional Addiction, Highways, Bushbashing and Neuroplasticity

Purpose: To identify what addictions are and their link to emotions. To explore how applying the skill of MYTERN can help change negative patterns of thinking and create new pathways in the brain.

Materials: Butchers paper, markers, MYTERN Mini Manual.

Procedure:

1: Write the definition of Addiction on the board.

"Addiction is the state of being enslaved to a habit or practice or something that is psychologically or physical habit forming to such an extent that it feels impossible to stop" (Foster, MYTERN, 2016, p. 15).

2: Ask students to form groups of four and hand out butcher's paper and markers. Get them to draw up a table, one side that examples addictions, the other side that examples emotions, referred to in Table 2.

Table 2:

Addictions and Emotions

Addictions	Emotions associated with addictions
Sugar	Feeling sad, low, anxious
Drugs	Feeling worthless, bored, unworthy

3. Students read the chapter in their groups from the MYTERN Mini Manual Emotional Addiction (page 25-27) and add to their table.

4: Ask groups to respond to the class with what emotions they thought went with the various addictions identified.

5: As a whole group, read highways, bushbashing and neuroplasticity from the MYTERN Mini Manual (pg. 28).

6: Discuss the term *neuroplasticity* with the students and how that by applying the skill of MYTERN can change negative patterns of thinking and create new patterns of thinking and pathways in the brain.

7: Have the students identify a negative pattern that they may want to change. Ask students to share if they feel comfortable doing so.

Benefits: This lesson allowed the students to delve into mature concepts such as addictions and neuroplasticity. Year 8 students are developing their maturity and the researcher observed their increased enthusiasm when discussing concepts that involved a mature perspective. Students were afforded the opportunity to learn from a scientific perspective that there is a biochemical reason for all states of emotion and each time we experience emotions our body produces chemicals related to that particular emotion (Foster, MYTERN, 2016). Students learnt that if they feel worthless a lot of the time, their cells will begin to expect that particular chemical and that the next time the cells divide, they develop more receptors so that they can receive more of the 'feeling worthless' chemical, creating an addiction (Foster, MYTERN, 2016). Students were taught that MYTERN helps break the addictions to less positive patterns of thinking and help form new and positive patterns. Students also benefited from being informed that we can change the pathways in our brain, which is

referred to as *neuroplasticity*. MYTERN uses the metaphor that the dirt roads that *bushbashing* creates, can eventually form new highways, leading to more positive destinations. This lesson benefited the students by teaching them that they can overcome old patterns of thinking and form new patterns of thinking through the concept of neuroplasticity and using the metaphor of bush bashing. Through the lesson, the researcher could address the research question: “How do I use social and emotional learning to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students?”. This lesson employed MYTERN to focus on the emotional intelligences of self-awareness, self-confidence, self-control, adaptability and initiative.

Field notes: This lesson was observed by a work colleague (female) who was interested in observing her homeroom respond to the MYTERN program and develop her knowledge of the program. As MYTERN has been taken on as a whole-school approach, all homeroom teachers are encouraged to deliver a short MYTERN lesson weekly during homeroom time. The first comment she shared with the researcher during our debrief time was, “The whole class was engaged during the discussion times and they were really tuned in to the topic, I found it really interesting myself”. She then went on to say, “The students were really interested in the topic of emotional addiction and you could see them working collaboratively in their groups”. This affirmed the researcher’s personal observations. Discussing and sharing personal thoughts and opinions allowed the researcher to develop stronger connections with the students. By allowing students to reflect on their experiences and construct their knowledge, students were enriched by exploring the emotional aspect of school, which is discussed in the Literature Review section of the thesis under Experiential Education. The researcher’s work colleague also commented on the fact that as she observed students, she noticed that all students were involved in their group work collaboratively and she was really impressed with the way students were discussing their ideas with each other. She observed that students were interested in the topic and listened intently during whole group discussion time. The aim of this lesson was to promote student’s thinking about their patterns of thought and to understand that they can change their thought patterns through emotional self-awareness and self-control. The researcher’s work colleague observed students brainstorming and sharing ideas about addictions and how they relate to our emotional state. She made comment that, “Your lesson helped to scaffold and support the students thinking through simple procedures that were effective and familiar to them”.

Lesson Five: Perspectives

Focus Question: How does seeing things from a different perspective help create positive relationships?

Purpose: To understand that perspective-taking and empathy help to build positive relationships.

Materials: MYTERN Mini Manual, books and pens.

Procedure: Students are instructed to draw a stress continuum and position themselves on the continuum between talker and non- talker. See below for Stress Continuum:

Stress Continuum

Non Talker

Talker



Next, ask students if they can predict where others (friends and family) may lie on the same continuum? Are they at different positions? How does this impact you when either of you are stressed? Discuss.

Next, ask students to complete another continuum on body image. The continuum could be from positive to negative. Talk about where they position themselves, and challenge them to think about where they think their family and friends may sit on the same continuum.

Discuss: *How could understanding where people are at on different continuums help with your relationships?*

Read the Perspectives chapter in the MYTERN Mini Manual (pg.31) as a class.

Discuss: Perspectives. Why do we all see things differently? What is powerful about understanding other people’s perspectives?

Benefits: The researcher observed that the students benefited from this lesson by delving into the concept that people see things from different perspectives and that by empathizing with others could help build positive relationships. Furthermore, the lesson encouraged the students to be self-aware and know where they are positioned on these different continuums, and without judgement, allow others the freedom to choose where they position themselves on the same continuum.

Students benefited from learning that they cannot expect the people around them to see things and handle situations exactly the way they do. Students benefited from learning that by empathising with others and seeing different perspectives will translate into forming positive relationships. This lesson helped influence one of the fundamental emotional intelligences as outlined by Goleman (1996); social-awareness.

