

सामूहिक पहल

Samuhik Pahal

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● Reflections

PAGE

How high can a ladder climb?

By Jyoti Ravichandran from Thrive Foundation

3-7

**We need to focus on emotional wellbeing,
the need has never been greater**

By Megha Dhamidharka from Adhvan Foundation

● Educational Resources

PAGE

बच्चों की पत्रिकाएं।

*By Nidhi Gaur and Chandan Yadav from Ektara,
Takshila's Centre for Children's Literature and Art*

8-9

● Ground Zero

PAGE

Apni Shala (Maharashtra) Space for Nurturing Creativity (Uttarakhand), Makkala Jagriti (Karnataka), Art of Play (Delhi), Fourth Wave Foundation (Karnataka), Prayas (Rajasthan)

10-14

Alleviating distress in children through social emotional-learning programs

● Updates

PAGE

Notes from the 19th Annual Wipro Education Partners' Forum 2020

The Partners' Forum is organized every year with the aim of leveraging the wide range of experiences, approaches, and perspectives, which our 200+ partners bring across varied contexts and subject domains. This year's theme was 'Surviving to Flourish: Adaptations in the times of COVID-19.'

15

Samuhik Pahal Readers' Survey

How high can a ladder climb?

On practicing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools

By Jyoti Ravichandran from Thrive Foundation

Thrive has been working with schools on comprehensive preventive and promotive mental health practices for four years now and moving towards instituting well-being centric school policies. In this time, we have engaged with questions around the following issues. What SEL will look like in our classrooms? How much sense it makes to align outcomes to US-based norms? If SEL is indeed “doctoring” personalities of children to align to some social agenda? If SEL is a tool to really accommodate diverse temperaments and learn to live across lines of difference with deep social connections and a commitment to justice?

We have also had to grapple with how to practice well-being within the organisation. So, you can imagine how writing a reflection piece on using social and emotional learning in school settings can turn any psychologist neurotic. Through this piece I will explore my meanderings within the field of mental health and abstract some practices we've found enabling in practicing well-being.

What is Wrong with Traditional Psychology?

When I first began practising as a psychologist in a clinic, in 2011, the novelty of performing psychometric assessments, drawing up reports and making further referrals lasted two months. I was actively involved in perpetrating a medical, deficit-centric discourse of why people are not living their best lives and taking all the wrong cues from what I was *feeling* about it (hopelessness, boredom, anxiety) to mean I have to do more of my job and well. My calendar was full and my heart really was not.

The first client I took in for psychotherapy was a 10 years old boy. He had a severe case of a form of social anxiety disorder called Selective Mutism. We got on with work and I hit a snag very quickly as this boy showed me how working with the individual and family wasn't enough, if a huge contributor to his development was to be ignored - his school. Teachers were unaware of his condition, putting the problem down to a “superior attitude”.

In my experience and later education, it's only helpful to talk about emotions to the extent that it allows you to get it out of your system and focus on what needs to be done. In a society where sanctions imposed on emotional expression are many, there is a tendency to overcompensate by defining safe spaces as places of free emotional reign.

I can see how they might have gone straight to that conclusion. The child's intelligence was superior, general knowledge vast, his sense of humour sarcastic and sharp when he did speak. Always the topper, the teachers felt

he wasn't speaking to them from arrogance. Quivering chin, shrinking shoulders, palpable fear of being spoken to (let alone scolding and beatings) were never noticed.

I did the only thing I could which was to send letters to the teachers explaining the condition and ways to reduce anxiety and increase meaningful engagement in class. Similar efforts were taken for other kids with mood problems, self harm behaviours and victims of bullying. I never heard from the teachers. Now, it became impossible to see mental health management as an individual problem. The seeming lack of interest in educators was something I wanted to act on.

So, Thrive began in 2016 with its focus on strength-based, non-blaming approach to mental health, social and emotional learning curriculum, teacher training modules and assessment protocols and a team of psychologists and educators.

Decentring Emotions in Mental Health Discourse

As we started with a direct delivery model with students, we quickly ran into some questions. Most pressing of which was - what are we really here for? This past year we've had to rely on every stakeholder Thrive is associated with to plan our activities and operations on compromised budgets and lost hiring opportunities. Emotions were running high, low and sideways.

Which made me ask, how an organisation full of psychologists, should speak about emotions! What are the benefits of talking about what you're feeling? What are the limits of its use? What are the possibilities of using them as a stepping stone to greater team cohesion or self awareness? In my experience and later education, it's only helpful to talk about emotions to the extent that it allows you to get it out of your system and focus on what needs to be done. In a society where sanctions imposed on expressing emotions are many, there is a tendency to overcompensate by defining safe spaces as places of free emotional reign. It sounds so liberating and self-affirming, and it is. But what if there could be more?

What does it take to really transform a safe space and its associated limitations on learning into a brave space, where we are not hesitant to probe a conversation and mine its richness for more insights and learnings, within the team and in classes? We had to find ways of mirroring this understanding to serve our children well. We learned that a sensitive curriculum unearths the complexity of our children's lives and paves a way forward.

Take for example the following exchange with a 15 years old student.

Student (S): When the lockdowns were imposed, my uncle had to quit his cab driving job and instead push a

vegetable cart around our neighbourhood.

Super Validating Facilitator (SVF): Oh, that sounds like a huge change! How are you feeling about it?

S: Horrible, of course. I feel terrible for him.

SVF: Absolutely understandable how you might feel horrible. Anyone else in this situation may feel the same too.

S: K.

Alternative situation:

Student (S1): When the lockdowns were imposed, my uncle had to quit his cab driving job and instead push a vegetable cart around our neighbourhood.

Facilitator: I see. That sounds like a big change in your uncle's life.

