Teacher perspectives on factors facilitating implementation

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**Teacher perspectives on factors facilitating implementation of whole-school approaches for resolving conflict**

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Abstract

While social-emotional learning programmes in schools often have positive outcomes, many such initiatives are not well implemented and maintained. This paper reports on teacher reflections on the process of planning and implementing a whole-school social-emotional learning (SEL) programme with a conflict resolution focus, called Enhancing Relationships in School Communities (ERIS). Ten primary schools participated in an 18-month professional development programme offered by the researchers to assist schools to develop a whole-school approach to handling interpersonal issues using a cooperative problem-solving approach. Implementation (core) teams of 3-5 members, including principal or assistant principal and relevant teachers, attended workshops and managed the change process. In individual interviews, 29 core team members described the most significant changes that had taken place, what factors facilitated those changes and what assisted in overcoming barriers. A synthesised model of facilitators of implementation was developed on the basis of these interviews. The major components of the model included ensuring a whole-school vision and process; pre-programme engagement confirming commitment and alignment of researcher and teachers’ visions; facilitative programme structure and processes such as linking the current programme to existing programmes and processes in the school; leadership and support for staff in the change process, for example, through the implementation team; the nature of the programme content; and monitoring and feedback processes core to sustain motivation and inform on needs and outcomes.

Keywords: social-emotional learning; conflict resolution, implementation; core team
Introduction

The importance of students developing social and emotional capacities has been gaining acceptance in educational contexts internationally, with a recent meta-analysis indicating that universal (aimed at all students) social-emotional learning (SEL) programmes in schools can potentially improve student social and emotional skills, behaviour, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). The ability to resolve conflict cooperatively and constructively has been recognised as an important component of social and emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones, 2004). Building a school community that uses cooperative and constructive approaches to conflict has the goals of creating a safe and constructive learning environment for students, helping students focus on academic outcomes; supporting students’ social and emotional development to become well-functioning members of society; and creating positive, socially just school communities (Jones, 2004).

While evaluations of SEL and conflict resolution (CR) programmes have suggested they can indeed improve student outcomes when effectively implemented (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007; Jones, 2004), translating efficacy studies into programmes implemented under real world conditions can be challenging, with a range of studies showing that new initiatives in schools are often not well implemented and do not deliver anticipated benefits (Elias et al., 2000; Miller & Leyden, 1999; Walker, 2004), or are implemented, but not maintained over time (Deutsch et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 1992; Rogers, 2003). Similarly, because of the challenges in making large-scale changes in schools, new education system policies and programmes may not necessarily be implemented effectively (Elmore, 1997; Priestley et al., 2011).
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The challenge of implementing new programmes is likely to be particularly great when new skills are in the area of SEL. Not only are there limited opportunities in most pre-service teacher education programmes to develop competency in teaching SEL (Cohen, 2006; Jennings & Greenberg, 2008), but managing emotional responses and addressing conflict constructively are interpersonal skills that can be challenging for teachers themselves to learn and apply (Elliott et al., 2011; McLaughlin, 2000). Yet, when implementation barriers to SEL are overcome, programmes implemented by school staff have been shown to be at least as effective as programmes run by outside researchers or experts (Durlak et al., 2011). Therefore, research examining facilitators to implementing and sustaining new SEL initiatives is needed.

Aims

Our aim in this paper was to consolidate a range of factors that appear to support implementation of SEL programmes and to create a synthesised model that can guide future research and practice efforts. We were particularly interested in the model being derived from the school-based experiences of those teachers and school leaders who are most actively engaged in professional development, planning and implementation processes. Relevant actors, such as school leaders and teachers, can serve as key informants about the processes that are most effective in creating stable, widespread and routinised implementation across a school (Batton, 2004; Eiseman et al., 1990; Elias et al., 2003). The value of a qualitative approach to understanding how specific outcomes have been achieved has been discussed extensively in the literature on programme evaluation (e.g., Patton, 2002). Therefore, in our study, a qualitative interview-based methodology was used to explore participants’ reflections of what they found most helpful while engaging in a professional development process with the aim of planning and implementing a new SEL programme.
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The specific programme examined in this study is the *Enhancing Relationships in School Communities* (ERIS) programme, a professional development programme that uses a core implementation team model to assist schools to develop cooperative whole-school conflict resolution approaches. While ERIS was the approach used, we hope that the lessons learned from those responsible for implementing the programme can be generalised to other SEL initiatives and contribute to “implementation science” (Fixsen *et al.*, 2005). A model derived from reflections of core team members could potentially support the development of theory related to facilitative factors in programme implementation and could help form a framework to consider when designing evaluations of SEL professional learning programmes and school initiatives, including those using an implementation team model.