Field Notes: Students were enthralled with this lesson and the researcher observed the students really wrestling with some of the concepts. For example, a discussion about allowing others the

freedom to have a different perspective and not judge them Student 8 (male) questioned “But why should we allow them to have a different perspective if what they think is wrong”. Student 4 (male) added, “It is impossible not to judge someone if their perspective is dangerous and wrong”. This was a tricky concept for the students and some were puzzled. However, other students shared their thoughts in support of the topic. Student 7 (female) stated, “We do not need to agree with someone to see their point of view”, Student 12 (female) added, “I now see things differently from some of my friends and that is ok. I do not need to agree with everything they say”. The researcher observed that students really enjoyed discussing their thinking in this lesson and could see them really questioning the topic. This lesson encouraged and observed critical thinking, which is crucial to 21st century education.

Lesson Six: *The dangers of too much stress and the benefits of generating positive emotions*

Purpose: For students to understand that generating positive emotions is good for their wellbeing.

Materials: *Projector, Role-Play cards*

Procedure: Display the following excerpt on the screen and get students to read it.

“The stress response was originally designed as the body’s way of protecting you, as it helps you stay focused, energetic and alert. The stress response also helps you perform in an emergency, giving you extra strength. When you perceive a threat, your nervous system responds by releasing a flood of stress hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. This response can save your life.

The stress response was designed to be engaged for short periods of time. However, beyond a certain point, stress stops being helpful and starts causing major damage to your health, your mood, your productivity, your relationships and quality of life.” (Foster, MYTERN: The MYTERN MINI MANUAL, 2016, p. 17).

Look at the Cognitive and Emotional System Table 3 below and discuss.

Table 3:

Cognitive and Emotional System Table:

<u>Cognitive Symptom</u>	<u>Emotional system</u>
<u>Memory Problems</u>	<u>Moodiness</u>
<u>Aches and pains</u>	<u>Eating more or less</u>
<u>Frequent colds</u>	<u>Nervous habits</u>

(Melinda Smith, M.A., Robert Segal, M.A, and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D. (2014) in Foster, 2016, p.17)

Ask the students to discuss in pairs: How important is it to be able to manage your own stress levels?

Discuss answers with the whole class.

Ask the students to suggest how thinking positively could impact their physical, emotional and mental health?

Discuss.

Read the list of benefits of generating positive emotions in the chapter on Positive Emotion in the MYTERN Mini Manual (page 34).

Students are then asked to form groups of four to act out scenarios and resolve them using the skill of MYTERN. The scenarios are:

1: You get to school and your friends are ignoring you, whispering about you and you do not know what you have done.

2: You have just found out that you have an assignment due tomorrow and you have not even started it.

3: A family member has fallen ill and you are worried about their health.

4: You have the opportunity to go on a school camp but are worried about being away from home and out of your comfort zone.

Give students time to come up with a resolution to the scenario using the MYTERN process. Students can then perform their scenarios to the class.

The students are then asked to give feedback to the groups on how well they resolved the scenario using the MYTERN skill.

Benefits: Students benefited from learning how physical symptoms are related to behavioural symptoms and were highly engaged in conversation. For example, Student 17 (male) commented, "I had never thought about the fact that my behaviour is related to my physical state", whilst Student 2 (female) remarked, "I think that when I get headaches, it is because I am stressed and tired". Student 13 (male) commented that "When I am in pain, I do not feel like eating any food". This lesson helped influence the emotional intelligences of self-awareness, self-assessment and self-control. Students benefited from learning that positive emotions are good for our psychological, cognitive and social wellbeing and that learning to generate positive emotions is an essential skill. Students benefited from classroom discussion, as they could build upon their thoughts and opinions by listening to their peers. Using role play and discussion in class, students could construct knowledge through role playing real-life scenarios and coming up with a solution in groups, and then reflecting upon what they have learnt through discussion. The lesson adopted the concepts from experiential education, which is important to this research and discussed in the Literature Review section. Furthermore, students were exposed to the emotional intelligence of relationship management, by working collaboratively with their peers and coming up with ways to manage conflict.

Field Notes: This lesson provided the students with the opportunity to reflect upon how stress and negative emotions affect the physical body. Students showed a positive attitude and were very involved in the lesson. The researcher observed high levels of student engagement during the group work scenarios. The researcher heard Student 6 (female) say to her peers “I love role plays, they are so much fun”. The researcher observed the students cheerfully form their groups and appear excited about the task. However, the researcher did observe some students being disruptive in their groups and thereby taking away valuable time that was given to construct their role plays. A way the researcher could get around this next time would be to group the students by asking them to form pairs and then pair them with another pair. This would act as a good balance between working in friendship groups and working with peers they do not usually work with in order to boost productivity. The researcher observed the students using the language of MYTERN during the role plays, which indicated that the students were benefiting and learning the vital skills of the MYTERN program.

Lesson 7: Integrating the skill of MYTERN into everyday life

Focus Question: How can we integrate the skill of MYTERN into our everyday life? How can the skill of MYTERN benefit us?

Aim: For students to understand that the skill of MYTERN takes practice, and that it can help to change negative patterns of thought and behavior into positive patterns of thought and behavior.

Materials: MYTERN Mini Manual

Procedure: Explain to students that trying to change patterns of thinking and ways of reacting to situation and circumstances requires practice, therefore, the skill of MYTERN needs to be practiced.

Ask the students to turn to the chapter “How do I incorporate MYTERN into my everyday life?” (pg. 37) and ask different students to read aloud the examples on how to use MYTERN.

Next, get students to read aloud the MYTERN Solutions to everyday problems, located on page 40. Select the students to read by using the Popsicle sticks, thereby ensuring each student has a turn at reading.

Students are then asked to come up with an example from their own life where they have used the MYTERN process and write it down before sharing it with a partner.

Students are then asked to answer the question on their MYTERN self-assessment survey: How would you react before understanding the MYTERN skills to stressors in your life? How would you try to react now?

