



Early years curriculum materials

# **Encouraging social and personal learning**

**Developing positive social relationships in the early years**



**Queensland  
Government**



**Queensland  
Studies Authority**  
*Partnership and innovation*

## Background

This case study examines how the Prep Year experience equips children with a social language for learning independently, interacting with their peers in a positive way and managing conflict as it arises. Children are explicitly taught a common social language from Prep to Year 3. Teachers use an explicit conflict resolution and problem-solving process to help children solve most problems independently. The common approach to independence and conflict resolution allows children to make decisions about ways to interact positively.

The *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYCG)* sets out the role of the teacher and reciprocal interactions which include facilitating, collaborating as a learning partner, making learning explicit, building connections and challenging children to develop deep understandings.

The teacher in this case study uses reflection as an integral part of her planning and learning with children. Her extensive use of visual and written diaries supports the prep children and forms the basis of decision making.

“Reflection with children about learning is also important and gives form to decision making. Teachers support child reflection by:

- modelling and verbalising thinking and language used for reflecting
- scaffolding reflection using photographs, diagrams, comments and questions, diaries and plans
- helping them identify things they have learnt
- developing interest in sharing ideas about learning with others
- providing opportunities to share reflections and responses in a variety of ways, for example, drawing, painting, talking and role-playing.” (*EYCG*)

## **The importance of developing and implementing social skills and conflict resolution programs: A principal's perspective**

### **Community perspective – A snapshot**

Our school community is multicultural — 14.1% of students were born in a non-English speaking country, 23.3% of students have one or both parents born outside Australia and a quarter of our students receive support via ESL programs.

Our catchment area has the lowest Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSED) in this education district.

Through staff surveys and discussions, we have identified the social and emotional issues which characterise some students in our school community. Our experience shows that these issues occur more frequently in our student population than in other educational settings. These students need extra support to develop their:

- ability to express their emotions in words
- self-esteem
- anger management skills
- problem-solving skills
- social skills.

We have developed two integrated programs which encourage children to become socially capable and independent learners: the Social Skills Program and the Conflict Resolution Program.

### **Social Skills Program**

Our staff found that, at the beginning of the Prep Year, students lacked the social and problem-solving skills needed for independent learning in their new environment. While many students were competent in other settings and simpler contexts, they found the school setting so different that they could not learn and interact effectively. As a result, we were spending too much time on behavioural issues.

Our Social Skills Program focuses on the behaviours described in the EYCG learning areas: social and personal learning. We teach the behaviours that are appropriate in a school setting and explicitly identify and talk about inappropriate behaviours with the children. We use a seven-step process (described later in this case study) to teach appropriate social and personal skills.

### **Conflict Resolution Program**

We also found that the conflict resolution skills of the beginning children were inadequate for this bigger and more complex social setting. The children needed knowledge and skills to manage their relationships at school so they could feel in control of themselves and their environment,

Our Conflict Resolution Program supports children facing imminent conflict to use skills of assertiveness and considered response instead of physical aggression and immediate reaction.

We show the children the different options they can use, and teach, model, practise and reinforce the appropriate conflict-solving behaviours.

## **Encouraging social and personal learning**

We encourage the children to practise and role-play their new understanding of these behaviours, so that they become consistent and predictable responses rather than reactions.

As part of this process, we teach students to identify and label their feelings and show them appropriate ways to express these feelings. We also teach them the importance of body language in effective communication.

Teaching students the language of resolution and supporting them to understand how they are feeling and reacting in various situations helps them to develop self-control and to express their feelings appropriately.

These two programs establish a strong foundation for the personal and learning wellbeing of the students. The programs provide strategies which help students experience success, develop positive relationships and develop a sense of being an independent learner — factors which we believe support them in lifelong learning.

## **Partnerships**

To build on the knowledge and skills that children gain from these two programs, it is vitally important to establish continuity between home and school. Every child takes home booklets explaining the programs, and the teachers run information sessions in which parents are encouraged to follow up important aspects of our programs at home. Parents often comment on how socially capable and independent their child becomes soon after entering school.

## **Beginning the process**

Our staff identified the skills students needed to behave in a positive, proactive manner at school and to learn how to become socially capable and independent learners.

The early years team then set about developing social and problem solving language and behaviours to be explicitly taught and practised in the context of the flexible learning environment.

The identified skills were put on a continuum to be explicitly taught from Year 1 to Year 3. From 2003 it was extended to include the Prep Year.