The *Enhancing Relationships in School Communities Programme*

The ERIS programme is a professional development programme designed for primary school staff to help them develop their own cooperative conflict resolution (CR) understanding and skills, and then to apply those learnings at a whole-school level (Wertheim *et al.*, 2009). The process involves schools committing to an 18-month programme in which a core implementation team of 3 to 5 teachers, including leadership, attends seven professional development days (together with other schools’ core teams). The core teams are expected to take responsibility for school changes, including providing professional development to staff in their school, and overseeing changes in the school’s curriculum, policy and practice around handling disputes. In addition to implementing a conflict resolution curriculum, teachers are encouraged to apply ideas and skills in daily practice, such as with students during playground supervision, and with parents and fellow staff.
A central cooperative conflict resolution model is taught to core team teachers for subsequent dissemination to all school staff (Wertheim et al., 2006), which combines theories of cooperation (Deutsch, 1973), goal interdependence (Deutsch et al., 2006), and integrative problem solving (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986) with the applied approach of the Harvard Negotiation Model (Fisher & Ury, 1986). An abbreviated version called the SIB model (Setting the scene for cooperation, Identifying interests of the parties, and Brainstorming options) forms the basis of cooperative conflict resolution efforts (Wertheim et al., 2009). Teachers learn to apply the model when negotiating, mediating disputes, coaching students to solve their own conflicts, and solving general interpersonal or intergroup problems. The aim of the ERIS programme is, therefore, to assist schools to apply constructive conflict resolution and cooperative problem-solving approaches at a whole-school level, including making changes in policy and practice.

In the first cohort to complete the ERIS programme, twelve schools were randomly assigned to either a full (7 workshops for implementation teams) or partial (two workshops) intervention over an 18-month period (Trinder et al., 2010). Teachers completed surveys pre- and post-programme assessing conflict approaches (including responses to scenarios) and activities. At pre-programme, teachers generally held negative perceptions of conflict and few teachers described using an integrative approach to managing student-based disputes. At post-programme, full-programme teachers, particularly members of the implementation team, evidenced a significantly more constructive view of conflict, greater understanding and reported use of integrative, constructive approaches to managing conflict and increased teaching of CR curriculum in classrooms. Researcher field notes from school visits indicated that full-programme schools also engaged in more whole-school changes in policy and practice, including instituting a constructive conflict resolution approach as standard practice for managing student
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disputes during playground supervision (Trinder et al., 2010). The professional learning team
members themselves reported making particular gains.

These findings suggested that providing sufficient professional development and support
is important in implementation efforts. In addition, full programme schools varied considerably
in how comprehensively the programme was implemented, suggesting that further examination
of factors facilitating implementation was needed to inform programme developments. The
current study reports on the experiences of core team members of a second cohort of ten primary
schools who subsequently completed the full ERIS programme. Previously reported quantitative
ratings of the programme (based on teacher surveys, scenario responses and field notes) with the
second cohort (White et al., 2012) indicated that after one year, compared to a comparison group
that received educational materials but no professional development, programme school teachers
had made significantly more gains in knowledge and understanding in cooperative conflict
resolution. At post-programme, programme school staff described using more cooperative
approaches to handling conflict, particularly in schools where implementation teams had
provided more professional development to non-implementation team staff. Programme school
teachers reported teaching significantly more conflict resolution curriculum to students than did
comparison school teachers (median hours reported by implementation team teachers = 11, other
programme teachers = 8, comparison school teachers = 0). Programme school teachers also
reported greater student gains in understanding and use of cooperative methods. However,
again, programme schools had made varying degrees of progress in changing policy and practice
related to handling day-to-day incidents. The current study used a qualitative methodology to
gain a deeper insight into factors impacting on these school outcomes.
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**Considering Facilitators of Programme Implementation**

In designing the ERIS programme, consideration was given to factors researchers have previously proposed as facilitating implementation and maintenance of new SEL initiatives in schools. School leadership providing support for new initiatives has been noted as important (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Ertesvåg *et al.* 2010; Gager & Elias, 1997; Han & Weiss, 2005) as has been the use of implementation (core) teams (Firth *et al.*, 2008; Gager and Elias 1997; Ishler *et al.*, 1998). Implementation teams with responsibility for the professional learning of staff encourage active interchange of ideas to overcome passive learning and isolation of individual teachers (Hadar & Brody, 2010). Involvement of leaders within a core team ensures that someone with authority can take sustained responsibility for implementing the initiative. Core teams are also a potentially efficient way to provide professional development to a limited number of teachers, who then can disseminate new knowledge and skills throughout their school. The value of such implementation teams, in ensuring effective implementation, has been recognised in evaluations of a range of educational innovations (Higgins *et al.*, 2012).

Additional facilitative factors reported include the programme being seen by the school as relevant to school needs and as fostering mutual respect among students (Fullan, 2004; Gager & Elias 1997); teachers being personally committed to the programme (Ishler *et al.*, 1998); and the programme being consistent with goals of the school and education systems at a broader level (Gager & Elias 1997; Han & Weiss 2005). Researchers have also described benefits of teachers developing a sense of ownership of the initiative, being involved in planning, and being supported to adapt the initiative to the school’s specific needs (Everhart & Wandersman 2000; Gager & Elias 1997; Ringeisen *et al.*, 2003). Other factors include an ongoing, school-wide focus, and staff and students having a shared knowledge of the same conflict resolution
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Finally, as noted earlier regarding the ERIS programme (Trinder et al., 2010), numerous researchers have argued that adequate professional development for school staff is crucial and that teachers are often offered too little preparation and support (Elias et al., 2003; Freeman et al., 2003; Jones & Compton 2003; Walker, 2004; Wertheim et al., 2006). Providing expert consultative support to school teams engaged in new projects has similarly been identified as a significant facilitating factor in programme implementation (e.g., Firth et al., 2008).