Benefits: Students were motivated by the practicality of this lesson. They examined how they can implement the skills of MYTERN in their everyday life by; receiving the daily MYTERN message from the App, using some of their personal emotional tools (PET’s), checking their GPS, trialing different PET’s to see what works best, identifying when others need to TERN(Take Emotional Responsibility Now) and teaching others to TERN. Students benefited by learning that their emotions are what is on the inside and that they are in control. When asked how they felt about that statement, student 1 (female) said, “It makes me feel empowered, that I can

steer my emotions onto a green road and that I am in control". When working in pairs to share their experiences with using the MYTERN process, students benefited from the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and processes with their peers, as adolescence is a time where students are greatly influenced by their peers. Students also benefited from the opportunity to reflect on the MYTERN program by reflecting on the question "How would you react before understanding the MYTERN skills to stressors in your life? How would you try to react now?" This allowed students to be reflective and to see the benefits that MYTERN has imparted. The researchers' intention for implementing MYTERN was to positively influence emotional intelligence in a group of Year 8 students as research (Durlak, 2011) suggest that SEL intervention programs are attributed to higher levels of social and emotional skills and attitudes which lead to positive social behaviors that contribute to success.

5.2 Part Two: The four themes

Distinct themes were formed based upon the implementation of the seven MYTERN lessons to the researchers Year 8 class. These themes came about by listening to group discussion, student observations, partaking in informal conversations and by reading and interpreting the students MYTERN self-assessment survey. While some of these themes were named directly, some were implied through informal conversations with the participants during the course of the lessons. These themes relate to the researchers intention of implementing the SEL program MYTERN to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students. In this section, the researcher's intentions are outlined as an action researcher and evidence is offered of the learning that took place in the Year 8 classroom in relation to the themes that emerged. The themes are:

- 1: MYTERN encourages students to be emotionally self-aware and accurately assess their emotional state.
- 2: MYTERN encourages self-management and emotional self-control.
- 3: MYTERN encourages student's social awareness skills through perspective taking and having empathy.
- 4: MYTERN influences relationship awareness skills as students cultivate an increased capacity for prosocial behavior and conflict management.

Self-awareness is an appropriate starting point because, as Denham (2006) points out, students with strong social skills that are self-aware are more likely to make and sustain friendships, initiate constructive relationships with teachers, participate in classroom activities and be positively involved in learning. Also, research suggests that children who can effectively be aware of their thinking and manage their behaviour are more likely to have better grades and higher standardised test scores (Blair and Razza, (2000); Bull et al., (2008); Epsy et al., (2004); Howse, Lange et al., (2003) in Jones et al, (2017). By incorporating social and emotional learning (SEL) into the classroom through the MYTERN program, it was the researchers aim to influence a holistic approach to education where students developed the emotional intelligence capabilities of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. The researcher aimed for the students to cultivate an increased capacity for understanding the needs and feelings of others and themselves and contributed to developing their emotional intelligence.

5.3 Theme One: MYTERN encourages students to be emotionally self-aware and accurately assess their emotional state.

Critical to the success of the MYTERN program was the receptivity of the students to the program, so it was important that the researcher used engaging ways to implement the concepts of the program. Students were introduced to the concept of self-awareness in the beginning stages of the program. Key words associated with this parameter were emotional self-awareness, self-control accurate self-assessment, emotions, and choice.

Students worked on developing their self-awareness throughout the MYTERN program, especially during lessons one and three. As students entered my classroom, there was a wide array of attitudes and feelings about the concept of self-awareness. Some students felt that they could accurately assess how they feel and felt confident in that capability, whilst others students admitted that this is not something they had thought about.

The key intention to these lessons was to get students to become aware of their emotions, how they make them feel and act and expose them to the metaphor and skill of MYTERN.

In the MYTERN self-assessment survey, students were asked to give themselves a rating out of ten to ten different questions in relation to the emotional intelligence capabilities that MYTERN incorporates. Students gave themselves a rating prior to, and after the implementation of the program. This allowed the researcher to analyse the data and deliberate the successful ways to implement MYTERN to influence emotional intelligence. Question One on the survey asked students to rate their “Ability to recognise what road I am on (identify how I am feeling)”. While analysing the pre and post result to the self-assessment survey, the researcher could see that on average students rated themselves 10% higher on Question One after the completion of the MYTERN program. This painted a clear picture that MYTERN allowed students to develop their self-awareness. Please refer to Table 4 below.

Table 4:

Percentage of improvement for Question 1 of the MYTERN self-assessment survey

Question 1: Ability to recognise what road I am on (identify how I am feeling) /10.

Average Score Q1		
Pre MYTERN	Post MYTERN	Percentage Improvement
7/10	8/10	10%

The Classroom Circle was a feature of every class, especially in lessons 3 and 5 where the students worked in groups. Circle protocol involved one person speaking at a time whilst other students listened respectfully. An object, such as a talking stick was sometimes used and was passed around the circle. The student holding the talking stick held the floor, without interruption, until finished. Students had the choice to pass. This symbol allowed each speaker to feel special and indicated the speaker was to be listened to with respect. Appendix C evidences the students' comments during class. Students enjoyed sitting in a circle for these lessons as reflected in this comment from Student 9 (female):

"I loved sitting in the Classroom Circle and I wish we could do more of it. It made me feel that everyone valued what I was saying and I felt recognised and heard".

Several other students also commented that the Classroom Circle was a valuable time for self-reflection. As Student 11 (female) said, circles were "a great way for us to get to know each other better and to share our thoughts". When asked if they felt confident to share their thoughts freely in a circle, the researcher was surprised with most students indicating that they felt safe to share their feelings in a circle, as adolescence is generally a time for students to be reluctant in sharing their opinions for fear of being judged. However, Student 19 (male) reflected "I am sometimes reluctant to share, but it feels safe to share in a circle". Overall, the researcher did find that students reacted positively to the Classroom Circle and noted that students kept asking "Can we form the Classroom Circle? Are we sitting in a circle today?"

