

creative
schools

AN INITIATIVE BY:

FORM.
building a state of creativity

Creative Schools Enhances Wellbeing

A Case Study by:

Dr Mathilda Marie Joubert
Creative Schools Evaluator
Adjunct Research Fellow,
University of Western Australia



FORM has offices and galleries in Perth and the Pilbara, and projects across the State. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of all these lands, particularly the Whadjuk Noongar people of Boorloo/Perth and Kariyarra people of Marapikurrinya/Port Hedland. We pay respect to community Elders and to their ancestors whose enduring connection to this Country and ongoing contributions to our collective culture and communities we appreciate and honour. We are deeply grateful for the privilege of working on these lands.

39 Guger Street
Claremont, Western Australia, 6010
E: mail@form.net.au
T: +61 8 9385 2200

Designed and published by FORM Building a State of Creativity Limited.

Our websites:

www.form.net.au
www.spinifexhillstudio.com.au
www.creativeschools.com.au
www.scribblersfestival.com.au
www.publicsilotrail.com.au
www.tracksweshare.com.au
www.giantsofmandurah.com.au

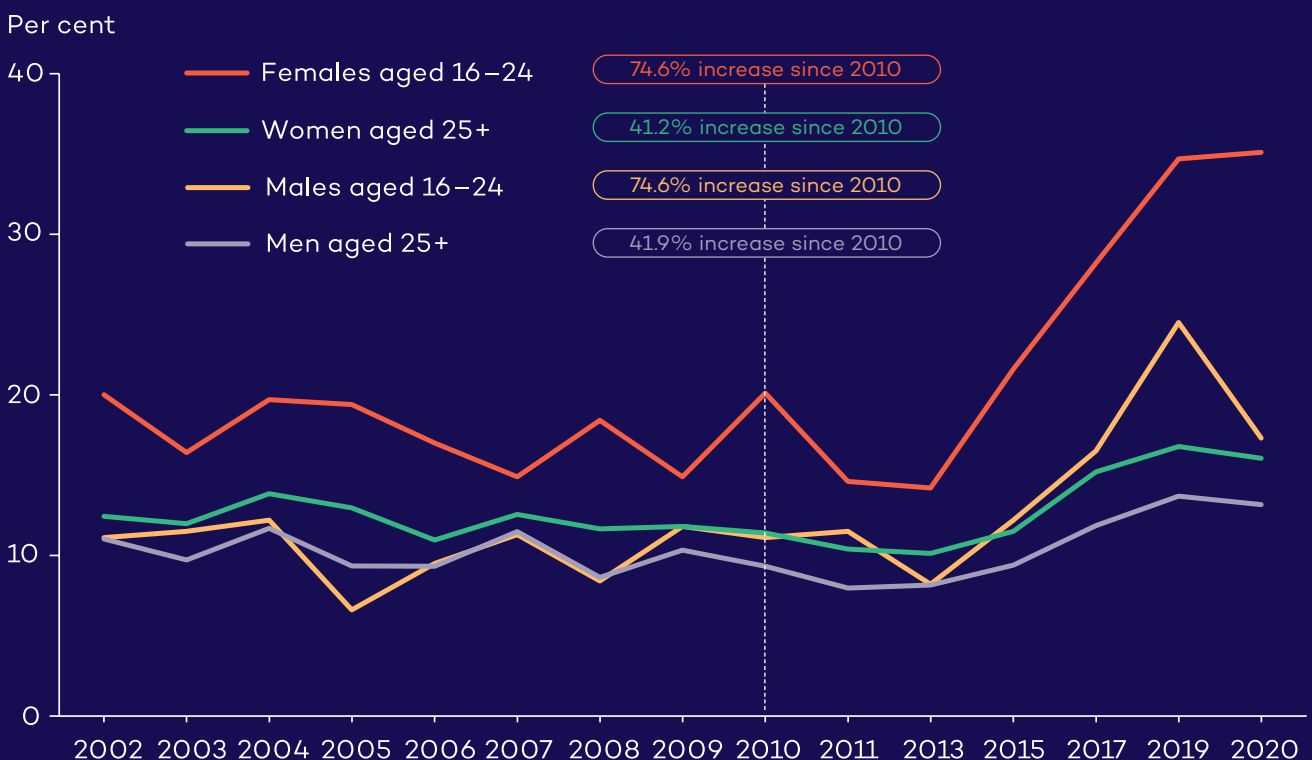
©FORM Building a State of Creativity Limited 2025. All rights reserved. FORM Building a State of Creativity Limited is protected by copyright and trademark law. Copyright for imagery and written content in this publication is held by FORM Building a State of Creativity Limited or individual contributors, where applicable. Every effort has been made to adhere to best practice ICIP protocols. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form without prior permission from the publishers.

