

SUMMARY REPORT

12 Month Pilot of Implementing Working With Others at Mt. Hamilton Baptist Day Care “Pumpkin Patch”

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Working With Others

Grounded in evidence based research at the University of Brighton, UK, Working With Others provides a practical, responsive, practitioner focused programme of training and support for schools and early years providers.

The Working With Others programme teaches children effective groupwork / teamwork skills and enhances social skills, emotional literacy and thinking skills. Its practical, responsive approach focuses on how to build trust, communication and problem solving skills, as well as using pre- and de-briefing with children to build vocabulary, understanding and strategies for working effectively with others.

Aims of the Pilot Project

The staff of Mt. Hamilton Baptist Day Care “Pumpkin Patch” (we shall refer to the centre as Pumpkin Patch) were interested to find out whether Working with Others (WVO) could help them by providing a practical, hands on way of addressing the social interactive piece for children and staff as an integrated, whole setting approach.

After initial conversations and meetings Pumpkin Patch and WVO each committed to a 12 month program of training and support to implement the WVO approach across all their classes, working with all 24 staff and 160 children from 8 months to 5 years.

The Program

Cathy joined Pumpkin Patch for a week every 3 months to provide:

- Whole staff training
- Class observation and feedback sessions and supervision for each class
- Forward planning for interim staff meetings with Mary Pat and Sue

Over the year all staff, including administration, float staff and the cook, received 21 hours in-service training via 4 half days (Saturdays) and staff meetings.

In between Cathy’s visits Mary Pat and Sue provided further support for staff within staff meetings and team meetings.

At initial training sessions staff identified 3 goals they would like to achieve with their children over the coming 12 months. These were expressed as ‘I can’ statements:

- **I can take turns in a group**
- **I can understand people’s emotions through their body language**
- **I can see how my behaviour affects others**

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Using the WWO process we broke down these goals and developed strategies for teaching the skills to children in **all** classes.

Making it work in the classroom

Long term, sustained, embedded organizational change does not happen in a week or even a month. Asking practitioners to reflect on and extend their practice requires sensitivity, understanding and lots of time.

The Working With Others approach recognises the importance of relationships as key to providing a safe, secure and accessible learning environment for all children. Its training and support for practitioners is framed around 4 fundamental areas:

1. **trust, communication and problem solving skills** - we encourage and help practitioners progress through a process of building and reinforcing each of these skills so that they can develop safe and inclusive relationships among their children.
2. **pre- and de-briefing** - we help practitioners develop an open style of facilitative conversation with children that discusses the 'how' and learning around of working together as well as the content of their task. Through this children are
 - a. introduced to the vocabulary of working together
 - b. more aware of the impact of what they do and say on others
 - c. encouraged to take ownership and responsibility for their learning and behaviour
 - d. taught to reflect and think about different strategies for interacting and working with peers - what they might do differently next time, how they might respond to specific challenges in future.
3. **planning for collaborative and cooperative activities** - we help practitioners reconsider and extend how they organise and plan for group activities; how groups are composed, how tasks are structured to encourage interdependency and cooperation together and how to balance the challenge of working together with the demands of the task itself.
4. **ongoing support and supervision** - in asking practitioners to reflect on and change their practice we introduce the key principles of the program and offer a step by step approach to incorporating it into an individual's repertoire in the classroom. To enable success and confidence time has to be given to practitioners to 'give it a go' and then through supervision and peer support be encouraged to think about what they might do differently next time. The positive response of children and a growing confidence and understanding of what they are doing is then usually a great motivator for them to become more creative and inventive in their use of the approach with their children.

At Pumpkin Patch we implemented the program with staff under the broad umbrella of looking at how we could knit the sensitivity, awareness and relationships **between** children, of all ages at the centre. At training session, staff and team meetings we agreed together next steps for moving forward and extending what we were doing, responding also to what each teacher felt their children were able to cope with. The kind things we agreed to try together were to:

- Trust exercises in the classroom
- Have a go at pre and debriefing
- Encourage children to use each other's names
- Think of activities to encourage turn taking
- Use random grouping to build and develop inclusive, positive relationships
- Recognise the importance of labelling for developing vocabulary
- Use circle time to develop communication skills
- Model skills
- Focus on developing and extending emotional vocabulary and literacy
- Develop independent activities where children could transfer their skills.

Outcomes

For both children and staff team

- Increased ownership
- Taking more responsibility for themselves and each other
- Greater trust
- Improved communication
- Enhanced independent problem solving

Children

- More relaxed, enjoy other's in their class and are comfortable mixing together - for example, will sit with/ play with anyone else in their class
- Greater awareness and sensitivity to each other - for example, in response to other children needing help to reach something or being upset
- Regularly demonstrate empathy and sensitivity to each other - for example, a toddler fetching a blanket for another child when they were upset
- Can identify and ask for what they want and/or need
- Taking responsibility for their learning and thinking / talking about what they have learnt in terms of content and process (how they worked/learnt) - for example, can say what they liked / didn't like and how their friend helped them
- Calmer classrooms - children more relaxed and less frustrated with their improved communication skills
- Observable changes in behaviour - for example, less accident reports and aggressive behaviour incidents
- Smoother and less stressful transitions, including new children being incorporated into class group - for example, children will spontaneously invite new child to join them in their activity
- Enhancing these skills and using approach now evident across all age ranges, including young babies.

Staff

- Through training and activities the staff team were encouraged to mix together more randomly which has enhanced team relationships and trust and helped them become more comfortable with everyone on the staff team.
- One of the ways we raised greater awareness of the staff team was to work on what an effective, ideal team looked like and what contribution they made to their team and its goals
- Training sessions included opportunities for conversations among staff that encouraged reflective practice, that posed questions like, 'why am I in this team?' and, 'what does it mean to be part of this team?' As a group they then could discuss the importance of participating, contributing, showing sensitivity to each other, engaging with others - which in turn gradually became accepted as part and parcel of being part of the Pumpkin Patch team and doing your job
- We worked on developing reflective practice and professional dialogue by together also considering other aspects such as:
 - accountability
 - managing conflict
 - giving and receiving positive praise
 - giving feedback to each other
 - identifying ways of moving professional practice on.
- Our raised awareness of the staff team alongside the children means that WWO is now fundamentally an integral part of our ethos as a whole setting; we now look at hiring staff differently and find that we listen and look for something different to what we might have done in the past.



Challenges

- Finding the time for training and supporting staff; this was a big commitment and investment - but really worth it as it maintained momentum and motivation across the year
- At the beginning staff felt that they were already doing much what the new program was proposing
- Overcoming and unlearning ingrained beliefs and preconceptions about what children can do
- Getting all staff to *really* buy in on putting teaching and promotion of social skills as first and foremost within classroom
- Getting staff to let go of control and recognise that they have permission to take risks with children, even if it might not work.

Why has it worked so well?

- Investment of time and money
- Staff willingness to try new ideas
- Organizational support from top down, including Mt. Hamilton Baptist Day Care Board of Directors and management staff
- Layers of support and training across the whole year: regular visits to maintain momentum and build on movement forward, with interim support via team meetings and staff meetings from Mary Pat and Sue
- Kept as a high, visible priority across the whole setting
- Inclusive for all staff and all children - everyone part of the process
- Implementation has been one step at a time, working from where people are at and helping them then always look to where to move forward to
- Slow and deep learning that has enabled staff to reflect on and change their practice gradually and in a meaningful way
- A genuine collaboration with staff that values and recognises their input and professionalism.

Evidence and data collected

- Ongoing evaluations and feedback from staff
- Questionnaires for staff - for example, through questionnaires we were able to identify that all staff wanted further training and support on managing conflict with colleagues
- Less accident reports
- Transition between classes and of new children starting
- Independence of children who regulate themselves and each other independently from the adult
- Staff reporting they have more time to step back and observe their class.

Next steps

We are continuing to building on previous work together and want to focus more on diversity, communication and managing conflict among the staff team. We are also continuing to explore together different personality types and its impact on effective teams.

We have begun to

- a. consider how this program can further support transition for children and staff
- b. map social skill and WWO skills progression across the age ranges and within the school year for children.

Further areas we want to address are:





Outdoor play
Extending collaborative opportunities in classrooms
Linking more closely into the classroom environment, programming and curriculum.

We are confident that this pilot program has proven successful on many different levels. Our staff have increased understanding in what it means to be the ideal team, and are able to give co-workers the difficult message even when it's challenging to do so. They understand personality types, and how to communicate effectively with each other. Staff members are more self reflective, and have reconfirmed their dedication to the Early Childhood Education profession. They have become intentional in their approach to early learning and care. The children in our care are more knowledgeable in the area of emotional literacy and are reaching higher goals than ever before. They are reflective about their own play and work activities with other children, and have adapted to working well with all children. Parents have noticed that their children are able to articulate their feelings and the feelings of others, and their children are able to communicate effectively.

We look forward to continuing our partnership and collaboration with Working With Others since it has become such an integral part of our work with children. Our understanding of children is much deeper as a result of our achievement. "There's no going back."