As a result of the positive student experiences with circles, Classroom Circles were used as a core teaching strategy throughout the MYTERN program as a means to engage students and improve student learning. The researcher observed that the Classroom Circle built community and enhanced student connections.

The sense of relationship developed in the circle activities informed the classroom environment. This was evident in classroom discussion and the respectful way in which all students listened to each other and which they were keen to contribute. The researcher observed that Classroom Circles allowed students to get to know one another, interact with the program materials, co-construct knowledge, and reflect upon learning holistically. When the researcher asked her work colleague, why she thought the students responded so well to the Classroom Circle, she responded, "it is because they all equally have the opportunity to speak and feel listened to. Everyone is on equal footing, no one is at the head".

During Lesson Three of MYTERN, students were introduced to the skill and metaphor of MYTERN. The rationale behind this lesson was to alert students to emotional intelligence being a skill, and that skills need to be developed through self-awareness, self-assessment and practiced, just like physical fitness. The skill is based around the metaphor that you are the driver, only you have control of the steering wheel, and all the roads that you drive down represent your thoughts and emotions.

Throughout the lesson, students started to gather the understanding that less positive thoughts and feelings lead down red roads, which help build resilience, whilst positive thoughts and feelings are referred to as green roads and lead to health and happiness. The researcher had the students respond to the statement on the board that said “The skill of MYTERN is just as important a skill to master as numeracy and literacy”. By doing this, the researcher was able to gauge where the student’s attitudes were at by listening to their responses. It was observed through informal classroom conversations that the students had not thought of MYTERN being a skill. As the lesson progressed, the researcher observed students starting to understand the metaphor. Student 14 (female) noted “If I know I am on the red road because I’m angry, I can then learn to steer myself onto the green road”. The use of the metaphor is well situated to help transform the complex information underpinning MYTERN (i.e. neuroplasticity) into simpler and more accessible concepts. This was evidenced in the language that formed in the classroom, with students adopting the language used in the MYTERN program.

Being able to identify what road you are on, and make an accurate self-assessment is part of the emotional intelligence framework the researcher intended to teach through the MYTERN program in this action research. Table 6 below evidences that the class average went up by 10 % when comparing the MYTERN pre and post self-assessment survey for Question 8 (I do not blame others or circumstances for how I feel).

Table 5:

Percentage of improvement for Question 8 of the MYTERN Self-Assessment Survey

Question 8: I do not blame others or circumstances for how I feel. /10

Average Class Score		
Question 8		
Pre MYTERN	Post MYTERN	% Improvement
7	8	10%

Students felt they had a better understanding of their emotions and were more emotionally self-aware and better equipped to control and understand their thoughts and emotions. Student 8 (female) responded “before MYTERN I would probably blame other people for putting me on a red road, now I am aware that I am the one that is putting myself on that road”.

It was observed by the researcher that students started to use the skill of MYTERN to confidently assess their emotions and learn how to take control of their emotional state. Student 11 (female) noted, “MYTERN gives me the awareness to understand what road I am on and understand that I can change direction any time I choose to”. Students also spoke about the importance of knowing that you are on a red road, as this can be dangerous. Student 4 (male) shared with the class that “when I am feeling depressed, it is hard to share what I’m going through but, I know if I do not, it will not get better”. This evidences that students were identifying their emotions through utilising the skill of MYTERN. The researcher observed that MYTERN played a role in increasing self - awareness, accurate self-assessment and enabled students to be more self-confident.

5.4 Theme Two: MYTERN encourages self-management and emotional self-control.

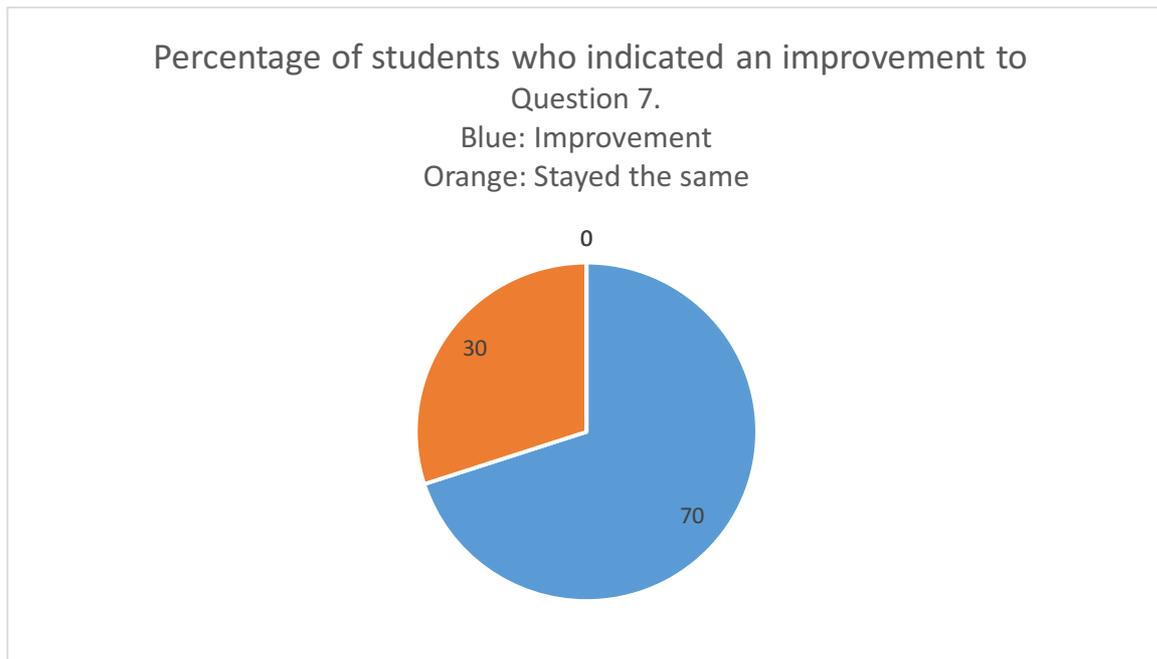
Whilst developing the emotional intelligence of self-awareness is important, so too is the ability to self- manage and exercise emotional self-control. Throughout lessons Two, Four and Six, students were exposed to the concept that they are in charge of their emotional state and that they can change patterns of negative behavior by changing their thinking. Sharing the content of these lessons was largely oral, along with readings, PowerPoint slides, hands on activities and role-play.

