



Effects of Personality on Student Outcomes

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As we reported in an earlier article, *The Role of Personality in a Successful Boarding Experience* (Issue 2, 2009), there are many factors which may contribute to a student's experience of boarding school and hence their academic and non-academic outcomes. While there are a whole range of contextual factors, e.g. peers, activities, school climate, we also predicted that personality (a student factor) may also play a part. Since writing this earlier article the first year of data has been analysed and early findings on the effects of boarding school were published in Issue 1 (2011). The big question of the ABSA research is, are any differences in outcomes due to whether students are boarders or day students, or do other factors influence these outcomes.

To recap, the ABSA study has measured academic (e.g. motivation, engagement, achievement, academic buoyancy, student approaches to learning) and non-academic outcomes (e.g. life satisfaction, self-concept, interpersonal relationships) as well as measuring a range of background characteristics including personality to test its contribution. The five dimensions of personality measured include agreeableness (e.g., friendliness vs. unkindness), conscientiousness (e.g., self-discipline vs. spontaneous behaviour), extraversion/introversion (e.g., outgoing vs. reserved nature), emotional stability/neuroticism (e.g., sense of security vs. nervousness), and openness to experience (e.g., curious vs. cautious approach).

After analysing the first year of data, and controlling for other factors, early findings indicate (at $p < .001$) that there were no significant differences between boarders and day students on 16 out of 19 academic and non-academic outcomes. This, we believe, is a major finding in that we demonstrated predominant educational parity and equity between boarding and day students – a finding that should bring important comfort to educators and parents alike. On 2 of the 7 non-academic measures – meaning and purpose in life and relationship with parents – boarding students are significantly more positive than day students. On one academic outcome – impeding motivation (comprising anxiety and academic uncertainty) – boarders are higher than day students.

Interestingly, drilling deeper into the results from Year 1, we find there are other significant differences between students, but these are not due to their day or boarding status, but due to the influence of personality (see Table 1; only significant results reported). For example, higher achieving students tend to be more agreeable, conscientious, and open to new experiences. Or, students who are more agreeable and conscientious tend to have higher adaptive motivation, educational aspirations, participation in class, completion of homework, satisfaction with life, meaning and purpose, more likely to set personal best goals, and have more positive relationships with parents and teachers.

The results in Table 1 illustrate the complex nature of factors which influence people to achieve a range of outcomes, in this instance, related to academic and non-academic outcomes. Care must always be taken when using simple statistics to explain complex phenomena. For example, it is not valid to ask boarders (or day students) a question about enjoyment of school, then analyse the results by taking the average scores between these groups, without considering the interrelated nature of other factors. For example, the research did not find a statistically significant difference between day and boarding students' enjoyment of school, but did find that students whose personality was more agreeable and conscientious were higher on measures of enjoyment of school.

Thus, before we draw conclusions about the effects of boarding school, it is vital to take into account other factors which may also influence or contribute to a student's behav-

our or outcomes of schooling. In the case of the above example regarding enjoyment of school, we saw it is students' personality (rather than their boarding status) that is the major factor. It is the robustness of the ABSA study, due to the large-scale nature of the design – 5,198 students from across 13 boarding schools in Australia – and the broad range of influences (35 factors) and their interrelations, that allow us to take into account the many contributing factors to substantiate boarding school findings.

It therefore appears that given the realities of the need or desirability of boarding school for many families and students, parents can take comfort in the knowledge that (after accounting for differences on other factors such as the child's personality) there is broad parity in opportunity and outcomes between boarding and day students. Further analysis will take place to examine the role that boarding house or school factors may have on these outcomes and to further examine the influence of various other factors. This then provides an opportunity for boarding schools and staff to tailor the boarding experience, whether it be support in certain areas (e.g., organisation, boarding house) and pastoral programs to support particular personality types (e.g., shy students) so that each student in our care can optimally enjoy their boarding experience and achieve to their potential.

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Table 1 – Effects of personality domains on academic and non-academic outcomes

	Agreeableness	Conscientious	Extraversion	Neuroticism	Openness
Academic Outcomes					
Adaptive Motivation	+	+		+	+
Impeding Motivation		-		+	
Buoyancy		+		-	+
Cooperation	+		+		
Competition		+	+	+	
Personal Bests	+	+			
Enjoyment of School	+	+			
Educational Aspirations	+	+		+	
Class Participation	+	+	+		
Absence from School					
Homework	+	+			
Non-Academic Outcomes					
Satisfaction with Life	+	+	+	-	
Stability	+		-	+	
Meaning and Purpose	+	+	+		+
Extracurricular Activities		+	+		+
Peer Relationships	+		+	-	-
Parent Relationships	+	+		-	
Teacher Relationships	+	+			

+ indicates a positive effect of personality factor
 - indicates negative effect of personality factor