S1: Yes, Akka. He used to dress up so smartly in his driver's uniform and drive safely in an AC car. It's gutting to see him in a folded-up lungi walking the streets, pushing a heavy load.

F: What does this tell you about your uncle?

S1: I don't know. It's just very sad to think about it.

F: Can anyone else in the group share your thoughts on what this tells us about S1's uncle?

Student 2: He's so adaptable! Can drive also, can sell vegetables also!

Student 3: He seems to do what is needed to take care of his family without sitting at home, dejected and drinking. That is what happened to my cousin when he lost his job. He didn't even look for something else.

F: S1, you heard your classmates say a few things about your uncle. Did that resonate with you? Many people seem to deal with difficulties in different ways as S3 shared about his cousin.

S1: Now that you say it, I do think he's so brave and positive. He still smiles and cracks loud jokes. I only get sad. But yes, I see how he's so adaptable and hard working. I do feel proud of him.

The difference between the two scenarios is evident. A pedagogic approach to SEL that is limited to emotions (or indeed, psychotherapy or organisational development) will only take you so far. In the second scenario, emotions were validated and opportunities were provided as well for these to be expressed and changed. There is a real commitment to unearth the strengths of the people in our students' communities as they face adversity. This suddenly offers possibilities of talking to children about it in ways that paves a path forward. What values are underlying a negative emotion? What have you lost that is of value? What is threatened? What is precious? What can you do to honour the ways in which people around us live?

These questions give huge meaning to a reflection exercise. This is a powerful way to introduce agency in

students: creating brave spaces and skills necessary to navigate them, promoting healthy decision-making and independent action, standing on the shoulders of community members and rich socio-political and cultural histories.

Community Mental Health: How and How Much?

Most things have gone seriously wrong for almost all of the families we work with, save a small minority. But, not surprisingly, we found that parents could easily articulate at least one thing that is always well at any given time. A parent who has lost his job and is struggling to make ends meet for his family of five on an income of Rs. 5000 a month said he's grateful his children at least go to a school that takes care of their books and gadgets and keeps three children active every day. It is a huge source of solace to him that when this trying time passes, his children will go back to school and onward.

Another parent said her morning tea has become non-negotiable 'alone time' for herself. Yet another laughs unapologetically that she catches naps under the fan when her daughter is cramming for exams. Everyone is engaged in small but significant acts of everyday resistance to adversity, resourcefully capturing moments to enjoy rest and laughter. What are the opportunities this presents to strengthening parental identity? How might this enable them to take stock of their own successes, challenges, assets and support? How can this inspire our students in our classrooms and help them foster stronger ties with their communities?

There is a real commitment to unearth the strengths of the people in our students' community as they face adversity. This suddenly offers possibilities of talking to children about it in a way that paves a way forward. What values are underlying a negative emotion? What have you lost that is of value? What is threatened? What is precious? What can you do to honour the ways in which people around us live?

The splintering of the learning environment into a virtual classroom space and physical home space demanded adult stakeholder interventions include parents too. We had to be intentional about not becoming a hegemonic authority of well-being in their homes and relationships. So, we provided non-demanding, non-intrusive content for anyone to use as they will. Our job is to enable access first and actively support the first step of engagement in communities and work together to get to higher order outcomes with the community fully roped in and dictating the way forward.

We started sending our weekly well-being tips, stories, etc. to our parents via Interactive Voice Response System Technology. We had parents suggesting we hold periodic virtual or socially distanced well-being circles in school, send messages and videos over WhatsApp that can be revisited or shared, provide counselling for parents and students as they feel the need and so on. We had to really think about what kind of support we wanted to provide, not how we wanted people to change. The latter is to be discovered.

Reflections

The practice of community mental health is a complex undertaking. SEL curricula abound, often with very little focus on facilitator orientation, clear articulation of knowledge construction processes within classrooms and staffrooms and lacking critique of biases/blind spots/over-intervention in practice. These are all necessary components to ensure equity in mental health access, delivery and democratic dissemination of expert knowledge in communities. Let us take psychology to the

streets with all the necessary signs for safe navigation but first, put your own seat belts on.

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We need to focus on emotional wellbeing, the need has never been greater

By Megha Dhamidharka from Adhvan Foundation

The pandemic has been especially devastating for marginalised communities. In addition to adversely affecting education, health and livelihoods; it has deeply impacted children's mental health. The fear of the virus, social isolation and the atmosphere of constant uncertainty have led to a spike in anxiety and depression in children and adults alike.

When the first lockdown was announced it almost seemed unreal to us at Adhvan. We immediately got in touch with the Child Care Institutions where we run our library programmes and made plans to restart our programme in April. However, it soon became clear that this pandemic was here to stay and we needed to find another way to connect with our children.

As the world raced to find digital solutions, we felt a need to slow down and move inward. To imagine how best to serve our children from a centered space. We explored different ways in which educators were reaching out to children and began to imagine our own. However, while we were deep diving into the virtual world, the government was washing its hands off the children living in Child Care Institutions like Children's Homes and Shelter Homes. Institutions were asked to send children back to families that had previously been deemed unfit, and to close down.

Many Institutions closed their doors, while others persevered by advocating alongside many child rights groups. However, to stay open, Institutions had to safeguard against Covid at all costs. Many Institutions decided against allowing their regular staff to enter. Those who stayed within the home managed it during the lockdown. With only a skeletal staff present, most educational and enrichment activities were stopped and children's limited interactions with the larger world ceased altogether.

At Adhvan, we kept trying to find ways to work with children. Virtual engagement wasn't possible as Institutions lacked the digital infrastructure and know-how. We explored interventions via telephone. But due to shortage of staff, even this couldn't be arranged. All we could do was ensure continued access to books through our book boxes present at the Institution and wait.

