

Caring for Life Education

2013-2016 Evaluation Results



Developing empathy in classrooms and beyond

Caring for Life (CFL) is ACTAsia's education programme for elementary schools throughout Asia, designed and presented by professional teachers as part of the curriculum.

CFL has been especially well received in China where it has helped ACTAsia earn recognition and awards from regional and central Government. Five years into the programme our syllabus has been taught as part of the school curriculum by more than 130 schools in 11 provinces, reaching more than 65,000 children.

In line with UNESCO's 4 Pillars of Learning: Learning to Live Together, CFL was launched in 2012 with an aim to foster respect for people, animals, and the environment, and to help children develop a sense of compassion.

Three years of intensive investigations

Our programme has undergone a rigorous scientific evaluation, using closely matched controls, well-validated instruments, and participant analyses. This three-year study is overseen by Professor Bill Samuels, Ph.D., at the City University of New York, US, and is made possible by the support of the Chinese Committee for the Next Generation.

The evaluation studied the effect of CFL across three years of learning. Key outcomes were found to be:

• **Pro-social behaviour** Every year we measured whether each child in grades 1 and 2 was friendly and popular, and showed compassion for the feelings of others [Measured by the Teacher Observation of Classroom Adaptation – Checklist (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2009)].

We found that the CFL programme had a strong and reliable effect on children's pro-social behaviour, and encouraged them to show concern for the well-being of others around them. (Figure 1)

• **Disruptive behaviours** In both grades we also measured how well the CFL programme could reduce actions that cause harm to others, both directly and indirectly. We monitored if a child physically harmed or threatened others, broke rules, didn't get on with their peers, or got angry and aggressive when provoked.

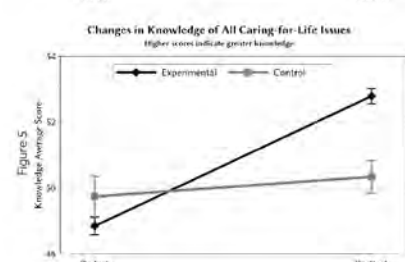
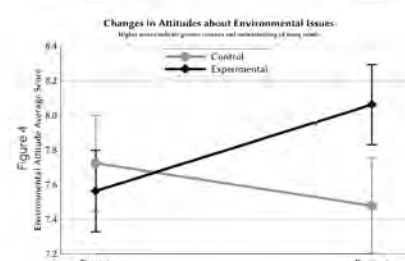
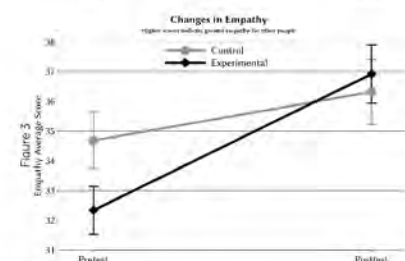
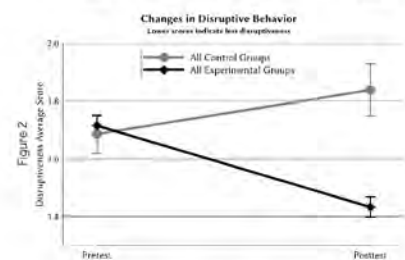
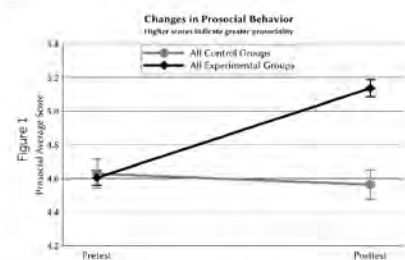
There was not much room for improvement against this target because teachers reported that students were only rarely disruptive before the study. However, children who were noted to be occasionally disruptive behaved even better after participating in CFL. (Figure 2)

• **Empathy** During Academic Year (AY) 2015–2016, we measured how much students cared about others' feelings, if they could recognise and share happiness or unhappiness. By random chance, students in the control group were more empathic than the experimental group before the study began. However, after participating in the CFL programme, students in the experimental caught up completely [Measured by the Basic Empathy Scale (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006)]. (Figure 3)

• **Concern about the environment** Also during AY 2015–2016, we measured our students' awareness and concern for the environment, including wild animals, pollution, water, energy, and recycling [Measured by the Children's Environmental Attitude and Knowledge Scale (Leeming, Dwyer, & Bracken, 1995)].