Cover image: CARE School student participant, FORM's Creative Schools reflective journaling workshops, WA, 2021. Photograph by Edwin Sitt.

Mental health outcomes for young Australians have been deteriorating consistently over the last 15 years. Psychological distress, self-harm, stress, anxiety and depression are all continuously rising, and growth in alternative schools catering for students with mental health challenges continues to rise (refer to the graph below).

Since the Covid-19 epidemic there has also been growing evidence of increasing stress levels and rising burnout rates amongst teachers and school leaders. Within this context, Creative Schools seems to be an effective antidote to the rising poor mental health by contributing to positive wellbeing outcomes for students, including students with diverse needs, as well as positive impacts on teacher wellbeing. These positive impacts are illustrated in this case study through a quantitative data, qualitative data and vignettes from projects in Creative Schools classrooms.

Psychological Distress, Australia



Creative Schools Makes Students Feel Happy



CREATIVE SCHOOLS SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCES STUDENT WELLBEING

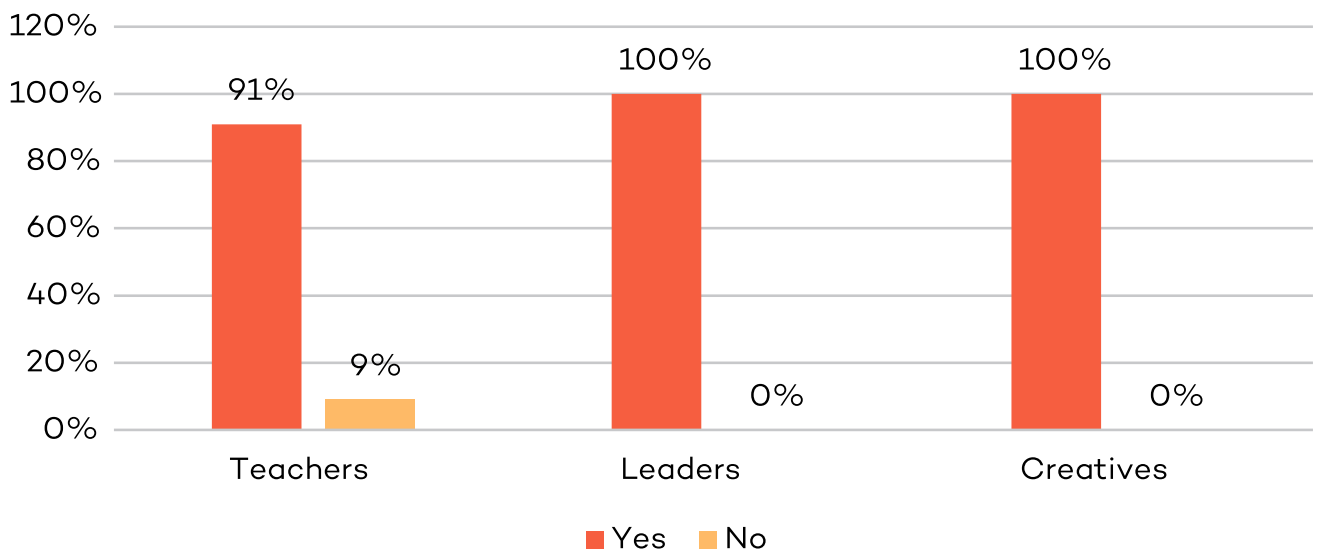
Over the past seven years, **89% of students report enjoying Creative Schools sessions**, often explaining that the sessions make them feel happy. At a time when mental health outcomes for young people continues to decline, this is a significant finding. The creative learning methods employed encourage students to explore, experiment and express themselves through various art forms, problem-solving activities, and collaborative projects. Engaging in creative activities can boost students' self-esteem, self-expression and self-confidence, allowing them to develop a stronger sense of identity and purpose.