In the absence of opportunities to conduct library sessions, we decided to use our time to plan and prepare for when we could meet with children. Though our Library interventions were already aimed at promoting social and

Adhvan Foundation strives to support the holistic education of children living in Child Care Institutions like Children's Homes and shelter homes through library program that foster a love of reading, support literacy, and enhance life skills. Adhvan also offers training and capacity building workshops to schools and NGOs equipping them with the knowledge and skills required to run vibrant libraries in their unique contexts.

emotional wellbeing in addition to nurturing reading and supporting literacy; we knew that in light of the pandemic we would have to work more intensively on supporting children's emotional wellbeing.

Though our Library interventions were already aimed at promoting social and emotional wellbeing in addition to nurturing reading and supporting literacy; we knew that in light of the pandemic we would have to work more intensively on supporting children's emotional wellbeing.

We began to design lesson plans that would encourage children to reflect on their experiences of the lockdown and express how they felt through art, drama and writing, that could open up dialogues around anxiety, depression and coping with difficult emotions using books like 'Ruby's Worry' and 'The Rabbit Listened'. Our Library sessions aimed to open up these complex ideas through 'Story Read Alouds' and discussions around the experiences of each character, their experience of difficult emotions and what helped them accept and be comfortable with them.

We hoped to deepen children's understanding of anxiety and depression through extension activities like reflective journaling and creative writing exercises where they could reflect on their own their experiences of such issues. We also wished to help children discover coping strategies by exposing them to different experiences like grounding through the breath, mindfulness meditation practices and collaboratively coming up with self-care practices that could enhance their emotional wellbeing.

When we were finally able to begin again in September, we started to notice challenges that we didn't anticipate. We had walked back in after a gap of five months and

expected to pick up where we had left off. Children's ability to engage with the Library and our rapport with them, both had reduced. We needed to acknowledge this and modify our plans to once again deepen children's engagement and connection.

Now whenever children feel the urge to share, they put pen to paper and write a letter to us. We read and respond to each letter. Though this activity was imagined as a means to stay in touch and promote self-expression it has become an act of trust.

We began to create more opportunities for children to define their experiences of the pandemic and to share areas of growth that they would like to address. Children living in Institutions always had limited control over their lives. But the pandemic even took that little control away. And so, we began to create more opportunities for choice within our library sessions and collaboratively discussed and designed the sessions with them.

The children shared that they were feeling extremely cut off from the larger world. They wanted to know what was going on, not just by hearing piecemeal information from adults but by engaging themselves. We thought together and came up with the idea to have news time during each library session so that they could choose how they engaged with the articles and what they chose to focus on.

After restarting our sessions, I noticed that many children were eager to talk to me one on one. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts it wasn't always possible to engage with all children personally. As I was trying to find a way to address this, I was also trying to think of a way to keep the connection with children alive, if for any reason physical sessions had to be put on hold again.

The virtual world wasn't a possibility nor was connecting over a phone call. So, we decided to use letters as a way to stay in touch. We opened up this idea with our children through a delightful book "Pyari Madam" wherein a young Adivasi girl shares her life with her teacher through letters, talking about the smallest squabbles with her sister to her questions about larger social issues like mining that impact her life.

Now whenever children feel the urge to share, they put pen to paper and write a letter to us. We read and respond to each letter. While 2-3 children are regular, others write when they feel the urge to share. As many children are still learning to express themselves through their writing, there is some inhibition to write. This is a completely voluntary exercise and instead of children's interest fading over time we have seen it strengthen. More and more children write to us each week and acting on their request we have created some writing time in our library session.

Sometimes these letters are simple sharing of their

everyday life "Didi aaj mera test thoda kharab gaya. 20 mein se sirf 13 aaye. Lekin class mein baaki ke number aur bhi kharab they. Agli baar aur padhoongi aur zyada number laaongi. - "Didi, my test didn't go well today. I only scored 13 out of 20. The others scored even lesser than me. Next time I will study and score better."

Sometimes the letters are deeply personal. One of the children wrote saying, "Didi aaj maine Priya (name changed) ko adoption men dene ka faisla kiya. Maine sahi kiya na? Maine usse milna kum kar diya hei lekin uski yaad bahut aati hei aur padhai karne men dikkat hoti hei. Didi men fail ho gayi to? - "Didi, I decided to give my daughter Priya up for adoption. I did the right thing no? Though I meet her less, I think about her a lot and find it difficult to concentrate on my studies. Didi what if I fail?"

This deeply personal sharing cannot be a one-way interaction. The children also ask us about our lives and our challenges and it is only by responding to them with the same openness and vulnerability that we can we build meaningful relationships. Though this activity was imagined as a means to stay in touch and promote self-expression, it has become an act of trust. Trust that we will read all that they have shared without judgement and trust that we will respond with love.

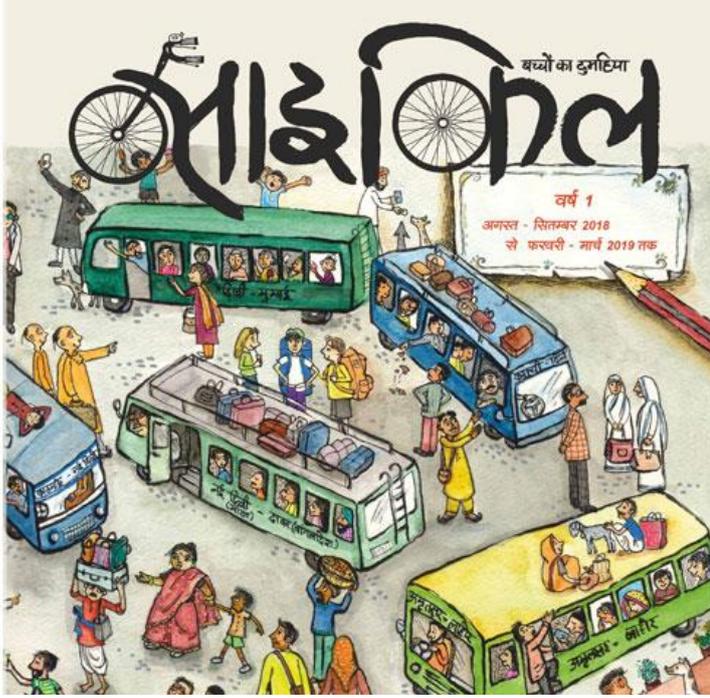
Going forward we hope to continue to think together with our children. To listen to their needs and to adapt to changing circumstances. We intend to deepen our work around understanding and coping with difficult emotions enabling children to develop different coping strategies that they can draw on when times get difficult. And through it all we hope to continually reflect on our practices and modify our approaches to best support children's emotional wellbeing.

