

Social-Emotional Challenges and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning

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Introduction

All individuals interact with others in different social settings. Be it children or adults all need to be socially well adjusted in order to be relevant in a particular social interaction. The ability to be able to respond appropriately or be able to pick the social cues is of critical relevance in social contexts. social competence has been defined as:

"the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations".

All children are born with the predisposition to learn the basic skills for their social adjustment by way of observing others in different social settings. some characteristics which are indicators of positive social and emotional behavior patterns have been identified, which ultimately lead to positive mental health during childhood.

How do children start to understand who they are, what they are feeling, what they expect to receive from others? These concepts are at the heart of their social-emotional wellness. They contribute to a child's self-confidence and empathy, her ability to develop meaningful and lasting friendships and partnerships, and her sense of importance and value to those around her. Children's social-emotional development influences all other areas of development. Different domains of development: cognitive, motor, and language development are all greatly affected by how a child feels about herself and how she is able to express ideas and emotions. Professionals sometimes define healthy social-emotional development in young children as early childhood mental health. Healthy social-emotional development includes the ability to be socially competent which involves many elements. The ability to regulate emotions in terms of expressing their own and in turn be able to understand other persons' feelings is the key to develop emotional maturity. Children who have the ability to explore and engage with the environment and form sustainable positive relationships are socially competent children. Children with well-developed social- emotional skills are more confident with pronounced skills at expressing their ideas and feelings. They can empathize better with others; manage their feelings of frustration and disappointment better. There is a positive correlation between school success and social emotional competence of children.

Relevance Of Social-Emotional Competence For Well Being Of Children

During the past two decades, a convincing body of evidence has accumulated to indicate that unless children achieve minimal social competence by about the age of 6 years, they have a high probability of being at risk into adulthood in several ways (Ladd, 2000; Parker & Asher, 1987). (Ladd &Profilet, 1996; McClellan & Kinsey, 1999; Parker & Asher, 1987; Rogoff, 1990) suggests that a child's long-term social and emotional adaptation, academic and cognitive development, and citizenship are enhanced by frequent opportunities to strengthen social competence during childhood. Hartup (1992) notes that peer relationships in particular contribute a great deal to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults. He states that "the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not school grades, and not classroom behavior, but rather, the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children. Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain close relationships with other children,

and who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer culture are seriously at risk" (Hartup, 1992, p. 1).

The risks are many: poor mental health, dropping out of school, low achievement and other school difficulties, and poor employment history (Katz & McClellan, 1997).

Because social development begins at birth and progresses rapidly during the preschool years, it is clear that early childhood programs should include regular opportunities for spontaneous child-initiated social play. Berk and Winsler (1995) suggest that it is through symbolic/pretend play that young children are most likely to develop both socially and intellectually. Thus, periodic assessment of children's progress in the acquisition of social competence is appropriate. Functioning over a period of at least three or four weeks is required. How children act toward and are treated by their classmates (cooperatively or aggressively, helpfully or demandingly, etc.) appears to have a substantial impact on the relationships they develop (Ladd, 2000). However, healthy social development does not require that a child be a "social butterfly." The most important index to note is the quality rather than the quantity of a child's friendships. Children (even rejected children) who develop a close friend increase the degree to which they start liking the school over time (Ladd, 1999). There is evidence (Rothbart & Bates, 1998; Kagan, 1992) that some children are simply shyer or more inhibited than others, and it may be counterproductive to push such children into social relations that make them uncomfortable (Katz & McClellan, 1997). Furthermore, unless that shyness is severe enough to prevent a child from enjoying most of the "good things of life," such as birthday parties, picnics, and family outings, it is reasonable to assume that, when handled sensitively, the shyness will be spontaneously outgrown. Early childhood is a period of both great opportunity and vulnerability. Early childhood experiences set the stage for later health, wellbeing and learning. In the past, most of the focus was on building young children's academic skills in an effort to ensure they were prepared for school. However, in recent years a growing body of research has demonstrated the strong link between young children's social-emotional competence and their cognitive development, language skills, mental health and school success.

Social, emotional and cognitive competencies serve as a critical foundation for children's well-being and as protective factors for children growing up in adverse circumstances. These competencies are related to a reduced risk for academic, behavioral, mental health, and substance use problems.