Teachers, school leaders and creative practitioners agree on these positive outcomes, **with 91% of teachers and 100% of school leaders and creative practitioners reporting that Creative Schools sessions have a positive impact on student happiness and mental wellbeing.**

Creative learning methodologies foster a positive and inclusive

classroom environment, where students feel valued and supported, reducing stress and anxiety. By promoting critical thinking, adaptability and a love for learning, Creative Schools not only enhances academic performance but also equips students with essential life skills, ultimately contributing to their overall mental and emotional wellbeing.

Do you think the Creative Schools sessions had a positive impact on student happiness and mental wellbeing?



Qualitative data from students, teachers, leaders, creative practitioners and parents identified that Creative Schools projects generated feelings of joy and happiness that can improve student emotional wellbeing.

FORM's Creative Schools present the *I HAVE MORE TO SAY* podcasting sessions at Murdoch University, 2023. Photograph by Dan MacBride.





STUDENTS

“We get to share in Creative Schools. When others want things and feel sad, we can share with them. Sharing makes others feel happy and know they have friends.”

Pre-Primary Student, Camboon Primary School

“I actually want to do these tasks, but other tasks I don’t want to do. I’m not that good at science, but she puts learning in a fun perspective, so we understand it and want to do it.”

Year 9 Student, Bob Hawke College

“It gave me more freedom because it took me away from all that stress stuff.”

Student

“Creative Schools definitely made me happy. If I was in a bad mood and then there was a Creative Schools lessons after, I would absolutely be way happier than I would be before.”

Student

TEACHERS

“Students not only enjoyed the sessions, but it also helped them to sit more comfortably with not being sure or not being perfect at the first try. They opened up to each other creating a more positive classroom environment which enabled them to feel happier at school.”

Teacher

“It absolutely contributed to student wellbeing. It feels less like traditional schoolwork, creating a fun and engaging environment whilst practising skills that are so important.”

Teacher

PARENTS

“The children are really enjoying Year 6. They are just having a great year, and I think it is because of Creative Schools. I have two older children who attended the same school and found Year 6 so boring and stressful, just preparing for the transition to high school. Creative Schools definitely has to be the link.”

Parent, Bayswater Primary School



"I have noticed that this project brought him a lot of happiness and confidence. This way of thinking is clearly so stimulating and, by introducing creativity, seems to encourage more mental scope and freedom and remove pressure or anxiety about learning new information. The fact that he would come home excitedly telling me and his brother what he had done that day and then sit down to draw and find such enjoyment in learning was wonderful to see."

Parent, Mosman Park Primary School

CREATIVE PRACTITIONERS

“There has been smiles and laughter and enjoying learning.”

Creative practitioner

“The Creative Schools sessions had a very positive impact on student happiness and mental wellbeing. From the moment I entered the classroom, students knew it was time for 'fun learning'. The sessions were seen as a time for creativity and exploration, where every student, regardless of their abilities, could participate in engaging activities.”

Creative practitioner

SCHOOL LEADERS

“The joy you see from kids in their learning has been wonderful to witness.”

Principal, Bayswater Primary School

“Our kids have benefited. It has given the joy back to learning.”

Principal, Merriwa Primary School





Reflective journaling exhibition *my thoughts laid bare are like a home without curtains* as part of FORM's Creative Schools program, WA, 2023. Photograph by Edwin Sitt.