During the first year of school we aim to provide children with basic knowledge and understanding of “how to be a learner at school”. We teach them the skills they need to operate in their new school setting.

In the following years children revise previously learned skills and are introduced to skills, behaviour and language that support self-directed behaviour and independent learning.

## **Continuing the process**

In a whole school context, once this level of knowledge and understanding has been explicitly taught and reinforced during the initial primary years, the remainder of the school is able to adopt and adapt the main tenets of these programs into extension programs within their classrooms.

This ensures that there are common understandings about behavioural issues between all staff and students from Prep to Year 7.

## **Beyond school**

We believe that this social/behavioural scaffolding will help the children develop a sound basis for interacting successfully and meaningfully as adults in a wider community. We hope to mould adults who have a range of social competencies, who have confidence in their ability to manage their own behaviours, and who have a respect for others.

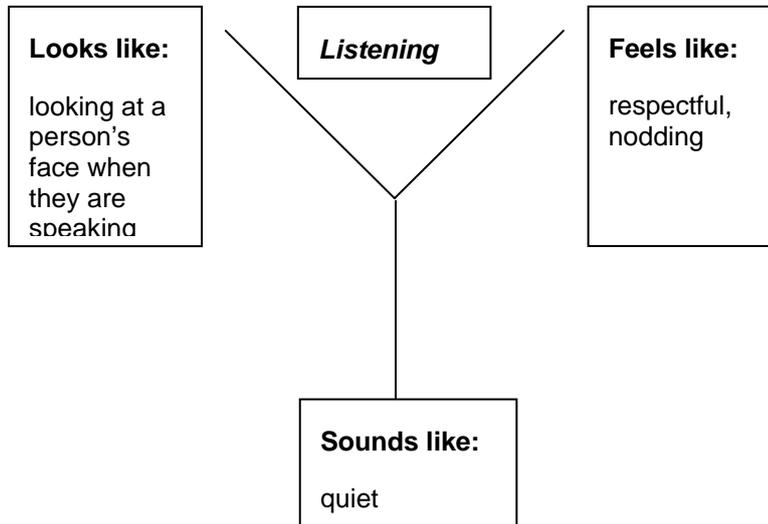
To attain a high level of social competence in family and social relationships, work environments and other contexts of adult life, emerging adults need to be able to adjust and adapt their language and behaviour to different situations. Teaching children social, emotional and problem-solving skills in the early years will help them develop into lifelong learners in the social/emotional domain.

Greg Burns, Principal

	<p><b>Links to <i>Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYCG)</i></b></p>
<p><b>A classroom perspective</b></p>	
<p>Throughout our lives we make adjustments to our behaviour for social and cultural reasons. I believe that learning socially appropriate behaviour on entering school is one of the first stages of social competence.</p> <p>I encourage independence very early in the Prep Year. The children in my context need very clear boundaries about what is appropriate behaviour for school and what isn't. Our school makes explicit the type of language and behaviour the children need to understand and use in order to succeed.</p> <div data-bbox="523 1093 882 1346" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>We begin with a conflict resolution and problem-solving process. Firstly, when a problem arises we tell the children they can use words to “solve the problem”. We explicitly teach the children the words and body language to identify the feelings associated with positive and negative use of words. Examples of language to use can be as simple as, “I don’t like”.... “Please don’t do that”. We also model and role-play positive and negative ways to use words. The modelling and role-playing shows children how to use a neutral tone, as well as a more assertive tone of voice.</p> <div data-bbox="517 1610 890 1877" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Secondly, we teach the children how to ignore a problem. We explicitly teach which problems they can ignore and which problems they can't — such as urgent health and safety issues and continuing problems.</p>	<p><b>Social &amp; personal learning — Social learning</b></p> <p><b>Interacting:</b></p> <p>using explicit language that describes fair and peaceable ways to interact, collaborate and resolve conflicts with others</p> <p>Page 1 of an A4 folded book that is sent home with each child to share with their family</p> <p>Page 2 of the take-home book</p>



For children to be successful in school they need independence in three contexts: personal independence, independence in social communication and independence in learning experiences. So children understand how to be successful at school, we make explicit what positive social strategies should “look like”, “feel like” and “sound like”. We use a Y diagram to record explicit examples of behaviours.



To make this explicit, I use the following processes for communicating and learning:

- identifying
- representing
- reframing
- modelling
- rehearsing
- reinforcing
- reflecting.

**Making learning explicit**

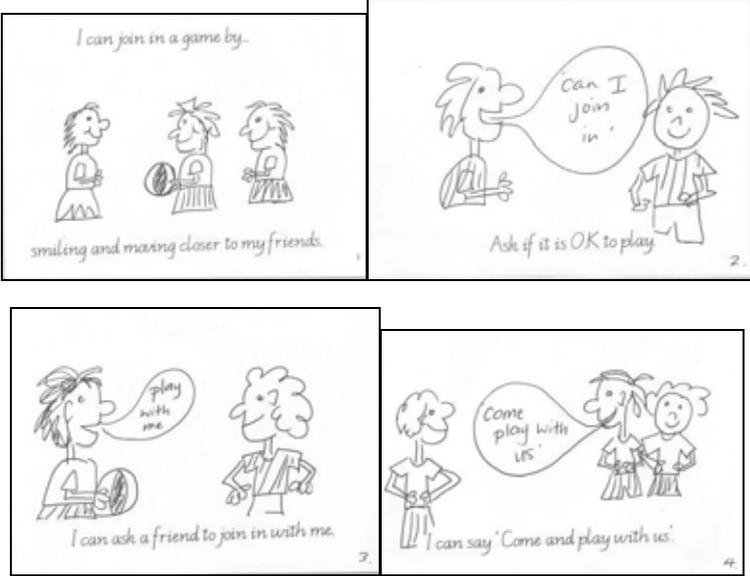
Discussing and explaining meanings and ideas

**Facilitating**

Scaffolding and prompting

<p><b>Identifying</b></p> <p>Identifying means making clear what behaviour and language is appropriate and what is inappropriate. We can predict some behaviour from our observations very early in the year, so we begin the strategies before the behaviour arises. If unsuccessful behaviour arises, we identify it by discussing what it “looks like, feels like and sounds like”.</p> <p>We point out the differences between what behaviour looks like “at home” and “at school”. For example, at school you may have to ask, “May I go to the toilet?” However, at home you don’t need to ask.</p> <p>Another example is using and playing games at home — what does it “look like”, “feel like” and “sound like”? How does this compare with using games at school? Sometimes the home rules are different from the school rules. We explain why things need to be different and why children need to learn new strategies. We discuss these similarities and differences in detail.</p>	<p><b>Social &amp; personal learning — Social learning</b></p> <p><b>Interacting</b></p> <p>Initiating discussions with children about fair and peaceable ways to interact with others – what they “look like”, “sound like” and “feel like”</p> <p><b>Making learning explicit</b></p> <p>Co-constructing understandings</p>
<p>Example of <i>identifying</i></p> <p>Identifying turn-taking: the teacher says, “I’ve noticed that when we’ve been playing board games, children haven’t been taking turns with the dice. This is what taking turns looks like.” The teacher then puts her hand out and says, “Can I have a turn please?” The teacher clearly identifies and models the expected behaviour.</p> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;">   </div>	<p>This is what ignoring “looks like” — hand up, looking away.</p> <p>This is what sharing “looks like”.</p>

	<p><b>Links to <i>Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYCG)</i></b></p>
<p><b>Representing</b></p>	
<p>As a follow-on to the identifying process, we get the children to represent both successful and unsuccessful behaviours. This can be done in a variety of ways, for example, role-playing, drawing and making books that illustrate successful and unsuccessful strategies using digital photographs. At the beginning of the year we make many books. We made one book called “Girls go to the girls toilet, boys go to the boys toilet”, which illustrated going to the toilet, flushing the toilet, washing hands, then going outside. The last page said, “You NEVER play in the toilet.” This transparent process ensured that there was no misunderstanding about what was appropriate and what was inappropriate.</p> <p>To help the children further, we list or draw the inappropriate behaviours. We then cross out the inappropriate behaviours. We refer to these as “crossed out” behaviours. This is a constant reference point for the children. We can use it as a reminder if a problem arises, for example, “You just used a crossed out behaviour. Can you remember how we talked about why that isn’t appropriate?”</p>	<p><b>Facilitating</b></p> <p>Breaking down tasks</p>
<p>We try to make all school processes transparent. Some other books we made to illustrate school social strategies were: “What to do if you have a problem at school”; “Listening in a group”; “Joining in a game”; “Painting”; “Sharing” and “Taking turns”. These books also go home with the children and help us to build partnerships with their families.</p>	
<p>We develop links to literacy by putting up signs and posters in the playground, sandpit or near equipment. This may be in the form of sociograms and Venn diagrams. For example, if there is a problem in the sandpit, such as a child throwing a truck, we want to reframe the way the children look at it. We may do a sociogram or story map together to talk about what the negative behaviour “looks like, feels like and sounds like”. Sometimes we use an emotional wheel that lists feelings. This helps the children give a name to feelings. We use this to inform a lot of feeling-grams. We also use characters from stories to identify emotions and problems or events that might evoke similar feelings. Then we model and practise the body language that represents a particular problem. We will often play games like “Guess what my body is saying” so the children can identify and practise feelings, for example, “Make your body look frustrated/scared”.</p> <p><b>Example of <i>representing</i></b></p> <p>Representing turn-taking: the teacher says, “Let’s take a photo of what turn-taking looks like and put it in our diary”. Children then model what turn-taking looks like, by holding one hand out and asking “Can I have a turn please?” and looking at the person holding the dice. The teacher takes a digital photo. Several examples of positive and negative turn-taking procedures are also recorded in the diary using words and pictures.</p>	

