Promoting Social Responsibility Through Community Engagement: The development of the SPEAK-Up toolkit for promoting elementary school children’s capacity for social action

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Abstract
Schools provide opportunities for children to make positive impactful changes in their communities. SPEAK-Up is an educational toolkit designed to strengthen children’s capacity to enact social change through community engagement. The current project describes the development of the toolkit and its role in supporting socially responsible behaviours, belief systems, and environments that empower children to enact change in their communities.

Development of the SPEAK-Up Website:
www.witsprograms.com/speak

- SPEAK involves three phases to promote socially responsible environments that empower children to engage within their communities.
- Within each phase there are associated resources that complement their learning intentions.

Context
- SPEAK-up is a social-emotional learning program that supports the development of social responsibility.
- Based on past research which shows that school-based programs reduce emotional and behavioural problems by increasing social responsibility (e.g., Leadbeater, Thompson, & Sukhawathanakul, 2016; da Cunha et al., 2021).
- Social responsibility reflects societal norms that inspire behaviours and attitudes with an overall concern for the welfare of others (Sukhawathanakul & Leadbeater, 2020).
- Social responsibility and prosocial behaviours can be promoted in classrooms through Dialogic Literary Gatherings, meaningful and reflective discussions (Villardón-Gallego et al., 2018).
- The foundational social skills for SPEAK are taught during the preceding WITS and LEADERs programs. These help children develop peaceful, considerate and safe problem-solving skills when dealing with peer conflicts. Thus, learning how to be a part of a peaceful community before engaging with it.
- Based on these findings, diverse resources have been made to complement the goals of SPEAK-up.

1 THINK phase
Resources include:
- Lesson plans for teachers to shift from a teaching to mentoring mindset when engaging with the SPEAK resources.
- Book-based activities and tips to create a safe classroom environment.
- Activities and reading lesson plans for classroom interactions with complex global issues.

2 COMMUNICATE phase
Through diverse activities, students strengthen their behavioral skills for the project. For example, collaboration, problem solving, and leadership skills.

3 ACT phase
The classroom create and complete a meaningful social action project, which involves collaboratively identifying, planning, and directing solutions for a problem within a community. A step-by-step toolkit is included to help teachers guide the classroom.

Figure 1. Mock-up of the SPEAK-up website where all resources and information will be accessible to teachers.

Figure 2. Some of the SPEAK books with associated lesson plans that help children engage with and understand complex global issues.

Future Directions
- Conduct a pilot study to evaluate the efficacy of the toolkit.
- Teachers will provide feedback through focus groups.
- Future study will involve a formal evaluation of the toolkit through a randomized control trial of schools.

References

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