The rationale behind the lesson ‘Who is in charge of our emotions?’ was to explain that we are in charge of our emotions. Furthermore, it was exemplified that no one can make us feel a certain way and that we are responsible for our emotions and the actions that we take. Students were very interested in this concept and some expressed a lack of prior knowledge about this topic, as Student 13 (male) expressed, “What if someone hits me with a cricket bat, they are the one that made me angry”. The researcher observed some students really grappled with this topic and students were surprised to learn that we can choose how we feel about a situation by being aware of our feeling and exercising self-control. Adding to this conversation with Student 13, another student remarked (Student 11, female) that “If you know it was an accident, then you can move on and not feel angry and not retaliate”. By analysing Question 7 (Understand the concept that I may not be able to change my circumstances, but I can control how I react to it) of the MYTERN self-assessment survey, it was noted that 70% of the students rated themselves higher after MYTERN, indicating they had developed their sense of responsibility and control over their emotions. The researcher was

surprised that 30% of the students marked themselves with the same score for this question as it was indicated through classroom discussion that this was an area of concern.

Figure 3:

Question 7: Understand the concept that I may not be able to change my circumstances, but I can control how I react to it. /10



Lesson four further delved into the emotional intelligence of self-management. The researcher discussed the concept of ‘neuroplasticity’. Students were interested to learn that it has been proven that we can change the pathways in our brain to form new positive habits. Student 15 (female) acknowledged, “You can change an old way of thinking by driving down a new road”, Student 6 (female) furthered, “It can be tough to change an old way of thinking, so it can take a lot of practice”. It was observed by my work colleague (female) who sat in on the lesson that the students were enthralled with the concept and had taken well to using the MYTERN language. The researcher observed the students using the terms from the MYTERN program (based on a driving metaphor) which was crucial to the research. During this lesson, the researcher observed students level of optimism rise as they began to use positive language and acknowledge that they can adapt and change old patterns to achieve positive outcomes. This was reiterated by a work colleague (female) who observed the lesson, “seeing the students gain hope that they can change their path through changing their thoughts and habits was exciting”.

Students explored the benefits of applying the skill of MYTERN and generating positive emotion in lesson six. They showed an understanding that MYTERN has both protective and restorative functions, which leads to good mental and emotional health. From analysing the post self-assessment score for Question 6 (Ability to stay on a green road when others are on a red road), on average, students rated themselves 20% higher, indicating that they had developed the emotional intelligence of self-control over the course of the MYTERN program, referred to in Figure 4.

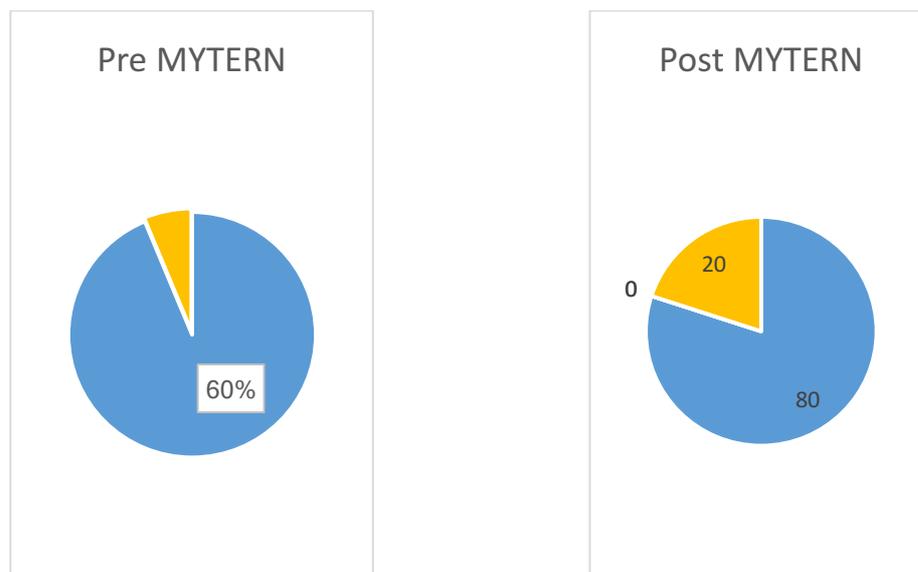
Figure 4:

Percentage of improvement to Question 6 post MYTERN

Question 6: Ability to stay on a green road when others are on a red road. /10

Blue = I can stay on a green when others are on a red road.

Yellow= I cannot stay on a green road when others are on a red road.



The researcher observed the students make connections between physical and behavioural symptoms. Student 3 (female) voiced, “When I am feeling anxious about schoolwork, I usually isolate myself by going to my room”, Student 10(male) added, “Sometimes if I am in pain I will not be able to eat anything”. There was a high level of engagement and cooperation in this activity and the researcher observed students eager to share their experience and relate their physical symptoms to behavioural symptoms. Student 20 (male) observed, “I have not thought about how my behavior relates to my physical symptoms, but when I do think about it, it makes sense”.

The researcher observed the student's level of understanding when students were instructed to make a role play that dissolved a stressful situation using the skill of MYTERN. Group Two were posed with the scenario:

You have just found out that you have an assignment due tomorrow and you have not even started it.

