The Effects of TOGETHER: A Contextually Responsive and Collaborative Parent–Educator Program for Teaching Social and Emotional Skills in Young Children

Joanna Grace Phillips

B.Sc New Zealand, GradDipTchLn New Zealand, Master of Education New Zealand

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Social Sciences, Media, Film and Education
Swinburne University of Technology

Melbourne, Australia

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Abstract

Children who develop strong social and emotional skills in the early years are typically more successful in their schooling and demonstrate more positive relationships with others. When children are provided with effective early-intervention support from parents, teachers, and educators in a contextually responsive and collaborative manner, their social and emotional development improves. Many early-intervention programs have limited opportunities to develop parent–educator partnerships or cater for the diverse contexts of families when teaching young children social and emotional skills. An investigation is needed about how early-intervention programs can meet the children, families, teachers, and educators’ contextual needs and encourage parents, teachers, and educators to work together in partnership when developing children’s social and emotional skills.

The TOGETHER: Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Skill (TOGETHER) program was developed to address these gaps. TOGETHER was designed as a universal, contextually responsive, and collaborative program for parents, teachers, and educators to work together to teach social and emotional competence skills to young children. The TOGETHER program takes a strength-based approach using positive behaviour guidance strategies in its training package conducted over two 120-minute workshops.

This study reports the development of the TOGETHER program and its effects via a multiple case study design using a mixed-method approach across five diverse preschool settings and associated parents’ homes in Melbourne, Australia. Seventeen children, 18 parents, and 14 early childhood teachers or educators participated. Quantitative measures included using a questionnaire that provides information regarding the parents’ and teachers’ beliefs and practices; a rating scale for identifying children who require additional assistance with their social and emotional development; and home and preschool observations of the selected children’s behaviour. Qualitative measures included the Communication Styles and Demographics Questionnaire, open-ended questions on the Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ), anecdotal notes from the home and preschool observations, the TOGETHER program workshop recordings, a follow-up social validity questionnaire, and parent and teacher/educator interviews.

The implementation of the TOGETHER program for this research project consisted of five phases: Phase 1 – Two-step multiple-gating procedure; Phase 2 – Baseline; Phase 3 – the TOGETHER program intervention; Phase 4 – Post-workshops; and Phase 5 – Follow-up. The data analysis for each case study was conducted through a mixed-methods approach using
both descriptive and content analysis. Triangulation was used to deepen the understanding of
the effect of TOGETHER in each case study.

The results indicated that five children were struggling with their social and emotional
skills before the TOGETHER workshops at home and preschool. Their parents, teachers, and
educators identified that they required additional support to improve their parenting and
teaching practices. The parents of 11 of the children also reported concerns about their child’s
social and emotional skills at home. From the BPRQ, their beliefs and practices on how to
teach social and emotional development skills to young children varied. During and after the
two training workshops, it was found that when the parents, teachers, and educators had
worked together in partnership and had shared their knowledge, consistency in responding to
the children’s challenging behaviour had occurred. In turn, there had been an increase in
descriptive praise and encouragement to most participating children in the home and
preschool settings at post-workshop and follow-up. With an increase in the positive
interactions between the children, parents, teachers, and educators, there had been an increase
in the children’s prosocial skills and a decrease in their challenging behaviour.

The findings suggest that for parents, teachers, and educators, cultivating a strong parent–
educator relationship, which involves developing partnerships based on understanding the
family’s individual context and collaborating together, is key to early-intervention programs
being successful. In addition, developing an understanding of family context results in
stronger parent–educator partnerships, which can help ensure that early-intervention
programs for teaching social and emotional skills to young children are inclusive and
successful for all.

Further research on the TOGETHER program is required to determine the program’s
applicability across a broader range of family contexts and how best teachers and educators
can pass on the TOGETHER knowledge to other families who find barriers to participation in
such programs.
Acknowledgements

First, this incredible journey would not have been possible without the wisdom and guidance of my two amazing supervisors, Prof Sivanes Phillipson and Dr Gaye Tyler-Merrick. I met Sivanes not long after arriving in Australia from New Zealand. I was curious, however a little hesitant, about proceeding with my PhD in a new country while still being a mother and teacher. I was also a little doubtful of my own abilities. It was through Sivanes’s encouragement and belief in me that pushed me over the line to begin the incredible and often challenging PhD journey. In her role as my principal supervisor, she brought such creative ideas to my research study. Her ability to challenge my thinking in such a positive and encouraging manner has enabled me to grow so much as a researcher. Her knowledge and passion for strong partnerships between children, families, teachers, and professionals has also been so valuable in my own journey as a mother, teacher, and now researcher. I remember meeting Gaye, my assistant supervisor, during the early days of my teaching career at a professional development course that I attended. Her enthusiasm and wisdom in developing children’s social and emotional skills was inspirational as was her ability to communicate with teachers and parents. I approached her to mentor me through my master’s thesis and was so glad she took on the challenge because, without her, I would never have progressed to completing a PhD. She was the perfect choice to join Sivanes and me on this journey. She would be that little voice in the back of my head that would constantly remind me of what I could achieve and would consistently encourage me to persevere. I will be forever grateful to these two supervisors who have not only been valuable mentors I look up to but have also become cherished friends.

Next, I would like to thank the children, parents, teachers, and educators reflected in each case study. They were essential partners in helping me to understand the effects of the TOGETHER program. The time they gave to participating in the training and offering their voices was immensely valuable. The support from my research assistants – Mye, Cat, and Sonia – in collecting the data also ensured we had gathered a clear picture of what was happening in each setting. They also provided incredible interpreting services when needed. The same goes for Sarah and Zoe, who brought their exceptional teaching skills to help care for the children during the workshops. I would also like to acknowledge the financial assistance from the Faculty of Health, Arts and Design of Swinburne University of Technology in the preparation of this thesis.
Thank you to Brenton Thomas, from Fresh Eyes Australia, who provided editing services for this thesis in accordance with the requirements of the university-endorsed Guidelines for Editing of Research Theses, which form part of the Australian Standards for Editing Practices.

Finally, a huge shout-out needs to be extended to my family. To my parents, Mike and Joanne, your continual love and encouragement has always propelled me forward. To my three sisters, Sarah-kay, Kathleen, and Laura, your ability to keep me laughing over the years has ensured that when times are tough, I am always able to find joy. To my in-laws, Dave and Glenis, your ability to provide help and support to our whole family when I have been so busy in this journey has been incredible. To my husband, Matt, your ability to keep our household running and our son, Jonty, entertained when my head was buried in the computer screen did not go unnoticed. And, finally to Jonty, your late-night hugs were so valuable when you saw me working hard. You kept me going and reminded me of why I do what I do.

I have been so blessed to have a child who has taught me so much about how to be a mum and a teacher.
Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

This thesis includes extracts from a book that is based on the thesis being published by Routledge named Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills: Using the TOGETHER Programme and two unpublished publications. The core theme of the thesis is an investigation into a contextually responsive and collaborative parent–educator program for teaching social and emotional skills in young children, named TOGETHER: Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills (Phillips et al., 2017). The program takes a preventative approach, has been developed to deepen educator–parent collaboration, and caters for contextual diversity during training. TOGETHER specifically aims to train parents and educators together to increase children’s social and emotional skills. This is achieved through the training of educators and parents in positive behaviour guidance techniques. The program also takes contextual variances into consideration when deciding on the delivery and the approach to training for each individual learning community.

The ideas, development and writing up of all the papers in the thesis were the principal responsibility of me as the candidate, working within the Faculty of Health, Arts and Design under the supervision of Professor Sivanes Phillipson, Swinburne University of Technology and Dr Gaye Tyler-Merrick, Nottingham Trent University.

The inclusion of the co-authors reflects the fact that the work was produced from active collaboration between researchers and acknowledges input into team-based research.

In the case of Chapters 4 and 5, my contribution to the work involved the following:

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<th>Publication title</th>
<th>Publication status*</th>
<th>Nature and extent (%) of students contribution</th>
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| 4              | Measurement of parents’ and educators’ beliefs, practices, and relationships using Rasch analysis: Towards advancing children’s social and emotional competence | Under review        | First author – 80%  
                              |                                                                  |                     | Second author – 10%  
                              |                                                                  |                     | Third author – 10%  |
| 5              | The feasibility of TOGETHER: A collaborative parent-educator                      | Accepted for publication | First author – 80%  
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* e.g. 'published' / 'in press' / 'accepted' / 'returned for revision'

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DECLARATION

We hereby declare our contribution to the publication of the ‘book’ entitled:
Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills: Using the TOGETHER Programme

First Author

Name: Joanna Phillips
Signature: 
Percentage of contribution: 80% Date: 02/02/2021

Brief description of contribution to the ‘paper’ and your central responsibilities/role on project:
My contribution included the main development of the ideas and the TOGETHER project in collaboration with my supervisors. My role also included the data collection and writing-up of the paper.

Second Author

Name: Sivanes Phillipson
Signature: 
Percentage of contribution: 10% Date: 02/02/2021
Principal Supervisor:
Name: Sivanes Phillipson Signature: Date: 02/02/2021

Third Author
Name: Gaye Tyler-Merrick Signature: Date: 02/02/2021
Percentage of contribution: 10%

Brief description of your contribution to the 'paper':
Active collaboration and input into the ideas and development of the TOGETHER project. Assistance with editing and submitting to the journal.
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DECLARATION

We hereby declare our contribution to the publication of the ‘book’ entitled:
Measurement of Parents’ and Educators’ Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Using Rasch analysis: Towards Advancing Children’s Social and Emotional Competence

First Author

Name: Joanna Phillips
Signature: 
Percentage of contribution: 80% Date: 02/02/2021

Brief description of contribution to the ‘paper’ and your central responsibilities/role on project:
My contribution included the main development of the ideas and the TOGETHER project in collaboration with my supervisors. My role also included the data collection and writing-up of the paper.

Second Author

Name: Gaye Tyler-Merrick
Signature: 
Percentage of contribution: 10% Date: 02/02/2021
Brief description of your contribution to the ‘paper’:
Active collaboration and input into the ideas and development of the TOGETHER project.
Assistance with editing and submitting to the journal.

Third Author

Name: Sivanes Phillipson
Signature: 
Percentage of contribution: 10%  Date: 02/02/2021

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Principal Supervisor:

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Name: Joanna Phillips  
Signature:  
Percentage of contribution: 80%  
Date: 02/02/2021

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My contribution included the main development of the ideas and the TOGETHER project in collaboration with my supervisors. My role also included the data collection and writing-up of the paper.

Second Author

Name: Gaye Tyler-Merrick  
Signature:  
Percentage of contribution: 10%  
Date: 02/02/2021
Brief description of your contribution to the 'paper':
Active collaboration and input into the ideas and development of the TOGETHER project.
Assistance with editing and submitting to the journal.

Third Author

Name: Sivanes Phillipson 
Signature: 
Percentage of contribution: 10% 
Date: 02/02/2021

Brief description of your contribution to the 'paper':
Active collaboration and input into the ideas and development of the TOGETHER project.
Assistance with editing and submitting to the journal.

Principal Supervisor:

Name: Sivanes Phillipson 
Signature: 
Date: 02/02/2021
Preamble

This thesis includes extracts from a book based on the thesis that is being published by Routledge. For the flow of the thesis, the book titled *Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills: Using the TOGETHER Programme* has been blended through the chapters.

The research project that is the subject of this thesis used data from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). The AEDC is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. The findings and views reported are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Department or the Australian Government.
### Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BPRQ</td>
<td>Beliefs Practices and Relationships Questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBC</td>
<td>Conjoint Behaviour Consultation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSD</td>
<td>Communication Styles and Demographic Questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood teacher</td>
<td>Refers to a person who holds an approved early childhood teaching qualification, such as a 3- or 4-year bachelor degree or above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood educator</td>
<td>Refers to person who holds a Diploma or Certificate III in early childhood education and care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EYLF</td>
<td>Early Years Learning Framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IY</td>
<td>Incredible Years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Refers to those who have the primary caregiving role for a child. Roles include biological parents, step-parents, nominated guardians, or relatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent–Educator</td>
<td>Refers to the both the relationship between families, early childhood teachers, and educators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDRS</td>
<td>Social Development Rating Scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VEYLDF</td>
<td>Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOGETHER</td>
<td>TOGETHER: Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills program.</td>
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Dedication

For my husband, Matt, and son, Jonty

Their humour, support, and patience has taught me so much on this incredible journey.

Nāku te rourou nāu te rourou

ka ora ai te iwi

With your basket and my basket

The people will thrive
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Chapter 1
Context of Study:
Collaborative and Contextually Responsive Programs for Developing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills

Social and emotional skills are an essential part of a young child’s development. In fact, the early years are viewed as the key development period for children’s social and emotional development (McCabe & Altamura, 2011). Therefore, it is vital that young children experience environments that provide a strong foundation for the development of their social and emotional skills. In addition, the social and emotional interactions young children have with their primary caregivers (for example, parents, early childhood teachers, and educators) and their peers form the foundations for both academic and personal success (Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016). Through these interactions children are able to learn skills of how to build relationships with others and cope with their own emotions. Children who have developed such competencies in the early years are typically more successful in their schooling (Denham et al., 2013). They also demonstrate more positive relationships with their peers, family members, and educators.

In contrast, the developmental trajectory is more adverse for children with poor social and emotional skills, where the level of support provided in the home and preschool environments is minimal (Lim et al., 2013). Children who have persistent challenging behaviours are at risk of developing antisocial behavioural patterns. These patterns have the potential to reduce the development of their social and emotional skills, decrease their academic potential, and heighten their vulnerability to isolation through being excluded by their peers and teachers (Bongers et al., 2004; Whitted, 2011). Children who are considered to be either vulnerable or at risk in their social and emotional development often have poor social skills, struggle with expressing themselves, and find it difficult to interpret social messages from others (Wiglesworth et al., 2010). In turn, children who struggle socially have fewer positive social interactions, are viewed as being socially incompetent, and are more vulnerable to the development of externalising and internalising psychological disorders (Bornstein et al., 2010). A child’s ability in emotional regulation has also been shown to have a direct link to the development of their social and academic readiness (Hair et al., 2006). Consequently, the importance of supporting young children in the development of social and
emotional skills is paramount as well as the development of strategies for parents, early childhood teachers, and educators as soon as possible.

This opening chapter will illustrate, there continues to be gaps in research that is related to the social and emotional development of young children and this chapter provides details of these gaps. However, before the gaps are discussed, the definition and terminology of social and emotional skills needs to be clarified. Next in this chapter, the key people involved in developing children’s social and emotional skills are introduced. This information is then followed by a description of the current climate of parent, teacher, and educator training in developing children’s social and emotional skills. From this point, the chapter explores the gaps identified in the currently available programs. Finally, an alternative approach to building the capacity of parents, teachers, and educators when assisting children in their social and emotional skills is presented.

What Is Social and Emotional Development?

Both the words “social” and “emotional” are intertwined in the development of children’s social and emotional development (and prosocial skills), and throughout this thesis they are used together. However, it is important to understand what is meant by each concept.

Social Development

Successful social development involves the growth of skills that are linked to effective interaction with others. With children these skills include turn-taking, being cooperative with adults and peers, understanding others’ feelings, and curbing aggressive behaviour or social withdrawal (Bornstein et al., 2010; Denham et al., 2013). In programs, such as the Teaching Pyramid Model, social competence is regarded as a child’s ability to build positive relationships with others, solve common problems, and engage and persist with challenging tasks (Hemmeter et al., 2006). The achievement of such skills is an important aspect of children’s development as they prepare for a successful transition from preschool to school.

As explained earlier, children who have developed strong social skills are more likely to be successful in forming friendships with their peers, participating in group and community activities, and engaging in reciprocal interactions (Bornstein et al., 2010). The development of a child’s social skills needs to also take into consideration the child’s temperament, the home and early childhood settings, and the relationships the child forms in these environments (J. Murray & Farrington, 2010; Webster-Stratton & Taylor, 2001).
How one views social development is also heavily influenced by the environment and the context (such as, the way of doing things at home and at the ECE setting, religious beliefs, diversity across generations, socioeconomic status) that surrounds children. Similarly, how a parent, teacher or educator what is socially appropriate or inappropriate is also influenced by the many contexts which surround them (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Therefore, it is especially important to recognise that individual differences contribute greatly to how a parent, teacher, or educator perceives what child social skills are. For example, one person may believe that maintaining eye contact is an important part of social connection, whereas for another, such contact may represent disrespect. A child voicing their opinions in a classroom may be viewed by some as a child who is confident in contributing their ideas and is celebrated for the contributions they make; others may view the child as disruptive and non-conforming. Therefore, understanding what is socially acceptable in each context, together with understanding the context of the family and their values and beliefs, is essential in helping a child develop their social skills (Barnett et al., 2010; Park et al., 2016; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007).

**Emotional Development**

Children’s emotional skills are a precursor to, and connected with, the development of their social skills (Campbell et al., 2016). Emotional development is the ability to articulate, understand, and regulate one’s emotions, as well as recognise and understand the emotions of others (Denham, 2006; Hemmeter et al., 2006). Children’s emotional skills involve children being able to express and regulate their emotions (Denham et al., 2012). The development of strong emotional skills is considered fundamental to the development of social skills. It is also strongly linked to the development of stronger prosocial relationships with peers and adults and higher levels of academic success. As with social development, emotional development in children is also highly dependent on the environment that surrounds them (Allen & Steed, 2016). It is dependent on their social experiences, their relationships with the parents/caregivers/relatives in their lives, and the systems of beliefs that influence their lives. For example, before children can verbalise, they realise that their own emotional responses can be used to communicate. An infant will smile to show joy and connect with those close to them. They will cry to communicate they are hungry, uncomfortable, or tired. How a child manages their emotional responses represents their developing emotional competencies. As previously mentioned, a child’s emotional response is influenced by how their
parents/caregivers respond to them. Children who interact with parents/caregivers and educators who are highly attuned to be responsive to a child’s emotional communications are more successful in regulating their emotions (Housman, 2017). Conversely, children who experience unpredictable responses from parents/caregivers and educators find it exceedingly difficult to understand and regulate their own emotions. They often present with emotional delays such as heightened anxiety, fears, and aggressive behaviours (Denham et al., 2003). Therefore, it is vital that children experience consistent responses from both their parents and their educators. So, how is consistency developed? The first step is developing an understanding of a child’s context through contextually responsive practice.

The Key People in Developing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills

Children are influenced the most by those with whom they have the closest relationships (Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, 2016). Their first, most meaningful relationships, are with their families, especially their parents or caregivers. In addition, the type of experiences children have with their early childhood teachers and educators can have a substantial influence on their development, including increasing social participation and productivity in adulthood (Tayler et al., 2015, 2016). The next sections contain descriptions of the influential people in the early years of children’s lives and what is referred to as the parent–educator partnership.

Families and Parents

Families are considered central to children’s social and emotional development. Families can provide a strong platform for children to learn through dialogue, exchange, and emotional connections (Violato et al., 2018). For the purposes of this research project, the term family was used to describe the many home contexts in which children are raised and cared for. As described by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) the definition of family takes many forms and includes de facto or married couples, single parents, step and blended families, and families with visiting arrangements with parents not living in the same home (ABS, 2015). Central to many families are children’s parents or caregivers. Throughout this thesis, the terms parent and caregivers refer to all parental figures in a child’s life. Parental figures include biological and stepparents, grandparents, and nominated carers. Parents are often thought of as the most prominent role models in a child’s development (Tekin, 2011) and are
often referred to as a child’s first educators (Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, 2016).

**Early Childhood Teachers and Educators**

Early childhood teachers and educators may be a child’s first connection with another adult outside their family (Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, 2016). It is important to note that in the Australian context and early childhood teacher refers to a person who holds an approved early childhood teaching qualification, such as a 3- or 4-year bachelor degree or above. Whereas early childhood educator refers to person who holds a Diploma or Certificate III in early childhood education and care.

Both teachers and educators provide children with experiences that can promote or discourage their social and emotional development (Denham et al., 2012). Therefore, the inclusion of teachers and educators in the research of children’s social and emotional development is essential. Manning et al. (2107) demonstrated that children in high-quality early childhood settings, which include lead teachers with higher-level tertiary qualifications, experience a more positive social and emotional developmental trajectory.

**The Parent–Educator Partnership**

The term parent–educator partnership was used throughout this research project and was central to the project’s aims. Hieneman and Fefer (2017) state that collaboration between families and professionals (such as early childhood teachers and educators) is a key component for supporting families. Cooperation and a strong partnership between a child’s parents and their educators leads to several positive outcomes, which include an increase in a child’s prosocial behaviours, the development of positive attitudes towards school settings, and an increase in their academic achievement (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). The importance of this partnership is discussed later in this chapter.

**The Current Climate of Parent, Teacher, and Educator Training in Developing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills**

In Australia, the TOGETHER program’s country of origin, the importance of developing children’s social and emotional skills is clear. There is a significant number of children either at risk or vulnerable to developmental delays in their social and emotional skills (AEDC; Australian Government, Department of Education and Training, 2019). Children considered
to be susceptible to such delays have usually experienced some emotional and social challenges relating to cooperating with others, showing respect for property and others, following instructions, exhibiting self-control, and being kind and helping others. They may have also experienced problems with anxious behaviours, aggressive behaviours, and inattention/hyperactivity. Compared to other children, vulnerable children regularly struggle to get along with others, are disrespectful of others and property, have low self-control, and find it difficult to manage aggressive behaviours. A total of 42,434 of Australian children (14.4%) are at risk of developing social delays, and 28,673 of them (9.8%) are considered developmentally vulnerable to social delays. For emotional development 42,390 children (14.5%) are at risk of developing emotional delays and 24,377 of them (8.4%) are considered vulnerable in their emotional development. These statistics highlight the importance of parents, teachers, and educators learning the skills and strategies that will strengthen children’s social and emotional skill levels and fulfil the objective of reducing the number of children at risk or vulnerable to social and emotional delays.

Such concerning statistics were the catalyst for the development of the TOGETHER program. The key concept of TOGETHER is to train parents, teachers, and educators so that they can assist children in growing their social and emotional skills. The term growing is apt in this context because young children’s social and emotional development and growth depends very much on the contexts of their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Fox et al., 2003).

When a child is provided with effective support from their parents, teachers, and educators in a consistent and collaborative manner, their social and emotional development improves. For example, Sheridan et al. (2012) found that positive changes in children’s behaviours were stronger when there were improvements in the parent–educator relationship. Children who have developed strong social and emotional skills in their early years are typically more successful in their schooling, more effective at connecting with others, and are able to express their needs and feelings (Denham et al., 2013). Therefore, it is vital that parent, teachers, and educators work together to grow children’s social and emotional skills.

When children are not provided with support from their parents, teachers, and educators, their social and emotional development is at risk. Children with persistent challenging behaviours are at risk of developing ongoing antisocial behavioural patterns (Bongers et al., 2004; Whitted, 2011). These patterns have the potential to reduce the development of their social and emotional skills, decrease their academic potential, and
heighten their vulnerability to isolation through exclusion by their peers and teachers. Consequently, a positive social and emotional developmental trajectory is problematic for children if they have poor social and emotional skills. The risk is increased when the support in their environments, such as at home and in early childhood settings, is minimal (Lim et al., 2013).

Children who are considered either vulnerable or at risk in their social or emotional development often find it difficult to express themselves and interpret social messages from others as well as struggle academically (Wiglesworth et al., 2010). Children who struggle with their social and emotional skills have fewer positive social interactions and are often considered to be socially incompetent by either their parents or their educators or both (Bornstein et al., 2010; Wiglesworth et al., 2010). Such considerations can lead to children developing externalised and/or internalised psychological disorders. The importance of supporting young children to develop social and emotional skills early is critical, as is the development of strategies to teach these skills to parents, teachers, and educators. Addressing social and emotional delays early is considered a preventative measure to stop children from following an antisocial trajectory in later childhood, adolescence, or adulthood (Patterson et al., 2016). Over the decades, early-intervention programs have emerged with the aim of altering that trajectory.

Early-intervention programs that assist children in the development of strong social and emotional skills have become widely available for parents, early childhood teachers, and educators. Research has demonstrated that early intervention can alter the developmental trajectory for at-risk or vulnerable children (Bornstein et al., 2010). Research has also validated that social and emotional training programs experienced earlier in a person’s life have a greater impact when compared to the effect of these programs undertaken later in life when behavioural patterns have become more entrenched (Brietenstein et al., 2009). Additionally, the long-term maintenance of children’s social and emotional skills increases when programs are put in place earlier in a child’s life (Morrison et al., 2000).

There are a range of programs available to provide both parent and educator training in developing children’s social and emotional skills. Parent training has been demonstrated to be effective in reducing delays in children’s social and emotional development. For example, S. Gerber et al. (2016) found that parents had noticed that their children’s antisocial problems had reduced, an increase in parental satisfaction had occurred, and a decrease in parental stress as a result of the training had also transpired. Other research has demonstrated the
impact that parents’ beliefs have on children’s social and emotional skills (Barnett et al., 2010). Specifically, changes in parents’ beliefs and practices (as a result of training) can alter children’s social and emotional development. In relation to teacher and educator training, some studies have revealed that an increase in children’s prosocial behaviour had occurred as a result of the training. For example, Morris et al. (2013) posit that changes in teacher and educator practices towards children’s behaviour will lead to improvements in children’s social and emotional skills.

Given the noticeable benefits of such parent, teacher, or educator training, there has been considerable research into the effects of several specific programs designed to increase children’s social emotional competence skills – for example, the Incredible Years (IY; Webster-Stratton et al., 2001), the Teaching Pyramid Model (Fox & Hemmeter, 2009), and Conjoint Behavioural Consultation (CBC; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). These programs focus on enhancing the development of children’s social and emotional skills earlier in life through either parent, teacher, or educator training. As a result of earlier intervention, such programs have been effective in reducing delays in children’s social and emotional development. Outcomes include a reduction in children’s challenging behaviour, an increase in parental satisfaction in training and using the training in their home, and a decrease in parental stress. Each program provides a range of evidence-based practices in positive behaviour guidance strategies that lead to effective early interventions.

Each of the aforementioned programs has made an important contribution to the understanding of the development of children’s social and emotional skills. First, IY offers separate programs for either parents (Webster-Stratton, 1990) or teachers and educators (Webster-Stratton, 2000). IY focuses on helping parents, teachers, or educators to establish skills in guiding children in the development of their social, emotional, and academic achievement. Studies have found that the IY programs can lead to positive changes in parent, teacher, or educator practices. Changes include an increase in the number of positive behaviour guidance strategies, such as descriptive praise (Webster-Stratton et al., 2001). In turn, these practices can significantly improve children’s positive behaviour and their social competence as well as family relationships (Fergusson et al., 2009; Trillingsgaard et al., 2014). Though it is important to note that the positive changes are not always maintained over time and the changes are dependent on the beliefs of the parent or the caregiver (Reid, Webster-Stratton, & Hammond, 2003).
The Teaching Pyramid Model, on the other hand, is an evidence-based intervention program that has produced some promising results in the development of children’s social and emotional skills (Fox & Hemmeter, 2009). The program has been established on the principles of positive behaviour support (PBS), with an early childhood focus. Research has shown that children in the care of teachers who have participated in this program have demonstrated more socially appropriate behaviours with children identified as being at risk have shown higher levels of positive social interaction skills (Hemmeter et al., 2016).

Finally, in the Conjoint Behavioural Consultation (CBC) program, parents are viewed as essential partners in early intervention (Sheridan et al., 2012; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). They are empowered to contribute when individualised interventions for children with social and emotional delays are being developed. In this program parents and educators work in collaboration with an educational consultant. They embrace strength-based principles to build the social, emotional, and academic wellbeing of children. For example, Bellinger et al. (2016) found in a study of three children experiencing social and emotional delays that CBC interventions were effective in increasing prosocial behaviour – specifically compliance – in both the educational and home settings. Like the IY and the Teaching Pyramid Model, the CBC interventions contained strategies for providing positive reinforcement (descriptive praise), clear expectations, the self-monitoring of practices, and visual supports. Programs such as IY, the Teaching Pyramid Model, and CBC illustrate the positive effects of early intervention on children’s social-emotional trajectories.

These three programs consist of many evidence-based practices that lead to effective early interventions, such as the use of positive behaviour guidance strategies to build children’s social and emotional skills. Each program also offers training for both parents and educators; however, they are trained separately. Some programs, such as the Teaching Pyramid Model, are now beginning to make inroads into how they can be contextually responsive, with specific reference to culture rather than context (Allen & Steed, 2016). CBC specifically highlights the importance of collaboration and the development of strong partnerships between parents and educators, while also addressing the diversity of families and children (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). If such programs, however, offer ways to develop children’s social and emotional skills, why the need for another program? In the next section, the problem that provided the impetus for this research project is introduced.
The Problem

Despite the availability of the Incredible Years (IY; Webster-Stratton et al., 2001), the Teaching Pyramid Model (Fox & Hemmeter, 2009), and Conjoint Behavioural Consultation (CBC; Sheridan et al., 2012) programs, they have inherent barriers that can restrict the participation of parents, teachers, and educators. Barriers include pragmatic issues (for example, travelling distance and time constraints), poverty, language, social isolation, and mistrust (Bermudez et al., 2011; Domenech Rodríguez & Wieling, 2004; Gable & Halliburton, 2003). In addition, early childhood teachers continually report that they need assistance in addressing children’s persistent antisocial behaviour (Carter & Van Norman, 2010; Church, 2003; Corr et al., 2017; Reinke et al., 2012; Tyler-Merrick, 2014). In research conducted by Flower et al. (2016), it was found that through a lack of provision of effective strategies, educators may feel ill-equipped in working with children who demonstrate social and emotional delays.

What is also concerning is that teachers and educators continue to express the need for professional development in parent–educator partnerships and collaboration (M. Murray & Mereoiu, 2016). Such concerns have led to the identification of two gaps that require further investigation: first, there is a need to investigate new approaches in responding to the contextual barriers of children, families, teachers, and educators; and, second, there is a need to explore how early-intervention programs can deepen the parent–educator partnership and provide more opportunities for collaboration and support. Each focus point is explained in detail.

Gap 1: The Need for a Contextually Responsive Approach

Understanding the home, educational, and community contexts surrounding a child is an essential element in the development of their social and emotional skills (Barnett et al., 2010; Park et al., 2016; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). Children’s social and emotional development is influenced by the relationships, communication patterns, and environmental contexts that they are exposed to every day (Shonkoff et al., 2017). The impact that parents, educators, and the home and educational culture has on child development (Gay, 2010) highlights the importance of exploring the influence of contextually responsive practices in parent–educator training when developing children’s social and emotional skills. It is important to note that when context is referred to in this particular research project, it is not only referring to ethnically and culturally diverse contexts but also contexts which refer to the
diversity across generations, beliefs, socioeconomic status, and home and educational settings. J. Murray and Farrington, (2010) and Webster-Stratton and Taylor, (2001) both argue that the contexts surrounding a child have a profound impact on how successful they are in developing strong social and emotional skills.

Given the impact of context on children’s social and emotional development, it is important to acknowledge how context influences the level of participation in programs that promote children’s social and emotional skills. For instance, there are some contextual barriers that stop a parent from seeking assistance with their child’s social and emotional skills. For example, Stern et al. (2015) found that poverty, social isolation, and access to resources can be factors that prevent parents from requesting support with their children’s social and emotional skill needs. They also found that the demands of family life, challenges with childcare, transportation, and time constraints also greatly influence the ability of a family to seek assistance or participate in any resulting early-intervention program.

As a result of the above, it is concerning that past research has highlighted that these programs often fail to address the barriers that inhibit the recruitment process (Lustick, 2016). Not addressing these barriers has the potential to limit the diversity of participants and the opportunity then to prevent or intervene early to halt a negative life course trajectory. It has also been noted that teachers and educators experience challenges in their attempts to meet the contextually diverse social-emotional needs of children and their families (Lustick, 2016; Vincent et al., 2011). With increasing numbers of contextually diverse families in the community, there is a heightened risk that teachers and educators may react negatively to children’s misunderstood behaviours that do not relate to the dominant culture’s expectations (Bermudez et al., 2011; Domenech Rodríguez & Wieling, 2004; Fallon et al., 2012).

The particular beliefs that parents, teachers, and educators have regarding the guidance of children’s prosocial behaviour have a significant impact on the development of a child’s social and emotional skills (Park et al., 2016). Koerting et al. (2013) state that in order to mitigate these barriers there needs to be an understanding of parents’ and educators’ views, beliefs and the unique characteristics and circumstances of each family when developing engagement strategies. When these considerations are taken into account, then the barriers that families may face in accessing training can be reduced. Similar considerations also need to be accommodated when reducing professional development barriers for teachers and educators. Gable and Halliburton (2003) also state that the individual beliefs of
teacher/educators and pragmatic issues (such as travelling distance) need to be acknowledged and incorporated when accessing professional development programs.

Furthermore, the beliefs and practices that families hold are greatly influenced by the contexts in which they live (Kazdin & Weisz, 2018). Differences in child-rearing beliefs and practices, fears of associated stigma, and racial discrimination have been revealed to be factors that may deter parents from participating in programs that may be helpful to them. A sense of disrespect from professionals may also contribute to the reluctance of parents to participate.

For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the impact of parents’, teachers’, and educators’ practices in response to children’s social and emotional behaviours (Barnett et al., 2010; Jun Ahn, 2005). In their research study, Barnett et al. (2010) demonstrated that parental beliefs and practices have a tendency to predict child adjustment. For example, parents who displayed a high level of sensitive/responsive parenting behaviours, coupled with low concerns of spoiling their child, correspondingly exhibited positive parenting beliefs and practices, and there was a reduced level of their children developing internalising symptoms. In contrast, high levels of concerns from parents about spoiling their child correlated with negative parenting behaviours and a heightened risk of children developing emotional problems. Harsh parenting styles have also been linked with child behaviour problems and juvenile difficulties (Park et al., 2016). Conversely, maternal warmth and support has been shown to increase prosocial behaviours in children (Davis et al., 2015). The impact of positive parenting practices on children’s social and emotional skills is an important factor in understanding how these practices influence children’s development.

There are several other ways in which beliefs and practices are interpreted. Beliefs and practices in parenting research have drawn terminologies such as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles (Baumrind, 2005). Research has demonstrated, children of parents who have an authoritative style often exhibit higher social and emotional competence than children of parents who have an authoritarian style (Chan et al., 2009; Vartuli, 2005). Similarly, Walker (2008) used these parenting styles to explore educator beliefs and practices in behaviour guidance and concluded that educators with authoritative styles had pupils who were more engaged and responsive, while teachers with authoritarian styles had pupils who were more resistant to learning. They also found that teachers with permissive styles demonstrated inconsistent classroom management and as a result, had pupils with lower autonomy.
The impact parents have on student achievement has also been identified in Phillipson and Phillipson (2012), where parental expectations and beliefs about what their child can achieve contribute greatly to their achievement. Though their research focused more on academic abilities, it is possible for this to be generalised to the development of children’s social and emotional abilities, and the role that positive feedback plays in children’s development. The study found that parents help their children recognise their abilities by giving clear feedback to their children about parental expectations regarding academic behaviours.

Similarly, early childhood teachers’ and educators’ beliefs and practices towards children’s behaviour also has the potential to influence children’s social and emotional development in both positive and negative ways. Initially, the level of emotional support provided in the context of the early childhood classroom influences the development of children’s social and emotional skills (Burchinal et al., 2010). Children observe teachers’ and educators’ behaviour and how they conduct themselves socially and emotionally. In turn, they become models for what children interpret as acceptable social and emotional behaviour. Morris et al. (2013) addressed this notion through a research project that investigated the relationships between the emotional socialisation practices of teachers and the emotional development of children. The research involved the testing the children’s emotional knowledge, observations of their emotional behaviour, and observations of teacher–child interactions. Morris et al. ’s research demonstrated that the emotional climate set by educators has the potential to significantly impact on children’s understanding of emotion. However, this development is complex and the bearing a teacher/educator has on a child’s emotional development is only one part of an intricate system of social influences. Hence, the importance of investigating the beliefs and practices of the multiple influences in children’s lives, especially that of both parents and teachers/educators combined, appears paramount.

In addition to considering the beliefs and practices of parents, teachers, and educators there is a need for program facilitators to consider the unique characteristics and circumstances of each family and preschool community. Especially when developing engagement strategies and programs with parents, teachers, and educators. When such considerations are made for participants, the barriers they may face in accessing and engaging in the program can be minimised (Allen & Steed, 2016). For example, Jain et al. (2019) found that when interventions included professionals who could speak the native languages of
families, along with greater cultural sensitivity and patience in the programs, the families felt more supported and therefore willing to engage.

Given the importance of facilitators (and early childhood teachers and educators) responding to contextual variances with children and families, it is also important to understand the policy frameworks within which teachers and educators operate. Every country has its own policy framework that guides the implementation of plans and actions for children’s development and learning. For example, in countries such as Australia and New Zealand, the importance of teachers and educators embracing contextually responsive programs is clearly identified in many of the early years’ curriculum documents. Such documents include the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (ELYF; Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009) the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF; Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, 2016), and Te Whāriki He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education – Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017).

All three documents allude to how children’s learning and development is impacted by their families’ cultural histories; how educators and professionals need to value and recognise children’s individual identities in order to enhance children’s wellbeing and identity; and how early childhood environments need to promote cultural awareness and understanding. The VEYLDF specifically states that “when children experience acknowledgement of and respect for diversity, their sense of identity becomes stronger” (Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, 2016, p. 12) and that “a strong sense of identity enables a child to be confident and to recognise and accept that in any social setting there are consequences for their actions and behaviours … and learn how to interact with others with care, empathy and respect” (Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, 2016, p. 18). Combining the literature supporting the need for contextually responsive practices (Stern et al., 2015; Wyatt, 2014) and the explicit guidelines from early childhood curriculum policy documents, it is highly desirable that programs designed to teach young children social and emotional skills should embrace contextually responsive models and meet policy guidelines.

Early interventions in a child’s social and emotional development need to be responsive to the contextual needs of the families. If a program is designed to allow for flexibility in the delivery then the program is likely to have a greater and more sustained impact my incorporating practices that are contextually relevant and provide meaning to the
participants (Stern et al., 2015; Wyatt, 2014). However, the programs currently available for
parent and educator training have limited scope in catering for diverse beliefs and varying
practices and contexts when teaching social and emotional skills for young children. Although
there is a growing body of research that is addressing this problem in the primary and
secondary levels of schooling (Cramer & Bennett, 2015; Hershfeldt et al., 2009; Lustick,
2016), research into the early years research appears limited. Nonetheless, there is a small
body of research that shows a move towards being more contextually responsive. For
example, Arkan et al. (2013) found in their review of the Triple P and Incredible Years (IY)
parent-training programs that both programs were effective and acceptable to families across
several varying cultures. The review discusses how a parent’s culture impacts on their beliefs
on what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. It also highlights that across cultures
parents typically want their children to be successful in life and often experience similar
behavioural challenges. However, they stated it is important to note that practices vary both
within and between cultures. They conclude by indicating that it would appear that the
founding principles of positive behaviour guidance interventions are applicable to many
cultures; however, it appears to be the style of the delivery that has the greatest impact on a
program’s ability to adapt to context.

Adapting a program to parent context has been shown to be successful. Sumargi et al.
(2014) adapted the Triple P program pecifically referring to the cultural context of Indonesian
families residing in Australia. The use of translated materials, examples that were culturally
relevant, and the provision for discussions and questions provided an effective platform for
parent engagement and successful skill acquisition. This small study found that the basic
properties of positive behaviour guidance did not need to be adapted; rather, the method of
delivering the program made it applicable and acceptable to families.

Other early-intervention programs have also investigated their effectiveness across
culture. Research into other contextually responsive programs includes the Parent Training
Oregon Model (PMTO™; Forgatch & Kjøbli, 2016). PMTO™. Countries’ cultures that have
been investigated include Iceland (Sigmarsdóttir & Guðmundsdóttir, 2013), the Netherlands
(Thijssen et al., 2017) and Mexico (Baumann et al., 2014). The study conducted by Baumann
et al. (2014) demonstrated how the cultural adaption process (CAP) guided the development
of a culturally responsive version of PMTO™, with the aim to adapt the program to suit the
needs of a community in Mexico. This process involves “setting the stage, initial adaptions,
and adaption iterations” (Domenech Rodriguez & Wieling, 2004, as cited in Baumann et al.,
The study also consisted of five stages: (1) exploration; (2) preparation; (3) early adoption; (4) implementation; and (5) sustainability/feedback phase. In each stage a cultural adaption specialist (CAS) was engaged who had expert knowledge of the community’s culture, and the whole team embraced an ethos of collaboration in the formation of the intervention. The study highlighted how the adaption of a particular intervention can be a lengthy process, requiring collaboration and an understanding that an intervention tool needs to be considered as a “living and flexible document that should reflect the context where it is being implemented” (Baumann et al., 2014, p. 42).

The literature continues to recognise that the challenge of being contextually responsive in early intervention is still in its infancy and that ongoing research is required (Allen & Steed, 2016). The previously mentioned literature focused on the family or the parent as a single unit, thus highlighting the need for parent-educator collaboration. The next gap is now addressed in the following section.

**Gap 2: The Need for Collaborative Designs in Parent, Teacher and Educator Training**

Collaboration between parents, teachers, and educators is vital as it provides a platform to develop a common understanding on practices and beliefs concerning the development of children social and emotional competence (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). When considering ways to be contextually responsive, it is important to recognise that this collaboration, plus consistency between home and education environments, plays an important role when teaching children social and emotional skills (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016).

Collaboration and a strong partnership between a child’s family and their educators can lead to several positive outcomes. This includes an increase in a child’s prosocial behaviours, the development of positive attitudes towards school settings, and an increase in their academic achievement (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). Social and emotional skills training that has a consistent application across the home and educational settings includes influential people in the child’s life (parents, teachers, and educators), and should occur as early as possible, having been demonstrated as being the most effective time to enhance children’s social and emotional skills (Webster-Stratton & Taylor, 2001). Such training also improves the parent–child or educator–child relationship (Webster-Stratton & Taylor, 2001). These relationships are even more effective when both parents and educators work together in partnership (Sheridan et al., 2012). Whereas inconsistency between the practices of carers can
lead to negative outcomes for children’s social and emotional development (Claessens & Chen, 2013).

For the above reasons and as noted earlier there are a small number of programs that embrace the parent–educator partnership. Namely, First Steps to Success (Feil et al., 2014), Conjoint Behavioural Consultation (CBC; Bellinger et al., 2016; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007; Sheridan et al., 2012), and the Exploring Together Preschool Program (ETPP; Reid et al., 2008). Feil et al. (2014) explored the First Steps to Success (preschool edition). This research project involved 126 classrooms each with one child (mean age of 4 years), the child’s parents, and one educator participating. The 20-day classroom-based component involved coaches working directly with the child and demonstrating appropriate practice to the educator. A large portion of this component involved rewards and praise for the child when engaging in appropriate behaviour.

The home-based component involved weekly meetings (over a period of six to eight weeks), with the parents and the coach in the child’s home. Each meeting focused on the development of skills such as “communication and sharing, cooperation, limits setting, problem solving, friendship making, and self-confidence” (Feil et al., 2014, p. 157). Several positive outcomes emerged from the implementation of this program. Of interest, was the reduction in children’s problem behaviour and an increase in children’s social and emotional skills as obtained from the results of the educator and parent questionnaires and not from direct observations of the children, parents, teachers, or educators. The program was in response to child challenging behaviour (reactive rather than preventive) and the time investment in this program, both from the parent and teacher and educator perspective, was high.

The collaborative approach is also central to Conjoint Behavioural Consultation program (CBS; Sheridan et al., 2005, 2012). In CBC parents are viewed as essential partners in the formation of effective individualised interventions or education programs. Parents and educators work in collaboration with an educational consultant, embracing a strength-based focus in enhancing the social, emotional, and academic wellbeing of children. In a study of three children (between the ages of six and seven) experiencing behavioural challenges, Bellinger et al. (2016) investigated the effect of the CBC interventions. The parents and educators were trained separately. Parents attended two to three 60-minute behavioural training support sessions. The training included strategies for providing positive reinforcement (descriptive praise), explicit expectations, self-monitoring, and visual supports.
The teachers’ training sessions consisted of brief 10- to 15-minute consultations. A consultant worked with both the parents and the teachers to develop a collaborative behaviour plan of each child. The study found that the CBC interventions were effective in increasing prosocial child behaviour, specifically compliance, in both the educational and home settings. It also found the CBC interventions could assist with the formation of effective links between families, educators, and outside professionals. CBC has been suggested as an appropriate intervention for children requiring higher levels of support due to the collaborative design of the program (Bellinger et al., 2016). However, considering the small sample numbers and limited contexts the study shows that the collaborative approach to early intervention requires ongoing research.

In the Australian setting, the Exploring Together Preschool Program (ETPP) has produced some promising results in relation to establishing an intervention model that embraces parent and educator partnership (Reid et al., 2008). ETPP is a community-based program that involves separate training groups for parents, children, and preschool educators in social and emotional development training. Reid et al (2008) conducted a study on ETPP involving 37 preschool children (aged three to six years) and one of their parents participating in a 10-week program. The program included a weekly one-hour session for each child and parent (10 sessions per child and 10 sessions per parent). Two support meetings were also given to the early childhood teachers; the time commitment required was not given. The training consisted of teaching parents how to interact more positively with their children to improve child behaviour. The study found that children’s social skills significantly improved post-intervention and behaviour problems reduced. There was also an improvement in parenting skills and general satisfaction with a corresponding reduction in parental stress. Educator measures were non-significant, with the researchers suggesting that this may have been due to the minimal participation of educators. It was also suggested that the children may have reacted differently with the educators. It is important to note that, like the previously mentioned programs, the time commitment from the parents was substantial, with 20 hours over 10 weeks. Training for preschool educators involved two meetings and was voluntary.

The First Steps to Success (Feil et al., 2014), CBC (Bellinger et al., 2016; Sheridan et al., 2012), and the Exploring Together Preschool Program (Reid et al., 2008) all offered valuable insights into what is effective when developing and implementing an early-intervention program for young children with social and emotional behavioural difficulties.
However, in these three programs, the opportunity for explicit, practical parent–educator interactions was limited and the time commitments required of participants was substantial. What is also concerning is that despite the availability of these and similar programs, teachers and educators continue to express the need for professional development in parent–educator partnership and collaboration (M. Murray & Mereoiu, 2016). Therefore, it became apparent that there was a need for a program that would offer more opportunities to develop the parent–educator partnership, including opportunities for parents, teachers, and educators to train together in the same strategies, be shorter in duration, while at the same time empowering parents, teachers, and educators to work together independently from program facilitators.

The Response to the Gaps

The research indicates there is a need to develop a parent, teacher/educator program which is more contextually responsive and promoting a more collaborative practice in parent–educator training to be developed. For the purpose of this research project, a program was developed to addresses the two gaps discussed in the previous sections. The program takes a universal and preventative approach to the development of social and emotional competence skills in young children and it is applicable to the whole preschool community. It has been developed to deepen parent–educator collaboration and caters for the families’ contextual needs during the training. This is achieved through parents and educators being trained together and sharing experiences associated with their child(ren) in the same workshops.

The program has been informed by the Incredible Years (Webster-Stratton et al., 2001), the Teaching Pyramid Model (Fox & Hemmeter, 2009), and the Conjoint Behavioural Consultation (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007) programs. The program takes a universal and preventative approach to developing children’s social and emotional competence skills, that is, the skills taught to parents and educators is applicable for all children, reducing the need for higher-level interventions. The key difference of this program to others is that it aims to increase children’s social and emotional skill with the minimum time of training for parents, teachers, and educators. The program was designed to be short in delivery with two 120-minute workshops, each a week apart, with both parents and teachers/educators. As such, it aims to reduce barriers such as the social stigma of attending such programs, social isolation, access to resources, challenges with childcare, transportation, and time constraints while providing a platform for a stronger parent–educator partnership.
Trust between teachers/educators and parents is an important factor when engaging in early-intervention programs (Adams & Christenson, 1998; Santiago et al., 2016). Early childhood settings are one of the first places where children experience relationships with adults other than those in their immediate families (Coleman et al., 2013). Therefore, the program’s objective is to empower educators with strategies so that they can teach the program’s principles well after the training has been completed. Through empowering educators to facilitate the program themselves, they are able to reach many more families that the facilitators could not reach. In this manner, not only will parents gain skills in developing their child’s social and emotional skills but also teacher and educators will have access to professional development and work more closely with their families.

In the next chapter, the three important theories that informed the development of the program are introduced. Following that, the program is presented as one that is contextually responsive and promotes the parent–educator partnership. The barriers to families, teachers, and educators accessing early-intervention programs are included. Finally, the strategies that are taught to parents, teachers, and educators to develop children’s social and emotional skills are identified and explored.
Chapter 2

TOGETHER – What It Is All About

In this chapter, the program, TOGETHER, is introduced. TOGETHER aims to help parents, teachers, and educators to understand strategies that will develop children’s social and emotional skills. TOGETHER emerged from a need to not only assist with the struggles being faced by parents, teachers, and educators in developing children’s social and emotional skills but to also share the knowledge of some simple, evidence-based strategies that really work when helping children develop social and emotional skills. TOGETHER aims to provide these strategies in a contextually responsive manner. While the strategies are simple, TOGETHER acknowledges that the hard part is being consistent with the strategies. Therefore, TOGETHER’s objective is to create a platform that encourages collaboration between parents, teachers, and educators in order to develop consistency across the home and preschool settings.

Before discussing the strategies of TOGETHER, it is important to understand the foundation that the program is built on. Therefore, this chapter begins with an overview of the three theories that have been combined to create TOGETHER’s conceptual framework. Once the framework has been explained, the TOGETHER program is then detailed. The chapter concludes with the research questions. These questions have been informed by both the conceptual framework and the TOGETHER program as a response to the gaps that have been identified in children’s social and emotional development.

The TOGETHER Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework informs not only the development of the TOGETHER program but also the research methodology and the analysis process that were used to develop the program. The framework is a combination of several key theories that help to explain the development of children’s social and emotional skills. The explanations include how the theories work together to assist in understanding children’s social and emotional development and the beliefs and practices of parents and educators. Also explored is how each theory considers the need for strong parent–educator partnerships and collaboration, and how these effect the development of children’s social and emotional skills.

The framework incorporates the theoretical concepts from the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), and family-centred practice
(Dunst, 1997, 2002; Dunst & Trivette, 1996). In short, the components of the conceptual framework were selected due to the complex systems that influence children’s social and emotional development. In order to understand how beliefs, practices, and relationships influence children’s development, it is important to consider both parents and educators together, not separately in this research project. It is also important to understand the dynamic interactions that occur between home and preschool and the effect they have on children’s social and emotional development.

Figure 2.1 provides an outline of how each theory has contributed to the conceptual framework and helps to explain the dynamic interactions that occur between home and preschool. First, the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) underpins the strategies taught to parents and educators in TOGETHER that relate to children’s prosocial behaviours. The strategies include giving descriptive praise when such behaviour is observed, thus giving attention to practices that are strength based. Second, the inclusion of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) enabled the context to be explored – that is, the child, family, preschool, and community, all of which influence a child’s social and emotional growth. Finally, the inclusion of family-centred practice (Dunst, 2002) forms the cornerstone of the TOGETHER program, where families and educators collaborate and work in partnership to facilitate children’s social and emotional development. The help-giving strategies central to family-centred practice also align with TOGETHER’s goal of empowering parents, teachers, and educators to teach the skills required to develop a child’s social and emotional compe
Social Learning Theory

The introduction of the TOGETHER conceptual framework begins with the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). In this theory, cognition, behaviour and the environment are all linked to children’s learning. Through this lens, children learn through observation, imitation
and modelling from the people that surround them and the environmental context in which they live. The TOGETHER training places emphasis on parents, teachers, and educators modelling prosocial behaviours. In the delivery of TOGETHER, the interest is in how parents and educators can be motivated to learn and undertake evidence-based practices to develop children’s social and emotional competence. As children imitate these behaviours, parents, teachers, and educators are trained to recognise them through positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement includes using descriptive praise, where a child’s prosocial behaviours are clearly acknowledged by their parents, teachers, or educators when a child does things well. It also plays an important role in the TOGETHER training program because children develop hypotheses about what behaviour they perceive as appropriate and what behaviour is not appropriate. The adoption of this theory in the TOGETHER program aids in understanding how children’s social and emotional behaviours can change because of the role positive reinforcement plays.

The social learning theory also assists in understanding the change in parent, teacher, and educator practices. Bandura (1977) discusses how cognitive processes, including symbolic rehearsal, have the potential to act as a reinforcer and thus change behaviour. In the TOGETHER training, parents, teachers, and educators are provided with reminder strategies to help them increase the number of positive interactions. These reminder strategies can be viewed as a tool for symbolic rehearsal. However, the contextually responsive and collaborative elements of TOGETHER require further theoretical inclusions – hence, the incorporation of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

**The Ecological Model**

The theory is important to this research because it places the importance of studying children in multiple environments. The ecological model complements social learning theory as it helps explain the contextual influences in children’s development are shaped by a variety of environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Using this model helps to understand how contexts and the perspectives, practices, and relationships of parents and educators influence children’s social and emotional development. The model also acknowledges the interactions between the child, their family, the community, and the wider society and how they influence their development. For the TOGETHER research project, the aim was to understand children’s social and emotional development across the home and preschool settings.
Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) use the construct of process-person-context-time (PPCT) to illustrate the complex environmental interactions that influence a person’s beliefs, behaviours, and overall development. The concept of PPCT is interwoven in the TOGETHER conceptual framework, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. First, through acknowledging the influence of the process, knowledge can be developed regarding the interactions between children and their environment and the significant people in their lives. Second, through understanding the role of the person, how the beliefs and practices of parents, teachers, and educators influence children’s development can be investigated. In the same vein, understanding the influence of a child’s characteristics on their social and emotional skills plays an important role in understanding their development. Finally, through acknowledging the influence of context and time, the environmental features and changes that influence children’s development can be understood.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), children are placed the centre of a set of five influential systems. These systems are the microsystem (environments of home and preschool), the mesosystem (the relationships between the home and preschool setting), the exosystem (the influence of external community aspects), and the macrosystem (cultural and societal beliefs), and the chronosystem (changes over time).

Appreciating how children are nestled within these five systems helps to understand how programs like TOGETHER can assist with the development of their social and emotional skills. For this research project, the personal relationships that the children had with their families, teachers, educators, and peers were especially important. It was these very relationships that TOGETHER focused on at the commencement of the program’s implementation. In turn, the links made between home and preschool are vital in the program’s strategies.

Of equal importance are the contextual elements – that is, the cultural and personal beliefs, the influence of parents’ work, and the extended community – and the role they play in understanding the support required of those participating in the TOGETHER program. Finally, through this research project the influence that change in parents’, teachers’, and educators’ beliefs and practices had on children’s social and emotional development over time was important to understand. By adopting the ecological model and including it in the TOGETHER conceptual framework, the influence that time has on the changes in child behaviour and parent/teacher/educator beliefs, practices, and relationships can be acknowledged.
However, the difference with the TOGETHER conceptual framework is that the centre of such a system is viewed slightly differently. For the framework, the child is placed in the centre together with their parents, their teachers and their educators, which leads to the third theory of the TOGETHER conceptual framework – family-centred practice (Dunst, 2002).

**Family-Centred Practice**

Family-centred practice (Dunst, 2002) focuses on the social systems of families. This is similar to the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Specifically, family-centred practice places importance on the relational and participatory practices between parents and professionals, such as educators. Relational practices are strength based, involve family-familiar practices, and encompass parent and educator perspectives (including values, cultural perspectives, and beliefs). Such practices also require participants to engage in reciprocal communication accompanied by active and reflective listening. Such skills are essential in quality early childhood education settings and part of best practice.

Participatory practices, on the other hand, compliment relational practices and enable parent–educator collaboration and embrace flexibility (Dunst, 2002). These practices can be individualised, and they encourage information sharing and family choice in any decision-making between the family, teachers, and educators. In other models, children may often remain the sole focus of early-intervention strategies, whereas in family-centred practice, it is the whole family that is involved in capacity-building supports (Rouse & O’Brien, 2017). Considering the diversity of families in early childhood settings it is vital that professionals (such as teacher, educators, and program facilitators) are flexible in their approaches to ensure maximum participation early intervention programs such as TOGETERH.

The acknowledgment of these key relational and participatory practices plays an important role in the delivery of the TOGETHER program. Family-centred practice signifies the importance of being responsive to the contextual needs of children and families, celebrates their strengths, and encourages strong parent–educator partnerships (Dunst, 2002), all of which are essential elements in TOGETHER.

**How Do These Theories Work Together?**

These three theories that have been outlined were brought together to create the TOGETHER conceptual framework, which has been used in both the development of the TOGETHER program and to also help understand the patterns that have emerged from the research
project’s findings. As illustrated in Figure 2.1, each theory is clearly visible and linked to the other two. First, the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) surrounds the whole framework and is presented as a continual motion. This motion signifies the constant social interactions and the learning that occurs between the child, parents, teachers, and educators. Second, the influence of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) acknowledges the contexts that surround the child, family, and educators. Finally, the contribution that family-centred practice (Dunst, 2002) makes to the TOGETHER program is evident from the parents and the child being placed at the centre of the model with the support of the educators (holding hands). The child, parents, and educators are surrounded by relational and participatory practices that stem directly from the concept of family-centred practice.

The practices are presented in a circular motion due to the continual influence they have on the perspectives, practices, and relationships of parents, teachers, and educators, which were key factors in the TOGETHER research project. The relational and participatory factors are also important due to the influence they may have on the social behaviours of a child.

The TOGETHER Program

TOGETHER: Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills (TOGETHER; Phillips et al., 2017; see Appendix A) was born from recognising a need for a parent, teacher, and educator training program that was contextually responsive and would encourage parent–educator collaboration. It was also created to be more accessible, less time consuming, easy to follow, and ultimately empower participants to pass their new knowledge on to other families and educators in their community. The TOGETHER program has been drawn from several established behaviour programs such as the Teaching Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (Fox et al., 2010; Fox, & Hemmeter, 2009) and the Building Cooperation in Three- to Five-Year-Old Children Teacher Training Manual and Workbook (Phillips, 2014; Phillips et al., 2013). It has also been informed by the Incredible Years Teacher and Parent program (IY; Webster-Stratton, 1990; Webster-Stratton et al., 2001), the Parent Training Oregon Model (PMTO™; Forgatch et al., 2004), and Conjoint Behavioural Consultation (CBC; Sheridan et al., 2005).

