



Enhancing Emotional Literacy  
through Visual Arts

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## Schools Manual

This document provides interested schools with an outline of The Dax Centre approach for enhancing emotional literacy through visual arts (ELVA). The document includes an overview of The Dax Centre, a history and outline of the project and components of ELVA, including benefits and considerations for the school and the process for registering interest.





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## OVERVIEW

### About The Dax Centre

The Dax Centre promotes mental health and wellbeing through fostering a greater understanding of the mind, mental illness and trauma through art and creativity. It incorporates the Cunningham Dax Collection, a collection of over 15,000 works created by people with an experience of mental illness and trauma. The Dax Centre is a world leading institution dedicated to the exploration of the interface between art and mental health.

## ABOUT ELVA

### Rationale and Concepts

In recent years there has been a growing awareness in the general community of the importance of the emotional life of children. We now understand how some childhood trauma can lead to life long difficulties, and in many cases, the development of mental illness in adult life. There is also a greater appreciation of the neuro-plasticity of the brain, in particular the developing brain of children, and how enhancing their emotional literacy in their early years may protect them from some of life's difficulties.

Emotional literacy may be defined as the capacity of a person to understand their emotional experiences. Children who possess emotional literacy are emotionally aware, alive and connected with themselves. They are better equipped to develop capacities to engage with and manage emotional difficulties they encounter. As a consequence they are more resilient in the face of emotional challenges.

ELVA aims to use visual arts as the medium to enhance the capacity for children to be emotionally aware, and emotionally connected with themselves, others and with experiences and situations. It recognises the importance of creating time, space and place for the children to reflect on themselves, their interactions with their social setting and express this within a safe and supportive environment.

ELVA is an experience based approach and is therefore fundamentally different from most other emotional literacy programs that are based on skill training or behavior modification.

ELVA is a classroom based model to enhance the emotional literacy of primary school children through art. Originally funded through a private philanthropic trust, it began in 2010 involving a multi-disciplinary working party consisting of teachers and child psychotherapists, psychiatrists, analysts and psychologists..



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This classroom based approach, which includes teacher professional learning, implementation and ongoing support, has gone through a trial and pilot 1 and 2 phase, followed by evaluation and refinement, and is now available for all primary schools.

There are already several classroom based programs that aim at promoting the wellbeing of primary school children. This approach has the potential to complement such programs by 'value adding' to both existing art curriculum and wellbeing programs.

## **ELVA FRAMEWORK**

ELVA has integrated a psychodynamic approach and is underpinned by current understandings of neuroscience and the development of the mind and brain of children.

### **Psychodynamic approach**

- Assumes emotional literacy is a capacity that develops through experience rather than a skill that is learned.
- Pays close attention to the dynamic factors that determine the creation of a safe supportive environment where emotional experiences are valued and emotional experiences encouraged.
- It highlights the importance of a teacher's interest and attitude in the emotional world of their students and how this attitude impacts on their emotional experiences and expression.
- It also highlights the interaction between the classroom environment and the broader climate of the school and its local community

### **Neuroscience**

- Emotional literacy involves well-developed neural circuits connecting parts of the brain that are involved in perception, thinking and feeling.
- Creative activities that involve perception, thinking and feeling also utilize these same circuits.
- Increase in contained emotional experiences that utilize these circuits will strengthen development.
- Stress/trauma and uncontained emotional experiences shut down these circuits.

### **Development of the brain and mind**

- The capacity of a child to be resilient against adversity is dependent on their capacity to make sense and process these challenging experiences.
- Although the brain and mind continues to develop throughout life, the process of shaping it is most significant in childhood and adolescence.
- The mind and brain is shaped by experience and use.
- Developmental tasks, trajectories and stages influence awareness of and engagement with the emotional life of oneself, other people, and our communication skills and styles.



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This unique approach, which integrates psychodynamic, neuroscientific and developmental perspectives is appropriate for all children from prep to year six. It is designed to strengthen mental health, create safe and contained learning environments and engage teachers' capacity to engage with their students.

## Benefits and costs for school

### Benefits for the school

- Training in and experience with the Dax approach to Visual Arts
- Access to a complementary approach to supporting student wellbeing
- Building teacher capacity and promoting teacher reflection.
- Seven training days for at least two staff, and one support day visit to school/organization site. Training includes two facilitators, training material, and refreshments.
- Attendance at the annual Dax Emotional Literacy conference.
- Access to web based resources
- 24 months support from Dax educational consultant.  
(Value \$8000)
- Support in implementing the Dax Approach.
- Assistance in deepening whole school engagement with the Dax Approach.

### Costs for the school

- The cost of training implementation and support over the three years is \$1600 +GST/per teacher.
- Each school is encouraged to choose a minimum of two and a maximum of three teachers (e.g. visual arts teacher, wellbeing coordinator and curriculum leader) to complete the training.
- Time allocation to communicate with Dax consultant.
- Participation in the evaluation process.



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## COMPONENTS OF ELVA

### School Participation

ELVA offers schools teacher professional learning, assistance during the implementation stage and support in engaging the whole school community.