While many of the proposed facilitating factors were integrated into the ERIS programme design and delivery, and the programme resulted in positive gains (White et al., 2012), we were interested in which factors were perceived as most important by the key actors responsible for initiating and overseeing school-wide implementation. The aim of our study was to determine which factors appeared to facilitate positive outcomes, and to synthesise them into a comprehensive model. Therefore this paper reports on interviews of the core team staff who led the change, from which we aimed to develop a framework of factors facilitating implementation efforts. Processes that assisted in overcoming barriers to implementation during the change process were also considered in developing the framework. Collection of qualitative data in this study would allow us to tap into important participant perspectives on implementation processes that were not elicited in the quantitative data collection.

Method

Participants

Ten primary schools (6 State and 4 Catholic schools) in the Melbourne (Australia) metropolitan area participated in the ERIS programme. Core teams comprised the principal or
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vice-principal and 2 to 4 other teachers. They were responsible for managing the programme at their school, attending 7 days of professional development and disseminating information to fellow staff (which ranged from 11 to 52 staff members, \( M = 26.38, SD = 12.18 \)). A total of 29 core team members (25 female, 4 male) took part in post-programme interviews, including 6 principals, 6 assistant principals (three were also student welfare coordinators), 2 student welfare coordinators, 13 class teachers and 2 specialist teachers.

The ERIS Programme

After obtaining relevant university and education department ethics approvals, schools were recruited by information on a university website, information distributed by teachers enrolled in a Master of Education course, and through school networks. To enhance staff commitment, school eligibility required principals to indicate that at least 80% of staff supported participation in the programme. Of 13 applications, 10 schools were randomly assigned to be programme schools.

Programme schools agreed to form a core team of three to five staff, provide time for core teams to disseminate learning to fellow staff and provide teacher replacement costs for attending PD sessions. Core team members were asked to attend seven PD sessions across 18 months, meet regularly with their teams and disseminate information to fellow staff. Non-core team staff were asked to attend one full-day PD session early in the programme.

Each school received one initial visit and three subsequent progress review visits from ERIS researchers to discuss individual school progress and support implementation.

ERIS professional learning programme. Workshops consisted of a combination of professional development on conflict resolution concepts, skills, activities and role play practice, consideration of the cultural context and respect for cultural diversity, and time for planning.
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University professionals, with content knowledge and experience in working with schools, prepared and delivered materials and workshops. Two principals from schools that had previously completed the ERIS programme described how they had implemented the ideas in a whole-school fashion. One PD day, attended by all school staff, covered professional learning pertinent to cooperative conflict resolution. Schools were provided with resources including books, posters, access to a DVD, and student curriculum materials at three developmental levels.

Data Collection

Interviews. Post programme, three core team members from each school (except for one school that provided two members), were interviewed individually using a “significant change story” (Dart & Davies, 2003) approach. Interviewees were asked to describe the most significant changes they had observed in their school as a result of project participation, and to reflect on what factors had assisted in bringing those changes about and what challenges had been experienced in the process. Audiotapes were transcribed and scrutinised for emergent themes. The transcript data were categorised into major themes, initially by an independent researcher, who had not designed or administered the programme. Further themes were elicited and refined by two ERIS researchers, with consensus being reached.

Results: Preliminary Observations

Prior to describing facilitative factors, participants described the most significant changes they had noticed resulting from engaging in the ERIS programme. While not the main focus of this paper, a brief summary is provided to set the context. Teachers often described changing their curriculum content to include the cooperative conflict resolution model, role plays and skills building; and indicated that inclusion of curriculum and role plays for students assisted the
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students to learn the conflict resolution skills and language, and better apply the ideas in the playground when teachers encouraged students to do so. Teachers in some schools reported creating a broader whole-school change, in which the school changed their school-wide conflict management procedures to the SIB cooperative conflict resolution approach. Usually this change involved an agreed protocol to be followed for handling incidents in the playground. Some teachers and school leaders also reported using the skills in managing classroom and parent disputes and problems between staff. When positive changes were described, participants were asked how they had come about, and what had facilitated them.

Results: A Synthesised Model of Facilitative Implementation Factors

Teachers and school leaders described multiple factors that facilitated implementation of the ERIS programme in their schools. On the basis of these themes a synthesised model was created, which is shown in Figure 1. The major components of the model included ensuring pre-programme engagement, a whole-school vision and process, considering programme content, programme structure and process, implementation (core) team roles, and monitoring and feedback processes.

Pre-programme engagement

Pre-programme engagement was noted as important and included elements such as initial motivations, timing of the programme and leadership and staff support.

Initial motivations. Initial motivations for school involvement in ERIS varied. Some teachers described a desire to enhance school community relationships generally, while others sought to build conflict resolution strategies specifically:
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We thought this was another way for us to continue our journey in looking at methods, ways and strategies for building a stronger culture within the school, a culture that tries to have as little conflict as possible.

