

# THE BERRY STREET EDUCATION MODEL (BSEM)

A whole-school approach is a cohesive, collective and collaborative action in and by a school community that has been strategically constructed to improve student learning, behaviour and wellbeing, and the conditions that support these (DET, 2009). The BSEM offers a whole-school approach to pedagogy and behavioural management that can be used consistently in the classroom and throughout the whole-school. It provides a way to teach the content of any subject area while addressing the social and emotional learning needs of the students in the process.

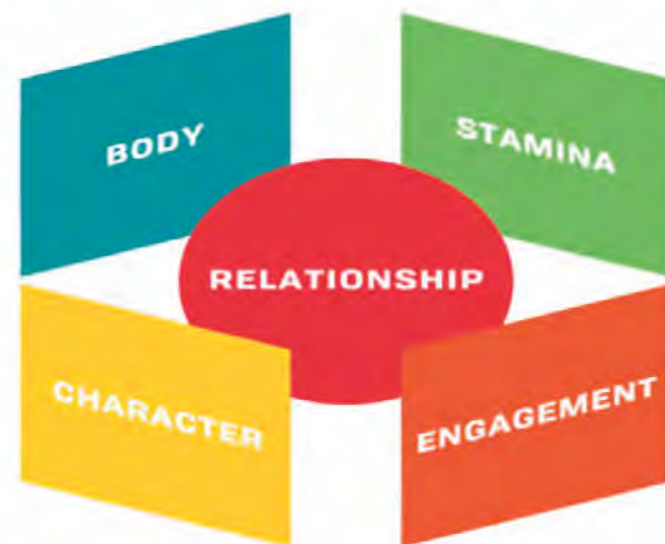
The approach draws on neuro-scientific findings that suggest that the child's biological and developmental responses to trauma need to be addressed before they are 'ready' to build relationships and engage with learning content. In repairing dysregulated stress responses, focus is placed on restoring self-regulatory abilities. Self-regulation includes emotional control, impulse management, and regulatory capacities, and are crucial to the child's healthy development (Bath, 2008; Duckworth & Seligman, 2017; Duckworth & Steinberg, 2015).

Educational and therapeutic strategies aimed at addressing the dysregulated stress response and building regulatory capacities include creating supportive environments and engaging in physical and emotional regulation activities. A focus on supportive environments involves creating a classroom environment within which young people can explore self-regulation and co-regulation, identify negative emotions, and learn to manage their behaviour. Such environments support young people through classroom activities that have both physical and emotional foci. Physical regulation activities seek to align the body through sensory integration and rely heavily on rhythm, repetition, and routine. Emotional regulation activities aim to help the young person to identify, acknowledge, label, understand, and work with difficult feelings; build the capacity to communicate those feelings to others; link internal thoughts to external stimuli; acquire and practise strategies for de-escalating emotions; and learn how to return to a comfortable state after arousal. Underpinning the BSEM is the importance of building both in-the-moment self-regulation and longer-term resources and capacities (Brunzell et al., 2015b).