From the outset, TOGETHER aims to include the contextual needs of every participant. These needs are taken into consideration when deciding on the delivery and approach to training for each individual learning community. When needed, the approach
includes finding ways to adapt the preschool program to suit the needs of all children, parents, teachers, and educators. The program is also focused on the development of contextual understandings between parents, teachers, and educators. The development of such understandings is that for contextual barriers to be reduced, an understanding of parents’, teachers’ and educators’ views and beliefs are essential in the planning stages (Koerting et al., 2013).

The TOGETHER program takes an individualised, flexible, collaborative, and strength-based approach towards training parents, teachers, and educators. The program trains adult participants in positive behaviour guidance strategies and functional behaviour assessment and analysis skills. Positive behaviour guidance strategies include the use of descriptive praise and encouragement, increasing the number of positive parent–child or educator–child interactions, and recognising a child’s strengths (Fox et al., 2010). Functional-behaviour assessment and analysis is a set of techniques and strategies that has been designed to ascertain the reason why a child engages in challenging behaviour and to identify strategies that teach prosocial behaviours – for example, identifying why a child may be having a tantrum (Hadaway & Brue, 2016). The content of the TOGETHER program has been designed to help parents and educators to:

1. Gain a common understanding about positive behaviour guidance strategies to build children’s social and emotional skills.
2. Develop collaborative and trusting relationships between parents and educators.
3. Work together to develop and implement positive behaviour guidance strategies in the home and preschool respectively, with the ultimate goal to improve children’s social and emotional skills.

**Getting Started With TOGETHER**

Before the delivery of the TOGETHER program, it is essential for facilitators to build an understanding of the contexts that are relevant to the children, their parents, the teachers and the educators, and the preschool in order to ascertain any barriers present that may reduce participation. To assist with these understandings, the TOGETHER facilitators ask each participating parent and educator to complete a Communication Styles and Demographics (CSD) questionnaire prior to embarking on the program.
The eight-question CSD questionnaire requests parent and educator demographic information such as gender and nationality, the home language(s), and the teachers’/educators’ education levels. The questionnaire also asks if there are any time constraints or barriers (such as access to childcare) that would create difficulties in accessing the TOGETHER training program. It asks about any specific cultural needs, workshop time preferences, and preferred communication style (such as face-to-face, phone, email). The questionnaire has been designed to provide demographic details to help ascertain the contextual needs of each parent and educator. Using this information, the facilitator can then adapt the TOGETHER program and the two workshops to suit the needs of the individual participants.

**The TOGETHER Workshop Training**

The TOGETHER workshops are intended to be welcoming and relaxed. The style of the workshops often involves small focus groups where the parents, teachers, and educators practise producing strategies together. The workshops are interactive and encourage collaboration between all participants, with the facilitator encouraged to take a step back while the parent–educator partnerships grow. By taking an interactive and collaborative approach in the workshops, it is anticipated that parents, teachers, and educators will become confident in the strategies taught. Via the self-developed CSD questionnaire and collaboration with parents and the educating team, facilitators can determine communication preferences, accommodate the cultural practices used in each community, and determine if there are any barriers that may limit participation. For each preschool community, the circumstances may be different. One preschool community may require workshops to be run in the evening, some parents may require support with childcare, and the group’s size may vary according to what parents, teachers, or educators are comfortable with. The CSD questionnaire provides initial information of these needs.

The TOGETHER program includes the following content. It is delivered over two 120-minute workshops with a week’s break between them. The first workshop includes:

(a) *An introduction to the Tree Model: Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills* (see Figure 2.2). The Tree Model forms the building blocks for the TOGETHER program. It provides parents and educators with a visual representation of the essential elements of the TOGETHER training. Parents and educators are encouraged to place the Tree Model in a visible place in the home
or classroom as a reminder to them of the evidence-based strategies that can be used to develop children’s social and emotional skills.

The Tree Model is linked closely to the TOGETHER conceptual framework. First, the child and their parents are placed centrally in the model, with the teachers and educators holding their hands in support. There are also links to building partnerships and relationships (family-centred practice; Dunst, 2002), understanding culture and context (the ecological model; Bronfenbrenner, 1986), and strategies to guide children’s behaviour to develop their social and emotional skills (social learning theory; Bandura, 1977). However, not every element is explained at the very beginning of training; rather, each element is carefully scaffolded as the parents and educators work through the program.

(b) **Building relationships between educators, parents, and children.** Central to the Tree Model is an image of a child with their parents who are holding the hands of the teachers and educators in partnership. The image of partnership is important because it illustrates how TOGETHER has been designed for parents and educators to work together. The image acknowledges that parents are the true experts of their child, and that the teachers and educators can be a source of support to both the child and the parents. The phrases “build and maintain relationships” and “partnerships between children, parents, and educators” have been placed at the roots of the Tree Model. Their placement illustrates that the development of strong relationships and partnerships with children, families, and educators from the very beginning will lead to the strong growth of children’s social and emotional skills.
Figure 2.2

The Tree Model: Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills
Exploring and understanding the context and culture of the children, their families and the preschool’s/community’s culture. In Chapter 1 it was mentioned that the contexts enveloping a child can have a positive impact on how successful they are in developing strong social and emotional skills (J. Murray & Farrington, 2010; Webster-Stratton & Taylor, 2001). But before this can begin, it is vital that parents and educators are provided with an opportunity to develop an understanding of each other’s contexts. This is “family culture and beliefs” and “community culture” are placed at the strongest part of the Tree Model – the roots. At the very beginning of the TOGETHER workshops, parents, teachers, and educators are provided with a platform to come together and share cultural practices, family and preschool rituals, and important aspects of their beliefs and practices concerned with developing children’s social and emotional skills.

The benefits and use of descriptive praise and encouragement. Fox and Lentini (2006) demonstrated that when children receive feedback and specific encouragement when learning new skills, their perseverance increases. Webster-Stratton et al. (2008) have also shown that adults who provide higher levels of praise are more likely to encounter children with increased levels of social competence, emotional self-regulation, and lower levels of inappropriate behaviours. Descriptive praise has also been shown to improve intrinsic motivation in children (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). The significant effects of descriptive praise and encouragement on children’s social and emotional development is why “positive interactions” are placed on the largest leaves on the Tree Model.

In the first TOGETHER workshop, parents and educators are taught to increase the number of positive interactions they have with children – essentially “catching children when they are being good”. During this part of the training, participants are taught about the importance of describing the appropriate behaviour and to focus on the learning process (rather than the final product). They are encouraged to use proximity praise and encouragement and target specific behaviours according to a child’s social or emotional needs. They are also taught that understanding social cues and developing emotional regulation...
takes time, and for some children a higher number of positive interactions may be needed. To teach prosocial skills (and reduce challenging behaviour), parents and educators are also introduced to the “Golden Apple” – an essential part of the Tree Model – where participants are encouraged to provide at least five positive interactions for every one negative interaction to effect change.

(e) *How to be a proactive parent or educator.* As mentioned earlier, the hardest part of the TOGETHER principles is getting parents and educators to practise the newly taught skills consistently. To do this, TOGETHER offers strategies to assist parents and educators to develop consistency, including the development of a basic positive behaviour guidance plan. Parent–educator collaboration is encouraged when creating reminder strategies and developing the plan to ensure it works for each parent, teacher, or educator, while developing consistency.

Between workshops, the educators and parents are encouraged to implement and practise the learnt positive behaviour guidance strategies in the preschool and home settings respectively. One week later, the parents and educators regroup for the second workshop. The second workshop includes:

(a) *Reflection on how effective the previously taught strategies were.* On return from one week of practice, parents and educators come together to reflect on their week of practising the skills and to answer the following questions:

i. How did the reminder strategies work for you in helping you deliver praise to children with challenging behaviours or the child who may be invisible or shy?

ii. How did they help you focus on praise and encouragement?

iii. How did it make you feel in your own practice? Did you notice a change in the child’s behaviour?

By reflecting and sharing, parents and educators are provided with another opportunity to collaborate, empower each other, understand each other’s perspectives more, and begin to develop consistency in practices across the home and preschool settings.

(b) *Developing rules, boundaries, and managing misbehaviour.* Even though the focus of the TOGETHER training is to develop positive interactions, there are times when children’s behaviour can be very challenging and specific strategies
are required. On the Tree Model the leaves become smaller for each strategy, illustrating to parents and educators that while such strategies are important with assisting in challenging behaviour, it is the positive interactions that make the most difference to children’s social and emotional development. During this part of the training, the importance of establishing clear rules/boundaries in partnership with children, parents and educators, and the importance of being consistent with these rules and boundaries is discussed followed by the function of behaviours and the reason why children engage in challenging behaviour. It is carefully explained to parents and educators that when they understand the purpose of the behaviour, they can make better decisions on how they, as adults, can help the child to appreciate appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Parents and educators are specifically asked to focus on what happened before the behaviour, what is the challenging behaviour, and what happened after? Following these questions, the parents and educators are able to identify the function of the challenging behaviour and then they are able to identify the appropriate response, such as redirecting, planned ignoring, natural and logical consequences for inappropriate behaviour, and the “sit and watch/cooling off” strategy. They are reminded about the Golden Apple throughout each strategy – five positive responses for every negative response.

(c) *Bringing all the skills learnt together.* In the final part of the TOGETHER program, parents and educators work together to develop a more detailed behaviour plan for each child, which includes understanding the reasons for the challenging behaviour (functional-behaviour assessment), identifying the challenging behaviours they want to reduce, identifying the opposite positive behaviours they want to increase, and then developing the prosocial and relationship strategies alongside some relevant descriptive praise phrases they could use.

The overall goal of the TOGETHER training is to build the capacity of the parents and educators so that they become confident in teaching children’s social and emotional skills independently from the TOGETHER facilitators. However, it is important to recognise that the last workshop does not signal the end of the TOGETHER program: parents, teachers, and educators are provided with additional coaching if needed. Additional coaching may include side-by-side assistance in the classroom, one-to-one meetings with parents, teachers, or
educators, or additional workshops to scaffold on the knowledge acquired. The parents, teachers, and educators are also empowered to work together to coach and encourage each other. As their confidence develops, it is hoped that they can facilitate the program with their family members or preschool communities themselves. The following research question addressed the gaps in the literature and further built on the research in this area of need for young children:

*What are the effects of the TOGETHER program on the beliefs, practices, and relationships of parents, teachers, and educators in positive behaviour guidance and children’s prosocial skills?*

In order to answer this question, answers were sought to the following three subsidiary questions:

1. What are the current beliefs, practices, relationships, and barriers to the training of parents, teachers, and educators in positive behaviour guidance?
2. How do parents’, teachers’, and educators’ beliefs, practices, and relationships change after program implementation?
3. How do children’s social and emotional skills change after program implementation?
Chapter 3
The Approach for Investigating TOGETHER

In this chapter, the approach taken to investigate the research questions outlined in Chapter 2 is introduced. The approach was designed to investigate the different elements of the TOGETHER program. The methods used in this research helps to understand the effects of TOGETHER on children’s social and emotional skills. They help discover the current beliefs and practices of parents, teachers, and educators and how these change over time.

Research Design and the Rationale

In order to investigate the effects of the TOGETHER program, a multiple case study approach was selected. A case study is a common approach used in social sciences as it specifically allows researchers to investigate a phenomenon in real-life contexts. A case study is an in-depth investigation of individuals (such as children, parents, or educators), a group (such as families or early childhood communities), or an intervention (Mac Naughton et al., 2001). Such an approach collects data from a variety of sources including observations and interviews. A case study serves to illustrate what happens to an individual or group in relation to a specific phenomenon, to represent the change in participant behaviour in the natural setting, and represent what occurs in everyday life (Yin, 2006). For example, looking at the changes in behaviours in children, or the beliefs and practices of parents and educators after implementation of the TOGETHER program. The multiple case study approach enabled the development of the research model to consider the expected and unexpected influences of parents and educators in promoting children’s social and emotional skills.

The rationale for using a multiple case study approach in the TOGETHER investigation was two-fold. First, the five early childhood communities in which the TOGETHER training took place were each contextually unique from each other. The case study approach provided a range of different ways to collect information to determine whether the TOGETHER program was working in each of these communities. Second, such an approach enabled the effects of TOGETHER to be investigated in far more detail than might have been possible if working with a larger population.

As is shown throughout this chapter, information was collected on the effectiveness of TOGETHER through a variety of ways. The reason for using different methods was because the use of only using one method would not have produced a sufficient amount of reliable
data to understand the changes in the parents’, teachers’, and educators’ beliefs, practices, and interactions. Neither would there have been enough data to understand the changes in children’s social and emotional skills. When researching young children’s behaviour and interventions, the information/data collection methods need to include not only the voices of the parent, teacher, educator, and child but also other ways of recording and understanding their beliefs, practices, and behaviours in everyday life (Harris & Manatakis, 2013).

When investigating the beliefs of participants, the use of “self-reports” are limiting and may not be a true representation of the actual beliefs and/or practices that parents, teachers, and educators actually engage in (Gaete et al., 2017). Therefore, direct observation of what they actually do offers an alternative approach in providing a clearer picture of why parents and educators do things in certain ways. Direct observations are also helpful as the researcher is placed in the actual environment of where the change is occurring. Gaete et al. (2017) discuss that researchers can see the behaviours, beliefs, and practices occurring in real time, and this may result in a deeper understanding of the changes occurring. By using different approaches to data collection and analysis, such research can expand on the findings, elaborate, and illustrate the results more clearly. Such an approach can also highlight any contradictions found in the beliefs, practices, and behaviours of the parents, teachers, and educators. Each approach that was taken to data collection and data analysis in this study is detailed further in this chapter. However, the ethical considerations are presented first, followed by an outline of how the participants were recruited.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was initially received from the Monash University Human Ethics Committee (see Appendix B, Part 1). The project moved to Swinburne University of Technology in March 2018 and ethical approval was also granted by Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix B, Part 2). The Victorian Department of Education and Training also granted ethical approval (see Appendix C).

There were several factors undertaken before starting the TOGETHER program in each setting. First, in each setting parents, teachers, and educators were provided with explanatory statements about the TOGETHER research project (see Appendix D). If any parent, teacher, or educator wished to be part of the study they completed consent forms (see Appendix E). The children of the families who were participating were also asked for assent (see Appendix F).
Second, it was important to ensure that all the information gained from the parents, teachers, educators, and children remained confidential. This meant that the names of the parents, teachers, educators, and children and the preschools would not be used by the researchers in any report, conference presentation, or publication on the project. Additionally, pseudonyms/code names were used to reduce the risk of identification.

Third, Australia is a multicultural nation. In 2012, the ABS reported that over 18 per cent of Australians spoke another language other than English. Therefore, there was a high possibility that some parents, teachers, educators, or children involved in the five case studies may have English as a second language. Therefore to ensure everyone could be included, and with the assistance of the directors of the participating preschools, the different cultural communities in each setting were identified and then the project invitations, explanatory statements, consent forms and questionnaires were translated into the languages that had been identified when required. Where other cultural barriers were also identified, the TOGETHER program was adapted to suit the needs of those particular parents and educators.

Fourth, I was previously employed as an educational leader and early childhood teacher for one of the sessional groups at the preschool in the first case study; however, the participants were from a separate group in which she had not taught. Because of this, it was made very clear in all case studies that participation in the TOGETHER research project was voluntary so parents, educators, and children could withdraw from TOGETHER at any time if they so wished. If they chose to withdraw, extreme care would be taken to ensure that the information that had been obtained from the questionnaires, rating scales or observations relevant to them was destroyed. At the end of each project, a summary of the study was given to the nominated supervisor/director at each preschool. Participating families also provided contact details if they wished to receive the summary.

Finally, data was securely retained, kept in the strictest confidence, and stored in locked filing cabinets in a room allocated to the project at Swinburne University of Technology. The data will be securely disposed of or destroyed when no longer needed, as per the University’s guidelines.

**Recruitment of Participants**

Five early childhood settings participated in this research project, thus making five case studies. These case studies presented in this thesis are contextually different and offer in-depth illustrations of how TOGETHER taught the children positive social and emotional
skills, influenced parent and educator beliefs and practices, and successfully deepened the parent–educator partnership. Each case study is presented as follows and a summary is presented in Table 3.1:

- Case Study 1: Tamati and Henry
- Case Study 2: Recognising All Children
- Case Study 3: The Community Hub
- Case Study 4: Trying Their Best
- Case Study 5: Long Day Care as the Extended Family

The preschool in Case Study 1 was recruited as a result of the direct relationship that I had had with the teaching team through being previously employed as their educational leader and early childhood teacher. In the second and fourth case studies the preschool’s local Early Years Management (EYM) had heard about the study as they were also the management team for the preschool in the first case study. I also placed an invitation to the study on a social media page asking for teachers and educators located in Victoria, Australia, to participate. In total 110 teachers/educators responded to the post. Due to logistics of the study, only the first five teachers/educators were approached for this study, with two preschools deciding to take part, thus the participants for Case Studies 3 and 5 were recruited. For all five case studies, I met with the management of each preschool and/or the head teacher before meeting the teachers and educators. The managers were specifically asked how to best involve the parents, teachers, and educators in the TOGETHER program. It was decided that an initial staff meeting would first occur in each preschool to recruit the teachers and educators and where the study would be fully explained. The recruitment of parents and their child would come second because it was important to ascertain the best way to approach the families according to each preschool’s communication practices.

Teachers and educators were invited to a one-hour presentation. The aims of the research project were explained, along with a brief overview of the TOGETHER program. The teachers and educators were given a week to decide if they wished to participate in the program. After they had decided to participate, the teachers and educators then needed to gauge if any of the families would be interested in participating in the TOGETHER project. Once that interest had been confirmed, I collaborated with the teaching team to determine the best approach to encourage all families of the children attending each preschool to participate in the project.
## Table 3.1

**Summary of participants, settings, and contextual considerations in each case study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study name</th>
<th>Case Study 1 – Pilot Study: Tamati and Henry</th>
<th>Case Study 2: Recognising All Children</th>
<th>Case Study 3: The Community Hub</th>
<th>Case Study 4: Trying Their Best</th>
<th>Case Study 5: Long Day Care as the Extended Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>2 children, 2 mothers, 1 teacher, 1 educator</td>
<td>4 children, 4 mothers, 1 father, 1 teacher</td>
<td>3 children, 3 mothers, 3 teachers, 3 educators</td>
<td>3 children, 2 mothers, 1 father, 2 teachers</td>
<td>5 children, 5 mothers, 2 fathers, 1 teacher, 3 educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool setting</td>
<td>Community-based preschool for children aged three to six years offering one 3-year-old and two funded 4-year-old kindergarten programs</td>
<td>Community-based preschool for children aged three to six years offering one 3-year-old and two funded 4-year-old kindergarten programs</td>
<td>Two 4-year-old funded kindergarten classes in a Community hub with maternal and child health centre and two community playgroups.</td>
<td>One 4-year-old funded kindergarten classes in a Community hub with maternal and child health centre and one community playgroups.</td>
<td>Private long day care with an infant room, toddler room, and a three- to four-year-old room with a funded four-year-old kindergarten program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual considerations</td>
<td>Preference for small groups and face-to-face meetings. Evening workshops for working families.</td>
<td>Preference for small groups and face-to-face meetings. Childcare assistance needed. Work around family commitments. Additional one-on-one coaching for missed workshops.</td>
<td>Teachers and educators time poor with family commitments after preschool to be considered. Childcare assistance needed. Additional one-on-one coaching for missed workshops.</td>
<td>Teachers time poor with family commitments after preschool to be considered. Childcare assistance needed. Barriers for father to attend training. Teachers passed on strategies to parents who could not attend.</td>
<td>Workshops included dinner and childcare assistance once Long Day Care closed. Work-life balance impacted attendance. Teachers and Educators passed on strategies to parents who could not attend.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After consultation with the five preschools in relation to recruiting families to the project, the following process was adopted:

**Case Study 1 – Pilot Study: Tamati and Henry**

After the teaching team met with me, the teacher and educator gave informed consent to be part of the program. They then chose to follow their usual methods of communicating with families, which included using an interpreter to rewrite the information in the languages of the families who attended the preschool where needed. Communication also included, placing in the parent pockets (a wall hanging with personal pockets for each family), an information sheet that explained the aims of the project and a consent form. A one-page poster of the project’s main points was also placed on the preschool’s communication board. Finally, time was scheduled for families to meet the researchers for a short presentation of the TOGETHER project at the end of the preschool session, along with a copy of the information sheet and a consent form (in appropriate languages). The consent form could either be returned to the researcher or left in a labelled box at reception. In this centre, a total of 22 families were approached, with two agreeing to participate. The parents agreed for their child to be part of the child selection process and be observed in the preschool and at home, and for them to participate in the parent–educator training, complete two interviews and two surveys with the researchers. The children were considered to have provided assent when they agreed to “be watched playing at preschool and at home” after being asked by their parents and educators.

The recruitment procedure in this first case study provided an important first lesson before embarking on any further recruitment. The multicultural preschool community encompassed families from various socioeconomic backgrounds and were of Australian, New Zealand, Indian, South East Asian, Middle Eastern, and European descent. However, the participating educators identified as predominantly Australian. While all the educators chose to participate, only two families gave consent, both being Australian.

Feedback from the educators suggests that barriers, such as time limitations and language barriers, had contributed to the low participation numbers. Educators made specific reference to parents working and children being cared for by grandparents or attending family day care. This meant that connecting with a diverse range of families was challenging. These challenges demonstrate the need for more collaboration with educators before the recruitment process begins as well as coaching the educators in how to establish effective relationships with families.
**Case Study 2: Recognising All Children**

In heeding the lessons from Case Study 1, the recruitment procedures for Case Study 2 followed the same protocols as for Case Study 1 except that minor adjustments were included to suit the needs of the preschool community and to reduce the effect of the parent time limitation and language barriers as experienced in Case Study 1. The preschool’s head teachers expressed an interest in participating after a group email was sent by the local EYM organisation on behalf of the research team. As there had been several staffing changes at the preschool, only the head educator participated. After informal consent was obtained, all families at the preschool were approached to gauge their level of interest and possible participation in the program. They were invited, via email and the placement of notices in the parent pockets, to attend a TOGETHER program meeting. The email and notices included the explanatory sheets and consent forms. A one-page poster of the project’s main points was also placed on the preschool’s communication board.

To increase participation numbers, a presentation was given at the end of a preschool session by me, the centre director, and head teacher, where the aim of the research project and a brief overview of the TOGETHER program was provided to families. Given that both the centre director and the participating head teacher had developed a strong trusting relationship with the families, it was decided that the centre director and the head teacher would explain the study and program. At the end of the 15-minute presentation, the centre director, head teacher and I were available for questions and explanatory sheets and consent forms were distributed to the families.

It was this level of trust between the families and the centre staff that proved to be the most valuable element in the recruitment process for the research project. Of the 45 families that attended the centre, the parents from eight families gave consent for their child to be part of the child selection process and to be observed in preschool and home settings. The parents also agreed to participate in the parent–educator training sessions as well as complete two interviews and two surveys. The eight children were requested to provide assent.

**Case Study 3: The Community Hub**

As with Case Study 2, the recruitment procedures for Case Study 3 followed the same protocols as for Case Study 1, but with the following adjustments to suit the needs of this preschool community. I was approached by the preschool after a recruitment advertisement had been viewed on a social media site for early childhood teachers and educators. After
giving the 15-minute presentation about the TOGETHER program research project to the teachers and educators from all four preschool rooms located at this preschool, teachers and educators from two of the rooms decided to participate in the TOGETHER program.

The parents of children in these two four-year-old kindergarten rooms were invited to attend the TOGETHER presentation while waiting to pick up their children. During the presentation, the aim of the research project and a brief overview of the TOGETHER program was provided, along with explanatory sheets and consent forms. An email containing the explanatory sheets and consent forms was also sent to all families. The teachers and educators were unable to participate in the presentation with families, due to work constraints. Recruitment consisted of three families from both classes (66 families in total were approached). Not having the teachers and educators involved in the presentation may have influenced the willingness for families to participate. Each child from the three families provided assent. I worked closely with the teachers and educators to reach the parents who had been unable to attend the presentation due to work commitments; however, contacting them proved a barrier, even with involvement of translators and grandparents. On a positive note, six teachers and educators were recruited.

Case Study 4: Trying Their Best

The educators in the four-year-old kindergarten program were approached after expressing an interest from an invitation sent out through their EYM. An invitation was sent out to both kindergarten programs at the centre; however, only one four-year-old program decided to participate. Both the qualified teachers in the participating group cited that they were overwhelmed with their current workload and preferred that the researchers approached the families to participate in the TOGETHER research project. Three parent presentations were undertaken, where the aims of the research project and a brief overview of the TOGETHER program (set up in the foyer with food and an information table) was provided. Also, explanatory letters were placed in the parent pockets and emails were sent to each family for recruitment purposes. Of the 33 families, three families gave consent with their children providing assent.

Case Study 5: Long Day Care as the Extended Family

The educators in the four-year-old kindergarten program were approached after expressing an interest through an advertisement placed on social media. After meeting with centre
management, an invitation was sent out to all teams at the preschool. The three- to four-year-old kindergarten program decided to participate. Of all the case studies, this setting was one of the most successful in terms of recruitment because of the one-on-one time with the director and each of the teachers/educators to explain the project and the program. In this preschool, the staff were all given paid release time to meet with the me. They were also encouraged by their director to think of the project as an opportunity for their own growth and professional development.

For the recruitment of the families, the director spoke to each individual family and connected with them to listen to their concerns about their child’s social and emotional development. She talked to them about the value of TOGETHER and discussed the explanatory sheets and consent forms. In total, three educators and five families consented to participate in the TOGETHER research project. As with the previous case studies, the children provided assent.

Data Collection

To collect parent, teacher, educator, and child information, the following data collection methods were used and are outlined in Table 3.2. It is important to note that the facilitator of the TOGETHER program in this research project was the PhD researcher herself:

1. A parent, teacher, and educator questionnaire especially designed for TOGETHER, called the Communication Styles and Demographics (CSD) Questionnaire (see Appendix G, Part 1). The CSD was completed with the parents, teachers, and educators before the first workshop commenced either face-face at the preschool or via a phone interview. Each conversation was recorded. The self-developed eight-question questionnaire was specifically designed to explore how the TOGETHER program could be adapted to suit participants and reduce barriers where needed. The questions were informed from literature which discussed possible contextual barriers to participation in early intervention (Lustick, 2016; Stern et al., 2015; Vincent et al., 2011). The questionnaire asked the participating parents, teachers, and educators to provide their details, such as gender and nationality, the home language(s), and the teachers’/educators’ education levels. Questions around barriers to participation, communication styles, and cultural considerations were also asked. Then the facilitator used that information to adapt the delivery of TOGETHER, specifically for participating
children, their parents, teachers, and educators. Practice interviews were conducted with non-participating teachers, educators, and parents to ensure the ease in response.

2. The Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ; Phillips et al., 2020a; see Appendix G, Part 2) is used to assist in understanding the beliefs and practices of parents, teachers, and educators in relation to developing children’s social and emotional skills, as well as understanding the relationships between the parents and educators. The BPRQ consists of six Likert-type subscales – four subscales to measure authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and cultural beliefs, a fifth subscale to measure practices and a sixth subscale to measure relationships. Each subscale finishes with an open-ended question where participants can elaborate on their thoughts regarding their beliefs, practices, and the parent–educator relationship. A separate study to measure the BPRQ using Rasch analysis is presented in Chapter 4. The aim of this paper was to assess the measurement properties using a Rasch analysis, including reliability and validity, of the BPRQ for parents, teachers, and educators. The paper also provides a detailed outline of the development of the BPRQ.

The protocols for dissemination of the question were as follows. In Case Study 1 participants were invited to complete the BPRQ questionnaire either via a phone interview or a paper form which was returned to the researcher in a sealed envelope. For Case Studies 2 to 5 the previous options were provided alongside an option for the interview to be completed via Qualtrics online (Instructions to complete were at the top of the on-line questionnaire). The questionnaires were in English and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Translation services were offered to parents and educators if required. All participants indicated they were happy to complete in English. To ensure confidentiality, the online Qualtrics questionnaire and the paper version used unique identifiers, so the responses were anonymised.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Instrument Development</th>
<th>Participants involved</th>
<th>Type of data captured</th>
<th>Phases Instrument implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Styles and Demographics (CSD) Questionnaire</td>
<td>Self-developed to capture data for the flexible implementation of TOGETHER. Informed by literature which discussed possible contextual barriers to participation in early intervention (Lustick, 2016; Stern et al., 2015; Vincent et al., 2011).</td>
<td>Parents, Teachers, Educators</td>
<td>Demographic data, Barrier to participation, Communication styles, Cultural consideration</td>
<td>Phase 2: Baseline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| The Social Development Rating Scale (SDRS)           | Adapted from: Tyler-Merrick, 2014.                                                      | Parents, Teachers, Educators | Likert scale with 15 questions to rate the level of competence of prosocial behaviour and 15 questions to rate the level of antisocial behaviour on a scale of 150. | Phase 1: Social Development Rating Scale and Two-step multiple-gating procedure, Phase 5: Follow-up
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home and preschool observations</th>
<th>The observation codes and the recording form adapted from Phillips (2014).</th>
<th>Selected parents and children at home.</th>
<th>Counting of observation codes related to teacher, educator, or parent behaviour in response to children’s behaviour.</th>
<th>Phase 2: Baseline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers, educators, and selected children at preschool.</td>
<td>Counting observation codes of children’s appropriate and challenging behaviours.</td>
<td>Anecdotal notes on observations of child, parent, teachers, and educators.</td>
<td>Phase 4: Post-workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop data gathering</td>
<td>Anecdotal notes in Case Study 1 lead to the inclusion of whole workshop recording due to the rich conversations between participants.</td>
<td>Parents Teachers Educators</td>
<td>Case Study 1: Anecdotal notes taken by the facilitator to collect stories and insights of all participants during the TOGETHER training.</td>
<td>Phase 3: The TOGETHER program intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Case studies 2 to 5: Audio recording of workshops to collect stories and insights of all participants during the TOGETHER training.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up questionnaire</td>
<td>Adapted from Phillips (2014).</td>
<td>Parents Teachers Educators</td>
<td>Program’s relevance, applicability, knowledge gained and areas for improvement.</td>
<td>Phase 5: Follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up interview</td>
<td>Three open ended self-developed questions.</td>
<td>Parents Teachers Educators</td>
<td>Changes to educators’ and parents’ beliefs and practices about behaviour, changes in relationships, and improvements for TOGETHER.</td>
<td>Phase 5: Follow-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. *The Social Development Rating Scale combined with the Two-Step multiple gating procedure* (SDRS; Tyler-Merrick, 2014; see Appendix H). In order to identify children with social and emotional needs a two-Step multiple gating procedure utilising an educator nomination form and the SDRS was employed (Tyler-Merrick, 2014). The use of the two-step multiple gating procedure occurred before baseline observations. The employment of this procedure before baseline was used to help identify the learning needs of children with social and emotional needs. The educator nomination form involved each participating teacher/educator nominating up to six children who meet the definition of children with behaviour difficulties. The SDRS was then be used to identify the learning needs of each child. However, considering the low number of parents consenting to be part of each case study the educator nomination form was omitted for case studies following the pilot. All participating parents, teachers, and educators were asked to complete the SDRS in order to capture the social and emotional needs of all children. The SDRS scale consists of 30 items. This Likert scale has 15 questions to rate the level of competence of prosocial behaviour and 15 questions to rate the level of antisocial behaviour on a scale of 150. If a child received a score of less than 113, then a social emotional competence intervention program was recommended. By conducting the SDRS for each child the facilitators of the TOGETHER program were able to adopt a family centred approach through understanding the family’s perspectives of each child’s needs (in addition to the perspectives of the teachers and educators). From here, the facilitator was able to recognise the child’s strengths and work with the child’s parents/family, teachers, and educators in developing prosocial behavioural strategies for each child.

4. *Observations* of the children and educators in the preschool and selected children and parents in the home. This was done by a dedicated researcher in the preschool and by the parents in the home via a small video camera, with responses marked on observation sheets (see Appendix I). The observation codes and the recording form had been adapted from Phillips (2014). The coding manual was provided to the classroom research assistants to provide coding definitions, and the observation process protocols (see Appendix I). The duration of each observation was 30 minutes and occurred three times in each phase (before the workshops,
during the teaching workshops, and after the teaching workshops). For the second
and third case studies the home recordings were divided into 15-minute
observations as the families found 30 minutes to be difficult to capture.
The direct observations focused on two dependent variables. The first was the
educator or parent behaviour in response to the child’s behaviour. The response
codes included:
a. descriptive praise (praise that describes the positive behaviour – for example,
   “You have tried so hard to put on your shoes – great work”)
b. positive praise without description (for example, “Well done”, or a smile or
gesture in response to appropriate behaviour)
c. discouragements (negative responses to a child’s behaviour or “stop” requests
   – for example, hitting)
d. planned ignoring (intentional ignoring of a behaviour such as a tantrum); and
e. non-contingent responses (this was recorded when none of the prescribed
   behaviours had been observed in response to a child’s appropriate or
   inappropriate behaviour).
The second dependent variable was the children’s appropriate and challenging
behaviour: appropriate behaviour is defined as cooperating with an adult or peers
and listening and engaging in socially appropriate activities with peers and other
adults; challenging behaviour is defined as engaging in disruptive activities, not
complying with adult requests, and displaying antisocial conduct such as hitting or
having a tantrum. Anecdotal notes were also taken during each observation and
recorded on the same observation sheet.

Two postgraduate students were trained to assist with the observations and to
ensure inter-observer reliability during the observations. Their training included
one 60-minute meeting with the TOGETHER facilitator to clarify the codes and
two 30-minute training sessions that involved practising direct observation in
another preschool class and from a sample video in a home setting. The practice
included using the observation codes and then scoring the children’s responses.
Once inter-observer reliability observations returned a result of 85% or more,
training was discontinued. This occurred on the second training session. Inter-
observer agreement was calculated for 33% of preschool observations across all
phases and agreement occurred for 88% of the observations.
5. **Workshop data gathering.** As each workshop progressed through the content participants were able to share their stories related to their views, experiences and contribute to collaborative behaviour plans through small group conversations lead by the facilitator. In the first case study workshop quotes from the conversations were derived from anecdotal notes taken by the facilitator. For the other four case studies the valuable conversations regarding the use of beliefs and practices to increase children’s social and emotional skills were captured between the parents, teachers, and educators via the use of a recording device. The recording device was a small, handheld digital voice recorder equipped with three small microphones to enhance recording quality. For each workshop, the device was placed on a small table in the middle of the group. Once the workshop was completed the recording was uploaded to secure online storage for future analysis.

6. **Follow-up questionnaire.** A voluntary social validity survey via Survey Monkey was conducted during the post-intervention phase requesting responses for the program’s relevance, applicability, knowledge gained and areas for improvement. The survey consisted of seven Likert-type questions and three open-ended questions and informed by questions used in the social validity survey from Phillips (2014). This questionnaire was used in Case Study One and results were automatically sent to the researcher’s Survey Monkey account. However, due to low participation in the questionnaire participants were invited to a voluntary follow-up interview as outlined below.

7. **Follow-up interview.** A voluntary interview was completed by the parents, teachers, and educators. This phone interview occurred approximately two weeks after the final observations and was approximately 20 minutes long and audio recorded. Each participant could choose whether the interview was conducted face to face or vis a phone call. If they chose to do the interview face-to-face the interview was held at the preschool.

   The interview included three scripted open-ended questions on (1) how the educators’ and parents’ beliefs and practices about behaviour may have changed or had not changed due to the TOGETHER program; (2) if there were changes in the parent-educator relationships; and/or (3) any suggested improvements for the TOGETHER program. The questions were chosen to ensure a natural flow of conversation between the interviewer and interviewee. Prompts were provided if
the participant required further clarification on the question or assistance to elaborate further. Practice interviews were conducted with non-participating teachers, educators, and parents to ensure the ease in response. It was found during practice interviews that the interview structure allowed for the natural flow of conversation and were flexible when needed. Once each interview was completed the recording was uploaded to secure online storage for future analysis.

**Research Design, Measures and the Phases of the Case Studies**

Figure 3.1 shows the case study research design and how the eight data collection measures were used. By using these different data collection measures in each case study, the links and pathways between each tool can help explain what happened in each case study. Each tool also helped this study to address the different elements in the TOGETHER Conceptual Framework (see Figure 2.1 on page 23).

**Figure 3.1**

*Overview of the Research Design of Each Case Study*

First, the Communication Styles and Demographics (CSD) Questionnaire and Beliefs Practices Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ; Phillips et al, 2020-b) completed by the parents, teachers, and educators assisted with building understanding the contextual influences that related to both the home and preschool settings in each case study. These influences linked to the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The CSD and BPRQ
responses, together with the workshop data collected, also helped to understand how relationships were formed, how practices could be adjusted according to family needs, and how parents, teachers, and educators could work together for the benefit of a child’s development, as per the elements of family-centred practice (Dunst, 2002). The Social Development Rating Scale (SDRS; Tyler-Merrick, 2014) completed by both the parents and teachers/educators provided information about a child’s social and emotional needs and areas of potential concern. Finally, using the home and preschool observations helped to explain how the environment, social, and cognitive processes influence children’s, parents’, teachers’, and educators’ behaviours and practices, which is an important element of the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977).

The eight measures provided data for each case study and were accumulated over five different stages. Each of the five phases (and measures) are outlined as follows:

- **Phase 1: Social Development Rating Scale and Two-step multiple-gating procedure.** A two-step multiple-gating procedure (see Appendix H) uses an educator nomination form, which is part of the SDRS (Tyler-Merrick, 2014) to identify children with behaviour difficulties. The procedure involved two educators nominating any child in their class who met a definition of “a child with behaviour difficulties”. Children met the definition if they “(a) complied with teacher instructions much less frequently than other children of the same age, and any children who (b) engaged in antisocial behaviour much more frequently than other children of the same age” (Church et al., 2006, p. 2). In Case Study 1 this procedure was used as is. However, for Case Study 2 through to Case Study 5 it was identified that the challenging behaviours of the child experienced by the parents were quite different from those experienced by the educators. Therefore, the SDRS was completed for all participating children by both the parents and the educators prior to Phase 2.
Phase 2: Baseline. The baseline consisted of the CSD questionnaire, the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a), and the preschool and home observations. The educators completed their CSD and BPRQ questionnaires at the end of a working day two weeks prior to the baseline observations occurring. The parent CSD and BPRQ questionnaires were completed via a phone call interview. The preschool observations occurred for three days over a period of two weeks. There were three 30-minute observation periods for each participating educator and child.

Phase 3: The TOGETHER program intervention. The TOGETHER program was delivered over two 120-minute workshops, held one week apart, at a time and location which suited the participants. Workshop data gathering was collected via anecdotal notes by the facilitator for the first case study and by audio recordings for the other four to capture the valuable conversations regarding the use of beliefs and practices to increase children’s social and emotional skills between the parents, teachers, and educators.

Phase 4: Post-workshops. The post-workshop and in-home observations replicated the same procedures used during the baseline for three days over a period of two weeks.

Phase 5: Follow-up. The preschool and in-home observations replicated the same procedures used during the baseline and post-workshop phases. These occurred for three days over a period of two weeks. During the follow-up sessions, parents, teachers, and educators completed a second SDRS to determine if there had been a change in their perceptions of child behaviour. Parents, teachers, and educators also completed the BPRQ. The purpose was to see if a change had occurred in the beliefs, practices, and relationships of the parents and the educators. The participants were also invited to attend a feedback interview that would be conducted either face-to-face or by phone and complete the voluntary feedback survey.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for each case study was conducted through a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative approaches included a descriptive analysis of the Social Development Rating Scale (SDRS; Tyler-Merrick, 2014), preschool and home observations, and the self-developed Beliefs Practices and Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ; Phillips et al., 2020a). The
Qualitative data was analysed through content analysis as outlined by Mac Naughton et al. (2001). The content analysis included the workshop audio data, notes from the observations, the responses to the open-ended questions from the BPRQ, and the information from the follow-up interviews. The data analysis conducted for each instrument is described in the next sections.

**Quantitative Analysis**

**Analysis of the Communication Styles and Demographics Questionnaire data.** At the baseline, the CSD questionnaire answers were categorised according to demographic information such as gender, age, nationality, education level, years of teaching, cultural considerations, group preferences, and communication preferences. The results were collated, tabled, and used to inform the delivery of the TOGETHER program. The same analysis was used in each case study.

**Analysis of the Social Development Rating Scale data.** A basic descriptive analysis was undertaken of the data from the Social Development Rating Scale (SDRS; Tyler-Merrick, 2014) to address the question regarding the change in child behaviour. The descriptive analysis for the SDRS included the medium score and standard deviations for both educators for each participating child for the purposes of examining a change in child behaviour after educator and parent training. The descriptive data was collated and tabled. For the first case study, descriptive data was only available for one child. For the remaining four case studies data was provided for all participating children.

**Analysis of the Home and Preschool Observations.** The frequency counts from the direct observations for each of the response codes (that is, praise, descriptive praise, and discouragements) were calculated and then placed in line graphs to determine whether differences had occurred between the baseline and the post-workshop response scores given by the parent, teacher, and educator participants in each single-case study. The response types were descriptive praise, general praise, non-contingent responses, and discouragements. Frequency counts also occurred for selected children relating to appropriate behaviour and inappropriate behaviour. When the data showed a change in child behaviour the data was also placed into a line graph to illustrate the change.
Analysis of the Beliefs, Practices, Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ) data. Descriptive statistics were used to ascertain the differences and the changes beliefs, practice and relationships in the teachers, educators, and parents from the responses on the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a). The scores for each Likert-type question for each participant were entered manually into an Excel spreadsheet. For each individual case study, the results were tabulated and compared between participants and phases. For example, for the Beliefs Subscale (Subscale I, II, III, & IV) comparisons were made between the participants’ responses to questions both pre and post intervention and included statements such as: “I believe that children’s appropriate behaviour needs to be praised/encouraged frequently.”; “I believe that children need to be told when they do not meet my expectations.”; and “I believe I am confident in guiding children’s behaviour I believe that it takes many people to raise a child.”

For the Practices Subscale (Subscale V) comparisons were made between the participants’ statements both pre and post intervention such as: “I give frequent compliments to children for appropriate behaviour.” and “I am consistent with how I address inappropriate behaviour.”

Comparisons were also made between questions on Parent-Educator Relationships Subscale (Subscale VI), both pre and post intervention, which included statements such as: “I have clear communication with my families/ child’s teacher and educators.” and “I feel families/teachers/educators view me as a partner in their child’s development at preschool.”

All questions included in the BPRQ can be viewed in Appendix G (part 2).

Analysis of the Social Validity Questionnaire data. A Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 representing a negative response to 5 representing a positive response, was used for the social validity survey for the first seven questions. The scores for each question were tabulated and compared between participants. The results were then combined and were analysed using descriptive statistics that included the mean and standard deviation for each question.
Qualitative Analysis

Analysis of the Beliefs, Practices, Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ), Qualitative Notes from the Observational Data, Workshop Notes and Recordings, Social Validity Questionnaire, and the Follow-Up Interviews.

Thematic analysis was the process adopted to analyse the responses from the open-ended questions from the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a), the qualitative notes from the observational data, workshop notes and recordings, social validity questionnaire and the information from the follow-up interviews. The process involved six phases as outlined by (Norwell et al., 2017):

1) Familiarisation of data.
2) Generating initial codes.
3) Searching for themes.
4) Reviewing themes.
5) Defining and Naming Themes, and finally.
6) Producing the Report.

During phase one, the familiarisation of data, each data set from each instrument was read several times as a way to search for emerging patterns and meanings in each individual case study. Each data set was read at least twice. Notes were made about ideas for possible codes.

At phase two, generating initial codes, notable segments of text in each data set were captured. Each code contained explicit boundaries relating the information sought from each specific tool. By using the codes, the analysis was used to organise sections of related or comparable text to begin to tell the story if each case study. During this phase, the larger data sets from the workshop audio and final interviews were coded through data analysis tool, NVivo.

Phase three, searching for themes, involved placing the important codes into themes. Themes around parent/teacher/educator beliefs, practices, and relationships before and after the TOGETHER program were able to be captured across the various data sets to form the story if each case study. Mind maps were used to determine the themes emerging. For the smaller data sets related to the BPRQ, qualitative notes from the observational data, and the social validity questionnaire the mind maps were
created on paper. For the larger data sets (workshop audio and final interviews) concept maps from NVivo were used.

During phase four, reviewing themes, the themes from data from each set were reduced in order to paint a clearer picture of what was happening for the children, parents, teachers, and educators in case study. From here the analysis moved to the fifth phase where each emerging theme was able to be described and provide a clear story for each case study. With the five phases completed the data was able to be brought together to contribute to the production of each story emerging from each case study. As Mac Naughton et al. (2001), stated that qualitative data, such as thematic enables the researcher to tell a story: “These stories are strengthened by using voices from the field, or detailed snapshots of the field, to bring to life the arguments being pursued in the research report” (p. 133). Thus, the units derived from the data were used to illustrate the effects of the TOGETHER program in the story and complement the quantitative data.

**Triangulation of Findings**

One important element of each case study story and analysing the overall effect of TOGETHER was the triangulation of the data. Triangulation was used to enable the trends that had emerged from the five case studies measures to be drawn together for a greater understanding of the findings (Flick et al., 2012). Figure 3.2 indicates how the data collections measures were drawn together to uncover the effect of context and relationships on the changes in the children’s behaviour from the preschool and home observations as well as the parents’, teachers’, and educators’ beliefs and practices. Flick et al. (2012) state that data source triangulation enables researchers to understand the experiences and attitudes of participants from the qualitative data. Such data can be used to further unpack the trends that have emerged. Additionally, Mathison (1988) explains that triangulation provides researchers with a methodology to “construct meaningful propositions about the social world” (p. 15). Triangulation not only assists in the convergence of a phenomenon but also exposes inconsistencies and contradictions in the findings – thus reducing bias and increasing the validity and reliability of the findings.
Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the data collection methods, the procedures, and the analysis of the five case studies. By taking a case study approach, using multiple data collection measures, illustrative evidence was produced that enabled the five unique narratives to be profiled in such a way as to demonstrate the changes that had occurred because of the TOGETHER program. The nature of the parent, teacher, and educator relationships, and their collaborative practices became more apparent through the application of the various data collection methods. Furthermore, the triangulation of the findings enabled the findings to be viewed through multiple lenses, thereby providing a richer analysis of the changes that had occurred in each setting.

Chapters 6 to 10 present the results of each case study. They are presented in the form of stories to illustrate the effects of the TOGETHER program on the children, parents, teachers, and educators across the five distinct contexts.

Before the results are presented, two papers are provided in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 reports on the development and measurement of the Beliefs, Practices and Relationships Questionnaire using Rasch analysis, while Chapter 5 reports on a study that explored the feasibility of the TOGETHER program. Chapter 4 sets the scene for Chapter 6 by expanding on the findings from the same cohort of participants. It is important to note that since publication, amendments have been made to the conceptual framework. The updated conceptual framework has been detailed previously in Chapter 2.
Chapter 4


The manuscript contained in this chapter, which provides an account of the research that used Rasch analysis to determine the validity of the Beliefs, Practices and Relationships Questionnaire as a measure of parents’ and educators’ beliefs, practices and relationships, has been submitted for review in the journal Asia Pacific Journal of Education. This journal is published by Taylor and Francis.

Title: Measurement of Parent and Educator Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships using Rasch Analysis: Towards Advancing Children’s Social and Emotional Competence

Authors: Joanna Phillips, Gaye Tyler-Merrick, and Sivanes Phillipson

Abstract

Parents and educators working together is one key strategy to develop children’s social and emotional competence skills. The steps in providing these skills requires an understanding of parent and educator beliefs, their practices and how to build reciprocal relationships. This paper reports on the development and measurement of the Beliefs, Practices and Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ) using Rasch analysis. The BPRQ surveys parent and educator beliefs, practices and the relationships between parents and educators when developing children’s social and emotional competence. A total of 68 parents and educators of young children from diverse backgrounds across Australia and New Zealand responded to the BPRQ. The Rasch item indices show the BPRQ is a valid measure of parents’ and educators’ beliefs, practices and relationships. While the BPRQ requires further development, it has the potential to be a valuable tool in understanding the influence of parent and educator beliefs, practices, and relationships on children’s social and emotional development.

Key words: Parent–educator relationships, parent–educator beliefs, parent–educator practices, measurement, children’s social and emotional competence.
Introduction

The development of young children’s social and emotional competence influences their educational and developmental outcomes. Children with persistent behaviour difficulties are at risk of acquiring antisocial behaviour, decreased academic outcomes, isolation from peers and teachers and exclusion from school (Whitted, 2011). In contrast, children who develop strong social-emotional competencies are more successful in their schooling (Webster-Stratton et al., 2008) and demonstrate more positive relationships with peers, educators, and family members (Denhem et al., 2012).

To increase positive social-emotional outcomes for children, it is important parents and educators are taught skills to guide the development of children’s social-emotional competence. When training parents and educators in such skills, we need to consider the different beliefs and practices of both parents and educators (Gay, 2010) because these influence the development of children’s social-emotional competence (Park et al., 2016). To do this, early intervention programmes need to develop and foster strong parent-educator relationships (Minke et al., 2014).

Some early intervention programmes recommend strategies to develop children’s social-emotional development but often do not consider the beliefs of parents and educators. Beliefs and practices rarely occur in isolation; rather parent beliefs influence the use of specific practices and vice versa in social-emotional development contexts (Barnett et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important to understand the interaction between such beliefs and practices when it comes to developing children’s social-emotional competence skills.

Of equal importance is the attitudes parents and educators bring to the parent-educator relationship when developing children’s social-emotional competence skills. Interventions that value this relationship and establish a community of practice are more effective in the development of these skills (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016). When considering quality early
intervention, it is simply not enough to just train parents and educators in social-emotional competence strategies, we must also consider different parent and educator beliefs and practices and how to develop reciprocal parent-educator relationships. One step we can take to understand this relationship is to develop a tool that measures each of these factors. This study reports the development, measurement and validity properties of a tool which aims to do this.

Validity is an important tool used to measure the extent an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). Measuring the validity of the questions contained in BPRQ is important because it will help determine if the questions being used in the BPRQ capture the beliefs, practices and relationships of parent and educators in developing children’s social-emotional competence skills. To determine the validity of the BPRQ Rasch analysis was used. The Rasch model abides to a specific group of conventions. As Bond and Fox (2015) state these conventions are that:

“(a) each person is characterised by an ability, and
(b) each item by a difficulty that
(c) can be expressed by numbers along one line. Finally,
(d) from the difference between the numbers (and nothing else), the probability of observing any particular scored response can be computed ” (p. 28).”

Through Rasch analysis we are provided with criterion for measurement which allows us to measure the validity of the BPRQ. When responses fit the Rasch model then it is determined that instruments intentions have been met (Andrich, 1978; Andrich & Marais, 2019).
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) which supports the design and methodology of this study incorporates ideas of understanding beliefs and practices of parents and educators, considers the importance and need for strong parent-educator partnerships and the influence successful partnerships have on developing children’s social-emotional competence skills. The conceptual framework synthesises theoretical concepts from Family Centred Practice (Dunst, 2002), the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). These components were selected to represent the complex systems that influence children's social-emotional development. In order to understand how parent and educator beliefs, practices and relationships influence children's development, we must examine the influences of both parents and educators together, not separately, in both the home and early years environments.

![Conceptual Framework]

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of TOGETHER

Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1986, 2002), Dunst (2002), and Bandura (1977)

Beliefs and Practices

Beliefs and practices rarely occur in isolation, instead they influence each other (Barnett et al., 2010) so it is appropriate that both concepts are explored together. There are several ways in which beliefs and practices are interpreted. Beliefs and practices in parenting research have drawn terminologies such as authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles (Baumrind, 2005). Similarly, Walker (2008) used these parenting styles to explore educator beliefs and practices in behaviour guidance and concluded that educators with authoritative styles had pupils who were more engaged and responsive, while teachers with authoritarian styles had pupils who were more resistant to learning. They also found that teachers with permissive styles demonstrated inconsistent classroom management and as a result, had pupils with lower autonomy.

Beliefs are also important when developing children’s social-emotional development. This is influenced by context and culture (de Guzman et al., 2012) and parental expectations and beliefs about what their children can achieve (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007; 2010). Parent beliefs also influence the way they guide children’s behaviour and develop their social-emotional competence skills (Wieland & Baita, 2017). Harsh parenting contributes to more negative child outcomes and positive attention (Park et al., 2016) while maternal warmth and support leads to higher levels of appropriate behavior (Davis et al., 2015).

The emotional climate set by educators through their practice also has potential to affect children's understanding of behavioural expectations. As such, the level of emotional support provided in the early years classroom influences the development of children's social skills (Burchinal et al., 2010) as children observe educators’ behaviour and, in turn, educators become models for what children interpret as acceptable social-emotional behaviour (Morris et al., 2013).
Parent-Educator Relationships

With young children experiencing adult-child interactions at home and in early years settings, it is crucial that both parents and educators are skilled to teach children social-emotional competency skills. It is also essential that educators and parents develop effective relationships to ensure consistency of practice across home and early years settings. Parent participation, cooperation and a deepening of relationships between a child's family and their educators lead to positive outcomes (Dawson & Wymbe, 2016; Sheridan et al., 2005) with an increase in appropriate behaviour, a positive attitude towards school and an increase in child achievement, whereas, negative reports of the parent-educator relationship reflected poorer outcomes for children. It cannot be assumed that all parents and educators value this relationship in the same way. This relationship may vary and is often influenced by experience (Wieland & Baita, 2017). Minke et al. (2014) suggests the quality of this relationship may assist in establishing support for children’s social-emotional development.

Development of the Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ)

The BPRQ is designed to determine the beliefs, practices and views of the parent-educator relationship when developing children’s social-emotional competence skills. The BPRQ is not designed as a stand-alone assessment tool as it was developed to compliment the broader study of the Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Competence (TOGETHER) programme (Phillips et al., 2020). This programme uses direct observations of children, parents and educators in the home and early years setting, interviews with parents and educators, two parent/educator two-hour workshop sessions and a Social Development Rating Scale (SDRS) (Church et al., 2006). The BPRQ was designed to measure the change in beliefs, practices and relationships of the parents and educators as a result of the TOGETHER intervention programme through self-report. Self-report questionnaires are a convenient way
to collect assessment data (Kopcha & Sullivan, 2007). While existing assessment tools offered some insight as to how specific parent-educator relationships and their beliefs and practices can be investigated, there was not one tool that measured all factors when developing children’s social-emotional competence.

The BPRQ consists of six sub-scales which aim to identify the beliefs, practices and parent-educator relationships. Previous validated child questionnaires and subscales inform each subscale. The BPRQ is made up of (1) Beliefs, (2) Practices and (3) Relationships questionnaires. Two separate BPRQs were developed, one for parents and one for educators. Adaptations were made to suit the language style of each subset (e.g., the use of good and bad behaviour for parent questions and the use of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour for educator questions). However, the questions asked were the same as to facilitate a comparative analysis of differences and similarities between parent and educator beliefs, practices and relationships. Each subscale employed a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The reason for employing a 4-point scale over a 5-point scale was that the BPRQ needed to avoid neutral responses in order to capture the thought processes of the participants. As indicated by Garland (1991) when using 4-point scale participants are forced to make a distinct choice and will be less inclined to place themselves as neutral.

*Development of the Beliefs Subscales (Subscale I, II, III, & IV).* Several studies offered useful information to inform the purpose of this questionnaire. Davies et al. (2016) and Hollingsworth and Winter (2012) focused on the beliefs about what the parent or teacher felt a child should be able to achieve, rather than their beliefs about how they, as educators, developed children’s social-emotional competence. When reviewing those assessment tools, it was apparent we needed to develop questions that reflected parent-educator beliefs that influence their day-to-day practice as beliefs and practices do not stand alone, instead they
influence each other. The research of Baumrind (2005); Walker (2008) and Wischerth et al. (2016) also helped inform this sub-scale.

As each parenting/educator style is different, the beliefs subscale was divided into four subscales under the beliefs concept. These were authoritative (Subscale I, five items), authoritarian (Subscale II, five items) and permissive parenting/educator styles (Subscale III, 5 items), with Subscale IV incorporating cultural beliefs (ten items). Authoritative parenting/educator styles are defined as an approach which is void of restrictive directives - rather the parent/educator chooses to engage in practices which involve recognising children’s prosocial behaviours, they engage in calm discussions for managing and redirecting misbehaviour, and provide affection (Baumrind, 1996; 2005). These authoritative styles were reflected in the questions of Subscale I. Parents and educators who adopt authoritarian practices on the other hand place obedience of the child central to their approach (Baumrind, 1996; 2005). As the questions from Subscale II indicated authoritarian styles involve parents and educators believing that punishment is important and that children must always do what they say. Conversely, permissive parenting and educator styles embody the practice of avoiding any use of rules and is highly responsive to giving the child what they want (Baumrind, 1996; 2005). Questions from Subscale III reflected this style, such as believing the discipline may lead to a child not liking the parent/educator and that children should always get what they want.

The cultural beliefs subscale IV acknowledged the importance of the parent/educator context and the cultural context of the community in which they lived, which in turn motivates the kind of practices adults adopt to assist in children’s development (de Guzman et al., 2012). Examples of questions are “I believe that parents take the main responsibility for raising a child”, “I believe that it takes many people to raise a child”, “I believe that my child should be encouraged to do things on their own” and “I believe that children need to sit
quietly at school.” Such questions were used to ascertain varying cultural values on raising children and participants were asked to score this subscale, a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used. However, as cultural context vary considerably it was important that this subscale, along with all others, were followed by open-ended questions and a comment box which asked parents and educators to record any other views/beliefs they had on guiding children’s social-emotional competence.

