



Social and Emotional Learning for Early Years' Students

MONASH PRIMARY SCHOOL, CANBERRA, ACT

The School



Monash Primary School is located in the suburbs of Canberra close to the centre of Tuggeranong - a major retail and commercial centre in the ACT.

Monash is essentially a dormitory suburb providing housing for the employees of many government and commercial enterprises. The community has a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

Monash Primary has an enrolment of 506 students from Pre-school to Year 6. The staff members are very experienced and have a wide range of academic and experiential backgrounds.

The Program Background

For some years, a sizeable number of students at the school have presented with significant social and emotional challenges. These have included:

- some aggressive and confrontational behaviours generally;
- some shortfalls in social skilling;
- a lack of awareness of emotional well-being;
- evidence of playground bullying and aggression; and
- some aggressive responses to difficult situations.

Expected Outcomes

The school and its personnel were keen to ensure that students acted in a way that:

- showed concern for the feelings of others;
- involved an engaging and harmonious school environment;
- indicated an inclusive approach to school life: and
- demonstrated all students have social and emotional competence.

The Program in Action

The whole *social and emotional learning* approach at Monash Primary School has been embedded in the Values Education program. This involved the school community in identifying the specific core values and then determining how those values were going to be transmitted to the students.

First steps in the program

Having identified the need for social and emotional training, the school initially used some existing commercial programs to try and address the needs of the students in these key competency or values areas. The staff subsequently abandoned these approaches as they did not feel the programs were meeting the specific needs of the students in the school.

The staff members coordinating the program have since developed a very innovative approach to the explicit teaching of social and emotional competencies. After identifying some of the issues that exist amongst students the staff decided to develop some **training videos for early years' children**.

These videos focus on specific areas of social and emotional competence that are linked to the needs the staff identified. For example, children needed to be explicitly taught how to address each other appropriately as well as the adults with whom they interact. The photo above shows the scaffolding that occurs (in the video and classrooms) where students have to:

- *look at the other person;*
- *smile; and*
- *say hello*

whenever they engage with someone else. This, and other video clips are used by the early years' teachers to stimulate discussion and in-class activities.



The DVD is used in the following way. Firstly, the students are shown one video clip (e.g., *Saying Hello*) without any comments from the teacher. They are then given another viewing straight afterwards to help them reflect on the content.

After the two viewings, the teacher goes through the content of the video clip and asks pertinent questions such as:

- what happened in the clip?
- how do you think the various children were feeling (at different points)? and
- what could have been done differently?

The Program in Action - continued...

The next step in the program

This involves the students in deeper learning. Having grasped some of the key concepts they role play a variety of situations to further deepen their understandings.



For example (as shown in the photo) they might role play a child trying to *share* the bikes that other students are using. Similarly, they might use puppets to allow students opportunities to develop the targeted skills.

Teachers then follow up the learning by regularly re-enforcing the expectations and social skills during class or group activities. Whenever possible, the teachers refer to the *scaffolds* that appear around the room. Each video clip is treated for approximately one week and then constant re-enforcement occurs.

The video clips form a key part of an overarching approach to well-being. The school also uses the **Bounce Back** program to hone in on resilience development.

Two other components of the well-being approach, which address safe practices and bullying, are shown below.

Safe practices are explicitly taught. Students have been taught what to do if they see something (such as a syringe) in the playground or near the school. They know they should follow these 4 steps:

1. Stop
2. Don't Touch
3. Someone Stand Guard
4. Get an Adult

The teachers have assembled a collection of items that children might confront in the environs of the school that may make them unsafe. The final video clip in the series will complement the work done on *safe practices*.

Students are also given explicit skills to deal with **bullying** of any kind. They know what constitutes bullying and they also know to stop bullies they have to do one (or all) of these three things:

- TALK (Say, 'Stop! I don't like what you are doing!')
- WALK (to another part of the playground)
- ASK (an adult for assistance).

The accompanying photo shows the scaffolding used in classrooms to assist teachers to remind students and to re-enforce the skills.



Achievements

The major achievement has been actually working through the task of preparing, filming, editing and producing the video clips. This has been very demanding but professionally satisfying for the staff involved.

The video clips have made a significant impact on students' social and emotional understandings and skill levels.

In 2007, the teachers have dealt with the first three clips in the series. These are:

1. *Greeting Others* (saying Hello);
2. *Sharing*; and
3. *Taking Turns*.

The teachers have found that the students are applying the skills in everyday situations and also have noted that they use a common language when interacting informally.

Moving Forward

Once the video clips have been completed (early 2008) the staff feel it will be useful to have videos for the older students in the school. It has been so successful having the early years' students '*star*' in their own productions that they feel older students would acquire social skills readily using the medium.

The staff would also like to explore ways of rigorously evaluating the gains made in social and emotional competence for the students at various points in their schooling. By building the evidence base, the program will sustain itself and build momentum.

The staff members also feel they should become advocates for the benefits of social and emotional learning and the impact this has on academic performance. To this end they would like to share their experiences with other teachers.

Inhibitors

The staff members coordinating the project have found that video production is enormously time consuming and quite costly. They have been fortunate to have community expertise in video editing and that saved some costs. Other funds have been secured through:

- the ACT Education Department's professional learning fund;
- the Commonwealth funded Drug and Values Education Forum grants; and
- private donations from *Insight Consulting Partners Pty Ltd*.

Without these funds the project would not have been possible.

Time is also a significant inhibitor. Much of the work on the video clips has been done during the personal time of the two co-ordinators.



Things to Share

The main resource that the school has to share is their collection of video clips that focus on social and emotional learning. The clips (shown below) are on one DVD.

In all, there are 6 clips that focus on explicit teaching of such skills as:

1. how to greet others (saying 'hello');
2. sharing;
3. taking turns;
4. being friendly;
5. saying S.T.O.P to bullying; and
6. safe practices.

The approval for distribution of the DVD rests with the ACT Government and the school office will provide advice to interested professionals who want a copy. *It will be issued free of charge.*



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