The control group showed a marked slide in their concern for environmental issues, but those who participated in the CFL programme developed significantly greater concern. (Figure 4)

• **Knowledge** Earlier in the study, we evaluated how much the students understood about caring for each other, for animals, and for their own environment as well as that of the wider world. Towards the end of the three years we assessed the pedagogical progress of children who took part. The study found that students who participated increased their understanding of these subjects and issues, building on their knowledge as well as developing desirable, sympathetic characteristics [Measured by the Caring for Life Education Scale, ACTAsia, from the Primary Attitude Scale WIRE & NAHEE, 1983]. (Figure 5)



What does all this mean?

The results of this independent evaluation strongly support what we see in the classes we teach: ACTAsia's Caring for Life Education programme improves several key areas of children's development. Participating children became kinder, less disruptive, more empathic, more concerned about environmental issues both near and far, and also improved their knowledge of relevant subjects.

Why does it matter?

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is a process for learning life skills, including how to deal with oneself, others and relationships, and work in an effective manner. Research shows that students who take part in SEL curriculums, such as CFL, display:

- feelings of empowerment and better coping mechanisms
- improvements in classroom behaviour
- better social skills
- reduced aggressive outbursts and bullying
- higher self-esteem and lower stress levels.

We believe these qualities nurture the well-being of our children. Later in life, the skills and values learned can translate into reduced rates of domestic violence, lower drug and alcohol abuse, better academic results and a more satisfying and compassionate lifestyle. This is important for students in urban areas but even more fundamental for disadvantaged children in rural areas of China (also known as left-behind children).



Encouraging outcomes through examples

Being grateful for... Soon after International Children's Day on June 1st, ACTAsia was contacted by the mother of one of our students. While celebrating, her son had thanked her for bringing him into this world and for all she does every day to care for him. He had never said such things to her before, and she attributed his gratitude to his participation in CFL. Moved by the experience, she wanted to share with ACTAsia how pleased she was to find that her child had grown to be more compassionate towards her.

Being pro-active about... The principal of a participating school in Zhuhai excitedly called us at ACTAsia, saying that she had received a letter which she felt sure was inspired by our CFL programme. The letter was written by a seven-year-old girl at her school, who told the principal how she had witnessed four of her classmates hurting frogs outside the school. The girl explained it happened in front of a group of younger, pre-school children, and how she felt very sad about it. At the time she wasn't sure what to do, and in the letter she reflected upon why she did not stop the children doing harm, saying she was afraid. But her silence made her feel bad, and she said this was not the only time children behaved badly outside of school. Hoping the principal could help, the girl urged her to remind students that they should be kind to animals, and never cruel. Through a new sense of responsibility, this child had the courage to voice her concern to someone who would help.





Conclusion

ACTAsia is dedicated to helping children across the world grow to be caring leaders for positive change. We believe the evaluation of CFL is the largest, longest and most rigorous scientific study of an education in compassion to-date. Through its results, ACTAsia demonstrates the clear benefits of a holistic educational strategy, in the belief that nurturing respect for people, animals and the environment will lead to a more compassionate and sustainable world.

Guided by expert educators and our extensive experience in the field, ACTAsia continues to expand our pioneering CFL programme for older students and more diverse schools. We will continue to reach children across Asia whose lives and communities would otherwise never have the chance to learn more responsible, compassionate and sustainable ways to live.

All these changes we see first-hand: we see children learn how to help others near and far, to care for those who cannot speak for themselves, and to take responsibility for the world we share. We see hope.

1. Measured by the Teacher Observation of Classroom Adaptation – Checklist (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2009).

2. Measured by the Basic Empathy Scale (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006).

3. Measured by the Children's Environmental Attitude and Knowledge Scale (Leeming, Dwyer, & Bracken, 1995).

4. Measured by the Caring for Life Education Scale, ACTAsia, from the Primary Attitude Scale WIRE & NAHEE, 1983.

5. SEL is a process for learning life skills, including how to deal with oneself, others and relationships, and work in an effective manner.

PayPal



To find out more, and to donate,
please go to **www.ACTAsia.org**
Contact us at **info@actasia.org**

26/11/2017