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बच्चों की पत्रिकाएं।



साइकिल पत्रिका हिन्दी भाषा में कहानी, कविता, खत, यात्रा वृत्तांत, लेख, संस्मरण, व्यंग्य जैसी कई विधाओं में कई तरह की बातें आपके सामने रखती है।

दर्शन, कला, साहित्य, इतिहास, गणित, विज्ञान जैसे कई विषयों पर चर्चा के मौके देती है। इसमें बड़ों की ही तरह बच्चों की रचनायें भी छपती हैं। कुछ ऐसे पत्रे भी रहते हैं जो हमें आपसे जोड़ने का माध्यम बन जाते हैं जैसे माथापच्ची या कहानी बनाने, कागज़ के खेल की गतिविधियाँ। ये पत्रिका 9 साल से बड़े सभी पाठकों के लिए है और दो महीने में एक बार आती है।

इसके 68 पन्नों में कई तरह के बचपन झलकते हैं। उनकी ज़रूरतें, इच्छाएँ और सपने होते हैं। साथ में इतने सवाल होते हैं। उनकी परिस्थितियों से भी हम रु-ब-रु होते हैं। इसमें स्कूल जाते बच्चे का बचपन है तो स्कूल से भागता बचपन भी है। इसमें शहर में अपनी काम करने वाली माँ के साथ अस्पताल जाता बचपन भी है और गाँव में पेड़ों पर चढ़ता बचपन भी। इन बचपनों से झाँकते बच्चे, उनका मन, स्वभाव और परिस्थितियों से पाठक की पहचान होती है। साथ में दूर, और बहुत दूर बैठे पाठक की पाठक से भी पहचान होती है। दिल्ली शहर में रहते हुए मैसूर के दशहरे का मज़ा लेते बच्चे से पहचान हो जाती है। गाँव में पेड़ पर चढ़कर चिड़ियों से बातें करती लड़की जानी-पहचानी लगने लगती है। कूड़ा-बिनते बच्चे कुछ कम पराये लगते हैं। ये सभी बचपन जो हमारे आसपास ही थे साइकिल से हमारे संसार में शामिल हो जाते हैं।

फिर कुछ रोज़मर्रा की मुश्किल पर ज़रूरी बातें हैं। ये बातें शोषण की हैं, प्यार की, खोज की, समझ की और परिस्थितियों की भी। जैसे किसी का छूना अगर गलत लगे तो क्या कर सकते हैं, किसी की तरफ

आकर्षित होने का क्या मतलब होता है, संख्या क्या होती है, ज़मीन पर चलने और पानी में तैरने में क्या फर्क है, कुछ होना या कुछ भी नहीं होना के क्या मायने हैं। इन सब में हम अपने को कहाँ पाते हैं? जैसे कई प्रश्न मन में उठेंगे। ये प्रश्न साहित्य की मदद से किसी सन्दर्भ में उपजते हैं। ये प्रश्न पढ़ने के अनुभव से हमारे स्वभाव को, हमें रचते चले जाते हैं। हमारे दुनिया को देखने के नज़रिए को भी निरंतर बनाते चलते हैं।

साइकिल का एक पक्ष और है, चित्र। चित्र रचना को पढ़ने के अनुभव को बेहतर बनाते हैं। कई प्रश्न इन चित्रों के रचे संसार में और गहराई पाते हैं। फिर कुछ बातें जितनी समग्रता से चित्र में कही जा सकती हैं उतनी शब्दों में नहीं बन पाती। जब चित्रकार किसी घटना को चित्र में दिखता है तब वो उसमें जगह, समय, माहौल, लोग, पेड़-पौधे, पशु-पक्षी, आसमान, ज़मीन, और हाव-भाव जैसी कई बारीकियाँ उसमें जोड़ देता है। साहित्य के साथ मिलकर ये पाठक के अनुभव को और गाढ़ा कर देता है। फिर पाठक की कल्पना को उड़ान भरने के लिए मज़बूत ज़मीन देता है। साइकिल में छपे चित्र, चित्र को देखने, पढ़ने के मौके तो देते हैं। ये देखना और पढ़ना कब पाठक के चित्रों में झलकने लगता है ये पाठक को भी पता नहीं चलता। जैसे हर चित्रकार अपनी तरह से पेड़ बनाता है। ये रचना की आज़ादी पाठक की रचना प्रक्रिया का हिस्सा बन जाती है। बहुआयामी दुनिया को कागज़ पर उतारने की तकनीकों पर भी सोचने का मौका मिलता है।

इस तरह साइकिल आपके भरेपूरे संसार को देखने का, उसमें सांस लेने और उसे जीने का एक ज़रिया बन जाती है।

