



Enhancing Emotional Literacy
through Visual Arts

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 wellbeing through the educative power of art.

The Dax Centre houses the Cunningham Dax Collection, which consists of more than 15,000 artworks created by people with an experience of mental illness or psychological trauma. The Dax Centre uses this Collection as the centrepiece of exhibitions, education programs for students at all levels and for the community at large and specially directed projects in order to promote mental wellbeing. Our staff works closely with artists and communities who contribute their work and life stories to this Collection.

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.
- 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.
- 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 utilise 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 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.

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 ELVA. The teachers will gain an understanding and experience of ELVA, including the core components of implementation. The training is designed to assist capacity building in teachers in both the theoretical and experiential fields.

TPL is currently delivered through two training models: whole school training and selected staff training.

Whole School Staff Training

ELVA offers training at a whole school staff level. This model of training is conducted after careful consultation and discussion with the school leadership regarding alignment and readiness of the staff and school culture to the ELVA approach. In this model two Dax Centre facilitators deliver the training on-site over a period of 12 months at times negotiated between the school and facilitators.

Selected Staff Training

Selected staff training entails staff from approximately 10 schools coming together to participate in the TPL. After consultation with each school they are encouraged to choose a minimum of two and a maximum of three teachers (e.g. visual art teacher, wellbeing coordinator and curriculum leader) to participate. This creates a group of around 25 teachers from up to 10 different school settings. For this model the TPL is delivered over the first 12 months of the schools involvement with ELVA through six day-long trainings at The Dax Centre and an onsite consultation at the school.

Introductory Sessions and Workshops

The Dax Centre also offers a range of introductory workshops for schools interested in finding out more about ELVA (refer to the ELVA website).



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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.
- Eligibility to attend the annual ELVA symposium.
- Access to web based resources.
- Support during the implementing phase of ELVA.
- Assistance in deepening whole school engagement with ELVA.

Costs for the school

- The cost of the selected staff training is approximately \$1800 +GST/per teacher.*
 - Please contact the ELVA project manager at The Dax Centre to discuss the cost for whole school staff training.
 - Time allocation to communicate with a Dax consultant.
 - Participation in the evaluation process.
- * Cost subject to change.



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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 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>

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| 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> |
| <hr/> | | |
| 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

ELVA 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 training phase it is expected that ELVA 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 ELVA 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 ELVA framework 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

Schools considering participating in the ELVA approach need to consider the school culture. 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 ELVA within their school community. The teachers involved need to be committed to the TPL and implementation of ELVA in their school.

Expectations of the Schools

- Principal is supportive of the ELVA approach.
- A teacher has been designated to coordinate/implement ELVA.
- 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 .



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Expectations of The Dax Centre

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.

Evaluation

Schools are requested to participate in any 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.