	<p><b>Links to Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYCG)</b></p>
	<p>Content from the “Joining in” take-home book</p>
<p><b>Reframing</b></p> <p>All children come to school with some behaviours that may not work at school. We need to reframe the children’s views of behaviour in our context by showing them behaviour and language that is appropriate for school and reinforcing appropriate behaviour and language from home. This requires explicit teaching. In a sense we are training the children in “how to do school”. Social competence means being able to make adjustments for the social contexts you are in. Many of the children may not have come across the social context of school so we need to help them understand it. If an inappropriate strategy appears, we model the negative and the positive, and often make a book containing these models. For example, at the beginning of the year the children relied on adults to help them with everyday things. We made an explicit rule of “ask two friends before an adult”. We made a book detailing what words you can use to ask a friend to help you. For example, “Can you help me?” “I need some help here.”</p> <p>We regularly participate in discussion and reflection as a whole group. This helps develop consistent and continuous understandings and vocabulary for social and personal learning to refer to in individual or small group interactions.</p>	<p><b>Social &amp; personal learning — Personal learning</b></p> <p><b>Interacting</b></p> <p>Modelling strategies for seeking assistance from peers or adults and prompting children to use these strategies, when needed</p> <p><b>Building connections</b></p> <p>Drawing on prior knowledge and making links to new experiences</p>

Example of *reframing*

Reframing turn-taking: the teacher represents the negative ways of asking for a turn or turn-taking on the first half of a page in the reflective diary, and crosses it out. The positive ways of taking turns are represented on the right hand side of the page and have a tick beside them. The teacher points to the crossed out behaviour and says "This is not how we take turns". Pointing to the side where the positive ways are ticked, she says "This is how we take turns. We need to do this when we are playing board games and using dice".



A negative example of modelling turn-taking



A positive example of modelling turn-taking



A negative example of modelling joining in



A positive example of modelling asking someone to join in

<p><b>Modelling</b></p>	
<p>The teacher aide and I spend a lot of time modelling appropriate strategies for personal independence, social independence and independence in learning experiences. This modelling is done in whole class focus sessions and supported through the day. I believe that independence develops when children use positive social language and strategies. Therefore the teacher aide and I do a lot of focused teaching and learning to give the children strategies.</p> <p>For example, at whole group and reflection sessions we discuss problems that may have occurred that day. For example, the teacher may say “I noticed today that when I was speaking J interrupted me. Remember how to interrupt? Stop and look. Wait for the talk to stop. Say excuse me. Okay let’s practice that now.” Another example: “When Stephanie wanted to join in a game today I noticed that she had some trouble. What could she have done?” The children might reply, “Ask if it is ok to play”; “Ask a friend to join in with her.” By repeating the shared reference of the texts “How to interrupt” and “Joining in” made by the children, the appropriate behaviour is identified and the required language strategies are clearly and succinctly articulated. We sometimes refer to the class Big Book if necessary.</p> <p>To help the children understand what positive social strategies look like we role-play “what it looks like”. To help them understand how others may feel we role-play what behaviour “feels like”. For children to be able to talk about a feeling, they need to learn how to identify and label a range of feelings.</p> <p>Examples of <b>modelling</b></p> <p>Modelling turn-taking: when the children are playing board games and they are using a negative strategy, the teacher might say, “That’s not what turn-taking looks like. You need to put your hand out and ask ‘Can I have a turn please?’” The teacher might also scaffold the child’s response and model the strategy as part of the game by putting out her hand and saying to the other child, “Pass me the dice please, it’s my turn”.</p> <div data-bbox="525 1285 940 1597" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="577 1621 890 2033" data-label="Image"> </div>	<p><b>Facilitating</b></p> <p><b>Modelling and demonstrating techniques and strategies</b></p> <p><b>Making learning explicit</b></p> <p>Teaching and instructing in ways that are child-responsive</p> <p><b>Modelling</b></p> <p>Modelling examples of negative responses</p> <p>What a negative response to losing looks like</p> <p>A negative example of modelling interrupting — the person interrupting is tapping the adult on the arm</p>



A positive example of modelling interrupting — waiting for the adult to look at you and speak to you

**Modelling positive behaviour and language**

Child with arms extended is saying: “Oh well, maybe I’ll get a turn next time.” This is an example of modelling behaviour and language for turn-taking.

<p><b>Rehearsing</b></p>	
<p>In various contexts, the children practise what we have modelled and discussed previously. We record all of our strategies in a large visual diary so the children are able to regularly refer to them. We make sure we give children language examples to use in a number of situations, i.e. what a strategy “sounds like”.</p> <p><b>Example of rehearsing</b></p> <p>Rehearsing turn-taking: the teacher might group the children in pairs and help them to practise turn-taking by suggesting they put their hand out and ask “Can I have the dice please?” The other partner would then practise passing them the dice.</p>	<p><b>Facilitating</b></p> <p>Modelling and demonstrating techniques and strategies</p>
<p><b>Reinforcing</b></p>	
<p>When we see the children using the strategies we have made explicit and rehearsed we refer to them directly: “Good interrupting.” “Good, you’re showing me what listening looks like.” “Fantastic, I liked the way you looked at the listeners when you were speaking.”</p> <p>Reinforcing is different from responding. We are reinforcing common understandings that have been explicitly modelled and practised. The reinforcing is consistent and predictable. Responding can change each time and you can still be responding to the same behaviour in Term 1 as in Term 4.</p> <p>If a negative behaviour appears, we use language that we expect the children to use. For example, “When you show me proper interrupting, I will listen.”</p> <p>The children brainstorm praise words and have a bank of words to use when they see positive behaviour. Words like tremendous, ripper, beautiful and good try are used to give each other acknowledgment and reinforcement.</p> <div data-bbox="528 1628 938 1935" data-label="Image"> </div>	<p><b>Social &amp; personal learning – Personal learning</b></p> <p><b>Interacting</b></p> <p>Responding to children and giving positive feedback about their interaction and decisions with others</p> <p>Awesome, good job!</p>

<p>Example of <b>reinforcing</b></p> <p>Reinforcing turn-taking: if the teacher observes children using positive strategies she might say, “Good Pule, you put your hand out and asked for the dice. Well done.” When reinforcing appropriate strategies we use the words that the children have practised: “I could see that you stood back to let your friend have a turn and then you stood behind him — well done Milosh”; “Oh good turn-taking, you passed the dice to the next person and everyone else is waiting for their turn.” I also remind the children if they see someone using turn-taking during play, they need to give them a praise word. Additionally, at the end of play time I might ask the children: “Did anyone see or hear any good words or body talk to take turns — let’s write it down in our diary and see who did it. Did anyone not use the turn-taking strategies that we talked about? Do we need to have more practice?” This allows the cycle to begin again.</p>	
<p><b>Reflecting</b></p>	
<p>We regularly reflect on behaviour and strategies. We do this by recording thoughts in words, pictures and posters and in the many diaries we keep. As children learn new strategies we tick them off in our reflective diary, giving the children a visual acknowledgment of their competencies. “We can do listening now, I can see that you can show me what listening looks like and sounds like now, let’s tick it off in our diary.” I also get the children to share thoughts about how they think they have been going with the social language. We might say, “Who thinks they need a little more practice? Come up now.” We don’t treat the children negatively if they need more time to practise. We also get children who think they have been using the social language successfully to model for other children. We encourage children to call upon these children to help them if they need a particular strategy at a particular time.</p> <p>Example of <b>reflecting</b></p> <p>Reflecting on turn-taking: during group reflections the teacher might say, “I saw some really excellent turn-taking today. Well done, Pule. Let’s write down what you did.” She would then write down what Pule said and did and draw a representation of it in the reflective diary with a tick beside it. The teacher might also say, “Did anyone have a problem with turn-taking today?” The group would then discuss /draw/write about the problem and leave it in the reflective diary to refer to in the future.</p>	<p><b>Social &amp; personal learning – Social learning</b></p> <p><b>Interacting</b></p> <p>Using explicit language that describes fair and peaceable ways to interact, collaborate and resolve conflict with others</p> <p><b>Making learning explicit</b></p> <p>Discussing and explaining meanings and ideas</p> <p><b>Challenging children to develop deep understandings</b></p> <p>Assisting children to reflect and evaluate</p>

	<p><b>Reflective diary</b> — this page contains ideas for using words to solve problems</p>
<p>We have developed a list of behaviours that need strategies. Using “looks like, feels like and sounds like” we model, practise, rehearse and reflect on strategies that are useful when forming positive relationships. We do the same using negative strategies. When new children come into the group there are many models to help them settle in. They can read the books and diaries, and the children who are familiar with the process help teach the new children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Inviting others to listen</li> <li>• Sharing</li> <li>• Taking turns</li> <li>• Joining in/participating</li> <li>• Using nice talk</li> <li>• Have-a-go</li> <li>• Interrupting</li> <li>• Ignoring</li> <li>• Dealing with winning and losing</li> <li>• Accepting consequences</li> <li>• Giving and receiving praise</li> <li>• Dealing with anger</li> <li>• Using self control</li> <li>• Negotiating</li> <li>• Criticise the idea/action, not the person</li> </ul>	<p><b>Facilitating:</b></p> <p>Breaking down tasks</p> <p><b>Making learning explicit</b></p> <p>Making language and thinking strategies explicit, verbalising and modelling thinking and problem-solving strategies</p>

<p>We refer to the following schema directly when interacting with the children. We record visual and text prompts in our shared diary for children to use.</p> <p>For each of these points we give the children explicit examples of what it “looks like, feels like and sounds like”. We regularly model and use the language. When communicating with the children we use the same language consistently and economically. By this I mean that we don’t overload them with language. The language used in the classroom is consistent and predictable.</p> <p>We state the inappropriate behaviour simply: “That’s not what listening looks like.”</p> <p>We represent it: “This is what listening looks like.”</p> <p>We reframe and model it: “Show me what listening looks like.”</p> <p>We rehearse it: “Let’s practice what listening looks like.”</p> <p>We reinforce it: “Great listening.”</p> <p>We reflect upon our use of strategies: “Do you think we listened well today? Why/ Why not?”</p> <p>We don’t clutter the issue with unnecessary language and thinking which confuses the real issue of whether a strategy is appropriate or inappropriate.</p>	<p><b>Challenging children to develop deep understandings:</b></p> <p>Questioning and challenging children’s thinking</p> <p>Challenging children to consider other points of view and ways of understanding</p>
<p><b>Summary</b></p>	
<p>We have made these strategies explicit so the children can be more independent and less reliant upon us for intervention strategies when problems arise. The children readily praise each other with our agreed list of “praise words”. They will often remind each other of the appropriate strategy for a situation. This has really empowered the children.</p> <p>The children have also taken on “teacher of the day” roles to develop their independence and collaborative skills. Two children are chosen to be teachers of the day. Their role is to manage transition times by choosing and leading the rhymes, games and songs from a collaboratively developed list. We do this at lunch-time transitions, toilet time, moving to outdoor play and at other times when the children think it would be appropriate. This has moved the children to the next level, in which they share the power. Collaboration between the teachers and the children to form positive, empowered relationships has given the children considerable independence and pride in themselves as learners. Teachers of the day can often be heard giving gentle reminders to other children: “That’s not what listening looks like Stephanie; you need to look at the speaker...”</p>	<p><b>Collaborating as a learning partner</b></p> <p>Celebrating successes together</p>

Special thanks to Principal Greg Burns, Prep Year teachers, Jody Stehbens and Cathy Hartley, teacher aide Lorraine Ramsden, and children of the Prep class at Watson Road State School.

### Further reading

MacNaughton, G. & Williams, G. 1998, *Techniques for teaching young children — choices in theory and practice*, Longman, Australia.

“Social and emotional competence: Promoting healthy behaviour among youth”, *Facts of life*, Vol. 6. No. 4, May 2001.

[www.cfah.org/factsoflife/vol6no4.cfm](http://www.cfah.org/factsoflife/vol6no4.cfm) [accessed 27 January 2006]

This article looks at the long-term effects of developing children’s social and emotional competence.

Clawson, C. 2000 *Study confirms the importance of children’s early relationships*, Stanford Report, September 27, 2000.

<http://news-service.stanford.edu/news/september27/school-927.html> [accessed 27 January 2006]

This article summarises the findings of two papers that examine risk factors for children’s early school success.