



# Focus on Staff Training

Preliminary findings from a statewide professional development project  
in early childhood intervention centred on increasing social and  
communication skills and decreasing challenging behaviours

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Power and Passion: Progress Through Partnerships





## Background to the Project

- DADHC-funded initiative as part of *Stronger Together: A new direction for disability services in NSW 2006–2016*, involving a series of professional development modules written and presented by expert practitioners in early childhood intervention around NSW.
- The course focuses on the development of positive learning contexts and the use of functional assessment to guide strategies for improving social and communication skills in young children who may demonstrate challenging behaviours.



## Background to the Project (continued)

- To date, we have run four workshop cycles across rural, regional, and metropolitan locations in NSW.
- A complementary set of materials that specifically support personnel working with young children on the autism spectrum has been piloted and will be released in final form in 2010.
- The possibility of accreditation for participants who seek this is being explored.



## Why did DADHC commission this work?

- DADHC funds a wide range of non-government early childhood services.
- Early childhood intervention services play a critical role in supporting the development of children with a disability, including autism.
- Knowing about and implementing best practice strategies most appropriate for a child with autism are key issues faced by early childhood intervention service providers.



## Why did DADHC commission this work? (continued)

- Understanding, preventing, and reducing the incidence of challenging behaviour in young children, including children with autism, is a significant issue for staff and parents.
- An initial two-year pilot program was expanded given positive results reported by participants.

# Introducing the Guiding Framework



Adapted April, 2007, with permission from Fox, L., Dunlap, G., Hemmeter, M. L., Joseph, G., & Strain, P. (2003). The teaching pyramid: A model supporting social competence and preventing challenging behavior in young children. *Young Children*, 58(4), 48-52. Published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)(USA).



## Overview of intended participant outcomes

At the conclusion of this program participants will be able to:

- recognise the importance of preventative approaches in the form of nurturing contexts and relationships
- identify the link between social behaviour and communication in young children
- use a series of practical, evidence-based steps in designing strategies to enhance the social and communicative participation of young children on the autism spectrum and other needs
- build the capacity of staff in services to work in partnership with families



## Outcomes of the program

At the conclusion of the course participants are able to report:

- increased skills, understanding, and confidence in the provision of communication-based positive supports for child behaviour
- enhanced recognition in services of the importance of pro-active and preventative approaches to social learning
- improved capacity in the use of functional assessment and the design of positive behaviour support plans



## Participant information

<b>Participant role</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>
Teaching support	35	6.0
Teacher	214	36.6
Executive	48	8.2
Related professionals	78	13.3
Missing	207	35.4
Unknown	3	.5
Total	585	100.0



## Some preliminary pre-post participant report data

<b>Item</b>	<b><i>F</i></b>
I have specific strategies that I use to teach social and emotional skills in the children with whom I work	46.1*
I am confident in conducting a functional assessment of challenging behaviour in children with whom I work	297.4*
I am confident in assessing the communication needs of children with challenging behaviour	203.8*
I can design appropriate strategies to address challenging behaviours in children with whom I work as part of a positive behaviour support plan	156.0*

\* $p < .01$  These changes pre-post are positive and highly statistically significant, but it is important to note the reports are not matched on a personal level



## Follow-up websites

- Positive Partnerships: Supporting school aged children on the autism spectrum at <http://autismtraining.com.au>
- Early Childhood Intervention Professional Development Project at <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/sed/ecipdp/>
- Raising Children Network at <http://raisingchildren.net.au/>