Development of the Practices Subscale (Subscale V). The TOGETHER programme was developed from programmes which focused on teaching positive behaviour support (PBS) strategies as these strategies have the most evidence-base to support their use. For example, the PBS programmes which helped inform TOGETHER were the Pyramid Model (Fox et al., 2010), Building Cooperation in Three to Five-Year-Old Children (Phillips, 2014), the Incredible Years Teacher and Parent Programme (Webster-Stratton, 1990) and the Parent Training Oregon Model (PTMO) (Forgatch & Patterson, 2010). When developing the second subscale, the Practices Subscale, there were very few questionnaires that specifically addressed positive behaviour strategies so aspects from the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Shelton et al., 1996) and the Parent–Child Relationship Questionnaire (PCRQ; Furman & Giberson, 1995) were used. To understand the parent and educator use of PBS practices, more specific questions were required to reflect the practice elements taught in TOGETHER. Additionally, BPRQ had to be adapted to include language which parents would understand so two additional items were added resulting in 14 items. Each item related to the PBS strategies taught in TOGETHER such as “I give more attention to good behaviours rather than bad behaviours”. Items one to ten included questions relating to the use of praise, encouragement and proactive strategies to develop children’s social-emotional competence. Items 11 to 14 included questions relating to strategies to guide misbehaviour, such as “I am consistent with how I address inappropriate behaviour.” More attention was given to the
positive and prosocial items due to the higher focus TOGETHER placed on using these strategies. Like the Beliefs Subscale, parents and educators were asked to provide any additional views on the Practices Subscale.

*Development of the Parent-Educator Relationships Subscale (Subscale VI).* Parents and educators hold a range of views on relationships and often their views are influenced by experience (Wieland & Baita, 2017). There are tools which investigate parent involvement but there are limited assessment tools that look at the behaviours that constitute quality parent-educator relationships. Dawson and Wymbs (2016) adapted the Parent–Teacher Relationship Scale–II (PTRS) to measure educator relationship quality but the original Vickers and Minke (1995) PTRS included versions for both educators and parents. Though parts of the PTRS were applicable to the development of the Parent-Educator Relationship Subscale, the length of the PTRS was problematic. We wanted a scale that reflected family-centred practice (Dunst 2002), was more concise and placed parents and children at the centre of the relationship with the support of educators. Therefore, a ten, four-point, Likert-type questions (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree) was developed. Items one to three addressed communication, such as “*I have clear communication with my child’s educators.*” Items four to six addressed how families were valued such as “*My child’s educators are approachable.*” Items seven and eight addressed how responsive educators were to family’s cultural needs, such as “*My child’s educators honour our cultural beliefs.*” while items nine and ten addressed views on parent-educator collaboration, such as “*I feel that my child’s educators view me as a partner in my child’s development at kindergarten or school.*” As with the previous two subscales, participants were asked to add their views on the parent-educator relationship via open ended questions and comment box.
The combination of a variety of assessment tools all helped inform the BPRQ. The aim of this paper was to assess the measurement properties including the reliability and validity of the BPRQ for both parents and educators, using Rasch analysis.

**Methods**

This study was part of a larger project that aimed to investigate the effects of the TOGETHER: Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Competence programme (Phillips, Phillipson, & Tyler-Merrick, 2021). The BPRQ was developed and implemented to assist with understanding the beliefs, practices and relationships of parents and educators and how this impacted on the development of children’s social-emotional skills.

**Sample**

*Recruitment.* A total of 35 parents and educators responded to a general online invite via a social media platform and an additional nine participants responded via the initial pilot study for the TOGETHER programme (Phillips et al., 2020). A further 24 parents and educators who were involved in the main study of TOGETHER chose also to complete the BPRQ, making a total of 68 participants. All participants provided informed consent. Of the 68 participants, 54 were parents of young children aged between two to six years of age. Fourteen were educators employed in a variety of early years settings in a large city in Australia. The 68 participants were from diverse backgrounds including: Australian (Australian = 33, Australian/Dutch = one, Australian/Irish = one, and Australian/British = one), New Zealand (New Zealand = four, New Zealand European = four, New Zealand Maori = one, and New Zealand European/New Zealand Maori/Lebanese = one), South African = one, Scottish = one, Indian = two, Punjabi = one, Sikh = one, Polish = one, British = four, Anglo = one, Latin-American = one, Irish/Scottish = one, Vietnamese = two, Saudi Arabian =
one, Chinese = two, American = one, Mauritian = one, and Malayan/Tamil/Indian = one. All parents were mothers and all educators were female.

**Procedure**

*Questionnaire dissemination.* Thirty-five participants completed the BPRQ questionnaire via Qualtrics online as did 14 of the participants involved in the main study of the TOGETHER programme. Instructions to complete were at the top of the on-line questionnaire. The remaining 19 parent or educator participants came from the TOGETHER pilot study or a smaller study also undertaken. This group completed the questionnaire via paper with a letter explaining the process and a return envelope. The questionnaire was in English and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Translation services were offered to parents and educators if required. All participants indicated they were happy to complete in English. To ensure confidentiality, the online Qualtrics questionnaire and the paper version used unique identifiers, so responses were anonymised.

**Validation approach**

Rasch analysis was used as it allowed the researchers to screen tools that measured variables that were covert in nature such as beliefs and practices with this contributing to the quality of the measurement (Bond & Fox, 2015). WINSTEPS version 3.91.2.4 was used to assess the suitability of the findings to the Rasch model. Rasch analysis allowed the exploration of each item to ascertain if the rating scales were measuring what was intended (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2010). The validity of the rating scale was investigated by examining if each item met the expectations of the Rasch analysis through identifying the proportion of observed to expected score values. More specifically, Rasch analysis allows researchers to determine the item and person hierarchies. Using item and person fit scores
(infit and outfit) and \( t \) values (ZSTD), the researchers could determine the appropriateness of the model fit. Infit and outfit mean squares between 0.5 and 2.0 and ZSTD values of 0-2 indicate an acceptable fit. Additionally, the reliability of the scales could be viewed through the item and person reliability of estimate scores where scores greater than 0.5 are considered satisfactory. Anything below 0.5 indicates that participants may find items difficult to answer. The person reliability index shows how likely the same set of participants will show the same set of views on their beliefs, practices, and relationships with another set of questions relating to the same construct. While the item reliability index assists with unpacking how likely the responses from a new set of participants will remain stable.

To extend the functionality of each rating scale, Linacre’s (2004) eight guidelines were used. These guidelines provided a tool to assist analysing each scale and exploring ways to improve the scales. The guidelines are relevant for scales which are under development. Guideline #1 suggests there needs to be at least 10 participant responses for each category (in the case the BPRQ: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree). For Guideline #2, the distribution of items needs to be consistent (showing smooth increases) for optimal step calibration. Guideline #3 prescribes that categories 1 to 4 need to advance monotonically. Linacre (2004) suggested that Guideline #4 requires an outfit mean square of less than 2.0 to demonstrate there is a regular level of randomness, a stipulation of the Rasch model. Values above 2.0 are concerning as this indicates there is excessive randomness and threatens the measurement scales. Guideline #5 corresponds with probability curves and states that an important part of a successful rating scale is that step calibrations progress in a systematic manner. Such progression indicates the categories are used as expected. For Guideline #6 the relationship between the measures and the expected responses are explored, where Linacre (2004) stresses the importance of the ratings implying measures and vice versa. Finally, Guideline #7 and #8 set parameters for step difficulties where advances need to be between...
1.4 logits (Guideline #7) and 5.0 logits (Guideline #8). A logit is an added unit of measurement that can be used to show the difference between any person and any item. When the advances between the persona and item fall between the logits this contributes to the fit.

Results

**BPRQ-Beliefs- Authoritative Scale – Subscale I**

Rasch analysis on the 5-item BPRQ-Beliefs-Authoritative scale yielded the items and persons infit and outfit indices (see Table 4.1) (the individual item infit and outfit statistics can be seen in Table 4.8). The overall item fit met the Rasch model expectations with .97 for infit mean square and .93 for an outfit mean square. The infit and outfit t values also suggested a good fit with both values being lower than 2. The item infit t values were -.10 and the Outfit t values were .10. The item separation reliability indicated a good spread of items with a score of .91. The overall person fit also met the Rasch model expectations with .95 for infit mean square and .93 for an outfit mean square. A well-fitted model is suggested with infit t values at .1 and outfit t values at -.1. However, the person reliability estimates were slightly below expectations at .40.

Using Linacre’s (2004) eight guidelines Table 4.7 demonstrates that the BPRQ-Beliefs-Authoritative Scale meets Guidelines #3, #4, #5, #7, and #8. Guidelines #1, #2, and #6 were not met. Guideline 1 requires at least 10 counts in each category. Category 1 (strongly disagree) was not chosen by any participants and Category 2 (disagree) only had 6 counts. Participants were more likely to choose Category 3 (agree, 29%) or Category 4 (strongly agree, 69%). Guideline #2 indicates that for optimal step calibration there needs to be consistent observation distribution across categories.
While the increases between Category 2, 3, and 4 were consistent, Category 1 was omitted, therefore Category 2 and 4 were highly skewed, presenting with long tails. However, Linacre (2006) discussed how such skews could be expected when trying to capture specific beliefs. The tails presented in this study indicate that parents and educators were more likely to agree with authoritative parent/educator styles. The omission of Category 1 also suggested Category 1 and Category 2 (strongly disagree and disagree) needed to be combined in future scales as participants did not distinguish between the two categories. For Guideline 6, ratings need to imply measures, and measures imply ratings. While Guideline 6 was met for Category 3 and 4, it was not met for Category 2, where Linacre (2004) suggested the 40% or above is a useful level of coherence. Category 2 showed a lack of coherence between measures to ratings where only 33% of participants choice of ratings (coherence) explained participants’ measure, while 100% of measures implied coherence.

Table 4.1
Summary of Rasch item and person estimates for BPRQ-Beliefs-Authoritative – Subscale I (N=68)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure summary</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD adjusted)</td>
<td>0.00 (1.25)</td>
<td>3.86 (1.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of estimate</td>
<td>0.91†</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>0.97 (0.24)</td>
<td>0.95 (0.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit t (SD)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.3)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>0.93 (0.35)</td>
<td>0.93 (0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit t (SD)</td>
<td>0.1 (1.0)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: BPRQ=Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire; SD=standard deviation.
**BPRQ-Beliefs-Authoritarian Scale – Subscale II**

The Rasch analysis on the 5-item BPRQ-Beliefs-Authoritarian scale demonstrated the overall item fit met the Rasch model expectations with 1.00 for infit mean square and .99 for an outfit mean square (see Table 4.2) (the individual item infit and outfit statistics can be seen in Table 4.8). The infit and outfit t values also suggested a good fit with both values being between -1.9 to 1.9. The item infit t values were -.10 and the outfit t values were -.20. The item separation reliability indicated a good spread of items with a score of .91.

The overall person fit also met the Rasch model expectations with .99 for infit mean square and .99 for an outfit mean square. The infit t value of -.10 and outfit t value of .69 indicated a well-fitted model. The person reliability estimates of .79 implied that the 68 participants found the five items easy to answer.

All guidelines outlined by Linacre (2006) were adhered to, except for Guideline #6 (Table 4.7). While Guideline 6 was met for Categories, 2, 3, and 4, it was not met for Category 1. Category 1 showed a lack of coherence between measures to ratings where only 29% of participants choice of ratings explained participants’ measure.

**Table 4.2**  
*Summary of Rasch item and person estimates for BPRQ-Beliefs-Authoritarian – Subscale II (N=68)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure summary</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD adjusted)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.84)</td>
<td>0.60 (2.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliablity of estimate</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit statisites</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.29)</td>
<td>.99 (0.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit t (SD)</td>
<td>-.01 (1.7)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>0.99 (.32)</td>
<td>0.99 (-.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit t (SD)</td>
<td>-2 (.7)</td>
<td>0.69 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:BPRQ=Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire; SD=standard deviation.
BPRQ-Beliefs-Permissive Scale – Subscale III

The 5-item BPRQ-Beliefs-Permissive scale demonstrated the overall item fit met the Rasch model expectations with 1.02 for both infit and outfit mean square (see Table 4.3) (the individual item infit and outfit statistics can be seen in Table 8). The infit and outfit t values also suggested a good fit with both values at 0.00. The item separation reliability indicated a good spread of items with a score of 0.93. The overall person fit also meet the Rasch model expectations with .99 for infit mean square and 1.02 for an outfit mean square. The infit t value of -.10 and outfit t value of 0.00 indicated a well-fitted model. The person reliability estimates of .33 implied that the 68 participants found the five items relating to permissive parent/educator styles difficult to answer.

Table 4.3
Summary of Rasch item and person estimates for BPRQ-Beliefs-Permissive – Subscale III (N=68)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure summary</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD adjusted)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.84)</td>
<td>-1.85 (1.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of estimate</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>1.02 (0.29)</td>
<td>0.99 (0.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit t (SD)</td>
<td>0.0 (1.8)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>1.02 (0.26)</td>
<td>1.02 (0.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit t (SD)</td>
<td>0.0 (1.5)</td>
<td>0.0 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: BPRQ=Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire; SD=standard deviation.
While Linacre’s (2006) Guidelines #4, #5, #7, and #8 were met, Guidelines #1, #3, #6 were not adhered to (Table 7). For Guideline 1, Category 4 only had 5 observations, whereas Linacre (2004) suggests at least 10 observations are required for each category. For Guideline 3 average measure need to increase monotonically with category, however there was a decrease from Category 3 to 4 of 0.36 indicating that the rating scale is uncertain for the data set. The low number of observations at category 4 would have also influenced the decrease. Linacre (2006) suggest combining categories that do not advance. Guideline 6 was met for Categories 1 and 3, however not 3 and 4. Category 3 showed a lack of coherence between measures to ratings where only 37% of participants choice of ratings explained participants’ measure. Category 4 showed 0% coherence, indicating a poor relationship between measures and average expected ratings.

**BPRQ-Beliefs-Culture Scale – Subscale IV**

The Rasch analysis on the 5-item BPRQ-Beliefs-Authoritarian scale indicated the overall item fit met the Rasch model expectations with .00 for infit mean square and 1.06 for an outfit mean square (see Table 4.4) (the individual item infit and outfit statistics can be seen in Table 8). The infit and outfit t values also suggested a good fit with both values being between -1.9 to 1.9. The item iunfit t values were -.10 and the outfit t values were -.20. The item separation reliability indicated a good spread of items with a score of .91. The overall person fit also met the Rasch model expectations with 1.01 for infit mean square and 1.06 for an outfit mean square. The infit t value of -.10 and outfit t value of .00 indicated a well-fitted model. The person reliability estimates of .48 implied that the 68 participants found the five items difficult to answer.

Only Linacre’s (2006) Guidelines #4, and #6 were not met (Table 4.7). Guideline 4 required an outfit mean score less than 2.0, however, Category 1 had an outfit mean square of
2.21, indicating a distorted measurement system containing more misinformation in the observations. Guideline 6 was met for Categories 2, 3, and 4, however not for Category 3. For Category 3, there was little coherence between measures to ratings where only 4% of participants choice of ratings explained participants’ measure, thus indicating a poor relationship between measures and average expected ratings.

Table 4.4
Summary of Rasch item and person estimates for BPRQ-Beliefs-Culture – Subscale IV (N=68)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure summary</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD adjusted)</td>
<td>0.00 (1.45)</td>
<td>2.03 (0.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of estimate</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>0.99 (0.2)</td>
<td>1.01 (0.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit t (SD)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.2)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>1.06 (0.27)</td>
<td>1.06 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit t (SD)</td>
<td>0.2 (1.3)</td>
<td>0.0 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. BPRQ = Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire; SD = standard deviation.

**BPRQ--Practices Scale – Subscale V**

For the 12-item BPRQ-Practices scale the overall item fit met the Rasch model expectations with 0.99 for infit mean square and .98 for an outfit mean square (see Table 4.5) (the individual item infit and outfit statistics can be seen in Table 8). The infit and outfit t values also suggested a good fit with both values being between -1.90 to 1.90. The item infit t values were -0.10 and the outfit t values were 0.00. The item separation reliability indicated a good spread of items with a score of .93. The overall person fit also met the Rasch model expectations with 1.02 for infit mean square and .98 for an outfit mean square. The infit t value of -.10 and outfit t value of -.10 indicated a well-fitted model. The person reliability estimates of .78 implied that the 68 participants found the 12 items quite easy to answer.
While six of Linacre’s (2006) eight Guidelines were met, Guidelines #2 and #6 were not fulfilled (Table 4.7). Guideline 2 was not adhered to as Category 1 and 4 demonstrated highly skewed curves. Guideline 6 was met for Categories 3 and 4, however not for Categories 1 (no coherence at 0%) and 2 (little coherence at 30%) indicating a poor relationship between measures and average expected ratings.

Table 4.5

Summary of Rasch item and person estimates for BPRQ-Practices – Subscale V (N=68)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure summary</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD adjusted)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.92)</td>
<td>2.10 (1.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of estimate</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>0.99 (0.2)</td>
<td>1.02 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit t (SD)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.1)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>0.98 (0.23)</td>
<td>0.98 (0.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit t (SD)</td>
<td>0.0 (1.1)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: BPRQ=Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire; SD=standard deviation.

BPRQ-Relationship Scale – Subscale VI

Overall item fit also met the Rasch model expectations for the 8-item BPRQ-Relationships scale with .98 for infit mean square and 1.00 for an outfit mean square (see Table 4.6) (the individual item infit and outfit statistics can be seen in Table 8). The infit and outfit t values also suggested a good fit with both values being between -1.90 to 1.90. The item infit t values were -.10 and the Outfit t values were .20. The item separation reliability indicated a good spread of items with a score of .87. The overall person fit also meet the Rasch model expectations with .99 for infit mean square and 1.00 for an outfit mean square. The infit and outfit t values of -.10 for both indicated a well-fitted model. The person
reliability estimates of .68 implied that the 68 participants found the items were rather easy to answer.

All guidelines outlined by Linacre (2006) were met, except for Guidelines #1, #2 and #6 (Table 4.7). For Guideline #2 all Categories, except Category 3, presented inconsistencies. Category 1 and 4 were once again highly skewed, presenting with long tails. While Guideline 6 was fulfilled for Categories 3 and 4, it was not met for Categories 1 and 2 with both rating set at 0%. The ratings demonstrated that participants were not inclined to select Category 1 (strongly disagree) or Category 2 (disagree) with statements regarding the relationships between parents and educators.

**Table 4.6**

Summary of Rasch item and person estimates for BPRQ-Relationships – Subscale VI (N=68)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure summary</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD adjusted)</td>
<td>0.00 (1.05)</td>
<td>4.89 (2.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of estimate</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>0.98 (0.22)</td>
<td>0.99 (-0.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infit t (SD)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.0 )</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit mean square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.32)</td>
<td>1.00 (1.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outfit t (SD)</td>
<td>0.2 (0.8)</td>
<td>-0.1 (1.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: BPRQ=Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire; SD=standard deviation.
Table 4.7
Rasch scale category effectiveness for four-point response category in the BPRQ using guidelines set out by Linacre (2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Guideline</th>
<th>B-Atative</th>
<th>B-Atarian</th>
<th>B-Perm</th>
<th>B-Cul</th>
<th>PRAC</th>
<th>RELAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>At least 10 observation of each category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2 = 6 (2%)</td>
<td>Category 1 = 24 (7%)</td>
<td>Category 2 = 109 (32%)</td>
<td>Category 1 = 136 (40%)</td>
<td>Category 1 = 24 (4%)</td>
<td>Category 1 = 11 (1%)</td>
<td>Category 1 = 1 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 3 = 98 (29%)</td>
<td>Category 2 = 109 (32%)</td>
<td>Category 2 = 147 (43%)</td>
<td>Category 2 = 95 (14%)</td>
<td>Category 2 = 86 (11%)</td>
<td>Category 2 = 13 (2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 4 = 236 (69%)</td>
<td>Category 3 = 159 (47%)</td>
<td>Category 3 = 52 (15%)</td>
<td>Category 3 = 236 (35%)</td>
<td>Category 3 = 410 (50%)</td>
<td>Category 3 = 168 (31%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 4 = 48 (14%)</td>
<td>Category 4 = 5 (1%)</td>
<td>Category 4 = 324 (48%)</td>
<td>Category 4 = 307 (38%)</td>
<td>Category 4 = 354 (66%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Regular observation distribution</td>
<td>Observation distribution</td>
<td>Observation distribution</td>
<td>Observation distribution</td>
<td>Observation distribution</td>
<td>Observation distribution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>triangular peaked at Category 4</td>
<td>triangular peaked at Category 3</td>
<td>triangular peaked at Category 2</td>
<td>triangular peaked at Category 4</td>
<td>triangular peaked at Category 3</td>
<td>triangular peaked at Category 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Average measures advance monotonically with category</td>
<td>Category 2 = -1.44</td>
<td>Category 2 = -1.01</td>
<td>Category 2 = -2.71</td>
<td>Category 1 = -0.61</td>
<td>Category 1 = -0.55</td>
<td>Category 1 = -0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 3 = 1.67</td>
<td>Category 3 = 1.24</td>
<td>Category 3 = 0.59</td>
<td>Category 2 = -1.48</td>
<td>Category 2 = -0.39</td>
<td>Category 2 = -0.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 4 = 4.06</td>
<td>Category 4 = 3.76</td>
<td>Category 4 = 0.23</td>
<td>Category 3 = 1.82</td>
<td>Category 3 = 3.11</td>
<td>Category 3 = 2.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Category 4 = 3.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>OUTFIT mean square less than 2.0</td>
<td>Category 2 = 0.83</td>
<td>Category 2 = 0.94</td>
<td>Category 1 = 1.08</td>
<td>Category 1 = 0.98</td>
<td>Category 1 = 0.54</td>
<td>Category 1 = 0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 3 = 0.79</td>
<td>Category 3 = 0.97</td>
<td>Category 2 = 1.05</td>
<td>Category 2 = 1.05</td>
<td>Category 2 = 0.81</td>
<td>Category 2 = 0.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 4 = 1.21</td>
<td>Category 4 = 1.01</td>
<td>Category 3 = 1.07</td>
<td>Category 3 = 1.07</td>
<td>Category 3 = 1.01</td>
<td>Category 3 = 0.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Category 4 = 1.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

80
### 5 Step calibrations advance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>-3.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6 Ratings imply measures, and measures imply ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coherence</th>
<th>M→C</th>
<th>C→M</th>
<th>M→C</th>
<th>C→M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 1</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 2</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 3</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 4</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7 Step and difficulties advance by at least 1.4 logits and by < 5.0 logits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>-3.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8 Note:
BPRQ=Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire; SD=standard deviation; B-Atative=Beliefs-Authoritative; B-Atarian=Beliefs-Authoritarian; B-Perm=Beliefs-Permissive; B-Cul=Beliefs-Culture; PRAC=Practices; RELAT=Relationships.
Categories for all subscales: (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Agree, and (4) Strongly agree
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question number</th>
<th>Beliefs Authoritative</th>
<th>Beliefs Authoritarian</th>
<th>Beliefs Permissive</th>
<th>Beliefs Culture</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs Authoritative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>-2.1</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs Authoritarian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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The aim of this study was to test the measurement properties of the newly developed BPRQ using Rasch analysis. The BPRQ was designed to provide insight into the beliefs and practices of parents and educators regarding the development of children’s social-emotional competence skills and, designed to measure aspects from the complex systems that influence children’s social-emotional development and parent-educator relationships (Bandura, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Dunst, 2002). This is important because to the best of our knowledge, the BPRQ is the first attempt at developing an assessment tool that brings together the influences of parent/educator beliefs, practices and relationships on children’s social-emotional development.

The BPRQ identifies differences or commonalities between parents and educators in developing children’s social-emotional competence skills. As Kane (2016) implies the validation of an instrument would incorporate an assessment of how the instrument measures what it is meant to measure and also requires an investigation into the unintended positive and negative consequences. For the purpose of this study we wanted to investigate how the BPRQ measured the beliefs, practices, and relationships of parents and educators regarding the development of children’s social-emotional competence skills. Through Rasch analysis we were able to begin this investigation.
The Rasch analysis findings suggest the BPRQ demonstrates several elements that work well. The first strength is that all six subscales show an appropriate overall item reliability, and this fits the Rasch modelled expectations. The results suggest that most items are consistently answered. Secondly, the high item reliability suggests that if the same items were given to a different same-size sample of participants that there would consistency across the items, including the items which were difficult or easy (Bond & Fox, 2015).

Despite these strengths, it is important to remember that reliability does not necessarily represent validity. It is expected that when measuring the validity of the BPRQ that there would be several items that were inadequate in their current form. As Bond (2003) discusses it would be naïve of researchers to assume that all items would fit the criterion for measurement. As such, the complexity of combining beliefs, practices and views on relationships presented several challenges. Despite the high item reliability, the inconsistency with person reliability estimates suggest improvements are needed. Subscales I, III, and IV did not meet the Rasch modelled expectations for person reliability suggesting that the parents and educators found the items difficult or ambiguous to answer. Bond and Fox (2015) suggest that when low person reliability exists more investigation is needed as to how the errors can be reduced. On further examination, it was found that category one (strongly disagree) in Subscale I did not meet Linacre’s (2006) first guideline (at least 10 observations of each category) with no participants selecting this answer. Similarly, for Subscale III, category 4 (strongly agree) only had five responses. Because of this, the categories did not advance in the expected steps (Guideline three). Linacre suggests combining categories when they do not advance. To address this issue, we will combine categories one and two (strongly disagree and disagree) on Subscale I, reducing the scale to three categories (disagree, somewhat agree, and strongly agree). In addition, combining categories three and four for
Subscale III (*agree* and *strongly agree*) and reducing the subscale category responses to three (*strongly disagree*, *somewhat disagree*, and *agree*) will address the issue identified.

The low person reliability in Subscale I may be explained by bias. Subscale I consists of items relating to authoritative parenting/educator styles. Items include statements such as ‘I believe that my child’s good behaviour needs to be praised/encouraged frequently’ and ‘I believe that children need to be spoken to calmly when they are misbehaving.’ It is possible that the authoritative parenting/educator styles may be the more desirable or expected adult behaviour when interacting with children and may be affected by a self-preservation bias. Kopcha and Sullivan (2007) suggest there is a tendency for participants completing self-report questionnaires to portray themselves in a positive light to avoid looking less competent. Similarly, Subscale III errors may also be explained by bias. The third subscale focused on permissive parenting/educator styles included questions such ‘I worry if I discipline my child, they may not like me’ and ‘I believe a child should always get what they want’. These responses may also have been influenced by self-preservation. Additionally, guideline 6 was not met for specific categories across all subscales with several categories falling below 40% coherence. Linacre’s (2006) suggestions to combine categories may offer a plausible solution to this bias and to coherence not being met.

Interestingly, the low person reliability in Subscale IV was not explained by non-advancing categories with Linacre’s (2006) Guideline #4 not met. For this guideline, Linacre suggests the outfit mean square needs to be less than 2.0. For category one, the mean square was 2.2. Such a score indicates there is more misinformation than information in the responses to the items. However, in the case of Subscale IV, a high mean-square was more likely to be indicative of parent and educators differing cultural beliefs regarding children’s social-emotional competence as beliefs are influenced by context or culture (de Guzman et al., 2012). With the cultural and contextual experiences of the participants such variance is
expected. In fact, we expected variances in answers as this is precisely what we wished to measure.

Conclusion

The validation of the BPRQ shows the tool it fit for purpose in terms of measuring the beliefs, practices, and relationships of educators and parents participating in the TOGETHER program. However, in terms of demonstrating the BPRQ’s validity ongoing investigations are needed. While the analysis demonstrated the BPRQ fit the Rasch model expectations across all items and most person measures. several improvements are required.

One such improvement is ensuring that future analysis include a much larger pool of participants. As Kane (2016) suggest, validity needs to not only examine how a tool reaches its intended outcomes, but examinations are required about the unintended consequences. The analysis conducted in this study requires improvements before validity can be drawn, including investigating the wider social consequences, both positive and negative. Though the BPRQ was administered to a diverse range of participants, the low number of parents and educators means we need to be cautious in interpreting the results. The number of participants does not allow conclusions on responses from specific cultural backgrounds, despite the wide range of ethnicities represented. It is imperative that further studies are conducted to include more participants from various cultural and contextual backgrounds. As research explores the influence of cultural and contextual influences on parenting and educator practices, it is imperative we have a tool to measure such influences. This study indicates the BPRQ offers promise to identify the cultural and contextual variables of participants so the TOGETHER programme can be adapted to meet their needs. The BPRQ offered additional insights which were not visible through observations, rating scales, interviews and work-shop data used in the larger TOGETHER study. As we move forward,
it is imperative we continue to report on the application of the BPRQ in measuring parent-educator beliefs, practices and relationships as this influences children’s social-emotional development.

References


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doi:10.1080/03004430.2012.759567


doi:10.2146/ajhp070364


Chapter 5
Publication Two: The Feasibility of TOGETHER – A Collaborative Educator–Parent Program for Teaching Social and Emotional Competence in Young Children

The manuscript contained in this chapter, which provides an account of the research that explored the feasibility of the TOGETHER: Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Competence program, was submitted for review in the journal Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. The manuscript has been accepted for publication. This journal is published by Taylor & Francis. It is important to note that this feasibility study is also a report on Case Study 1 – Pilot Study: Tamati and Henry (Chapter 6).

Title: The Feasibility of Together – A Collaborative Educator–Parent Program for Teaching Social and Emotional Competence in Young Children

Authors: Joanna Phillips, Gaye Tyler-Merrick, and Sivanes Phillipson

Abstract
The aim of this study was to explore the feasibility of the TOGETHER: Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Competence program. This program was designed to build a more collaborative relationship between educators and parents so that they could, together, develop children’s social and emotional competence skills by using positive behaviour support strategies in an Australian early years setting. Findings are reported on two educators, two children and their mothers. Data was collected via a questionnaire, rating scale, direct classroom and home observations and educator/parent interviews. The results indicated an increase in educator and parent positive responses to the two young children’s appropriate behaviour and a decrease in their challenging behaviour. The findings also showed inconsistencies between educators in implementing the strategies. Educators and parents developed a more collaborative relationship. Identified barriers families have with accessing this type of program are discussed.

Key words. TOGETHER program, early years, positive behaviour support, educators, parents, children.
Introduction

Children with persistent challenging behaviour are at risk of developing antisocial behaviour. These behaviours reduce the development of their social and emotional skills, decrease academic potential and heighten their vulnerability to exclusion from early years settings through isolation from peers and teachers (Bongers, Koot, van der Ende & Verhulst, 2004; Whitted, 2011). In contrast, children who develop strong social and emotional competencies in the early years are typically more successful in their schooling and in later life as they demonstrate more positive relationships with peers, educators, and family members (Denham et al., 2013). To overcome negative social and emotional outcomes for young children, educators and parents should be equipped with positive behaviour support (PBS) strategies to strengthen children’s social and emotional competencies as these strategies have been shown to be effective in altering the social developmental trajectory of at-risk children (Fox & Hemmeter, 2009).

Positive behaviour support strategies have a solid evidence-base (Hemmeter, Snyder, Fox & Algina, 2016; Hemmeter et al., 2021). The use of behaviour specific praise has been shown to be an important component in increasing children’s social competence, emotional self-regulation, while decreasing the frequency of inappropriate behaviour (Green, Robbins, & Bucholz, 2019; Webster-Stratton, Reid & Stoolmiller, 2001). By placing positive adult attention on positive child behaviour, the potential of a child being motivated to engage in the same behaviour in the future is increased. In educator training Allday, Hinkson-Lee, Hudson, Neilson-Gatti, Kleinke & Russell (2012) investigated the effects of increasing behaviour specific praise (BSP) and the impact this had on behaviour for six children aged 5 to 12 years of age. The results showed that with an increase in educator BSP there was an increase in on-task behaviour in the selected children. The Pyramid Model for Promoting Social-Emotional Competence (Hemmeter et al., 2016), the Incredible Years (IY) programme (Webster-Stratton & Bywater, 2019; Webster-Stratton, Reid & Hammond, 2001) and the Early years settings First Steps to Success (Feil, Walker, Severson, Golly, Seeley & Small, 2009) all produced similar results when they investigated the impact of positive behaviour support (PBS) strategies on educator and child behaviour.

Like educator training, parent training in positive behaviour support strategies has received attention over the past 30 years. The Incredible Years Parent Training (IYPT) teaches parents to guide their children social, emotional and academic skills (Webster-
Stratton, 2000; Webster-Stratton & Bywater, 2019) using PBS strategies. This programme requires parents to attend 12 to 14, 2.5-hour group training sessions. Parents reported the IYPT programme improved their child’s behaviour and they experienced better family relationships (Fergusson, Stanley & Horwood, 2009). Another successful parent programme is the Parent Management Training-Oregon Model (PMTO) (Forgatch & Patterson, 2010; Forgatch, Patterson, & DeGarmo, 2005) which trains parents to use PBS practices. On this programme, parents attend training for appropriately 17 hours. This programme has been successfully implemented in countries such as Norway (Ogden & Hagan, 2008) and Denmark (Scavenius et al., 2020)

Collaboration between educators and parents is a key component for supporting parent training (Hieneman & Fefer, 2017). The IYPT and the PMTO programmes focus on the need for educator/parent consistency and collaboration, however, opportunities for this practical collaboration in application can be limited.

Several programmes embrace the collaborative partnership in the assessment and intervention process. One such collaborative programme is the Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). In CBC, parents are viewed as essential partners in the formation of individualised PBS based programmes (Garbacz et al., 2020). Bellinger, Lee, Jamison and Reese (2016) adopted this model but like the First Steps to Success (preschool edition) programme (Feil. Frey, Walker, Small, Seeley, Golly & Forness, 2014; Feil, Small, Seeley, Walker, Golly, Frey & Forness, 2016), both models trained educators and parents separately, thus lacked the opportunity for explicit, practical educator-parent interaction and considerable time commitments were required from both the educators and parents.

In Australia, the Exploring Together Early Years Settings Programme (ETPP) has produced some promising results for educator and parent partnerships (Reid, Littlefield & Hammond, 2008) but this community-based programme involves separate parent, child and educator training groups and involves a substantial time commitment from both parents with one to two-hour sessions per week over 10 weeks and, educators attending two meetings. There were positive changes in parenting skills and satisfaction and a reduction in parental stress recorded but Reid et al. (2008) acknowledged the educator component may not have been intense enough to allow adjustment in educator behaviour and this may have impacted on child behaviour.
The present study

The above educator-parent collaborative programmes all offer valuable insights that informed the development of the programme used in this current study –TOGETHER: Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills (TOGETHER). The evidence-based principles of PBS (Benedict, Horner & Squire, 2007; Hemmeter, Snyder, Fox & Algina, 2016; Hemmeter et al., 2021; Stormont, Lewis & Beckner, 2005) were used to inform the development of TOGETHER. When developing the programme, two main gaps emerged in the literature. Firstly, there were limited opportunities for practical educator-parent collaboration, and secondly, the time commitment from both educators and parents was substantial for all the established programmes. The issue of time commitment is concerning as parents’ report that ‘time’ is a major challenge as they juggle their everyday commitments (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2016). Therefore, there was a need to develop a collaborative educator-parent training model which reduced the time commitment required to participate but allowed for collaborative relationships to develop. Another reason to train educators and parents together was to encourage a community of support and reduce the stigma of attending such a programme. As suggested by Plath, Crofts and Stuart (2016), stigma can be alleviated when PBS programmes are available to all members of the school community (universal) and accompanied by small group sizes. To address these gaps, the authors developed and then piloted the TOGETHER programme. The programme aimed to train educators and parents together in PBS strategies and increase their collaborative relationships so that they could support each other in the implementation of TOGETHER. In this manner, they could provide consistency in application of the programme for children with challenging behaviour across the early years setting and home environments.

This study addressed the following research questions;

1) How feasible was the TOGETHER model in educator and parent training?

2) What were the effects of the TOGETHER programme on the practices of educators and parents in positive behaviour support?

3) How do children’s prosocial skills change after programme implementation?
Method

Development of the TOGETHER Programme

The TOGETHER programme was drawn from several established programmes such as the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap & Hemmeter, 2010; Hemmeter et al., 2016); Incredible Years Teacher and Parent Programme (Webster-Stratton, 1990; Webster-Stratton & Bywater, 2019; Webster-Stratton, Reid & Hammond, 2001) and the Parent Management Training - Oregon Model (PMTO) (Forgatch and Patterson, 2010). Where TOGETHER differs from these established early intervention programmes is that TOGETHER takes a more individualised, flexible, collaborative and strength-based approach to training both educators and parents together. TOGETHER also focused on the development of a collaborative and trusting relationship between educators and parents so that any different cultural understandings could be identified and explored before they worked together to implement the positive behaviour support strategies of TOGETHER in the early years settings and home.

TOGETHER was delivered at the early years setting over two, 2-hour evening workshops with a one-week break between workshops. The first workshop included (a) exploring and understanding the early years setting’s culture and the cultures of the families, (b) building relationships between educators, parents and children, (c) the benefits and use of praise and, (d) how to be a proactive and use the skills taught. Between workshops, educators and parents were encouraged to implement and practice the learned TOGETHER strategies in the early years setting and home respectively with additional coaching provided via, phone, text or email. Reminder text messages were sent offering assistance if needed. The second workshop included (a) reflection on how effective the previously taught strategies were, (b) developing rules, boundaries, and managing misbehaviour, (c) bringing all the skills learnt together.

Setting, recruitment, and participants

The setting was a small community-based early year setting for children aged three to six years located in a city in Australia. This multi-cultural early years community encompassed families of Australian, New Zealand, Indian, South-east Asian, Middle Eastern, and European descent. The early years setting operated three sessional groups with the
four/five-year-old group participating in this study. Twenty-two children attended this group for two days per week for 7.5 hours per day.

The early years setting expressed interest in being part of the study and consented to participate. Pseudonyms were given for all participants.

*Educator group.* Educator Sue held a bachelor’s degree in primary and early childhood education, had three years early childhood teaching experience and had been employed at the early years setting for one year. Educator Ali held a diploma in early childhood education and had been teaching 16 years at the early years setting. Both educators were Australian born and belonged to the local community.

*Selection of families and children.* The first child’s family had three children all under five years of age and had migrated to Australia five years earlier. Tamati was five years old and was selected by his educators via a two-Step multiple gating procedure utilising an educator nomination form and the Social Development Rating Scale SDRS (Tyler-Merrick, 2014). The use of the two-step multiple gating procedure occurred before baseline observations. The employment of this procedure before baseline was used help identify the learning needs of children with social and emotional needs. The educator nomination form involved each participating teacher/educator nominating up to six children who meet the definition of children with behaviour difficulties. For this study only two children were participating and only Tamati meet the definition. Once Tamati was nominated the SDRS was completed. The SDRS scale consists of 30 items. This Likert scale has 15 questions to rate the level of competence of prosocial behaviour and 15 questions to rate the level of antisocial behaviour on a scale of 150. If a child received a score of less than 113, then a social emotional competence intervention program was recommended. It was found that Tamati scores 113.5. His score was borderline as the cut-off score to identify children with social and emotional difficulties was 113. Because Tamati had difficulty sitting at mat-time and group times and he poked, interrupted and shouted at other children or educators when they were talking, Tamati’s mother consented to participate in the TOGETHER programme. She also consented for home video observations of Tamati and herself because she also struggled with his behaviour at home, namely with compliance to her requests at busy times such as dinner time and getting ready for early years settings. Tamati’s mother provided consent and Tamati provided assent. Tamati’s father did not participate.
The second child’s family had two children under five years of age and were Australian. Henry was four years old and he did not meet the cut-off point on the SDRS as having a behaviour concern, which qualified him as a comparison child. Henry was selected to ascertain if positive attention was given to a typical developing child from the educators during the early years setting observations. His family provided consent and Henry provided assent. However, Henry’s mother was not observed at home. Henry’s father did not participate.

At the initial interview and demographic questionnaire, the participants were asked about their family’s cultural practices and if any of their practices could be incorporated into TOGETHER. Examples of cultural practices which may need to be observed included consideration of providing halal/kosher/vegetarian/vegan food (as food was provided at the workshops) and considerations in how genders may interact with each other. No participants cited any cultural practices which needed to be observed. The participants’ preference for communication was for face-to-face communication except for Educator Sue who requested email or phone only communication. Participant demographics, cultural considerations, group sizes and communication preferences are presented in Table 5.1.

**TOGETHER Workshops**

The TOGETHER programme workshop group was open to all educators and parents at the early years setting. The group included Educators Sue and Ali, Tamati’s mother Kiri, and Henry’s mother Sonja. Two additional educators and three parents also participated but they were not included in this current study.

**Study Design**

The study design was a mixed methods approach utilising single-case AB design (Michiels & Onghena, 2019). The design included one baseline phase (A) and an intervention (treatment) phase (B). In single-case AB phase designs repeated observations of participants occur before and after an intervention. The intervention phase was followed by a post-intervention and a follow-up phase to continue to observe changes associated with the intervention. The design procedure was selected to show if a relationship existed between the educator, parent and child responses as a result of the TOGETHER programme.
Table 5.1
Participant demographics, cultural considerations, group training and communication preferences for all participants

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<td>NA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Henry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NA = not applicable
Five measures were employed in this study:

*Communication styles and demographics (CSD) questionnaire.* This self-developed eight-question CSD questionnaire requested educator and parent demographics and asked if there were any time constraints/barriers in accessing the TOGETHER programme, family cultural needs, workshop time preference and preferred communication style. From this information, the facilitator could adapt TOGETHER to suit the needs of the participants.

*Social Development Rating Scale (SDRS).* This 30-items, 5-point Likert rating scale (total score = 150 indicating a well socialised child) was used to identify a child with behaviour difficulties and the control child. The cut off score was 114 (Church et al., 2006). This screening measure was based on the work of Walker et al. (1994) and had been adapted successfully to New Zealand conditions for this age group (Tyler-Merrick, 2015).

*Early years settings and in-home observations.* Direct observations occurred in the early years setting for Tamati and Henry and in the home for Tamati at baseline, post-intervention and follow-up phases. The direct observations focused on two dependent variables. The first was the educator or parent behaviour in response to either Tamati’s or Henry’s behaviour. The response codes were (a) contingent praise (praise that described the positive behaviour, for example, “You have tried so hard to put on your shoes, great work”), (b) positive praise without description (for example, ‘well done’, or a smile or gesture in response to appropriate behaviour), (c) discouragements (negative responses to a child’s behaviour or using ‘stop’ requests), (d) planned ignoring (intentional ignoring of a behaviour such as a tantrum) and (e) non-contingent responses (recorded when none of the above behaviours were observed in response to child appropriate or inappropriate behaviour). The second dependent variable was the children’s appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Appropriate behaviour was defined as cooperating with an adult or peers, listening and engaging in socially appropriate activities with peers and other adults; inappropriate
behaviour was defined as engaging in disruptive behaviour, non-compliance to adult requests and antisocial behaviour such as hitting or tantrums. The observation codes and recording form was adapted from Phillips, Tyler-Merrick and Church (2014) and can be viewed in Appendix I.

Direct observations occurred at the early years setting during transition, mat-time, eating, and free play periods. Each observation lasted 30 minutes and occurred three times in each phase for both children (a total of 1.5 hours per child per phase). A postgraduate student was trained to assist with these observations. Inter observer agreement was calculated for 33% of pre-school observations across all phases and agreement occurred for 88% of the observations.

In-home observation sessions were recorded via a small video camera. Tamati’s mother operated the camera for three 30-minute periods in each phase (a total of 1.5 hours per phase) during selected family routines where non-compliance was more likely to occur such as bedtime, dinner, playtime or getting up in the morning. The camera was simple to operate and only required the parent to position the camera so that the whole routine could be viewed and heard.

Social Validity Survey. A social validity survey via survey monkey was conducted during the post-intervention phase requesting responses for the programme’s relevance, applicability, knowledge gained and areas for improvement. The survey consisted of seven Likert type questions and three open-ended questions.

Feedback interview. This phone interview occurred two weeks after the final observations and was approximately 20 minutes long and audio recorded. The interview included three open-ended questions on (1) how the educators’ and parents’ beliefs and practices about behaviour may have changed or had not changed due to the TOGETHER programme; (2) if there were changes in the parent-educator relationships; and/or (3) any suggested improvements for the TOGETHER programme.

Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire: A self-developed questionnaire named the Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ) (Phillips, Tyler-Merrick, Phillipson, 2020) was used in the larger TOGETHER project. The BPRQ was
created to understand the change in parent’s and educator’s beliefs regarding children’s social and emotional development (in addition to practices and relationships). However, the focus of this project is on the feasibility of TOGETHER in changing parent and educator practices and relationships, as well as child behaviour. Therefore, the BPRQ has not been included in this report.

**Procedure**

*Phase one, baseline.* Baseline consisted of the CSD questionnaire, the SDRS, the early years settings and home direct observations for three days per week for two weeks. The completion of the CSD and SDRS occurred at the early years setting for the educators one week prior to baseline direct observations occurring. Three, half-hour, observations also occurred in the home setting over a two-week period.

*Phase two, The TOGETHER programme intervention.* TOGETHER was implemented over two, 2-hour workshops held one week apart, from 7.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. at the early years setting.

*Phase three, Post-intervention.* This phase replicated baseline for three days over a period of two weeks. The social validity survey was sent to the participating educators and parents.

*Phase four, follow-up.* The early years settings and in-home observations replicated baseline and post-intervention phases. Educators 1 and 2 completed a second SDRS (Church et al., 2006). A feedback interview invitation was extended to all four participants. This was held by telephone.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis included descriptive statistics for the CSD questionnaire and SDRS (Church et al., 2006). Frequency counts with regression analysis occurred with the direct observations and transferred to SPSS where outliers and normality were conducted (Shapiro-Wilk's test). Regression analysis included paired-samples t-tests that were used to determine whether there was a statistically significant mean difference between baseline and post-intervention response scores given by the three adult participants. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen’s (1988) $d$ where .20 was considered small, .50 medium, and .70 large.
To observe individual behaviour change with Tamati and Henry the frequency scores were converted to line graphs. The graphs were accompanied by effect sizes (SMDall). Effect sizes (SMDall) were calculated individually. SMDall has been shown as an effective method to compliment visual analysis of single-subject case studies (Olive & Smith, 2005) and presented in Table format.

A Likert type scale was used for the social validity survey. The scores for each question were tabulated and compared across participants. The three open-ended questions were analysed via a constant comparative method to categorise and summarise the educators and parent responses (Barbour, 2008). The final interview responses were also analysed using this method with the responses placed into two written categories and tabled.

**Results**

The findings of each measure are presented.

**Social Development Rating Scale**

Tamati’s SDRS mean scores from educators Sue and Ali are presented in Table 5.2. At baseline, out of a possible total score of 150 (indicating a socially well-adjusted child), Tamati scored 113.5 ($n = 2$, $SD = 11.5$) indicating he was just under the cut-off score for his age group. At follow-up, this mean score increased to 122 ($n = 2$, $SD = 6$) nine points above his baseline score.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tamati</td>
<td>113.5</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tamati</td>
<td>113.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual Educator and Parent Behaviour

To report the total number of behavioural responses of Educator Sue, Educator Ali, and Tamati’s Mother when interacting with Tamati were collated and are displayed in Table 5.3. The results indicate that for Educator Sue, the number of times she gave contingent praise and positive praise increased from baseline to post intervention but at follow-up, these responses decreased back to baseline levels. Over the observations, there was a small decrease in the number of discouragements and non-contingent responses.

Conversely, Educator Ali recorded zero contingent praise at baseline, but this increased to 13 responses post-intervention and was maintained at follow-up. Her use of positive praise did not change from baseline to post-intervention but decreased at follow-up to only 2 occurrences. Her discouragements decreased from 13 at baseline to zero at post intervention and follow-up. Likewise, her use of non-contingent responses decreased from 38 at baseline to very low levels at post intervention and follow-up.

Tamati’s Mother increased her contingent praise from a baseline to post intervention, but this decreased at follow-up, nevertheless this was still higher than baseline levels. Her discouragements reduced from 7 at baseline to 1 at post intervention and this was maintained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Post-Intervention</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Number of responses</td>
<td>Total Number of responses</td>
<td>Total Number of responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator Sue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Praise</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Praise</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discouragements</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-contingent response</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator Ali</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Praise</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Praise</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discouragements</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-contingent response</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamati’s Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Praise</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Praise</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discouragements</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-contingent response</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
at follow-up. Her non-contingent responses decreased at post-intervention with an increase at follow-up.

**Individual Child Responses**

*Tamati’s direct observations at early years settings.* Figure 1 illustrates Tamati’s appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in the early years settings across all three phases with Educators Sue and Ali.

The results indicate the effects of TOGETHER were variable for Tamati, but he engaged in more appropriate behaviour than inappropriate behaviour with the exception of period 7 where there was an increase in inappropriate behaviour equal to his appropriate behaviour.

![Figure 1: Tamati's Preschool Observations](image-url)

Figure 1. The number of times Tamati engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviour when interacting with Educator Sue and Educator Ali.
**Henry’s direct observations at early years settings.** Henry was observed in the early years setting only. Figure 2 shows Henry’s appropriate and inappropriate behaviour across all three phases of the programme. Baseline indicates appropriate behaviour steadily increasing to a high of 20 responses at the first observation in the post intervention phase but from observation 5 there was a decline in appropriate behaviour with lower levels recorded at follow-up than at baseline, with a mean of 5 occurrences recorded at follow-up. In contrast, Henry’s inappropriate behaviour across all phases was zero or 1 occurrence per observation.

![Henry: Preschool Observations](image)

Figure 2. The number of times Henry was engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviour when interacting with Educator Sue and Educator Ali.

**Tamati’s direct observations in the home.** In contrast to the early years settings setting, Tamati’s appropriate behaviour indicated a decreasing trend during baseline but this increased during the post intervention phase and stabilised at follow-up with a mean of 16 appropriate responses. Tamati’s inappropriate behaviour was low over all phases and decreased from a mean of 2.67 at baseline to a mean of 0.33 at follow-up. Figure 3 shows the frequency of Tamati’s appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in the home setting.

There was a range of effect size for both children. Table 4 indicates the effect size for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in the early years setting for Tamati and Henry and for Tamati in the home setting. The early years settings observations of Tamati elicited a medium effect size for appropriate behaviour ($d = 0.56$) and large effect size for inappropriate behaviour ($d = 0.97$) but in the home setting, the effect size was large with ($d = 1.72$) and ($d = 2.49$) respectively. For Henry’s appropriate behaviour in the early years setting setting the effect size was large ($d = 1.00$) and small for inappropriate behaviour ($d = 0.34$).
Table 5.4

Effect Size (SMDall) of Tamati and Henry’s appropriate and inappropriate behaviour across the preschool and home settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>SMDall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M(SD)</td>
<td>M(SD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tamati (preschool)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate behaviour</td>
<td>13(5.89)</td>
<td>9.67(2.62)</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate behaviour</td>
<td>11.67(8.22)</td>
<td>3.67(3.30)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tamati (home)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate behaviour</td>
<td>10.67(3.68)</td>
<td>17(6.03)</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate behaviour</td>
<td>2.67(0.94)</td>
<td>0.33(0.47)</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Henry (preschool)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate behaviour</td>
<td>10(2.16)</td>
<td>7.83(5.84)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate behaviour</td>
<td>0.33(0.47)</td>
<td>0.17(0.37)</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. The number of times Tamati engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviour when interacting with mother.
Overall Educator and Parent Responses and Child Behaviour

There were no outliers detected in any of the tests and the assumption of normality was not violated as assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk's test, with the exception of overall appropriate child behaviour. Due to low participant numbers, a paired-sample t-test was conducted potentially skewing the test of normality. Table 5 indicates the paired-sample t-test was non-significant for overall positive responses (combined contingent praise and positive praise), non-contingent responses, discouragements, and overall appropriate child behaviour. However, for overall inappropriate child behaviour, the post-intervention-follow-up observations elicited a decrease of 2.67 (95% CI, 0.87 to 4.46) for the combined behaviour of Tamati and Henry per observation when compared to baseline observations. The decrease in post-intervention-follow-up responses were statistically significant $t(2) = 6.40, p < .02$. Effect size suggested a high practical significance calculated at $d = 1.42$. The effect sizes were also large for overall praise (calculated at $d = 1.68$), non-contingent responses (calculated at $d = 1.42$), and discouragements (calculated at $d = 0.87$). For overall appropriate child behaviour, the effect size was small, calculated at $d = 0.12$.

Table 5.5
Paired-Sample T-test of educator and parent responses to child behaviour and behaviour of Tamati and Henry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk's test of normality</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>$d$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult responses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall positive</td>
<td>0.225</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-contingent</td>
<td>0.988</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discouragements</td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>0.272</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall child behaviour</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate behaviour</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.851</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate behaviour</td>
<td>0.225</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Child behaviour recorded when interacting with an educator or parent.*

Social Validity Survey

Educators Ali and Sue, and Tamati and Henry’s mothers completed the social validity survey. The survey was anonymous, so responses are presented as Adults 1-4 in Tables 5.6 and 5.7 below. All the participants agreed or strongly agreed TOGETHER met their
expectations, they were able to apply the knowledge learned and the strategies were effective in reducing child behaviour problems and they were comfortable using the strategies as they were educator/parent friendly.

To supplement the above questions, the educators and parents also answered three open ended questions which are summarised in Table 5.7. Several suggestions were made for change to TOGETHER such as the need for more ‘real life’ examples from the facilitator as it was suggested that asking participants to provide their own examples could be confronting for some parents. Another suggestion was the inclusion of scheduled one-to-one follow-up meetings to help with the TOGETHER strategies being implemented. When asked what aspects of the training they found useful, they reported that positive praise, particularly specific (contingent) praise was effective, the additional opportunities for educator/parent collaboration was valuable and the strategies to ignore inappropriate behaviour while paying attention to the positive behaviours was most helpful. The educators reported TOGETHER was helpful in increasing positive interactions with children and their families.

Table 5.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educators and Parents Social Validity Survey</th>
<th>Adult 1</th>
<th>Adult 2</th>
<th>Adult 3</th>
<th>Adult 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The training met my expectations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been able to apply the knowledge learned</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The content was organised and easy to follow</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of instruction was good</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will continue to use the strategies taught</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strategies have proven to be an effective and efficient method for reducing behaviour problems</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, I feel comfortable with the strategies and consider them to be parent/educator friendly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Likert scoring 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
Table 5.7
Educators and Parents Social Validity Survey Short Answer Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Adult 1</th>
<th>Adult 2</th>
<th>Adult 3</th>
<th>Adult 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What aspects of the TOGETHER program training could be improved?</td>
<td>Scheduled follow up for teachers.</td>
<td>More &quot;real life&quot; examples</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What aspects of the training the participants had found useful?</td>
<td>Emphasis on specific praise.</td>
<td>Planned ignoring.</td>
<td>The</td>
<td>Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity to collaborate with parents.</td>
<td>Praise others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had training had influenced educator/parenting practice? Please state why or why not?</td>
<td>Consolidated my education and beliefs. Tools are easy and effective to implement.</td>
<td>Sometimes (influenced practice).</td>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>NR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased positive interactions with children.</td>
<td>Children are usually quite well behaved.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased positive interaction with families.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: NR = no response from participant*
Feedback Interview

An interview was conducted post-intervention to allow educators and parents to provide additional feedback if they wished. Educator X and one parent participated. The educator and parent responses indicated they were now more aware of giving more positive responses to children’s appropriate behaviour and they stated that a more collaborative relationship occurred between the educators and parents, due a feeling of ‘openness’. However, their responses highlighted two areas to consider for future implementation of the TOGETHER programme.

1. *One–to-one parent/educator meetings:* The parent indicated a need for one-to-one meetings with the educators so that they could discuss their child’s needs with confidentiality and follow up on child progress.

2. *Impact of time:* Making additional time was an issue for both the educator and parent. The educator reported she found it difficult to collaborate effectively with families as she did not see them (referring to grandparents bringing their grandchildren to early years settings) and a reduced connection with working parents limited the involvement of some families to participate in the TOGETHER programme. The parent said the busyness of family life, working, having a social life meant that she struggled to interact positively with her children and implement the TOGETHER strategies. However, she reported the TOGETHER strategies were simple to use and she found they helped her encourage positive interactions when at home.

Discussion

The overall aim of this study was to test the feasibility of the TOGETHER programme in one early years setting. While this study was small and not generalizable, the findings indicate the TOGETHER programme is feasible as an educator and parent training programme to develop young children’s social emotional competence skills and is worthy of further development. By training educators and parents together and only using two workshops to do this, the TOGETHER programme offers a simple and practical platform to encourage educator and parent collaboration in the teaching of children’s social and emotional competence skills. This also assisted in establishing a small community of support, reduced stigma of attending such programmes and helped parents understand they were not alone in the journey of parenting. These findings support that of Plath et al. (2016) who
suggests PBS programmes which are universal and begin with small group sizes potentially reduce any ‘stigma’ families may feel when attending. The educator and parent participants both reported the TOGETHER strategies were easy and effective to use. Collaboration between educators and families occurred due a feeling of ‘openness’ and this may have contributed to an increase in the consistency of strategies used across both the home and early years settings environments.

The TOGETHER programme led to an increase in positive interactions between educators and children in the early years setting and in Tamati’s home setting. The programme also opened additional conversations between educators and parents after the workshops, leading to more collaborative relationships between educators and parents developing. As suggested by Sheridan and Kratochwill (2007), a strong educator-parent relationship contributes to consistency in teaching social-emotional competence strategies across the home and school settings and impacts on children’s behaviour positively. The consistency in using the TOGETHER strategies may explain the decrease in Tamati’s inappropriate behaviour especially at mat time. This finding concurs with that of Webster-Stratton et al. (2001) where they also found that including influential people in the child’s life (educators and parents) and intervening as early as possible was most effective in increasing appropriate behaviour and improving the educator-child and parent-child relationship.

The above outcomes indicate the TOGETHER programme was feasible. However, there were some aspects which require further development. These include more scheduled follow-ups and one-to-one educator/parent meetings, increasing educator and parent recruitment and more research on the cultural adaptability of the programme.