Pursuing Wellbeing through Curriculum Engagement



At Manjimup Primary School, teacher, Ashleigh Madeley, and creative practitioner, Nic Sinclair, worked with a class of Year 6 students to explore how creative learning methodologies could be used to study topics of mental health and wellbeing. They explained that Health can easily be seen as the dry, poor cousin of the curriculum. Students were engaged in a range of creative learning tasks, from designing their own Wellbeing Olympics for the school to researching the impact of different types of addiction, including screens, gambling, vaping, caffeine, alcohol, etc. Each research team presented their findings in a style of their preference, from Tik Tok videos to books.

The project culminated with each student exploring what makes a personal HIT – their own Happy Inducing Thing (HIT).

The project did not just involve studying mental health and wellbeing; it also contributed positively to the wellbeing of the students.

Nic explained: “We did a mood rating check-in each week and used metaphors to describe moods at the start of each session. We would check in again after the session and the mood was always up after the Creative Schools session, each week.”

Ashley also noticed the change in her students: “There was a lot of negative energy in the first term, but that has now changed. We focused on gratitude and mindfulness and empathy and self-regulation in our learning. They are a lot more aware of their own learning now. They are more engaged. I feel they are happier.”



FORM's Creative Schools present the *I HAVE MORE TO SAY* podcasting sessions at Murdoch University, 2024. Photograph by Dan MacBride.

A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE:

XAVIER FROM MOUNT LAWLEY SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

This year, Mount Lawley Senior High School English Teacher Jackie Fitzpatrick has been working with artist Bernard Taylor and a Year 7 English class. The curriculum focus required students to study dystopian novels in Term 2 and film reviews in Term 3; so Jacqui and Bernard devised a program of learning whereby the students made their own dystopian movies. Teacher Jackie explains:

"We divided them into two teams and created two production teams. Both groups come up with fantastic stories, created shot lists, did background research and established their production teams with scriptwriters, costumes, artist, director, etc. The directors are great, pulling everyone in, making sure everyone has a role. They are having so much fun and they are driving it, they are owning it, coming up with their own ideas. These kids now have a very good idea of dystopian fiction."

She explained that the project had a particular transformational impact on one of her 'hard to reach' students, Xavier, an Aboriginal boy who lives in a home:

"[Xavier] is really shy... but he has been so enthused through this process. He really loves film, so making films has truly engaged him. He's really coming out of his shell now, putting his hand up. He is now engaged for the first time, ever."

Xavier himself explained how participating in Creative Schools lessons was challenging, but was helping him to develop confidence,

to settle into his new school, was improving his teamworking skills and ultimately, was making him feel happier:

"I've never done stuff like this before. It's challenging like scripting and planning. You can do team work. You can express yourself more. It's really interesting. I'm new here to the school. I've moved here from up North. I'm learning to talk more confidently and work in teams. Bernie [the creative practitioner] is very fun and very creative. He has cool apps. He helps me to be more confident and to enjoy myself."

Teacher Jackie explained that since getting involved in the filming, Xavier's confidence has just kept growing. Realising this was a real breakthrough for her and Bernie in terms of understanding the effect of their partnership, and the power of Creative Schools, in the classroom.

It seems to have been a real turning point for Xavier in his experience of education. In his

end-of-project reflection he wrote "I learnt a lot, I mean a lot", as if he suddenly realised, perhaps for the first time, that school is about learning and that he too can achieve success as a learner. When responding to the question about the key difference between Creative Schools lessons and other lessons, Xavier wrote in big letters "FREEDOM".

FORM's Creative Schools presents the
I HAVE MORE TO SAY, Perth, 2024.
Photograph by Dan MacBride.





Teacher Darlinda Singh from Westfield Park Primary School identified the power of Creative Schools to engage disengaged learners:

“We are a trauma-informed school and I became really interested in the connection between creativity, engagement, behaviour and learning. The biggest transformation was in one of my students that is often disengaged from learning and struggles with his behaviour towards others. At the start of the sessions, he was totally disengaged and wasn’t interested at all. As the weeks went by, he became interested and started to join in, often needing a lot of adult support. By the end of the sessions, he was leading his group!”