What we wanted was a clearer process on how to help children deal with conflict – a process that was consistent through the school, that used common language, that all teachers, children and parents [would be] able to use.

Aldersebaes et al. (2000) discuss the potential of “data to ignite change” in schools by revealing needs and enhancing the intrinsic motivation of staff to address them (p. 20). The motivating impact of local school data on some schools’ initial engagement in ERIS was evident in this project. Participants reported that data collected from student and parent opinion surveys for school reviews made them aware that the amount of unresolved conflict present was greater than they had realised. This realisation inspired action.

[Student survey feedback] was a bit of an eye-opener because not many staff thought that there was a lot of aggression and violence happening, but I think it was quite high, the percentage of children reporting being pushed or hit... that made people think that this conflict resolution approach is the way to go.

Like a lot of schools we had low student connectedness results on our data… it would be nice to have something that gave the kids skills.

We had this perception from our parent surveys and stuff that there were some conflicts that were unresolved - kids were feeling they weren’t being resolved properly. It was an area we wanted to address.
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Some participants noted that these initial motivations continued to help them engage over time as the process unfolded.

Timing of the programme. A further facilitator was ensuring the timing was right in terms of existing structures and priorities. In deciding whether to participate in the ERIS programmes, schools needed to evaluate programme commitment in relation to competing demands.

I think ERIS came in at the right time, because the student wellbeing role was created and …it just fits in beautifully with everything else that was happening within the school, with the school’s improvement plan.

Initial engagement motivations have been referred to as impetus for an initiative (Priestly et al., 2011). Impetus can be externally driven through system policies, directives or assessment processes, and/or internally motivated through identification of local needs. University and researcher initiated changes, which created the opportunity in the current study, as well as links with external organizations, can provide further impetus (House & McQuillan, 1998).

Leadership commitment and broad staff support. When describing initial entry into the programme strong leadership and staff commitment to the initiative were described in successful initiatives.

Support from leadership, we were committed to it, we’re going to make it work, we were going to give it a chance to work.

[We received] an enormous amount of support from the principal. He’s so supportive in whatever you do or suggest or what you might like to take on. He has this great enthusiasm that filters down…
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In addition to leadership commitment, commitment by the full school staff was described.

I suppose the staff committed to it. By being involved in the project we had to commit to it and it was an 18 month project. So, that was what we were going to do...

A Whole-School Vision and Process

At the centre of the facilitative factors, in the schools that made the most comprehensive changes, was a whole-school approach. Schools were encouraged to view the ERIS project as an opportunity to enhance relationships at a whole-school level. This included having a whole-school vision for how conflict would be handled as a school in ways that would enhance relationships,

We’ve definitely started looking this last year in the welfare team at developing [an] across school discipline policy and…that’s what pushed it.

It wasn’t just this level or that level, it was everybody …I think that was the key and just to make it work to somehow build it in so we were reminded of it and prompting each other of how to go about it.

We needed to get the language the same across the whole school.

It was going to be trialled by a few and then all staff were going to participate.

Application in all parts of the school, and at all grade levels, was the goal in these schools, with attempts made to ensure the availability of school-relevant and developmentally appropriate curriculum.
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*Disseminating whole-school practice guidelines.* One part of the whole-school approach was development of policy and practice guidelines, so that everyone was using the same approach to incidents; this was seen to be a significant advantage by participants. Physical prompts around the school and ready access to the model steps assisted teachers to put new skills into practice. Teachers reported carrying copies of the guidelines, and placing signs with the CR model around the school, in classrooms, in the staff room, and on boards around a ‘friendship tree’.

We have it on duty [playground supervision]; the [SIB] steps are there to remind. When the emergency teachers come in, it’s in the folder they get.

With the girls in class, if we’re having an incident, we sit them down and pull out the conflict resolution model and have it there…

It doesn’t matter if you go to the teacher down there or the teacher on the yard [during playground supervision] or the teacher in the classroom, we are all going to say the same kind of things to you.

The development in this project of a common collaborative-style language and common set of practices across the school reflecting a shift away from “traditional principles of power and control” (Sellman, 2011, p. 58), were seen to support whole-school change.

*Programme Content*
In terms of programme content, teachers emphasised that the conflict model, suggested practice, and curriculum offered by researchers were particularly useful because they consisted of clear, simple steps for resolving conflict.

_A simple, clear model for new skills and applications._ Various interviewees mentioned that it helped that the conflict resolution approach was simple and clear. It made progress appear manageable and the information easier to communicate to fellow staff.

As a staff there was a lot we did with conflict resolution because it was simple, it was tangible.

[The conflict resolution lectures were] very point, point, point, point and you got it and you could bring it back and you sort of felt confident that you could do the same thing.

_A clear structure for practice._ Teachers said the explicit structure helped them stay on track during disputes and motivated them to use the model.

Just to have those steps to follow keeps you on track of the issue ...I’ve done a diploma in counselling and we touched on the conflict resolution model but until I’d had the actual steps of knowing what to say, that’s really helped me, and helped the rest of the staff too, because you’ve got those beginning sentences which is good and you’ve got that real rigid structure that helps you to get to the end of it.

