

Moving against the grain? Investigating the efficacy of a touch-based intervention in a climate of suspicion

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Abstract

This article considers the implications of a small-scale research project, undertaken by the authors, which used the example of the Massage in Schools Programme (a simple peer massage programme) to ascertain whether the planned use of touch-based activity can support the growth of social and emotional skills in the primary classroom. Such claims are considered within the context of a modern society that is ill at ease with touch. Data, including observations of children and interviews with children and staff, were collected in two primary school classrooms pre, during and post the introduction of a six-week massage programme, led by Massage in Schools practitioners. The findings of this project demonstrate that the number of social relationships reported by children did increase post intervention. The article goes on to consider the possible mechanisms by which this was achieved and features of the classroom context that may mediate the impact of the intervention. The authors conclude that a touch-based intervention such as the Massage in Schools Programme may have a positive and potentially educational value for children and schools and support the growth of social and emotional skills.

Keywords: social relationships; personal, social and emotional development; peer massage; schools

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