

Social & Emotional Learning

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Introduction

While normally most young adults have the capacity to deal adequately with the transition from young adulthood to taking on adult responsibilities, are happy with their life, and are able to cope with the various problems that arise, some young adults do not have the necessary knowledge and/or the skills to deal with the many challenges and limitations they face, resulting in a significant emotional and social impact on their personal lives. These young people often end up experiencing everyday life as being hard and unrewarding. This reality is probably true for a majority of East Timorese young adults. Smith & Carlson (1997) point out that “a wide range of studies has linked life events, stress and adverse child and adolescents outcomes, including depression, anxiety, suicide attempts, antisocial behaviour, and health problems” (232). Social and emotional learning is one of the human dimensions that is most important to achieve as it helps people to become resilient, mentally healthy, and respectful of others and develop maturity in daily life as an individual as well as a member of the community.

I have decided to prepare a special educational program for a particular group of young adults in the Baucau district to assist their personal development by directly addressing their social and emotional wellbeing needs. Young adults in the Baucau District face a number of risk factors. Smith & Carlson (1997) state that risk factors can include, “characteristics of individuals and families, social contexts, or the interactions between persons and their environments” (234). Young adults in Baucau often face disappointment and frustration because they are not able to get a job, their family does not have the means to support them financially, and therefore they do not have sufficient money to be able to study at university level. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these young people have low self-esteem & self acceptance. Many of these also have little hope for a better future for themselves and a number marry early in the hope that this will improve their outlook for the future. This rarely happens, leading to disturbed family life which, in turn, affects the future of any children involved.

These social problems are complex and complicated by a number of historical, environmental, social, cultural and economic factors. It is sometimes very difficult for these same young people to know how best to deal with their emotional and social problems because they do not possess the knowledge and skills to help them accept their reality and develop stronger resilience, as well as social and emotional wellbeing (Gilligan 2000; Chaskin 2008). Hence, I chose to target this group to help build up their resilience and to develop the young people’s social and emotional learning. Smith & Carlson (1997) say that resilience is, “a key concept that can engage the optimism and energy of students in thinking about client change” (247).

Through this program of social and emotional learning it is hoped that these young East Timorese people can take a more healthy and mature way of coping with the emotional and social difficulties they face, because without this knowledge and these strategies some young adults may think the only way they can deal with their problems is to become depressed and then harm themselves physically, or create violence in the community, or drink too much alcohol and then cause disruption in their homes and to their families.

Description of the Education Setting

I have chosen to situate this emotional and social learning program within a Youth Training Center (Y.T.C.) located in Baucau, East Timor. Baucau is a large regional centre located to the east of the capital Dili. The Y.T.C. has 52 students, of mixed gender, and 5 staff. The types of learning programs presently being offered at Y.T.C. are finance, marketing, office skills, English language and computer training. Classes are usually conducted from Monday to Friday from 8.am to 12.pm, and then continue from 2.pm to

5.p.m. Each subject is allocated one hour per day. The objective of this training is for young people to develop a knowledge base and skills that will better equip them to gain employment in a government office, in a local business or in a non government organization. Currently there are no programs being run at Y.T.C. that target social and emotional learning.

Target Audience and Needs Analysis

The target of this program is young people whose are aged between 22-28 and have graduated from secondary school. They are living in Baucau but do not have enough money to continue their study at any University in Dili or Baucau as the cost is too expensive and their families are often farming in rural areas, eking out a subsistence living. They undertake training at Youth Training Centres for a short time (6 months) and expect to find a job quickly so they can get money to continue their study at university or to be able to live their lives in some comfort.

However, when they finish these courses not many can get a job as there is little or no new employment to be found in Government or Non-Government organizations and there are very few small businesses that offer employment opportunities. Frustration often drives them to anti-social behaviour at home and in the community.

Last year some Non-Government Organizations, for example Care International, World Vision, and Catholic Relief Services introduced programs that taught about peace building, character building and friendship in sporting activities to address this issue, but unfortunately the courses lasted only a short time and there has been no continuation nor follow up to assess the value of these courses.

Most of the students attending Y.T.C. come from sub districts and villages in the rural areas surrounding Baucau. Generally their parents are poor farmers or do not have paid jobs and, therefore, have little or no income. Most young people come from large families of 8 to 10 siblings, or sometimes even larger. A number of the young people also live away from their parents, but with members of their extended family who try to provide them whatever support they can. These social realities also contribute to the risk factors that, for some, can lead individuals to be influenced by friends be involved with illicit drugs and violence.