I always like to have [the SIB steps] there with me so I don’t divert from getting to the end and getting a solution …and looking for the deeper understanding of where this comes from.

_Associated curriculum and behavioural rehearsal._ Curriculum to teach concepts and skills were seen as important. Teachers also reported that applying the steps through role plays and
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rehearsals, during professional development for staff and with students in classroom and
playground contexts, enabled positive staff and student changes.

  I think a lot of it had to do with role plays, because that worked very powerfully.
  You had to teach it, you couldn’t just do it in the [playground].

  These observed factors parallel a set of four factors, termed SAFE, previously found to
predict better outcomes of universal SEL programmes (Durlak et al., 2011). These factors
include sequenced skills broken into smaller steps and sequentially mastered; active forms of
learning, such as behavioural rehearsal; focus, which involves sufficient time and attention
devoted to developing the skills; and explicit, clear and specific learning objectives, so students
know what they are expected to learn.

  Integrating the new processes and concepts into existing structures, processes and
curricula. Also related to content, schools appreciated when the new initiative was tied to
existing practices so they did not need to grapple with an entirely new programme. The ERIS
researchers supported schools in conceptually integrating the new programme into existing ones,
and helped build justifications for including conflict resolution in curriculum through providing
links to education systems’ learning standards and guidelines covering expected teaching
content. A common theme was the usefulness of integrating ERIS concepts, skills and processes
into already existing processes, such as school planning sessions:

  Traditionally we would do other things at the beginning of the year but we decided we were having
two weeks, it would be ERIS and they were the features that we’d look at to start off our year.

  We felt that we could build in empathy and an aspect of being able to resolve conflicts using the
models that we’ve been practising through ERIS, and it fitted into our assertive discipline.
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In some researcher field visits, core team members had commented that teachers were unclear about how the ERIS conflict resolution approach compared to restorative justice programmes, which some schools had previously implemented (Wertheim *et al*., 2009). As a result the researchers developed and presented a diagram emphasizing the similarities and differences between the two approaches. Teachers reported that this clarification facilitated implementation,

I think we felt that [the ERIS CR model] was very similar [to restorative practices] until it was actually pointed out with a [diagram] that compared the two… I think that clarified that issue which was … a stumbling block for us … I would say, for me, that was like the turn-around for the confidence to then come back [to the school] and say, no, it’s different, it complements and it really will be beneficial for the kids.

When core teams provided PD to staff, ERIS content was linked to State curriculum standards and ongoing SEL initiatives. Doing so gave the programme legitimacy, and helped make the programme appear more manageable with potential to be integrated into what teachers already knew and did.

It’s written into VELS [Victorian Essential Learning Standards], I mean, it’s there and once the teachers see it’s there too… we need to be looking at it …

We’re taking what is currently happening within our school. So, it’s what the teachers are familiar with, it’s what we’re currently using, it’s what is relevant to us and building on that, rather than starting afresh. That’s why I think it’s working.
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We sat down as a group and we looked at the conflict resolution curriculum and tried to combine it with Bounce Back [a SEL programme], because a lot of teachers here do a fair bit of Bounce Back

Some teachers described curriculum infusion, weaving ERIS ideas into existing curriculum and core subjects,

We also read I Am Jack…we used the whole [CR] programme - to nut out who was the owl [cooperative problem solver] and so on, and that was brilliant…So we’re able to associate all the ERIS stuff with what we’re doing.

This finding is consistent with Fullan’s (2001) concept of coherence-making, which recognises that change efforts are typically accompanied by overload and fragmentation, and that new initiatives are most effective when they can be integrated and aligned with current policy and practice.

Modifying and adapting ERIS curriculum to meet specific needs. Many schools clearly worked with and, in some instances, modified the curriculum ERIS researchers provided, adding relevant role plays, and modifying lessons for particular student groups or subjects. This appeared to help schools feel the material was applicable to their own students’ needs.

So we’d work on it, get into teams, modify the lessons so that it wasn’t a change every time you came up to look at something … We had a curriculum day devoted to it, the teams looked at [ERIS curriculum], they modified quite a bit of it…so then we could start off the first two weeks at the beginning of the year looking at valuing one another, looking at how to solve problems.
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Modifications included working through how to apply the process at different developmental levels.

We discussed how [the curriculum] would work around each of the [grade] levels.

It was really good in terms of just being able to simplify those processes with the younger kids, and giving the teachers some tools in which to do this… to deal with the subject matter at a very early stage.

Teachers modifying curriculum offered by researchers has been reported in previous studies (e.g., Everhart & Wandersman, 2000). This process has pros and cons. It may reduce curriculum fidelity when a manualised format has previously been evaluated (Jones, 2004). However, teachers and schools can gear material and processes better to the developmental needs or specific characteristics of their staff, students or school community. In addition, teachers develop ownership of the curriculum which potentially facilitates longer term maintenance (Everhart & Wandersman, 2000).

**ERIS Professional Learning Programme Structure and Process**

The programme structure and process were viewed as important facilitative factors. Staff mentioned ERIS programme format aspects that they considered helpful, including attending professional development days away from the school to concentrate on new learning unhindered by everyday distractions. The active nature of professional learning was also noted.