### Teacher Professional Learning

Participating in Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) is essential for teachers implementing the ELVA Dax Approach. The teachers will gain an understanding and experience of the Approach including the core components of implementation. The training is designed to assist capacity building in teachers in both the theoretical and experiential fields.

The TPL is delivered within the first 18 months of the schools involvement in the project through seven day-long trainings at The Dax Centre and an onsite consultation at the school. Each school is encouraged to choose a minimum of two and a maximum of three teachers (e.g. visual art teacher, wellbeing coordinator and curriculum leader) responsible for implementing the Approach to participate in the TPL.

In the first six months there are a series of four training days spread over terms 3 and 4, with a further day per term during the following 12 months. Training is from 9am-4pm at The Dax Centre, Kenneth Myer Building, Genetics Lane off

## PROPOSED TRAINING OUTLINE

Day	Theoretical	Experiential
1	<p><i>Introduction to the Dax Model</i> Overview of the project - the history and time line.</p> <p>Overview of core principles. An understanding of the development of the domains.</p> <p>An understanding of implementation in schools.</p> <p>Brief introduction to the format and development of the activities and units of work.</p> <p><i>Outline of the training</i> Aims, goals and process of the training.</p>	<p><i>An experience of the Dax Approach</i> The afternoon will be practical sessions designed to provide the teachers with experiences that complement the theoretical sessions</p> <p><i>Reflection through art making</i> Insideoutside boxes</p> <p><i>Discussion</i> The discussion including core principles, the notion of experience, relationships and reflections and the role of the facilitator.</p>

2	<p><i>Experience, relationships and reflection.</i> Demystifying a psychoanalytical approach. What is it and what is it not? Understanding boundaries.</p>	<p><i>An experience of the Dax Approach</i> The afternoon will be practical sessions designed to provide the teachers with experiences that complement the theoretical sessions.</p> <p><i>Reflection through art viewing</i> Art, memory and feelings</p> <p><i>Discussion</i> The role of art viewing on meaning making.</p>
3	<p><i>Understanding relationships.</i> From the child/carer to child/teacher- a developmental understanding.</p>	<p><i>An experience of the Dax Approach making.</i> The afternoon will be practical sessions designed to provide the teachers with experiences that complement the theoretical sessions.</p> <p><i>Reflection through art making</i> Memories of art making</p> <p><i>Discussion</i> Listening to our self and others.</p>
4	<p><i>Creating a safe and supportive environment</i> Boundaries/container/contained. Understanding anxiety individual/groups</p>	<p><i>An experience of the Dax Approach</i> The afternoon will be practical sessions designed to provide the teachers with experiences that complement the theoretical sessions.</p> <p><i>Something a little different</i> Portraiture.</p> <p><i>Discussion</i> Debrief and feedback of the training and final questions</p>



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## **IMPLEMENTATION STAGE AND ONGOING SUPPORT**

### Students

The Dax Approach is a universal approach to developing emotional capacity in all students within the school. It is not designed as an intervention for a targeted group of students with identified issues. During the pilot phase it is expected that the model be delivered to the whole class during the visual arts lessons. Depending on the individual school, the model may be delivered to all classes in the school or to a selection of classes.

### Classroom

Trained teachers are encouraged to implement 10 ELVA sessions in the class from the units of work created using the Dax Approach. This implementation is to be encouraged after the initial four training days have been completed. (These could include units of work developed by the Dax Centre, or units of work developed by the trained teachers using the Dax Approach and after approval by The Dax Centre). The teacher may choose to spread the units out over the four terms or as a block of 10 sessions. All units of work relate to current curriculum standards, assessment and reporting protocols.

### School Community

The Dax will continue supporting the school after the conclusion of the teacher professional learning phase through access to web based resources, supporting documentation, email support and through hosting the annual Dax ELVA Symposium.

### Expectations and Considerations for School Participation

There are certain considerations pertaining to schools participating in the ELVA approach. As ELVA involves both visual arts and wellbeing it is essential that schools have a culture that values the emotional world of all within the school community. It is also important that the school has additional support systems for students and teachers such as chaplains and social workers.

The Principal must be informed about and demonstrate support for the implementation of the ELVA Dax approach within their school community. The teachers involved need to be committed to the TPL and implementation of the implementation of ELVA in their school.

### Expectations of the Schools

- Principal is supportive of the approach.
- A teacher has been designated to coordinate/implement the model.
- At least 2 and a maximum 3 staff complete the Teacher Professional Learning component.
- The school has a visual arts program.
- The school has a culture that is sympathetic to enhancing children's emotional literacy.
- The school will cover the cost to release teachers for training and the cost of training (\$1600/teacher plus GST).



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### Expectations of The Dax Centre

During the pilot phase the participating schools can expect the following involvement and support from The Dax Centre:

- TPL provided as stated above.
- Email/phone access to Project Manager to support implementation.
- Access to developed units of work.
- Support in designing and developing units of work.
- One School visit if requested to assist and support implementation.
- Ongoing support after the conclusion of the pilot phase.

### Evaluation

Schools are requested to participate in an evaluation process which may include pre and post questionnaires, reflections from staff, students and parents, and photographic evidence.

### Privacy

The teachers and students and schools will not be identified by name in any reports, written or otherwise unless permission is specifically requested.