By Nidhi Gaur from Ektara, Takshila's Centre for Children's Literature and Art

प्लू टो को जानने से पहले छोटे बच्चों के लिए उपलब्ध साहित्य पर गौर करें। पाएंगे कि यह बच्चों को सिखाने और नसीहतें देने की अधीरता से भरा हुआ है। बच्चों के लिए कहानियों के कुछ लिजलिजे अन्त तय कर दिए गए हैं- उसे सबक मिल गया। उसने तय किया कि आज के बाद वह बड़ों का कहना मानेगा। उसने पिंजरा खोलकर तोते को उड़ा दिया। आदि।

यह भी माना जाता है कि बच्चों को तुकबन्दी अच्छी लगती है। इस चक्कर में तुकबन्दी तो हो जाती है पर रचना नहीं बनती। हमें यह परिदृश्य कभी बच्चों के हित में नहीं लगा। इसलिए कि इसमें यह मान्यता निहित है कि सीखना किसी मंजिल पर पहुँच जाने जैसा है। प्लूटो की समझ में सीखना एक सिलसिला है। यह सिलसिला किसी सिरे से शुरू होता है। चलता रहता है। पर इसका कोई अन्त नहीं है। किसी अन्त को मान लेना सीखने पर लगा हुआ पूर्ण विराम है।

छोटे बच्चे असीमित जिज्ञासा से भरे हुए हैं। उनकी कल्पनाशीलता

अनूठी और प्रश्न मौलिक हैं। हमारे लिए यह सिर्फ कहने की बात नहीं है। प्लूटो की रचनाएँ देखें तो पता चलेगा कि हम छोटे बच्चों की कल्पनाशीलता, समझ और तर्कबुद्धि में भरोसा करते हैं। इसलिए अपनी कविता कहानियों में इन क्षमताओं के रियाज़ के लिए छोटी-छोटी चुनौतियाँ पेश करते रहते हैं। बच्चों में हमारा भरोसा वयस्कों की समझ पर भरोसे से एक तिनका भी कम नहीं है। प्लूटो में प्रकाशित रचनाओं में यह दिखता है। जैसे अवलोकन के लिए ये सवाल-

खोजबीन:

- जाँचकर देखो इनमें से कौन सी बातें तुम्हें सच लगीं?
- सारे ऊँचे पेड़ों की पत्तियाँ छोटी होती है।
- सारे बड़े पत्ते कटे फटे होते हैं।
- काँटे वाले पेड़ों की पत्तियाँ बकरियों, ऊँटों को अच्छी लगती हैं।

(प्लूटो फरवरी मार्च 2020)

प्लूटो में भाषा के अनूठे प्रयोग मिलते हैं-

बादल छाते हैं

बिकने कहाँ बाज़ार में आते हैं

(प्लूटो अगस्त सितम्बर 2020 से)

खेल रहे थे सात

मगर दो लड़के चले गए

पाँच खेलते मिलजुलकर

दो लड़के चले गए

(प्लूटो अगस्त सितम्बर 2019)

द के नीचे झूल रही थी

दुम में एक और दुम

पूँछ के प में सबने देखा

पलट गई हो तुम

(प्लूटो अगस्त सितम्बर 2020)

प्लूटो तर्कबुद्धि इस्तेमाल के मज़ेदार प्रसंग प्रस्तुत करती है-
अध्यापिका- मैंने तुमको लाइन में सबसे पीछे खड़े होने का कहा था।
छात्रा- मैडम मैं वहाँ गई थी पर राशिद वहाँ पहले से खड़ा था।
जब हम कुछ दूँढ रहे हों तो वो हमेशा आखिरी जगह पर ही क्यों मिलती है? (प्लूटो फरवरी मार्च 2020)

प्लूटो की रचनाएँ देर तक गूँजती रहने और विचारों में उथल पुथल मचाने वाली हैं। इनसे कल्पनाशीलता, संवेदनशीलता और अलग-अलग नज़रियों से दुनिया देखने की दृष्टि मिलती है। (

प्लूटो अगस्त सितम्बर 2020)

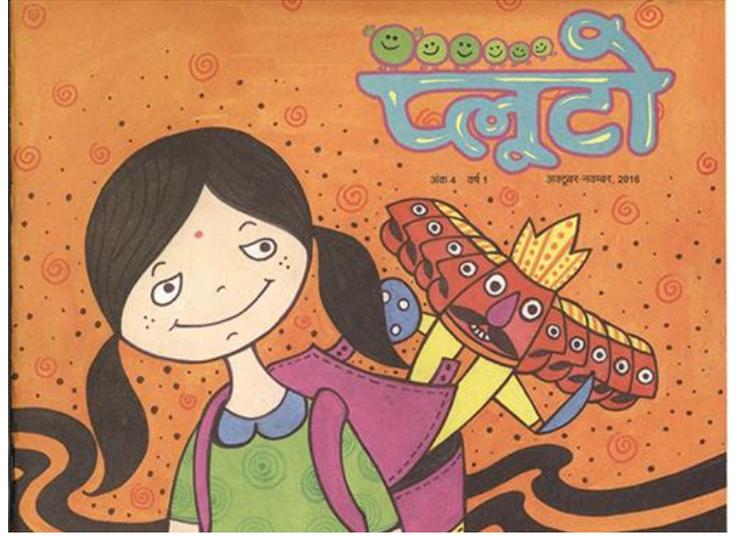
एक बड़ा तरबूज

गया नदी में कूद

ऐसी हुई छपाक

नदी हुई दो फाँक

(प्लूटो जून जुलाई 2019)



जेब्रा का बच्चा सोचता है

हाथियों की मूँड पर सूँड लगी है

जिराफ की सूँड पर मूँड लगी है

(प्लूटो जून जुलाई 2020 से)

मैंने एक गिद्ध पाला है

मेरे पापा को मेरे गिद्ध से नफरत है

पापा कहते हैं गिद्ध गंदे और पापी होते हैं

पर मेरा गिद्ध पापा को बहुत पसन्द करता है

वो सोचता है कि पापा बहुत स्वादिष्ट हैं

(प्लूटो अप्रैल मई 2020)

