

Implementing Socio-emotional Support Programmes

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VOICES

Socio-emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply knowledge, develop healthy attitudes, manage emotions and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships and make responsible and thoughtful decisions. To achieve these outcomes, it is important to understand teachers' socio-emotional background and make them understand how important these are in the learning processes of children as well, primarily understanding children better. This includes their family and societal backgrounds – factors which affect their learning.

This is especially important at this juncture when we are just coming out of the COVID-19 situation which had a disastrous impact on children's education. There were behavioural changes and inconsistencies in their learning process. For this to change, teachers need to focus more on listening to their students and working on building a better rapport with them. To address this aspect of children's wellbeing, we focussed on three programmes.

Three programmes for SEL

Vidya Pravesh

Vidya Pravesh was introduced as a short-term programme of ten weeks for classes I and II. It is a *Greet & Meet* initiative in which teachers devised different ways of greeting children each day. Then children assembled in the classroom and talked about their routines, family, interests or anything else that they wished to share. This space offered the children a platform to share their varied experiences, and at the same time, it gave teachers an opportunity to understand the children, their day-to-day activities and home environments better.

Children loved these sessions as the teachers welcomed the children with smiling faces, shook their hands or gave them hugs. These gestures are important for building deep relationships with children and also helped the teachers to successfully address and get in touch with their own emotions.

As we all know, addressing socio-emotional concerns is not a one-time activity and must be integrated with the teaching-learning process as a whole. So, while this will continue, other strategies in this direction to address the emotional needs of the children are being implemented. Some of these are, narrating stories in which there are different emotions, and hanging emotion charts in the classroom to help children understand the emotions that they experience and how to respond to them.

We have initiated these discussions with teachers and are planning to integrate these aspects into all our future engagements. However, we have to overcome some challenges which we see on the ground, such as children's lack of interest in learning and a drastic reduction in their attention spans.

Malebillu

Another initiative that we introduced was *Malebillu* for classes IV-VIII. The aim of this was to primarily encourage children to come to school. To perform better in the classroom, making them come to school and sit in the classroom is crucial. The children became very enthusiastically involved in this programme since it was activity-based. One of the teachers observed that educating the parents was as important as educating the children because of parents' high expectations from schools and children. Parents need to understand that the teachers are as concerned about the children's learning as they are and that the recovery of learning will be a slow and long process that should be handled sensitively for the children's emotional wellbeing.

In the case of first-generation school-goers, where children do not get any learning support after school hours, teachers have to work harder and with greater sensitivity to help them attain the required outcomes. Such concern of teachers also addresses children's socio-emotional needs.

Nali-Kali

Children up to 3-years of age follow the *Nali-Kali* process, which is completely activity-based and

fosters peer learning. This means that there are no standard sitting arrangements – the children move around the classroom, meet their peers and sing action songs. The teacher also sits in their group/ circle and is more of a facilitator. This is also a way of addressing the children’s emotional needs.

One teacher mentioned that along with creating a fear-free environment in her school by giving children opportunities to express themselves in every learning process, she taught them little-little things by example. For instance, when children

littered in the school compound, she would pick it up and throw it into the dustbin. Soon she did not have to do it; children were using the dustbin and it became a habit with them. She also stories and folk tales in their home language to give the children a sense of right and wrong. Learning values in the classroom and realising the importance of the socio-emotional wellbeing of children and its impact on their development, plays a crucial role in the teaching-learning process.



Figure 1. Children engaged in an activity to understand place value.



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