

Impact of Social-Emotional Support on Children’s Learning

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When children from diverse backgrounds come together in a classroom, the role of the teacher becomes crucial in helping them develop understanding, compassion and empathy for each other and learn to respect differences.



Figure 1. Children display their drawings and poems in the classroom.

As a practitioner at Azim Premji School in Mandawa, Sirohi, Rajasthan, my journey has deepened my understanding of the impact of social-emotional challenges on children’s learning. India is a rapidly growing economy, yet its underprivileged children continue to experience some of the worst living conditions that I have witnessed working in the field. These children have to deal with various issues, like abuse due to the family’s financial circumstances, gender discrimination, malnutrition, child labour, diseases, dysfunctional families, societal pressure, etc. These hardships rob them of the opportunities that all children should have for equitable growth and development. This article reflects my experiences of

working in an inclusive classroom, particularly focusing on the journey of Indra, a student of class VIII in our school.

Teacher’s role

The teacher’s role in an inclusive classroom is both crucial and challenging. Teachers are not merely dispensers of subject knowledge but also facilitators of emotional health, which can be considered as the foundation upon which academic learning is built. In an environment where children from diverse socioeconomic conditions come together, the teacher needs to be sensitive to the emotional and social challenges that hinder their academic performance.

Placing children with varying abilities in the same classroom cannot be labelled as inclusion. Inclusion means creating an environment where every child sitting in the classroom feels respected and valued and their needs are addressed. This demands a deep understanding of each child's social context, emotional state and background. Working in an inclusive classroom has reinforced my belief that without understanding the families they come from, their needs and challenges, how they are helped at home, and the potential they have, academic teaching alone is insufficient.

Many children who come from underprivileged backgrounds face various personal challenges. Their emotional distress may manifest in the form of low self-respect, anxiety, withdrawal from social interactions, and a lack of motivation to learn.

Indra, a student of class VIII, faces these challenges. She comes from a family of cultivators engaged in rent farming, and sometimes she also joins her parents at work in the fields, especially during harvest time. When she was in class VII, she was struggling with basic letter identification and often used to get confused with less commonly used alphabets. Her reclusive and introverted nature made her hesitant to talk to her peers, many of whom came from better financial and social backgrounds.

Fostering trust

My learning from working with Indra and many other students like her who struggle academically is that to make them learn better, we need to build a connection and rapport with them. Indra's home happened to be on my way to school and as I was her class teacher as well, I visited her home frequently. Our informal conversations about her immediate surroundings – her cattle, farming and day-to-day work – helped her to open up and allowed me to connect with her on a personal level. During my visits, I also witnessed the financial hardships and daily life challenges faced by the family.


Indra gradually became comfortable with me and started sharing things related to school and classmates. This allowed me to tailor my teaching plan for her according to her needs, starting with the basics of the English language. We started with letter recognition and sounds, slowly fuelling her confidence and competence.

Peer support and encouragement

I divided the whole class into three mixed-ability groups for activities and peer learning. Each group had students from rural and urban backgrounds, both genders and diverse social backgrounds. Indra was greatly supported by Shahista and Shorya, who were students at L3¹ and came from urban settings. They helped her in reading

Q.5 Write 6 sentences about the given picture, using the words given in the box. 3

Girl, Boy, Tree, cycle, play, cricket, Ball, ground, road, fountain, children



is boy play ball 5 दोन रहे है।
 AK ROY पता है रात है।
 AK GIRL SEKL चत रात है।
 दो BOY गेगा दो रहे है।
 AK GIRL RS is दो रहे है।
 AK GIRL पता है।

Q.6 Rearrange the Sentence. 2

- She / is / beautiful / girl / a. She is beautiful a girl
- teacher / she / is / a. teacher she a is
- She / a / girl / is. she a is girl
- tea / I / like. tea like KE

Figure 2: A sample of Indra's work, August 2023

Date = 30/8/24 Name = Indra Class = 8th

My self

My Name is Indra. My school Name is AJIM PARMJE school. I study in class 8th. My Father Name is sume. My Father is Farmer. My mother Name is vathari. My mother is horn meca. My Father is daevr. my 5 Sister Raka, goodeya, kidun and Ani. my brother Name is Athool. My femuli mebas is 8. my Fervr Tichy is Deepika mem, Jagrthe mem, Somiya mem, Anil sur, moeth surma sur, Smoeth yathu sur. my friend as meni but my best friend is shilpa, Deepika and dhaoyga. my Fervr Fard is mago. my Fervr Suber is hinthi, eglis, and ganith. my Fervr but is Pecop. Shilpa is may my helpig. Deepicka mem is my best tchr. my Sester and mi Pleg in Farmig.

Figure 3: A sample of Indra's work, August 2024

and writing practice that continued even after the English period.

Indra's case features the value of emotional backing in the learning process. When children sense that they are loved and cared for, regardless of their academic performance or other factors, they are more inclined to engage with the learning process. I encouraged her to speak in class, even if it was just one word or a sentence at a time. This gave Indra confidence. When she would raise her hand to respond or to participate in the classroom discussions, all the other students encouraged her and wanted her to initiate and even clapped and appreciated her efforts. Small efforts like calling her by her name and giving her example, while teaching some concepts or asking her some basic questions that she could confidently answer boosted her self-esteem. The confidence and sense of achievement after accomplishing any task, no matter how small it was, were crucial in her academic development.

Classroom strategies

As educators, we need to keep our motivation high, especially while assisting those students who are struggling with learning. Our trust in our own and the students' efforts is important to the process of creating positive changes. Though Indra's learning progress is taking time, her slow but noticeable progress motivates me to work harder.

As a teacher, I try to ensure that my teaching strategies meet the needs of all students, especially those from challenging socioeconomic backgrounds. Here are some approaches that have proven helpful in my experience:

- **Creating a healthy environment:** A healthy and emotionally safe environment encourages students to participate in the process of their learning without getting scared of failure or judgment.
- **Understanding unique needs:** It is vital to understand the unique needs of each child. For Indra, this involved beginning with the very basics of language learning and progressively increasing the difficulty level as her self-confidence developed.
- **Reinforcement:** Every achievement of Indra was

Endnotes

- According to NIPUN Bharat guidelines, children's learning progress at Level3 or L3 implies that they achieve learning outcomes on their own (without the teacher's support).



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“ As we celebrate the diversity and uniqueness of each student by creating inclusive classrooms, we also have a big responsibility to foster an environment where all the students, irrespective of their background, can flourish. ”

celebrated by her classmates, no matter how minor it was. Appreciating and recognising every small step motivates a child.

- **Peer support:** Now Indra is not hesitant to talk. She enjoys interacting with her classmates. Whenever she needs any support, she asks her classmates whether it is in reading a big word or framing a sentence. Peer learning not only develops social skills but aids learning as well.
- **Communication with parents:** Teacher's interaction with parents plays an important role in creating a support system for student's learning.

Conclusion

As a teacher, creating a classroom where every child's needs are addressed and each one of them can learn according to their ability is a challenging task. Having academic knowledge is not enough. The progress of children like Indra can be slow and the result is not immediately evident but as teachers, we need to be persistent and optimistic.

When children like Indra learn, it gives teachers immense pleasure. Seeing a student who struggled with the alphabet, reading small passages and participating actively in the classroom gives a sense of satisfaction and hope to the teacher that all students can learn.

As we celebrate the diversity and uniqueness of each student by creating inclusive classrooms, we also have a big responsibility to foster an environment where all the students, irrespective of their background, can flourish. This demands an unwavering commitment to understanding the unique challenges, providing emotional support, and building trust, which will not only support students' learning but also contribute to their well-being.