नदी किनारे

बाघ का घर था

बाघ के घर को

बाढ़ का डर था

(प्लूटो अगस्त सितम्बर 2019)

प्लूटो के पाठकों की उम्र में एक बड़ा लक्ष्य पढ़ना सीखना भी होता है। पढ़ना मतलब लिखे हुए से अर्थ ग्रहण करना। यह एक वैचारिक कौशल है। और लिपि को डीकोड करना महज़ एक स्थूल कौशल। पढ़ना सिखाने के क्रम में जब लिखित सामग्री से अर्थ ग्रहण करने से ज्यादा इस बात को तरजीह दी जाती है कि बच्चे लिपि को डीकोड करना सीखें समझते हुए पढ़ना नहीं होता। प्लूटो की रचनाएँ रोचक होती हैं। इन्हें पढ़ेंगे तो अगले अंक का इन्तज़ार करेंगे। यह पत्रिका बच्चों को साहित्य का पाठक बनाने में मदद करेगी। आप प्लूटो की रचनाओं के इर्द गिर्द पढ़ने, सुनने, बातचीत करने और सोचने के काम करेंगे तो पढ़ना सीखना बच्चों के लिए एक मज़ेदार अनुभव बन सकेगा।

By Chandan Yadav from Ektara, Takshila's Centre for Children's Literature and Art.

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<https://www.ektaraindia.in/>

Alleviating distress in children through social-emotional learning programs

From building self-esteem to reducing learning anxiety, social-emotional learning (SEL) has helped children with skills critical to their overall development. But has the curriculum been effective during the pandemic?



Children learning about emotions at a BMC school (pre-COVID). Photo by Apni Shala

The pandemic situation has disrupted the academic benchmarks that children are expected to meet. Over the past 10 months, parents have struggled, and with them, disadvantaged children too have faced issues such as shortages of food, violence at home, struggles of access to mobile phones and data, etc. The emotional condition of children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds needs special attention.

While organisations delivering social-emotional learning programs continue to support children through the online mode, it has been full of challenges. How can social emotional-learning help children reintegrate when schools reopen? And why is it important to foster an environment that builds emotional competence now more than ever before.

Rohit from Mumbai-based organisation Apni Shala says, "Children are carrying a lot of emotions that they may not be able to navigate. They may not even know what is the emotion that they are going through. If we get straight away into learning, some kids will manage, but for most

kids, it won't be easy. We might set them up for another failure if we don't keep their social-emotional well-being in mind."

Since 2013, Apni Shala has been implementing the Collaborative Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework on social-emotional learning in 18 Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) Schools in L, and M West wards and several non-profit organisations. The L and M West wards in Mumbai have slum areas with highly dense populations.

Children are carrying a lot of emotions that they may not be able to navigate. They may not even know what is the emotion that they are going through. If we get straight away into learning, some kids will manage, but for most kids, it won't be easy...

- Rohit from Apni Shala



Children are learning about measurements and making a bracelet. Photo by SNC

Researchers, educators and policymakers widely use the CASEL framework to help establish systemic, equitable, evidence-based social and emotional learning for all students from preschool to high school levels. It covers areas like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Apni Shala has steadily worked on implementing this curriculum in public schools that see value in it.

Some of the key aspects of Apni Shala's SEL program involve bringing mindfulness to work and allowing children to experience their own agency in developing and understanding their lives. The organisation largely focuses on preventive interventions and refers cases that require counseling or therapy to partner organisations with expertise in the area.

Rohit says, "The principal's buy-in in the program is very critical for it to be successful. We first pitch our program to the principal of the public school, and after a signed agreement, we reach out to the officers in the education department to seek more permissions. Multiple factors determine whether a school agrees to implement the program or not. Often awareness about the benefit of social-emotional learning is less. In those cases, it is more important to build awareness around the subject first and

then persuade the school to implement the program."

Typically, a social-emotional learning class lasts 45 minutes to an hour, where the first few minutes are dedicated to 'circle time' in which the facilitator sets the context for the day. The objective is to engage children in activities that lead to cognitive development, physical development, and psychosocial development. Educators believe that this is one of the most dynamic ways for children to experience different situations and learn naturally.

In Uttarakhand's Garhwal region, Space for Nurturing Creativity (SNC) has been running a learning center for over ten years. This center provides a holistic nurturing environment for children and adolescents. It helps them develop curiosity driven explorations towards independent and co-learning and creativity. It fosters mental well-being and ability to live harmoniously as well. Meditation, music, and encouragement for original thinking are central to SNC's approach for holistic mindset development of children. More than 90% teachers of the government schools, where SNC works, have eagerly adopted these practices. Those engaged in delivering the program have reported spontaneous expression of creativity by the children after its adoption.

Archana from SNC says, "Before children start learning alphabets at our learning center, we encourage them to observe nature, as they get more involved in the inner process, they get nurtured. Music is also an intrinsic part of our curriculum. We do one hour music sessions every day and also allow them the opportunity to listen to music at night. We have found that they are more energetic, and it helps them in their day-to-day activity."

Before children start learning alphabets at our school, we encourage them to observe nature, as they get more involved in the inner process, they get nurtured. Music is also an intrinsic part of our curriculum. We do 10-15 minutes of music sessions every day and also allow them the opportunity to listen to music at night. We have found that they are more energetic, and it helps them in their day-to-day activity.

- Archana from Space for Nurturing Creativity (SNC)

One of the significant changes that SNC has seen in the children is how it has prepared them to manage their emotions and interact with the surroundings. Every year the SNC team takes children for a visit to a new state. The team has found that the children manage themselves quite well even without adult supervision and are empathetic to each other's needs.