Group two chose to resolve the situation by first, identifying how they felt (self-awareness), then to take control of the situation by going to speak to the teacher. This allowed them to make a plan and feel better (move onto the green road). The researcher observed this group using the emotional intelligence of self-management by utilising self-control, adapting the new circumstance (having to write an assignment) and take initiative by going to see the teacher and negotiating a new due date. The researcher observed that role-play is a great way of practicing the skill of MYTERN and that students enjoyed the task. The researcher observed positive interaction in the class when coming up with the role-plays and the level of enthusiasm was high, indicating that role-plays are a great way to teach concepts of emotional intelligence. The researcher could reflect that this lesson was very successful and met the aim of the action research question, to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students.

The researcher observed that the students were developing an understanding of their emotions and learning to observe, understand and control their emotions for positive outcomes.

5.5 Theme Three: *MYTERN encourages students to be socially aware through emotional processes such as perspective taking.*

The process of using MYTERN helped to influence my students' emotional intelligence by engaging in the emotional process of perspective taking. The skill of MYTERN is an emotional process that helped students to recognise, express, and regulate their emotions, as well as engage in perspective-taking around the emotions of others. Lesson Five of MYTERN delved into looking at different perspectives and showing empathy for others. Empathy is the ability to see the world from another's' perspective which can lead to compassion, understanding and to forgoing judgement. This ability, to recognise that other people have their own set of challenges and to care of others is fundamental to a holistic education.

The emotional intelligence of social awareness helps support youth to accurately interpret other people's behaviour and actions so that they can positively engage in social situations and interact confidently with peers. This evidences the importance to teach the emotional intelligence of social-awareness through the MYTERN program.

Students responded well to the MYTERN lesson on perspectives and acknowledged that different people have different points of view and that is ok. Student 4 (male) acknowledged, “Sometimes my parents have different ideas of what is good for me than what I do, but I know that they are wiser than me”. Students were challenged to place themselves and others on a stress continuum and analyse how they handle stress in comparison to friends and family. Student 16 (male) commented, “When I’m stressed I get quiet and just want to be left alone, but when my mum is stressed, she angry gets really quickly and we need to give her some space”. While analysing the post self-assessment survey, the researcher could gauge from the answers to Question 9 (I understand that everyone is on their own individual journey and I allow them to be on their path without having to change them), that students had improved their scores from the beginning of the MYTERN program, but still found this one of the most challenging concepts. Student 14 (female) commented, “I understand that others see things differently to me, but it is hard sometimes when you think someone is wrong and you want to help them”. One teaching strategy of helping students to understand other people’s perspective was the use of the continuums. By getting students to draw up several continuums on different topics such as body image and religion, and place where they are on the continuum as well as their family and friends, this helped students conceptualise that we all place ourselves on the continuum at different points. The effect of using these continuums was evident in the comment by Student 17 (male), “this activity helped me realise that I deal with stress and other things in a completely different way to my sister, she tends to cry and slam doors, and I go quiet”. Student 18 (male) said, “It is ok if we all see things differently”. This MYTERN lesson allowed students to understand that people have different viewpoints and to show understanding and empathy for different perspectives.

5.6 *Theme Four: MYTERN influences relationship awareness skills as students cultivate an increased capacity for prosocial behavior and conflict management.*

MYTERN helped influence student’s relationship management skills through engaging them in the MYTERN process where they learnt to manage conflict, build bonds and work collaboratively with their peers. Lesson Seven of the program delved into the importance of integrating the skill of MYTERN into daily life so they can navigate their emotions and the emotions of others successfully. MYTERN reiterates that this process is a skill, and it takes practice to change patterns and thinking and ways of reacting. The MYTERN process is a skill that helped students to recognise, express and regulate their emotions so that they could successfully resolve conflicts by understanding their emotions and the emotions of others which in turn help to build positive relationships.

Students were asked to reflect on how the MYTERN program allowed them to develop their relationships in the post self-assessment survey. They were asked, "How would you react to a stressful situation before the MYTERN program and how would you react now?" Student 1 (female) answered, "Before MYTERN I would over react, blame others, feel over-whelmed and take it out on other people. Now I will reach for a PET". Student 4 (female) answered, "I was very quick to think and make my decisions of who was right and wrong, now I take my time, do deep breaths and gather my thoughts before coming to a conclusion". Student 5 (male) made the interesting comment that "I will still get angry with people because in my opinion they should not have done it if they knew it would get me angry, but now I think I can handle it with control". The researcher learnt a great deal about the student's attitudes and thoughts towards the MYTERN process from analysing the final question on the student self-assessment survey; I now embed the skill of MYTERN into my daily life. The researcher found that 90% of the students recorded a higher mark on the post MYTERN survey and can use this research to inform best practice teaching and learning. Students recorded a reflection of the MYTERN program after the final lessons on how MYTERN has influenced them. Reflections included, "I am now more aware of what other people are going through and to have empathy for others" (Student 3, female); "Before MYTERN I would blame others for putting me on a red road, now I know I am the one who put me on that road" (Student 13, male); "Before MYTERN I would have contained my emotions and let it build up, but now I know to ask for help". However, some students indicated they were confident in the process as Student 19 (male) commented, "I already knew how to control my emotions, but it was interesting how others handle situations". These answers reflect the understandings of both the strategies and the deep meaning behind the MYTERN program. Evaluation methods of the program included oral feedback, student observations and written answers from the post MYTERN self-assessment survey. This allowed students to express their learning and understandings effectively.

The researcher observed the skills taught from this program had a positive effect on the students understanding of the emotional intelligence of relationship and conflict management as previous lessons had dealt with self-awareness, self-management and social-awareness. Time was the greatest challenge, with several students asking for more classes that revolved around relationship management. With time, would have come more opportunities to connect with the concepts of relationship management and teachings. However, this was the final lessons scheduled into the curriculum and with reports looming, the class involved in the research needed to change topics to meet curriculum demands. However, the Year 8 class will continue to be involved in 15 minute weekly MYTERN lesson during homeroom time at the start of the day. This allowed the class to revise and build upon the content taught over the seven lessons.

