An Evaluation of connXionz for Boarding School Staff

HFCC Los Angeles 2013
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Overview

- Rationale for the research
- Comparison between staff and boarders’ perceptions of the boarding environment
- Evaluation of the staff training program connXionz for Boarding School Staff
- Challenges
- Future directions
- Questions
The boarding environment and the role of boarding staff
In loco parentis role of boarding staff

- ‘in place of a parent’

- ‘having or taking on the responsibilities of a parent when dealing with somebody else's child’
How many boarders?

Currently around 20,000 young Australians aged 12-17 years live in the *in loco parentis* care of boarding school staff for 38 weeks each year.
Is the boarding environment influential in boarders development?
Home away from home?
Study 1

Comparison between staff and boarders’ perceptions of the boarding environment

- conflict
- social support
- boarding school climate
- 2 open-ended questions
  - enjoy?
  - difficult or don’t enjoy?
Who participated?

121 staff and 415 boarders from nine boarding schools across South East Queensland, Australia
Demographics – Study 1

**Staff**
- 20 – 60 years
- 57% parents
- <1 - 15 years in boarding

**Boarders**
- 13-17 years
- <1 – 5 years boarding
## Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure (Scales scored 1-10)</th>
<th>Staff internal consistency</th>
<th>Boarder internal consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict – CBQ -10</strong></td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Climate - Life in Your Boarding School - 10</strong></td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Support – Board4S</strong></td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Home away from home?
Empirical support
Conflict (low scores = less conflict)

- staff approachable
- disagreements with... (Boarders: 4, Staff: 2)
- usually listen to what I say (Boarders: 4, Staff: 3)
- 3X/week I get angry with a... (Boarders: 5, Staff: 3)
- don't follow my instructions (Boarders: 4, Staff: 3)
- talks with boarders... (Boarders: 5, Staff: 3)
- often seem angry with me (Boarders: 5, Staff: 3)
- I don't get on very well with... (Boarders: 4, Staff: 3)
- never understand my side (Boarders: 4, Staff: 3)
- don't value my opinion (Boarders: 4, Staff: 3)
Boarding School Climate
(high scores = more positive climate)

- ...have a say in decisions
- ...can express their views
- ...good discipline at this school
- ...behaviour is good
- ...boarding school a safe...
- ...Boarders fight a lot
- ...attention to feelings
- ...feel good about themselves
- ...Staff show commitment to...
- ...Staff friendly and...

Boarders  Staff
Social Support
(high scores = more support)

- Give good advice
- Make it ok to ask questions
- Help boarder solve problems
- Am fair to boarders
- Listen when mad or upset
- Demonstrate empathy, understanding
- Demonstrate care for them
- Answer their questions
- Praise when they have tried hard
- Help when they need it

Boarders
Staff
Qualitative accounts

The literature presents polarised perspectives on boarder outcomes. ‘independence’ Vs ‘emotional deprivation’

Being sent away to boarding school at seven is as great an inspiration as any songwriter could have - to be taken away from one’s family and locked away for 10 years. It does create an incredible intensity of emotion.

(James Blunt)
“Boarding makes you more independent and free thinking”
“it teaches me to respect others and listen to their opinions”
(White, 2004)
Boarding is equivalent to socially condoned child abuse (Duffell, 2005; Schaverien, 2011)
Randomised Controlled Trial of connXionz for Boarding School Staff
So......what does a parenting program have to offer boarding staff acting *in loco parentis*?
**connXionz and Triple P**

Tailoring the Program

- The importance of the *in loco parentis* role
- Complex boundaries between staff and boarders
- Consistent application of strategies
### connXionz and Triple P

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONNXIONZ STRATEGY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>APPLICATION TO THE BOARDING CONTEXT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spending time with boarders</td>
<td>Spending frequent, brief amounts of time when no pressure to get other things done</td>
<td>Opportunities for boarders to enjoy adult contact; to demonstrate an interest in boarders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking to boarders</td>
<td>Having brief conversations about topics that are of interest to them</td>
<td>Promoting opportunity to voice opinions and to discuss issues and interests important to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing appropriate affection</td>
<td>Adult-to-teenager displays of affection that don’t cause embarrassment</td>
<td>Demonstrate appropriate ways of showing affection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Staff Training

- Duty of Care – A Certificate Course in Residential Care (Hawkes, 2001, 2010)
- Currently 382 boarding staff of an estimated 1500 have been accredited in this training course (ABSA. 2013)
RCT of connXionz for Boarding School Staff

- 9 boarding schools in South East Queensland
  - Schools matched on population and sex of boarders then randomly allocated to condition
- $N = 58$ staff members participated in connXionz training course
# RCT of connXionz for Boarding School Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Intervention (N=32)</th>
<th>Wait-list (N=26)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong>*</td>
<td>Female 14</td>
<td>Female 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male 18</td>
<td>Male 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong>*</td>
<td>45.66 (12.34)</td>
<td>30.38 (10.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent</strong>*</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years in boarding</strong>*</td>
<td>7.55 (7.23)</td>
<td>4.35 (4.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>University Education</strong>*</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## RCT- Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pre-intervention</th>
<th>Post-intervention</th>
<th>Difference score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>WL</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>78.69</td>
<td>80.96</td>
<td>88.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy and role satisfaction</td>
<td>34.96</td>
<td>40.59</td>
<td>36.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment Stress Anxiety Depression</td>
<td>7.76</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.01</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>6.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Competence – Intervention, Control
Competence – further analyses

- Intervention group reported significantly greater increase in 13 of 15 competencies measured

- Greatest improvements in:
  - Establishing positive relationships
  - Promoting boarders’ development
  - Negotiating behaviour contracts to promote self-control
Satisfaction ratings

- Active participation: 6.45
- Overall rating: 6.32
- Course Content: 6.2
Challenges

- Recruitment
- School terms
- Time constraints
- Staff commitment (voluntary/conscripted)
- Data collection & follow-up
Future Directions

- Which model?
- Accreditation
- Supervision and support
Questions?