The presentations have been good, to stop and have a day where we reflect on it because the busyness of schools doesn’t allow us that… Practising it as part of it, as well, was good.
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I think the model was a good one because we had a number of opportunities to go away and trial and implement and come back and talk about it and then try again.

Working with external consultants over an 18-month period, provided time to learn new concepts, trial the initiative and work through implementation difficulties, supported by ERIS researchers. The support provided at the individual school level by researchers visiting schools was also valued and differentiated the programme from other professional development experiences:

The support, the way the [research] team has moved around the schools has been different, as far as PD goes. I think [ERIS researchers] have been able to get a sense of individual schools … connecting with us as a school and helping us implement the change.

Sufficient time dedicated to the initiative. The ERIS programme ran for 18 months, due to the research funding time frame. Teachers commented appreciatively about what they perceived as the extended time frame compared to many other professional development programmes.

I think the model is a good one because it’s spread over a good amount of time. That’s really critical because if you want any significant change to happen it needs to be given time to practice and to make sure that happens.

The model was a good one because we had a number of opportunities to go away and trial and implement and come back and talk about it and then try again.

The schools that reported the most positive outcomes, generally allocated dedicated staff time to the initiative. This was achieved in different ways by different schools.
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The beginning of the year was crunch time…how to make that happen…So we looked at spending one of our three planning days on ERIS and then using the first two weeks to actually drive it.

Nonetheless, for many schools there was an awareness that it takes time to engage all staff and, for some, much more work needed to be done.

I think a lot of people didn’t kick off with it as early as they should have or could have. Sort of sit back…wait, see how it goes for them …So therefore it hasn’t been everybody all at once … But this is the second year so it’s kind of better this year.

I still see we’re very much at the start. But we’ve had 18 months of going out and getting educated and … now it’s roll up the sleeves time and work and get it into the school.

*Learning from and presenting to other schools.* The opportunity for cross-school input and support was also viewed as helpful. The format of the programme allowed schools to learn from each other. Two schools that had previously completed the ERIS programme were invited to be partners in the ERIS project and their principals presented how they had implemented ERIS ideas at a whole-school level, thereby demonstrating what could be accomplished and how challenges could be addressed. On the final PD day, core teams also presented what their own schools had accomplished. Core team members described the usefulness of learning from other schools’ activities and accomplishments.

The day when we all gave our presentations, that was a really meaningful thing… it really brought things alive … that did make a big impression.
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Comparisons with other schools were reported as having effects for various reasons, motivating core team members to meet the standards of others, or encouraging schools to celebrate their own accomplishments.

We knew that we hadn’t done much and we were starting to feel guilty and we wanted to take …something out of it so that we could see for ourselves that we weren’t wasting your time, we weren’t wasting our own time."

…speaking to teachers from other schools. That was interesting because it gave us a lot of feedback and we came back feeling quite positive about what we were doing.

Other researchers have described similar benefits to developing cross-school networks enabling time for reflection and networking (Muijs et al., 2011; Priestly et al., 2011). Fullan (2010a) has characterised such partnerships and cross-school networking as “positive pressure,” that can motivate change and allow peers to learn about implementation from each other while actually engaged in it.

Implementation (Core) Team Roles

Core teams leading implementation processes in their school. Core team composition and processes were seen as crucial. The core team model was described as useful, particularly when combined with workshops away from the school and consultant researchers visiting schools to provide individualised support. Core teams were described as the key force leading the initiative.

Core team members described a variety of roles that they played as the change team in their school, including managing planning and implementation processes, providing leadership,
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learning new information and skills to disseminate throughout their school, trialling new methods, and motivating and supporting colleagues in the transition process.

Teachers explained reasons core teams were effective.

So the knowledge isn’t just residing in one or even two people, you had a group of four teachers effectively who could be sharing and bouncing ideas, information, successes and failures off each other.

The three [core team members] tended to plan the lessons around ERIS. Then, because we team teach, we always … did it as a group… So we did a lot of group lessons…Then we would put some of the interesting things that had come up on our interactive white board and we saved things to an ERIS folder.

*Composition of the core team.* The particular teachers and roles represented on the core team were indicated as aiding its effectiveness. All core teams had leadership represented by a principal or assistant principal. Teams also included personnel who were seen to be well-placed to support the programme, such as the school’s student wellbeing coordinator or curriculum coordinator.

The student wellbeing role was created [just prior to the programme] and then through that everything else sort of came about.

In some schools the core team was a pre-existing team, which had advantages in that communication processes were pre-existing.
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Now what we do have here are professional learning teams and one… is the welfare, wellbeing team. So we decided that would be the group that we would go through to get this programme off the ground and we meet twice a term.

*Core team members providing school-based professional learning.* Core teams provided professional development to their staff, through formal and less formal means. Information, behavioural rehearsal through role plays and discussion all helped embed the knowledge and develop skills.

We have been PDing [providing professional development to] the staff. We’ve had a few short PDs, which the staff had responded really well to. We’ve presented some of the information provided to us through the ERIS programme.