East Timorese culture and social structure generally supports young people in terms of social and emotional development. For example relationships within family which are very strong that the value of respect is most important in all aspects of life. However reality shows that a lot of young people have lost any hope for their own future. Many young people are disillusioned about the result of independence and have become frustrated because they are not able to get a job nor a salary. Money is not available for them to continue their education at university. The result is that many young people fall in to negative thinking and living and resort to such influences as alcohol, drugs, and violent behavior.

In general, the social and emotional learning program I am proposing aims to help the young people attending Y.T.C. Baucau to strengthen their resilience and be able to reduce the many social and emotional problems they face. Gilligan (2000) said that “reducing the accumulation of problem areas seems to reduce the risk of later problems” (38). Therefore, in view of the emotional and social needs of the young adults, this program will aim to help these young adults:

- To accept the reality and limitation and present situation
- To be able control their emotions
- To not fall into bad influence (drugs & alcohol).
- To be able to avoid violence and damage to property
- To be a positive influence in the community
- To strengthen their personal identity

The particular social and emotional values and skills this group of young adults will develop are:

- Respect; for themselves and others.
- Tolerance for different situations and accepting difference.

- Responsibility; accepting personal responsibility and making a positive contributions.
- Self acceptance; recognizing and accepting their strengths, talents and difficulties.
- Coping skills; dealing with stress, disappointment, anger and frustration.

Of the 52 students at Y.T.C., 35 are male and 17 are female. Therefore, to facilitate a more effective learning process within this program I will need to divide the students into the two roughly equal groups of both male and female.

Staffing this emotional and social learning program will require three additional staff to those already working at Y.T.C. One person will act in the role of coordinator/facilitator of the program. The coordinator will be responsible for facilitating the training and support of the two staff and monitoring the overall development of program. The other two people will teach the program modules and each will be responsible one of the groups of young adults.

Recommendations for possible programming provisions

Based on the assessed risk factors and the desired program outcomes, this program will seek to assist these young adults to be able:

- To discuss why it is important to be more intentional about teaching social and emotional skills.
- To identify strategies for supporting their development social and emotional wellbeing.
- To understand the importance of providing opportunities for them to more deeply understand their own, as well as others’ emotions.
- To understand the importance of teaching problem solving and to be able to identify problem solving steps.
- To understand why they need to learn to control anger and handle disappointment and to be able to identify strategies to deal with their anger effectively.
- To identify strategies for stress management.

Learning modules

The emotional and social learning program contains four modules. Each module will be taught in a six week block, one hour each day for four days each week. See Table 1 below:

Table 1 –

Weeks	MODULES	Day/Time
1 – 6	Character Building	Monday – Thursday 1 hour
7 – 12	Problem Solving	Monday – Thursday 1 hour
13 – 19	Emotions and Anger Management	Monday – Thursday 1 hour
20 – 26	Stress Management	Monday – Thursday 1 hour

- Module 1: Character Building

Subtopics:

1. What is personality character building?
2. Importance of character building
3. Developing a positive character
4. Identifying my personal character
5. Values for character building
6. Developing strategies to build good character (personal, relationship, career)

- Module 2: Problem Solving

Subtopics:

1. Types of problems young people experience and their impact on them.
2. Importance of problem solving
3. Learning the steps of problem solving
4. Understanding peace and peacemaking
5. Anticipate problems and promoting peace

- Module 3: Emotions and Anger Management

Subtopics:

1. What are emotions?
2. Importance of learn emotions and anger management
3. Understanding anger
4. Identifying the causes of anger
5. Strategies for managing emotions, particularly anger

- Module 4: Stress Management

Subtopics:

1. What is Stress?
2. Importance of learning stress management
3. Identifying the causes of stress
4. Implication stress for daily life
5. Strategies for managing stress in daily life

Learning Process

Each module will involve young people in an integrated learning process that will involve:

- a. *Instruction/input:* An important aspect of the learning process whereby young people will be given input on specific topics to develop and deepen their cognitive understanding of these important areas.
- b. *Class discussion:* Discussion provides the opportunity to clarify thinking, explore issues, raise questions, test out with peers their understandings and listen to differing positions and ideas.
- c. *Opportunity for small group, personal sharing:* This is an opportunity for young adults to share their experiences with each other about their life experiences of particular topics. The young people will be divided into small group (2, 3 or 5 people) to make it easier for them to share what they thinking and feeling.
- d. *Young people keeping a learning journal:* Through learning journal the students can reflect personally on what they have learned in each subtopic. The journal also challenges them to think more deeply about the topic they are learning.
- e. *Invite guest speaker from local community:* Members of the local community (parents, community leader, business people) will be invited, to share their experiences, thoughts and approaches with young people in regard to specific topics related to social and emotional wellbeing.
- f. *Students conduct interviews:* In some modules, the learning process of program participants will be enhanced when they conduct interviews with members of the local community (parents, community leader, business people) to gather information on the experiences, thinking, values or opinions of people in the broader community.
- g. *Complete worksheet:* Getting participants to complete worksheets is one way of determining how well they comprehend the content they are learning in a particular lesson, or helping to promote further research on particular topics.
- h. *Situational dilemmas:* These young people will be given dilemmas which are stories relating to real life situations relevant to the life of these East Timorese young people. The objective is for them to discuss, reflect and hopefully come to a resolution of how best to resolve the dilemma.

- i. *Use music and songs:* Various modern songs and music that talk about character, problems, emotions and stress will be used to stimulate discussion and reflection.
- j. *Role play:* The young people will be given opportunities to act out particular roles within real-life type situations, especially those dealing with character, stress, emotions and developing problem-solving skills. The teachers will use the role play to encourage the participants to reflect on what they have learned through the role play.
- k. *Drawing, painting and photos:* The young people will use drawing, painting and photos as a means of identifying or expressing things like emotions (sad, happy, smile, laugh, tired), relating personal experiences and so on.
- l. *Recognizing my character traits:* Young people will have the opportunity to learn that every person has a number of character traits. They will have time to identify their own character traits, for example by thinking of themselves as a product, and their name as their own private brand.

Monitoring and Evaluating the Program

I propose that both summative and formative format assessment are used in this program to evaluate whether it attains its objectives and to monitor its effectiveness. The Irish National Council for Curriculum Assessment, (INCCA 2005) state that,

The emphasis in summative assessment is on measuring a young person's cumulative progress towards learning or curriculum objectives. The purpose of formative assessment is to enable teachers to make informed decisions with regard to selecting curriculum objectives, identifying appropriate teaching methodologies, designing learning activities, choosing suitable resources, differentiating learning and giving feedback to young people on how well they are doing (9).

Summative and formative assessment are important ways of collecting data, interpreting, and providing information that can help teachers to make judgments, and determine whether the learning process is attaining its objectives. Through these different forms of assessment the teachers will know if, in the learning process, something needs to improve and inform decisions about the best kinds of strategies that will develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes of these East Timorese young adults.

- **Formative assessment**

The two forms of formative assessment that will be used in this program are teachers reviewing participants learning journal and conducting regular short written tests. The program participants will be asked to keep a learning journal throughout all the different modules to help them articulate what they understand and feel about what they are learning within each topic. The written tests will measure the cognitive understanding of the content the young people are learning in each subtopic.

- **Summative assessment**

The two forms of summative assessment that will be used are an end of program exam and a questionnaire that will be completed by all staff at Y.T.C. All the staff will be given questionnaire to survey their ideas about the effectiveness of the program, what improvements they think need to be made, and what they would recommend about the program continuing into the future.

Conclusion

This program will target the social and emotional wellbeing of young adults by providing an important addition to the vocational learning program currently being conducted at the Youth Training Centre, Baucau. The two programs working together will provide a more holistic education for this group of young adults with their particular developmental needs. This program will aim to give these young people sufficient coping skills to help them with to deal the social and emotional problems they face as they develop their personal identity, life-long relationships and commitments and find a meaningful career. This

program will also help the young people to be more confident in themselves, have good self-esteem, self acceptance and able to make appropriate decisions about their future. Additionally, it is hoped that the program will help young people in Youth Training Centre Baucau to be able to manage their emotions, and not fall into the bad influence of drugs and alcohol, to avoid violence and damage to property and to be a positive influence in the local community. As well as assisting in the holistic development of these young people, it is hoped that these same young people will also positively contribute to the peace and development of our young democratic nation.

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