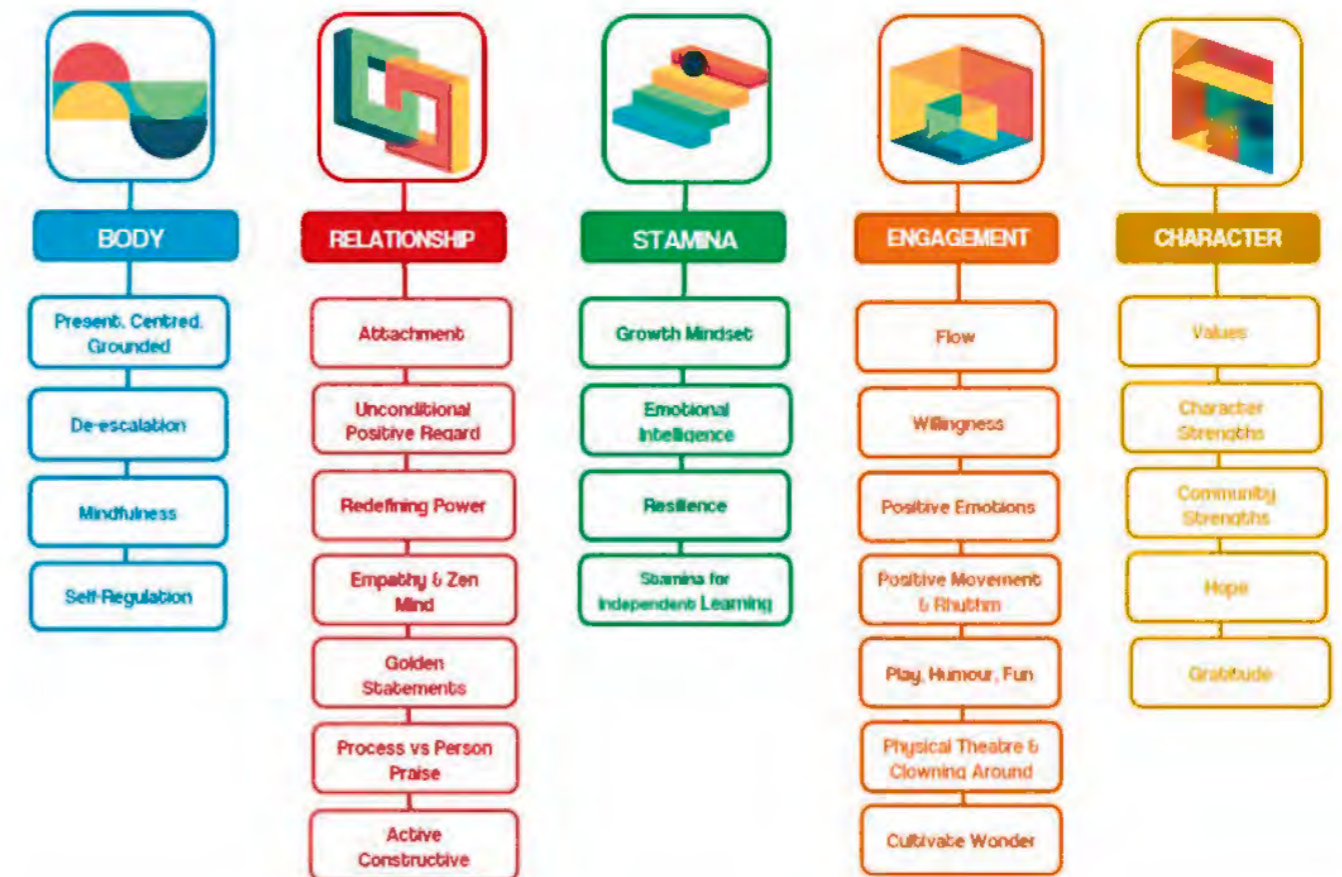
To support students in developing these capacities, the BSEM begins by guiding teachers in developing a trauma-informed lens through which to view and understand their students' behaviours and needs. Then, it provides a developmental curriculum that assists students to learn skills to build networks of support, feel confident as learners, and manage difficult and challenging emotions. The Berry Street training team also provide teachers with intensive and on-going professional development, and detailed advice on structuring the teaching day in the form of a suite of printed curriculum guides (Brunzell et al., 2015b).

As illustrated in **Figure 1**, the BSEM curriculum comprises five domains: **BODY**, **STAMINA**, **ENGAGEMENT** and **CHARACTER**, all anchored by **RELATIONSHIP**. As shown in **Figure 2**, each domain contains a cluster of focus areas, within which are located sets of teaching and intervention strategies and practices. Identification of the foci was guided by international research (Brunzell, Stokes & Waters, 2016). The domains and their respective foci are applied sequentially, beginning with **BODY**, and subsequently proceeding through **RELATIONSHIP**, **STAMINA**, **ENGAGEMENT**, and **CHARACTER**.

**Figure 1: The Berry Street Education Model (Brunzell et al., 2015b)**



**Figure 2: The Berry Street Education Model (Brunzell et al., 2015b)**



The BSEM curriculum contains over 100 classroom strategies and practices, which have been designed to enable teachers to adapt the components to their own classroom context. Each part of the curriculum is designed to be a Strategy, a Brainbreak, or a Lesson Plan.

- **Strategies** are teacher-centred approaches for strengthening students' self-regulation or relationships, and teacher behaviours that are integrated with pedagogical approaches.
- **Brainbreaks** are short-burst regulatory activities designed to ready students' brains for learning. Containing options such as mindfulness and emotion/humour activities, Brainbreaks promote both self-awareness through checking current emotional, physical and psychological states, and

self-regulation through cultivating flexible, resilient and open mindsets. They are flexible and can be interwoven into the classes at any time.

- **Lesson Plans** provide detailed sequences for teaching specific skills and strategies. Within each lesson there are several core learning intentions, supported by a collection of activities. Teachers are able to select lesson components to suit the needs and capabilities of their students. These activities can also be integrated into other curriculum areas to support students' learning. Each lesson plan contains background information outlining the reasons for the activity; lesson aims/objectives; a list of materials needed; an estimated session duration; a description of the activity, and materials such as worksheets.

# RESEARCH DESIGN

Within the **BODY** domain, classroom strategies and practices are framed by four inter-connected focal areas: **Present, Centred, Grounded; De-escalation; Mindfulness; and Self-Regulation**. Activities help students develop awareness of their physical and emotional states, identify their own stress responses and readiness to learn, establish and practice a variety of coping strategies that can be used within and outside of school, be mentally present in the classroom, and develop a strong self-regulatory capacity. Strategies include breathing and stretching, classroom discussions, collaborative design of individual Focus/Safety plans, focusing attention on a single point, and visualisation.

The **RELATIONSHIP** domain is the BSEM's anchor, with the belief that struggling students will put forth their best efforts for teachers they like, respect, and believe will be present for them at times when they are not at their best (Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2015). Practices and strategies focus on **Attachment, Unconditional Positive Regard, Redefining Power, Empathy and Zen Mind, Golden Statements, Process vs. Person Praise, and Active Constructive Responding**. Activities embrace the shared responsibility for the student within a consistent and closely-aligned whole-school context, emphasising the importance of peer support and mentorship for teachers. Strategies help teachers to maintain a vision of the child's wholeness, separate the student from their behaviours, respond to students in ways that open up conversation and create a sense of connection, remain calm despite provocation, and empower students to take responsibility for their own behaviours.