"If they see trash, they pick it up. If they see someone fight, they intervene; we have found that this way of



Art of Play educator conducting circle time with a football team at Khel Mela in Ambala. Photo by Art of Play

learning is helping them to deal with different situations," adds Archana.

SNC also works through subjects like creative writing, history, art classes to pique the imagination of children. The team blends social and emotional aspects of learning by asking them about their opinion on important characters in history or asking them to imagine how they would have responded in place of a particular character. This often leads to exciting discussions from which all children get to learn.

SNC's program was significantly affected due to the pandemic as teachers couldn't engage with children in person as regularly as they used to, but from their experiences believe that it has added tremendous value in a child's learning process.

Hemant from Delhi-based Art of Play says, "The social-emotional component was always an important part of the education system and process. But it was not given its importance in the normal scenario. We did not have defined outcomes and goals specific to social-emotional learning. Now COVID-19 has exposed us to a very uncertain situation where a child is restricted within the boundaries of his home and exposed to different kinds of emotional pressures. COVID-19 has surfaced the well-being issue much beyond what we had imagined."

Art of Play uses the social emotional learning frameworks of National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) and Emory University as a part of their sports curriculum for students, and modifies it based on feedback they receive from the ground.

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- Hemant from Art of Play

The NASPE curriculum is focused on enhancing knowledge, improving professional practice, and increasing support for high quality physical education, sport, and physical activity programs. Emory University's Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning curriculum enhances SEL programs with key additional components such as attention training, compassion and ethical discernment, systems thinking, resilience, and trauma-informed practice.

As a part of their program, Art of Play cater to all genders and children with physical abilities from grade 1 to grade 8

and also provide teacher training on implementing their program to government school teachers. The organisation has an assessment module in place where the growth of the children is tracked based on their physical development and their social and emotional learning. At present, Art of Play reaches out to over 13000 children in Ambala, Varanasi, Faridabad, and Delhi NCR.

While the organisation has adopted their curriculum to the online mode of delivery, it is evident that the engagement is not the same as it was offline. At present, the delivery of Art of Play's online SEL curriculum is restricted to short tasks done by children in isolation or in small groups with or without a facilitator. The challenges faced in delivering social-emotional learning programs online remain the same as delivering a regular school curriculum such as limited access to phone or data, lack of interaction with teachers and other children – the core of social-emotional learning.

Karnataka-based organisation Makkala Jagriti, which means 'Awakening of Children' has been engaged in delivering an online curriculum focused on social-emotional learning since the lockdown. The team too found that data and device were big challenges in the delivery of their program, but there was also an unexpected positive outcome.

Addressing the physical, emotional, and social aspects of developing sexuality in Children with Disabilities requires counselling and guidance. In the school environment, our teachers deal with these situations. But some parents find it difficult to understand that it's a very normal thing in the home setting, and don't know how to deal with it.

- Kalpana from Prayas

Sunayana from Makkala Jagriti says, " Our focus was on addressing the social-emotional learning of parents and children by conducting activities and sessions to help them de-stress. One of the unexpected outcomes of the online sessions has been the involvement of parents in tasks given to children – that was a positive sign as it has helped in building a stronger bond between children and parents. Having said that, online classes are not a reality for the children that we work with."

Makkala Jagriti seeks to create holistic learning platforms and empower socio-economically deprived children. The organisation uses a curriculum that helps children in developing twenty-two life skills. The curriculum blends more than one life skill such as empathy and inter-personal skills or self-awareness and problem-solving, etc. so that there is repetition and reinforcement. The Makkala Jagriti team encourages teachers to appreciate children, help them in building confidence; besides, parents too are informed and encouraged to build a relationship of trust with their children.



Children try to eat a biscuit dangling from a string without using their hands during an activity. Photo by Prayas

COVID-19 has significantly affected the delivery of social-emotional learning program for Children with Disabilities too. Before the lockdown, children with disabilities interacted with teachers, support staff, and peers who understood their difficulties. The sudden disconnect has made many parents anxious about the future of their children's education.

Diana from Fourth Wave Foundation says, "Many parents were in a state of shock with the thought of remote learning and how children were going to keep up. They were also concerned about managing the new learning format and if they could support their children and adapt quickly, fearing dropout in case of non-connectivity."

As part of their remote learning curriculum, Fourth Wave Foundation has been focusing on three key areas under social-emotional learning - self-awareness, self-management, and decision-making. Of all the three, decision-making is perhaps the most critical and takes a long time to instill. Decision-making skills give children the ability to communicate what they need and when – perhaps, the most critical skill in times of the pandemic.

Diana says, "In the offline learning environment, we instill these important decision-making skills in the children. But in the remote learning environment, it is challenging to deliver the curriculum around this. We hope, that by the time children return to the centers, they don't forget everything that they had learnt. It will require a lot of effort to bring children back to their earlier levels after things get normal."

The challenges faced by Children with Disabilities are far more pronounced and requires expert intervention for them and their parents.

In Jaipur-based Prayas Special School, that works with children with intellectual disabilities - some with multiple disabilities - parents had to be counseled on how to keep

their children transitioning into teenage more engaged.

Kalpna from Prayas Special School says, "Addressing the physical, emotional, and social aspects of developing sexuality in children with disabilities requires counselling and guidance. In the school environment, our teachers deal with these situations. But some parents find it difficult to understand that it's a very normal thing in the home setting, and don't know how to deal with it. We advise all parents to support children in engaging with nature, make art, dance, or listen to music."

