



The Early Years Model of Practice: Supporting Social Emotional Learning by “Being”

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Families and teachers of students on the autism spectrum perceive social skills, emotional development, and friendship as important outcomes of schooling. The delivery of curriculum focused on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is an integral aspect of effective educational practice for these students. Within the Australian Curriculum, SEL is incorporated within the Personal and Social General Capability with an emphasis on student learning in relation to understanding self and others, and managing relationships and learning. Key educational practices that support SEL for students on the spectrum have been integrated into a new online resource, the Early Years Model of Practice (EY-MoP).

The EY-MoP supports teacher efficacy and decision making in relation to the effective education of students on the spectrum in the first year of school. The model comprises a set of educational practices aligned with the organisers of Belonging, Being, and Becoming from the Early Years Learning Framework. The practices aligned with Being develop students’ personal and social capabilities and encourage a positive teacher response to challenging behaviour. These practices draw together general teaching practices that support the creation of a classroom climate that supports social emotional learning and autism-specific instructional strategies that build social skills.

This presentation outlines the development and validation of the “Being” practices, and reports preliminary trial data regarding teachers’ thoughts on and use of the “Being” practices. To develop the EY-MoP, a review of the literature on effective educational practices for students on the spectrum was conducted and essential elements identified. Established practice listings from the fields of early childhood education and early childhood special education were also identified and reviewed. Identified elements and practices were categorised, refined, and rewritten to create a unique set of practices that support SEL. Next, these practices, as part of the EY-MoP, were validated. The content validity of the “Being” practices was established by surveying five subject matter experts whose responses, when analysed, established all practices had excellent Individual Content Validity Indices. The social validity of the practices was established via an online survey of 129 early years teachers from Queensland (QLD), New South Wales (NSW), and Victoria. Analysis showed there was >90% agreement that the “Being” practices were recommended. Finally, the EY-MoP is being trialled in 19 Prep/Kindergarten classrooms in metropolitan QLD, NSW, and Victoria. Preliminary data from both surveys and interviews suggests “Being” practices are seen as essential to academic engagement and success at school.