‘Hop-to-it’ Program: what it is and what it does

By
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In 2005, the ‘Hop-to-it’ Program was first introduced into St. Francis College at Crestmead in Logan City as a response to a perceived school concern about how to improve the lives of the more ‘troubled teens’. These were those students whose distinctive behaviour and attitude was not only significantly impacting on their own self-image but also on the lives of everyone around them – staff and students. These were the students who are regularly labelled as ‘high risk’ students because of the manner in which they were emotionally, socially and academically disengaged and distanced from the school curriculum, policies, processes and procedures. Their ways of acting are perceived as falling outside of the College’s understanding of acceptable student behaviour. Consequently, the St Francis College initiated this program with the specific aim of re-engaging these students into some form of worthwhile learning.

Implicit within this St Francis College initiated program is the understanding that, previously, the disengagement of such students had been unsuccessfully managed by means of a deficit model of behavioural management behaviour. A deficit model promotes the view that a student is incapable of changing their own behaviour, and therefore their behaviour needs to be externally controlled by processes designed and implemented by others. While such external measures might possess logistical efficiencies, in our modern world that promotes individuality and self-determination, such measures are progressively becoming less acceptable, and therefore largely ineffective, for those particular students it is meant to help.

In contrast, the ‘Hop-to-it’ Program utilizes an “abundance” model of student support, rather than a “deficit model”, whereby it presumes that each student is capable of controlling and changing their own behaviour provided they are taught how to do it. It focuses on trying to help each student to understand their Inner Self and, thereby, to be able to make better personal decisions about their own behaviour. This is about teaching the student to learn how to understand, and thereby control, their own behaviour.

This program is about empowering the student to study and understand their complex SELF and the ways in which its components interact so as to influence their behaviour. More specifically, the ‘Hop-to-it’ Program addresses the distinction and relationships amongst the key components of the SELF of behaviours, beliefs, values, motives, self-esteem and self-concept. These are often unconscious psychological, social and cultural phenomena that interact in order to influence the person’s behaviour. Also, how these components interact is very idiosyncratic. The interaction is peculiar to the individual student, is not predictable by an external observer, and is consistent within the understandings of the particular student. In this way, this individualistic but consistent pattern of interaction of the components of the student’s SELF is said to create “repetitive compulsive” behaviour regardless of whether or not others judge the resultant behaviour as good or bad.

Consequently, this program aims to build the capacity of each participating student to change their own behaviour by helping them to become aware of the distinction
between their “Pretending Self” and their “True/Authentic Self”. Their “Pretending Self” occurs when their repetitive compulsive behaviours are creating outcomes that are clearly not helping the student to achieve the success they really want. Whereas, the “True/Authentic Self” occurs when their repetitive compulsive behaviours are creating outcomes that will help the students to achieve the success they really want.

It is through such deep self-discovery that the student can unpack the rationales underpinning their unhelpful repetitive compulsive behaviours. They become aware of why they behave the way they do and that their behaviours are an external mirror of their ‘Inner Self’. In other words, through involvement in this program ‘troubled teens’ become conscious of the unconscious parts of their SELF that regularly govern their personal beliefs about who they are and what they can achieve. Moreover, through this knowledge of their inner self they are able to stop doing things that undermine their desired success and to start doing things that will help them to achieve what they really want.

Specifically, the program involves the student participating in a semi-structured program of self-reflection. The students are engaged in activities wherein they have to conduct a thorough examination of their individual SELF. The program empowers students to discover the relationship between their authentic ‘Inner Self’ and their repetitive compulsive behaviours which prevent them from achieving success.

This Program is premised upon the following key understandings about each student:

- It refrains from labelling students as ‘at-risk’ or ‘out-of-place’;
- It focuses on the ‘whole Self’ of each student;
- Students are treated as competent social actors whose agency is vital in the production and determination of their own social world and life journey;
- Students create their self-image in response to their social world as they interpret it;
- This interpreted social world of the student is filled with inherent contradictions, false assumptions, misunderstandings, misguided desires as well as some ‘actual’ realities;
- Students live in many diverse, contesting and complex places;
- Students are heterogeneous – they have many, diverse and contesting ways of knowing and ways of behaving, and they value things differently.

Finally, while the outcomes of the ‘Hop-to-it’ Program are many, I wish to highlight six key outcomes:

- Students are able to recognise the immediate impact of their negative repetitive compulsive behaviours upon their personal wish to become a successful student;
- Students who enhance their self-concept and level of self-esteem are able to adopt more appropriate motives for their behaviour and, thereby, adopt more socially acceptable personal values, beliefs and behaviours;
- Students can improve their level of self-confidence and self-control through developing awareness of the inherent contradictions and misunderstandings in how they interpret their lives;
• Students who understand their self more fully can learn to actively engage in the school curriculum, policies, processes and procedures and thus they achieve greater academic success
• Students who develop a deeper understanding of their own individual life journey are can readily ‘order the chaos’ in their immediate reality;
• Students can learn these essential understandings and skills simply through guided deep self-reflection on their inconsistent self-concept, self-esteem, motives, personal values, beliefs and behaviours.

In conclusion, the students who have participated in the ‘Hop-to-it Program at St Francis College have been able to personally change their own negative repetitive compulsive behaviours. Arguably this is the most powerful change that these students have as yet encountered in their personal journey. Through their participation in the ‘Hop-to-it’ Program, these students have gained insight into their ‘complex selves’ and each has acquired skills to allow their ‘true/authentic self’ to govern their current and future school and life journey. It is anticipated that the knowledge they have gained from this Program will enable them to create their own way of making meaning and creating success throughout their life.