The findings indicate that more scheduled follow-ups are required so that educators and teachers can have additional coaching outside of the two workshop sessions. Additional coaching may have alleviated Educator Sue’s struggle in adopting the TOGETHER strategies especially for increasing the number of positive interactions she had with children. Feedback from one parent also indicated a need for more one-to-one meetings so that they could discuss their family’s individual needs and in a confidential manner. As part of TOGETHER, additional feedback was provided at the request of each participant and reminders were sent via text offering assistance, but these offers were not taken-up by either the educators or parents at the time. The reasons for this were not clear, however, it may be that most of the participants were confident in the strategies taught or that they were busy and did not have
the time to follow up this request. Future TOGETHER programmes will include one-to-one meetings, follow-up emails, or phone calls to scaffold the skills taught and to provide feedback to help develop the skills taught. Further development will also consider Allday et al. (2012) suggestion of additional performance feedback every three days.

Another aspect which requires further development is how TOGETHER can reach a wider range of educators and parents. Like Plath et al. (2016), this study also found that the timing of the workshops, lack of transport and work commitment determine if a family can participate or not. The TOGETHER programme needs to further explore additional ways in which to include working parents and extended family members especially those from different cultures.

This feasibility study was limited to one early years setting. While the early years setting was ethnically and contextually diverse, the participants belonged to two similar ethnic and contextual groups. As a result, the TOGETHER programme was not explored in terms of addressing ethnic and contextual diversity and as such this aspect of the programme is yet to be investigated. practices in parent–educator training when developing children’s social and emotional skills. It is important to note that when context is referred to in this particular research project, it is not only referring to ethnically and culturally diverse contexts but also contexts which refer to the diversity across generations, beliefs, socioeconomic status, and home and educational settings.

**The effects on educator and parent practice and child behaviour**

Encouragingly, the strategies taught by TOGETHER increased both educator and parent skill in positive behaviour support strategies. Educators and parents both reported during and after the training, the skills taught were effective and easy to use. The increase in the use of contingent praise replicates that of Allday et al. (2012) who also found the consistent use of contingent praise lead to an increase in positive behaviour for children with, or at-risk of emotional and social delays. As a result of TOGETHER, Tamati and Henry both experienced an increase in positive interactions and a decrease in discouragements from Educator Ali. Tamati’s mother also made several changes to the way she interacted with Tamati at home. Firstly, she made a conscious effort to increase her number of positive interactions and decrease her discouragements. She anecdotally reported Tamati would
contingently praise his brothers and when his father joined them, there was a focused effort from him to give contingent praise to Tamati (and other family members). These results are consistent with the findings of Ogden and Hagen (2008) who also found parents in the PMTO programme moved their focus to recognising and acknowledging appropriate behaviour.

These findings indicate the two, 2-hour workshops were enough to effect change for Educator Ali and Tamati’s mother. The format of the workshops provided a platform for the educators and parents to collaborate on the TOGETHER strategies, possibly enhancing their educator-parent relationship.

The TOGETHER programme made little effect on the teaching practices of Educator Sue. Educator Sue’s contingent positive responses were substantially lower than Educator Ali’s, especially at follow-up and her discouragements and non-contingent responses remained higher than Educators Ali’s across post-intervention and follow-up. A possible explanation for this resistance may have been that her engagement and commitment to the programme may not have been as high at Educator Ali. Allowing more opportunities for facilitator performance feedback and educator-to-educator collaboration may have alleviated these differences. Alternative communitive methods could also be explored such as on-going coaching via Zoom. Fox et al. (2010) suggests that for interventions to be successful certain infrastructures need to be in place including ongoing professional development and support for educators and parents.

Limitations

The current study presents several limitations. It must be noted that the first author was previously employed at the early years setting chosen for the study. Although upmost care was taken to ensure the participants did not feel obliged to participate, bias cannot be discounted. Additionally, the behaviour of the educators, parents and children may have changed due to the presence of the first author during the direct observations. It is therefore important that future studies recruit participants from a range of early years settings so to reduce any implications that may arise from the participants knowing the researchers.

The participant sample size was small therefore generalisations cannot be made when interpreting the change in educator, parent, and child behaviour. The small sample size also had an impact on the effect size and statistical analysis. Future studies need to explore how
sample sizes can be increased in a variety of diverse early years settings communities to avoid this issue.

The collection of observational data also needs further investigation for the change in educator responses to be more visible. In this current study, the direct early years setting observations were restricted because the observers followed Tamati and Henry and only included the two educators when they interacted with either child. Thus, the change in the two educators’ responses were only observed when they interacted with either Tamati or Henry. This inconsistency meant it was difficult to obtain a clear picture of the change in educator and child responses. Future early years settings observations should include individual observations of each participating educator and child (not just following the participating children). By adopting this approach, future researchers will have a clearer picture of the behaviour change for educators and children.

To gain a fuller understanding of Henry’s appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, a SDRS should have been undertaken at baseline and post intervention. Likewise, video observations should have also occurred in the home environment for Henry. In this manner, a full picture of Henry’s behaviour could have been reported. In the home setting, this would have provided a deeper understanding of mother and child interactions, thus helping to explain his appropriate and inappropriate responses at home and at the early years setting.

Finally, there was little variance in educator or parent demographics, therefore, future studies should explore the adaptability of the TOGETHER programme to other culturally diverse communities.

Conclusions

The TOGETHER programme adds to a small body of literature in which educators and parents work together to develop young children’s social and emotional competence skills. Of importance, this small feasibility study offers promising results in how to deliver a collaborative programme focused on TOGETHER strategies where educators and parents learn via two workshops and then consistently deliver TOGETHER strategies in the early years setting and home settings to reduce a child’s challenging behaviour. As a result, there was in a positive change in one educator and one parent in consistently delivering the TOGETHER strategies.
There are gaps in TOGETHER which need to be further developed. The challenge is now to address these gaps and then further investigate how TOGETHER can attract more educators and parents from different cultural communities to a programme such as this. Further investigations are also required in how TOGETHER can provide additional individualised support to assist educators and parents to further develop and support young children’s social and emotional competence skills.

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Chapter 6

Results of Case Study 1 – Pilot Study: Tamati and Henry

Tamati arrives at preschool with an eager smile and gives his educator, Ali, a huge high five. He bounds into the cloakroom and hangs up his bag, then rushes over to the blocks, giving his mum, Kiri, a huge hug and kiss to say goodbye on the way past. He then settles into creating his new block masterpiece. For 30 minutes, he is in his own world as he carefully places each block on top of the other and creates little “hidey holes” for his cars ... that is, until another child comes along and accidently knocks over a block. Tamati looks up in shock, then his face becomes angry ... he stands up ... then uses both his hands to push the other child over. The other child starts to cry and then Tamati follows suit. The peaceful play experience has now turned into a loud flurry of emotions. His other educator, Sue, walks over to assist both children, but the crying continues and she struggles to understand why. In fact, she has been struggling to understand why Tamati reacts the way he does most days.

In Case Study 1, the pilot study of TOGETHER with the two boys, Tamati and Henry, is presented. This pilot study tested how feasible the program was in a typical preschool setting in Melbourne, Australia. This case study demonstrates how a positive behaviour guidance program, such as TOGETHER, can improve children’s social and emotional skills. It also provided insights into the effects the program had on both parenting skills and educators’ behaviour guidance practices and helped the parents, teachers, and educators understand why children react and behave in certain ways.

This is the journey of one early childhood teacher and one educator as they worked with two children and their families to help them develop the children’s social and emotional skills. The case study highlights the skills the parents, teachers, and educators learnt from the TOGETHER training, address the challenges they faced, and show how the practices they acquired guided the children in ways that were more positive.

The Preschool Setting for Case Study 1

The setting for the first case study was a small community-based preschool for children aged three to six years located in Melbourne, Australia. It is focused on one classroom from the preschool. In this classroom, at the time of the program, 22 children were attending the preschool for two days for a period of 7.5 hours per day (a total 15 hours). The multicultural
preschool community consisted of families from Australian, New Zealand, Indian, South-East Asian, Middle Eastern, and European backgrounds. From the self-developed CSB questionnaire and interviews (completed before the workshops commenced), the details of the participating children, their families, and the educators were identified and then use this information to adapt the delivery of the TOGETHER research project specifically for them. The participating children, Tamati and Henry, along with their families, teachers, and educators, are introduced below.

The Children and their Families

Tamati

The focus child, Tamati, was five at the time of the study. He lived with his mum, Kiri, his dad, Nikau, and his two younger brothers, Iliaka and Ari. The family arrived from New Zealand five years earlier and identify as New Zealand Māori. Tamati is a very curious child who has a love for everything mechanical. He enjoys playing with train sets, building intricate constructions, and exploring space-related concepts. He also loves riding bicycles, where he takes risks by performing balancing movements accompanied by extra little tricks as well as reading with his mum and brothers. As an older brother, Tamati shows just how wonderfully caring he can be towards Iliaka and Ari. However, there are times when Tamati struggles with his social and emotional skills.

At preschool, he was finding it difficult to share with others. If others tried to come and play in the same area at preschool, Tamati would often become irritated and, at times, aggressive, where he would push or hit other children. He was also finding it difficult to engage in reciprocal conversations with his peers and struggled to accept other children’s perspectives. In contrast, however, he would relish delving deep into conversations with adults on topics that were of interest to him. He didn’t participate well in group times unless, of course, they related to his own individual interests. Often at group times he would be restless and deliberately poke others, interrupt other children when they were sharing their ideas by yelling or screaming, or walk away within one or two minutes of the group time commencing and refuse to come back.

At home, Tamati struggled to follow simple instructions from his mum, Kiri, such as getting dressed. He needed constant reminding of the tasks he needed to do and at times he would become very frustrated with the morning routines by screaming, crying, or throwing
himself on the floor. He would often become upset if one of his younger brothers interrupted his play and would hold his hand out towards them to indicate that he did not want them to approach him. He also found it difficult to express himself and communicate what he needed, often resorting to screaming.

**Tamati’s Mum, Kiri**

During the week Kiri would stay at home to look after her three sons while Tamati’s dad, Nikau, went to work. She has limited support from her extended family as they all live in New Zealand. However, the connection they have with their local church offers some support. She values the time her family spends together. She feels it is important to gather together each evening around the dinner table and spend time talking about their day. One practice they have as a family is choosing a book to read together at the dinner table – she feels that building a love for literacy at an early age is important. The family also has strong religious beliefs, which play a significant role in how they build relationships as a family. They spend time praying together and sharing what they value. Both Kiri and Nikau are very involved in the preschool community, with Nikau often offering his time at the weekend to participate in working bees at the preschool.

During the preliminary interviews, it became apparent that the morning routines were very stressful for Kiri when she was trying to get all her three sons ready for the day as well as cope with Tamati’s emotional and social needs. She valued the importance of having Tamati at preschool on time; however, there were some days when getting out the front door was a huge struggle. As previously mentioned in the description of Tamati, there were times when he would become very frustrated with the morning routines and would consequently scream, cry, or throw himself on the floor. Kiri had also become concerned about Tamati’s speech and his ability to communicate his frustrations. His behaviours were impacting on her ability to get all the three boys ready for the day.

**Henry**

For this research it was important represent children who had a variety of social and emotional needs to see if the educators would apply the same principles learnt in TOGETHER for all children, not just the focus child (Tamati). Therefore, Henry was also included for preschool observations. Henry was also five years old at the time of the study. He lives with his mum, Sonja, his dad, Tim, and his three-year-old sister, Lucy. Like Tamati,
Henry has a deep interest in space-related subjects and putting together block structures. He also enjoys painting and activities that involve intricate crafts. He loves engaging in socio-dramatic play in the home corner and the cubby house.

Henry presented with more developed social and emotional skills than Tamati. At the preschool, he would watch other children play and carefully gauge their playing to ensure he would feel comfortable before joining them. As soon as he joined in with the group play, he would become confident in contributing his own ideas and would be happy to listen to the ideas his playmates had. He would eagerly share with his peers and would always be excited to be part of the preschool’s group times. At home, Sonja found him to be an easy child to manage throughout the day (yet she struggled with his younger sister, Lucy). Henry would follow Sonja’s instructions at home and would always be keen to assist her in simple daily chores. She also mentioned that he was an extremely caring brother to his sister and was very tolerant of her when she tried to take away toys from him.

**Henry’s Mum, Sonja**

Sonja would also spend several days at home during the week with her children while Tim was away working. On two days of the week when she was working as a music teacher, Henry and Lucy would be looked after by their grandparents. Sonja reported that the time her children would spend with their extended family was very important to her as well as for Henry’s and Lucy’s development. She loved the idea that Henry and Lucy could get to know their grandparents more while she was working. Sonja’s and Tim’s love for music also played a big part in the family culture – they would use music to connect with each other and she had begun to teach Henry how to play the violin. Like Kiri and Nikau, Sonja and Tim would eagerly offer their assistance to the preschool community, especially with working bees and fundraisers.

While Sonja reported that at home Henry was quite a placid and helpful child, she did struggle with Lucy. She hoped that the TOGETHER training would assist her with developing ways to help Henry and Lucy get along together.

**Tamati’s and Henry’s Educators, Ali and Sue**

Tamati and Henry had two educators, Ali and Sue. Sue has a bachelor’s degree in primary and early childhood education, and at the time of this research study had had three years early childhood teaching experience. Also at this time, she had been employed at the participating
preschool for one year. Ali has a diploma in early childhood education and had been teaching for 16 years at the participating preschool. Both educators are Australian born and had grown up in the local community. Both reported that they struggled with guiding children’s difficult behaviour. Sue also reported that she struggled with forming effective relationships with the families at the preschool. In particular, she had a preference for speaking to the parents either over the phone or via email because face-to-face interactions would make her feel anxious:

Sometimes I lack confidence in approaching families around various issues with their child because I don’t feel confident in my knowledge of child development, feel I lack experience and don’t have good strategies to offer parents. I also feel worried about being culturally inclusive.

Due to Sue’s lack of confidence, additional coaching sessions on the content of the TOGETHER training were offered to her. This additional coaching was intended to reduce the concern she had about the potential face-to-face group work during the actual TOGETHER sessions. Interestingly, it was found that in this study face-to-face meetings were the preferred means of the parents to learn about their children’s activities at the preschool. Hence, it was important that both educators, especially Sue, were equipped with skills on relationship building that they could use during the TOGETHER training with parents.

What Was Learnt About the Children, Their Parents, and the Educators Before the TOGETHER Training?

In detailing Tamati’s and Henry’s background, it was highlighted how their behaviour was manifesting, as well as the practices and beliefs around behaviour guidance, before the TOGETHER training occurred for their parents and Ali and Sue. In using the measures mentioned in Chapter 3, the patterns in the behaviour, beliefs, and practices of each of the participants were discovered.
What Was Learnt About Tamati’s and Henry’s Social and Emotional Development Before the Training?

**Tamati.** Tamati was chosen as the focus child due to some concerns raised by Ali and Sue via the Social Development Rating Scale (SDRS; Tyler-Merrick, 2014). Their concerns included Tamati’s struggle to participate in group activities with his peers, his difficulty in taking turns and following Ali’s or Sue’s instructions, his attempts to get his own way by throwing tantrums, his hurting of other children when they interrupted his play, his disruption of the play of his peers, his struggle to acknowledge peers during conversations, and his predilection for continuing to talk when others had indicated they wanted to say something.

The classroom observations also confirmed that Tamati was struggling with some social and emotional behaviours. For example, as highlighted in the introduction to this chapter, there were moments when Tamati was unable to express his frustrations after another child had disrupted his work. There were also occasions when he struggled to be part of the group: it was noted that at mat times he would often crawl between the other children who were trying to listen to Sue or would poke those beside him. When asked to be part of a group activity, he would often get up and walk away after a minute or so and would prefer to play on his own. Often Ali was observed redirecting his play to avoid conflicts with other children, or bringing him back to mat times when he had been struggling to join in.

At home the observations confirmed Kiri’s concerns: Tamati was struggling with following simple instructions from his mum, and when he was frustrated with not being understood, he would scream loudly or simply walk away. He would resist others by extending his arm out towards them with his hand raised and would then become upset.

**Henry.** Ali and Sue said they had no social or emotional concerns for Henry. In fact, they reported he would happily follow directions, participate and listen at group times, was able to take turns, offered toys to other children, and calmly played around others. Interestingly, though, the classroom observations revealed that while Henry was very compliant with Ali’s or Sue’s instructions and was tolerant of other children, he did struggle to engage with his peers throughout the day.

He would often follow Ali and Sue around the classroom to show them his creations; however, there was minimal response from his educators to his positive behaviours. He also had a tendency to watch what other children were doing from the sidelines and was uncertain how to approach them when they were engaged in group play. Henry was considered to be a
“well-behaved” child. However, as evident from the classroom observations, this may have also meant that he was receiving little to no positive feedback for his appropriate behaviours. In addition, as Ali and Sue held no concerns for his social development, it could also be construed that some of the social delays Henry had been displaying were largely being ignored.

As seen from the reported and observed behaviours of Tamati and Henry, both parents and educators had a role to play in each child’s behaviour. Therefore, this case study continues by explaining the beliefs and practices of Kiri, Sonja, Ali, and Sue in relation to guiding children’s behaviour and social and emotional development. Their perceptions regarding the parent–educator relationship is also explored.

As expected, the parents, Kiri and Sonja, and the educators, Ali and Sue, all had varying beliefs and practices in relation to building children’s social and emotional skills and guiding their behaviour. From the Beliefs, Practices, Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ; Phillips et al., 2020a), interviews, classroom observations (of Tamati, Henry, Ali, and Sue), and home observations (of Tamati and Kiri), the patterns of behaviour and how these related to the beliefs of the parents and educators were able to be discerned.

What Was Learnt About the Beliefs and Practices of Kiri, Sonja, Ali, and Sue?

It was found that there were several key areas of behaviour where the parents and the educators had different viewpoints prior to the TOGETHER training. For example, not everyone agreed that children’s behaviour needed to be praised or encouraged frequently. For example, Kiri was uncertain about this statement and felt that too much praise could be problematic for children’s learning and development. When asked to reflect on her practice, she recognised that she would give more attention to Tamati’s inappropriate behaviour rather than to his appropriate behaviour. She also reported that she would not return her attention to Tamati’s appropriate behaviour after she had to redirect him. In addition, Kiri said that she would not share with others when Tamati had done something well and did not have a clear set of rules where she involved Tamati in producing them.

Kiri’s beliefs and reported practices were also reflected in the in-home observations, where the only positive feedback she would give was with a few statements such as “good boy”. She would offer very limited positive feedback in the way of descriptive praise or encouragement. Tamati would also receive more discouragements from his mother as a way
of directing his behaviour, and Kiri would often give directions without inviting any feedback from him.

On the contrary, Ali and Sue did report that they agreed that children’s behaviour needed to be praised or encouraged frequently. They also reported that within their own practices, they would give more attention to appropriate behaviour rather than to inappropriate behaviour; they would return their attention to appropriate behaviour after redirection; they would share the child’s appropriate behaviour with others; and they had a clear set of rules or guidelines for the children. However, the in-class observations contradicted their beliefs and reported practices. Both Ali and Sue gave very limited positive attention to either Tamati or Henry during the observations. In fact, they actually provided less positive interaction than Kiri (who recognised she gave limited positive interactions to Tamati). Ali gave a noticeably higher number of discouragements and there were a high number of instances where Ali or Sue would give directions to the children without inviting any feedback from them.

Henry’s mum, Sonja, while not observed at home, did report practices that were more aligned with the educators. However, both Sonja’s and Kiri’s beliefs were more aligned with authoritarian parenting styles. They both believed that their sons should always do what they say. They felt that children should be told when they had not met their parents’ expectations and that there would be times when they needed to use an angry voice. Sue disagreed with all of these statements, and while Ali also disagreed, she did feel there were times when she needed to use an angry voice.

When asked about their perspectives on their child’s role in the classroom, Kiri and Sonja had several views, which contradicted Ali’s and Sue’s. Both parents felt that children needed to work hard in school to achieve success, while the educators disagreed. Both parents felt that eye contact was important in communicating while the educators did not, and there was some disagreement on who had the primary responsibility for raising a child, with the parents believing it was more their role, while Ali and Sue saw raising children as a partnership between parents and educators.

What Was Learnt About the Parent–Educator Relationships?

On a positive note, both Kiri and Sonja selected either the agreed or strongly agreed option in the Beliefs, Practices, Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ; Phillips et al., 2020a) for the question of whether they believed they had good-quality parent–educator relationships. They
also reported that they strongly agreed that the educators valued the strengths of their child and their family; that they were responsive to their needs; and that they were viewed as partners in their child’s development.

Interestingly, Sonja strongly agreed on all aspects of the parent–educator relationship, whereas Kiri felt that there was some room for improvement in that relationship. She also felt that the communication with Ali and Sue could be improved, as could their responsiveness to Tamati and his family’s needs, and the valuing of his strengths. While Kiri felt that Ali and Sue considered her a partner in Tamati’s development, she indicated that more could be done to strengthen this partnership. Both Ali and Sue reflected that while they agreed they had clear communication with the families, were responsive to the children and their parents, valued the strengths and cultures of the families, and viewed the families as partners, there was also a need to deepen the parent–educator relationship on all levels.

**The Responsive Approach to Being TOGETHER**

As previously indicated, information was gathered on the beliefs and practices of the parents and Ali and Sue and provided an understanding of the relationship between them. However, information was still needed on how they liked to interact with each other. One of the main principles of the TOGETHER program is to ensure that all parents and educators feel comfortable in the training environment. Therefore, through the CSD questionnaire information was gathered regarding the way they would like to interact and communicate, and the venue and times that would best suit them for the training.

Tamati’s and Henry’s parents and educators had a preference to work in small groups and communicate face to face in more personal settings. Both the parents and educators desired the training to take place over dinner as indicated by these comments: “*Would love a kid-free night where I don’t have to cook … At the end of a long day at work it would be great to have some dinner ready and share with our families.*” It is a fundamental component of TOGETHER that facilitators understand the communication styles and preferences of the participants to ensure that the parents and educators have been brought together in a way that is contextually responsive.

After consultation via the CSD questionnaire with Tamati’s and Henry’s parents and educators, the TOGETHER sessions were held at the preschool on two Monday evenings, one week apart. Working with Sue and Ali, a warm and welcoming environment was set up before the arrival of the parents. The arrangement included the placement of chairs in small
circles, extra cushions, and a coffee table laden with food. Both Sue and Ali prepared one of their favourite dinner dishes, and though both Tamati’s and Henry’s parents weren’t asked to bring any food, they still brought some. Ali said that the act of sharing food was often a way that they would come together and celebrate as a community; therefore, sharing a meal with each other added a welcoming element to the TOGETHER nights.

As the parents arrived, there was a warm flurry of conversation and laughter between the parents and educators. They appeared at ease, with open body language and a willingness to engage with each other. By developing an understanding of the contextual elements of the parents and educators in this small preschool community, the facilitator was able to adapt the delivery of TOGETHER to suit the communication and contextual needs of Tamati’s and Henry’s parents as well as Sue and Ali.

What Happened During the TOGETHER Training?

The principles of the TOGETHER program (see Figure 2.2 on page 31) in this preschool setting aimed to assist parents and educators to build their understanding of each other’s context. Opportunities were initiated at the commencement of the training for both Tamati’s and Henry’s parents and Ali and Sue to develop an understanding of each other’s practices and beliefs (including their beliefs related to guiding children’s behaviour). For example, small group discussions were used for the parents and Ali and Sue to freely discuss how they built relationships with their child/children. They were also provided with strategies in building these relationships. Some examples of the strategies included take time each day to spend some quality one on one time with each child, know what interests the child has and use this to make connections, spending time at the child’s level, and enjoy playing together. The group discussions also allowed the parents and Ali and Sue to discuss cultural practices which were important to them and come up with ways these could be acknowledged. They were then given additional strategies to develop collaborative relationships for the benefit of children’s social and emotional development. For example, as a group they were asked to come up with some ways that they could celebrate the cultures of their community to help develop positive relationships between children, parents, teachers, and educators. The objective of the training in each of the sessions was for the parents and educators to exchange ideas in small group discussions in order to appreciate ways in which they could develop stronger relationships with the children and with each other.
As the training progressed, and the parents and educators shared their ideas, it was interesting to observe the point when the parents and educators realised that they had varying ideas on how they developed relationships. In sharing their ideas, the educators particularly were able to come up with new ways to build relationships with both Tamati and Henry in the settings of the preschool and learnt how to adjust their practices according to each child’s needs. For example, both Sue and Ali were surprised to discover that Tamati’s family bonded over books and that the family placed much importance on their faith. They also discovered the role music played in Henry’s home life and how it provided an opportunity for connection between his mother and him. The discussions resulted in the educators commenting on how such information was vital to understanding the behaviours of each child. The information was also important in understanding the context of each family, which then assisted in the development of individual positive behaviour guidance plans. To enhance these plans, it was also helpful to note how positive praise and encouragement could be adapted to develop a child’s understanding of social expectations that could help both Tamati and Henry develop useful emotional regulation.

Once the parents and educators had got to know each other better, the focus of the training focused on ways they could develop a child’s social and emotional skills using positive praise and encouragement. The TOGETHER principles that were applied during this session included celebrating the positive interests/cultural practices that the children and their families connected with, and then using the parents’ and educators’ new-found understanding of each other to build positive relationships with the children. In brief, the focus was to increase the number of instances when a parent or educator would provide positive praise and encouragement to assist children in understanding the social expectations of them. Both the parents and educators were then given the “homework task” of documenting how many times they gave positive attention and negative attention, with the aim to have at least five positives for every negative. Both Tamati’s and Henry’s parents as well as the educators, Sue and Ali, developed their own reminder tools, such as marking their hands with every positive interaction or transferring pebbles from one pocket to another each time they provided praise. They were asked to report on this in the next session.

On the second training night (after a week), the parents and educators reflected on how they had progressed in providing positive feedback to the children. In those reflections, they were asked to think about whether their feedback had had any impact on the children’s behaviour. Ali reported that she had noticed the children had also been starting to praise and
encourage each other more so than before. Much to her delight, Ali added how the children had started to praise her as well. She also mentioned that the overall classroom climate was more positive than usual and that she was pleased about that.

Not surprisingly, both Kiri and Sonja reported that it was often a struggle to remember to provide praise and encouragement to their sons, and at times it felt like they were forcing the positive feedback; however, they were beginning to see the “ripple effect” it was having on the siblings as well as on Tamati and Henry. They mentioned that the children enjoyed receiving recognition for when they did things well, and it was exciting to see the pride on their faces when the encouragement was given.

However, the parents and educators also reported on the difficult behaviours and associated challenges they were experiencing at home and at preschool. This second-night reflection provided an ideal opportunity to present to the participants examples of lived experiences that would explain the concepts of functional behaviour analysis and the importance of recognising the reasons that underpinned the behaviours. As the challenges were discussed, each parent agreed that they often experienced similar challenges, which led to the group developing a shared bond over such challenges. These sharing moments potentially reduced any stigma a parent might have been feeling in experiencing the challenges of coping with their children’s behaviour.

One common recurring challenge for both Tamati’s and Henry’s parents and educators especially was the expectations relating to turn-taking. The children sometimes did not understand that if they did not take turns, they could potentially hurt each other. As the parents and educators worked together, they identified the behaviours they wanted Tamati and Henry to display. They progressed to discussing the possible reasons for each behaviour that they felt was inappropriate and devised together a number of proactive strategies as part of a positive behaviour plan that they could then use to encourage appropriate behaviours.

Sue identified the need to also have more private one-to-one parent–educator consultations after the training. Therefore, additional meetings were scheduled by both educators with each family to have a confidential but collaborative planning session. The facilitator provided additional coaching and words of encouragement via text or phone calls for the parents and educators. Interestingly, it was the educators that the parents approached for additional coaching rather than the facilitator. This turn of events demonstrated that both the parents and educators had developed a trust in each other to be partners in the children’s social and emotional development.
What Happened After the TOGETHER Training?

It has been one month since the last observation of Tamati. He is back in the preschool with the building blocks again. He sees another child has built a tall tower and walks over to it, says how big it is, and then asks if he can knock it over. Ali quickly intervenes to help Tamati understand the importance of being respectful of others’ work and suggests he build a tower of his own. Tamati listens and begins to build a tower next to the other child’s. He is being careful of the other child’s tower by moving very slowly every time he passes the tower. “You’re being so caring about your friend’s tower – great work,” says Ali. Tamati smiles and continues to go back to his tower building. As the building progresses, Ali continues to give Tamati descriptive praise about how careful and respectful he is being. Suddenly, it is completed and Tamati stands back with his hands in the air. Ali looks over. “Wow! Nice job on building the tower. You have made it so big,” she says. Other children come over and give Tamati the same feedback, impressed by his creation. Tamati smiles with pride and proceeds to tell his peers about his new creation.

After the TOGETHER training had been completed, it was observed that there had been a shift in Tamati’s and Henry’s behaviour, a shift in the beliefs and practices of the educators and parents, and a deepening of the parent–educator relationship. Again, by using the measures mentioned in Chapter 3, these changes were observed.

What Was Learnt About Tamati’s and Henry’s Social and Emotional Development After the TOGETHER Training?

Tamati. Both the Social Development Rating Scale (SDRS; Tyler-Merrick, 2014) reports from the educators, Ali and Sue, and the in-home and classroom observations indicated that Tamati’s social and emotional skills had improved. They both identified that after the training had been completed, Tamati would follow their instructions more consistently and would join in more regularly with adult-directed activities.

He joined in with the more group-based activities, and he was interacting with other children more appropriately. When he became angry or frustrated, he was able to regulate his emotions and verbalise how he was feeling. He was also more willing to share with his peers and, in turn, was forming new friendships.
Tamati’s behaviour change was also evident from the in-home observations (see Figure 6.1). In the weeks following the TOGETHER training, the number of appropriate behaviours steadily increased, and his inappropriate behaviours decreased. In the follow-up observations, which occurred six weeks after the training, Tamati’s appropriate behaviours did decrease; however, the promising outcome was that his appropriate behaviours remained well above the number recorded before the training, and his inappropriate behaviour remained quite low. The classroom observations indicated that the improvement in Tamati’s classroom behaviours was not as visible when he was interacting with Sue; however, when he was interacting with Ali, his behaviours were much more positive.

**Figure 6.1**

*The Number of Times Tamati Engaged in Appropriate or Inappropriate Behaviour When Interacting With His Mother*
Henry. As previously mentioned, Henry was chosen to be part of this case study to see how Ali and Sue would interact with other children if they had not been identified as having behavioural needs. When Henry interacted with Ali, there was a noticeable increase in his appropriate behaviours. However, after the TOGETHER training had been completed, there were many instances when his appropriate behaviour was not acknowledged by Sue, and he would often experience long periods where no feedback would be given.

What Was Learnt About the Beliefs and Practices of Kiri, Sonja, Ali, and Sue After the TOGETHER Training?

After the TOGETHER training had been completed, there had been a noticeable shift in the beliefs of the parents, Kiri and Sonja, and the educators, Ali and Sue. The responses provided in the Beliefs, Practices, Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ; Phillips et al., 2020a) indicated a consistency that was emerging between all the participants. The responses from the mothers and Ali and Sue also indicated that they had taken on concepts from the TOGETHER program. Such concepts related directly to positive behaviour guidance strategies used to assist in the development of children’s social and emotional skills. For example, after the training, they all reported that they believed that the children’s behaviour needed to be praised or encouraged more frequently.

When it came to the positive behaviour guidance practices, a promising change had occurred with both the parents and educators – their responses had become more aligned. For example, everyone felt they could now give more attention to appropriate behaviour rather than inappropriate behaviour; they could let children know when they were doing great work; and that they could share how happy they felt when children were doing things well. There was also an acknowledgment of the importance of recognising children’s appropriate behaviour after they had calmed down from being redirected due to inappropriate behaviour. The shift in the reported practices had also been noticed in the actual observed practices of Kiri and Ali, with both increasing the number of descriptive praise statements they made when they interacted with Tamati; however, the observed practices of Sue demonstrated that there had been little change.

Another change was that after the training had been completed, there had been a small shift by Kiri and Sonja to beliefs that were more reflective of a non-authoritarian style, such as using a calm voice when directing child behaviour. A greater understanding had also developed regarding the differences between bribes and rewards, with all agreeing that bribes were not helpful in directing behaviour. Another outcome was that Kiri, Sonja, Ali, and Sue
had worked together on a set of guidelines for the children to follow and included the children in developing these guidelines. These practices had contributed to the improved consistency between home and preschool and, in turn, had deepened the parent–educator partnership.

Interestingly, Kiri’s and Sonja’s perspectives on their children’s role in the classroom had not changed much after the training; however, their beliefs that related to the role of the parent, such as parents taking the main responsibility for raising a child, had changed slightly. While Kiri and Sonja still agreed with this statement, it had moved from strongly agree to agree, which indicated that there had been a shift in how the participants now viewed the parent–educator partnership.

**What Was Learnt About the Parent–Educator Relationship After the TOGETHER Training?**

While both parents and educators either agreed or strongly agreed that they had good-quality parent–educator relationships prior to training, there had been a shift from agree to strongly agree in several areas. Such results indicated that by undertaking the TOGETHER training program, the parent–educator partnership had been strengthened. Both Kiri and Sonja reported that they strongly agreed with the statements that the educators valued the strengths of the child and their family, that they were responsive to their needs, and that the educators were viewed as partners in their child’s development. Also, remember at the beginning of this chapter that Sue was concerned about her abilities in communicating with parents – well, after the training she reported that she felt more confident and clearer in her communication with the parents. Both her and Ali also reported that they placed more value on the strengths of the families.

**Kiri’s, Sonja’s, Ali’s, and Sue’s Views on the TOGETHER Program**

While the above data reported on the changes that had occurred as a result of the TOGETHER training, it is also important to understand how the participants felt about the effectiveness of the program to ensure it was relevant to their needs. Consequently, all of the four adult participants (Kiri, Sonja, Ali and Sue) completed an anonymous social validity survey. The survey responses indicated that the training had met their expectations, that they were able to apply the knowledge they had learnt, and that the content was easy to follow. They also reported that they would continue to use the strategies they had learnt given that
the strategies had proven to be an effective and efficient method for reducing behaviour problems.

When asked what could be improved, the participants’ responses included:

- Scheduled follow-up for teachers
- More real-life examples

When asked what aspects of the training the participants had found useful, their responses included:

- Emphasis on specific praise
- The opportunity to collaborate with parents
- Planned ignoring and praising others
- The strategies

When asked if the training had influenced educator/parenting practices, the participants’ responses included:

- It (TOGETHER) consolidated my education and beliefs. Tools were easy and effective to implement. Increased positive interactions with children. Increased positive interaction with families
- Sometimes (influenced practice). Children are usually quite well behaved

The short responses indicated that the participating adults had made several suggestions for modifying the TOGETHER program. They recommended that the facilitator provide more “real life” examples because asking participants to provide examples could be too confronting for some of them. Another suggestion was the inclusion of a one-to-one follow-up session to discuss the behaviour plans or strategies that were being implemented. When asked what aspects of the training they found useful, the participants reported that positive praise, particularly specific (contingent) praise, was effective; the additional opportunities for parent–educator collaboration was valuable; and the provision of strategies to ignore inappropriate behaviours while paying attention to the positive behaviours was effective. The training was also considered to be effective in increasing positive interactions between the educators and the children and the children’s parents.

An optional post-intervention interview was offered to enable educators and parents to provide additional feedback if they wished to do so. Both Ali and Sonja took up the offer.
Both their responses to the interview questions indicated that they had become more aware of the need to provide positive responses to children’s appropriate behaviours and they stated that more collaboration had occurred between the educators and parents due a feeling of “openness”. However, their responses highlighted two key areas to consider for future implementation of the TOGETHER program: one-to-one parent–educator meetings and the impact of time.

**One-to-One Parent–Educator Meetings.** Sonja indicated a need for additional one-to-one meetings with the educators so that the two of them could discuss the child’s needs with confidentiality and follow up on the child’s progress. **Impact of Time.** Making additional time was an issue for both Ali and Sonja. Ali reported that she found it difficult to collaborate effectively with families as it was hard with some of her families when she did not see them (referring to grandparents rather than parents bringing children to the preschool). She also mentioned that time and communication barriers, such as reduced connection with working parents, limited the involvement of some families to attend the TOGETHER program. Sonja expressed concern at the amount of time required to implement the strategies that she had learnt given the busyness of her family life. It meant that she sometimes struggled to interact positively with her children because she was often tired from work but had to organise the daily dinner/cleaning/family routines as well as have a social life. She did report that the strategies were simple to use and she found that they helped her to encourage positive interactions when she was so busy.

**Overall Lesson About the Feasibility of the TOGETHER Program**

Case Study 1 regarding Tamati and Henry offers promising results in how to deliver a collaborative parent and educator positive behaviour guidance program. The TOGETHER training taught both parents and educators effective positive behaviour guidance strategies in the same setting at the same time. As a result, there was an increase in Tamati’s positive behaviours and a decrease in his inappropriate behaviours, and an overall improvement in his social and emotional skills. Henry’s behaviours remained unchanged, though it was promising to see more positive interactions between him and Ali. There was also a positive change in Ali’s and Kiri’s observed practices relating to positive behaviour guidance strategies when they interacted with Tamati. Finally, consistency had developed between the parents, Kiri and Sonja, and the educators, Ali and Sue. Their beliefs and practices had
become more aligned regarding positive behaviour guidance and developing children’s social and emotional skills.

However, the results also indicated that there were still some shortcomings that needed to be rectified, including how the data was collected. In this first case study, the observations occurred when a child was interacting with an educator. However, a valuable lesson was learnt during this case study in that the observations were only capturing the change in the child’s behaviour. Therefore, for Case Studies 2, 3, 4, and 5 the preschool observations included separate observations of the behaviours of each child, the practices of each teacher or educator, and their responses to each child’s behaviour. Three 30-minute observation periods also occurred in the home setting over a period of two weeks for children who had been selected for home observations. The home observations occurred via a small easy-to-operate camera that the participating parent turned on during busy times of the day when they had difficulty with their child, such as food routines, bedtime routines, and playtime. At home, the observations included the behaviours of each child, the practices of the parent/s, and their responses to the child’s behaviour.

Additionally, the two TOGETHER workshops conducted in the Pilot Study/Case Study 1 contained discussions between participants, which gave valuable insights into their beliefs, practices (both related to culture and behaviour guidance practices), and how they had developed relationships with their children and with each other. Therefore, it became imperative that workshops be recorded at all future training sessions in order to capture the group conversations that would provide rich research data with genuine voices from the parents and educators.

Finally, the results from Case Study 1 demonstrated a need to include a wider demographic of participants. Moving forward, the challenge was to investigate how the TOGETHER program could be adapted to suit the diverse needs of both educators and parents, while building common understandings and providing ongoing communication and support for all participants. The following four case studies illustrate how TOGETHER was adapted to suit the needs of two more diverse groups of children, parents, and educators.
Chapter 7

Case Study 2: Recognising All Children

Isabella watches on while three girls build an enormous house out of wooden blocks, big enough to fit her and the three girls. Isabella carefully places a block on the corner, looks up at the three girls, then quickly steps back and continues to watch. She appears unsure about how to join in. She looks over at her educator, Jia, who does not see her as she is busy helping other children at the craft table. Isabella turns back to the three girls and keeps watching them for another 10 minutes. None of the three girls invites her to play, and when Jia walks past, she does not see that Isabella has been struggling to join in. Throughout the day Isabella quietly follows the directions of her educators; however, she is not confident in joining in with the other children. She either plays on her own or sits on the outside of other children’s play groups. Isabella appears to be an invisible child. Because of her quietness and ability to comply with the educators’ directions, it appears she is often forgotten. This is a concern as she appears to need an educator to help show her how to join in with the other children. At the moment, she is showing social delays, and these are being missed by her educators. If you were a parent or an educator of a quiet child like Isabella, would you notice these behaviours?

All too often children are often identified as having social or emotional delays when their challenging behaviours become more noticeable. As evident from the vignette about Isabella, children’s social and emotional needs may often go unnoticed, especially when they are compliant or follow all their educator’s instructions. Case Study 2 demonstrates how the TOGETHER strategies can be used to develop a range of social and emotional needs in young children. This includes quiet children who are often unnoticed by confident children wanting their own voices to be heard.

In Case Study 2 two focus children, Isabella and Samuel, their early childhood teacher, Jia, and the children’s parents are introduced. Two other parents – who also joined the TOGETHER workshops and answered questions about their children, Julian and Ava – are also introduced. The findings show the contexts of each child have interesting similarities but also distinct differences. Through the TOGETHER conceptual framework, the influence of their families’ contexts is also illustrated.
The Preschool Setting for Case Study 2

The second case study was set in a small community-based preschool that offered kindergarten programs for three- and four-year-old children. Only families from the four-year-old kindergarten program were invited to participate given that the children were attending for 15 hours, whereas the three-year-olds were only attending for five hours. At the time of the TOGETHER project, this early childhood community consisted of three educators and 45 children and their families, who attended the preschool via a rotational system. The three educators attended the preschool Monday to Friday for five hours per day, while each child attended three assigned sessions (a total of 15 hours) per week.

This multicultural preschool community consisted of families from Australian, American, Indian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, Middle Eastern, and European backgrounds; the participating families in the project were from Australian, American, and Chinese backgrounds. Again, the CSB questionnaire was used to identify demographics, communication styles, and the various needs of the children and their parents. As the parents from the three families needed assistance with childcare to attend the workshops, the workshops were conducted at the preschool with the children in attendance. The childcare was provided by a qualified educator who was not participating in the study. The children, their families, teachers, and educators are introduced below.

The Children, Their Parents, and the Early Childhood Teacher

Isabella

At the time of the study Isabella was four years old. She lives with her mum, Juan, her dad, Taio, and her six-year-old brother, Michael. At home Isabella enjoys drawing, reading picture books, and being in the outdoors with her family. Isabella was chosen as one of the focus children due to concerns that had been raised by her parents such as not following their instructions and having frequent tantrums. At home Isabella speaks Mandarin and Cantonese with her family and she is confident speaking English with her educators at preschool. The head teacher at the preschool and Isabella’s educator, Jia, also speaks Mandarin, which was immensely helpful in assisting Isabella over six months to settle into the four-year-old preschool program.

While Isabella is confident with English, Juan reports that by having her home language spoken at preschool, her daughter has appeared more at ease and is very
comfortable around her early childhood teacher, Jia. During the previous two terms, Isabella had shown a high amount of anxiety about attending preschool due to finding it difficult to develop friendships with peers and being uncertain of the impending separation from her mother. However, the anxiety has now dissipated due to the additional attention Jia has given her when she arrives at preschool and the help she has received in transitioning to activities that she enjoys. At preschool Isabella is now content creating artwork and engaging in intricate tabletop activities by herself, such as puzzles and threading games. Despite being comfortable in engaging in activities by herself, Isabella struggles to interact/play with peers of her own age and this has been limiting her opportunities to develop strong social and emotional skills.

Isabella’s Mum and Dad, Juan and Taio
Juan is a busy mum caring for her two active children, Isabella and Michael, and dad, Taio, works full time. Juan identifies as Chinese and Taio as Taiwanese. Both Juan and Taio speak Mandarin and Cantonese as their first languages but are also fluent in English. Juan remarks that her and Taio’s cultural practices are remarkably similar. As a family they have a love for the outdoors. They often go on camping trips and roast marshmallows on the open fire. Taio is also an avid fisherman who loves to share his skills with his children. Juan is very involved with the preschool community, often volunteering in the classroom, and often asking Jia how she can be of assistance with the daily classroom tasks, such as helping tidy at the end of the day. Juan was so pleased to have Jia as Isabella’s teacher given her ability to speak Mandarin, which reduced any potential miscommunication between the preschool and the family. She was also delighted with Jia’s responsive and caring nature in helping Isabella settle into the preschool.

Samuel
Samuel was also four years old. He lives with his mum, Charlotte, his dad, Peter, younger brother Levi, and older sister, Bethany. Samuel’s name was selected randomly from the children who were not identified as needing assistance with their social and emotional skills. Samuel was the second focus child. He has a very curious personality and loves to be involved with anything new. In fact, when observations began at the preschool, he was very curious about what the researchers were doing and followed them around with his own clipboard, pretending he was taking observations, too. At preschool, Samuel is eager to ask
the educators questions and to offer his ideas. He gets very involved in group play, loves to use his imagination, and is frequently engaged with creative tabletop activities. At home, Samuel enjoys playing craft-based activities with his older sister. His mum reports that he is really into creating things using tape and loves to describe his creations in full detail.

**Samuel’s Mum, Charlotte**

Charlotte identifies as American and is very busy with her three children. She takes them to preschool, school, and sporting activities while Peter works full time. Charlotte has been part of the preschool community for the past few years and plays an active role, frequently volunteering to assist with classroom activities (including cleaning) and being a parent that helps on preschool excursions to places like the zoo. She mentioned that Peter and her had recently been reading about the importance of positive feedback as a tool to develop children’s social and emotional skills so, consequently, she was quite eager to participate in the training to build on their new-found knowledge.

**Julian**

Julian was also four years of age. He lives with his mum, Lillian, his dad, Matthew, his older sister, Gloria, and his younger brother, Timothy. Julian was not selected as a focus child, so observations were not required of him at home or preschool; however, he is included in this case study because Lillian participated in the workshops and reported on Julian’s needs. She reported that at home he is generally well behaved, with the main challenge being sibling conflict when they are all together. She mentioned that Julian is quite independent and is helpful in looking after Timothy. She also said that he happily goes with the flow of the family. At preschool Jia reported that Julian easily makes friends, follows most classroom instructions, and is often involved in imaginative “superhero” games. He is a highly active child who likes to challenge himself on the climbing equipment outside and loves to explore the outside environment.

**Julian’s Mum, Lillian**

Lillian, who identifies as Australian, is busy with both raising her family and volunteering with local community charity organisations. She spends much of her time running between preschool, school, the children’s sporting activities, and meeting her community
commitments. Lillian feels confident in parenting her children; however, she mentioned that she was always eager to learn new strategies to help manage her family unit.

*Ava*

Ava (four years old) lives with her mum, Zoey, her dad, Jackson, and her two brothers, Hunter (six years old) and Lachlan (two years old). Ava was not selected as a focus child, so observations were not required of her at home or preschool; however, she is included in this case study because Zoey joined in with the workshops and reported on Ava’s needs. Zoey reported that at home Ava enjoys helping her around the house and shows her appreciation to others when they help her. She is generally good at taking turns and sharing with her siblings and takes a genuine interest in others when engaged in conversation. Zoey’s main concerns are that Ava does not always follow instructions and struggles with her ability to express her emotions on occasions. At preschool Jia reported that Ava loves to play dress-ups with her peers, engage with books and puzzles, and explore her outside environment.

*Ava’s Mum, Zoey*

Zoey, who also identifies as Australian, had recently started a new job as an early childhood educator and her family had recently moved homes. As a result, Zoey had been very busy trying to balance her work and family life. She mentioned that all her children had reacted to the change in homes, especially Ava’s younger brother, who had been experiencing a high number of tantrums daily. Due to time constraints and trying to balance work and family life, Zoey required additional support in the way of additional coaching over the phone for her to participate in the TOGETHER workshops.

*Early Childhood Teacher, Jia*

Jia has a Master of Education and has been teaching in early childhood education for five years. Originally from China, she speaks both fluent Mandarin and English. She is the early childhood teacher for the four-year-old group and is assisted by two educators (who chose not to participate in the TOGETHER program because they did not have the time). She has been teaching at the current preschool for the past two years.
**What Was Learnt About the Children, Their Parents, and the Early Childhood Teacher Before the TOGETHER Training?**

In using the measures mentioned in Chapter 3, the patterns in the behaviour, beliefs, and practices of each of the participants were explored. These are detailed as follows:

**What Was Learnt About Isabella’s and Samuel’s Social and Emotional Development Before the TOGETHER Training?**

Once Jia had completed the Social Development Rating Scale (SDRS; Tyler-Merrick, 2014) for each child in the class, her rating scores indicated that she had no concerns for the social and emotional development of Isabella, Samuel, Julian, or Ava. However, the results from the CSB questionnaire, which was completed with the parents, and in the conversations with Jia, revealed that all the parents – Juan, Charlotte, Lillian, and Zoey – had concerns relating to their children’s social and emotional skills. Therefore, each parent was asked to also complete the SDRS. By having both Jia and the parents complete the SDRS, the additional information was able to be used to develop a deeper understanding of each child’s social and emotional development as follows:

**Isabella.** Isabella’s mum, Juan, reported that at home they had been struggling with Isabella engaging in several challenging behaviours, such as not following their instructions, having frequent tantrums, pleading when she could not get what she wanted, and often interrupting and annoying her older brother. Such behaviours were also observed in the home video recordings where, on one occasion, she had a tantrum for 30 minutes because she did not want to eat her dinner.

Interestingly, at preschool Isabella was different. She willingly followed the instructions of Jia, sat with the group at story time and concentrated on class activities for extended periods of time. While the score from the SDRS completed by Jia did not indicate challenging behaviour for Isabella, it did show that there were concerns with her making friends/forming friendships and staying engaged with her peers. These concerns were also supported by the classroom observations taken before the TOGETHER workshops. For example, Isabella was not confident in asking her peers if she could join in, and she found it difficult to respond appropriately when other children tried to interact socially with her. She would not talk back but would nod, smile, or hand a toy to another child. She would not approach peer groups in a way that would encourage acceptance into the current group.
activity or conversation. Of greatest concern was that because she was so quiet and compliant with the classroom rules, she would often go unnoticed by her peers, by Jia, and by the other educators. Consequently, there were many missed opportunities for her to develop her skills in developing and maintaining friendships.

**Samuel.** Samuel’s social and emotional concerns were more evident at home than at preschool. From the results of the SDRS, completed by his mum, Charlotte, and the home video recordings it became evident that Samuel was often disruptive during family gatherings as he struggled to listen to the ideas of others, had difficulty in compromising in group play, and would sometimes resist following instructions.

Jia reported at preschool that while on some occasions Samuel was disruptive at group times, she had no other concerns relating to his social and emotional skills. This was noted in his classroom observations: he was often eager to engage with others in imaginative group play, would welcome peers into his play, and would confidently contribute to group conversations. At group times, in his keenness to get his ideas across, Samuel would sometimes struggle to let his friends talk.

**Julian.** Julian was not selected as one of the focus children, therefore, there were no home or preschool observations of him. However, the concerns of his mum, Lillian, which became apparent from both the SDRS and the parent interviews before the training in the TOGETHER workshops commenced, indicated that Julian’s family were experiencing some challenges with his social and emotional development. Such concerns included not eating or drinking and misbehaving at mealtimes, often interrupting or annoying his siblings, and shouting at them. Jia, on the other hand, reported no concerns for Julian at preschool. He eagerly joined in with his peers, was great at taking turns, engaged in reciprocal conversations, and followed Jia’s instructions with confidence.
Ava. As with Julian, Ava was not selected as one of the focus children, therefore, there were no home or preschool observations of her. However, her mum, Zoey, indicated through the SDRS that the family was experiencing challenging behaviour at home from Ava. For example, there were times when she would ignore her parents’ requests, interrupt or annoy her siblings, or plead or nag to get what she wanted. In contrast, however, Jia reported that she had no concerns with Ava. At preschool Ava would immediately follow classroom instructions, show an interest in others and what they were saying, and was confident in approaching others in group play.

**What Was Learnt About the Beliefs and Practices of Jia and the Four Parents Before the TOGETHER Training?**

To begin with there were several similarities in the beliefs of Juan, Charlotte, Lillian, Zoey, and teacher Jia that had been identified in the beliefs and practices section of the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a). All believed that children’s behaviour needed to be praised and encouraged frequently and providing affection to them was also important. They also felt that children needed to be spoken to calmly when they were misbehaving. However, discrepancies in other beliefs and practices did become apparent between the members of this small group. For example, while most of the parents felt that there were times when they needed to use an angry voice when a child was misbehaving, Jia did not agree with this statement. Isabella’s mum, Juan, felt that an angry voice worked well in stopping Isabella’s challenging behaviour from recurring. In the first BPRQ, she stated that “I do find punishment, like talking to them with an angry voice or have time out, for bad behaviour with my children works very well to stop it from recurring.”

As mentioned, Jia did not agree with this statement. In fact, there were several instances where Jia’s beliefs differed from the parents. While Juan, Zoey, and Lillian felt that bribes were valid tools to control children’s challenging behaviour, Jia (and Charlotte) did not agree. This difference was also noticeable for eye contact when communicating: all the parents believed this was important, whereas Jia disagreed because she had observed that all children communicate differently. Her beliefs also extended to learning: while Jia highly valued free play as a form of learning, Juan, Charlotte, and Lillian believed that children should work hard to achieve success at preschool and Zoey felt children needed to sit quietly at preschool.

Such differences highlight how teachers and educators may often have different perspectives to parents on growing children’s social and emotional skills and how to
approach education. Jia was trained at an Australian university where play-based learning is regarded as best practice and recognising and responding to cultural differences is quite important. Therefore, it is understandable that Jia recognises that not all children communicate in the same way; that she values children’s contributions to group conversations; and that she sees play as an important part of education. Conversely, Juan, Charlotte, Lillian and Zoey had views that had not been influenced by a teaching degree and had been more influenced by their contextual surroundings, including the way they had been brought up (reference to the ecological model). Interestingly, though, Charlotte’s view more closely aligned with Jia’s in relation to directing behaviour, which may be explained by the fact that she and her husband had recently been reading about the importance of providing descriptive praise and encouragement to develop children’s social and emotional skills.

The parents’ beliefs also differed on what to do if a child has a tantrum. Juan mentioned she did not feel confident in her parenting skills, and in preliminary discussions with Jia and the TOGETHER facilitator, she mentioned how she needed further guidance on how to guide Isabella when she had tantrums. This was evident in the first home observation, where Juan and Taio (Isabella’s dad) struggled with Isabella’s tantrums for over 30 minutes at the dinner table. Juan had also recognised her struggles and her inconsistencies when she said that she hadn’t given much attention to appropriate behaviours (as opposed to challenging behaviours), and that she hadn’t calmly explained to her children why behaviours were challenging or inappropriate. In contrast, Charlotte, Lillian and Zoey felt that they let their children, as well as Jia in teaching these parents’ children, know when they were doing a good job: they would give frequent compliments; they would single out appropriate behaviours; they would immediately return their attention to the appropriate behaviour after inappropriate behaviour; and they would frequently let Isabella, Samuel, Julian and Ava know they could succeed.

Interestingly, despite the responses from Jia about giving positive attention to children, the preschool observations contradicted her reports. These inconsistencies were noticed in the observations of Jia and her interactions with Isabella and Samuel in the classroom. Before the TOGETHER workshops, the observations of Jia revealed that she would give little descriptive praise or encouragement to Samuel and Isabella. She would often give directions, yet when the children followed her directions, no feedback was given. As mentioned earlier, Isabella shied away from interacting with peers during play, therefore, the small number of interactions with little to no feedback from Jia did not assist with
developing Isabella’s social and emotional development. Isabella was requiring assistance to interact with her peers; however, it appeared from the classroom observations that due to Isabella’s quiet nature and the busyness of the classroom, Jia was missing important opportunities to extend Isabella in these skills.

There was also very little positive and descriptive feedback given to Isabella’s positive behaviours by Juan or Taio. For example, both Isabella consistently engaged in appropriate behaviour that was not recognised by her parents. On the other hand, sometimes the challenging behaviour was not addressed by Juan, or Isabella would be redirected with no positive feedback once they had started to do the “right thing”.

As this chapter reveals, Jia’s, Juan’s, and Taio’s participation in the TOGETHER workshops enabled them to develop skills to assist Isabella. It also unveils how the parents and Jia worked together to develop consistency in their beliefs and practices, which Ava’s mum, Zoey, believed was extremely important: “It is important that all carers are of a similar belief. This builds consistency. It also allows both parents and educators to learn what might work best for individuals’ children.”

**What Was Learnt About the Parent–Educator Relationship Before the TOGETHER Training?**

Before the workshops commenced, all the parents reported that they felt the relationship they had with Jia was noticeably strong through the data provided in the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a). For example, they felt there was clear communication due to the various avenues provided such as Jia being available for conversations before and after the preschool sessions, frequent emails, a community noticeboard at the entrance, and individual parent pockets for paper communication. They felt that Jia was responsive to the needs of their children and family and recognised and valued their backgrounds through cultural celebrations (for example, Chinese New Year celebrations for Isabella and Halloween for Samuel).

The parents also felt that she viewed them as partners in their children’s development due to her responsive approach and they valued her experience. As pointed out by Juan, Jia had established trust with the family: “My educator [referring to Jia] has my full trust as she has shown me how caring and responsible she is and that she is absolutely more experienced than me. I think this is very, very important to the children.”
The Responsive Approach to Being TOGETHER

The delivery of the TOGETHER program for these four parents and their early childhood teacher, Jia, required a slightly different approach from Case Study 1. The initial meetings and the information from the CSD were used to determine the interaction and communication styles of the parents and Jia, the most comfortable time and place for the families where the TOGETHER training could be implemented, and any barriers that they may have been facing in accessing the training.

Both Jia and the parents felt that the training was best suited to be delivered at the preschool. As most of the families had school-aged children, there was a small window of time between 1 pm and 3 pm where the parents could meet after the preschool session but before they needed to go to the local school to pick up their older children. The four parents all mentioned they required assistance with childcare. To overcome this barrier, a qualified early childhood educator was employed by the research team to watch the children at the preschool while the parents participated in the training at the TOGETHER workshops. To make the meetings more friendly and welcoming, a light afternoon tea was provided for the children, parents, and Jia.

Ava’s mum, Zoey, was unable to attend the first session due to job and family commitments, so the trainer provided the workshop content as well as additional coaching to her by phone to keep her up to date with the other parents and Jia. In being adaptable to each family’s situation, the facilitators ensured that the workshop information was the same for all the parents and Jia, which helped to build consistency between the preschool and the home environments.

What Happened During the TOGETHER Training?

In Chapter 3 it was mentioned that a valuable lesson was learnt in how opportunities could be missed in capturing the discussions regarding the parents’ and educators’ relationships, beliefs and practices during the workshops. Therefore, for this case study each workshop was recorded, which led to the capture of some important insights from the parents and Jia. The two workshops followed the same format as Case Study 1.

Workshop 1

At the beginning of this workshop there was a feeling of excitement as the parents connected and their children realised that they would be staying at the preschool for a few extra hours.
The fact that there would be afternoon tea at the preschool created a party-like atmosphere for the children. Several of the children were eager to join in for the first few minutes to see what their parents were up to. In fact, Samuel was eager to help with the presentation at the beginning, where he provided an opportunity for the facilitator to demonstrate the use of descriptive praise at the commencement. There was much laughter and conversation from all the children’s parents and Jia, which indicated that everyone was quite comfortable at the preschool and eager to participate. After the parents and Jia were introduced to the TOGETHER principles at the beginning of the workshop, they opened their TOGETHER training manuals to page 11 (see Figure 7.1) and were then prompted to discuss how they could develop strong relationships with children and each other.

There were many contributions from the group. Jia initiated the conversation by stating how she had developed relationships with the children at the preschool, with a focus placed on following their interests:

*I make an effort to have eye contact and also really listen to them. And then everything you do and you show that you genuinely interested and listen to their thoughts. I remember when Isabella first started last year, she had Sarah as her teacher and she was a bit resistant to me, but I think over the time she can tell that I’m very interested in her and I want to make the relationships and I would just always be there for her if she needs help.*

Jia’s comments prompted Charlotte to contribute how she had formed relationships with Samuel and his siblings at home through their interests, and how this focus had sparked conversations between her and her children:

*Samuel is really into just sort of creating stuff and making stuff with paper and drawing and like taping more paper together...they spend a lot of time just making stuff. So, I find that if I give them the undivided attention of them explaining what they’ve done, like if in full detail of what they’ve created, all they've named it, all that sort of stuff.*
Juan was initially very quiet; however, her confidence began to develop as Charlotte discussed her family and the way they had developed relationships between each other, which suggested that the small-group setting was encouraging conversations between all the participants. Juan nodded in agreement with Charlotte’s statement and then made specific
references to how Isabella loved to copy the activities they had been doing at preschool when she was at home. For example, she mentioned the picture books that the children had created themselves, which was an initiative of Jia’s, whereby she had introduced a platform for the children to express themselves and to build a connection between each of their homes and the preschool. Each child had drawn pictures and Jia had helped them turn their pictures into a story. All the parents agreed that the picture books had been helpful in creating a connection between the home and the preschool, and how proud the children had been in being able to share their “published” works with their families and their peers at preschool. For example, the following statement from Charlotte highlights just how effective these books had been in developing relationships:

I’ve actually been reading some of the ones like as a bedtime stories, I’ll pick up they’ve (Samuel and his sister) drawn some pictures at kinder and then the kids will narrate what each page is. And I just write down verbatim what they say, which sometimes it’s so silly and I’m like, we’ll read them. They’ll pick it out…he (Samuel) loves it. His story is getting read at bedtime.

The conversations continued as the parents shared their cultural practices with each other, and how they used such practices to build relationships. For example, Isabella’s dad, Taio, expanded on how they enjoyed camping, roasting marshmallows over the fire, and fishing as a family. Jia responded, discussing how Isabella would often talk about these experiences and how excited she was when her dad caught calamari. Charlotte listened and mentioned how as a family they would often celebrate the American holidays, which are not celebrated in Australia; however, at the preschool they did, which had made them feel very welcome. She also mentioned how as a family they loved to engage in dance parties and how this was extended at the preschool:

As a family we do a lot of dance parties. All three of them (children) get into it. During the day, at the weekends. They are inside and still moving around and it’s hilarious ... and we find that if I am grumpy that it can really turn all our moods around ... we put just on upbeat music ... it’s the only tradition we really have ... we do that a lot to reset .... Ever since Mr. George came in and did a little break-dancing class (at preschool), he likes to spin around on the floor. And he’s Mr. George.
As the conversations continued, it became quite evident that some strong connections had developed between Jia and the parents. Jia was very responsive to the families’ interests and cultural practices. She mentioned how they had made a point to celebrate different cultural celebrations of the families attending each year and was eager to discuss with the parents how she could incorporate more of the families’ home practices at the preschool.

As the relationships between the parents and Jia deepened, the importance of providing positive praise and encouragement for the behaviour they wanted to see became apparent. Specifically, the focus was on how positive praise and encouragement has consistently been shown to develop children’s social and emotional skills. It was discussed that adults who provide a higher level of praise are more likely to encounter children with increased levels of social competence, emotional self-regulation and lower levels of inappropriate behaviours (Webster-Stratton et al., 2008). The parents and Jia were shown types of positive praise and encouragement. They were provided with examples of positive strategies in action, such as focusing on the learning process rather than the final product and the use of proximity praise and encouragement. As the examples were being illustrated, the parents began bonding over the struggles they had been facing with their own child’s challenging behaviour. Each parent felt relieved that the other parents had been experiencing similar struggles, and thus by sharing their struggles, they had started to build a community of support. The comments the parents made truly highlighted the everyday struggles they were facing, such as Lillian’s:

It’s more trying to take out the frustration ... why do I have to tell you 16 times to get out the door [referring to her children]! My daughter said to me, “You do that funny smile when I know you are not happy.” That’s because I’m trying really hard to, you know, not lose it ... to fake it until your make it ... forcing a smile can be really hard.

Lillian bonded with Charlotte on this comment:

Sometimes it’s about trying to stop the children from killing each other at the dinner table ... “He’s making faces at me” ... “He’s telling me I’m stupid” [comments her children would make to each other]. [I say] “You have come to the table and you are to sit really nicely.” They don’t know when to stop ... he doesn’t understand when that limit is.
And this was followed by Isabella’s dad, Taio, who said, “I think she needs to control her temper. She throws a tantrum pretty easily when you say don’t touch that ... We didn’t have the same with her brother ... she is struggling with her emotions.”

As a team, the parents and Jia (with the help of the facilitator) were able to devise some proactive solutions for the struggles they had been having with the challenging behaviours of the children. Such solutions included the parents using descriptive praise when their children were doing the behaviours they wanted to see. By using the basic positive behaviour guidance plan (page 29 of the manual – see Figure 7.2), they were able to identify the behaviours they wanted to see less of, list the prosocial behaviours they wanted to see more of, come up with proactive and relationship-building strategies appropriate to their context, and list some useful descriptive phrases of praise and encouragement that they could use to acknowledge when their child was being socially or emotionally appropriate.

The parents and Jia also developed some reminder strategies to help keep their focus on the positive behaviours the children engaged in and worked towards the rule of “The Golden Apple” – five positive responses for every negative response (see Figure 7.3). For example, Charlotte mentioned how she would place five head bands on her wrist and transfer them to the other wrist each time she gave praise, and because she always had hand ties on her wrist, she felt this was a great tool. The parents and Jia were then given the homework task of practising the five positive responses for every negative one by using the basic positive behaviour guidance plan and the reminder strategies that they had developed.
Figure 7.2
Basic Positive Behaviour Guidance Plan

<table>
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<tr>
<th>List the behaviours you want to see LESS of...</th>
<th>List the behaviours you want to see MORE of...</th>
<th>Proactive and relationship strategies (what we will do)</th>
<th>Praise and encouragement – useful phrases</th>
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The Golden Apple: 5 positive responses for every negative response
Workshop 2

The second workshop saw the parents and Jia eagerly arrive, ready to share their reflections on how they had progressed with giving more positive feedback than negative feedback to the children over the week. Charlotte began: *I did really try to praise good behaviour every time I was seeing it. And not just, like you said, being very specific, sort of with the praise. I think we would just say, “Oh, good job. That’s great.” And I think we did that a lot. And we didn’t really specify, so we’ve tried to do that. And even this morning, I noticed after having done that for not even a week, Samuel got dressed the first time I asked him, and then he came in to show me and he said, “Look, I put on my shoes without you even asking.” So, I said, “Oh, I love it when you get dressed the first time I ask you. I’m so proud of you, you knew you were leaving so you decided to put on your shoes all by yourself.” I’m sure it was just a fluke, and that probably won’t happen on Monday. But I tried to take advantage of that moment and just, like, really make him feel proud of what he did, and that I was really impressed with it.*

Juan mentioned that she had been like Charlotte and had not used descriptive praise until she had started the TOGETHER training. While she was yet to see a change in
Isabella’s behaviour, she had noticed positive changes in herself: “Before I was like you [referring to Charlotte]. I would just mention “good girl”. But this week I have been more specific but haven’t seen a big change in her [Isabella], but I have seen a change from my side. I’m starting to enjoy her more instead of “Urgggghh!”

Charlotte returned to her reflection and built on this:

*I’ve noticed this even yesterday; I was walking home from kinder... Samuel would always say “I can’t walk another step.” ... But we happen to be walking with his friend, and he walked the whole way by himself without complaining ... So, I reinforced it yesterday by saying how proud I was of him the day before for walking all by himself. And I said, “You must be getting big, so is Andrew. Your legs are getting stronger; you’re getting so much bigger. Like, I’m so impressed at how you can do that all on your own.” And he was just like, “Yes.” And you can see him puffing his chest out.*

After these reflections, the focus moved to developing rules/guidelines, redirecting behaviour, natural and logical consequences for inappropriate behaviour, and the sit and watch/calm down strategy. As the parents and Jia discussed the importance of rules, it became evident that many of the rules were framed in negative terms such as “Never talk over the teacher”, “Don’t touch”, and “No talking at the dinner table”. The parents also discussed how at home there was often inconsistency between them and their partners. These discussions led to points being made about having a set of three or four simple home rules, stated in positive terms, which all family members (or all educators) knew and were developed with the children to ensure consistency with parents and to also help with everyday routines at home and at the preschool. Such rules included “We use gentle hands”, “We speak kindly to each other”, and “We treat our toys nicely”.

As the discussion progressed to the parents talking about the challenging behaviours that they were experiencing with their children, they were quite eager to share examples of what they meant with each other. As in Workshop 1, they continued to bond when they all recognised that they often felt the same way. Lillian started:

*My kids fight all the time ... “He’s got my things”, “She’s making a noise”, “He’s clapping, he’s singing when I want to be singing.” I think it’s jealousy. There is this singing-in-the-car business – one wants to do it and the other
wants to do it … But I think that’s just competition … I want them to play nicely.

Charlotte had similar feelings, and made a point of how time poor families can be:

And sometimes it is so time sensitive … all of a sudden, just in that moment, just refused to walk away. He (Samuel) was trying to physically fight me to get in the car. It was like one of those moments where I was kind of letting it happen, but then I was, like, you still have to go to school.

Zoey laughed and agreed with their frustrations:

I have that; you need to be in the car to go to school. They’re just so slow. They just dawdle. Yeah, like half an hour to 40 minutes to eat a bowl of cereal. I’m, like, are you kidding me?

As the parents discussed their frustrations and struggles, the group were able to reflect on the previous discussion around positive forecasting (letting their children know that they believed they could get ready on time) and giving descriptive praise for the prosocial behaviour. Then discussions regarding children’s tantrums became the next hot topic, with Juan mentioning her challenges with Isabella:

She is usually so reasonable. But when these things happen, that’s why I feel so ill equipped to deal with it … I sometimes say to her, “What do you actually want me to do in this moment?” Look, sometimes she’s just having a meltdown and I literally have no control over her.

Lillian agreed and offered her ideas: “In regard to my six-year-old, she absolutely loses it, and you can’t reason with her. I’ll often say, ‘Go to the reset spot.’ I do ask her to go somewhere else to calm down.”

These examples of their struggles enabled more discussions about the reasons behind the tantrums and devise ways to recognise the behaviours that occurred before and after the tantrum. Specifically, their attention was drawn to page 42 of the TOGETHER training manual (Phillips et al., 2017) and the “A-B-C Identification” strategy (see Figure 7.4), where the parents and Jia were encouraged to reflect on the reasons why a child may be exhibiting challenging behaviours. They were asked to identify what happened before the behaviour (A = antecedent), what was the challenging behaviour (B = behaviour), and what happened after
(C = consequence). For example, Zoey was able to use this strategy to illustrate an interaction she had had with Ava:

I know often with her she is tired, and we had gone to gymnastics for two weeks in a row (A = antecedent) …. We had been going straight after school, and she had a meltdown – just burst into tears because we weren’t having a hot dog for dinner (B = behaviour) …. Clearly, it was not about the hot dog. And I said, “Sweetie, we don’t have to go to gymnastics. If you’re tired, you need to go home and you need to relax. And you just want to sit at home and chill out; we can do that.” I recognised that she needed to go home (C = consequence when Zoey took Ava home to rest).

Jia also mentioned how at the preschool they had quiet places such as the reading corner or tents where children could go to if they needed some time to breathe and gather their emotions.

The group then moved into discussing natural and logical consequences associated with the previously discussed behaviours that the parents had found challenging. For example, in Zoey’s case, where her children were taking too long to eat a bowl of cereal (despite Zoey’s best efforts to get them to eat) and the family needed to leave, the natural consequence would be that the child would miss out on breakfast and would need to wait until morning tea to eat. Or, in Lillian’s case, where her children would constantly fight over who would get to sing their song, with the logical consequence being that the music would be turned off. Once the siblings had figured out how to take turns and encourage each other, the music would be turned back on, and Lillian could give descriptive praise for the turn-taking and encouragement.

As the discussion progressed, the conversation steered towards more violent behaviour. Charlotte gave the example of Samuel’s unawareness of his strength: “Samuel has no idea about his own strength; he’s hitting us, pulling my hair out.”

Lillian was also having the same challenges with her youngest:

With the unsafe behaviour, it is fairly frequent, and he is my first terrible-two tantrumer. He will just continue for 10 minutes, kicking and screaming, and I just have to put him in the car … He’s literally ripping my hair out … he will scream the whole way to school and all the way back.
Figure 7.4

A-B-C Identification – Functional Assessment

A. What happened before the behaviour? (A – Antecedent)
B. What is the problem behaviour? (B – Behaviour)
C. What happened after? (C – Consequence)

Through following this process you will be more informed as to what behaviour support strategy to use and you will understand what the child is trying to tell you.
This discussion led into the “sit and watch” strategy (Phillips et al., 2017). For an outline of this strategy, see Figure 7.5. This is a strategy to use when children become out of control. Lillian and the facilitator acted out a scenario where Lillian was pretending to have hit another person and needed help to calm down. Using the map outlined in the sit and watch strategy, the facilitator acted out how to approach each stage of the strategy with assistance from Lillian. Emphasis was placed on reducing eye contact and attention, while staying beside the child until the child had calmed down. Then once the child had been calm for more than two minutes, help was given to the child to enable them to move to socially appropriate choices while remembering to follow up with descriptive praise once the child had been playing well again. When the conclusion of the session was close, the parents began reflecting on how the discussions had helped them realise that they were not on their own in their parenting journey. Zoey made the following comment:

I like that feeling like you are not the only one dealing with it [the behaviour] ... like sometimes at a school pick-up you are ... arghhh! You forget that on any given day someone else is going through their own struggles and it is not always talked about. I’ve been trying to be more realistic with them.

And she was quickly supported by Lillian: “Yeah, maybe one of them [another parent] is in the car and struggling. I’m saying to myself, ‘Thank goodness, it’s not only me’, and then feel better on the way to school.”
Figure 7.5
Sit and Watch Strategy

Sit and Watch Strategy — only use as a last resort. Remember that from the very beginning you must give the child your full attention. If there is another adult available, use them to support the other children so you can do this.

- The child behaves in an unsafe way — for example, hurts another child/adult/animal/property.
- The child sits and watches to calm down. Other children/family members continue to play. Adult sits next to child and gives no attention.
- Child refuses to go and says, “You can’t make me.”
- Adult puts their arm around child so that they can’t hurt anyone else and gently sits child down next to them.
- Child sits and watches to calm down. Other children/family members continue to play. Adult sits next to child and gives no attention.
- Child moves or refuses to settle. Adult, with a firm, calm voice, says, “You need to calm down, and when you are calm, we will talk about what has happened.”
- Adult says to child, “You have hurt... Come here so you can see the other children/family members playing safely.” (Indicate a space on the perimeter of the activity and guide if necessary).
- If child says “no”, adult says, “I’ll show you how.”
- If child says “yes”, adult says “Show me that you can.”
- Adult says, “You hurt... so you need to sit and calm down. Can you play nicely?”

Follow up with descriptive praise when the child is playing/participating appropriately.

The Golden Apple: 5 positive responses for every negative response.

2 minutes pass and child is calm.
What Was Learnt About the Children, Their Parents, and the Early Childhood Teacher After the TOGETHER Training?

After the training in the TOGETHER workshops had finished, the preschool observations continued, and Isabella’s and Samuel’s parents made video recordings at home. All the parents and Jia completed a second BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a) regarding their beliefs, practices, and views on the parent–educator relationship, as well as the SDRS (Tyler-Merrick, 2014) for their child (Jia did one for each child), and everyone participated in a final interview. The information collected from the questionnaires and the interviews indicated that many changes had occurred in the children, parents, and the early childhood teacher, Jia.

What Was Learnt About Isabella’s, Samuel’s, Julian’s, and Ava’s Social and Emotional Development After the TOGETHER Training?

Isabella. After the training, the video recordings indicated there had been an improvement in Isabella’s behaviour at home. First, there were no signs of tantrums and she consistently showed progression in the development of her social and emotional skills. For example, she willingly followed her parents’ instructions (including eating her food at mealtimes) and was using her voice to communicate when she felt frustrated or challenged by a certain task. Her perseverance with activities at home also increased when her mum, Juan, gave her descriptive praise for “doing the right thing”. The completion of the SDRS by Juan supported the improvements in Isabella’s social and emotional skills. She reported that Isabella was complying with her parents’ instructions more often; she was eating and drinking appropriately at mealtimes; she was less likely to plead, nag, or demand things; and she was staging fewer tantrums.

The SDRS completed by Jia showed Isabella had improved in her confidence to interact with peers at the preschool; however, this had taken some time. Isabella continued to find it difficult to approach peers during play but would respond appropriately to them when they tried to interact with her by engaging in conversation. On several occasions Jia made the point of providing descriptive praise and encouragement when Isabella contributed to group play and scaffolded the interactions between Isabella and her peers. Jia also made an additional effort to include more of Isabella’s interests in classroom activities, such as setting up a campsite (connected to Isabella’s family’s home practices and context). Through the campsite scenario, Isabella was more inclined to engage in play with peers as this was something that she was familiar with and, therefore, she was more comfortable.
By taking this inclusive approach, Jia had been able to provide Isabella with opportunities to practise reciprocal conversations with her peers, which enabled her to begin to form friendships – interestingly, Isabella and Samuel were observed frequently playing together after the workshops. Maybe this had something to do with the fact that they had spent time together outside the preschool session when their parents were attending the workshops. As time progressed, an improvement in Isabella’s social skills when she was interacting with others had been noted. She had become more confident in offering her ideas during group times and there had been instances where she had initiated play with others. Isabella was no longer invisible to other children and she was receiving positive feedback from Jia (and other children), which was improving her confidence in the classroom environment.

**Samuel.** For Samuel there had also been a noticeable improvement in his social and emotional skills, which had become evident from the home video recordings, the preschool observations, and the SDRS parent and educator reports. He was more willing to share and was less disruptive. His mother, Charlotte, summed up his improvement well in her own words:

*With Samuel we have seen several changes ... He really, really responds well to the positive praise ... like, it has just been amazing seeing him, like, puff up his chest and be proud when we give him that positive praise. Like, when he’s being gentle with his younger brother, or when he’s being really kind, you know, like sharing, and doing something special. So I definitely think it’s improved [his behaviour] because he’s more inclined to do those good behaviours because he knows he’s getting “positives” back and that we are acknowledging them, and they (his good behaviours) are not necessarily going unseen.*

While concerns regarding Samuel’s development were not an issue at the preschool, Jia said she had seen growth in his social and emotional development skills. For example, she reported that he was now more willing to allow others to contribute their ideas during group conversations.
**Julian.** As mentioned earlier, Julian had not been selected as one of the focus children, therefore, there were no home or preschool observations made of him. The SDRS and reports from his mum, Lillian, indicated that, generally, Julian was engaging in more positive interactions with his siblings, which included agreeing to compromises during conflicts and being helpful with family tasks.

**Ava.** The SDRS completed by Ava’s mum, Zoey, also demonstrated improvements in Ava’s social and emotional development skills at home. Ava was following rules more easily and was responding to boundaries more positively. She was being more polite with her siblings, was more inclined to take turns when interacting with her siblings and would join in adult-directed activities when asked.

**What Was Learnt About the Beliefs and Practices of Jia and the Four Parents After the TOGETHER Training?**

First, the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a) revealed that Jia and the four parents all strongly agreed on parenting and teaching beliefs that were more consistent with authoritative styles. The meaning of this term is that children’s appropriate behaviour needs to be praised or encouraged frequently and that when a child tries hard (even at the small things), they should be given praise and encouragement. Yet before the training in the TOGETHER workshops, Jia and the four parents did not believe this and were inconsistent in their beliefs. However, these inconsistencies did not translate to their practices. Jia, Juan, Charlotte, Lillian, and Zoey all reported that they would let children know when they were doing a good job; they would single out the appropriate behaviours they wanted children to do; they would share how happy they were when children did things well; and they would encourage children to talk about themselves in positive ways.

Interestingly, Isabella’s mum, Juan, reported that she did not believe she gave more attention to positive behaviours than negative behaviours. However, the home observations clearly contradict this (see Figure 7.6). In fact, the observations revealed that Juan had dramatically increased the number of her descriptive praise and encouragement statements. Before the workshops it was noted that there had been only six positive interactions provided by Juan to Isabella and over 18 discouragement statements made. After the workshops, Juan had increased the number of descriptive praise phrases given to Isabella, which averaged 25 per observation, and made only a few discouraging statements. It appeared that she had not
realised just how much she had increased her positive interactions with Isabella. However, by the final interview she knew:

*I technically had heard about it [the strategies] before the training, but I didn’t realise it was that effective ... And, yeah, like I said during the first session, I would always praise her but use very general terms like “good girl” and “well done”. Now I am being more specific, and I find it very effective. And the major thing is I actually really learn to enjoy her more. Before I was like, “Oh, you’re so annoying.” But now, actually you see the improvement little by little because you are looking for the good things she has actually done. So, yes, I enjoy her more.*

**Figure 7.6**

*Child Isabella: Home Observations*

*Note.* The figure indicates the number of times per 15-minute observation period that Isabella’s parents responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to Isabella’s behaviour and the number of times Isabella had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her parents.*
For Samuel’s mum, Charlotte, there had also been an increase in the number of descriptive praise and encouragement statements she had given to Samuel, although before the workshops began, she did have a good grasp on the importance of descriptive praise due to additional reading she had done before the TOGETHER workshops. As a result of providing more descriptive praise and encouragement to Samuel, she reported that she had begun to see a change in his behaviour and that the modifications she had made to her parenting strategies were working for the whole family. She was refreshingly honest:

You see such an improvement with all the kids [her three children] and how eager they are to please us. So, I think a lot of their behaviour comes from that. I’ve definitely seen a change since using that message (positive feedback) with them. Yeah, but it’s not all puppies and rainbows. You know, there is still a lot of fighting and arguing. But I will say honestly that in the last four weeks we have noticed an improvement.

She continued by stating how the training in the TOGETHER workshops had helped develop more consistency in the strategies she and her husband were using to improve their children’s social and emotional skills:

Since the training it has created conversation between me and my husband in that we had not talked about parenting before, so it has sort of enabled us to bring to the table the things that I’ve learnt and sharing in the handouts you’ve provided. One of the techniques we really like, because it’s really easy to remember, is the 5 to 1 in terms of every negative interaction. Trying to have five positive ones and sort of wipe the slate clean and negate that negative interaction. Especially because he [her husband] has such limited time with them [the children]. It makes us a united front in terms of consistency in our parenting, and I’m using similar techniques, so they’re getting the same sort of parenting and response from both of us.

Lillian found that by practising the strategies she had learnt in the TOGETHER workshops, she was able to improve her interactions with Julian and found the sit and watch strategy particularly helpful. When asked about how her interactions had changed, she mentioned:
Yes, so mostly around that example that you gave around having the child sitting with you and explaining to them that they need to ... When they are ready to behave in an appropriate manner that they can go and re-join what’s happening. It is probably the biggest one. It doesn’t quite work very well with a nine-year-old, but for the younger ones.

Zoey found that the TOGETHER training had challenged some of her previous practices. She referred to how she had been raised with different strategies and had been using them. However, after completing the TOGETHER training, she had been practising the new way of guiding her children’s behaviour to develop their social and emotional skills:

*I think it (TOGETHER) is quite positive, particularly if you have people who haven’t been brought up that way. It has helped a bit as I had been brought up with you get the smack, but that doesn’t particularly translate well and so that (the TOGETHER strategies) has been quite beneficial.*

For Jia, the preschool observations showed that, overall, she had tried to use more descriptive praise and encouragement when interacting with the children (see Figure 7.7). She mentioned that she had been trying to give more meaningful positive feedback. However, she did make the comment that she didn’t really have any children in her class who had challenging behaviour. Her response indicates that she may have misinterpreted some of the TOGETHER strategies and, as a result, she was inclined to only give positive feedback to children who were struggling with their social and emotional skills.
Teacher Jia: Preschool Observations

Note. The figure indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that Jia responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to all the children’s behaviour and the number of times the children had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her.

What Was Learnt About the Parent–Educator Relationship After the TOGETHER Training?

As was realised from the parent and educator voices in the workshops, there had been some moments when the parent–parent and parent–educator relationships had been strengthened. The participants had found common ground on the challenges they were facing and then worked together to develop consistent strategies between their homes and the preschool. Before the TOGETHER workshops began, all the parents had reported that they had a strong relationship with Jia, which they said continued after they had completed the training. Such
reports were evidence of Jia’s family-centred teaching practice (Dunst, 2002). Her approach had been noted by the encouraging comments from the parents, such as the one given by Charlotte:

*Hearing how an educator deals with certain behaviours is helpful … like the educator’s techniques … They [the children] have been very receptive with the educator, but I like hearing the educator’s approach as I think that’s very helpful as a parent.*

When Juan was asked about her family’s relationship with Jia, she reflected on just how helpful Jia had been in helping Isabella settle into preschool when her daughter was experiencing separation anxiety: “She has been great ever since the beginning because I have experienced some difficulty with Isabella settling at school. I was very upset and Jia was very helpful. So it was like the relationship was already perfect.”

Jia also indicated that she believed that the parent–educator relationship had improved between her and the parents who had attended the training:

*We feel closer because we went through the training together and it’s a great relationship-building exercise, and you also receive positive feedback from them. So definitely the relationship has strengthened. And it helped me to build the relationship with that child, which will help you deal with the challenging behaviour; and also the relationship with the family. It helps you build that partnership for dealing with the child’s behaviour.*

When asked how the parent–educator relationship could be improved, the common response was that the parents would like to spend more time with the educator; that communication was the key; and that there needed to be consistency between what the parents did at home and what the educator did in the preschool. Juan felt that she needed more time with Jia to learn the strategies and would look to Jia for that support:

*I think it’s just like things we need to discuss and spend more time together so we can bring things up like again and again, you know what I mean? Even before the lecture, I had heard about it [positive praise and encouragement]. But after the lecture, I forgot things … And after a couple of months I stopped … not that I had forgotten the theory, but I had just forgotten to do it*
on a regular basis. So, if the educator somehow did a reminder ... not for like an hour lecture, just every now and then.

As detailed in the next two chapters, it was found that the trust parents have with an educator, like the trust Juan had developed with Jia, is a vital element in helping families develop strategies to grow children’s social and emotional skills. In Chapter 6 the ways in which early childhood teachers and educators can be empowered to pass on the knowledge they have learnt from the TOGETHER program to the families that they work with are explored.
Chapter 8

Case Study 3: The Community Hub

Rishi is busy exploring outside. He loves to climb on the preschool’s playground equipment and dig in the sandpit. Suddenly, it is time to come inside for group time. Naomi, one of his educators, had mentioned a few minutes earlier to the group that this would be happening. However, when she announced it was time, Rishi ignored her and continued to climb. Once all the other children were in, she walked over to Rishi, who smiled, then ran in the other direction of the door. After several reminders from Naomi, Rishi eventually came inside. All the other children were sitting on the mat listening to their other educator, Laura. Naomi needed to lead Rishi by the hand over to the mat and show him where to sit. He sat for a few minutes listening to Laura’s instructions about how some children were able to share stories about their weekend. As each child began to take their turns, Rishi would interrupt, trying to tell his story, and speak over the other children. Naomi had to keep reminding him throughout the group time to let other children talk and to stop yelling over them. For most of the group time, Rishi struggles to join in and Naomi spends most of her time redirecting his disruptive behaviour. Is he just being naughty? Is he just being difficult? On the other hand, is there something more to his behaviour?

The two preceding case studies have described the application of TOGETHER in varying contexts, including preschools and family circumstances. In Case Study 3 a new context is introduced – a community hub consisting of two preschool programs. This case study explores how the context of the hub has contributed to the stronger relationships between the children, parents, teachers, and educators. Benjamin, Hailey, and Rishi are the three children that are central to this case study, along with their mothers and educators. Case Study 3 brings together the components of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) by showing how the educators were able to respond to the contexts of Benjamin’s and Rishi’s disruptive behaviour. Also discussed is how additional coaching had empowered the educators to share their practices with other families who could not attend the TOGETHER training.

This chapter also details the important role educators have in reaching out to families who may be hesitant about participating in the initial TOGETHER program. The case study also uses family-centred practice (Dunst, 2002) to illustrate the important role educators have in empowering families with positive behaviour guidance skills, and the effect this has on children’s social and emotional development. Finally, the findings demonstrate as to why
researchers and outside professionals need to value and utilise the trust educators have already cultivated with families when developing effective early interventions.

The Preschool Setting for Case Study 3

Case Study 3 is unique in that the participants are from a preschool program located on the same site as a maternal and child health centre and two community playgroups. The preschool is divided into four rooms, with each providing a program for four-year-olds. All four rooms share a large outdoor communal space. This configuration is a recent concept that is changing how many early childhood centres operate in Victoria, Australia (Garvis et al., 2016). The concept is most often referred to as a community hub.

At the time of the research study, families from two of the rooms had volunteered to participate in the TOGETHER project. The preschool programs were being delivered to 33 children in each of two rooms. The six educators attended the preschool Monday to Friday for five hours per day, while each child attended three assigned sessions (a total of 15 hours). Three educators had been allocated to each room; however, both rooms shared a large outdoor space, which meant there were times when the children would interact with all six educators. The multicultural preschool community consisted of families from Australian, Indian, Sudanese, Middle Eastern, Chinese, and European backgrounds. Two of the participating families identified as Australian and one family identified as Australian-Fijian-Indian. The educators identified as Australian, Mauritian, Malayan/Tamil/Indian, and Punjabi/Indian. As with Case Study 2, the parents needed assistance with childcare in order to attend the workshops, so they were conducted at the preschool with the children in attendance. Again, a qualified educator who was not participating in the study provided the childcare. The children, their families, and the educators are introduced below.

The Children, Their Parents, and the Educators

Benjamin

Benjamin is a four-year-old boy who lives with his mum, Kelly, and his maternal grandmother. Kelly grew up in the local area and the family identify as Australian. They have several family members who live nearby, including Benjamin’s cousins who are of a similar age. Benjamin receives much enjoyment from playing with other children, especially when it is one on one. At preschool he will often be found building houses with large pieces of
construction equipment, creating sandpit cities with the cars, engaging in craft-based activities, and climbing challenging playground equipment. At home he has a great interest in playing with Lego. With every creation he will have a special name for it and delights in telling his mum all about his Lego inventions. He also enjoys watching movies with Kelly – it is their family treat. However, Benjamin finds it difficult to regulate his emotions and interact with large groups of children.

**Benjamin’s Mum, Kelly**

Kelly is a single mum who works long hours at a local supermarket. She ensures she can meet Benjamin’s needs by adjusting her shifts to enable her to pick him up and drop him off at preschool. She feels it is extremely important to be available to talk to his educators when needed. Kelly reported that she finds it exhausting parenting Benjamin at times and her confidence is lacking. She had been getting additional advice from an external psychologist to assist her with Benjamin’s behaviour. She had also started to employ some of the strategies she had learnt from his psychologist; however, she mentioned that living with her mother (Benjamin’s grandmother) was making things very difficult as her mother would often contradict the strategies that she was trying to implement. Her mother would often tell her that she is not instigating the correct strategies. At times, Kelly feels quite isolated and the preschool has become, consequently, a place of trust for her. She has developed an especially strong relationship with Anika, one of Benjamin’s educators. Anika herself is a single mother and Kelly feels she can relate to her and will often seek guidance and reassurance from Anika.

**Hailey**

Hailey is also four years old and lives with her mum, Diana, her dad, Paul, and her younger brother, Beau. The family has lived locally for all of Hailey’s life and identify as Australian. Diana reports that Hailey enjoys spending time with her cooking – they often go to the *Taste* website and pick out recipes. Hailey loves to paint her nails and play dress-ups. Paul is a computer technician and, as a result, Hailey has taken a deep interest in how computers work and will often ask him questions at the dinner table about his day with computers. Hailey also loves to be part of everything Diana does and will follow her around most of the day and help care for Beau. The family are also big movie buffs, so watching films forms much of their time connecting as a family. At preschool, Hailey often takes on a leadership role during
play, yet she is good at negotiating and taking on the ideas of her peers. She enjoys being involved in socio-dramatic play and can often be found in the bamboo plantation outside, or the family corner inside, pretending to cook, looking after the baby dolls, or going camping.

**Hailey’s Mum, Diana**

Diana spends most days caring for Hailey and Beau, while Paul works full time. Diana plays an active role in the preschool community and will often volunteer her time for fundraising and in-class help. She values the active role she plays in Hailey’s life and cultivates their relationship through her love of cooking and baking. She feels confident in her parenting and actively seeks out opportunities to develop her knowledge as a parent, which includes reading parenting books and attending community playgroups. Diana has also developed a special friendship with Benjamin’s mum, Kelly, and frequently organises play dates for Hailey and Benjamin.

**Rishi**

The third child in Case Study 3 is Rishi who was introduced at the beginning of this chapter. From a Fijian-Indian background, he lives with his mum, Meleni, his dad, Jo, and his two-year-old brother, Adi. The family has had several personal challenges over the past year, with extended family members becoming ill. At home, Rishi loves to play chase and play-fight with Adi. He enjoys reading picture books with his mum and dad and practising his drawing. At preschool Rishi loves to move about his environment and is constantly exploring new ideas, especially when it involves testing out building toys, putting puzzles together, climbing on the outside obstacle course, and digging in the sandpit. However, Rishi has demonstrated several delays with his social and emotional skills.

**Rishi’s Mum, Meleni**

Meleni was willing to be part of the training and for Rishi to be observed at the preschool. However, due to time constraints and family illness, she was not able to participate in interviews.

**Benjamin’s and Hailey’s Teachers and Educators – Emma, Anika, and Sukhleen**

Of Australian descent, the head teacher for Room 1, Emma, has a Bachelor of Education (Primary and Early Childhood) with two years’ experience. The second educator, Anika, is
from Mauritius, and she speaks French and Creole as her first languages and has a Diploma in Early Childhood Education. She has been teaching in the early childhood sector for two years. She is also in the process of completing her Bachelor of Education (Primary and Early Childhood). The third educator, Sukhleen, also has a Diploma in Early Childhood Education. She identifies as Punjabi, speaks Punjabi and English, and has had four years of teaching experience. She has been in the current preschool for two years.

*Rishi’s Teachers and Educators – Laura, Sabeena, and Naomi*

Laura is the head teacher in Room 2. She holds a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) and has been teaching for 15 years. She identifies as Australian. The second educator, Sabeena, has a Diploma in Early childhood Education. She identifies as Malayan/Tamil, speaks Tamil, Hindi, and English and has been working at the preschool for the past two years. She has been teaching in early childhood for over 10 years. She was also working towards her bachelor degree, which meant she was unable to be onsite for all the observations during the data collection phase. The third educator, Naomi, is also an early childhood teacher who has been teaching for two years and has a Bachelor of Education (Primary and Early Childhood). She also identifies as Australian.

**What Was Learnt About the Children, Their Parents, and the Educators Before the TOGETHER Training?**

As a result of the baseline observations, surveys, and interviews, the patterns of behaviour and the beliefs of each participant were able to be identified as follows.

**What Was Learnt About Benjamin’s, Hailey’s, and Rishi’s Social and Emotional Development Before the TOGETHER Training?**

**Benjamin.** The Social Development Rating Scale (SDRS; Tyler-Merrick, 2014) scores given by Benjamin’s mum, Kelly, and his three educators indicated that Benjamin was struggling with his social and emotional development, so he was selected as one of the focus children for Case Study 3.

Kelly reported that Benjamin had aggressive outbursts of behaviour daily at home. He would often kick her, pull her hair, twist her arm, and scream extremely loudly when he became frustrated. Such behaviours were witnessed during the baseline video observations. There were times when Kelly was unsure what was triggering his meltdowns. When he
became upset, Benjamin found it difficult to explain to his mum why he had had the meltdown. She also reported that Benjamin found it difficult to follow instructions, such as when she asked him to get dressed. She reported that there would often be several instances during the day when he would not listen to her and would often walk away. At preschool, Benjamin would generally follow the educators’ suggestions, which made his challenging behaviours less pronounced. However, his educators reported that there were times when he would struggle to understand the perspectives of his peers, take turns, focus on non-preferred tasks, and join in with group times. Over the term there had been several instances where he had hurt other children in order to have a turn with a toy, or had hurt someone when they had annoyed him at group times. His educators reported that he would often want to watch group times from a distance because larger groups of children appeared to overwhelm him. These behaviours had also been observed during the preschool observations.

**Hailey.** Hailey’s preschool educators reported that the SDRS had revealed that she had reasonably strong social and emotional skills, but the general concerns related to the struggles she had with joining in with peer groups and the preference she had for playing one on one. Her mum, Diana, reported that, at home, the main struggles they had with Hailey were related to her eating habits. At most dinner times, Hailey would find something wrong with the food, often describing things as being too grainy or too soft. Both the preschool and the home observations indicated that Hailey was quite eager to please others, looked out for her younger brother, and had established several close friendships with selected children.

**Rishi.** The SDRS was conducted by Rishi’s educators—his mum, Meleni, declined to do the SDRS, citing time constraints. The scores given by Laura, Suhkleen, and Naomi indicated that there were a high number of concerns relating to Rishi’s social and emotional development. The educators reported that he would often watch his peers playing from a distance and was very cautious about joining in with group play. Rishi struggled to take turns with other children, and if a peer stood too close to him when he was concentrating, he would often hit them out of frustration.

He would also become aggressive if another child was playing with a toy that he wanted to play with. He would often interrupt other children during mat times and would resist coming inside when called. Rishi’s family had given consent for Rishi to be involved in the research project; however, due to family illness, Meleni found it difficult to take part in
the interviews. His educators reported that they had detected from the family that there was a
general feeling that Rishi’s behavioural concerns were more a result of the interactions he
was having at preschool rather than any concerns at home.

What Was Learnt About the Beliefs and Practices of the Parents and the Educators Before
the TOGETHER Training?

The following section uses the SDRS (Tyler-Merrick, 2014), the BPRQ (Phillips et al.,
2020a) and the observations to gain some understanding of the children’s, their parents’ and
their educators’ situations before the workshops commenced.

First, the BPRQ indicated that Kelly and Diana held strong beliefs regarding the
importance of praising and recognising children when they had done things well, as did the
six educators who aligned with more authoritative behaviour guidance styles. However, the
responses relating to authoritarian styles differed, with both Kelly and Diana believing that
children should always do as they were told, the use of an angry voice and punishment was
acceptable for inappropriate behaviour, and that parents should always be in control of their
children. Conversely, the educators were divided regarding the use of angry voices, with
some emphasising the importance of being calm at all times. In addition, while all the
educators agreed that punishment was not an appropriate strategy for
misbehaviour (they
cited the importance of guidance), they did differ on the point of whether they should be in
control of children and the use of an angry voice.

Kelly’s and Diana’s responses to the BPRQ also indicated that they believed that the
primary responsibility for raising children lay with the parents, whereas the educators placed
more emphasis on the idea that it took many people to raise a child. Kelly, Diana, and Anika
also believed in the importance of children sitting quietly at school and that they would often
require assistance with most things, whereas Emma, Sukhleen, Naomi, Laura, and Sabeena
disagreed. They felt strongly that children should be able to look after themselves at
preschool and that part of learning often involved much movement and play.

Regarding practices, Laura and Sukhleen acknowledged that they did not give more
attention to appropriate behaviour rather than inappropriate behaviour, and this was
confirmed in the classroom observations. Interestingly, Emma, Naomi, Sabeena, and Anika
felt that they did give more attention to appropriate behaviour – as did Kelly and Diana – but
it was only Naomi who was observed giving more positive attention to appropriate
behaviours during the baseline observations. This suggests that while the educators felt they
gave positive attention to children, the observations suggested that this was not always the
case. Laura and Kelly also recognised that they were not consistent in their behaviour
guidance strategies.

Regarding the parent–educator relationships, both parents and each of the educators
felt that these relationships were strong. In fact, during the interviews this point was often
cited by the educators as being one of the hallmarks of such partnerships:

Sabeena: *By us respecting families at the beginning, you make good
relationships, and then they trust you.*

Naomi: *Across the board we put a lot of practice into our everyday
interactions to ensure strong relationships are built from the beginning, such
as getting to know their interests, open conversations and purposeful listening
so that they know we value what they talk about.*

**The Responsive Approach to Being TOGETHER**

As with the previous case studies, the delivery of the TOGETHER workshops was adapted
to suit the needs of the families and the educators and to ensure that all participants felt
comfortable with their involvement in the project. After the initial consultations (and the CSD
questionnaire), information was gathered regarding the way the participants would like to
interact and communicate as well as their venue preferences and the times that would best
suit them for the training.

Not surprisingly, all the educators mentioned that they were quite time poor and had a
strong preference for the TOGETHER workshops to be held immediately after the preschool
session at 2.30 pm, once families had left; any later would be difficult for all of them as they
had their own families to tend to. Kelly, Diana, and Meleni also stated that afternoon
workshops would suit them the best; however, they would need care for their children.
Therefore, an external educator was employed by the research team to care for Benjamin,
Hailey, Rishi, and their siblings during the training workshops.

The availability of food at the workshops was also a motivating factor for attendance,
with the educators stating that they would be tired and hungry after a five-hour shift and,
understandably, the children and their mums would be also. To help the parents, children,
teachers, and educators, each workshop was set up like an “afternoon tea” session where food
and drink was provided. This set-up produced a relaxed atmosphere that was conducive to
conversation from the moment the participants entered the room. The important role that food
plays in bringing children, families, teachers, and educators together was highlighted in this case study and moving forward many of the teachers and educators felt that this would a strategy they would continue to implement.

Sometimes it was hard for the parents to attend. Rishi’s mum, Meleni, was unable to attend the first session due to a family emergency and Hailey’s mum, Diana, was unable to attend the second session due to her car breaking down. Consequently, make-up sessions were arranged for each of them via phone and face-to-face meetings. Due to the facilitators’ adaptability to each family’s situation, they were able to ensure the same training was delivered to both the parents and the educators.

**What Happened During the TOGETHER Training?**

The two TOGETHER workshops provide a platform to assist the educators and the families, which facilitated the gaining of additional insights into the beliefs and practices of the parents and educators and the parent–educator relationship. The workshops followed the same format as explained in Chapter 4.

**Workshop 1**

As the first workshop progressed, both the parents and the educators exchanged stories with each other as they shared their experiences regarding how they had developed relationships with the children and understood their needs. From the beginning of the training, the educators supported each parent in contributing and empowered them to share stories about their child. For example, Diana excitedly shared about Hailey’s passion for cooking: “Saturday is when she becomes involved in cooking ... we go through the Taste website ... that’s our little thing.” Hailey’s educator, Emma, keenly took notes and mentioned that she had noticed this in the classroom and that she may need to include a cooking program at the preschool. Kelly then elaborated on Benjamin’s love for Lego and how he enjoys playing with his cousin. She mentioned that “I feel like I am building a relationship with him when he says things are cool ... as long as it makes him happy ... that smile makes you happy and you are, like, ah, all good.”

Rishi’s educator, Naomi, supported Kelly in her statements and shared stories about her own experiences as both a parent and a teacher, and the need to sometimes adapt her interests to suit her own child’s:
It’s like pretending you are interested ... I had to pretend ... in my head I don’t care about the game, but I care about you [referring to her own child and wanting to let the child know that she cared].

The sharing of ideas continued as Kelly and Diana talked about their struggles at home and the educators offered their experiences in solidarity. As stories were recounted, both the mums and the educators showed more confidence in contributing to the group discussion. The trust the parents had developed in the educators had become evident. For example, Kelly shared her struggles with trying to get Benjamin dressed and wanting him to listen. As the focus was on recognising and responding to positive behaviours, Emma shared how she would assist her nephew with his listening skills by giving him descriptive praise when he had listened well.

Towards the end of Workshop 1, Kelly shared her struggles with Benjamin hitting and kicking her. The educators were extremely supportive in helping Kelly produce strategies that would help her recognise when he was being gentle. Together they developed a positive behaviour guidance plan. However, it became clear that she also needed strategies to deal with Benjamin’s aggressive behaviours when they were occurring. Consequently, some simple calm-down strategies were suggested, with the emphasis being placed on using the Golden Apple’s principle of five positive responses for every negative response. The trainers mentioned that the following week’s workshop would include more strategies to assist with misbehaviour.

**Workshop 2**

The second workshop began with the parents and educators reflecting on their progress in giving more positive feedback than negative feedback, as well as the reminder strategies they had used over the past week since Workshop 1. The educators commented on how the reminder strategies had helped them become more aware of their practices. Each reminder strategy had been developed according to the needs of each participant. For example, Naomi and Laura began by noting on their hands with a pen when they had given positive praise and made the following comments: Naomi: *It [the reminder strategies and the training] made you more aware of what you were saying ... looking through another lens was interesting.*
Laura: *I was consciously thinking of the five positives if I had given a negative ... I was aware when I needed to factor that in and upping that a little more.*

For Emma, she placed small pebbles in her left pocket, which she transferred to her right pocket when she had given positive praise. She had an interesting reflection on her previous beliefs on positive praise and how after the first TOGETHER workshop, accompanied by her change in practice, those beliefs had been challenged. She made specific reference to her provision of descriptive praise during group times:

*Over the past week it [the reminder strategies and the training] had made me think how much praise I had been giving in group times. In the past I would have focused more on the task. I thought that if I did that [give praise], I would lose children ... I have now changed my practice in that I am more flexible to talk to children about their positive behaviour. I thought it would hinder the concentration of the other children, but it didn’t at all in the end. They would listen to the praise ... then they all wanted the praise.*

Sukhleen, on the other hand, realised that without the reminders her practices would be harder to change. She was quite diligent in her role and admitted that she would often become caught up in the daily tasks. An educator’s day can be extremely challenging in the education and care of children and the constant vigilance required to maintain cleanliness and complete everyday routines. Sukhleen gave an honest and valuable reflection about how it was hard to change her behaviour when she didn’t use the reminders: “*I went back to my natural behaviour ... and forgot it (to give praise).*”

The remainder of the second workshop was focused on developing rules and guidelines, redirecting behaviour, natural and logical consequences for inappropriate behaviour, and the sit and watch strategy used to calm down children. The workshop began with an exploration of the current rules or guidelines that were operating in the home and the preschool settings, and it was interesting to note that while the parents had their rules set in their minds, the rules were only stated when the child had done something wrong and, therefore, were expressed using negative terms. For example, Meleni (who participated in the second workshop) stated that she would tell Rishi and his brother that there is to be “*no screaming, no running, and no jumping on the couch.*”
Kelly responded by saying that she would tell Benjamin that there is to be “no hurting, kicking or hitting.” The conversations with each parent provided a basis for suggesting new ways of introducing rules and guidelines for their children. Such strategies included stating the new ways of behaving in positive terms, with the focus changed to what the parents (and the educators) wanted their children to achieve and how important it was to involve their children in the establishment of the rules and guidelines so as to develop their social understandings. Kelly quickly adapted her thoughts regarding the rules she had told Benjamin: “I would ask him to share and be nice to everyone ... be kind to others ... so, I could try to use gentle hands ... Yeah, I’ll try that.”

In moving into why children may engage in inappropriate behaviours, the term *functional behaviour analysis* was introduced. The participants were assisted in exploring why a child may be displaying disruptive behaviours. It was encouraging to see how the parents and educators reflected on the times when a child may have a meltdown and discuss why this may have occurred in the first place. As the challenges were being shared and the mothers and educators in the workshop could relate to these experiences, a sense of camaraderie began to emerge. Through this sharing exercise, the parents and educators realised that they were not alone in their challenges in raising and guiding children. For example, in recounting her struggles with Benjamin, Kelly indicated that she would like guidance from the educators: “Let’s say he is playing with Lego and he is concentrating, and it breaks ... then he loses it. I can’t do anything about that.”

Together with the facilitator, Naomi, Emma, and Kelly discussed what may have triggered Benjamin’s frustrations and the ways that they could reduce the impact of these triggers when he was playing with Lego. They also talked about the importance of acknowledging him when he had been persistent with the Lego building task and congratulating him when he had been able work through his frustration. Offering him a space to calm down was also a strategy they discussed. Kelly did mention to the educators that many of the strategies appeared to be working because she had been astounded by the positive change in him over the past term already.

Other strategies explored in the workshop were redirecting; natural and logical consequences for inappropriate behaviour; and the sit and watch strategy. Kelly and Meleni were also able to work together with their children’s educators to develop positive behaviour management plans for Benjamin and Rishi. Through collaboration, the parents and educators were able to produce plans that would engender consistency between the practices of the
parents at home and the practices of the educators at the preschool. With an increase in the consistency and collaboration between the parents and the educators, Benjamin’s, Hailey’s, and Rishi’s social and emotional skills had begun to improve. These improvements and changes are now unpacked.

**What Was Learnt About the Children, Their Parents, and the Educators After the TOGETHER training?**

From the baseline observations, the surveys, and the interviews, patterns of behaviour and the beliefs of each participant were able to be identified as follows.

**What Was Learnt About Benjamin’s, Hailey’s, and Rishi’s Social and Emotional Development After the TOGETHER Training?**

**Benjamin.** Benjamin’s mum, Kelly, and his educators, Emma, Anika, and Sukhleen all reported an improvement in his social and emotional skills. The changes that had been noticed were supported by the preschool observations and the SDRS (Tyler-Merrick, 2014) that had been completed by Kelly and the educators. Both the preschool observations and the SDRS indicated that there had been an increase in appropriate behaviour from Benjamin in the weeks immediately following the TOGETHER training and that this continued during the follow-up observations. In particular, Benjamin was more eager to join in with group activities and would follow group instructions. He became more cooperative with games such as hide-n-seek and was able to accept the ideas of other children. He was also beginning to show an understanding of how his actions could assist others – for example, he was observed helping other children get their lunch boxes from their bags and was eager to assist his educators with tidying up. Benjamin was also demonstrating an understanding of when another child’s behaviour was inappropriate by walking away before the situation escalated into a confrontation. Emma’s reflection was a promising indication of the positive change that had occurred in Benjamin’s behaviour, specifically relating to his emotional regulation: “From our perspective, he is a lot calmer than what he was. He is such a different child. There was a lot of anger … he would get frustrated with other children.”

Kelly reported that there had been a 50 per cent improvement in Benjamin’s behaviour at home. She mentioned that she had noticed a shift in his ability to get along with others and was able to compromise with others when a disagreement arose. He was also following her instructions more regularly and the number of aggressive meltdowns had
reduced. Kelly found the strategies relating to redirecting were particularly useful in helping Benjamin regulate his emotional meltdowns:

*It [the redirection] really does help. He was getting angry and sooking. I said how about we go and choose a movie [to help him calm down]. Sometimes it is so simple to refocus ... it shortens the length of the tantrum.*

However, there were still many instances where she was struggling with his behaviours. She mentioned that consistency had been hard to achieve in the context of the family home and that there were ongoing challenges in the dynamics of the extended family they lived with. Halfway through the follow-up phase of the study, Benjamin and Kelly moved out of the family home, so the home context altered. This change increased Kelly’s stress levels as she tried to manage a safe home environment for Benjamin, continue her role as a single mum and meet her work commitments.

**Hailey.** Hailey’s social and emotional skills were relatively strong before the TOGETHER training except for a few challenges at home with her eating habits and her preference for one-on-one play. Her skills remained strong and the reports from Diana indicated that Hailey’s behaviour at dinner had been improving. At the preschool it was encouraging to note that her positive behaviours, such as playing with other children and encouraging others, had been acknowledged by her educators through the frequent positive feedback and the descriptive praise.

**Rishi.** Rishi’s educators – Laura, Sabeena, and Naomi – all reported an improvement in his social and emotional skills at preschool. As previously mentioned, due to family illness his mum, Meleni, had found it difficult to take part in the interviews and, therefore, the change in his home environment was unknown; however, the improvement in his behaviour in the preschool setting was promising. The preschool observations and the SDRS completed by his educators indicated that there had been an increase in the number of appropriate behaviours exhibited by Rishi in the weeks immediately following the TOGETHER training.

There had also been a slight rise in the number of inappropriate behaviours as well; however, they remained below the number observed before the TOGETHER training had commenced. Through the educators’ actions in scaffolding on the behaviours they wanted to see, Rishi’s aggressive temperament began to subside, which manifested particularly in him.
hitting other children less frequently when he was frustrated with having to wait his turn. His educators made sure they gave him descriptive praise and encouragement when he was playing well alongside his friends.

In addition, Rishi was starting to regulate his emotions when he was becoming frustrated by remembering to walk away or asking an educator for help. During the observations, both Laura and Naomi congratulated him on coming to them to ask for help when he needed it. He was also beginning to use polite remarks to engage with others, such as “Can I please join you?” He was also happily joining in with group times and was becoming less inclined to talk over others during group activities. An encouraging remark was given by Naomi: “I feel like with Rishi and his behaviours he has grown so much and it has been a real positive for him.”

What Was Learnt About the Beliefs and Practices of the Parents and the Six Educators After the TOGETHER Training?

The major shift in Case Study 3 relates to the change in the practices of the two parents and the six educators. This change, in turn, contributed to a deepening of the parent–educator relationship. After the training, the BPRQ showed that overall, the parents Kelly and Diana the teachers/educators who completed the questionnaire (Emma, Anika, Naomi and Sabeena) shared more with each other in their beliefs and their practices were more consistent in developing children’s social and emotional skills. There was also an overwhelming consistency in the responses to the BPRQ questions that related to authoritative styles of behaviour guidance. The parents and educators all strongly agreed that a child’s appropriate behaviour needs to be praised and encouraged frequently; that giving attention to their child was important; that when a child tries hard (even at the small things), they should be given praise and encouragement; and that it is important to be able to talk to their child about inappropriate behaviour in a calm manner.

Kelly’s and Diana’s beliefs regarding punishment also changed and became more aligned with the beliefs of the educators – specifically, the understanding that redirecting inappropriate behaviour should be framed by guidance rather than punishment. During the initial BPRQ, Diana noted her concerns that disciplining her daughter might lead to Hailey not liking her; whereas after the training, she was able to appreciate the value in redirecting Hailey when inappropriate behaviour had occurred.

Consequently, these beliefs also aligned more with the practices reported on in the BPRQ: Kelly and Diana and the teachers/educators Emma, Anika, Naomi and Sabeena
reported that they gave more attention to appropriate behaviours rather than to inappropriate behaviours; they singled out the appropriate behaviours they wanted the child to practise; they were more consistent in how they addressed inappropriate behaviours; and they involved the child in creating the rules. However, Kelly reported that while she was making attempts to provide positive feedback to Benjamin, there were times when she was struggling and ongoing guidance was needed. After the TOGETHER training, Kelly would often connect with Anika on ways she could improve her positive behaviour guidance practice for Benjamin, highlighting how the educators were able to provide support and coaching with such skills:

*I’m doing my best with him and doing a lot of praise. It was 50/50 really ... yeah, I’m giving more positive praise when he lashes out ... I don’t know ... I’m struggling a lot with his lashing out ... In regard to behaviour guidance, I am not sure things are going well. I need a little bit more guidance on patience and dealing with that.*

The reports from the educators also showed that they were making attempts to reflect on their own practices of guiding children’s behaviour and developing children’s social and emotional skills. While the educators felt that the strategies taught in the TOGETHER program consisted of concepts they already knew, the two training workshops prompted them to reflect more on how they actually used the strategies they had learnt and, as result, they began to change their practices. For example, Emma mentioned how she had moved from simply making requests of the children to ensuring that she had more positive interactions with them:

*I think the training was already in line with what I believed, but my practices have changed ... I think I’m more honest with myself ... I was having shorter bursts. I was not connecting enough ... I had to check to make sure I was giving feedback. I had been giving requests rather than positive feedback.*

In addition, Naomi started to use the strategies with her extended family, as well as with her immediate preschool community, and recognised the importance of acknowledging all children when they were doing things well:

*I knew a lot of the concepts and it [TOGETHER] has reinforced it. The conversations of how to support families and why children are doing these*
things was really helpful. It’ll be in the forefront of my mind ... I have even shared it with my sister and her son ... I’m trying to give more positives for children that are always the ones doing the right thing, too. When I’m just going past them I make an effort to give them positives ... for fourth term this is a good thing as it keeps them focused.

The changes in practices had also been observed during the classroom observations (see Figures 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5), where Emma, Anika, Sukhleen, Laura, and Naomi had noticeably increased the number of positive interactions they had with the children during the observations following the TOGETHER training. (Sabeena was only able to be observed four times during the data collection phase due to being on placement.) For example, during the second observation of Anika, she gave a substantial number of descriptive praise statements to the children:

*I like your painting, it’s beautiful ... You have all done great work, thank you ... Keep going, you are trying really hard ... Good boy, well done on packing up ... There is so much food here, great eating everyone ... Ah, I love your painting, I can see Santa ... Thank you for helping her.*
Figure 8.1

*Teacher Emma: Preschool Observations*

Note. The figure indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that Emma responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to all the children’s behaviour and the number of times the children had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her.
Figure 8.2

*Educator Anika: Preschool Observations*

Note: The figure indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that Anika responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to all the children’s behaviour and the number of times the children had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her.
Note. The figure indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that Sukhleen responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to all the children’s behaviour and the number of times the children had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her.
Figure 8.4
Teacher Laura: Preschool Observations

Note. The figure indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that Laura responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to all the children’s behaviour and the number of times the children had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her.
Figure 8.5

Teacher Naomi: Preschool Observations

*Note.* The figure indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that Naomi responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to all the children’s behaviour and the number of times the children had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her.
Sukhleen had paid attention to the processes involved in the children’s learning, which demonstrates the shift that had occurred in her thinking. She now recognised the importance of acknowledging the steps the children had been taking towards their learning, not just the final product. For example, her comment to Benjamin when he was working on his building: “You’re up in the universe? Wow, that’s a cool world! Tell me about the universe … wow! You know so much about the universe … you’re right, Benjamin.”

She also celebrated Benjamin’s achievements with her colleagues at the same time, which led to a sense of achievement for Benjamin: “I’m excited to see [as Benjamin led her by the hand] … Emma, did you see Santa’s house? It’s so cool!”

Emma’s practices had also changed after the TOGETHER training. During the training, one of the goals in Benjamin’s positive behaviour guidance plan had been to be able to join in, concentrate, and contribute to group times. The plan had been developed by his mum, Kelly, and his three educators (Emma, Anika and Sabeena) and included several descriptive praise phrases that could assist with his goals. Therefore, during the group times, Emma would ensure that she gave Benjamin positive feedback and acknowledge the times when he was demonstrating appropriate behaviour. For example, during one observation, Emma gave the following descriptive praise phrases, which resulted in Benjamin remaining engaged in the group time:

*Benjamin, are you going to be able to sit there? … Great choice, Benjamin, I can see you now … Show me how you listen … Would you like to stand up [asking Benjamin to contribute to the group time]? … Thank you for sharing … Benjamin, great listening … Thank you, Benjamin. You can tell me your team name now … You had your hand up. Great work.*

Emma also ensured that she gave positive feedback to other children during the same group time. Her responses not only assisted Benjamin in understanding the expected social behaviours but also ensured that the other children were receiving positive feedback for when they were doing things well. For example, she would frequently acknowledge Hailey when she was making positive contributions to the group: “Hailey, you have been sitting so nicely – would you like to pick the song today? … She’s (Hailey) being a very good friend to you.”

Like Emma, Laura understood the importance of providing positive feedback when children were trying hard at tasks that may be challenging for them. She was aware that Rishi would often wander around the room and find it difficult to engage in a play-based activity.
for an extended period of time. When she was noticing that he was trying to engage in activities, she would give him encouragement throughout the process: “You worked really hard on this ... Rishi, it looks amazing; I can’t wait to see what it looks like when dry ... Well done, Rishi, you got there in the end. It was a good choice.”

The changes in practice were also observed in early childhood teacher Naomi. She provided regular positive feedback to the children before the TOGETHER training, but she increased the number of times she provided descriptive positive praise. In particular, she made specific efforts to engage more with Rishi by ensuring that she provided more positive feedback when she had to give redirection to him:

- I like the way you are sitting [after he had struggled to join in at group time and was sitting still] ... You were already listening – great work ... I loved how you put your hand up [after he had called out several times and needed to be reminded to put his hand up for his turn] ... Thank you for sharing ...
- Great question ... You are right. Great remembering.

As with Naomi, Sukhleen and Anika also increased their positive feedback during specific classroom routines, such as tidying up; their interactions with the children tended to more directive with limited positive responses. Sukhleen reported that giving descriptive praise was a challenge for her during the day, especially considering the demands of the tasks that needed to be completed each day. She saw the value of providing positive feedback, yet she was refreshingly honest when she said that it would take time for her to change her practice. Such a reflection is important for any type of training program because a shift in practice would often take some time for many participants.

**What Was Learnt About the Parent–Educator Relationship After the TOGETHER Training?**

The reports from the parents, teachers, and the educators, as well as the classroom observations, indicated that consistent improvement had occurred in the practices of the parents and the educators after the training. Together with their improved practices, there had also been an improvement in the relationships between the parents and the educators. For Benjamin and his mum, Kelly, the support from his three educators, especially Anika, became invaluable during this time, especially considering the challenges they had been facing at home. Each educator noted that there had been an increase in Kelly’s interactions with them. She had begun to show a deeper trust in communicating the
challenges that she was facing at home with Benjamin and regularly sought advice from his educators on the strategies that she could use at home. Another encouraging outcome from the TOGETHER training was that the educators were sharing positive stories about Benjamin with Kelly, which she appreciated: “When I see them [the educators] and he’s kind of upset, they’ll take him aside and they let me know when he’s been really good.”

In Rishi’s case, the educators were experiencing challenges in how best to communicate with his family. They recognised that developing a closer partnership with his family was going to take some time and that they needed to adapt to how they would interact with his parents, especially his dad, Jo. They had started to see the positive changes in Rishi and that the partnership they had developed with his mum, Meleni, was assisting in his social and emotional development. However, as highlighted by Naomi, the relationship with Rishi’s family was still developing:

*Rishi’s mum has spent more time with us and we have had more communication and reciprocal conversations with her. I feel like with Rishi and his behaviours he has grown so much, and it has been a real positive for him. With dad there is still a barrier ... we need more time with him ... I feel like we need to be positive rather than telling them things they don’t want to hear. They want to hear that their child is happy and safe ... We have more interactions with mum so we have more opportunity to connect ... dad not so much. I don’t know how [to connect] apart from organising more nights; he works full time ... It’s a real challenge ... It’s the same for lots of families.*

The teachers and educators also recognised that their own flexibility in how they communicated with all preschool families was pivotal in ensuring that they were being contextually and culturally responsive and family centred. There was an understanding that each child’s parents communicated in different ways and that there were barriers as to how involved they could be with their child’s preschool education. The educators in both classrooms recognised that many parents were time poor due to work and life commitments. For example, Laura reflected on the importance of building a strong rapport with families from the beginning and how technology was being used to communicate:

*At the start it is about building rapport ... breaking down the perceptions we had of families. We have had the intimate one on one and, wow, we were on different page ... it was rectified ... They [the parents] were like, wow, you*
know what he/she is like ... It is becoming more common to be sending emails ... We need to be open to opportunities ... Sometimes we get emails late at night ... We need to be flexible in allowing the families to have the opportunity to touch base, even if it is later.

Naomi also valued the importance of building strong relationships with families at the beginning and reflected on how the relationships were not only for the child’s education but also for the wider preschool community. She touched on how every year they were presented with a new preschool community and therefore their practices needed to change in response to the needs of the different families in the community:

*I’ll build the relationship at the start ... We did our fathers’ night ... Maybe we could have monthly family gatherings ... It’s about being able to come into the environment and being not only about the child’s education but about the community ... When you build that rapport with them [the families], and then when you do need to have those conversations about things that are developing, they may be more receptive to taking it on board without feeling it is harsh. Every year it is different with the community; it depends on the community.*

Emma agreed with Naomi while also recognising that families observed their practices as educators. She made specific reference to building relationships through community events at the beginning of the preschool year and said how such events that contributed to the building of trust between parents’ and educators’ breakdown potential barriers and increase the educators’ approachability: “It’s about the families and bonding [referring to community events] ... but the families are watching you, too. They see you are approachable ... It’s those little chinks in the armour that have them see you as approachable.”

**Training/Empowering Educators Through the TOGETHER Program**

It became evident from the observations and final interviews that the educators had developed strong and trusting relationships with Benjamin’s, Hailey’s, and Rishi’s families. These relationships extended to many other families at the preschool as well. It had also become apparent that despite my best efforts to recruit children and families to be involved in the TOGETHER project, it was not the me, the researcher, who had the relationships with the
families. While the educators participated in the recruitment process, there was still a need for the facilitators to develop trust with the families; however, as the educators’ comments have highlighted, such trust takes time. My own reflections informed me that empowering the educators to be facilitators of the TOGETHER program in their own community increased the potential for more families to be reached. Therefore, I proceeded with a third training session after the final observations, which was specifically designed to train the educators to become facilitators of the TOGETHER program. As Naomi said: “Yes, I agree, they don’t trust you (the researcher/facilitator) … So it makes sense it comes from us … The relationship is everything.”

Naomi’s statement clearly illustrates the need for additional coaching to train educators to be TOGETHER facilitators. All six educators – Emma, Anika, Sukhleen, Laura, Sabeena, and Naomi – were eager to participate in additional coaching, which aimed to not only provide them with the training skills of the TOGETHER program so that they would be empowered to continue to work in partnership with the children’s families but to also pass on their knowledge to the wider preschool community. A central element of the third session was the importance of building relationships with families in a contextually responsive, culturally appropriate, and family-centred way. The workshop and final interview discussions highlighted the interesting ideas that had emerged for developing relationships and establishing practices in positive behaviour guidance as well as the value that the educators had placed on the TOGETHER program.

It was encouraging to see that the educators had been able to recognise the strengths they had in establishing relationships with the preschool’s families. They understood that the relationships and the trust that they had already established with the families would be of great assistance in building relationships and developing family partnerships in guiding children’s social and emotional skills. For example, Anika, Sukhleen, and Sabeena all saw the value of speaking more than one language and appreciated how this ability could assist in building trust with families from different cultures. Many of the children were brought to the preschool by their grandparents who found it difficult to communicate with the educators as English was not their first language. However, with Anika speaking French and Creole, Sukhleen speaking Punjabi, and Sabeena speaking Tamil and Hindi, they were able to communicate with several of the grandparents who spoke languages other than English. This was not only beneficial for the children and their families but also provided another means of communication for all the educators. As Sabeena noted: “Most of the grandparents who come
speak a different language, such as Hindi. So, it’s easy for me to communicate with them and they feel comfortable.”

As the educators discussed ways to move forward and involve more families in the TOGETHER program, they saw how immensely valuable the additional languages that Anika, Sukhleen, and Sabeena spoke could be in responding to the context of each family. They also discussed how they felt small, intimate groups of families would be the best approach for any future collaboration with them. This reasoning was not only because of their own confidence in delivering the TOGETHER program but also because they felt that the trust they had with the families could be better maintained in smaller groups. Through the coaching sessions, the educators were able to develop ways to facilitate the program that were contextually and culturally responsive to their immediate community at the preschool. Some of the educators also discussed that maybe through team teaching, with the assistance of the TOGETHER manual, their confidence in facilitating the program would improve. For example, in her final interview, Emma made the following statement:

*The training manual is consistent ... It reminds you that this is the path we are taking. It lies with my own confidence ... and practising in front of my peers ... I think it is just practice and the support of someone else, such as team teaching.*

While the outcomes of the additional coaching sessions were not measured, the workshop conversations and the final interviews gave some insight into how the educators had benefited from the additional training. The sessions also demonstrated how they could facilitate TOGETHER in the future, and that the trust they had already developed with the participating families could be the key to reaching other families.

In understanding the backgrounds of the families they were working with, the educators were able to establish contextually responsive relationships, improve the consistency of their practices, and increase the children’s social and emotional skills – all goals of the TOGETHER program. With specific reference to her experience with Rishi, Laura recognised that understanding the family context and recognising how a child’s behaviour manifested that context was an important component in facilitating future TOGETHER training:

*I think that once you know a bit more of the context of the family and the child, we know how to work with him ... We need to give him a role, a purpose, and*
have control over the situation, and then we will get the best out of him that day ... It’s about understanding the function behind the behaviour.

Case Study 3 has provided a new starting point – exploring how educators can be trained as facilitators of the TOGETHER program. While the following two case studies do not include the third training session, as occurred in this case study, they do offer insight into the significant role teachers and educators have in the lives of children and their families.
Chapter 9

Case Study 4: Trying Their Best

It is an hour into the kindergarten session. Rebecca is already exhausted. The night before she was up until 10 pm preparing transition statements for each individual child in a classroom of 33. She has spent the morning preparing for the program, she is expecting a visit from the preschool field officer, and a speech therapist is coming to observe a child with additional needs. On top of this, the preschool is expecting a visit from the Department of Education and Training in a week’s time to assess the preschool’s performance. The pressure is mounting, yet she maintains her professionalism and pushes on through. As the day progresses, she is struggling with several challenging behaviours in the classroom. She confides with the researcher about her struggles and states she finds it difficult to cater for all the children when she is having to give so much attention to reducing conflicts between specific children. In her preliminary interview, Rebecca stated:

I think that as a teacher the most tricky part is that you do try your best ... like we have a child with a behavioural need and he needs someone with him and we are always dealing with him every day in terms of inappropriate behaviours.

The demand on early childhood teachers and educators growing children’s social and emotional skills is having a significant impact on their own health and wellbeing (Corr et al., 2017). Demands derive from working with complex regulatory frameworks, working fragmented hours (including nights and weekends), and working in environments that are highly paced and constantly changing. Consequently, some teachers and educators may be less inclined to deliver evidence-based or innovative practices (Larson et al., 2018). Such concerns could potentially impact a teacher’s or educator’s ability to implement strategies from programs like TOGETHER. In Case Study 4, two teachers, Rebecca and Janice, are introduced. This case study illustrates the struggles they were facing in the classroom and how, by providing strategies from TOGETHER and collaborating with parents, they were able to alleviate some of the stress. It also demonstrates that teachers and educators often place a huge value on the role they play in children’s lives and that they are constantly trying their best to build children’s social and emotional skills.
It is important to note that all three children in this case study have mostly been doing well with their social and emotional development. Therefore, the focus of this case study is more on how the teachers and parents changed their practices to continue to build the skills of the three children. In turn, the teachers and parents learnt skills to help other children.

**The Preschool Setting for Case Study 4**

Also set up like a community hub, the setting includes two funded four-year old kindergarten programs, a three-year-old kindergarten program, a parent and child playgroup, and a maternal health nurse onsite. The preschool community consisted of two teachers, two educators, 33 children, and their families who attended the preschool on a rotational system. The two participating teachers attended the preschool four days per week for five hours per day, while each child attended three assigned five-hour sessions (a total 15 hours). The two educators did not wish to participate in the research project. The multicultural preschool community consisted of families from Australian, Indian, Sudanese, Middle Eastern, and European backgrounds. The participating families were all from an Australian background. Again, onsite childcare was provided to the two families attending the workshops. Information on the children, their families, and two teachers are provided below.

**The Children and Their Families**

**Mia and Her Family**

Mia is an energetic and engaged girl who was five years old at the time of the study. She lives with her mum, Heidi, her dad, Rob, and her younger brother, Brody. Both parents identify as Australian. Both her mum and her teachers, Rebecca and Janice, had reported that Mia has an imaginative way of playing. She is often found building and playing house with her peers. She often takes the lead in her games and is very inclusive of those around her. She makes sure her peers feel welcome in her play and shows strong skills in caring for others. Heidi reports that her daughter is very caring of her younger brother and loves to help at home. Mia was one of the two children chosen for preschool observations. Home observations did not occur.

Heidi is a full-time mum and is studying for her education degree part time. She spends most of her day caring for Mia and her brother, Brody, while Rob goes to work. She is involved in several local playgroups and as a result knows many of the other families who
attend the preschool. She is actively involved with preschool life through being a parent help in the classroom and volunteering for excursions. Through the knowledge she has gained from her studies and the support she receives from extended family, Heidi feels relatively confident in her parenting skills; however, she is eager to further her parenting practice.

**Matt and His Family**

Matt was also five years old at the time of the study. He has a curious mind loves to ask many questions. He lives with his dad, Lincoln, and his two younger siblings, Michaela and Ryan. His dad is local to the area and the family also identifies as Australian. Lincoln reports that the family is quite isolated. Matt is always excited to come to kindergarten. As soon as he arrives, he is surrounded by his peers who look to Matt to lead them in the day’s new adventure. He will spend much of his day riding the trikes, making mud pies in the cubby house, and creating weapons and vehicles from the many construction supplies. He also enjoys quiet moments reading books, often alongside Mia. Matt was one of the two children chosen for preschool observations. Home observations did not occur.

Lincoln is a single dad who divides his time between a highly physical job and looking after his three children. He is quite isolated, and in order to attend the TOGETHER training, he required caregiving for all three children. Caregiving was provided; however, for both sessions he was called into work and was unable to attend. He was very stretched for time between work and looking after his children. He had little support from extended family or friends. Offers were made to do separate sessions. However, it was determined that the best support for Lincoln and his family would come from Matt’s two teachers, who would pass on the knowledge they had learnt.

**Liesel and Her Family**

Liesel is a friendly and welcoming four-year-old. She lives with her mum, Hannah, her dad, Rodney, and her younger brother, Dylan. Liesel’s teachers report that she enjoys engaging with intricate crafts and is highly creative. Liesel would often bring home piles of craftwork each week and would often take the lead and show her friends how to complete certain crafts. She enjoys pretending to be the teacher and will often have her friends sitting down around her while she reads them all a book. No preschool or home observations occurred for Liesel.

Hannah is a dedicated mother to her two children, spending most of her day caring for them while Rodney is at work. She ensures that both her children get to experience many
things in the community, often attending playgroups and library groups for children. Like Heidi, Hannah often volunteers to help in the classroom. Hannah feels confident in guiding Liesel’s social and emotional skills, although there are times when she feels overwhelmed with sibling rivalry and would like assistance in this area.

**The Teachers**

**Rebecca**

Rebecca has a four-year degree in early childhood and primary teaching and has been teaching in early childhood education for six years. She is the lead early childhood teacher for the four-year-old group and is assisted by teacher Janice and two other educators. The educators chose not to participate in the TOGETHER program. Rebecca has been teaching at the current preschool for the past year, and although she feels confident in developing children’s social and emotional skills, she does, however, feel that she could learn more regarding classroom management. She mentions she is experiencing difficulties with several children. She finds that her day is often taken up assisting with their emotions and guiding their prosocial skills.

**Janice**

Janice has a Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies has been teaching in early childhood education for 20 years. She works alongside Rebecca in the four-year-old group. She has been teaching at the current preschool for the past year. She feels confident with her teaching practices and was interested in participating in TOGETHER to support Rebecca.

**What Was Learnt About the Children, Their Families, and the Educators Before the TOGETHER Training?**

The following section uses the SDRS (Tyler-Merrick, 2014), the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a) and the observations to help understand the current contexts of the children, their parents, and the two teachers before the workshops commenced.
**What Was Learnt About Mia, Matt, and Liesel’s Social and Emotional Development Before the TOGETHER Training?**

The SDRS was completed by Rebecca and Janice to help identify the current social and emotional development of Mia, Matt, and Liesel. Once they had completed the SDRS for each child in the class, their rating scores indicated that they had no concerns for the social and emotional development of Mia, Matt, or Liesel. Therefore, each parent was also asked to complete the SDRS to ascertain if they were any concerns in the home setting. Heidi and Hannah completed the SDRS but Lincoln did not. Having both the teachers and two of the parents complete the SDRS enabled the additional information to be used to develop a deeper understanding of each child’s social and emotional development.

**Mia.** At preschool Rebecca and Janice reported that Mia interacted with her peers in a peaceful manner. She was confident in taking turns and joined in happily with the group activities. The preschool observations also demonstrated that Mia was doing well with her social and emotional development. At home, Heidi reported that Mia showed appreciation of others by saying “thank you” or offering help. She would take turns and respond appropriately when others interacted with her. However, Heidi did report that Mia would often require assistance to persist with tasks when unsupervised, to eat and drink appropriately at mealtimes, and to compromise with others when conflicts arose. Heidi also reported that Mia would often interrupt others when they were working or relaxing on their own.

**Matt.** Rebecca and Janice reported that Matt engaged in mostly prosocial behaviours. They reported that he was good at taking turns, showed an interest in what others did and was confident in making compromises. However, the initial preschool observations demonstrated that Matt would sometimes engage in inappropriate behaviours that would often go unnoticed by his teachers. For example, when the class was asked to pack up, he would indicate that he had heard the instruction; however, he would then choose to walk around the room and start pulling out more toys. When it came to sitting down for group time, he would often need several reminders and would have to be eventually brought to the group by Janice. There were also times during play when children told him to stop, or that they were scared; however, he would persist with the behaviours, believing them to be funny. Lincoln was unable to engage in phone conversations regarding his son or complete the SDRS.
**Liesel.** While no preschool observations occurred for Liesel, the SDRS did provide some insightful information. As with Mia and Matt, both teachers had reported no concerns about Liesel’s social and emotional skills. Rebecca and Janice stated that she is confident in taking turns, shows an appreciation and interest in others, and is willing to help her peers and teachers.

At home, Hannah reported that Liesel was quite polite, she interacted with friends and family well, and would show an interest in others. Hannah did report, however, that there were times when Liesel needed support with turn-taking and expressing herself when she was upset or angry. She also mentioned that Liesel would often appear to ignore requests from others and would plead or whine when her initial requests were not met.

**What Was Learnt About the Beliefs and Practices of the Parents and Teachers Before the TOGETHER Training?**

Before the workshops, Heidi and Hannah and the two teachers, Rebecca and Janice completed the Beliefs, Practices, Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ; Phillips et al., 2020a). There were several key similarities in the answers relating to beliefs from both the parents and the teachers. They all believed that prosocial behaviours needed to be acknowledged and that giving affection was important. However, the parents differed from the two teachers’ beliefs. The parents felt that they should always be in control of their children and that children always needed to do what they were told, whereas the teachers felt this was not the case. Rebecca expanded on her beliefs in the questionnaire. She specifically stated the following:

> I believe that it is sometimes okay to let the children know if I am disappointed with them. That I don’t want to be cross. That I just am because when you’re doing this you are putting yourself at risk or whatever it is ... There is also a time when I need to say, “I’m quite angry about what I just saw you do, and raising your voice.”

Rebecca’s extended answer focused more on the belief of letting children know when they had not met her expectations, and less on recognising the positive behaviours. Such beliefs were also reflected in the classroom observations where there was limited attention given to prosocial behaviours. Although, Rebecca and Janice both reported that they engaged in practices that recognised positive behaviours, this was not reflected in the classroom observations. The same belief was also reported by the parents (though the parents were not
observed at home). Such practices included giving attention to more positive than negative behaviours, letting children know when they were doing things well, giving genuine praise and encouragement, and sharing children’s positive behaviours with family and friends. Such contradictions between reported practices and the observed practices suggest that although Rebecca and Janice believed that they were acknowledging positive behaviours, they may have been unaware of just how little attention they were giving to children’s positive behaviours. However, Rebecca did expand on her reports about her practices:

*I think genuinely and honestly when we see the same behaviours every day we are always, like, “That was inappropriate behaviour, this is what we should be doing, this is what we want to see here” [to the child who was being inappropriate]. I may react differently for a child who is generally really well behaved and one who pushes the rules. If the well-behaved child broke a rule, I don’t know if I would be as harsh.*

What is refreshingly honest here is that despite Rebecca feeling that she was giving positive attention to appropriate behaviours, there were some gaps in her practice. She did recognise that for children who were struggling with their social and emotional development, she gave less positive attention. Such recognition was an important distinction to make before she began the TOGETHER workshops. This acknowledgement also helped the facilitator to understand the gaps in Rebecca’s practice which the TOGETHER training may help to improve.

**What Was Learnt About the Parent– Educator Relationship Before the TOGETHER Training?**

Before the workshops both Hannah and Heidi reported in their Beliefs, Practices, Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ; Phillips et al., 2020a) responses that they felt the relationship they had with Rebecca and Janice did have some strengths. However, Hannah did mention that she felt that the communication was not always clear with the teachers. Both Hannah and Heidi answered agree rather than strongly agree to most questions, suggesting that there was some room for improvement regarding the teachers’ responsiveness to their needs and valuing their strengths. Interestingly, Janice also recognised that there was some room for improvement. However, Rebecca answered strongly agree, suggesting that she felt the parent-educator relationship was stronger than the other three perceived. She did expand
on some of the relationship building practices employed at the preschool by saying the following:

*We provide communication letters to families and communicate with individual families throughout the year. We find out from individual families what the best way is for us to be communicating with them. We can then respect them in all areas in terms of finding out about their cultural celebrations and how we can be respectful of their needs.*

The above comment from Rebecca does suggest that she recognised that they had some practices that would help the parent-educator relationship. However, as the overall answers on the BPRQ suggest, there was room for improvement.

**The Responsive Approach to Being TOGETHER**

As designed, the delivery of the TOGETHER program was adapted to suit the needs of the families and the teachers and to ensure that all the participants felt comfortable participating and the context of their home was included in the training program. After the initial consultations and the CSD questionnaire, information was gathered regarding the way the parents would like to interact and communicate, their venue preferences, and the times that would best suit them for the training.

Not surprisingly, both Rebecca and Janice reported that they were very time poor and preferred to have the TOGETHER training immediately after the preschool session at 2.30 pm once the families had left. Heidi, Hannah, and Lincoln also stated that after the session would suit them the best, however, they would need care for their children. Consequently, an additional educator was employed by the research team to care for the children, Mia, Matt, and Liesel and their siblings during the training sessions. However, Lincoln was stretched for time between work and looking after his children. He had little support from extended family or friends, and due to being called into work, he was unable to attend the workshops. Offers were made to do separate sessions for him. However, it was determined that the best support for Lincoln and his family would come from Matt’s two teachers, who would pass on the knowledge they had learnt. Such challenges demonstrate that despite the best efforts to accommodate families, challenges will continue to arise in relation to reducing the barriers to accessing programs such has TOGETHER.
As with the previous case studies, the availability of food at the workshops was also a motivating factor for attendance, with the educators stating that they would be tired and hungry after a five-hour shift and, understandably, the children and their mums would be also. To help the parents, children, teachers, and educators, each workshop was set up like an “afternoon tea” session where food and drink was provided. This set-up produced a relaxed atmosphere that was conducive to conversation from the moment the participants entered the room.

**What Happened During the Together Training?**

The two TOGETHER workshops provide a platform to assist the educators and the families, which facilitated the gaining of additional insights into the beliefs and practices of the parents and educators and the parent–educator relationship. The sessions followed the same format as explained in the previous chapters.

**Workshop 1**

Due to a recorder malfunction, the first workshop was not taped; however, anecdotal notes were taken. As identified through the BPRQ, there was room for improvement in the parent-educator relationship. The foundations of the TOGETHER program are built on establishing strong relationships and partnerships from the outset. Consequently, the two parents and two teachers were given the opportunity to develop an understanding of each other’s practices and beliefs (including their beliefs concerning guiding children’s behaviour). They were also provided with strategies to develop collaborative relationships for the benefit of the children’s social and emotional development. As the workshop progressed, Heidi and Hannah shared how their families operated. Both of them said that they placed importance on eating meals together as a family and that bath time and bedtime routines were crucial in building their relationships with their children. They talked about their connections with the local playgroups and how they enjoyed attending music groups for young children. Rebecca mentioned that she could understand the importance placed on mealtimes because at the preschool both Mia and Liesel would often gather and talk with their peers at lunchtime around the table. The discussions helped Rebecca and Janice appreciate the practices that Heidi’s and Hannah’s families engaged in at home.

Later in the workshop the focus turned to how the children’s social and emotional skills could be developed using positive praise and encouragement. The TOGETHER
principles that were discussed during this session included celebrating the positive interests/cultural practices the children and their families connected with and using their new-found understanding of each other to build positive relationships with the children. In brief, the focus was to increase the number of instances when a parent or educator would provide positive praise and encouragement to assist children understand their social expectations. The parents and educators were then given a “homework task” of documenting how many times they gave positive attention and negative attention, with the aim to have at least five positives for every negative. Heidi, Hannah, Rebecca, and Janice developed their own reminder tools, such as marking their hands with every positive interaction or transferring pebbles from one pocket to another each time they provided praise. They were asked to report on this task the following week.

**Workshop 2**

For the second training session, the format was similar to the layout of the previous three case studies. Hannah, Heidi, Rebecca, and Janice reflected on how they had been progressing with providing positive feedback to the children. The workshop recording provided some valuable insight into the progress they had been making. Heidi began with discussing how she was not only giving attention to Mia but also to her younger brother, Brody: ”I was really conscious of praising Brody because he is always in the background doing the right things.” This comment recognises that Heidi had been practising the lesson from the first session about recognising the shy/invisible child. The parents and teachers had been taught that some children may miss out on praise due to them being cooperative, shy or non-demanding. They were reminded to recognise such children’s positive attributes regularly.

Hannah discussed another point on how great it had been to hear positive feedback from other adults as well. Immediately after the first workshop she received a phone call from her mother-in-law who wanted to praise her on the great job she was doing with the children:

> *On the drive home from the other week, my mother-in-law called and said I just want to let you know how good you are doing with the kids. Then Mia did something and I praised her and she was so happy.*

As Hannah was reflecting, she was able to recognise the feeling of success and empowerment she felt from the praise given to her by her mother-in-law. In the Workshop 1 both the parents and educators were encouraged to praise and encourage each other, too. The
The flow-on effect was that Hannah understood the impact that praise and encouragement would have on her role as a parent. She then understood how descriptive praise could be used as a tool to improve intrinsic motivation in children.

Conversely, Rebecca shared that while she had been increasing her positive interactions, she had also experienced a difficult week. She recalled how in the first workshop it was discussed that sometimes teachers or parents would find it difficult to praise children who are inattentive, disengaged or uncooperative. She mentioned that due to experiencing a number of poor behaviours from children during the week, she had given more negative comments rather than praise or encouragement:

_I found it difficult with one of our friends at kinder who has a high number of challenges. Today it was just a further challenge. On the bad days when you are, like, “Please don’t push my buttons” ... and then it makes you feel, like, argh. Sometimes I feel like I’m just a poor teacher. Then I remembered to praise him for being honest. It was only the positive I could find._

She was encouraged by both the facilitator and the parents. The facilitator congratulated her on recognising that those types of negative behaviours have the potential to reduce how much praise and encouragement she gave. Rebecca was also reminded that this was key in helping her to understand that a more conscious effort is needed when praising children who exhibit more challenging behaviours. Heidi offered her great encouragement, too, telling her to remember that when she was teaching, there are 33 children in the classroom and to be easy on herself.

As the workshop continued, the parents and teachers expanded on the difficult behaviours and associated challenges they were experiencing at home and at preschool. The facilitator provided further examples of lived experiences in order to explain the concepts of functional behaviour analysis and the importance of recognising the reasons behind the behaviours. Janice was able to tap into her 20 years of teaching, plus her experience as a mother and a grandmother. She shared how strategies like planned ignoring had been valuable in dealing with poor behaviour from her granddaughter. Janice also mentioned that she and her daughter had been working together to reduce the amount of attention they were giving to her granddaughter’s tantrums in order to develop consistency. She then reiterated the importance of acknowledging her granddaughter when she was being polite and showing positive behaviours.
As the challenges were being discussed, each parent agreed that they often experienced similar difficulties, which led to the group developing a shared bond over dealing with such challenges. These shared moments had potentially reduced any stigma that either Hannah or Heidi might have been feeling in having to cope with their children’s behaviour. Discussions also occurred regarding the use of positive praise and encouragement to reduce any negative stigmas associated with children who were struggling with their social and emotional skills. Rebecca mentioned that she had noticed some children were blaming one child for certain behaviours when he was not even there. Therefore, the discussions returned to the critical point of ensuring to praise and encourage children with more challenging behaviours more often – essentially “catching them when they were good”.

**What Was Learnt About the Children, Their Families, and the Teachers After the TOGETHER Training?**

After the TOGETHER training the preschool observations of Mia and Matt were continued. Heidi, Hannah, and the teachers completed a second BPRQ regarding their beliefs, practices, and views on the parent–educator relationship. They also completed a second SDRS for their child and everyone participated in a final interview. The information from each of the questionnaires and interviews indicated that there had been changes in the children, parents, and teachers.

**What Was Learnt About Mia’s, Matt’s, and Liesel’s Social and Emotional Development After the TOGETHER Training?**

**Mia.** At home Heidi reported that Mia was engaging in more prosocial behaviours when eating with her family. Heidi would regularly give her descriptive positive feedback (and her siblings) during mealtimes as this was a focus for the whole family. Mia was more focused on eating and happily joined in at mealtimes. Heidi had also noticed that Mia had improved in her ability to compromise with others and respect their space. As previously mentioned, Mia had strong social and emotional skills at preschool, and her skills continued to be strong through both the SDRS reports and the preschool observations.


**Matt.** Matt was only observed at preschool and the SDRS was only completed by Rebecca and Janice. The SDRS reports suggested that Matt was continuing to maintain his strong social and emotional skills. The preschool observations also noted that he was more willing to join in with group times and had become more responsive to the requests of others after the baseline observations had indicated that he had been struggling with these skills.

**Liesel.** While no preschool observations had been made of Liesel, the follow-up SDRS indicated that her social and emotional skills had improved compared to Hannah’s initial report of her daughter’s skills. Hannah’s later report indicated that she believed Liesel was developing ways to calm herself down and had improved in complying with requests from family members.

**What Was Learnt About the Beliefs and Practices of the Parents and Teachers After the TOGETHER Training?**

First, the BPRQ revealed that the teachers and the parents had become more aligned in their beliefs regarding parenting and teaching practices. Previously, both parents, especially Heidi, had reported beliefs that were more aligned with an authoritarian style of parenting. Such beliefs included that parents should always be in control of their children and that children always needed to do what they were told by their parents. However, after the workshops neither parent agreed with these statements. In the follow-up interviews when asked about their beliefs, Rebecca, Janice, Heidi, and Hannah all reported that it was not so much a change in their beliefs but rather in their practices. Heidi specifically stated that “it is not so much my beliefs but my behaviours that have changed; after talking to others about it, I can implement them in my home. There is less disciplinary action and more around positive behaviour.”

There are incongruences in Heidi’s statement. As the baseline BPRQ indicated, all the parents and teachers believed in the importance of giving praise and encouragement. However, this was not reflected in the baseline observations of the teachers at preschool (parents were not observed in this case study). Interestingly, after the training workshops, Janice reported that she believed in the importance of providing positive praise and encouragement. Yet, her teaching practices did not show substantial change (see Figure 9.1). As a result, there continued to be more negative interactions when children interacted with Janice than when they interacted with Rebecca. The observations of Rebecca revealed that she had made a considerable effort to increase her positive interactions, especially with
descriptive praise and encouragement. Rebecca was more responsive to children’s appropriate behaviours, as shown in Figure 9.2. While there had been high a number of instances of children’s appropriate behaviours at the baseline, Rebecca had not been responsive to many of the children’s positive behaviours. After the workshops she had made more of an effort to “catch the children when they had been good”. As a result, there had been an increase in the children’s appropriate behaviours and a decrease in their inappropriate behaviours.

**Figure 9.1**  
*Teacher Janice: Preschool Observations*

![Graph](image)

*Note.* The figure indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that Janice responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to all the children’s behaviour and the number of times the children had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her.
Figure 9.2

*Teacher Rebecca: Preschool Observations*

Note. The figure indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that Rebecca responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to all the children’s behaviour and the number of times the children had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her.

While Heidi and Hannah were not observed at home, their interviews did provide important insights into how they believed their practices had changed. Heidi reflected on how she had developed strategies to calm herself down and think of what positive feedback she could give to Mia. She also mentioned how Mia and Brody had been responding well to her use of descriptive praise:

*The training has made me more aware of the behaviour and opened my eyes more to positive reinforcement. Now I’m noticing more positive behaviour.*
just relax and try to think of the positives and making it more aware in my mind ... It is what I say to kids as well ... and now they are more positively behaved. They're feeding back on my positive reinforcement.

Heidi’s feedback and Rebecca’s observations indicate that the TOGETHER training had provided the parents and educators with strategies to improve their practices and assist with the children’s social and emotional skills. The TOGETHER strategies had also provided Rebecca with useful strategies to help other children who had not been involved in the study. She mentioned that over the course of the research project she had continued to be challenged by specific aggressive behaviours. She also indicated that she required support to assist children to regulate their angry emotions and to play safely alongside others. She was finding that much of her day was being spent as a peacekeeper. In the TOGETHER training, specific strategies are taught to help children calm down when they are being aggressive, including the sit and watch strategy (see Figure 7.5 on page 164).

Rebecca reported that this strategy had helped several children to calm down and understand what behaviours were socially appropriate. She also found that she was less inclined to lecture children on what behaviours were inappropriate; instead, she was able to use the strategy to help model important social behaviours, such as showing children how to play safely with each other. She specifically stated:

'It has kind of gone from talking at them, saying, “This is what I just saw you doing. Why did you do that?” ... Why this, and bombarding them with words and questions. Now it is more like “Let’s just sit here and watch how so and so is playing and see what you can take from that.” So it would be more modelling and observation rather than just talking.'

These comments indicate that one of the important outcomes from the training was not so much that the parents had received support but rather that the teachers were now able to develop strategies to assist other children and their families. One other important change in this case study was the improvement in the parent–educator relationship.

What Was Learnt About the Parent–Educator Relationship After the TOGETHER Training?

Before the workshops Hannah had reported that she felt that the communication had not always been clear with the teachers. Both parents also indicated that there was some room for
improvement regarding the teachers’ responsiveness to their needs and valuing their strengths. After the workshops there were positive reports from both Hannah and Heidi regarding the parent–educator relationship. Their BPRQ responses indicated that they strongly agreed with all aspects relating to the teachers respecting them as a family and responding to their needs as well as the fact that they considered the teachers to be partners in their child’s development. Heidi reported that by completing the workshops with the teachers, she had a more personal relationship with them:

I think that just going through the training with them [the teachers] has given me a personal relationship with them. I felt much more comfortable approaching them and discussing things with them knowing that we were on that same page.

Hannah also recognised that more positive interactions had been occurring between the parents and teachers, with the teachers engaging in positive interactions with not only the children but also the parents: “The educators’ interactions have been much more positive in the emails sent home and they are always ending with a really positive note like, you know, the parents and the children are all doing things really well.”

Such interactions appeared to have a roll-on effect when Heidi noticed that one of the teachers was struggling:

I did notice something was happening with one of the teachers and I did pick up on the negativity so I sent her an email to let her know I think she is doing a great job, and you know, a bit of positive reinforcement. She found that beneficial on her behalf ... it was a bit of positive reinforcement to another adult.

The feedback from Heidi reflected the fact that the feedback teachers receive from parents is just as important. The positive feedback given to the teacher encouraged them in what was a difficult situation. As Rebecca illustrated throughout the TOGETHER training and the interviews, there had been several challenges that she required support with. The TOGETHER training did provide her with strategies, however, the addition of having parents pass on positive praise may have engrained the strategies she had developed even more. The reflections on such positive reciprocal interactions continued as Rebecca reflected on the parent–educator relationship in her final interview. She had been showing signs that she was
developing confidence to pass on the strategies that she had learnt to other families who had been unable to attend the TOGETHER workshops:

I know not to make assumptions that all parents are going fine at home but just don’t want to say. It’s just reaching out to all families and saying if there is anything we can be doing, and this [the TOGETHER training] is something we have done and have said if there is anything you want us to be doing at kinder. We have had a fair few people who have come up to us and said this is what they are doing at home. This is how they are acting at home. Is it because of here and have you seen anything, and things like that? So even putting out the general question of whether there is anything you would like us to be doing with the children here at kinder in terms of social and emotional behaviour management kind of stuff. We have had a little bit of engagement with that. Just making it general for families. I think partly it build up an element of respect.

Hearing about Rebecca’s confidence to pass on the TOGETHER strategies to others suggests that the two 120-minute workshops had provided her with the knowledge she needed to support more families. The support given to families by the professionals with whom parents may have the most trust makes sense. Having teachers deliver the TOGETHER strategies, and not unfamiliar facilitators, may provide the necessary confidence to families to overcome the barriers that may have been deterring their participation. Hannah’s final feedback also reiterates the importance of parents and teachers spending more time together to align the strategies that they have been taught in TOGETHER:

I think the communication and the availability to have time spent on that relationship is needed. Yes, so that they can have these discussions and find out what is working at home and what’s working at kinder and aligning the same behaviour strategies at home and at kinder. To make it fluid between both parents and teachers ... needing to have that time to figure those things out.

Similar sentiments were reflected on by the parents and educators in the final case study: Long Day Care as the Extended Family.
Chapter 10

Case Study 5: Long Day Care as the Extended Family

It’s just after morning tea and the children have all had something to eat in the food hall. They have been instructed to line up at the door that takes them back to the classroom. Three-year-old Kobe is eager to go outside and keeps trying to exit the food hall via the door that takes him back to the playground. He keeps needing to be redirected to line up while his three educators busily try and clean the tables before the next class comes in to eat. While his educators are preoccupied with their tasks, Kobe is persistent with trying to open the door and is getting impatient with waiting. His impatience grows and he starts to push other children. Educator Kylie needs to intervene and tells Kobe to stop and get back into the line, but he keeps running around the room thinking it’s a game. Once the educators have finally completed their tasks, Kylie opens the door to the classroom. Kobe tries to go outside again. He is reminded that they will go out soon. The children spend the next 10 minutes playing with the classroom toys. Kobe heads over to the dinosaurs. The dinosaur he usually plays with is missing. He becomes terribly upset and throws himself onto the floor, screaming. Kylie comes over to him and attempts to calm him down. He yells over and over “outside, outside” and cuddles into Kylie. Kobe has been at the long day care since 7 am that morning. Kylie mentions that he is often the first to arrive and the last to leave. She thinks that he is simply exhausted. While he often exhibits challenging behaviours, Kobe has a close relationship with his educators, especially Kylie.

The long day care (LDC) centre that Kobe attends opens at 6.30 am and closes at 6.30 pm. Kobe attends five days per week for up to 10 hours per day. The operating hours of the LDC are common for such centres in countries such as Australia. For Kobe, the type of interactions he has with his educators are extremely important for his social and emotional development. Though children’s development is highly influenced by their early experiences with their immediate family, so are the experiences children have in LDC settings (Taylor et al., 2016). The findings in this chapter detail how teachers and educators in LDC centres are often in the position where they are providing care for children for long hours. It also illustrates that the roles teachers and educators have in LDC may be one of the most vital positions for children’s strong social and emotional development. As children spend longer hours in such settings, it is crucial that they experience positive interactions with their teachers and educators so that they learn how to be part of the social world. Equally
important is that the ability of educators to pass on their knowledge to parents and their colleagues is something that cannot be underestimated.

The Preschool Setting for Case Study 5

The setting for Case Study 5 is a private long day care with an infant room, toddler room, and a three- to four-year-old room with a funded four-year-old kindergarten program. The group consisted of one teacher, two educators, and 25 children. The teacher attended the preschool five days a week for eight hours a day, while the two remaining educators job-shared. The four-year-old kindergarten program was included within the long-day-care system, which meant that each child’s attendance varied, with many attending five full days per week. The long day care centre was open between 6.30 am and 6.30 pm and was a multicultural community consisting of families from Australian, Indian, Middle Eastern, South American, and European backgrounds. The participating families identified as Australian, Chilean, Serbian, and Indian. The teacher identified as Australian, one educator as Chilean, and the other as Arabic. The TOGETHER workshops were held at night to due to the families’ work commitments. Dinner was provided by the centre and childcare was provided by an educator who was not participating in the study. The children, their families, and three educators are introduced below.

The Children and Their Families

Kobe

Kobe was three years old at the time of the study. He is an energetic and affectionate boy who lives with his mum, Chloe, and his dad, Stephen. He often arrives at the LDC centre eager to see his three educators Kylie, Rachel, and Nora and greets them with a huge smile. Kobe’s main interests relate to playing with dinosaurs and small plastic animals. He also has a love for moving fast in the playground. He will often ride the trikes at speed, push the big sand trucks while running, and enjoys pushing his physical capabilities with the hula hoops and climbing structures. Kobe was chosen as one of the focus children for this study due to the high level of concern relating to his social and emotional development. The concerns became evident after the three educators completed the Social Development Rating Scale (SDRS; Tyler-Merrick, 2014) and the scores indicated he was below the cut-off for social and emotional delays. His mother, Chloe, was invited to complete the SDRS and was initially
willing to record home observations. However, work and family pressures meant she was unable to undertake either. Therefore, understanding Kobe’s social and emotional development was discerned from the SDRS scores, the educator interviews, and the preschool observations.

*Kobe’s Mum, Chloe*

Chloe is a busy and dedicated parent to Kobe. Both her and Stephen work long hours running their family business. The family is quite isolated, with no extended family or friends nearby. Therefore, Chloe reports that the LDC centre that Kobe attends provides an essential support to their family. She highly values the input from Kylie, Rachel, and Nora, Kobe’s three educators. She especially enjoys the updates they send to her regarding Kobe on the LDC centre’s online curriculum app. Chloe was intending to be involved in the TOGETHER training and complete the home recordings; however, urgent work associated with their business prevented her from attending. In light of Chloe’s situation, therefore, it was determined that the best support for her to gain the skills from the TOGETHER training would be for the three educators to provide her with those.

*Beau*

As with the previous case studies, the children were chosen with a variety of social and emotional needs to see if the educators would apply the same principles learnt in the TOGETHER training to all children, not just a focus child (Kobe). Therefore, Beau was included in the research project. He was also three years old at the time of the study and lives with his mum, Tiffany, his dad, Pete, and his 18-month-old sister, Marley. Beau attends the LDC centre three days per week from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm. He is quite curious and eager to engage with activities that require problem-solving such as building complex structures out of blocks and completing puzzles. He also loves to play with his peers in the sandpit, where they will work together to make interesting roads and cities. He enjoys figuring out how things work and will often engage his educators with many questions. At home, Tiffany reports that he enjoys spending time with his younger sister and is very caring towards her. He also attends a music playgroup once a week with his mum and sister.
Beau’s Mum, Tiffany

Tiffany, who identifies as British, spends time between caring for her two children and working three days per week in the health sector; Pete works five to six days per week. On the days that Tiffany works, Beau attends the LDC centre. She also has the support of several close family friends. She ensures that both her children get to experience many things in the community – for example, attending music groups for children. Tiffany completed the and Beliefs, Practices, Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ; Phillips et al., 2020a)) both before and after the TOGETHER training and attended the workshops. However, she was only able to complete two home video recordings, which meant that the home observations could not be included in the research study.

Fabian

Fabian was four years old at the time of the study and lives with his mum, Sophie, and his three-year-old sister, Amelia. His parents have recently separated, and he visits his dad on the weekends. Fabian was not selected as a focus child; however, he is included in this case study because Sophie participated in the TOGETHER workshops and reported on Fabian’s needs. There were no home or preschool observations made of Fabian given that he was not a focus child. Nevertheless, what has been reported is that Fabian easily makes friends, follows most classroom instructions, and is often involved in imaginative “superhero” games. He is a highly active child who likes to challenge himself on the climbing equipment outside and loves to explore the outside environment.

Fabian’s Mum, Sophie

Sophie, who identifies as Australian, spends time between caring for her two children and working three days per week in retail. On the days she works, Beau attends the LDC centre. She has the support of her parents nearby and sees them on a weekly basis. As a family, they enjoy attending the local parks and playgroups. Tiffany completed the SDRS and BPRQ both before and after the TOGETHER training and attended the workshops.

Andrej

Andrej was three years old at the time of the study. He lives with his mum, Anaya, and his dad, Rodavan. They are a family from an Indian-Serbian background. The family speaks mostly English at home, although Aanya will sometimes speak Hindi with Andrej. Andrej
was not selected as a focus child; however, he is included in this case study because his parents participated in the workshops and Aanya reported on Andrej’s needs. There were no home or preschool observations made of Andrej given that he was not a focus child. Nevertheless, what has been reported is that Andrej has a keen interest in building-based activities and is quite curious to see how things work. He is eager to join in with group music sessions and dancing with his friends.

**Andrej’s Parents, Anaya and Rodavan**

Andrej’s mother, Anaya, identifies as Indian and speaks Hindi and English and his father, Rodavan, identifies as Serbian. There were no requirements for interpreters. Both Anaya and Rodavan work full time in professional positions. They would sometimes have family members from overseas who would stay in the family home for extended periods and assist with Andrej. Other than that, they would rely on the LDC centre to help support them in the care of Andrej. As a family they enjoy exploring the beaches and parks and gathering with friends. Anaya completed the SDRS and BPRQ, both before and after the TOGETHER training and both parents attended the workshops.

**Hugo**

Hugo (four years old) who lives with his mum, Isla, his dad, Miguel, and his 18-month-old sister, Maya. The family speaks Spanish at home. His parents migrated from Argentina and have been in Australia for 10 years. Hugo and his family also speak fluent English. Hugo attends the LDC centre four days per week from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm. He spends much of his day riding the trikes, building in the sandpit, and creating weapons and vehicles from the many construction supplies. Hugo was not selected as a focus child; however, he is included in this case study because his parents participated in with the workshops and Isla reported on his needs. There were no home or preschool observations made of Andrej given that he was not a focus child.

**Hugo’s Parents, Isla and Miguel**

Isla and Miguel both identify as Argentinian and their first language is Spanish. They are also fluent in English and therefore there was no requirement for interpreters. Both of them work full time in professional positions. They also have the support of several close family friends. However, family support is limited because their extended family lives overseas.
Consequently, they rely on the LDC centre to help support them in the care of Hugo and his sister. Isla completed the SDRS and BPRQ, both before and after the TOGETHER training, and both parents attended the workshops.

**The Educators**

**Kylie**

Kylie has a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and was close to completing a four-year bachelor’s degree. She has been teaching in early childhood education for nine years. Kylie identifies as Australian. She was eager to engage in professional development regarding children’s social and emotional development due to the challenges she was experiencing in guiding children’s social and emotional skills in the classroom.

**Rachel**

Rachel has a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and is completing her diploma. She has been teaching for two years. Rachel grew up in Australia but originally came from Afghanistan. At home she speaks Dari and when at preschool she speaks English. Rachel was also seeking assistance with guiding children’s social and emotional skills due to the current challenging behaviours that were occurring in the classroom.

**Nora**

Nora has a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and has been teaching in the sector for eight years. Nora feels confident in assisting children with their social and emotional skills; however, as with Kylie and Rachel, she would like extra support to assist the children they teacher and care for.

**What Was Learnt About the Children, Their Families, and the Educators Before the TOGETHER Training?**

The SDRS (Tyler-Merrick, 2014), the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a), and the home and preschool observations were used in this research project to help to understand the current situation of the children, their parents, and the three educators before the workshops commenced.
What Was Learnt About the Children’s Social and Emotional Development Before the TOGETHER Training?

As with the previous case studies, the three educators at this long day care centre were also asked to complete the SDRS to help identify children with social and emotional delays. The scores for both Kobe and Hugo indicated that they were struggling with their social and emotional skills. Of the two children, Kobe was chosen as the focus child for observations. To also determine if the educators were giving positive attention to all the children, Beau was also chosen for observations. Fabian’s, Andrej’s, and Hugo’s parents and educators also reported on their social and emotional development through the SDRS. The information from the SDRS for all children and the observations of Kobe and Beau are are detailed in the next sections.

Kobe. The SDRS reports for Kobe from his educators and his classroom observations were the main source of information on his social and emotional development. Due to extenuating circumstances his mum, Chloe, was unable to complete the SDRS or the home video recordings. The educators at the long day care centre reported that Kobe would often greet them in a friendly manner and had formed a friendship with one other child who enjoyed racing the sandpit trucks with him. However, they had a high number of concerns regarding his social and emotional development. They reported that Kobe required support with following directions or requests despite the fact that he had heard them. He also needed assistance to help him take turns, to interact with other children safely in group play and to calm down when he became frustrated with not getting what he wanted. In those instances, Kobe would often act violently towards others including hitting, kicking, and pushing. He would also plead or whine persistently until he was able to get what he wanted. The classroom observations confirmed that Kobe was struggling with the same social and emotional behaviours (see Figure 10.1). The vignette on Kobe that commenced this chapter provides a clear example of the daily struggles he was having with his social and emotional development. According to his three educators, he struggled daily. They were intervening every hour to keep Kobe and his peers safe.
Figure 10.1

*Child Kobe: Preschool Observations*

**Note:** The indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that the teachers and educators responded with positive statements, discouragements or no response to Kobe’s behaviour and the number of times Kobe had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviour when interacting with the teachers and educators.
**Beau.** The SDRS scores from Beau’s educators indicated that there were no concerns for his social and emotional development. His educators mentioned that he was generally polite, that he was able to take turns with others, and that he was able to persist with tasks unsupervised. However, they did have some concerns for his social and emotional development. They reported that he would often interrupt or annoy his peers when they were engaged in other activities and he would often talk over others. At times, he also required support in expressing himself when he was upset or frustrated. However, the classroom observations demonstrated that Beau was positively engaging with his peers and educators most of the time. He was observed taking turns, joining in at group times, and showing confidence in following instructions. At home Tiffany reported that he was interacting with friends and family well and was showing an interest in other children. She did report, however, that there were times where he still needed support in taking turns with his younger sister and expressing himself when he was upset or angry.

**Fabian.** Fabian’s mum, Sophie, reported that at home he was generally well behaved with the main challenge being sibling conflict when they are all together. She mentioned that Fabian was quite independent and was helpful with the family routines. There were times, however, when he would struggle to go to his dad’s at the weekend. As a result, there were frequent instances where he would find it hard to be separated from Sophie when he was dropped off at the LDC centre. At the centre, his educators reported that Fabian was easily making friends, would follow most classroom instructions, and was often involved in imaginative “superhero” games with his peers.

**Andrej.** Andrej’s mum, Anaya, couldn’t complete the SDRS. However, she still reported before the workshops that at home he was doing well and was confident in approaching others to play. She mentioned that Andrej was quite independent and was helpful with family routines. At preschool, his educators reported that Andrej was learning to make friends, would follow most classroom instructions, and had a very inquisitive mind.
Hugo. Hugo’s mum, Isla, reported that at home Hugo was polite, interacted with friends and family well, and would show an interest in others. She did report, however, that there were times when Hugo would require support with turn-taking and expressing himself when he was upset or angry. She also mentioned that he would often appear to ignore requests and would often be disruptive with his younger sister, Maya. His educators reported similar social and emotional skills.

**What Was Learnt About the Beliefs and Practices of the Parents and Teachers Before the TOGETHER Training?**

Before the workshops, three of the parents (Tiffany, Sophie, and Isla) and the three educators completed the Beliefs, Practices, Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ; Phillips et al., 2020a). While they all the responded with either *strongly agree* or *agree* to the statements related to authoritative beliefs (such as giving attention to positive behaviours), differences emerged on the questions relating to other beliefs. All the parents agreed that children needed to always do what they were told, that parents should be in control of their children at all time, that there were times for angry voices, and that children needed to sit quietly at school; all three educators disagreed with these beliefs. Regarding parent and educator practices, there were also several key differences in the answers provided by the parents and educators. Such differences indicated inconsistencies between the home and the long day care centre in guiding children’s social and emotional skills. Sophie and Isla reported that they believed they gave more attention to appropriate behaviours than inappropriate behaviours, whereas Tiffany and the educators felt they did not.

In support of the educators’ reports, the classroom observations confirmed that the three educators were giving limited positive praise and encouragement (see Figures 10.2, 10.3, and 10.4). Consequently, there were higher levels of inappropriate child behaviour and lower levels of appropriate behaviour. The following statement from Nora provides insight into the reasoning for the limited amount of positive praise and encouragement and why she was not able to give positive attention to all children:

*I feel that when you give children constant praise, they always look for recognition. I will praise something out of the ordinary. She continued further in the interview, saying, “You can’t always be with every single child when they call your attention.”*
The statement from Nora and the reports from the BPRQ indicated that the parents and educators required more support to understand the strategies behind positive behaviour as a tool to develop children’s social and emotional skills. Kylie also discussed how she was requiring further support to develop her knowledge regarding children’s development and how each year would bring new challenges to her understanding: “I need help with children who have additional needs, you know, and those types of things. Yeah, I mean I’m forever learning about them ... and every year it’s a different year.

**Figure 10.2**

*Educator Kylie: Preschool Observations*

*Note.* The figure indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that Kylie responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to all the children’s behaviour and the number of times the children had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her.
Note. The figure indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that Rachel responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to all the children’s behaviour and the number of times the children had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her.
Figure 10.4

*Educator Nora: Preschool Observations*

Note. The figure indicates the number of times per 30-minute observation period that Nora responded with positive statements, discouraging statements or no response to all the children’s behaviour and the number of times the children had been engaged in appropriate or inappropriate behaviours when interacting with her.
What Was Learnt About the Parent–Educator Relationship Before the TOGETHER Training?

The BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a) completed by the parents indicated that they believed that the parent–educator relationship was strong, although Sophie did report that the communication between her and the educators could be stronger. However, on all other aspects Sophie and the other parents felt the educators were responsive to the needs of their children and family and recognised and valued their cultural backgrounds. The LDC centre specifically taught Spanish as part of its curriculum, which assisted Hugo to settle into the centre. The parents also felt that educators viewed them as partners in their children’s development due to their responsive approach.

The educators also believed that they had developed a strong parent–educator partnership with all the families. Such beliefs connected well with the philosophy of the LDC centre where they work. The centre also was also extending its curriculum into the homes of children. It would give families learning resources to continue the learning that had occurred in the centre into the family environment. The educators also prided themselves on being open and honest with families during communication. Kylie expressed her thoughts on how she had developed partnerships with her families:

*I think it’s being honest. Yes, like, I’m always very honest with them; and, yes, every child has been doing something that’s been out of character for them. I’ll have a discussion with them [the parents] but tell them not to talk to their children at home about it because I’ve already dealt with the situation here. But it’s important they know.*

The Responsive Approach to Being TOGETHER

For this fifth case study the approach to the delivery of TOGETHER varied again. For each of the families the main barrier to participation in any such program was time and the need for the parents to work. Therefore, after interviewing each family, it was determined that the most appropriate time for the training to occur was immediately after the LDC centre had closed for the day. However, as closing time would coincide with dinner time for the families, it was decided by the centre that the parents and educators would be provided with an evening meal. In addition, childcare would be provided for all the participating children and their siblings in the room adjacent to the meeting room by a qualified early childhood educator paid for by the research team. The educators would also be paid by the LDC to
attend, thus removing the barrier for the educators regarding attending unpaid professional development. Consequently, an additional two educators who worked in other rooms also joined in the workshops.

As previously mentioned, Kobe’s mum, Chloe, was unable to attend the workshops due a last-minute change with her business. However, as Kobe required substantial assistance with his social and emotional development, extra time was set aside between and after the workshops to provide the educators with additional support. The hope was that by supporting the educators further they, in turn, would be able to provide Chloe with the strategies she could use to support Kobe at home. By being adaptable to each family’s situation, the facilitators were able to ensure the workshop information was passed on to all families, even if they had not been able to attend the workshops. Such an approach was used to help build consistency between the LDC centre and the home environments.

What Happened During the TOGETHER Training?

The two TOGETHER workshops provide a platform to assist the educators and the families, which facilitated the gaining of additional insights into the beliefs and practices of the parents and educators and the parent–educator relationship. The sessions followed the same format as explained in the previous chapters.

Workshop 1

The fifth case study reinforces the point that the foundations of the TOGETHER program have been built upon the ability to establish strong relationships and partnerships from the outset. Consequently, the four parents and three teachers were given the opportunity to develop an understanding of each other’s practices and beliefs (including their beliefs around guiding children’s behaviour). They were also given strategies to develop collaborative relationships for the benefit of children’s social and emotional development.

Thus, as the workshop progressed the parents discussed how their families operated. All four parents reported that they had developed relationships with their children in the same manner. They discussed how they would often all go outdoors and enjoy playtime together. They also discussed how they frequently included involving the children in everyday tasks, such as helping with cleaning and getting ready to go out. For all the families, the end of the day would be hectic because the parents had been working and the children would have been at the LDC centre all day. Therefore, the opportunities to connect were often part of the
evening routine. The parents discussed how giving cuddles and the quiet moments, such as reading together, were important in developing the parent–child relationship. One of the educators, Nora, added to the conversation on her beliefs regarding the development relationships with children, and how this had changed from previous generations:

*It’s about making sure they have a voice. I was brought up in a time when we should be seen and not heard. I wanted my children to have a voice. Now my children are very vocal ... Just having that voice and being able to express themselves is important.*

Rachel agreed with Nora’s statement and discussed one of the LDC philosophies, the RIE (Resources for Infant Educarers) method (M. Gerber, 1998). Rachel discussed with the group the importance of positive respect and asking children for permission before doing things with them. Beau’s mum, Tiffany, scaffolded on what the educators were saying and mentioned that the difference between her children’s previous LDC centre and this one was “massive” because the positive interactions were much more apparent at the current LDC centre.

The conversation progressed to how they could develop their child’s social and emotional skills using positive praise and encouragement. The TOGETHER principles that were applied during this session included celebrating the positive interests and the cultural practices the children and their families connected with and using their new-found understanding of each other to build positive relationships with the children. In brief, the focus was to increase the number of instances that a parent or educator would provide positive praise and encouragement to assist children to understand their social expectations. From here, both the parents and educators were given the “homework task” of documenting how many times they gave positive attention and negative attention, with the aim to give at least five positive responses to the children for every negative response. The parents and the educators developed their own reminder tools. Tools included marking their hands with every positive interaction or transferring pebbles from one pocket to another each time they provided praise. They were asked to report on this the following week.

**Workshop 2**

As with the previous four case studies, the second workshop began with reflections from the parents and the educators on how they had progressed over the previous week in giving
positive praise and encouragement. They were also asked to reflect on how this was helping the children’s social and emotional development. Kylie began the conversation with the difference it was making to her practice:

*I didn’t need a reminder as I was very focused on it. I even had some of the educators laugh at me and thought I was forcing it. I was doing it to the book. So, I really tried my best not to use negatives and go straight to the positives. It worked to the extent that the child would come up to me and want to help. I was trying to focus on what I wanted him to do. It’s a process but I can see a change.*

Tiffany also found that the strategies were helping Beau. She made specific reference to how she had recognised the process in the tasks and, in turn, there were fewer emotional meltdowns from Beau when they were in public:

*Yeah, I can see a change, massively. Oh, the difference it was making. When we would go to the supermarket, it would usually be a nightmare. I got him to help with picking the pears and the scanning. The whole process of him helping me and giving him praise along the way worked. So, previously when something came up and he wanted a bottle of water and I said “no”, there would be a meltdown over the bottle of water. But, it wasn’t this time as the rest of the experience was positive.*

Nora responded to Tiffany’s statement with how the use of positive praise and encouragement created a more positive environment:

*On the whole I just felt that feel-good experience. That positive language flipped and was thrown at the children. One child I’m thinking of came up to me three times this week to show me what he had completed and looked for the praise. Honestly, it’s still a work in progress. With persistence it will happen.*

Nora’s reflection was important as it highlighted the importance of being persistent and consistent with the strategies taught in the TOGETHER program. This reflection segued into a discussion of the importance of also being consistent with the strategies that followed. The remainder of the second workshop was focused on developing rules/guidelines, redirecting behaviour, natural and logical consequences of inappropriate behaviour and the sit
and watch/calm down strategy. When the current rules or guidelines operating in each home and preschool setting were being explored, it was interesting to note that while the parents had their rules set in their minds, the rules were only stated when the child had done something wrong and were expressed in negative terms.

As the discussion moved to why children may engage in inappropriate behaviours, the term functional behaviour analysis was introduced. The participants were assisted in exploring why a particular child may be displaying disruptive behaviours. It was encouraging to see how the parents and educators reflected on the times when a child may be emotionally upset (such as having a tantrum, crying, or withdrawing) and discussed why this may have occurred in the first place. As the challenges were shared, more collaboration developed as each parents and educators could relate to the experience of the others. Through this sharing exercise, the parents and educators realised that they were not alone in their challenges in raising and guiding children. In fact, they all bonded over the challenges they were having at mealtimes and getting their children to eat without having a tantrum.

The mealtime scenario led to discussions regarding the use of natural and logical consequences. It was discussed how to first give children healthy food choices to choose from; this way the child may develop a sense of control over what they were eating. It was also mentioned how positive praise and encouragement should be given throughout the process, for even the smallest steps, especially if the child was finicky with their food. Finally, the natural consequence was that the after-dinner treats would not happen if there had been no eating of the healthy food options beforehand. Through collaboration, the parents and educators were able to produce a plan that would assist with developing consistency between the parents’ practices in the home and the educators’ practices in the preschool. With an increase in the parent–educator consistency and collaboration generally, the children’s social and emotional skills began to improve.

**What Was Learnt About the Children, Their Families, and the Educators After the TOGETHER Training?**

From the data produced by the baseline observations, surveys, and interviews, patterns of behaviour and the beliefs of each participant were identified.
What Was Learnt About the Children’s Social and Emotional Development After the TOGETHER Training?

Kobe. While Kobe’s parents were unable to attend the workshops, the role that the educators played in his social and emotional development had a noticeable impact on his prosocial behaviours. As Figure 10.1 on page 228 demonstrates, the number of inappropriate behaviours Kobe was engaging in prior to the educators’ TOGETHER training was much higher than after their training. The improvement in his social and emotional skills was also supported by the SDRS scores. Kobe’s educators reported that after the training he was following their instructions more consistently and was joining in more regularly with adult-directed activities. He was also cooperating more in the group-based activities and interacting with other children more appropriately. had begun to regulate his emotions when he was angry or frustrated and verbalise how he was feeling. He was also more willing to share with his peers and, in turn, he was forming new friendships.

Despite the fact that Kobe’s parents were not able to attend the workshops, it became evident that the work the educators had been undertaking with Kobe’s family was having an effect on his development. One of his educator’s, Nora, reported the following:

On a daily basis I was having to pull him aside as he was hurting other children. It's because they [the other educators] brought the parents in and he has improved. It was not just about dropping him off and picking him up. Sometimes we got so busy that we forgot to ask about what has happening at home. Yeah, so we’re really working hard to try to get to the bottom of it. Like what is going on?. Well, since I’ve been back, I have seen a huge difference in his behaviour. He’s improved tenfold because his parents have become involved.

Beau. Beau’s mum, Tiffany, and his educators reported that, generally, Beau’s social and emotional skills were competent before the training. Any of the concerns they did have had dissipated after the workshops. Beau was now more inclined to listen to ideas of others during play and group activities. Tiffany reported that at home he had improved in his ability to regulate his emotions when he was frustrated or was not getting what he wanted.

Previously, he would often throw a tantrum when he was not getting what he wanted in public places. Tiffany reported that by focusing on the positive things, he was no longer indulging in tantrum behaviour.
**Fabian.** As mentioned previously, Fabian had not been selected as one of the focus children and, therefore, there were no home or preschool observations of him. The SDRS scores and reports from Sophie and his educators showed that as a whole he was coping better with saying goodbye to his mother when he was to be separated from her. He continued to demonstrate strong skills in making friends, engaging in group play, and helping other at home and preschool.

**Andrej.** Although Andrej’s mum, Anaya, did not complete the SDRS before the workshops, the scores from the SDRS she completed after the workshops indicated that Andrej’s social and emotional skills were competent. He was expressing himself when he was upset showing an interest in others during conversations and following well the limits and boundaries that had been set at home. Andrej’s educators reported that he was continuing to participate well in group times, was showing an interest in other children, and was learning how to take turns with others.

**Hugo.** Hugo’s mum, Isla, reported that at home he was continuing to be polite, that he was interacting with friends and family well, and that he was showing an interest in others. Both Isla’s and the educators’ SDRS scores indicated that Hugo was improving his turn-taking and was expressing himself when he was upset or angry. He was also following instructions more consistently and joining in with group activities.

*What Was Learnt About the Beliefs and Practices of the Four Parents and the Three Educators After the TOGETHER Training?*

In this fifth case study, the results from the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a) and the final interviews indicated that there had been a considerable shift in the beliefs and practices of the parents and educators. After the workshops, the BPRQ showed that, overall, the beliefs of the parents (Tiffany, Sophie, Anaya, and Isla) and the educators (Kylie, Rachel, and Nora) had become more aligned in developing children’s social and emotional skills. There had been an overwhelming consistency in the responses to the BPRQ questions relating to authoritative styles of behaviour guidance. All the participants selected the *strongly agree* option that a child’s appropriate behaviour needs to be praised/encouraged frequently. There had also been a shift from the parents’ previous authoritarian beliefs to a more authoritative style of beliefs (belief styles are outlined in Chapter 4). Specifically, the understanding of redirecting inappropriate behaviour using guidance rather than punishment.
As a consequence, the parents’ and educators’ beliefs had also aligned more with the practices reported on in the BPRQ as well as the practices observed in the classroom. Specifically, the parents and educators reported that they were giving more attention to appropriate behaviours than to inappropriate behaviours, they were singling out the appropriate behaviours they wanted the child to practise, and they were more consistent with how they addressed inappropriate behaviours. As Figure 10.1 on page 228 indicates, the higher number of positive interactions that the educators had given Kobe resulted in him displaying more appropriate behaviours.

The individual educator observations for Kylie, Rachel, and Nora (see Figures 10.2, 10.3, and 10.4 on pages 231, 232 and 233 respectively) also indicate that the three educators had been transferring their use of positive interactions to all other children involved in this research project. Rachel’s comment on the change in her practices provides an important reflection into how she had increased her positive interactions:

*I’m using more, what do you call it? ... Positive reinforcement. I think it helps 110 per cent, especially for a child we are not focusing on as well as with the children we are focusing on, I’m seeing a change. It was at the point where I was having really bad days, but now I’m feeling a bit better. We are able to get things done during the day, whereas beforehand we had to get it done after work [after the session]. We were trying to get them to follow instructions. They [the children] felt good that we were giving them positive comments and because they felt good, they continued to do good things.*

Rachel had recognised the importance of providing descriptive positive feedback to the children for the various routines they enacted throughout the day. As a result, she found that her role as an educator had become easier to manage. With Rachel recognising the positive effects of the strategies taught in the TOGETHER program on her own practice and job satisfaction, she felt that it was important to pass on the strategies to other educators, too:

*I think every opportunity we find we try and use that method. I have tried to tell the other educators when they walk into the room to use the method as it will really help. I try to put it into my whole day and give to the other educators to use as well.*
As with the practices of Rachel (and the other two educators, Kylie and Nora), several of the parents reported that they had changed their practices as well, which had resulted in positive changes in their children’s social and emotional skills. Fabian’s mum, Sophie, discussed that while it was hard to consistently remind herself to use positive feedback, it was important because she knew it worked:

*It’s [the TOGETHER program] showing me that there is a different way of managing behaviour, and I guess I had tried it before ... so when I can tell that it is working, yes, I am using it more. You know that positive reinforcement is not easy to do all the time, but when you know it works, you revert back to it.*

Sophie also gave an important insight into her context as a single mother and the challenges she had with developing consistency across the separate homes of Fabian’s parents:

*It has helped 100 per cent [the use of the TOGETHER strategies], even with speaking to my ex about how to manage the behaviour stuff with Fabian. At the start my ex was really hesitant. But I’ve stuck to what I can see is working and like I said it’s not easy to continue all the time. Especially when I’m stressed. And I can see the difference in the kids when I’m stressed and I go back to using the strategies. They become more calm.*

When Sophie was discussing the changes in her practice, she also reflected on how it was helping Fabian see himself:

*He will ask things such as “Mum, what do you love about what I did?” He will be really specific about knowing when he has done something really well. He looks for the positive reinforcement, whereas before he was more concerned about the things he was doing wrong ... Giving him a moment to manage his emotions also helps.*

Sophie’s reflections demonstrate how parents can pass on the strategies of the TOGETHER program to other family members. Sophie had developed her confidence to do this as a result of the two 120-minute training sessions. She also cited how the support from
the educators had been valuable in helping her to develop the skills to assist Fabian and his younger sister.

**What Was Learnt About the Parent–Educator Relationship After the TOGETHER Training?**

Before the TOGETHER workshops, the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a) completed by the parents indicated that they believed that the parent–educator relationship was strong. The reports remained the same after the training. The responses from the parents in the final interview also confirmed their belief that the parent–educator relationship was strong. Several of the parents indicated that the strong partnership they had with their children’s educators was reassuring and they felt supported in improving their child’s social and emotional development. Sophie mentioned that when she became aware of the strategies that the educators were using at the LDC centre, she felt reassured: “I don’t think the relationship has changed. But the educators have always been really good. The educators were already doing much of what we talked about. It was quite reassuring.”

Anaya was also valuing the support that the educators were giving to Andrej. She reiterated her belief that she felt it was important that Andrej learnt how to respect his educators and that she liked to replicate the LDC centre’s practices in the home, which demonstrated the value that Anaya was placing on the learning experiences Andrej was receiving at the LDC: “They [the educators] are really good at getting children on board and listening. It’s more about the respect and about listening to the educators. I sort of follow up what happens at school.”

The connection Anaya spoke about was also confirmed by the educators’ comments in their final interviews. Rachel had begun to see a change in the feedback she was receiving from the parents:

> It has been very positive. Parents are coming to me and saying positive things about what is happening at home. When I hear that, I feel really happy because we are doing something right. I feel like there has been a change in the children and the parents are giving us the feedback, which is giving us the reassurance we are doing something right and focusing on the child.

Rachel’s comment demonstrates the important role that educators have in empowering parents to learn strategies that will assist their children’s social and emotional development. In Kobe’s case, where his parents could not attend the workshops, the role of
the educators in passing on the knowledge to them was even more vital. The support the educators gave to Kobe and his family was invaluable, especially considering the rapid improvement in his social and emotional skills after the TOGETHER training. As Nora previously mentioned: “He’s improved tenfold because they [the educators] involve the parents.”

Considering Rachel’s comments in relation to empowering parents, such sentiments were also expressed by Kylie when asked about ways the parent–educator relationship could be improved. Specifically, she talked about developing the confidence of the educators to pass on the strategies to the parents: “It is with honesty and consistency, and parents respecting the educators to follow through with practices. It’s also about building up the educators’ confidence and role modelling and empowering them to transfer the strategies to the families. And as Rachel said: “Parents want to know what to do and they come to us.”

Kylie’s and Rachel’s reflections are valuable when attempting to understand the role of the educator in supporting parents in the development of their child’s social and emotional skills. In Chapter 11, this case study and Case Study 3 provide clear examples of the trust that parents develop with their children’s educators and how this trust can be used to model the strategies of the TOGETHER program with parents. Sophie felt that the educators could continue to pass these strategies on to her. She also saw the value in passing on the strategies to other parents. To improve on the parent–educator relationship, she made the following comment:

*It’s more about parents talking about what they are doing at home. Having those discussions with the families around the behaviour and the centre actually giving information about the way they are managing behaviour. I didn’t know much about how they managed behaviour [until the TOGETHER workshops]. It would be good to give some of that information to parents to be able to use … Perhaps make it available through newsletters.*

Sophie’s remark about more connection with the educators was supported by Anaya’s final comment. She also reflected on the impact of time on both families and educators:

*We don’t have a chance to talk to the educators about how things are going. I think it is about time. The pick-ups and drop-offs are a rush. I think we should have an opportunity each fortnight or at least monthly to meet and greet. To*
get together to talk about the children, their experiences and their achievements.

Consequently, the challenge for this LDC centre was about finding the time to connect more with families in order to pass on the knowledge they have learnt. Nora specifically mentioned that she found times to connect with families difficult due to her working hours. Given that she worked from 10 am to 3 pm each day, she had to rely on the other educators for the more personal connection with families. However, she did not let time factor limit the parent–educator relationship and would send home notes and pass on messages through the other educators when she could. As this case study illustrates, when responding to a family’s context and finding new ways to communicate with them, there are times when educators need to work closely as a team. Nora could also see her role growing as she discussed the fact that she needed to think of new ways to connect with families. When ways that the TOGETHER program could be used as a tool to connect with families and empower her to pass the strategies to others was discussed, she became excited: “I’m excited for that [improving support through TOGETHER] where we can just filter it through to the community rather than it just being exclusive to two or three families.

Nora’s concluding comment highlights one of the aims of the TOGETHER program. It has been designed to be more accessible, less time consuming, and easier to follow, and ultimately empower participants to pass their new knowledge on to other families and educators in their community, not just those participating in the workshops. The final chapter is next and it synthesises the findings from this chapter and the preceding four chapters.
Chapter 11
Lessons Learned – It Is Not All Puppies and Rainbows:
Discussion

You see such an improvement with all the kids [Charlotte’s three children] and how eager they are to please us. So, I think a lot of their behaviour comes from that. I’ve definitely seen a change since using that message [positive feedback] with them. Yeah, but it’s not all puppies and rainbows. You know, there is still a lot of fighting and arguing. But I will say honestly that in the last four weeks we have noticed an improvement.

This quote from Charlotte (Case Study 2) illustrates she acknowledged the positive effects on her children after she participated in the TOGETHER program and a change in her parenting skills. However, she was also honest in her reflections. She recognised that the role of being a parent is, at times, incredibly hard, but she also realised that by persisting with the TOGETHER parenting strategies and practices, her children’s positive behaviours began to increase at home.

The case studies of all participants in the TOGETHER program, including Charlotte’s, are important in helping to evaluate the effectiveness of TOGETHER. In Chapter 2, the genesis of the program TOGETHER: Growing Children’s Social and Emotional Skills (Phillips et al., 2017) was explained. It developed from an awareness of the need for a parent, teacher, and educator training program (in growing children’s social and emotional skills) that was not only contextually responsive and encouraging of parent–educator collaboration but also (a) more accessible; (b) less time consuming; and (c) easy to follow than other social emotional competence early-intervention programs.

In this final chapter, the five case studies are reflected on using the method of triangulation to explain the effects of TOGETHER and address the four research questions. The results from the SDRS (Tyler-Merrick, 2014) and observations show that from the 17 children, five of them were struggling with their social and emotional skills in both settings before the TOGETHER workshops. The parents of 11 of the children had also reported concerns about their child’s social and emotional skills at home through the SDRS. The parents, teachers, and educators had identified they required additional support to improve their parenting and teaching practices. From the BPRQ, their beliefs and practices on
teaching social and emotional development skills to young children varied. During and after
the two training workshops, it was found that when the parents, teachers, and educators
worked together in partnership and shared their knowledge, consistency in responding to the
children’s behaviour occurred. In turn, there had been an increase in descriptive praise and
encouragement to most participating children in the home and preschool settings post-
workshop and in the follow-up. With an increase in the positive interactions between the
children, parents, teachers, and educators, there had been an increase in the children’s
prosocial skills and a decrease in their challenging behaviour. The following discussion
highlights the key findings from each research question and presents implications for the
TOGETHER program moving forwards.

The Beliefs and Practices of Parents, Teachers, and Educators in Positive
Behaviour Guidance Before the TOGETHER Workshops

The parents’, teachers’, and educators’ beliefs and practices before the TOGETHER training
commenced were investigated through the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a). The BPRQ results
indicated that their beliefs and practices on how to teach social and emotional development
skills to young children varied between all adult participants in all five case studies.

First, in relation to beliefs, in all five case studies, there were several key areas where
the parents, teachers, and educators had different viewpoints before the TOGETHER training.
Most parents held views relating to authoritarian styles, such as using an angry voice and
punishment was acceptable for inappropriate behaviour, and that parents should always be in
control of their children. Whereas most teachers and educators emphasised the importance of
being calm at all times with most agreeing that punishment was not an appropriate strategy
for misbehaviour (they cited the importance of guidance). Not everyone agreed that
children’s behaviour needed to be praised or encouraged frequently. Some parents felt that
too much praise could be problematic for children’s learning and development. In contrast,
many teachers and educators reported that they agreed that children’s behaviour needed to be
praised or encouraged frequently.

The different beliefs held by the parents and educators indicated that there was a need
to explore ways for the parents, teachers, and educators to develop a shared understanding
about how to grow children’s social and emotional skills. Like Sheridan and Kratochwill’s
(2007) work, there was a need for such understandings to be built between home and school
and when children experience consistency in values between home and educational settings, they experience more successful transitions, whereas inconsistencies between settings can lead to a greater risk of poor development. They specifically state, like the findings of TOGETHER, the manner in which parents, teachers, and educators are brought together to develop the parent–educator partnership shapes the benefits of the early-intervention program. In Case Study 5, Ava’s mum, Zoey, expressed such sentiments before her training commenced, stating: “It is important that all carers are of a similar belief. This builds consistency. It also allows both parents and educators to learn what might work best for individuals’ children.”

Second, the BPRQ responses (Phillips et al., 2020a) and the baseline observations of selected parents, teachers, and educators had demonstrated the inconsistencies between the reported practices and observed practices relating to guiding the children’s social and emotional skills. While most of the parents, teachers and educators reported that they had given attention to more positive than negative behaviours (such as letting children know when they were doing things well, giving genuine praise and encouragement, and sharing children’s positive behaviours with family and friends), this was not reflected in the observations of the observed parents and most teachers or educators. The baseline observations noted that the children had often been doing things well, yet there had been minimal positive feedback provided to the children about their prosocial behaviours. Specifically, the classroom observations confirmed that when the teachers or educators had given limited positive praise and encouragement, higher levels of inappropriate child behaviour and lower levels of appropriate behaviour had occurred. Such contradictions between reported practices and the observed practices suggest that although the parents, teachers, or educators believed that they had been acknowledging positive behaviours, they may have been unaware of just how little attention they had been giving to the children’s positive behaviours.

This finding regarding the varied practices between the parents, teachers, and educators was concerning but not new as this had also been found by Bornstein et al. (2010), Claessens and Chen (2013), and Wiglesworth et al. (2010). The inconsistency between the practices of carers had led to negative outcomes for children’s social and emotional skills. The findings of the TOGETHER research project also demonstrate that parents, teachers, and educators require additional training in providing positive feedback to children as a strategy to develop children’s social and emotional skills. Both concur with the importance of
providing positive feedback, stating that children who struggle with their social and emotional skills have fewer positive social interactions, resulting in reduced social and emotional skills.

The Parent–Educator Relationship Before the TOGETHER Workshops

A key component of Family-Centred practice, imbedded in the TOGETHER Conceptual Framework, is the encouragement of strong parent–educator partnerships (Dunst, 2002). Interestingly, the responses to the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a) in all five case studies indicated that the parents, teachers, and educators already felt that they had strong parent–educator relationships. Such results are promising as they indicate that the teachers and educators already valued the parent-educator relationship as part of their everyday practice. The results also demonstrated that the teachers’ and educators’ practices in developing parent-educator relationship were in line with the current curriculum documents – namely, the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (ELYF; Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009) and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF; Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, 2016). In both documents it is clearly stressed that one of the roles of teachers and educators is to build strong collaborative partnerships with families.

The value the teachers and educators placed on the parent-educators relationship was seen time and time again across all five case studies. In all studies, the parents believed that their child’s teachers and educators were being responsive to their child’s and family’s needs and valued their strengths and cultures. In Case Study 2, Isabella’s mum, Juan, commented on the relationship she had with teacher Jia: “My educator [referring to Jia] has my full trust as she has shown me how caring and responsible she is and that she is absolutely more experienced than me. I think this is very, very important to the children.”

Juan’s comment is one illustration of how the parents across the five case studies looked to their children’s teachers and educators as valuable partners in guiding their children’s social and emotional skills. In the same vein, many of the teachers and educators placed similar value on the importance of establishing strong parent–educator relationships, as discussed by Naomi in Case Study 3:

Naomi: Across the board we put a lot of practice into our everyday interactions to ensure strong relationships are built from the beginning, such
as getting to know their interests, open conversations and purposeful listening so that they know we value what they talk about.

Such results indicated that effective partnerships had already been established between the parents, teachers, and educators in most cases. However, several of the parents, teachers and educators reported areas for improvement in the parent–educator relationship. In Case Studies 1, 4 and 5, three parents indicated a need for stronger and clearer communication. In Case Study 1, teacher Sue and educator Ali also expressed a need to deepen the parent–educator relationship on all questions. Such results correspond with Murray and Mereoiu’s (2016) work, where teachers and educators continued to express the need for professional development in parent–educator partnerships and collaboration.

The Barriers to Participation and TOGETHER’s Response

Part of adopting a responsive approach to intervention is ensuring that families’ contexts are considered (Stern et al., 2015). The TOGETHER Conceptual Framework acknowledges to important role context plays in the lives of children, their families, teachers, and educators. As previously discussed, according to Bronfenbrenner (1986), children are placed the centre of a set of five influential systems. These systems are the microsystem (environments of home and preschool), the mesosystem (the relationships between the home and preschool setting), the exosystem (the influence of external community aspects), and the macrosystem (cultural and societal beliefs), and the chronosystem (changes over time). When attempting to reduce barriers, the framework illustrates the importance of acknowledging and responding to these influential systems. In particular, it is important to acknowledge the influence of cultural and personal beliefs, the influence of parents’ work, and the extended community.

As identified in all five case studies, there continued to be contextual barriers that stopped parents from seeking assistance with their child’s social and emotional skills. These contextual barriers needed to be acknowledged and responded to. Such barriers included time constraints, family life demands, challenges with childcare, and isolation from any other type of informal supports (such as no availability of extended family members to assist). The CSD questionnaire helped to understand some of these barriers.

For many of the families, the demands of coordinating family life, such as attending appointments and working around work–life, impacted their ability to attend workshops. Such barriers were clearly illustrated in Case Study 4 where Matt’s dad, Lincoln, was unable
to attend the workshops due to the family’s isolation and Lincoln dividing his time between a highly physical job and being a single father to his three children. In Case Studies 2, 3, and 5, several parents could only attend one workshop due to unforeseen circumstances such as cars breaking down, sickness in the family, and ongoing work commitments. Such barriers demonstrate that the contexts of families are varying and continuously moving.

While TOGETHER was flexible in its approach and application, the issue of parental involvement still needs to be addressed in future iterations of the program. One solution in responding to families being unable to attend the two workshops was to teach the teachers and educators to facilitate the program through additional training. Then they could pass this knowledge on to these families as trust had already been established between the parents, teachers, and educators. By being adaptable to each family’s situation, the TOGETHER facilitators could teach the families the TOGETHER program content at times suitable to the parents. Such an approach was used to help build consistency between the preschool and the home environments. This approach is supported by Bermudez et al. (2011) as they reiterated the importance of being adaptable to the participants’ context, and like TOGETHER, include the use of cultural advocates in implementation.

As had been mentioned previously, the lack of childcare had also been cited as a barrier that restricted family participation in Case Studies 2, 3, 4, and 5 (interestingly, in Case Study 1, parents cited that they would prefer evening classes and looked forward to a child-free night). Similar to these findings Stern et al. (2015) found that access to resources could be factors that prevent parents from requesting support with their children’s social and emotional skill needs. In TOGETHER, access to childcare resources weighed on the parents’ minds when deciding if they could attend the workshops, so in response, the two workshops were conducted at the preschools with the children in attendance. The result was that parents who had less informal support networks had more opportunity to attend the TOGETHER program. While the provision of childcare may seem like an obvious solution in reducing participation barriers it is important to note that there is little evidence of such provisions in other early intervention programs. Moving forward it is important that any form of early intervention programs takes into consideration the need for childcare as a way to support family participation.

Another barrier that Kazdin and Weisz (2018) alluded to is the fear of the associated stigma and racial discrimination of attending such a program. The universal approach of the TOGETHER program via the CSD questionnaire asked about ways parents, teachers, and
educators preferred to communicate and any cultural considerations that needed to be considered. For all five case studies, two considerations became evident – the need for small groups and the preschools’ cultural practices regarding food. By recognising how the parents, teachers, and educators could connect naturally (such as informal lunches or afternoon teas), the setting for the workshops ensured a relaxed and welcoming environment was provided. Many of the teachers and educators felt that creating events that involved food created a relaxed atmosphere. Including food at events was already an integrated practice in developing partnerships with the families; therefore, this was integrated into the TOGETHER workshops. Bermudez et al. (2011) also adopted similar practices in their study when responding to their participants’ contexts, with both childcare and food provided, along with time for socialisation between participants.

Responding to each family using the language they spoke at home also assisted in the responsive approach of the TOGETHER program. In the second case study, Isabella’s family was much more comfortable with Jia, her early childhood teacher, who spoke Mandarin. Hugo’s family also expressed similar feelings of comfort when, although the educators did not speak fluent Spanish, the long day care centre included Spanish in its curriculum and this led to a deeper sense of belonging for Hugo and his family. Likewise, Anika speaking French and Creole, Sukhleen speaking Punjabi, and Sabeena speaking Tamil and Hindi, all assisted with communicating with the children’s grandparents who spoke no English. As Sukhleen noted, her fluency in several languages assisted her fellow educators: “I always stand at the door and greet everyone ... then the parents and grandparents come and talk to us ... I can speak some of their languages and I can pass it on to Emma.”

It is interesting to note that the language skills of Anika and Suklenn were not used to their full potential until after the TOGETHER training. After the training they were able to support Emma in communicating with harder to reach families. Quite possibly, their language skills may have assisted in reducing the barriers for other families to attend the TOGETHER training if utilised earlier. In support of valuing home languages in early intervention, the work of Jain et al. (2019) supports these findings in that when interventions include professionals who speak the native languages of the families involved, the families feel more supported.

As a result of the facilitators, teachers, and educators understanding each family’s work, life, and language contexts, the TOGETHER program was adapted to the needs of each family. Koerting et al. (2013) concur with the need to be flexible. They state that early-
intervention programs need to consider each family’s unique characteristics and circumstances when engagement strategies are being developed with families. When these considerations are taken into account, then the barriers that families may be facing in accessing TOGETHER can be reduced.

The Changes in Parents’, Teachers’, and Educators’ Beliefs and Practices after the TOGETHER Workshops and the Effect on Children’s Social and Emotional Skills

The TOGETHER Conceptual Framework from Chapter 2 illustrates how the beliefs and practices of parents, teachers, and educators influence children’s social and emotional development. In particular, the framework highlights how family-centred practice is central to the TOGETHER program and places importance on the relational and participatory practices between parents, teachers, and educator (Dunst 2002). Such practices are strength based and encourage information sharing and family choice in any decision-making between the family, teachers, and educators. Through the inclusion of such practices in the TOGETHER program consistency in the beliefs between parents, teachers, and educators increased across all five case studies. The responses provided in the BPRQ (Phillips et al., 2020a) indicated that participation in TOGETHER workshops lead to consistency in beliefs and practices between the parents, teachers, and educators. They all believed that the children’s behaviour needed to be praised or encouraged more frequently; that giving attention to their child was important; that when a child tries hard (even at the small things), they should be given praise and encouragement; and that it is important to be able to talk to their child about inappropriate behaviour in a calm manner. The belief of redirecting inappropriate behaviour using guidance rather than punishment was also more consistent between all participants. Such a result is encouraging as Chan et al. (2009) and Vartuli (2005) also demonstrated that children of parents who have an authoritative view often exhibit higher social and emotional competence than children of parents who have authoritarian beliefs.

There had also been changes in the observed practices of the selected parents, teachers, and educators across all five case studies. These changes illustrate the role of process-person-context-time (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) in the development of parent, teachers, and educators’ practice. The concept of PPCT brings the elements of the TOGETHER Conceptual Framework together. For example, in Case Study 3, the concepts of
process, person, context, and time were evident through Teacher Emma’s reflections. Emma reflected in the second workshop on how she had increased her attention to the positive behaviours she had observed in the children. Initially, she said she had been hesitant due to concerns that too much praise and encouragement could be detrimental to children’s development. By engaging in the process of reflection Emma was able to recognise her own bias on how effective positive attention may or may not be. Over the week she discovered that by talking to the children about the things that they had been doing well, the children had increased their appropriate behaviour and decreased off task/challenging behaviour. Emma’s change in beliefs and responses to the children illustrate the role she played as an influential person in their lives. Emma’s change in practices also lead to a change in the children’s education context which lead to change in child behaviour.

Over the past week it [the reminder strategies and the training] had made me think how much praise I had been giving in group times. In the past I would have focused more on the task. I thought that if I did that [give praise], I would lose children ... I have now changed my practice in that I am more flexible to talk to children about their positive behaviour. I thought it would hinder the concentration of the other children, but it didn’t at all in the end. They would listen to the praise ... then they all wanted the praise.

Over time Emma had tried to increase her positive interactions between the two workshops and the months following the training. During this time, she had kept track of her positive interactions and reflected on her practice by placing pebbles in her left pocket and transferring a pebble to her right pocket each time she had given a positive statement to a child. While she had not done this every time, she had given descriptive praise. She reported that having a simple reminder in her pocket in the form of the pebbles helped her remember to focus on the children’s positive behaviours. Her change in practice had been visible in both the classroom observations, the BPRQ, and the interviews.

The above reminder strategies were also used by most of the other parents, teachers, and educators in each of the five case studies. The successful use of these reminder strategies connects to the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) surrounding the TOGETHER Conceptual Framework. Social Learning Theory place importance on how cognitive processes, including symbolic rehearsal, have the potential to act as a reinforcer and thus change behaviour. The use of reminder strategies provided a form of symbolic rehearsal. The
reminder strategies taught in the workshops are designed to be simple and fit in with everyday life. The parents, teachers, and educators had been encouraged to devise strategies that would work for them. In all of the case studies, the parents, the teachers, and the educators expressed how hard it had been to remember to give consistent praise and encouragement. They also mentioned the difficulty of remembering to catch children when they were “being good” and giving five positive interactions for every negative one. It became evident that reminder strategies needed to be implemented. These reminder strategies enabled parents and educators to reflect on their practices. In the reflection process that occurred in Case Study 3, the parents and educators commented on how the reminder strategies helped them to become more aware of their practices and to be more consistent. Educators Naomi and Laura had been making marks on their hands with a pen when they had been giving positive praise and made the following comments:

Naomi: It [the reminder strategies and the training] made you more aware of what you were saying ... looking through another lens was interesting.

Laura: I was consciously thinking of the five positives if I gave negative ... I was aware when I need to factor that in and upping that a little more.

These findings are similar to that of the Incredible Years (IY) training (Webster-Stratton et al. (2008), the Teaching Pyramid Model (Fox & Hemmeter, 2009), and Conjoint Behavioural Consultation (CBC; Sheridan et al., 2012) who also found that such strategies helped increase the use of positive feedback from parents and teachers. TOGETHER is based on many of the principles of the IY, the Teaching Pyramid Model, and the CBC programs. Therefore, it was not unexpected that there would be some similarities in the findings of this project as these three programs also use the positive behaviour guidance strategies which TOGETHER uses. The IY, the Teaching Model, and the CBC programs also suggest ways to be contextually responsive and promote positive parent–educator partnerships but the difference between the TOGETHER program and these other three programs is that the parents and teachers attend the training workshops together and that there are only two workshops.

In addition to these changes in parent, teacher, and educator practice, Case Study 3 was a clear example of how consistencies in practices could be developed. The Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) in the TOGETHER Conceptual Framework shows how the interaction between the child, their family, the community, and the wider society influence
their development. In this case it was the development of the consistent interactions between teachers, educators, and children which influenced the development of children’s social and emotional skills in the preschool setting. The teachers and educators realised that consistencies between their practices would result in them working together. Sukhleen and her colleagues, Emma and Anika, worked together to devise consistent ways that would improve Benjamin’s social and emotional skills. For example, they reflected on the behaviours Benjamin had been struggling with. They then discussed the prosocial behaviours that they wanted Benjamin to achieve. They recognised that he had been finding it hard to join in with group play (such as turn-taking), staying focused on non-preferred tasks, and not lashing out when someone upset him. The three educators then reflected on their own practices. They realised that they had been more focused on giving directions and intervening when Benjamin was engaging in inappropriate behaviours. They reflected that they had given little attention to him when he had joined in well with a group or had been playing happily alongside another child. After reflecting on their practices, Sukhleen, Anika and Emma decided to give descriptive praise and encouragement to Benjamin when he was playing happily alongside his peers; when he was trying to listen to the ideas of others; and when he was trying hard, even at the small things (praising perseverance and the steps of the process).

The three educators also devised some descriptive positive praise phrases they could use when Benjamin was doing things well. Such phrases included “You are playing so nicely with ____ and have listened to their ideas” or “Great work on waiting for your turn.”

As a result, Benjamin’s classroom behaviours improved. He was more able to follow instructions during group times and was taking on board the ideas of other children during play activities. He was also showing an awareness of other children’s feelings and could recognise when his peers needed help. He was more consistent in regulating his emotions and would walk away before a situation escalated into a confrontation. The following reflection from Emma indicates that Benjamin’s educators had been encouraged by the positive changes to his behaviour that specifically related to his emotional regulation: “From our perspective he is a lot calmer than what he was. He is such a different child. There was a lot of anger ... he would get frustrated with other children.”

For the other four case studies, there had also been an improvement in the social and emotional skills of the focus children because of one main reason: their parents, teachers, and educators had changed their practices, had collaborated together, and had developed consistencies between home and preschool. Such results demonstrate that the inclusion of
Family Centred Practices (Dunst, 2002) as one of the underlying frameworks of the TOGETHER program contributed to the program’s success. Through all five case studies parents, teachers, and educators were provided with explicit opportunities to work together during the workshops. They were also encouraged to collaborate after training through the use of individualised positive behaviour support plans. The program also encouraged shared decision-making between the family, teachers, and educators contributing to consistency between home and preschool, thus leading to the growth of children’s social and emotional skills. Such results are also supported by the work of Sheridan et al. (2012) who also found that when parents and educators worked together in partnership, children’s social and emotional development improved.

Another important conclusion that arose from the 5 case studies was that the change in parent, teacher, and educator responses to children’s behaviour led to the growth of children’s social and emotional skills. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that it may not always be the child’s behaviour which is challenging, rather it is the quality of the adult-child interaction and the type of feedback adults provide to children which needs to improve. For example, all the parents, teachers, and educators reported that they had increased their attention to when the child(ren) had been doing things well and had encouraged them with the response of descriptive praise rather than only giving them attention when inappropriate behaviour had occurred. As a result, they saw an increase in children’s social and emotional skills. Similar results have also been shown in the work of Fox and Hemmeter (2009), Fox and Lentini (2006), and Webster-Stratton et al. (2001, 2008). When exposed to more positive interactions, children demonstrate improved emotional self-regulation and lower levels of inappropriate behaviour. Specifically, Fox & Hemmeter, 2009 found that when educators adopted these strategies, positive outcomes for the children in their care were observed, especially for those identified as being “at risk”.

In the home situation, Case Study 1 illustrates this phenomenon. The findings show that by Tamati’s mother, Kiri, adopting positive behaviour guidance strategies after the TOGETHER training, Tamati’s social and emotional skills had improved. He was becoming more consistent in following instructions, such as getting dressed in the morning, joining in and sharing with his siblings, and turn-taking. He was regulating his emotions when he was becoming angry or frustrated and verbalising how he was feeling. Kiri had made a conscious effort to decrease her discouragements and focus on what Tamati had done well by increasing the number of her positive interactions when he had been “good”. She made statements like
“I really like your shapes” (referring to Tamati’s playdough creations). During mealtimes she would also make descriptive statements about how well he was eating. Interestingly, Tamati had also passing on praise to his younger brothers, such as telling them they had been eating well at the dinner table. There had also been a focused effort from his dad to praise Tamati (and his brothers) when he was being “good”. These results are consistent with the findings of Ogden and Hagen (2008), who had also found that when parents reduced the number of negative interactions and moved their focus to recognising what their children had done well that the positive changes occurred for all family members.

Similarly, in Case Study 2, when Isabella’s confidence was no longer “invisible to other children when she was interacting with them. Due to increased attention and positive feedback she received from Jia (and other children modeling Jia) when she participated in the group activities, her confidence increased in the classroom environment and she was now participated in group activities. Isabella become more confident in offering her ideas during group times and was initiating play with her peers more often. At home, Juan had also increased her positive interactions and comments to Isabella. She was now paying closer attention when Isabella was following directions and trying hard at activities, she would compliment her: “I believe you can do it”, “You are really putting in an effort today because you have finished your colouring and you now know what it is”, and “Yay, this is very tricky, but you found it” (followed by a celebratory two-handed high five). Isabella also started to praise her own efforts – “It’s so easy, I found the yellow, yay” – and persevering to finish tasks, saying, “I want to finish; when I was a little I couldn’t.”

These findings present a clear example of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) in action. As the theory states children learn through observation, imitation and modelling from the people that surround them and the environmental context in which they live. As the children imitated positive behaviours, and the parents, teachers, and educators provided positive reinforcement to these behaviours, the children’s social and emotional skills grew. These results are also in line with Fox and Lentin (2006) who demonstrated that when children receive feedback and specific encouragement to each step when learning new skills, their perseverance increases, just like it did for Isabella. These interactions give a clear illustration of the importance of providing positive feedback when children are trying hard, even at the small things. By focusing on the process rather than the final product, the children (and adults) had become more motivated to persevere with the tasks they needed to complete. Such recognition is important because children who are struggling with their social and
emotional skills have fewer positive social interactions. They are often viewed as socially incompetent by their parents, teachers, or educators, which can then lead to externalising and internalising psychological disorders (Bornstein et al., 2010; Wiglesworth et al., 2010).

The Changes to the Parent–Educator Relationships After the TOGETHER Workshops and the Effects on Children’s Social and Emotional Skills

At the very beginning of the TOGETHER program, the importance of relationships and the building of partnerships between children, parents, and educators is emphasised. While the parent–educator relationships were reported to have been strong before the workshops, the focus remained on maintaining communication and promoting teamwork between the parents, teachers, and educators throughout the training so that consistent strategies were carried out across the preschool and home environments. As the five case studies have illustrated, the adoption of a family-centred approach (Dunst, 1997, 2002) during training had enabled the parents, teachers, and educators to strengthen their partnerships. As these partnerships developed and the consistency of practices between the home and preschool increased, an improvement in the children’s social and emotional skills was observed. Early childhood teacher Jia from Case Study 2 explained how the training had built the parent–educator relationship:

*We feel closer because we went through the training together and it's a great relationship-building exercise, and you also receive positive feedback from them [the parents]. So definitely, the relationship has strengthened. And it helped me to build the relationship with the child that will help you deal with the challenging behaviour; and also the relationship with the family. It helps you build that partnership and dealing with the children's behaviour.*

Jia’s reflection demonstrates that the TOGETHER program provides opportunities for the development of strong partnerships at the outset, and by taking time to understand and develop these strong roots, productive relationships and partnerships can be built, which then lead to positive outcomes for children, parents and teachers. One such outcome, as found also by Sheridan et al. (2005) is that there is a higher likelihood that parents, teachers, and educators will be more effective in supporting the development of children’s social and emotional skills. The establishment of strong partnerships between parents, teachers, and educators is vital because it provides a platform for developing a shared understanding of
each family’s context and that of the preschool – the underpinning principle of the TOGETHER program. It also builds a mutual understanding of the beliefs and the parenting and teaching practices that will influence the development of children’s social and emotional skills (Barnett et al., 2010; Park et al., 2016; Sheridan et al., 2005). In understanding the context of family, educators can then adjust the preschool program to celebrate children’s interests, which, in turn, provides additional opportunities to give more positive interactions. While the sharing of such information may seem like a small gesture, it did, with Tamati and his family’s situation, lead to a much more positive learning environment them.

Similar outcomes were also illustrated in the other case studies. In Case Study 2, each parent mentioned the specific cultural practices that their family engaged in at home. For instance, the camping and fishing adventures of Isabella’s family and the dance parties held by Samuel’s family. As the parents discussed these practices, Jia, their children’s early childhood teacher, was provided with new ideas for the preschool program. Such discussions also provided additional opportunities for Jia to interact with Isabella and Samuel to discuss and affirm their family practices. For Isabella’s social and emotional development, such information was vital in helping her feel more included at the preschool and being part of her community. The observations indicated that Jia had incorporated the “camping practices” of Isabella’s family into the preschool program. In turn, Isabella’s social confidence grew in her interactions with her peers. This was because she had been able to engage in play-based learning that was linked to her own family’s cultural practices. These findings are not new as Baumann et al. (2014) and Hieneman and Fefer (2017) found that early-intervention programs that were flexible and could be adapted to the context of families maintained collaborative relationships between the families and the program facilitators.

The TOGETHER program provided an opportunity for explicit, practical parent–educator interaction. In other words, it allowed for the strengthening of relational and participatory practices (Dunst, 2002; Rouse & O’Brien, 2017), key concepts in the TOGETHER Conceptual Framework. Specifically, the workshop format provided a platform for teachers, educators, and parents to share their values and beliefs on behaviour guidance (relational practices). In the first workshop of Case Study 2, parents Kelly and Diana shared the struggles they had been having at home and the educators offered their experiences in solidarity. As the stories were being shared, the parents, teachers, and educators began to gain more confidence in contributing to the group discussion. The trust that the parents had developed with the teachers and the educators had become evident – for example, when Kelly
was sufficiently confident to share her struggles with getting her son, Benjamin, dressed and listening to her. Then Emma, in response to Kelly, shared how she had been assisting her nephew with his listening skills by giving him descriptive praise when he had listened well. Recognising this reciprocal role, these parents, teachers and educators had illustrated the vital role that teachers and educators have in developing families’ capacity to grow their children’s social and emotional skills. Coleman et al. (2013) agree by stating that such trust cannot be underestimated given that early childhood settings are one of the first places where children experience relationships with adults other than those in their immediate families. Early childhood settings are also a place where families can find support in the raising of their children. In the same vein, Santiago et al. (2016) found that the level of trust parents had with their child’s teacher predicted parental involvement in early-intervention programs. They also found such trust also correlated with improvements in children’s prosocial behaviour. Therefore, early childhood teachers and educators are in a very important position to empower the families they work with to gain skills to assist with children’s social and emotional skills. As the five case studies have illustrated, parents often look to their child’s teachers and educators for guidance. In turn, teachers and educators can look to children’s parents for guidance on how they can best meet their children’s needs. The challenges presented in this section have indicated that by adopting a family-centred approach (Dunst 1997, 2002), facilitators, teachers and educators can appropriately respond to the particular contexts of the families they are working with and find new stronger ways to accommodate their needs.

Through the case studies it was found that not only had the trust increased but through the sharing process, the parents, teachers, and educators had also come to realise that they had not been alone in their challenges in raising and guiding the children’s social and emotional skills. The sharing process encouraged in each study showed participatory practices (Dunst,2002; Rouse & O’Brien, 2017) in action, as illustrated in the TOGETHER Conceptual Framework. For example, in Case Study 3, Naomi and Emma, Benjamin’s teachers, discussed with Kelly the factors that may have triggered her son’s frustrations and how these triggers might be mitigated. They also discussed the importance of providing descriptive praise when Benjamin was being persistent with certain tasks and congratulating him when he had been able to work through the frustration. Offering him a space to calm down was also a strategy that was shared. Kelly mentioned to the educators that many of the strategies
seemed to be working because she had been astounded by the positive change in Benjamin’s behaviour over the past term already.

In addition, hearing how the educators had approached the challenging behaviours of the children appeared to assure and empower the parents in each of the five case studies. As with Kelly, Isabella’s mum, Juan, placed value on how the educators guided children’s behaviour:

Hearing how an educator deals with certain behaviours is helpful ... like the educator’s techniques ... They [the children] have been very receptive with the educator but I like hearing the educator’s approach as I think that’s very helpful as a parent.

From the various scenarios described, the TOGETHER training provided increased opportunities for the parents, teachers, and educators to learn from each other. They had been able to develop consistent practices to teach social and emotional skills through the workshop discussions. Consequently, the children had been provided with clear, consistent messages about prosocial behaviours and how to regulate their emotions. Also, when learning the skills, the teachers and educators had been able to implement consistent practices with other teachers and educators in the classroom and the parents had been able to share the strategies with other family members. In Case Study 1, Kiri had passed on what she had learnt to Tamati’s dad. In Case Study 2, Charlotte had been able to teach her husband the skills she had acquired:

Since the training it has created conversation between me and my husband in that we had not talked about parenting before, so it has sorted of enabled us to bring to the table the things that I’ve learnt and sharing in the hand-outs you’ve provided. One of the techniques we really like, because it’s really easy to remember, is the 5 to 1 in terms of every negative interaction. Trying to have five positive ones and sort of wipe the slate clean and negate that negative interaction. Especially because he [her husband] has such limited time with them [the children]. It makes us a united front in terms of consistency in our parenting, and I’m using similar techniques, so they’re getting the same sort of parenting and response from both of us.
However, for those parents who had been unable to attend both workshops, such consistency was much harder to achieve. Rishi’s teacher, Naomi (Case Study 3), stated that she had been able to make connections with his mum, Meleni, despite her not being able to attend all the training. Fortunately, Naomi had been able to find ways that she could use to pass on the TOGETHER strategies to assist Rishi’s family with the challenges they had been facing. However, she felt the relationship with Rishi’s parents was still developing:

*Rishi’s mum has spent more time with us and we have had more communication and reciprocal conversations with her. I feel like with Rishi and his behaviours he has grown so much, and it has been a real positive for him. With dad there is still a barrier … we need more time with him … I feel like we need to be positive rather than telling them things they don’t want to hear. They want to hear that their child is happy and safe … We have more interactions with mum so we have more opportunity to connect … dad not so much. I don’t know how [to connect] apart from organising more nights; he works full time … It’s a real challenge … It’s the same for lots of families.*

Naomi’s comments would no doubt resonate with many parents, teachers, and educators; while she had developed a strong relationship with one parent, the connection with the other continued to be a challenge. Ali, the educator from Case Study 1, had also found that connecting with family members had been a challenge. In turn, this disconnection had been impacting on the effectiveness of the partnership. Ali reported that she had been finding it difficult to collaborate effectively with families when she only interacted with the grandparents, not the parents. She also mentioned that time and communication barriers, such as reduced connection with working parents, limited some families’ involvement with the TOGETHER program.

Interestingly, the feedback from Henry’s mum, Sonja (Case Study 1), and Isabella’s mum, Juan (Case Study 2) resonated with the teachers’ and educators’ feelings regarding the time needed to be allocated for developing better connections between parents and educators. Both Sonja and Juan felt that they needed more time with the teachers and educators to understand how they could support their children in their social and emotional development. Sonja mentioned that there was a need for additional one-on-one meetings with the educators to confidently discuss Henry’s needs and follow up on his progress. Juan specifically stated:
I think it’s just like things we need to discuss and spend more time together so we can bring things up like again and again, you know what I mean? Even before the lecture, I had heard about it [positive praise and encouragement]. But after the lecture, I forgot things ... And after a couple of months I stopped ... not that I had forgotten the theory, but I had just forgotten to do it on a regular basis. So, if the educator somehow did a reminder ... not for like an hour lecture, just every now and then.

In Case Study 5, Anaya also felt similarly:

*We don’t have a chance to talk to the educators about how things are going. I think it is about time. The pick-ups and the drop-offs are a rush. I think we should have an opportunity each fortnight or at least monthly to meet and greet. To get together to talk about the children, their experiences and their achievements.*

These examples indicate the challenges with communication that had occurred in all of the five case studies and demonstrate that the barriers to establishing strong parent–educator relationships continued to exist for several of the teachers and educators. The findings also suggest that effective responses to contextual barriers vary between settings and, therefore, teachers, educators, and facilitators need to be flexible and responsive to the changing needs of families. The research of Koerting et al. (2013) corresponds with these findings. Their research found that in order to mitigate the barriers, early-intervention programs needed to be flexible, individually tailored to participants, provide one-to-one versions of the program where required, and provide facilitators who can empathise with participants in order to build trust. Such findings also highlight future research for the TOGETHER program to investigate.

**Limitations of the Study**

The first limitation of the TOGETHER research is that it cannot be generalised as more case studies are needed. It is important to remember that the five case studies are not generalisable to the wider population, as they were specific to five distinctly different contexts. In saying this, the five case studies have shown how TOGETHER is adaptable across settings. Each case study has demonstrated how the program can be used for parents, teachers, and educators to build their skills in developing children’s social and emotional skills in different
communities and with a range of different teachers, parents and children. The case studies have also indicated how the TOGETHER program can deepen the parent–educator partnership; however, it is important to recognise that in this research project there was not a sufficient number of diverse families to really test the extent to how contextually responsive the TOGETHER program could be. Therefore, the next challenge for exploring the effects of this program is to continue its implementation across a more diverse range of settings.

Another limitation is that the selected children all had mild behaviour difficulties, so TOGETHER was not tested with more challenging cases. While TOGETHER has been designed as a universal program for all children and families, it is important that its effects on children who are considered at risk of social and emotional delays are investigated. Wiglesworth et al. (2010) concur with the need of such investigations into early-intervention programs. They specifically state that the research is needed because children who are considered to be either vulnerable or at risk in their social and emotional development often have poor social skills, struggle with expressing themselves, and find it difficult to interpret social messages from others. It is also important to note that during the recruitment phase for all five case studies, families of children considered at risk were approached; however, most declined to participate. While the reluctance to participate is unclear, a possible reason is that the trust had not been developed between the parents and me; rather, the trust lay with the teachers and educators.

A third limitation is that observations should have occurred in all children’s homes as well as the preschool to gain a fuller understanding of all children’s social and emotional development. In this manner, a more complete picture of all children’s behaviour could have been reported. In the home setting, this would have provided a deeper understanding of parent and child interactions, thus helping to explain the changes in children’s social and emotional skills further. However, it is important to note that across the five case studies, cameras were provided to several families who had given permission for the home observations. While the parents had been provided with training in how to use the cameras and had been provided with reminders, they had found it challenging to find the time to take the recordings. Most of the parents who had been provided with the cameras only took, on average, three recordings, which meant the data could not be used. Therefore, future research also needs to consider other alternative methods for gathering evidence from the home setting.
Implications for Future Research
The key difference with TOGETHER compared to other early-intervention programs is its shorter delivery time. Its brevity may have been more appealing to the parents in the five case studies because they felt they could accommodate the shorter time commitment into their busy family life. One of the main aims of TOGETHER was to reduce the barriers, such as being time-poor and stigma associated with participation that some families and educators may face when accessing early-intervention programs. TOGETHER also relies heavily on the trust that early childhood teachers and educators form with the children, their parents/caregivers, and extended family members. While this research project has produced promising results, some unanswered questions require further investigation.

First, there are several barriers that need to be broken down so that parents can easily access programs such as TOGETHER. One barrier cited by parents, teachers, and educators was the time commitment. This barrier had also been noted in the research of Bermudez et al. (2011), Domenech Rodríguez and Wieling (2005), and Gable and Halliburton (2003). Consequently, the TOGETHER program was specifically designed to reduce the required time commitment from participants. As the five case studies have illustrated, the structure of the program was two 120-minute training workshops where the participants worked through an easy-to-follow manual with the facilitator. Additional coaching was provided in some cases; however, the visual images in the manual (see Appendix A) have been created to remind teachers, educators, and parents of the TOGETHER strategies. The manual is a tool that parents, teachers and educators can revisit without having to enrol in further training. In addition, the format of TOGETHER involves collaboration between the teachers, educators, and parents. By training together, more support is provided by the teachers and educators to the parents. There is even support given from parent to parent. Such support reduces the need for continual connection with other early childhood professionals. The support may also reduce the stigma that parents often feel when asking for assistance for their child’s challenging behaviour.

To continue to reduce the above time barriers future research in the TOGETHER program is needed into how early childhood teachers and educators can continue to provide support to parents and extended family members after training. In relation to Case Study 3, the two workshops were sufficient for the three teachers and the three educators to change their practices. They had increased their descriptive praise and reduced the number of negative responses that they had been giving to the children. They had also deepened their
partnerships with the parents who had trained with them. However, for the teachers and educators to have the confidence to build the capacity of other parents, families, or colleagues, another workshop was needed.

While this third workshop revealed that the teachers and educators were beginning to think of ways to implement the strategies of TOGETHER with other families (such as one-on-one interviews with the parents), ongoing research is needed to explore how best the teachers and educators can become facilitators of the TOGETHER program and the strategies can be maintained over time.

In some of the early-intervention programs, such as the Incredible Years (Webster-Stratton et al. (2008), the Teaching Pyramid Model (Fox & Hemmeter, 2009), and Conjoint Behavioural Consultation (Sheridan et al., 2012), the teachers and educators are trained in positive behaviour support strategies, as occurs in TOGETHER. Nevertheless, these participants appear to be overlooked as potential facilitators of these early-intervention programs. Therefore, it is important for future research to explore how early childhood teachers and educators can facilitate the TOGETHER program themselves. When teachers and educators are empowered to facilitate TOGETHER, there is the possibility that other barriers may be reduced such as engaging hard-to-reach parents and families (for example, grandparents, fathers, and working parents).

It will also be important to explore how teachers and educators as facilitators can be used to reduce or remove the barriers that may deter family participation; how they can dispel any sense of stigma associated with attending early-intervention programs; and how they can assist in making such programs more contextually responsive. In early childhood settings, where children are often receiving care and education from multiple sources (for example, parents, extended family members, teachers, and educators), it is important that future research explores how partnerships can also be developed with other influential family members or carers, not just the immediate carers.

While empowering early childhood teachers and educators to pass on the skills they have learnt in the TOGETHER program is one of the next steps in continuing the TOGETHER research project, strong partnerships with other early childhood professionals also need to be developed (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). The reason for developing partnerships with professionals is that families and children who are receiving early intervention are often assisted other early childhood professionals who are not teachers or educators. Specifically, in Australian early childhood settings, children are often visited by
preschool field officers, psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and maternal health care nurses, who have not been previously trained in positive behaviour support strategies. Therefore, it is important that teachers and educators are also empowered to pass on strategies from the TOGETHER program to other professionals to ensure consistency. Future research needs to explore how TOGETHER can continue to develop partnerships between all those that work with children.

**Conclusions**

The five case studies have demonstrated the important role parents, family members, preschool teachers, and educators play in young children’s social and emotional development. The role they play in a child’s life is vital for children to develop skills in forming friendships, participating positively in social settings, regulating their emotions, and engaging in meaningful play and learning. TOGETHER provides a collaborative program to assist parents, teachers, and educators to form strong partnerships and relationships so that they can work together to teach young children social and emotional skills. In using the Communication Styles and Demographics Questionnaire; the Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire (Phillips et al., 2020a); the Social Development Rating Scale (Tyler-Merrick, 2014); the home and preschool observations; the program workshop recordings; the follow-up questionnaires; and the parent and teacher/educator interviews; the findings indicate that the TOGETHER program provides a contextually appropriate platform to train parents, teachers, and educators in how to increase children’s social and emotional skills and develop consistency in practices between the home and preschool settings.

In the five case studies, the two 120-minute workshops resulted in positive changes for all the children, teachers, educators, and parents who participated in the TOGETHER program. For each of the children, there had been an increase in both their social skills and their emotional regulation. For the parents, teachers, and educators, there had been an increase in the amount of positive attention they had given to the children’s prosocial behaviours, including an increase in the level of descriptive praise and encouragement. The findings indicate that the TOGETHER program had provided opportunities for the development of teacher–parent partnerships during the workshops, which resulted in the building of a strong foundation between the home and the preschool that helped support the children in their social and emotional development.
The TOGETHER program, as evident from the five case studies, signals a promising way forward in early intervention for developing children’s social and emotional skills in a contextually appropriate manner. The case studies have indicated that social and emotional training programs for parents, teachers, and educators do not need to be lengthy, thus demonstrating that early-intervention programs can be undertaken in the context in which they are set, and parent and teacher/educators can work alongside each other to engage in the program together. As the title of the TOGETHER program states, it is by being together and not apart, that parents, teachers, educators, and early childhood professionals can grow the social and emotional skills of young children.
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Appendices

TOGETHER
Growing Children's Social and Emotional Skills

Joanna Grace Phillips
Sivanes Phillipson
Gaye Tyler-Merrick

An In-service Teacher, Educator and Parent Training Program
The TOGETHER programme is designed to help you develop positive strategies to help your children strengthen their social and emotional skills. TOGETHER focuses on the development of positive relationships between the child, their parents, early childhood teachers, and educators. The programme places importance on establishing positive home and preschool environments through focusing on positive behaviours more frequently than inappropriate behaviours.

By having parents, teachers, and educators train together we hope that you will all be equipped with positive strategies that are consistent in the home and at preschool. We also hope you can develop ways to strengthen your partnerships with each other to help your children develop positively.

It is well documented that young children with problem behaviours are at risk of developing anti-social behavioural patterns that can follow them throughout their schooling and into their adult years (Walker et al., 1996). However, with effective early intervention social adjustment issues can be avoided (Tyler-Merrick & Church, 2012). Feil, Walker, Severson, Golly, Seeley and Small (2009) remind us that:

*The preschool-age period, from 3 to 5 years old, unlike later childhood, allows a unique opportunity to dramatically affect children’s lives in positive ways,*” (p. 90)

Your role as a parent, teacher, or an educator plays such an important part in the life of the young children that are in your care. What an incredible honour to have. We look forward to being part of this learning journey with you all.

Joanna Grace Phillips
Professor Sivanes Phillipson
Dr Gaye Tyler-Merrick
Build and maintain relationships

Partnerships between children, parents and educators

Establish clear rules/boundaries in partnerships between children, parents and educators. Be consistent

Positive interactions
(including specific praise and encouragement)

Show what to do.
Distract
Redirect

Strategies for unsafe behaviour – for example, ‘sit and watch’

Use selectively

The family

Family context and beliefs

The child

The Tree Model
Growing Children's Social and Emotional Skills
Building Children’s Social and Emotional Skills Together

Session One

Part 1
Building Relationships

Part 2
Praise and Encouragement

Part 3
Being Proactive Parents and Educators

Session Two

Part 1
Being Proactive Parents and Educators
- revisit

Part 2
Exploring rules, boundaries and managing misbehaviour

Part 3
Being Proactive Parents and Educators
- Putting it all Together
Building Children's Social and Emotional Skills Together

Session One

Part 1
Building Relationships
Session One: Part 1, Building Relationships

With an educator and a group of parents discuss the following:

How do you build relationships with your child/children?

How do you know you have built a relationship with your child/children?
Building Positive Relationships

Here are some suggestions on how you can deepen your relationship with your child/children.

• Take time each day to spend some quality one-on-one time with each child. Even a few minutes can make a difference.

• Take the time to listen.

• Know what interests the child has and use this to make connections.

• Spend time at the child’s level.

• Ask about feelings (you can use picture cards to help the discussion, examples given).

• Share something about yourself.

• Celebrate special occasions together.

• Problem solve together.

• Enjoy playing together.

“From birth, warm respectful relationships with familiar adults build and strengthen secure attachments that are fundamental to children’s learning and development” (Department of Education and Training, 2016, p.11).

“Early childhood professionals and families who engage respectfully and responsively with children from birth in everyday routines and experiences promote children’s confidence and empowerment” (Department of Education and Training, 2016, p.11).

Extra tips for Teachers and Educators

Ask about life outside of preschool.
Send notes home about the positive things children have done.
Discover the talents and gifts of every child and build on these.
Learn about the cultures of all children at your preschool and celebrate these.

Extra tips for Parents

Ask about what your child enjoys at preschool.
Tell you child’s educators about the positive things your child has done.
Every child has strengths – find these and celebrate them.
Building Positive Relationships

Part of building positive relationships is developing strong partnerships between the child, their parents and their educators.

This includes understanding each other's cultural practices

With an educator and a group of parents, talk about the cultural practices that are important to you and how these help develop positive relationships with your children.
Now, as a group come up with some way that you can celebrate the cultures of your community to help develop positive relationships.
Building Children's Social and Emotional Skills Together

Session One

Part 2
Praise and Encouragement
Positive interactions
(including specific praise and encouragement)
Why use specific praise/encouragement?

- When children receive feedback and specific encouragement when learning new skills their perseverance will increase (Fox & Lentini, 2006)

- Adults who provide a higher level of praise are more likely to encounter children with increased levels of social competence, emotional self-regulation and lower levels of inappropriate behaviours (Reid & Stoolmiller, 2008)

- Contingent praise (specific praise) has also been shown to improve intrinsic motivation in children (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002)
How to make praise and encouragement effective

Be specific
For example, instead of saying… “good work” or “good boy/girl” use a phrase such as…

“Wow! You put your shoes on all by your self! well done!”

This way the child understands what behaviour you expected him/her to do and that the behaviour is valued, having the potential to motivate them to do the same behaviour in the future.

Positive, respectful engagement also teaches children how to form strong bonds and friendships with others “ (Department of Education and Training, 2016, p. 11).

When children from birth have positive experiences of relationship and place, they can develop a strong sense of security, identity and belonging (Department of Education and Training, 2016, p. 18).

Thinking on the spot – The Praise Phrase Activity
The Golden Apple
5 positive responses for every negative response
Remember to show enthusiasm

Praise/encouragement can be ineffective if it given in a dull tone, where eye contact is not given, or void of any smiles. Strategies such as slowing yourself down to give the child eye contact, a warm smile, and even pat on the back increases the impact of the praise given. With children who may be inattentive, impulsive, or easily distracted when delivering praise, a passing comment could be easily missed, highlighting the need for enthusiastic praise.

Focus on the learning process rather than the final product

This helps the child to remain focused on the task and strengthens their self-esteem. If the outcome is not what was intended they can still take pride in their achievements throughout the learning process.

The use of proximity praise and encouragement

This tool can be valuable in reminding the child, who is inattentive, of the expected behaviour without drawing attention to him/her. This type of praise involves focusing on the positive behaviour of other children, while ignoring the negative behaviour of the disengaged child. For example, while asking the children to come inside for lunch ‘Katie’ may choose to do her ‘own thing’ rather than follow the adults directions, while Julie is following the directions. The educator or parent could respond with “Julie has gone straight inside for lunch, great listening Julie” This comment may help Katie adjust her behaviour accordingly, and in turn the educator/parent can then give her praise or encouragement when she follows the educator’s or parent’s instructions.
Promote child self-praise — through self-praise children are able to recognise their own achievements. This helps develop internal motivation as they look inside themselves for their own approval. You can do this through using statements that may reflect how they are feeling about their achievement. For example “You must feel so proud of yourself for making such a terrific sandcastle.”

Target specific behaviour according to the child’s needs —
Always keep watch for learning opportunities to build on. For example you may have child who is struggling to take turns or share. So you would praise and encourage the child for the beginnings in learning to take turns and share. Watch out for children’s early attempts at new skills and use specific praise and encouragement to build on these.

Do not combine praise or encouragement with put downs — this can be very confusing for the child and often they will focus on the negative comment rather than the positive; making the praise/encouragement ineffective.
Remember to praise children with more challenging behaviours more often. Sometimes educators or parents find it difficult to praise children who are inattentive, disengaged or uncooperative due to these behaviours drawing out negative comments rather than praise or encouragement.

By understanding that this type of behaviour has the potential to reduce how much praise and encouragement you give is key in helping you understand that a more conscious effort is needed when praising children who exhibit more challenging behaviours.

Remember the shy/invisible child – sometimes children may miss out on praise due to them being cooperative, shy, or non-demanding. Remember to recognise their positive attributes regularly.
• Encourage children simply because you enjoy their company and they have had to do nothing to gain your praise. This shows that you appreciate them as an individual and using statements such as “It’s great to see you today” can be affirming to your relationship with the child.

• Maintain positive expectations for all children and couple this with positive forecasting statements. For example, when encouraging cooperative play you could say “I know that you are such a helpful friend, I’m looking forward to seeing how you help Peter with his sandcastle.” This is a great way to show children that you have faith in their abilities.

• Encourage children to praise themselves and others. When a child praises another this can be very reinforcing. Use strategies like the ‘Compliment Circle’ at group time or as a family to encourage peer/sibling praise. To encourage self praise use statements such as “Wow, you have built such a great house –tell me about your work?”

• Use non-verbal encouragement as well, such as thumbs up, a high five or a smile 😊

Additional ideas…

For Teacher and Educators
Remember to let parents and families know what positive behaviours you are encouraging at preschool and remember to share the positive moments with them.

For Parents and families
Remember to let the educators know what positive behaviours you are encouraging at home and remember to share the positive moments with them.

Celebrate together!!! 😊
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3oKwCk5k3w

When watching this video write down some ‘specific praise or encouragement’ phrases that could have been used.
Building Children’s Social and Emotional Skills Together

Session One

Part 3
Being a Proactive Parents and Educators
The Golden Apple
5 positive responses for every negative response
<table>
<thead>
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<th>List the behaviours you want to see LESS of...</th>
<th>List the behaviours you want to see MORE of...</th>
<th>Proactive and relationship strategies (what we will do)</th>
<th>Praise and encouragement – useful phrases</th>
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The Golden Apple
5 positive responses for every negative response
Being a Proactive Educator or Parent

If you want to help children gain social and emotional competence it is important for you as an educator or parent to be aware of how your own behaviour is impacting on their development. Following are some strategies that may assist you in strengthening children’s social and emotional competence.

Over the next week choose one of the following reminder strategies to help your deliver descriptive praise and encouragement to ALL children who you are with, especially to children with challenging behaviours or the child who may be invisible or shy.

- Place some tokens/beans/small stones in one pocket and when you praise he child put the item in the other pocket OR...
- Wear a paper bracelet or a band aid and have a pen handy – each time you praise or encourage the child make a mark on the bracelet OR...
- Come up with your own idea in recording the amount of praise and encouragement you give you give – what about a phone app?

In your next meeting report to the team how the reminder helped you focus on praise, how it made you feel in your own practice and if you noticed a change in the child’s behaviour.

For Educators
In your next meeting report and reflect to the team how the reminder helped you focus on praise and encouragement, how it made you feel in your own practice and if you noticed a change in the child’s behaviour.

For Parents and families
After 1 week report and reflect to the other adults in your family how the reminder helped you focus on praise and encouragement, how it made you feel in your own parenting and if you noticed a change in the child’s behaviour.
Before you go home let’s play a...

Kahoot game

Please go to Kahoot.it and select play.

Wait for instructions 😊

https://play.kahoot.it/#/k/e0f665ec-08f4-47fe-9910-52b17c341add
Building Children's Social and Emotional Skills Together

Session Two

Part 1

Being Proactive Parents and Educators - revisit
How did the reminder strategies work for you?
How did they help you deliver praise to children with challenging behaviours or the child who may be invisible or shy?

How did it help you focus on praise and encouragement?

How did it make you feel in your own practice?

Did you notice a change in the child’s behaviour? Is so, what happened?
Session Two

Part 2
Exploring rules, boundaries and managing misbehaviour
Establish clear rules/boundaries in partnerships between children, parents and educators. Be consistent.

The Golden Apple
5 positive responses for every negative response
What are the actual rules for your preschool or at home at the moment?

In order for children to be cooperative they need to know what is expected of them, therefore it is important to have a clear set of rules. In the early childhood setting or at home you need to limit the set to 3 or 4 rules and state these in positive terms. For example, ‘use your gentle hands’ would be more appropriate than the negative rule of ‘Don’t hit’. These rules also need to be observable behaviours in order for them to be clear. Remember that rules are there to tell the child what they should be doing. For example, ‘put up a quiet hand to ask a question’ is more clear than ‘be respectful’.

Involve the children when creating these rules/guidelines.
Remember that all behaviour has a purpose (or a function).

When we understand the purpose of the behaviour then we can make better decisions on how we as adults will help the child develop their understandings about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. This process will also assist you and helping children develop strategies to control their emotions and develop their social skills.

*For example,* when a child is being positive the purpose may be to make them happy, relax or form new friendships/relationships. What would we do to encourage this behaviour?

*For example,* when a child is being inappropriate it may mean they need attention, they wish to escape from a situation, they are telling you they are angry or stressed, or they wish to obtain something. We are now going to explore strategies to help you help your child work through these negative emotions and focus on the positive outcomes...
A. What happened before the behaviour? (A - Antecedent)
B. What is the problem behaviour? (B - Behaviour)
C. What happened after? (C - Consequence)

Through following this process you will be more informed as to what behaviour support strategy to use and you will understand what the child is trying to communicate to you.
The Golden Apple
5 positive responses for every negative response

Show what to do.
Distract
Redirect

The family

The child
Redirecting

Remember to be consistent – not just yourself, but all the educators at the preschool and family members at home.

For Teachers and Educators
Ensure that all educators agree on what inappropriate behaviours are to be gently redirected.

Make sure you use one of the child’s preferred activities to redirect the child to.

State the inappropriate behaviour when redirecting and remember to **follow-up with specific praise and encouragement when the child is playing/participating appropriately**

For Parents and families
Ensure that all adult family members agree on what inappropriate behaviours are to be gently redirected.

Make sure you use one of the child’s preferred activities to redirect the child to.

State the inappropriate behaviour when redirecting and remember to **follow-up with specific praise and encouragement when the child is playing/participating appropriately**
For Teachers and Educators
In order for planned ignoring to be effective the whole educating team needs to know and agree as to what specific, low-level, attention seeking, behaviours that will be ignored, for example tantrums or sulking.

Ensure that the inappropriate behaviour being targeted can actually be ignored.

When using planned ignoring use no eye contact and avoid discussion with the child.

Slightly move away from the child, staying in proximity.

Teach other children to ignore minor inappropriate behaviour as well.

For Parents and families
In order for planned ignoring to be effective the whole family needs to know and agree as to what specific, low-level, attention seeking, behaviours that will be ignored, for example tantrums or sulking.

Ensure that the inappropriate behaviour being targeted can actually be ignored.

When using planned ignoring use no eye contact and avoid discussion with the child.

Slightly move away from the child, staying in proximity.

Teach other children to ignore minor inappropriate behaviour as well.

In some instances when ignoring inappropriate behaviour it can get worse before it gets better – but stay consistent and persevere.
Though you may make every effort as a parent or educator to ignore or redirect misbehaviour and promote positive behaviour sometimes there are times when children will continue with inappropriate behaviour. In this case natural/logical consequences need to be used. Natural/logical consequences need to be consistent, applied promptly after the inappropriate behaviour occurs, be convenient, age appropriate, be related to the behaviour, and be given in a respectful but firm, calm and straightforward way. Transition the child back into the activity (or if needed redirect them) and remember to follow-up with descriptive praise when the child is playing/participating appropriately.
The Golden Apple
5 positive responses for every negative response

Strategies for unsafe behaviour – for example, ‘sit and watch’
Use selectively
Sit and Watch or ‘Cooling off’

After going through the Sit and Watch Strategy we will take turns to practice the strategy with each other. It is so important that the whole teaching team and the family is consistent with this strategy – you all need to do it the same as each other.
Sit and Watch Strategy – only use as a last resort. Remember that from the very beginning you must give the child your full attention. If there is another adult available use them to support the other children so you can do this.

The child behaves in an unsafe way – e.g. hurts another child/adult/animal/property.

(Adult) “You have hurt… Come here so you can see the other children/family members playing safely.” (indicate to a space on the perimeter of the activity and guide if necessary).

(Child) Refuses to go. “You can’t make me.”

(Adult) Put your arm around them so they can’t hurt anyone else and gently sit them down next to you.

Child sits and watches to calm down. Other children/family members continue to play. Adult sits next to the child and gives no attention.

2 minutes pass and child is calm.

(Adult) “You hurt…, so you need to sit and calm down. Can you play nicely?” If they say “yes” adult to say “Show me that you can…….”

Child says “no” – adult to say “I’ll show you how.”

(Adult) “You hurt…, so you need to sit and calm down. Can you play nicely?” If they say “yes” adult to say “Show me that you can......”

Child sits and watches to calm down. Other children/family members continue to play. Adult sits next to the child and gives no attention.

Child moves or refuses to settle. (Adult) – with a firm, calm voice. “You need to calm down, and when you are calm, we will talk about what has happened.”

Follow up with descriptive praise when the child is playing/participating appropriately

The Golden Apple
5 positive responses for every negative response
Session Two

Part 3
Being Proactive Parents and Educators
- Putting it all Together
A plan for positive behaviour

In order to strengthen particular behaviours and be more specific in your praise and encouragement, it is useful to recognise the negative/inappropriate behaviours you want to reduce, then identify the opposite positive behaviours you want to increase.

For Teachers and Educators
As a team practice writing a behaviour plan (on the following page) for a child in your class. Communicate this plan with the child’s family. By all teachers, educators and family members understanding what behaviour to give attention to the impact of the praise and encouragement has the potential to double.

For Parents and families
Practice writing a behaviour plan (on the following page) for your child. Communicate this plan with the child’s educators and other family members. By all educators and family members understanding what behaviour to give attention to the impact of the praise and encouragement has the potential to double.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List the behaviours you want to see LESS of…</th>
<th>List the behaviours you want to see MORE of…</th>
<th>Proactive and relationship strategies (what we will do)</th>
<th>Praise and encouragement – useful phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possible reasons for negative behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible reasons for negative behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Possible reasons for negative behaviour</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible reasons for negative behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Steps for encouraging cooperative behaviour

Cut out each box and place it in the correct place on the tree provided.

Remember: choose the least intrusive steps first (the big leaves) when guiding behaviour and that the foundation for encouraging cooperation in children is giving attention, specific praise or encouragement for the behaviour you want to see.

- Communicate the preschool/home rules and limits with all children, family and educators
- Use the Sit and Watch Strategy for aggressive inappropriate behaviour

- Give specific praise and encouragement a soon as you see appropriate behaviour
- Develop relationships with children, family and educators

- Step ___: remember to follow-up with descriptive praise when the child is playing/participating appropriately
- Develop partnerships with children, educators and families

- Use natural/logical consequences
- Ignore non specific, low-level, attention seeking behaviours

- Celebrate family culture and beliefs
- The Golden Apple 5 positive responses for every negative response

- When needed redirect children to their preferred activities, offering them a choice.
- Understand the Community culture
Build and maintain relationships
Partnerships between children, parents and educators
Positive interactions (including specific praise and encouragement)
Show what to do.
Distract
Redirect
Establish clear rules/boundaries in partnerships between children, parents and educators. Be consistent
Strategies for unsafe behaviour – for example, ‘sit and watch’
Use selectively
The Golden Apple
5 positive responses for every negative response
The family
Family context and beliefs
The child
Community context
The Tree Model
Growing Children's Social and Emotional Skills
As you continue on this journey do it in partnership with each other and draw on each others strengths.

**Future Tasks**

**For Teachers and Educators**

**Behaviour plans**
Ensure your behaviour plans are where all teachers and educators (including relievers and students) can see. Consistency is so important and by all teachers and educators understanding what behaviours to give descriptive praise and encouragement to, the impact of the positive interactions has the potential to double.

Communicate and work with families in developing your behaviour guidance strategies

Continue to use your reminder strategies for increasing descriptive praise and encouragement with ALL children at the preschool. Descriptive praise takes a great amount of practice and your efforts will be rewarded in seeing the children that you work alongside developing stronger social, emotional and academic skills.

Remember that every moment has the potential for you to offer descriptive praise and encouragement – this includes centre activities, care moments (toileting etc), daily routines (lunch and group times etc), and even when you are cleaning or setting up new activities. Though you may be busy getting things ready remember to be aware of the children around you and ‘catch them when they are good’.

And finally, remember to encourage each other on this new learning journey, and as you give children praise and encouragement do the same for your colleagues.

**For Parents and Families**

**Behaviour plans**
Ensure your behaviour plans are where all adult family members can see – consistency is so important and by each family member understanding what behaviours to give descriptive praise and encouragement to, the impact of the positive interactions has the potential to double.

Communicate and work with your child’s educators in developing your behaviour guidance strategies

Continue to use your reminder strategies for increasing descriptive praise and encouragement with ALL children in your family. Descriptive praise takes a great amount of practice and your efforts will be rewarded in seeing your children developing stronger social, emotional and academic skills.

Remember that every moment has the potential for you to offer descriptive praise and encouragement – this includes childcare routines, family activities and even when you are cleaning or getting the dinner ready. Though you may be busy getting things ready remember to be aware of your child and ‘catch them when they are good’.

And finally, remember to encourage each other on this new learning journey, and as you give children praise and encouragement do the same with the other adults in your home.

---

**The Golden Apple**
5 positive responses for every negative response
References


In addition, information, handbook layout and activity designs, were adapted from these resources;


Appendix B – Ethics Approval from Universities

Part 1: Approval from Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee
Approval Certificate

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and has granted approval.

Project Number: 0244

Project Title: The effects of a culturally responsive and collaborative program on the perspectives, practices and relationships of parents and educators in promoting children’s social and emotional competence

Chief Investigator: Assoc Professor Simona Phillipson

Expiry Date: 21/09/2021

Terms of approval – failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.

1. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, before any data can occur at the specified organisation.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MURREC.
4. You should notify MURREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.
6. Amendments to approved projects including changes to personnel must not commence without written approval from MURREC.
7. Annual Report - continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report.
8. Final Report - should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MURREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected completion date.
9. Monitoring – project may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MURREC at any time.
10. Retention and storage of data - The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of the original data pertaining to the project for a minimum period of five years.

Thank you for your assistance.

Professor Nip Thomison
Chair, MURREC
Part 2: Approval from Swinburne University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee

To: Professor Sivanes Phillipson, FHAD

Dear Sivanes,

**SHR Project 2018/130 – The effects of TOGETHER: a culturally responsive and collaborative parent-educator program for teaching social and emotional competence in young children**

Prof. Sivanes Phillipson, Mrs Joanna Phillips (Student) – FHAD; Dr Gaye Tyler-Merrick (Nottingham Trent University)

Approved Duration: 23-04-2018 to 21-09-2021

(Monash University HREC ref: 0244 – TRANSFER TO SWINBURNE)

I refer to the application submitted for Swinburne ethics clearance for the above project.

Relevant documentation pertaining to the application, as emailed on 19 April 2018 with attachment, was given expedited ethical review on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) by a delegate significantly on the basis of the ethical review conducted by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC Ref 0244).

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date and as regards Swinburne, ethics clearance has been given for the above project to proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions outlined below and as follows. MUHREC may need to be apprised of the Swinburne ethics clearance.

- The approved duration is **23 April 2018 to 21 September 2021** unless an extension request is subsequently approved.

  - All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

  - The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions,
including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor, and addition or removal of other personnel/students from the project, requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/clearance from SUHREC for approval. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project. Information on project monitoring, self-audits and progress reports can be found on the Research Intranet pages. (However, formats required by or submissions to Monash University HREC in this regard may be acceptable all things being equal.)

- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact the Research Ethics Office if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance as regards Swinburne, citing the Swinburne project number. Please retain a copy of this email as part of project record-keeping.

Yours sincerely,

Astrid Nordmann
Appendix C – Ethics Approval from the Victorian Department of Education and Training
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

For Educators

PROJECT: The effects of TOGETHER: A contextually responsive and collaborative parent and educator programme for teaching social and emotional skills in young children

Professor Sivanes Phillipson
Associate Dean International
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design
Phone: +613 9214 3531
e-mail: sphillipson@swin.edu.au

Joanna Phillips
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design
Phone: +61 410 248 014
e-mail: jgphillips@swin.edu.au

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve?
The purpose of this research is to explore the effects of a culturally responsive and collaborative program design on the perspectives, practices and relationships of parents and educators in the development of children’s social and emotional competence.

Why were you chosen for this research?
You were chosen for this research as you are an educator of young children currently enrolled at Only About Children.

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

- If you wish to participate please sign the provided consent form and place it in the agreed secure location. Joanna will be collecting the consent forms on the 27th of March.
- Participation in this project is voluntary and that you can withdraw yourself from the beginning of the project up to the end of March without having to give a reason.
- When completing the online questionnaires, interviews or being part of the observations it will not be possible to withdraw data once you have submitted the response.
- If you choose not to participate you are still welcome to attend the parent and educator training program.
Possible benefits and risks to participants

- In participating in this project you will be involved in two collaborative parent and educator “Promoting children’s social and emotional competence’ training sessions.
- These 2 hour sessions will be held no more than 14 days apart and will be conducted at a time suitable for the families and the educators.
- These training sessions are designed on evidence based practices that will help you and the families work together in developing skills to help promote children’s social and emotional competence. Audio recordings will be taken.
- You will need to complete two short online questionnaires and three 15 minute interviews about your beliefs and practices with the children and their families in regards promoting their social and emotional development Audio recordings will be taken.
- At the preschool, Joanna and her research assistant will take observations of the educators and a small group of children. This will involve 9 observations lasting 30 minutes each over a period of approximately 6 weeks.
- You will also be asked identify children who are still experiencing difficulty in following instructions, cooperating with others or exercising self-control with behaviour and will complete a short Social Development Rating Scale for the small group of children.
- From the small group of children 2 children will be selected to have video observations in the home setting.
- The preschool’s policies and guidelines in relation to child protection will be followed at all times.
- Nothing will change in the preschool as ‘everything will just carry on as it normally does’.

Confidentiality
Confidentially is assured as the names of the educators, the parents, the children or the preschool will not be used in any report, conference or publication the researchers may do. Additionally, pseudonyms/code names will be used in an effort to reduce the risk of identification.

Storage of data
The information collected will be kept in the strictest confidence and will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a room allocated to the project at the University, and will destroyed after five years.

Results
At the end of the project we will give a summary of the study to the Nominated Supervisor, and request that this is posted in your preschool’s newsletter
Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Swinburne University of Technology Ethics Research Office:

Research Ethics Office
Swinburne Research (H68)
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218
Hawthorn VIC 3122

Tel: +61 3 9214 3845 or +61 3 9214 8145. Email: resethics@swin.edu.au.
Fax: +61 3 9214 5267

Thank you,

Sivanes Phillipson
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

For Parents/Guardians

PROJECT: The effects of TOGETHER: A contextually responsive and collaborative parent and educator programme for teaching social and emotional skills in young children

Professor Sivanes Phillipson  
Associate Dean International  
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design  
Phone: +613 9214 3531  
email: sphillipson@swin.edu.au

Joanna Phillips  
PhD Candidate  
Faculty of Health, Arts and Design  
Phone: +61 41024 8014  
email: jgphillips@swin.edu.au

You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact Joanna via the phone number or email address listed above.

What does the research involve?

The purpose of this research is to explore the effects of a culturally responsive and collaborative program design on the perspectives, practices and relationships of parents and educators in the development of children’s social and emotional competence.

Why were you chosen for this research?

You were chosen for this research as you are either a parent or guardian of young children currently enrolled at Only About Children. The preschool team have given us approval to work with the educators in recruiting families for this project.

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

- If you wish to participate, please sign the provided consent form and give it to your child’s educator or Mardi who will place it in a secure location.
- Participation in this project is voluntary and you can withdraw yourself or your child (or he/she can withdraw) from the beginning of the project up to the end of March without having to give a reason.
- When completing the questionnaires, interviews or being part of the observations it will not be possible to withdraw data once you have submitted the response.
- If you choose not to participate, you are still welcome to attend the parent and educator training program.
Possible benefits and risks to participants

- In participating in this project, you will be involved in two collaborative parent and educator “Promoting children’s social and emotional competence’ training sessions.
- These 2-hour sessions will be held no more than 14 days apart and will be conducted at a time suitable for the families and the educators.
- These training sessions are designed on evidence-based practices that will help you and your child’s educators work together in developing skills to help promote your child’s social and emotional competence. Audio recordings will be taken.
- You will need to complete two short online questionnaires and three 15-minute interviews about your beliefs and practices in promoting your child’s social and emotional competence. Audio recordings will be taken.
- At the preschool, my research assistant and I will take observations of the educators and a small group of children. This will involve nine observations lasting 30 minutes each over a period of approximately 6 weeks.
- Educators and the parents of the children in the small group will be requested to complete a short social development rating scale for the small group of children to help identify any behavioural needs of the child and the change in the child’s behaviour because of the training.
- You will be informed if your child is in this small group. Only your family, the educators and the researchers will know if your child is part of this group.
- From the small group of children, two children will be selected to have video observations in the home setting. You will be compensated for your time with a $100 gift voucher.
- If you or your child require additional support, the educators will work with the local Preschool Field Officer.
- The preschool’s policies and guidelines in relation to child protection will be followed at all times.
- Nothing will change in the preschool or in the home as ‘everything will just carry on as it normally does’.

Confidentiality

Confidentially is assured, as the names of the educators, the parents, the children or the preschool will not be used in any report, conference or publication the researchers may do. Additionally, pseudonyms/code names will be used in an effort to reduce the risk of identification.

Storage of data

The information collected will be kept in the strictest confidence and will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a room allocated to the project at the University, and will destroyed after five years.
Results
At the end of the project, we will give a summary of the study to the Nominated Supervisor, and request that this is posted in your preschool’s newsletter.

Complaints
Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Swinburne University of Technology Ethics Research Office:
Research Ethics Office
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PO Box 218
Hawthorn VIC 3122
Tel: +61 3 9214 3845 or +61 3 9214 8145. Email: resethics@swin.edu.au.
Fax: +61 3 9214 5267

Thank you,

Sivanes Phillipson
Appendix E – Consent Forms for Educators and Parents/Guardians

CONSENT FORM
For Educators

Project: The effects of TOGETHER: A culturally responsive and collaborative parent-educator programme for teaching social and emotional competence in young children.

Chief Investigator: Sivanes Phillipson  PhD researcher: Joanna Phillips

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consent Item</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating in the two parent and educator training sessions where audio recordings will be taken.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing the online questionnaires and three 15-minute interviews where audio recordings will be taken.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to be observed in the preschool setting</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being part of the process in selecting a child and their family for observation including completing a social development rating scale to identify the child’s behavioural needs.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name of Participant

Participant Signature Date

347
CONSENT FORM
For Parents/Guardians

Project: The effects of TOGETHER: A culturally responsive and collaborative parent-educator programme for teaching social and emotional competence in young children.

Chief Investigator: Sivanes Phillipson         PhD Candidate: Joanna Phillips

I have been asked to take part in the Swinburne University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I consent to the following:</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating in the two parent and educator training sessions where audio recordings will be taken.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing the online questionnaires and 3 15-minute interviews where audio recordings will be taken.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing my child to be observed in the preschool setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being part of the process in selecting a child and their family for observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If selected, allowing video recordings to occur at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If selected, being willing to set up the camera at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name of Parent/Guardian Participant

Name of Child Participant

Parent/Guardian Participant Signature

Date
Appendix F – Assent Form for Children

ASSENT FORM
For Kindergarten Children
(For the parent/guardian or educators to read to the children)

Project: The effects of TOGETHER: A contextually responsive and collaborative parent and educator programme for teaching social and emotional skills in young children

Chief Investigator: Sivanes Phillipson

Joanna and (name of research assistant to be placed here) are doing a project at the university. They will be helping the Mums, Dads and teachers learn about ways to help you play together with your friends and your family.

During this time, everything will be just the same - nothing will change.

The teachers and your family will also write some things about you and will choose some children for us to watch playing at the preschool or at home.

We, Mum/ Dad/caregiver/educator (as applicable) know what is happening as well. If you have any questions you can talk to me, Mum, Dad, your teachers or to Joanna (as applicable). If you change your mind about being in the project, that's fine, too. All you have to do is to tell me (Mum, Dad, caregiver, educator or Joanna, as applicable). Is this O.K. with you?

Yes No
Thank you for helping with the project.

Child’s name: ___________________________________________________

Signed parent/caregiver/educator: ______________________________

Date: ____/_____/_____

**Project:** The effects of TOGETHER: A contextually responsive and collaborative parent and educator programme for teaching social and emotional skills in young children

---

**Educator Questionnaire**

**Part One: Communication Styles and Demographics (CSD) Questionnaire**

Date: __________________ Name: _______________________________

**Communication**

Please take time to think about how you like to communicate when working with the families at your preschool.

**There is no right or wrong answer** – simply record your response on each statement that best reflects your working situation. If you wish, please add comments to elaborate further.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My home language is___________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At work, I prefer to communicate in my home language. Yes/No (please circle)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At work, I prefer to communicate in English. Yes/No (please circle)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My qualifications are_________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been teaching in early childhood for _______ (number) years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been at my current early childhood setting for _______ (number) years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My age bracket (circle): under 20 / 20-29 / 30-39 / 40-49 / 50-59 / 60plus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The times that suit me for parent- educator meetings or preschool gatherings are … (tick as many as you like)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before kindergarten starts</td>
<td>Mornings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After kindergarten finishes</td>
<td>Evenings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the kindergarten session</td>
<td>After dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other______________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The days that suits me the best for parent–educator meetings or preschool gatherings are… (please circle as many as you like)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday/Friday/Saturday/Sunday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I prefer to communicate through… (tick as many as you like)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face to face meetings</td>
<td>Smart phone applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Phone calls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 2: Beliefs, Practices, and Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ)

Your beliefs on guiding young children’s social and emotional competence

Please take some time to think about your beliefs on guiding children’s social and emotional competence and circle the number that applies best. There is no right or wrong answer – simply record your response to each statement that best reflects your beliefs. If you wish, please add comments at the end to elaborate further.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that children’s appropriate behaviour needs to be praised/encouraged frequently</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that giving affection to children is important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that when children try hard (even at the small things) I should give praise and encouragement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that it is important to talk to children about disruptive behaviour when they misbehave</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that children need to be spoken to calmly when they are being disruptive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that children must always do what I say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that punishment is important when a child is misbehaving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>I believe that children need to be told when they do not meet my expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe that there are times when I need to use an angry voice when a child is engaging in misbehaviour</td>
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<td>I believe that educators should always be in control of children</td>
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<td>I believe that the child should always get what they want</td>
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<td>I believe that bribes are ok in helping children understand appropriate behaviour</td>
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<td>I believe I am confident in guiding children’s behaviour</td>
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<td>I worry if I discipline a child they may not like me</td>
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<td>I believe that inappropriate behaviour needs to be ignored</td>
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<td>I believe that parents take responsibility for raising a child</td>
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<td>I believe that it takes many people to raise a child</td>
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<td>I believe that eye contact is important when communicating</td>
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<td>I believe that children’s opinions are important</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe that children should work hard to achieve success at preschool and school</td>
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<td>I believe in a consistent routine for my child (e.g. bedtime routines, dinner routines, classroom routines)</td>
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<td>I believe that children should be encouraged to do things on their own</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe that children need help with most</td>
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</table>
Please take some time to think about your teaching practice in guiding young children’s social and emotional competence and circle the number that applies best. **There is no right or wrong answer** – simply your response for each statement that best reflects your teaching practice. If you wish, please add comments at the end to elaborate further.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I give more attention to appropriate behaviours rather than to inappropriate behaviours.</strong></th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>I let children know when they are doing a good job.</strong></th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I give frequent compliments to children for appropriate behaviour</strong></th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I single out the good behaviours I want children to do</strong></th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I share my positive feelings with children when they do things well.</strong></th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>When a child has been inappropriate, has calmed down, and is being appropriate again I immediately return my attention to the appropriate behaviour.</strong></th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I make my praise and encouragement genuine and enthusiastic when a child is playing well.</strong></th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I frequently let children know that I believe that they can succeed and encourage them to talk about themselves in positive ways.</strong></th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
I celebrate children’s appropriate behaviour with their family and friends. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4
---|---|---|---|---
I calmly explain to a child why his/her misbehaviour was inappropriate. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4
---|---|---|---|---
I am consistent with how I address inappropriate behaviour | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4
---|---|---|---|---
I have a clear set of rules at the preschool | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4
---|---|---|---|---
I involve children in making up the rules. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4
---|---|---|---|---
Are there any areas of behaviour guidance you would like more assistance with? Yes / No (please circle) If yes, what are they?
---|---|---|---|---
Do you have other views on behaviour guidance? Yes / No (please circle) If yes, what are they?
---|---|---|---|---

Your relationship with the preschool’s families

Please take some time to think about your relationship with your child’s educators and circle the number that applies best. **There is no right or wrong answer** – simply your opinion and perception on each statement that best reflects your family situation. If you wish, please add comments to elaborate further.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Completely Agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have clear communication with my families.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am responsive to individual children’s needs.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am responsive to the needs of individual families</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>I value the strengths of the children and their families</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I am approachable to my families</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I am caring with my families</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I treat our families with dignity and honour their cultural beliefs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I view parents as partners in their child’s development at preschool</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel families view me as a partner in their child’s development at preschool</td>
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Part 3: Fit Measures for Beliefs Practices and Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ)

Fit Measures for Beliefs Practices and Relationships Questionnaire (BPRQ)

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**Relationships**

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Appendix H – Social Development Rating Scale

PROJECT: The effects of TOGETHER: A contextually responsive and collaborative parent and educator programme for teaching social and emotional skills in young children


Teacher Nomination Form
(Kindergarten 3-6 year olds)

Kindergarten: ______________________ Session: ___________

Teacher’s initials: ___________________ Today’s date: __ / __ / __

Instructions
1. Please read the definition of “children with behaviour difficulties”, below, and write down the names of any children in your kindergarten who qualify as “children with behaviour difficulties”.
2. When completed, pass this form to the Head Teacher.

Definition – Children with behaviour difficulties
Please list any children in your kindergarten who (a) comply with teacher instructions much less frequently than other children of the same age and any children who (b) engage in antisocial behaviour much more frequently than other children of the same age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominated Child</th>
<th>Partner Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Frequently Asked Questions

Q  What do you mean by antisocial behaviour?
A  Antisocial behaviour includes any behaviour which is widely regarded as socially unacceptable.

Q  Does a child have to be both non-compliant and antisocial in order to be nominated?
A  No. You should list the children who follow your instructions less frequently than other children, you should list the children who engage in unacceptable behaviour more frequently than other children and you should list the children who do both of these things.

Q  I have a girl who bosses and bullies other children but she is not disruptive. Should I list her?
A  Yes, girls with behaviour difficulties are sometimes overlooked. It is particularly important that you do not overlook any girls who meet this definition.

Q  One of the children is developmentally delayed and engages in lots of inappropriate behaviour at kindergarten. Do I list her?
A  If the child meets the definition, then list her.

Q  One of the children has Autism and his interactions with other children are often socially inappropriate. Do I list him?
A  If the child meets the definition, then list him.

Q  I am not sure whether to list child X or not?
A  If you can’t decide whether to list a child or not, then list them. It is important that all of the children who may be at risk be identified at this first stage of the screening process.
Social Development Scale

To be completed by the teacher. Use this Scale for 3- to 6-year-old children

(Please select where necessary)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten:</th>
<th>Child Initials:</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girl □</td>
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DOB: | Age: yrs months | Ethnicity: |
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</tbody>
</table>

Does this child have a disability? Yes □ | No □ |

If yes, name the disability

Has the kindergarten received extra assistance for this child within the past 12 months? e.g., from GSE, Project early, etc. Yes □ | No □ |

Does the kindergarten currently receive extra assistance for this child? E.g., from GSE, Project Early, etc. Yes □ | No □ |

Is this child on the GSE/Project Early/other waiting list? Yes □ | No □ |

Does this child currently receive 2 or more hours per day of teacher aide assistance? Yes □ | No □ |

For how long you have had day-to-day contact with this child? Week(s)

This scale completed by: (initials only) Date:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Part 1</th>
<th>Part 2</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

For Office Use Only
Instructions for Teachers

The scale which follows consists of descriptions of 30 different social behaviours.

1. Please decide whether each of these behaviours is one which the named child engages in ‘very frequently’, ‘often’, ‘about half the time’, occasionally’ or ‘not at all’ and place a circle around the appropriate number.

2. When making these decisions, please take into account only the behaviour which you yourself have seen. It is most important that you do not allow your judgement to be influenced by what other people have told you.

3. When making these decisions, please take into account only the behaviour which you have seen during the past four weeks. It is most important that you do not allow your judgement to be affected by events which have happened at some earlier time.

4. When making these decisions, please record your immediate or first impression. Do not spend time pondering over individual behaviours.

5. Please complete every item. An incomplete scale cannot be used.

6. Each scale takes about 10 minutes to complete. Please select a period of time when you know that you will be free from interruption to complete the scale.

7. After completion, please return your Scale(s) to the Head Teacher.

Thank you for your assistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 1</th>
<th>(Please select one number for each item)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Knows and complies with centre limits and boundaries.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Complies promptly with teacher instructions.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Joins adult directed activities (e.g., coming to the mat) as soon as this is signalled or requested.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Persists with (continues to work on) tasks when left unsupervised.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Uses polite remarks/requests to gain the attention of peers.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Responds appropriately when other children try to interact socially with him/her.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Shows interest in what others are saying during conversations, e.g., by nodding, smiling, commenting etc.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Shows appreciation when others offer to help, e.g., by smiling, saying ‘thank you’, etc.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Takes his/her turn when others are waiting.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Eats, drinks, and behaves appropriately during kai time/snack time.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Compromises with others when conflicts or disagreements arise.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Offers toys to, and shares toys with others.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Approaches peer groups in a way which results in acceptance into the current group activity or conversation.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Associates with a range of typically</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2</td>
<td>(Please select one number for each item)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Expresses anger appropriately (without becoming destructive or violent).</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Ignores initial requests and directions even though he/she has heard them.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Reacts in a cheeky or impertinent way to requests or directions from adults.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Continues talking after others have indicated that they would like to comment or that they would like to get on with something else.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Interrupts or annoys others when they are working or relaxing on their own.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Disrupts the play or the activities of the other children.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Uses demands where others would use requests.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Continues to plead, nag, or whine after his/her initial request or demand has been refused.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Tries to get own way by throwing tantrums e.g., by sulking or shouting, or swearing and refusing to co-operate.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Continues to behave inappropriately after being reprimanded, warned, or asked to stop.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Says things which indicate that he/she does not care about the consequences of his/her inappropriate behaviour.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Shouts others down when he/she disagrees with them.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Blames others when reprimanded for behaving inappropriately.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Acts violently towards others, e.g., shove, hits, punches, or kicks others.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Does things which put the safety of other children at risk (e.g., throws hard objects or hits with objects).</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Behaves in ways which result in other students actively avoiding having to talk, play with him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix I – Child and Teacher Observation Sheets and Coding Manual

### The TOGETHER program: Child Observation sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preschool name:</th>
<th>Session no:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Setting: preschool/home (circle)</th>
<th>Educator name/code:</th>
<th>Child’s name/code:</th>
<th>Parent name/code:</th>
<th>BL / PI / PU (circle)</th>
<th>Start time:</th>
<th>Finish Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. **Note:** If no interaction between an adult/peer is occurring still record if child is being appropriate or inappropriate every minute and place line though columns 2, 3, 4, and 6 (for target/control child observations only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>InApp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
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<td>InApp</td>
</tr>
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<td>R</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>InApp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>S</td>
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<td>App</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>InApp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>InApp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>InApp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
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<td>InApp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
<td>NI</td>
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<tr>
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<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>InApp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>InApp</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
<td>NI</td>
<td>InApp</td>
</tr>
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<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>App</td>
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<td>App</td>
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</tr>
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<td>App</td>
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<td>Q</td>
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<td>NI</td>
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<td>Setting: preschool/home (circle)</td>
<td>Educator name/code:</td>
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<td>BL / PI / FU (circle)</td>
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Note: If no interaction between an adult/peer is occurring still record if child is being appropriate or inappropriate every minute and place line through columns 2, 3, 4, and 6 (for target/control child observations only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.</th>
<th>2. &amp; 3. merged as Ob is simply on educator compliance request to child behaviour</th>
<th>4. Educator/parent request</th>
<th>5. Child behaviour</th>
<th>6. Educator/parent/child response to appropriate or inappropriate behaviour</th>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>App InApp</td>
<td>PP CP D X X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>R S Q</td>
<td>App InApp</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>R S Q</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>R S Q</td>
<td>App InApp</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>R S Q</td>
<td>App InApp</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>R S Q</td>
<td>App InApp</td>
<td>PP CP D X X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sheet totals: R S Q App InApp PP CP D X X

All sheet totals:
The effects of TOGETHER: A culturally responsive and collaborative parent-educator programme for teaching social and emotional competence in young children.

Coding and Instruction Manual

Version 6
26th April 2018
The effects of TOGETHER: A contextually responsive and collaborative parent-educator programme for teaching social and emotional skills in young children.
This manual is written to assist researchers in the process of data collection.

Step 1: Selection of teacher or educator

The teachers/educators to be selected must work at the centre on the days of observation and be continuing employment at the centre for the duration of the observations. In addition any teacher who is currently undertaking professional development in behaviour management will not be included in the observations. Each teacher will be assigned a numbered code for the purpose of recording data.

Step 2: Selection of Students

Each teacher/educator will be given a Teacher Nomination Form and will individually nominate four children who meet the definition of children with behavioural difficulties. To be nominated each child must:

- Meet the definition of a child with behavioural difficulties as stated on the Teacher Nomination Form.
- Must be 3 to 6 years of age.

These nominations will be compared to identify 1 children for observation. One other child will be selected for control conditions.

Step 3: Use of The Social Development Scale

The Social Development Scale will be used to identify the learning needs of the 1 selected child. Each teacher/educator will complete one Social Development Scale for each child – a total of 4 forms per teacher.

Please ensure that:

- The cover sheet is completed with all of the student’s details.
- That the teachers understand the instructions on the second page
- All questions are completed on both pages

Step 4: Observation Period

Each daily observation period will be over 2, 30 minute sessions, these being during one of the time chosen below:

11:30 -12:00 Transition period (e.g. play to mat time)
12:00 – 12:30: Transition period (e.g. play to mat time)

12:30 – 13:00: Transition period (e.g. mat time to lunch time)

13:00 – 13:30: Transition period (e.g. lunch time to play)

For each day of observation day there must be a total of one 30 minute time sessions allocated to each child. When you begin a new session please ensure that the child chosen is different from the one in the previous session.

PLEASE NOTE: the session times above are for the Pilot Study. The time will be adjusted according to each Early Childhood setting’s routines. An additional time sheet will be issues to you.

During the base-line and post-intervention and follow-up conditions (a total of 12 hours of observations per phase) there must be a total of 2 hours of observations of each child. If a child is absent on one of the observations time will be made to collect the additional data.

**Recording Forms**

There is one daily planning sheet and two recording forms (child and educator). Please ensure that for each session that separate recording forms are used. The educator recording form follows the same format as the child recording form; however, columns 2 and 3 are for notes only as we are observing the behaviour of the educator and their interactions with children in general.

**Instructions:**

1. At the beginning of each observation day complete the daily planning sheet.
2. Complete a new recording form for each session.
3. During reliability tests both researchers are to begin recording at the same time and will have their own form for each session.
4. Record the following information in the provided columns:

   **Column 1: Line indicator**

   **Column 2: Teacher** – record the teacher/educators’ code here.

   **Column 3: Other child** – tick if peer is interacting with observed child

   **Column 4: Teacher compliance request**
If the request is positive in nature (the request states what the teacher wants the child to do rather not to do) please circle the most appropriate letter:

R = request: For example “Please come and help me tidy the toys.”
Q = question: For example “Can you please help tidy away the toys?” In the case where the pre-school has a rolling lunch system (e.g. multiple opportunities to eat) then only in the last call for kai should the question “Would you like to join us for food?” be included. *
S = Signal: For example a wave to call the child to the teacher, fingers to the lips to indicate for the child to be quiet or the ringing of a bell.

If the request in negative in nature (the request states what the teacher doesn’t want the child to do) please circle the most appropriate letter and place a cross through it:

R = request: For example “I don’t want to hear any talking from you at mat time”
Q = question: For example “Can you make sure you don’t make a big mess?”
S = Signal: For example a stern look before any negative behaviour occurs.

*Please note that the focus is on requests for compliance where there will be positive or negative consequences depending on the reaction from the child. When the statement, question or signal does not have any implied consequences (e.g. how did you make that colour?) then this is considered scaffolding and is not to be included in this column.

Column 5: Child’s response to teacher/parent/peer or general behaviour – according to the behaviour displayed by the selected child please circle the code that applies.

Note: If no interaction between an adult/peer is occurring still record if child is being appropriate or inappropriate every minute and place line though 2, 3, 4, and 6 (for target/control child observations only)

- **App = Appropriate behaviour refers to:**
  ✓ Cooperating with the teacher’s request.
  ✓ Beginning the activity and continuing with the activity that is expected.
  ✓ Listening, attending and continuing to attend.
  ✓ Engaging in socially appropriate interactions with peers, teachers and other adults.
  ✓ Ceasing behaviour considered inappropriate in the preschool within 3 seconds.
  ✓ Failing to comply due to a good reason – such saying they need to go to the toilet before they come to mat time.
• NI = Non-interactive behaviour
  ✓ The child chooses to watch on and not interact with a peer, adult, or activity.

• Inapp = Inappropriate behaviour refers to:
  ✓ Disruptive behaviour. For example, calling out at mat time, poking their friends who are trying to listen, interrupting other children’s work/projects
  ✓ Behaviours considered inappropriate in the preschool.
  ✓ Not complying, not attending to or ignoring the request within 5 seconds. For example, continuing to play in the sandpit after they have been asked to come inside for lunch.
  ✓ Avoidance or escape behaviours – such as running away or falling to the ground.
  ✓ Not starting or participating in the activity expected. *
  ✓ Displaying antisocial behaviour with peers, teachers or other adults (e.g. hitting, kicking, shouting, spitting, stomping, throwing and tantrums) and the child does not respond to the teachers request to stop within 3 seconds.

*Please be aware of any developmental delays specific children may have that are attending the centre. For some children participating or not starting an expected activity may be due their delays, rather than non-compliance

**Column 6:** Teacher’s attention - According to the type of attention the teacher gives please circle the most appropriate coded letter. DP PP NV D X+ X

**CP = Descriptive positive praise,** for example “Thank you so much for helping pack away the blocks”

**PP = Positive Praise without description** – such as saying ‘well done’, or a smile, a pat on the back or thumbs up in reaction to appropriate behaviour

**D = discouragements.** A discouragement is a negative response to a child’s behaviour. The negative response can be given by either through the tone or content of the statement. Discouragements could consist of phrases such as “You’re not listening to me!”, “You’re always hurting other children.”, “I have asked you so many times and you still have not done what I have told you.”, “When are you going to behave?”

A discouragement may also take form as stop request. This is a statement or action to restrict or stop what a child is doing. This is different from a standard request in that it will usually be a response to misbehaviour and may involve the use of an assertive statement. For example the teacher says sternly “Don’t run inside” after the child has been running inside.
**X+ = The teacher/educator ignores the child for a reason.** For example, a child is crying/sulking for not getting the spade that someone else has, so the teacher is ignoring this. This is usually visible in the way the teacher reacts to the situation and their interaction with other children and comments to other teachers. For example, the teacher may notice but turns away, or may quietly mention why she/he is ignoring the child to other teachers or children.

**X = No response to the child’s behaviour,** whether it is appropriate or not. Place a line through the circle if the attention is non-contingent. This means that the attention given does not relate directly to the behaviour, positive or negative. For example, telling the child off for making noise when it was not them.

**Column 7: Notes** – insert relevant notes regarding interactions here. Indicate the line the note it applies to.

**5. Recording rules: In all situations start a new line when...**

- The child being observed shifts their attention to another activity or shows a new behaviour. Place a line through columns 2, 3, and 5 if there is no teacher interaction when the child shows the behaviour (please view rule three for instructions regarding teacher attention).

- The teacher gives a compliance request, even if it is repeated. Record the child’s behaviour in reaction to the compliance request.

- Teacher attention is given without a compliance request, this can happen when a teacher reacts positively or negatively without any prior request. In these cases circle the child’s behaviour and the teacher’s response and place a line through columns 2 and 3.

**EXAMPLES**

**Child is showing appropriate behaviour and the teacher responds with positive attention.**

*e.g. Engaging in socially appropriate interactions with peers, teachers and other adults and the teacher say “you are playing so well with your friends...”*

Circle **App** in column 4
Circle **DP** in column 5
Place a line through columns 2 and 3
Record teacher number in column 2

**Child is showing appropriate behaviour and the teacher gives no response.**

*e.g. Engaging in socially appropriate interactions with peers, teachers and other adults.*

Circle **App** in column 4
| Child is showing inappropriate behaviour and the teacher responds with a stop request (discouragement/negative attention). |
|---|---|
| e.g. Disruptive behaviour. For example, calling out at mat time, poking their friends who are trying to listen, interrupting other children’s work/projects and teacher states “stop poking your friend.” |
| Circle Inapp in column 4 |
| Circle D in column 5 |
| Place a line through columns 2 and 3 |
| Record teacher number in column 2 |

| Child is showing inappropriate behaviour and the teacher/educator gives no response. |
|---|---|
| e.g. Disruptive behaviour. For example, calling out at mat time, poking their friends who are trying to listen, interrupting other children’s work/projects |
| Circle Inapp in column 4 |
| Circle X in column 5 |
| Place a line through columns 2, 3, and 5 |

| Teacher/educator gives compliance request to a child: |
|---|---|
| e.g. the teacher asks the child to come inside for mat time and the child complies, and the teacher says ‘good boy’ |
| Circle R in column 3 |
| Circle App in column 4 |
| Circle PP in column 5 |
| Record teacher number in column 2 |

| Teacher/educator gives more than one compliance request to a child: |
|---|---|
| e.g. the teacher asks the child to come inside for mat time by saying “can you come in for mat time please?” but the child runs away and the teacher responds with saying “Stop running away and listen.” Then she gives another request to come inside, saying “Come inside for mat time.” And this time the child does and the teacher gives no response |
| Circle Q in column 3 |
| Circle Inapp in column 4 |
| Circle D in column 5 |
| Start a new line |
| Circle R in column 3 |
| Circle App in column 4 |
| Circle X in column 5 |
Record teacher number in column 2

The teacher/educator ignores the child for a reason:

Circle the X+
Record the child’s behaviour – most likely inappropriate.
If there has been a compliance request record this in column 3
If another teacher intervenes put their code in column 1, delete the line and make a short note beside it.
Record teacher number in column 2

Additional rules:

- If there are multiple responses from the teacher to the child’s one behaviour just code the first, for example the teacher keeps praising the child for the same behaviour, or gives a lecture on how to behave.
- If a teacher responds late to behaviour and the child’s behaviour has changed place a cross through the response as the response is non-contingent. For example a child had been talking during mat time (inappropriate), then he/she chooses to be quiet and listen (appropriate), however the teacher says “Be quiet” to the child. Or in another case the praise is given late, “You have listening so well” however the child is now being inappropriate by talking during mat time
- *If no interaction between an adult/peer is occurring still record if child is being appropriate or inappropriate every minute and place line though 2, 3, 4, and 6 (for target/control child observations only)*

6. Collating data

- At the end of each session ensure that the totals are added together and the separate totals sheet is completed and stapled to the front of the recording sheets.
- Go through each recording sheet and make sure all lines are completed.
- If a line has been crossed out make sure the total amount of lines are adjusted. There are 20 data lines on the recoding sheet, so if one is crossed out adjust the final line to 19.
- Store completed daily recordings in the provided folder. All data will be transferred each day to a locked filing cabinet.
List of Publications (Conference Presentations)

