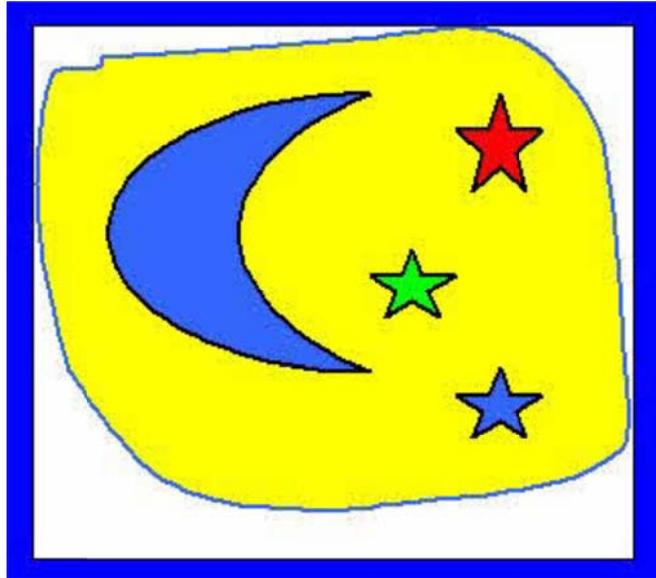


## Sleep Education in Australia



The effects of poor sleep on children's health, weight status and a myriad of neurocognitive domains is increasingly clear. A recent study in South Australia found that students who were in remedial teaching classes for assistance with academic and behavioural outcomes were 5 times more likely to have sleep problems compared to their classroom peers (Blunden 2007). However, parents, communities and education and health professionals appear to have a limited knowledge of the impact of poor sleep on health, development and particularly weight status and what constitutes poor or good sleep habits. Meta-analytic studies have suggested that psycho-educational sleep education programs that disseminate evidence-based information have been successful in improving sleep knowledge and improving sleep habits.

The Australian Centre for Education in Sleep (ACES<sup>®</sup>) has implemented the first systematic sleep education trials in Australia in 2006-2007 in both primary and senior schools<sup>12</sup>. Overall, 90-100% of students recorded the program content was 'good', informative (99%) easy to understand (92%), helpful (100%) and should be implemented in other schools (100%). 94% of students improved their knowledge of sleep through objective assessment.

ACES sleep education programs are now undergoing larger trials in 12 schools in South Australia with funding from the Australian research Council and the SA Health department.

Sleep education is coming of age!!

## How can you incorporate Sleep Education into your classroom?

There are many ways that teachers can deliver sleep education into their classrooms, either by incorporating this into existing curricula or indeed undertaking specific sleep education modules.

1. [www.simplyhealthy@schools](http://www.simplyhealthy@schools)

The SimplyHealthy@Schools module is available as a free, downloadable educational tool at [www.simplyhealthy@schools.com](http://www.simplyhealthy@schools.com) and aims to support teachers in educating children between the ages of eight and 12 years on the importance of sleep and how it can help to improve their health and well-being. In addition to helping children understand why sleep is so important, the module's assignments also allow the children to identify bad habits that might prevent them from getting a good night's sleep, such as reading under the bedclothes until late or eating the wrong type of food close to bedtime. Through play acting, they learn to recognize someone who is sleeping peacefully or someone whose sleep is constantly disturbed. There's even a session on relaxation therapy.

Go to the website and download the modules as well as the teachers guide.

This module has been trialled in South Australia in year 4 /5 students and the downloadable modules were adapted and incorporated into existing curricula.

For example, the teacher did two sessions per week with the students.

One session was delivery of the material from the website and the other was discussion and reflection on the content and their understanding and incorporating the sleep modules into the curriculum areas of the classroom.

Other websites rich in evidence based sleep information were used in conjunction with the [www.simplyhealthy@schools](http://www.simplyhealthy@schools) website to gather more information for student projects. These websites are particularly useful for older children and senior school students. These include:

[www.sleepeducation.net.au](http://www.sleepeducation.net.au)

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/>

<http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/>

## **Sleep education content was included into exiting curriculum in various ways:**

These can include:

*Group discussions and working in group projects:* (see below for ideas for projects and tasks). As there are always a range of learners and learning styles in every classroom then several alternative methods for delivering the same material can be adopted and adapted by each individual teacher. Bloom's taxonomy can be used as a basis for ensuring all curriculum areas are covered (see table below)

*Reflection:* parental discussions, reflected writing, construct meaning from peer discussion

*Literacy:* writing sleep journals, interpretation of web content and re-interpretation

*Poetry and creative writing:* writing poetry or songs about sleep

*Personal achievement:* – Tracking of own progress through maths charts and the solving of the codes from the simply healthy website

*Applying and evaluating:* gathering their own sleep data and evaluating it

*Mathematics:* analysing sleep data and use of the data for use in maths, graphs tables comparisons with other students' sleep data