5.7 Limitations:

This action research sought to answer the question of how can the social and emotional learning program MYTERN be used to influence emotional intelligence in YEAR 8 students. It sought to discover ways it could be implemented to effectively influence emotional intelligence.

There were a number of limitations that arose with a study of this nature. Firstly, this action research was a small, qualitative study and was dependent upon the student's honesty in their responses to the questions asked during classroom discussions. This is a general limitation with research of this nature. Furthermore, the study was at risk of students only giving answers that the researcher wanted to hear, as the researcher knew all of the students and had a level of rapport with them. This was a negative aspect of the research.

Secondly, the research relied upon the student's responses over a series of seven lessons. This subjected the study to gather data that was subject to a reliability bias, as people act differently on different days.

Thirdly, the research was conducted on a small, homogenous group of students from similar backgrounds. This affected the data as the data that was collected reflected 20 students from an independent Christian private school.

Finally, there was a degree of researcher bias in the way the data was analysed and interpreted. Certain quotes were selected to represent the findings and not everything the students discussed was included in the findings, but rather the quotes that were related to the particular research questions.

5.8 Further research:

The research presented offers a small view of how an SEL program, MYTERN was implemented in a Year 8 classroom to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students. The research conducted in this study has implications for further research. As was demonstrated in the literature review, although there has been extensive research outlining the benefits of social and emotional learning, little has been written about the implementation of SEL programs in the middle school. Chung and McBride (2015) conclude that few studies outline explicit strategies that foster and develop social and emotional learning competencies in the school curriculum for middle school students. Further research, looking at explicit strategies that promote emotional intelligence in middle school students is recommended.

Furthermore, to gather more data, this study could be replicated. This study was implemented at one of the schools campuses located in a small country town. This study could be replicated at the sister campus which is located in Victoria's largest regional city to provide further results and data. This could provide further evidence and data of the effects of the MYTERN and how it influences emotional intelligence in middle school students.

Further research looking at a larger sample size of students and schools implementing the social and emotional learning program MYTERN is recommended. This would allow a more comprehensive list of methods used to influence emotional intelligence in the Middle School. Furthermore, it is also recommended that future studies include the body of middle school students (Years 5-9) to gain more data and not limit the data collection to one year level as reflected in this study. All of the proposed research would allow middle schools to design and implement more informed and effective practices for delivering social and emotional learning to their students.

6 CONCLUSION

The overarching aim of this research was to research ways the social and emotional learning program MYTERN influenced emotional intelligence in year 8 students. It is crucial that in the period of adolescence, students learn to interpret and manage their emotions, create healthy peer relationships, develop empathy for others and learn to how manage conflict and work collaboratively. It is clear that people are composed of much more than just rational thought and middle schools are responsible for supporting student's emotional and social growth as this will empower them with the tools they need to lead happier lives and become thoughtful and productive members of society.

In the literature section of this study, the topics of experiential education, social and emotional learning programs, adolescent neurological development and emotion and cognition were presented. These topics were the main ideas behind this action research project. The research for this thesis was intended to gather information about how the social and emotional learning program MYTERN could be used to influence the emotional intelligence of Year 8 students. The results from the research have pointed to the following conclusions:

From the results of this research, it can be concluded that the social and emotional learning program MYTERN encouraged students to be emotionally self-aware through activities driven towards accurately assessing their emotional state. As referred to in Appendix D, on average, students rated themselves 10% higher at the conclusion of the MYTERN program when asked if they could identify their emotional state, evidencing that students had developed their emotional self-awareness skills. Furthermore, as referred to in appendix E, the results to the MYTERN Pre and Post assessment survey indicated that all students rated themselves 10% higher after the MYTERN program to the ability to not blame others for how they feel. Additionally, students rated themselves on average 10% higher to question 8 in regards to not blaming others or circumstances for how they feel. This indicates that MYTERN positively influenced the emotional intelligence of self-awareness.

Results showed that MYTERN encouraged the emotional intelligence of self-management and self-control. This was evidenced through students comments located in Appendix C describing how they felt MYTERN encouraged them to manage and control their behaviour. Also, 70% of students indicated through the MYTERN self-assessment pre and post survey, located in Appendix F, that MYTERN has helped them to understand that they cannot control their circumstances, but they can control how they react. The research indicates that MYTERN positively influenced the emotional intelligence of self-management and self-control through the use of role-play.

MYTERN encouraged students learn to look at other people's perspectives and influenced the emotional intelligence of social awareness. Student comments referred to in **Appendix C** indicated that MYTERN allowed students to see other people's perspectives, develop empathy and become socially aware citizens.

Findings from this research revealed that MYTERN positively influenced relationship management skills as indicated through student comments located in Appendix C. Students answered reflected their increased understandings of conflict management and collaboration through becoming confident and familiar with the MYTERN process. The results indicated that MYTERN helped students successfully navigate their own emotions as well as the emotions of others as they learnt to recognise, express and regulate their emotions throughout the program.

This study evidenced through student comments located in Appendix C and through observation and anecdotal notes the effective ways MYTERN can be used to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students. By using classroom circles, classroom discussion and role play, the four core competencies of emotional intelligence as identified Goleman (1996) of self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and relationship-management were positively influenced.

This study was limited largely by its small sample size and future research utilising a larger number of students and schools is recommended. This action research seeks to inform the practice of the researcher who undertook this study and to improve student outcomes.

From this research, it is clear that alongside of academics, social and emotional education is critical to a holistic education. Emotional intelligence is a skill that adds to personal and interpersonal effectiveness and ultimately to greater success in life. Providing social and emotional learning to middle school students can provide the basis for a student's ability to perceive, identify, manage and regulate emotions which can lead to personal success. This thesis evidenced that the incorporation of social and emotional learning is vital to a middle school student as they begin their journey into adulthood and become functioning, socially aware members of society.