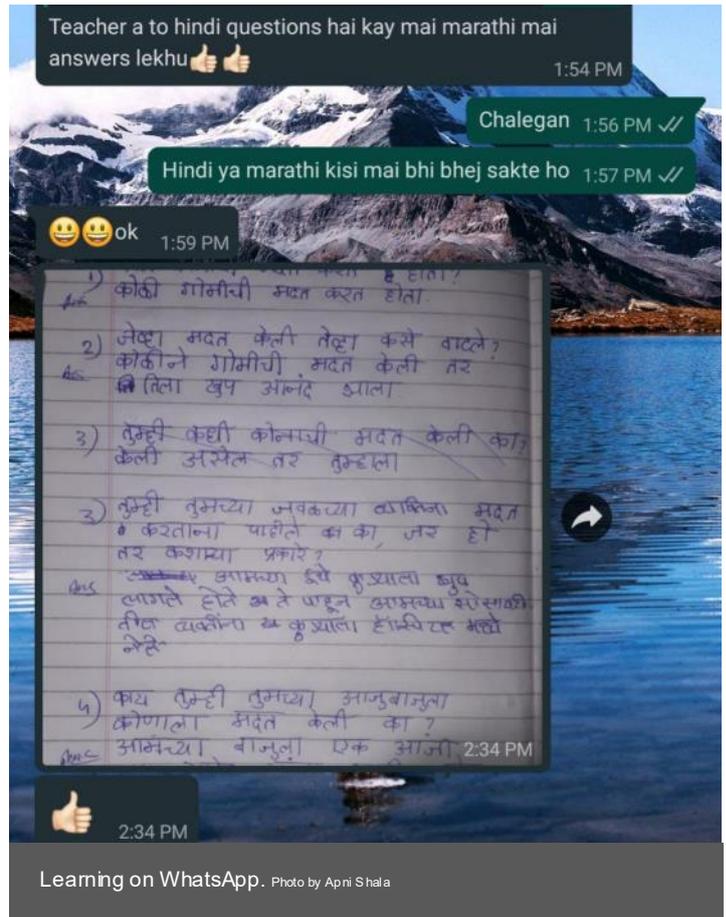
The shift we see in the (education) department is significant. We certainly see more awareness of social-emotional learning. Given the present scenario, we anticipate that teachers will have to focus on this for a large part after the school reopens, such as reflecting on emotions, facing boredom, designing specific sessions for when schools open— all these initiatives will be essential.

- Sunayana from Makkala Jagriti

Teachers at Prayas are encouraged to visit the children's home to talk to the parents whenever they can, as often parents don't disclose their issues over the phone. The teachers have also been advised to refer cases that need support to the in-house physiotherapist or psychologist to address the challenges faced by parents.

The discourse around social-emotional learning in India has been around for 6-7 years. But it has been a challenge to implement these programs even in normal circumstances. The overall emphasis on social-emotional learning in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a welcome change. For instance, the focus on developing character and enabling learners to be compassionate, caring, rational, and ethical is laudable. There seems to be some openness within the education department on the benefits of using social-emotional learning and prioritising it.

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present scenario, we anticipate that teachers will have to focus on this - such as reflecting on emotions and facing boredom etc. - for a large part, after the schools reopen."

The COVID-19 situation has allowed educators to test their social-emotional learning curriculum for the online mode and understand its limitations. For now, it does not seem like digital media can be depended upon for delivering a curriculum that largely benefits from human interaction. But perhaps, after schools reopen, it could become an important tool to help children reintegrate.

You can reach out to Apni Shala at contact@apnishala.org; SNC at sncshyamavan11@gmail.com; Art of Play at hemant@artofplay.co.in; Makkala Jagriti at headoffice@makkalajagriti.org; Fourth Wave Foundation at info@fourthwavefoundation.org; and Prayas at prayasjaipur17@gmail.com

Surviving to flourish

Notes from the 19th Annual Wipro Education Partners' Forum 2020



The Wipro Partners' Forum is organised every year with the aim of learning from the experiences, approaches and perspectives that our partners bring from varied contexts and subject domains. These have been occasions for reflection and exploration and not for the usual stock-taking and have helped us share with each other a diverse set of orientations to development, education and society, and to deepen our knowledge and understanding of social issues. The Forum is usually held in Bangalore, as a residential retreat, as a community building exercise. This year, the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to re-imagine the Partners' Forum, and as a result we tried out an online version for the very first time.

This year's Forum had the theme 'Surviving to Flourish: Adaptations in the times of COVID-19.' We requested a diverse set of organisations to share their experiences. These ranged from very early-stage institutions to older ones; from groups working with Children with Disabilities to those who focus on children in tribal areas; from those for whom libraries are an important arena for interventions, to those who explore the interface between the arts and education, and to some who work intensively on social-emotional learning.

The challenges faced by our partners by the COVID-19 pandemic are unprecedented and unique. They have adapted to these through two principal modes: the first can perhaps only be termed as 'externally oriented' and has involved changing programmatic models and interventions; the second is more internal and is related to

organisational culture and team dynamics etc.

Sharing happened around domains of work that lend themselves to the more informal modes of work engendered by the pandemic or have become increasingly more important due to it. These include social-emotional learning, libraries, children's literature, the arts, etc. Given that the National Education Policy (NEP) has been in existence for a few months, the session on NEP tried to discuss some common concerns surrounding it, in addition to deliberating on a few of its salient aspects.

Around 360-370 people attended the Forum, with around 150 participants attending some of the parallel sessions. A large number of the sessions were about providing perspective, raising questions and sharing stories. The videos will be available after a month or so. We will share relevant links with the partners' network when they are at hand.

Share your thoughts with us!

Samuhik Pahal is undergoing a process of transformation. We will be back in a new avatar after a couple of months. Your feedback has been central to the journal's evolution. Please fill in a survey about the periodical and help us put your needs and priorities at the focus of the journal's relaunch. The link to the survey follows...

Let's transform Samuhik Pahal together



Participate in the Readers' Survey

[Readers' Survey Link](#)





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Cover Photo:
Children learning about emotions at a BMC school
(pre-COVID).

Photo by Apni Shala, Mumbai

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