The Effects of two Components of the Aussie
Optimism Program on Social Skills

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Psychology of
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content, work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Kaye Natalie Cuthbertson Mills

2007
Dedication

With love to Kieran, Breanne and Harrison
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Abstract

The relationship between social skill deficits and emotional and behavioural problems has led researchers to examine the cognitive and behavioural elements of social skill acquisition in childhood. This research aimed to compare the effectiveness of two components of the Aussie Optimism program for enhancing social behaviour in late childhood.

One hundred and twenty-eight children (68 boys and 60 girls) aged between 9 and 12 years from two schools participated in the study: (a) 34 students received the social life skills program; (b) 49 students received the optimistic thinking skills program; and (c) 45 students were assigned to a no-treatment control group.

Children were assessed with self-report and teacher-report measures of social skills, adjustment and explanatory style at pretest, posttest and three months follow-up. In addition, the relationship between these variables at pretest and health-related variables measured throughout the intervention was examined. The results indicated that the social skills program improved the social skills of participating children at posttest. No intervention effects were found for explanatory style. No intervention effects were found for teacher-rated measures of behaviour or adjustment, although in general students improved on these measures over time. Eating breakfast was associated with increased social skills, and better teacher-rated academic performance and adaptive functioning at pretest. Stressful life events were negatively correlated with academic performance and teacher-rated happiness at pretest, and higher exercise levels were associated with less teacher-rated social problems at pretest.
This research indicates that the social life skills intervention program improves the social skills of participating children in the short-term. Limitations and implications of the present findings are discussed. Further research is needed to clarify the impact of health-related variables on intervention outcomes for children.
CONTENTS

Title ............................................. 1
Declaration of Independent Work ........... 2
Dedication ...................................... 3
Acknowledgements .......................... 4
Abstract ........................................ 5
Contents ....................................... 7

CHAPTER 1 OVERVIEW ............................................. 10
  1.1 Definition of social skills .................. 12
  1.2 Methodological Issues .................... 14
  1.3 Prevalence of Social Skill Deficits ........ 15
  1.4 Models of the Development of Social Skills 16
  1.5 Social Skills and Gender ................ 18
  1.6 Social Skills and Cognitive Factors .... 20
    1.6.1 Intervention studies ................ 21
    1.6.2 Attributional Style .................. 27
    1.6.3 Intervention Studies ............... 30
  1.7 Social Skills and Stress ................ 33
    1.7.1 Intervention Studies ............... 35
  1.8 Child Health Factors .................... 38
    1.8.1 Nutrition ............................. 38
    1.8.2 Exercise ............................... 39
  1.9 Improving Social Skills in School Settings 41
  1.10 The Aussie Optimism Program .......... 50
  1.11 Rationale of the Study ................. 51
  1.12 Hypotheses ................................ 52

CHAPTER 2 METHOD ............................................. 54
  2.1 Participants .................................. 54
  2.2 Design ......................................... 54
  2.3 Measures ...................................... 56
    2.3.1 Student Report Measures .......... 56
      2.3.1.1 Matson Evaluation of Social skills with Youngsters (MESSY; Matson, Rotatori, & Helsel, 1983) .................. 56
      2.3.1.2 Children’s Attributional Style Questionnaire (CASQ; Seligman et al., 1984) .................. 57
      2.3.1.3 Social-Cognitive Skills Questionnaire (SSQ) ......... 59
      2.3.1.4 Intervention Evaluations .......... 60
      2.3.1.5 Child Health Questions .......... 60
      2.3.1.6 Life Events Questionnaire (LEQ; Coddington, 1972) .... 62
    2.3.2 Teacher Report Measures .......... 63
      2.3.2.1 Teacher Report Form (TRF; Achenbach, 1995) .......... 63
      2.3.2.2 Facilitator Questionnaire ........ 65
  2.4 The Aussie Optimism Program Administration ........ 65
  2.5 Procedure ..................................... 67