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Appendix A:



MYTERN™

Take Emotional Responsibility Now

MYTERN Self- Assessment Survey (on a scale from 0-10) Pretest

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1: Ability to recognise what road I am on (identify how I'm feeling). | /10 |
| 2: Ability to recognise what road others may be on (identify how others are feeling). | /10 |
| 3: Not judge the roads that others take (not judge the actions of others). | /10 |
| 4: The ability to take control when I am out of control on either a red or green road. | /10 |
| 5: Wonderful knowledge of my PETS and ability to use them in different situations
(I know what to do to make myself feel better and I have a range of strategies). | /10 |
| 6: Ability to stay on a green road when others are on a red road
(Ability to stay calm and happy when others around me are angry). | /10 |
| 7: Understand the concept that I may not be able to change the circumstances, but
I can control how I react to it. | /10 |
| 8: I do not blame others or circumstances for how I feel. | /10 |
| 9: I understand the reasons for not always rescuing others.
(I understand that everyone is on their own individual journey and I can not
Change, nor am I responsible for rescuing others). | /10 |
| 10: I now embed the skill of MYTERN into my life | /10 |

Appendix B

Rebecca Barry
3 Nelson Ave,
Highton, Vic,
3216

Dear Nicholas,

In this letter it is my intention to inform you of the proposed Action Research study I will be undertaking as part of my thesis project this year.

I will be implementing 7 MYTERN lessons in my Year 8 Christian Education classes and looking at how I can use this program to influence emotional intelligence in Year 8 students.

Fundamentally, classroom action research is a method for finding out what works best in the classroom and can ultimately improve future student learning. The curriculum content will not change, with a focus on the pedagogy as such, students should only see the benefits and be in no harm.

All data collection will be integrated into daily classroom activity so that students did not feel they were a part of the research and hence, were in no harm. Throughout the research project, the data collected was carefully stored in a filing cabinet that was locked with a key to ensure no one could access it. Student names will be withheld to protect the privacy of the student.

The methods used for data collection will be student observations and pre and post survey results analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the MYTERN program.

I am seeking your permission for the fulfillment of this action research.

Kind regards,

Rebecca Barry
Classroom Teacher
Christian College

Appendix C

Student comments in class:

Comments regarding Circle time:

Student 9 (female):

“I loved sitting in the Classroom Circle and I wish we could do more of it. It made me feel that everyone valued what I was saying and I felt recognised and heard”.

Student 11 (female) said, circles were “a great way for us to get to know each other better and to share our thoughts”.

Student 19 (male) reflected “I am sometimes reluctant to share, but it feels safe to share in a circle”.

Students talking about self-awareness:

Student 14 (female) noted “If I know I am on the red road because I’m angry, I can then learn to steer myself onto the green road”.

Student 11 (female) noted, “MYTERN gives me the awareness to understand what road I am on and understand that I can change direction any time I choose to”.

Student 4 (male) shared with the class that “when I am feeling depressed, it is hard to share what I’m going through but, I know if I do not, it will not get better”.

Student 8 (female) responded “before MYTERN I would probably blame other people for putting me on a red road, now I am aware that I am the one that is putting myself on that road”.

Student 11 (female) noted, “MYTERN gives me the awareness to understand what road I am on and understand that I can change direction any time I choose to”.

Student 4 (male) shared with the class that “when I am feeling depressed, it is hard to share what I’m going through but, I know if I do not, it will not get better”.

Talking about different perspectives:

Student 13 (male) expressed, “What if someone hits me with a cricket bat, they are the one that made me angry”.

(Student 11, female) that “If you know it was an accident, then you can move on and not feel angry and not retaliate”.

Student 15 (female) acknowledged, “You can change an old way of thinking by driving down a new road”, Student 6 (female) furthered, “It can be tough to change an old way of thinking, so it can take a lot of practice”.

Student 3 (female) voiced, “When I am feeling anxious about schoolwork, I usually isolate myself by going to my room”, Student 10(male) added, “Sometimes if I am in pain I will not be able to eat anything”.

Student 20 (male) observed, "I have not thought about how my behavior relates to my physical symptoms, but when I do think about it, it makes sense".

Student 4 (male) acknowledged, "Sometimes my parents have different ideas of what is good for me than what I do, but I know that they are wiser than me".

Student 16 (male) commented, "When I'm stressed I get quiet and just want to be left alone, but when my mum is stressed, she angry gets really quickly and we need to give her some space".

Student 14 (female) commented, "I understand that others see things differently to me, but it is hard sometimes when you think someone is wrong and you want to help them".

Student 17 (male), "this activity helped me realise that I deal with stress and other things in a completely different way to my sister, she tends to cry and slam doors, and I go quiet".

Student 18 (male) said, "It is ok if we all see things differently".

Talking about how MYTERN has influenced their emotional intelligence:

"Before MYTERN I would over react, blame others, feel over-whelmed and take it out on other people. Now I will reach for a PET".

Student 4 (female) answered, "I was very quick to think and make my decisions of who was right and wrong, now I take my time, do deep breaths and gather my thoughts before coming to a conclusion".

Student 5 (male) made the interesting comment that "I will still get angry with people because in my opinion they should not have done it if they knew it would get me angry, but now I think I can handle it with control".

"I am now more aware of what other people are going through and to have empathy for others" (Student 3, female).

"Before MYTERN I would blame others for putting me on a red road, now I know I am the one who put me on that road" (Student 13, male),

"Before MYTERN I would have contained my emotions and let it build up, but now I know to ask for help".

However, some students indicated that were confident in the process as Student 19 (male) commented, "I already knew how to control my emotions, but it was interesting how others handle situations".

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