However, children experiencing adversity, such as poverty, family stresses, and domestic violence, also tend to emerge from childhood with lower levels of social, emotional and cognitive competence. Our research utilizes a bio ecological, or whole child, approach to examine the influences of neurobiological stress responses, self-regulation, parenting, family relationships, neighborhood, and economic disadvantage on children's social, emotional and cognitive well-being.

Play is a central context for social and emotional development in early childhood.

Social-Emotional Development Domains

The social-emotional development domain consists of the following three strands:

1. *Self*, which includes self-awareness and self-regulation, social and emotional understanding, empathy and caring, and initiative in learning
2. *Social Interaction*, which focuses on interactions with familiar adults, interactions with peers, group participation, and cooperation and responsibility
3. *Relationships*, which addresses attachments to parents, close relationships with teachers and caregivers, and friendships

Role Of Parents And Teachers

Studies have been of crucial significance in the domains of social-emotional development. This aspect of development is the foundation for all other domains. An emotionally supportive environment during early years is of utmost importance for the child to develop love for learning which is important for school success. “As young children develop their early emotional experiences literally become embedded in the architecture of their brain” (National Scientific Council on the developing child).

Key Social and emotional skills children need:

- Confidence
- Capacity to develop good relationships with peers and adults
- Concentration and persistence on challenging tasks
- Ability to effectively communicate emotions
- Ability to listen to instructions and be attentive
- Ability to solve social problems

It is important for the overall development of children that parents be present enough to support them, and this support fosters confidence and growth in many areas.

Just being physically present is not enough. Parents that may be nearby but that are not emotionally invested or responsive tend to raise children that are more distressed and less engaged with their play or activities. A study investigating the connection between parent’s investment and children’s competence suggests that the emotional involvement of parents really does matter and affects the outcome of their child’s emotional competence and regulation (Volling, 458). Parents should keep this in mind when considering the quality of the time they spend with their children, because if they do not invest enough of their time and commitment into pouring emotionally into their child, the child will struggle to learn how to regulate his emotions and interact with others appropriately. In studying the outcomes of Ainsworth’s Strange Situation experiments, L. Alan Sroufe found that the style of early attachment relationships predicts later emotional development of children. Sroufe asserts that, “Such variations [of relationship quality] are not reflections of genetically based traits of the infant but of the history of interaction with the parent” (188). This suggests that attachment styles are not inborn but are driven by how parents interact with their infant from births.

An important factor in the emotional development of children is how warm caregivers are, and studies have been done to find the effects of depressed mothers on the emotional development

of children. Depressed mothers have maladaptive thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors, and these, along with being in a similarly stressful environment as the mother, put a child at risk of developing his own emotional problems (Sroufe 2004). The fact that depressed mothers are likely to be indifferent towards their children, put them in less social situations, and generally provide less stimulation for their children, puts the children at a disadvantage for achieving normal emotional development. A key aspect of emotional development in children is learning how to regulate emotions. Children see how their parents display emotions and interact with other people, and they imitate what they see their parents do to regulate emotions (Sheffield Morris et. al 2007). A child's temperament also plays a role in their emotion regulation; guided by the parenting style they receive (Belsky et al). For example, children more prone to negative emotions or episodes of anger are deeply affected by hostile and neglectful parenting, often leading to even more behavioral problems. Difficult temperaments can become a bidirectional problem that evokes even more negative emotions from the parent if not monitored. Parents should be aware that not only do their own emotions and parenting style affect the emotional outcomes of their children, but if they are not aware of how their children's tempers affect them, they could fall into a spiral of ineffective and indifferent parenting which further contributes to negative behaviors from the children. Furthermore, how parents address the emotions of their children and respond to them affects how expressive the children feel they can be. Reacting with criticism or dismissing the sadness or anger of a child communicates that their emotions are not valid or appropriate, which can cause children to be even more prone to those negative emotions and less able to cope with stress (Siegler et. al). Instead, guiding children's emotions and helping them find ways to express themselves in a healthy manner helps them continue regulating their responses to challenges and even aids their academic and social competence. This sort of emotion coaching greatly helps in reducing future problem behavior in children.

In addition to being able to express their own emotions, it is important in social situations for children to be able to identify and deal with the emotions of those around them. Parents model for their children how to comfort someone who is crying or smile at someone who is smiling, but other parental behaviors also influence how their children learn to understand the emotions of others. It has been found that the interaction between parents affects a child's emotional and social development, and marital conflict contributes to problems in these developmental areas (Sheffield Morris et al.2007).

Safe, caring, participating and responsive homes and school support the development of a socially-emotionally healthy child. Positive home environments lead to a happy child who is independent and willing to take responsibilities and is a keen learner. It is deemed important that the child develops a sense of trust and resolves the developmental conflicts positively (Erik Erikson 1950). This makes the child feel connected to and belonging to the environment. Physical safety from verbal or physical threats/ teasing is of utmost importance for the healthy development of the child. Emotional safety is the result of internal sense of being safe which can be achieved if the child receives a warm and caring parenting. Consistency in discipline and a predictable routine are of great significance in making children emotionally mature and competent. Research has significantly shown that children who feel connected and safe at home are better adjusted in school are less likely to be absent from school for a longer duration. Lesser chances of such children be involved in substance use, or initiate sexual activity at an early age and also report higher level of emotional well-being (Resniek, et.al 1997).

Present Study

Based on literature and enhanced interest in the realm of social and emotional skills of children, a research work was undertaken in three schools in Delhi.

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. Identification of children with behavior problems
2. Assessment of children on various domains of development
3. Developing resource material as interventions in social emotional domains
4. Using the developed interventions in individualized settings
5. Post-intervention assessment of children on socio-emotional and cognitive/school related tasks.

The children who were facing some challenges in the school were being referred to the school counselor, such children in the age group 6-10 years were selected. A rigorous selection procedure was adopted for the purpose. A detailed and in-depth observation of class-rooms was taken up. During the observations those children who were hyperactive, or had attention related problems or were indulging in bullying behavior were selected to comprise the sample. The observations for each child were done for a period of three months in different school settings like playground, lunch break, during different subject classes. The children so selected from three different schools belonged to class2-class5. Eighty children were finally selected. Consent was obtained from the parents by way of written consent on a consent form developed for the purpose.

All the children who were to be part of the study were administered an Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder screening test. The purpose was to assess their behavior patterns in terms of hyperactivity and attention deficit.

Child behavior checklist and family inventory was administered to understand the interaction patterns of the parents and an understanding into the family dynamics.

Individualized interventions were developed for children to enhance their social and emotional competencies.

Based on research studies and available literature, the following social and emotional domains were identified for interventions:

- Management of Self
- Social Skills
- Interpersonal Relationships

Management of Self included emotional awareness, emotional self-control and regulation, resilience and self-motivation.

Social skills like social awareness, empathy and interpersonal competencies were considered for enhancing the social skills.

Interpersonal relations like forming friendships, conflict resolution, forming social bonds were used to strengthen the relationships.

These competencies were then reinforced by way of different strategies.

Strategies Developed For Enhancing The Social Emotional Skills

Any scientific enquiry needs to operationalize and define the key concepts. In the paper I would like to use the term emotional well-being from the perspective of positive psychology as an individual child's ability to enjoy life, be happy and well-adjusted in different social settings. Emotional well-being is not the absence of emotions but the ability to understand the value of your emotion and use them to move your life forward in positive direction. A well-being is a state that describes the happiness, confidence, contentment and ability of the child to use his/her potential in a productive manner in academic as well as in interpersonal relations. It is important to address the increasingly complex situations children face regarding academics, social relationships, citizenship, and health. Therefore, skills must be developed for negotiating diverse contexts and handling challenges at each developmental level (Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998).

Planned, ongoing, systematic, and coordinated social and emotional learning needs instruction to begin in preschool and continue through high school. The importance being assigned to this aspect of child's personality trait (I wish to address social emotional well-being as an important personality trait because once the child masters the various skills enhancing the social emotional maturity these skills become an integral part of the child's personality) in the western world is evident from the fact that there are a large number of researches funded by many government organizations in order to promote emotional well-being and consequently better performance in different spheres by the child. There is no dearth of workshops and training sessions for parents, teachers and other child care professionals empowering them to be able to strengthen children's skills at managing interpersonal relationships, their emotions and stresses.

The methods used in the study were:

1. Identification and Naming the moods/emotions: mood cards and flash cards showing different emotions were used
2. Concentration enhancing games : few games were developed which were helpful in increasing the child's ability to pay attention for longer periods.
3. Strengthen the potentials of children
4. Motivation techniques by way of activities
5. Flash cards and other activities for reinforcing positive behaviors in class rooms: flash cards displaying pro-social behavior in the classroom
6. Bibliotherapy is the use of literature for therapeutic purpose. Story telling sessions were organized for the children with the view to help them learn to empathize, and develop socially appropriate behavior and emotional skills. (Sapra, R. 2015).

It is beyond the scope of present paper to discuss the strategies in detail.

The diagrammatic representation of the benefits of storytelling is appended in the paper. These were some of the methods used during research.



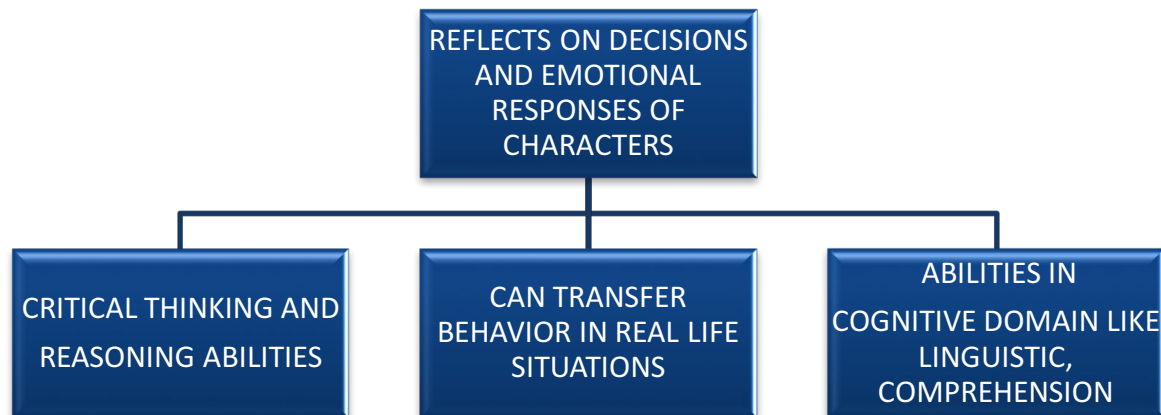
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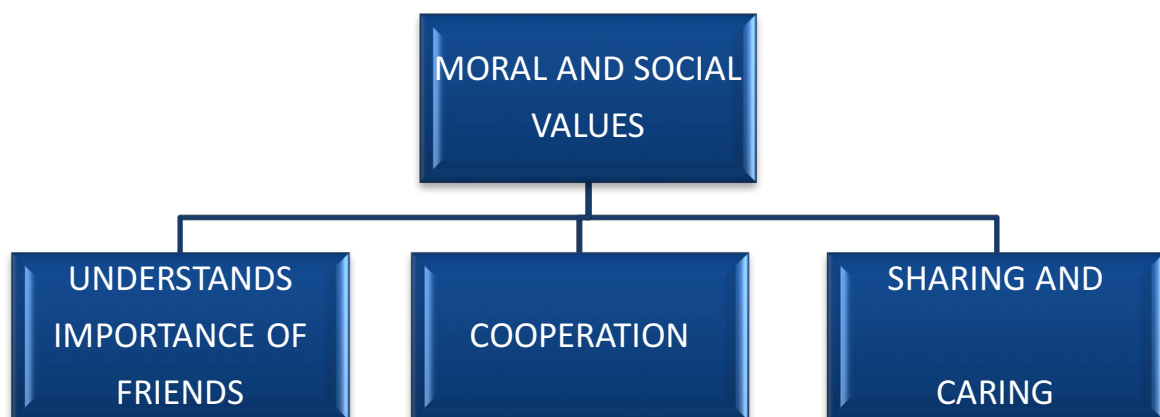
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Results And Discussions

The children who were selected for the study were exposed to the developed interventions twice in a week and each session lasting for 40-45 minutes for the first two months. In the next two months it was increased to four times in a week. Total exposure to interventions was for four months. after a period of three months of exposure to interventions a post test on social competence scale , ADHD screening test and academic performance was assessed in order to find the effectiveness and sustainability of the activities developed for enhancing SE skills of children.

There was a significant decrease in aggressive and other anti-social behavior. The children displayed increased attention ad concentration for the task at hand. The academic performance had shown significant improvement and the school grades were compared to their earlier grades before interventions in order to establish if academic performance had any significant

improvement. Parents and teachers both had corroborated the improvement in the behavior and school performance.

The various dimensions of social behavior as assessed by the social competence scale had shown a significant change. The decrease in impulsive and aggressive behavior was significant at 0.001 level of confidence. An increased sense of well-being was also observed in children.

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