CHAPTER 3 RESULTS ............................................. 74
  3.1 Attrition Rate ................................ 74
  3.2 Data Screening and Assumption Testing .... 74
  3.3 Pretest Differences and Preliminary Analyses .... 75
The Effects of the Aussie Optimism Program 8

3.3.1 Control Group Differences .......................................................75
3.3.2 Sample Comparisons .................................................................77
3.4 Design and Analysis .............................................................................79
3.5 Effects of Interventions on Social Skills and Attributional Style........80
  3.5.1 Social Skills ..............................................................................84
  3.5.2 Attributional Style .................................................................85
  3.5.3 Teacher Ratings of Adaptive Behaviour .................................86
  3.5.4 Social Skill Correlates ...........................................................89
3.6 Summary of Study Results .............................................................96

CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSION ........................................................................98
  4.1 Social skills .................................................................................100
  4.2 Attributional Style ........................................................................104
  4.3 Adaptive Behaviour .................................................................108
  4.4 Secondary Analyses ......................................................................110
    4.4.1 Social skills ........................................................................111
    4.4.2 Child Health Factors ...........................................................112
4.5 Summary of Qualitative Data ........................................................113

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS ................................................................115
  5.1 Methodological Strengths and Limitations .....................................116
  5.2 Directions for Future Research ......................................................118
  5.3 Summary ......................................................................................122

CHAPTER 6 REFERENCES ......................................................................123

CHAPTER 7 APPENDICES .....................................................................136

APPENDIX A: Parent Consent Form ......................................................137
APPENDIX B: Social –Cognitive Skills Questionnaire (SSQ) .....................138
APPENDIX C: Module Evaluation ...........................................................146
APPENDIX D: Parent Information Sheets ..............................................149
APPENDIX E: Child Information Sheets ...............................................151
APPENDIX F: Facilitator Questionnaire ...............................................152
APPENDIX H: Printout of Histograms 1 ..................................................156
APPENDIX I: Printout of Histograms 2 ..................................................158
APPENDIX J: Clinical Case Discussions ...............................................159
APPENDIX K: Table 1 of Intercorrelations ............................................162
APPENDIX L: Table 2 of Intercorrelations ............................................163

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Number of Intervention and Control Group Participants by Gender........56
Table 2.2 Summary of Aussie Optimism Modules ...........................................67
Table 2.3 Timetable of Data Collection and Aussie Optimism Administration for the Four Groups .................................................................69
Table 3.1 Number of Extreme Scores and Percentage of Sample Deleted ............75
Table 3.2 Mean, (SD) Control Group Scores for Measures at Pretest, Posttest and 3-months Follow-up .................................................................76
Table 3.3 Analysis of Variance for Effects of Control Group and Time on Outcome Variables ..............................................................77
Table 3.4 Means, Standard Deviations and Differences Between Three Samples at Pretest ...................................................................................................................79
Table 3.5 Means and Standard Deviations for Measures at Pretest, Posttest and 3-months Follow-up .................................................................81
Table 3.6 Summary of Analysis of Variance and Contrasts for Effects of Group, Gender and Time on Social Skills and Attributional Style ..................................................82
Table 3.7 Means and Standard Deviations for Measures at Pretest, Posttest and 3-months Follow up ........................................................................87
Table 3.8 Summary of Non-Parametric Analyses for Effects of Three Groups and Time on Teacher- Reports of Adaptive Behaviour .............................................88
Table 3.9 Correlations between Child Health Factors, Change Scores on Dependent Variables and Pretest Measures .........................................................91

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1. Mean MESSY scores for the intervention and control groups at Pretest, Posttest and 3 months Follow-up ...........................................................................84
Figure 3.2 Average percentage of times students (n = 73), in both intervention groups ate breakfast during the intervention .................................................................92
Figure 3.3 Average percentage of times students in both groups (n = 74) exercised each week during the intervention .................................................................94