I think giving it time and giving it PD and… we weren’t dictating to people, but we were exploring it together…, saying, ‘What do you think of this’ …’What does this mean?’ …and allowing people to ask questions and at the end of the sessions, just saying ‘what worked, what was good?’ … ‘What are you concerned about that we can follow up next time?’

Even though [non-core team staff] had been to ERIS to the one [whole staff] day and they were enthusiastic, there still needed to be professional learning, information given out to everybody.

The role play was really good … we had to work it out and try and adapt the two minute [SIB] model … we did it with our own staff.

*Core teams assisting, and relieving the burden on, other staff.* Core team members assisted other staff by helping plan and embed the relevant material in the curriculum.
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So I’m now going to go back and have a look at this unit in middle and junior [levels] and have a look at their ERIS components and see if I can weave that in for them and then present that to them as something already done, so they don’t have to do it for themselves.

Core teams prompting and encouraging progress. Core teams created opportunities to monitor and promote progress through ensuring time was allocated to ERIS at staff meetings, ensuring core team members were represented on other team processes, attending relevant meetings, and integrating ERIS activities into ongoing activities. In addition, informal conversations helped keep it on the agenda.

I think doing it at a staff meeting, reminding and raising the awareness on a regular basis…

Allowing time to have that conversation, ‘how’s the conflict resolution things going, how are you dealing with the issues’ and talking about ‘okay well there’s a two minute model’… Having to fit in people from different levels has been a good thing; at each level we’ve been able to have people that remind and prompt and encourage use of it.

We would give feedback in the welfare part of our staff meeting. You know, how are we all going?

Addressing a lack of commitment by some staff. In some schools not all staff embraced the initiative or saw it as relevant. Competing pressures and priorities acted against full school commitment and application. When lack of staff commitment was an issue, core teams addressed it in various ways. Some solutions involved finding ways to persuade staff of the usefulness of the initiative or elements of it. For example, in addressing teacher concerns that using the CR model would be too time consuming, one approach was to communicate that the time would be well invested,
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We keep talking about the fact that if we can get the children to be able to use [the CR] model in 50 per cent of the cases, then there’s a 50 per cent reduction in the amount of time.

Some core teams addressed limits in staff commitment by focusing on circumscribed goals for their school to ease the school into the programme or enable some changes to take place in areas that were most receptive and to provide leverage for expansion of the programme.

As the core team, we had to work hard to pick out the bits that were relevant to us and show the staff how that was going to fit in for us.

The challenge is still in a modern busy school having the right time and the opportunity for it to be developed. Our school … may have done better if it had been a whole-school exercise. …I think [ERIS has] had a significant impact, but that impact’s been largely in the one part, in the junior part of the school.

In response to these concerns, during one professional development day, core team members were guided in using the CR model as a problem-solving model to consider what staff concerns about ERIS might be and how concerns might be addressed.

To create the conditions for more informed decision-making and problem-solving, in the ERIS project, leadership of the change was conceptualised as a collaborative activity to be undertaken by the core team. The operation of the core team could be seen as embodying the practice of distributed leadership which has been advocated as a way to build school capacity and support school change (e.g., Harris, 2011; Stoll, 2009). This shared leadership approach and the many important roles and functions of an implementation team may not be obvious to those
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who first engage in a change project and it appears useful to clarify them and ensure that roles
are mutually agreed.

Monitoring and Feedback

Monitoring and feedback were important to motivate initial engagement in the
programme and encourage continued engagement in the change process. The core team role
in ensuring ERIS was kept on the agenda (previously described) is a form of monitoring.
More formal monitoring and feedback processes were also discussed. Collecting school data
and providing feedback about it was described as important in motivating change at various
phases of the project

Using data collection to inform and influence commitment. Some respondents described
implementing systematic data collection. One aim and outcome was to heighten staff awareness
of problems needing addressing, and thereby increase motivation and commitment.
Interviewees who had collected data on playground incidents reported that the data demonstrated
to fellow staff the need for conflict resolution initiatives and it motivated staff to implement
ERIS ideas.

When we initially started with ERIS we took data, like one of your other schools [in an earlier
cohort] took data in the playground, and we thought well that would be a good idea because we
needed to see whether there was actually a problem here - and there was.

The beginning of this year, I collated all [playground supervision] data from the whole year of last
year, which has never happened. Everyone at the school believed that we don’t have any problems
in the yard…but in collecting our data, that was very incorrect.
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I ran a [professional learning day] for the staff here... I presented all our data; I asked the staff to say how much time they thought we spent on discipline; how much conflict we had in the yard; what they thought the main issues were, and they ranked them one to 10. I collected all the results [to feed back later].

In our PD programme we encouraged data collection and in one PD workshop a principal from a prior ERIS cohort presented a graph showing progressive decreases in playground disputes over a two-year period following engaging in the programme. Tracking data on playground incidents over time also served to reinforce changes taking place and could motivate continued efforts at cooperative conflict approaches.

We did some tracking of the issues on the yard and there was a pleasant surprise that there was a reduction in the number of conflicts.

Data of this sort provides information about the effectiveness of changes that have been implemented, and informs about whether goals have been met and strategies need to be reviewed. Data collection allowed staff to reflect on what type of school culture they wanted to create, and over time could serve a reinforcing function, demonstrating that new processes were having a positive effect on student conflict. The positive impact of using local data to drive action in schools is supported across a range of school improvement initiatives (Schildkamp, & Kuiper, 2010).

**Directions for research**

In summary, the qualitative data from significant change stories of core team teachers provided a rich array of factors teachers viewed as motivating and facilitating efforts to
implement a whole-school approach to cooperative conflict resolution at the level of curriculum and daily practice in the school community. Many of their descriptions corroborate past reports of implementation factors in schools and were consistent with our own impressions while engaging with schools during field visits and professional development sessions. We were able to combine teacher and school leaders’ perspectives into a synthesised model of facilitative implementation factors that can be referred to when designing and carrying out change programmes in schools. Our study involved retrospective reports by core team members of perceived facilitative factors. These perspectives are highly important, as those teachers and school leaders were most directly involved in the change process. Nonetheless, observations by other school community members, including students, and independent observers, such as researchers, would complement this assessment of facilitative factors and methods for addressing barriers.

Furthermore, since the ERIS programme was designed around extended professional development for core implementation teams, the model tends to focus on advantages of, and factors relevant to, such an approach. Therefore, the model may need to be reviewed for application to other types of innovation.

Research is still needed on the best composition of implementation teams, for particular purposes, including which school leaders, representatives of the school community, personal characteristics and roles, are most important to involve for particular purposes. Higgins et al. (2012) have noted the paucity of research focusing specifically on team learning in implementation teams charged with the responsibility of leading school-wide change.

Given the key role of leaders and school commitment to an initiative that was noted by core team members in our study and previous researchers (e.g., Firth et al., 2008; Ishler et al.,
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1998; Priestly et al., 2011), methods for assessing and increasing commitment of core team members, and schools in general, need to be systematically evaluated. For example, in the ERIS programme prior to being accepted into the programme, schools were asked to determine that 80% of their staff agreed to participate, however, methods for determining this varied across schools.

Amount and kind of support offered by external programme facilitators, and methods for core team and other participant dissemination of ideas throughout the school are also worth researching. Specific types of processes in schools, including professional development that core teams can provide to fellow staff and processes for building home-school partnerships to support new practices all need further examination for their potential impact. Finally, schools involved in this study were all primary schools. While it is expected that change processes would be similar at secondary school level, specific challenges may exist in these typically larger and more complex organisations (McLaughlin & Talbert, cited in Stoll, 2007). Therefore, research into differently structured systems is needed. Finally, the model presented here covers facilitators of implementation efforts, since the time point of assessment was at the conclusion of the 18-month programme. Factors related to maintaining initiatives over time (Wiltsey-Stirman et al., 2012) and further embedding changes into larger systems needs further examination (Fullan, 2010b; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006).

In summary, this study identified a range of factors perceived by key actors as useful in facilitating successful implementation of a social-emotional learning programme designed to be applied at a whole-school level. As researchers, in agreement with previous literature, we concluded that supplementing our quantitative and field notes data collection with qualitative interview-based data provided a means to obtain a nuanced picture of process factors that may be
Teacher perspectives on factors facilitating implementation contributing to outcomes identified in quantitative research. The perspective of those school leaders and teachers involved in the professional learning and implementation process provided an important basis for developing a model of facilitative factors. We concur with Michael Fullan (2010b) who concludes, on the basis of decades of research on school change, “that practice drives theory. That is, focusing on improving practice uncovers the best specific ideas. What you learn along the way can be tested in the light of broader research, but practice – not research – should be the driver” (p. 25). We hope that the model (Figure 1) that has been presented will contribute to further theory development and research efforts refining processes for implementation of social-emotional learning programmes in schools.
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References


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Figure 1.
Model of process and structural factors facilitating implementation of a whole-school conflict resolution programme, based on implementation team perspectives
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**Programme structure and process**
- Implementation (core) team of school leaders and staff in relevant roles
- Extended PD offered to core team
- Resources provided
- Networking with other schools, including “lighthouse” schools
- Researchers engaging in field visits with schools

**Implementation (core) team roles**
- Providing leadership
- Encouraging commitment & ownership
- Meeting regularly
- Learning new concepts and skills to provide a school resource
- Overseeing policy changes
- Providing PD to fellow staff
- Supporting staff in the transition
- Providing prompts

**A whole-school vision and process**
- Consider policy & practice
- A common purpose, set of practices, and language
- Apply with students (class & playground), staff, parents and broader school community
- Relevant, engaging curriculum - all levels

**Pre-programme engagement**
- Clarify motivations and understanding of the project
- Strong school leadership and support
- Whole school commitment to the initiative
- Evaluate competing demands and whether the timing is right

**Programme content**
- Relevant to local needs
- Linked to existing education department policy
- A clear, simple conceptual model
- An explicit structure to enable application in daily practice
- Opportunities for behavioural rehearsal
- Clarifying fit with existing SEL and behaviour management approaches

**Monitoring and feedback**
- Data collection (school audits, surveys) to inform about the need for the initiative
- Monitoring progress
- Providing feedback to staff and relevant parties about findings to inform and motivate action