Emotional Development

Introduction

Emotional development in children is a broad, foundational area that is interrelated with all other domains of learning in early childhood. For example, the Kindergarten Integrated Curriculum for Prince Edward Island (2008) presents social and emotional development together as interrelated goals. In this resource, however, emotional development is a separate area of focus, and Chapter 2: Emotional Development includes 10 case studies dedicated to the emotional development of preschool children in child-care and kindergarten settings. These case stories present emotionally based skills and issues ranging from moving toward independence (Case Story 2.1: Learning Independence through Snow Pants) to asking for assistance (Case Story 2.10: Samaria’s Rough Patch).

Refer to the Learning Objectives and the Guide to Case Story Choice found in the Preface for a full listing of specific skill areas presented through each case story.


Case Story 2.1: Learning Independence through Snow Pants

“Ready!” young Hannah shouted with great glee. Finally! was the simultaneous thought of both Hannah’s teacher, Mrs. Rose, and Hannah’s early childhood educator, Mr. Samuelson, co-educators working as a team in this classroom, wiping their brows simultaneously as Hannah quickly scooted through the door from the kindergarten classroom to the yard to enjoy outside winter playtime.

“Snow pants!” Mrs. Rose said to Mr. Samuelson. “A necessary torment, perhaps?” They sat quietly for a few moments, enjoying a rare break from yard duty, grinning as they watched their group...
of young students enjoy the snow, each encumbered by a hat, mittens, a warm coat, lined boots, and, of course, snow pants.

“Lily,” Mr. Samuelson, or Robert, gently suggested to Mrs. Rose, “we spend so much time ’helping’ our students with their snow pants, but I can’t help but wonder if we are truly helping them when we keep doing it for them. Could we do a better job teaching them how to put them on with a greater degree of independence?”

“Well, let’s think about it,” Lily responded. “Is it part of the kindergarten program?” She reached up to her shelf of professional literature and pulled down a draft copy of the Kindergarten Program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). “Well,” she mused, flipping pages, “it says here on page 3 that we should be nurturing, but I don’t think there is any doubt we are doing that well. It also says that our ‘expectations should be challenging but attainable’ and we should ‘build children’s confidence.’ Is it an attainable, confidence-building challenge to imagine that our five-year-olds and almost-five-year-olds can put on their snow pants independently? They seem to manage most of their other outdoor clothes fairly well, with just a bit of help here and there, when things happen, like when their feet get stuck halfway into their boots, or those annoying liners twist around and get tangled in their socks.”

Robert added to the conversation. “Well, perhaps it is not attainable for every child, since we have to remember that children have different rates of learning and don’t obtain the same developmental goals at the same time. But I think we can add it to our plans as an educator-initiated activity.” Turning to page 12, he added, “Perhaps, though, we should be moving toward explicit instruction of this particular task to help our students move toward independence. I would sure enjoy watching them become more independent by even trying to put their own feet into their snow pants, rather than expecting an adult to hold them open for their little feet to push down inside. Let’s find a way to make this essential learning fun, engaging, and have a real-life context.”

Mrs. Rose to Mr. Samuelson tried a number of ideas to help with the goal of dressing for winter, including snow pants:

- They spoke with excitement to the class about the goal of dressing for winter, including putting on snow pants.
- They created a task analysis to figure out each step of putting on snow pants.
- They modelled how to get dressed for winter, including wearing snow pants.
- They took digital photos of one student and created a sequencing activity in the literacy centre. Here, students could choose to place the photos of getting dressed for winter, including snow pants, in the correct order, attaching each photo to a clothesline with wooden pegs.
- In the dramatic play centre, they created an extra bin that contained only carefully cleaned outdoor winter clothes left in the lost-and-found the previous winter. Here, children could challenge themselves to get dressed for winter using a timer, and celebrate when they exceeded their personal best.
They encouraged children to practise on their own, and provided verbal praise for each new step accomplished.

Two short weeks later, young Hannah shouted “Ready!” again, with great excitement and pride.

“You did it!” Mr. Samuelson and Mrs. Rose responded, smiling along with Hannah at her accomplishment. Mrs. Rose added, “You worked very hard to reach your goal. You problem-solved getting on your snow pants all by yourself very well!”

Through exploration, listening, playing, and practising in the kindergarten classroom, Hannah—like most of her classmates—could now get fully dressed for winter, including snow pants!

BRIEF RESPONSE QUESTIONS

1. [Child Development] In a busy kindergarten classroom, how would you balance the various skill levels for students working toward independence in a similar skill? Is it preferable to set a class-wide goal for a particular skill, as Mr. Samuelson and Mrs. Rose did? Why or why not?
2. **[Inclusion]** How would you change your verbal praise and feedback for children who, without a doubt, will be at different places in reaching goals?

3. **[Collaboration]** Review the roles of an early childhood educator and a classroom teacher working together to support a kindergarten class in Ontario’s Full Day Early Learning model (2010). Do you see any differences in their roles in teaching skills for independence?

4. **[Special Needs]** If a child in your classroom used a wheelchair or crutches for physical mobility, would you adapt this goal? If so, rewrite it and explain your suggested changes.

**IN-DEPTH RESPONSE QUESTIONS**

1. **[Website or Multimedia]** Children with more complex needs may require task analyses more often to learn skills that may be challenging for them. The Geneva Centre for Autism (2008) provides a visual task analysis for an independent toileting routine for a child with an autism spectrum disorder. View this video at Geneva’s learning site: [http://visuals.autism.net/visuals/main.php?g2_itemId=775](http://visuals.autism.net/visuals/main.php?g2_itemId=775). Choose a task that may challenge a child in kindergarten or a child with special needs who may be working to meet these specific goals. With visuals and/or words, create a task analysis for this skill. Explain how you would use it in a teaching environment.

2. **[Article]** In the article *Helping Kindergarten Writers Move Toward Independence*, Lamme, Fu, Johnson, and Savage (2002, p. 77) maintain that “Most kindergarten children tend to rely on adults for everything they do and for any new step they take.” In discussing strategies helping young children learn writing skills, they share a number of characteristics that lead kindergarten children toward further independence; for example, willingness to risk-take, willingness to experiment, using problem-solving procedures, avoiding perfectionism, utilizing provided learning materials, and asking for peer assistance. They see one step toward this independence as “when children think about the resources that are available to them because adults are not always around when they want” (p. 77). Choose an area of skill development appropriate for a kindergarten child—other than writing—and explain if and how these characteristics of growing independence do or do not apply to the skill you have chosen.

**REFERENCES**