The children’s confidence in themselves have grown. Some have been shy in the beginning. Their confidence and belief in themselves have been growing. They have come together as a team and evolved together without too much conflict. They have worked together really well. This is something they can bring to all the other subjects. Developing persistence has also been really good for this group. They have been so creative. They have been learning to adapt their ideas, and they have really enjoyed it. I feel that creativity allows them to enjoy the learning and the learning process, and through that, it has improved their wellbeing.”

**Darlinda Singh, Teacher,
Westfield Park Primary School**



CARE schools workshops as
part of FORM's Creative Schools
program, FORM Gallery, WA, 2025.
Photograph by Phil Berrick.



Creative Learning Enhances Teacher Wellbeing



Creative Schools does not only have a positive impact on student wellbeing. It also makes a valuable contribution to staff wellbeing. Over the past seven years, **an average of 94% of teacher participants** have enjoyed participating in the program. Interviews with participating teachers, school leaders and even students identified how Creative Schools positively impacts on teacher wellbeing: their involvement in Creative Schools inspired them, reinvigorated them, made them happier and made them fall in love with teaching again. At a time of a national teacher shortage with significant concerns around teacher morale, it seems that creative learning can make a positive contribution to teacher retention and wellbeing.

"The program has helped me regain my enthusiasm for teaching."

Teacher

"My teacher talks a lot about creativity now. At the start of the year I think she was really strict and now she seems much happier."

Year 3 Student, Melville Primary School

"It has sparked new life and life for teaching in this 'old dog'."

Teacher, Belmont Primary School

"It has re-inspired my love of teaching. Thank you."

Past Teacher Participant

“The Creative Schools project was one of the most inspiring programs I have participated in. I use the language everyday in my teaching and have been inspired to be a better teacher. I regularly share my experience of the project with colleagues and implement what I have learnt into my teaching.”

Past Teacher Participant





“She was a teacher ready to quit when I said we are doing Creative Schools. Now she’s saying I want to teach again, this is why I got into teaching.”

Principal, Camboon Primary School

“I think that the participation has sparked a renewed energy and enthusiasm for their teaching. The project teachers have also stepped more confidently into a leadership space and are working collaboratively with other members of staff. They are making suggestions about how we transform the school’s approach to teaching and learning.”

Principal, Merriwa Primary School

“Our teachers were feeling that the joy had gone out of their teaching. This program has brought it back. They also underestimated their creativity and thought that they weren’t creative. Once they reframed it, they realised that everyone is and has the capacity to be creative, it changed their whole perspective.”

Principal, Chidlow Primary School

“It has been fantastic for me. It literally has been. I can’t express the passion and the excitement that I now have for teaching again strongly enough. I would go and become a creative and go around schools just doing this all day. Creative learning should not just be a special program, it should just be a matter of course for all schools.”

Past Teacher Participant

“Teachers are creative souls. Creative Schools has reignited the flame for some teachers to do the things they have wanted to do, but may have forgotten about.”

Deputy Principal

“You have inspired me to look beyond what I know and to explore the boundaries I put on both myself and my teaching. You have given me my teaching mo-jo back and reminded me of why I am a teacher!”

Teacher, Bentley Primary School



"Creative Schools has also made a big impact on our teachers. We have many graduate teachers. I have learnt how different our younger teachers are. Initially they needed the structure and security of Explicit Instruction. Our pre-primary teachers then came to us and said: Phonics and Direct Instruction are important, but getting a bit boring on its own. Where is the joy in learning? I saw the light going on for them, so I gave them Creative Schools. They were ready for it. Seeing the teachers taking it on so bravely has been wonderful. The habits of mind in Creative Schools gives teachers a structure for teaching the Critical and Creative Thinking General Capabilities. Our kids have benefited. It has given the joy back to learning. I'm just really grateful that they got their joy of teaching back and our kids have benefited. I hope we have saved them from a career of worksheets."

Principal, Merriwa Primary School

creative
schools

AN INITIATIVE BY:

FORM.
building a state of creativity



STAN PERRON
CHARITABLE
FOUNDATION



Department of
Education



Department of
Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries