**Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC) Award for Excellence in Educational Research**

**Introduction**

The Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC) has established a new Award for Excellence in Educational Research. This is awarded to the Stranmillis University College researcher who demonstrates the potential for their research to have a significant impact on learners or practice in controlled schools. The award recognises the positive contribution that research can make to school improvement.

A CSSC assessment panel reviewed seven nominated high attaining dissertations at Master’s level selecting one recipient to receive the award.

CSSC has been disseminating articles, sharing the learning from a selection of nominated students. The third article is entitled: **Speak out Stay Safe programme.**

The NSPCC Speak out Stay safe programme is a preventative education intervention, available to every primary school across the UK and aims to equip children with the knowledge and understanding they need to stay safe from abuse.

It’s vital that interventions such as Speak out Stay safe are delivered as intended. Evidence shows that failed implementation leads directly to failed outcomes which could have a significant impact on the safety of children. It’s important that organisations like NSPCC understand, assess, and report on programme fidelity because research highlights how programme fidelity is difficult to maintain and it’s common for programme drift to occur. When this happens, the impact and positive outcomes of an intervention, such as Speak out Stay safe is unlikely to be achieved.

**What intervention did you implement?**

This study was focussed on Foundation and KS1 programme delivery and sought to improve and report an implementation fidelity assessment of the Speak out Stay safe programme. This involved further development and improvement of the delivery implementation assessment tool alongside observations to help understand adherence and competence to the programme delivery guidance alongside quantitative measurement and reporting. This study aimed to improve the measurement for delivery adherence and competence with younger children and involved testing the assessment tool for validity and reliability within schools across Northern Ireland and the UK. The study also sought to understand some of the challenges to delivery fidelity that volunteers were experiencing during delivery of the programme in school settings with children aged 4-7.

**What was the impact of the intervention?**

A delivery checklist for programme adherence and competence was created with the support of programme experts within NSPCC. The checklist enabled detailed quantitative measurement by component which was prior tested for reliability and validity across two observers during a live assembly in school. Whilst volunteers felt a little more nervous being observed for programme fidelity by two NSPCC staff, they understood the need to help to identify how well the programme was being delivered on the ground and to help prevent programme drift occurring.

Each individual component of the Foundation and KS1 programme was assessed and as anticipated, delivery adherence was high, this is common for programme interventions which are simple and straightforward. Whilst adhering to the programme components was good, delivering the programme with a consistently high level of delivery competence was more challenging and softer delivery skills such as teamwork, communication skills, responsiveness and maintaining pupil engagement were founder to be more difficult to maintain across the sample. It was also found that disruptions impact on programme fidelity and interruptions were common and the cause of significant distractions in the assembly. There were technological issues with IT challenges such as video or sound not working and people interruptions such as kitchen staff setting up lunch and also children being removed for other activities such as music lessons or swimming. Whilst these issues are to be expected in a school environment, the disruptions can have an impact on implementation fidelity of the programme and impact on children hearing and understanding important safeguarding messages.

The study also highlighted how children are more likely to concentrate and be less distracted if their teachers are also observing the assembly and role modelling engagement. This significantly helps volunteers maintain interest and engagement of the children in an assembly. In the study, volunteers reported that it’s easy to develop ‘bad habits’ and they value observations and look forward to receiving feedback and validation on their delivery. The study also recommended that volunteers should be observed more regularly to prevent programme drift and ensure volunteers stay on message and help children learn the key messages.

**Advice for implementing in schools**

This research was carried out pre-pandemic and *Speak out Stay safe* has since changed its delivery model to ensure children continue to receive these important messages. As face-to-face volunteer delivery has been a challenge during the last few years due to Covid-19, the NSPCC has adapted the programme to enable teacher delivery which is supported by an online hub of NSPCC resources including lesson plans, films, and activities alongside keyworker staff support. Early feedback is indicating that teachers feel more comfortable and engaged and this approach is helping teachers to feel more knowledgeable and comfortable with the messages.

The NSPCC Speak out Stay safe Programme is available to all schools in Northern Ireland with programmes available for Foundation, KS1 and KS2. There are five types of abuse covered in the programme [Physical, Emotional, Sexual, Neglect and Bullying] and it’s important that teachers ensure the content is delivered in full and that none of it is skipped over. Missing key elements of the programme can impact on what children learn and understand as these omissions could be a trigger that affects behavioural change and keeps children safe.

The NSPCC continues to improve development and implementation of the Speak out Stay safe programme. Schools can sign up at [www.nspcc.org.uk/schools](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/schools).

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