The **STAMINA** domain helps students overcome adversity, embrace opportunities for growth, and stay engaged in learning over extended periods of time. Focus areas include **Growth Mindset, Emotional Intelligence, Resiliency, and Stamina for Independent Learning**. Activities include identifying one's emotions, seeing how they change over time, and managing emotions well, reconceptualising failures as opportunities for learning, and encouraging students to embrace mistakes as part of the learning process.

The **ENGAGEMENT** domain highlights the importance of providing learning experiences that trigger interest, have a purpose, are relevant to the student's own ambitions and

vocational goals, and fall within the student's competencies. Focal areas include **Flow, Willingness, Positive Emotions, Positive Movement and Rhythm, Play, Humour, and Fun, Physical Theatre and Clowning Around, and Cultivating Wonder**. Activities include transitioning into lessons with positive hooks (i.e., short-burst attention-grabbing activities) and including short 'fun breaks' (i.e., fun stories and scenarios) into teaching.

The **CHARACTER** domain draws on Peterson and Seligman's (2004) Values in Action (VIA) classification of 24 signature character strengths (i.e., positive traits manifested in thoughts, feelings, and behaviours) – focusing on what is 'right' within the young person. Studies suggest that identifying and using one's strengths relates to higher levels of school performance and greater wellbeing (Shoshani & Slone, 2013). Focal areas include **Virtues, Character Strengths, Hope, and Gratitude**. Activities help students to identify and practise their personal strengths, articulate their personal values, develop understanding of themselves and others in the context of community, develop tolerance and respect for others' strengths, and employ strengths and values for future pathways. Strategies include 'strengths storytelling', 'strengths spotting', 'strengths assessment' activities, and applying/modelling resilient mindsets to small adversities in day-to-day classroom management.



## Overview

Following BSEM training delivered in 2015, Berry Street partnered in 2016 with three mainstream schools, Curran Primary School, Gemert Primary School and Ross P-9 College (names changed to protect privacy) to consider the impact of applying the BSEM within mainstream settings. Berry Street also partnered with researchers at Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne. The research and evaluation involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures, with data collected over a three-year period within the three schools.

The research and evaluation aimed to address the following questions:

- Did the training prepare teachers to deliver the BSEM?
- How was the BSEM implemented in schools?
- What impact did the Model have on teacher practice, social relationships, student psychosocial functioning and student behaviour and engagement?
- What impact did the Model have on both teachers and students managing everyday stressors both in and out of the school environment?

It was anticipated that the BSEM would:

- Inform the teacher's overall classroom approach (i.e., implicit teaching, such as modelling behaviours, interactions with the students).
- Be articulated through specific classroom sessions/activities (i.e., explicit teaching, such as integration of the BSEM curriculum within assignments, personal development activities).
- Have a positive impact on student socioemotional functioning and teachers' confidence and ability to meet the needs of their students.

## School, Community and Educational Contexts

The project comprised three mainstream schools: Curran, a relatively affluent primary school of 612 students in a north-eastern suburb of Melbourne; Gemert, a low socio-economic primary school of 296 students in the north of Melbourne, and Ross, a P-9 school of 752 students, in an outer eastern Melbourne area, identified in the Socio-Economic Indexes for

Areas (SEIFA) as at the lowest quintile.

When asked to nominate the main educational challenges being faced by their school communities, the leadership and teachers at all three schools highlighted:

- The diversity of student abilities.
- The difficulty of trying to engage or motivate disengaged students.
- The difficulty of trying to accommodate highly-engaged, average and disengaged students in a single class setting.

The BSEM was seen by all three schools as a coherent means of developing teacher skills and sensitivities, thereby enhancing their capacity to engage meaningfully and productively with the more vulnerable or marginalised members of their classes.

The schools also shared three common recognitions and concerns:

1. Mainstream teaching approaches and pedagogies were failing to meet the needs of a significant number of students.
2. Student populations were confronting diverse and complex challenges.
3. Teachers were facing significant professional and personal challenges in dealing with the diversity of student needs.

While the schools had similar rationales for choosing the BSEM, each school presents a distinct contextual and implementation picture.

## Curran Primary School

Curran Primary School is located in a north-eastern suburb of metropolitan Melbourne. In 2018, the school had an enrolment of 612, and a staff of 38 teachers and 12 support staff. The school population is relatively affluent, with an ICSEA value of 1055 (average 1000) with a spread of 12% bottom, 29% lower middle, 34% upper middle, and 26% top.

The school has a record of performing strongly on AusVELS and NAPLAN and has "always rated pretty high" (Principal, Curran, 2016) on the Student Attitudes to School Survey. It enjoys vigorous parental interest and involvement (e.g., 15 parents competed for two School Council vacancies at a recent election).