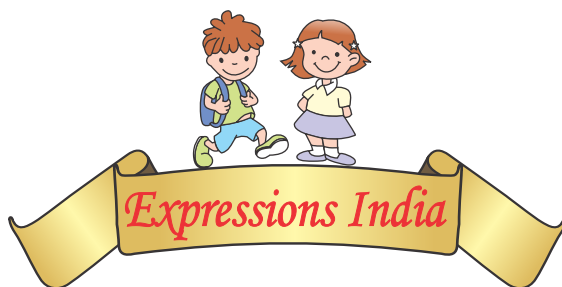


Indian Journal of **School Health** *& Wellbeing*

• Health Services • Life Skills Education • Healthy School Environment



The National Life Skills, Values Education & School Wellness Program

Healthy Schools Healthy India

*Education is not preparation for life..
Education is life itself
- John Dewey*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page No.
Editorial Board	i
Editor's Message	ii
Messages	iii-iv
Guidelines	v
Research Articles	1
Fear in Children's Literature: Stories as Emotionally Enabling Experiences <i>Swati Sehgal and Nidhi Seth</i>	2
Hierarchies and Power Relations between Adults and Children <i>Ravneet Kaur</i>	9
Including the Visually Challenged Student: Journey of the Teacher <i>Gagandeep Bajaj</i>	17
Inclusion of the Gender Diverse Child in the Classroom: Some Significant Issues <i>Shivani Arora</i>	23
Interface between Identity and Religion: Children's Negotiations at Home and School <i>Toolika Wadhwa</i>	28
Towards the Holistic Development of a Child: Some Reflections from the Writings of Tagore, Aurobindo and Krishnamurti <i>Vikas Baniwal</i>	35
Beyond Life Skills and Adolescence Education: Conceptualising Mental Health as the Ethic of Care <i>Vishakha Kumar</i>	42
Addressing the Developmental and Psychological Needs of Adolescents through Mental Health Service in Schools <i>Shefali Sharma</i>	47
Mental Health Concerns of Elementary School Children <i>Snigdha Madaan</i>	51
Understanding Middle Childhood in Urban Locales: Some Illustrations from Popular Bollywood Cinema <i>Rashi Mukhopadhyay</i>	57
Exploring the Notion of Teacher as Counsellor in Municipal Corporation Schools of Delhi <i>Nitesh</i>	62
Field Notes and Personal Experiential Accounts	68
Classroom Guidance Program- An Essential Tool for School Counseling <i>Rima Sehgal</i>	69
Understanding and Reaching out to the Psychological World of Children with Autism <i>Supriya Singh</i>	74
In the Era of 'English-Vinglish': Dreams and Aspirations of First Generation Learners of English <i>Deepti</i>	79
Educational Experiences of Children with Handicaps <i>Suman Sharma</i>	82
Book Reviews and Ideational Extracts: Learning from Existing Literature	87
Beyond Labels: Recognising the Hidden 'Gift of Dyslexia' <i>Aditya Rao</i>	88
Emotions, Identity and Mental Well-being of Teachers: Some Lessons from 'Divaswapna' <i>Chandan Shrivastav</i>	90
Peeping through the Window: Lessons from Children's Experiences at School <i>Manisha Subba</i>	94



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Editors' Message

The contributions in this issue are largely drawn from insights and understanding built up in the natural settings of home and school in which children and adolescents live, grow and experience the world. The common unifying thread across papers and articles is the belief that home and school are very potent spaces for the conservation and promotion of children's mental health and wellbeing both independently and in terms of the continuity that they provide to the growing child. Although the role of parents and teachers in this context is already well established, given the fast paced changes taking place in the world, there is a need to continually re-visit the notions and ideas that exist about children, adolescents, schooling processes, teachers' and parents' roles, policy imperatives etc.

One of the loftiest aims of education is to enable every child at school to emerge with a strong sense of self and identity. In this quest, understanding the world of children and adolescents through researches, the ideational frameworks of thinkers, field observations, media projections and some insightful texts and writings: both contemporary and classical, becomes a very worthwhile pursuit. This is the backdrop in which the flavour of the present volume has been visualised and captured.

Accordingly, the contributions have been categorised under three main headings: Perspective papers and Research papers; Field Observations and Experiential notes and Book Reviews and Extracts. It is hoped that after reading them, the reader will find more convincing and informed answers related to questions about children's development, mental health, schooling experiences, the changing role of parents and teachers, the importance of diversity in the present context and the world of children with special needs and understand how all of these are integral components of school health and wellbeing. It is sincerely hoped that all stakeholders who are concerned about children's health and wellness, particularly parents, teachers, teacher educators and school administrators will find this volume beneficial.

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MESSAGE

I am excited to know that the *Expressions India* is publishing the latest issue of *the Indian Journal of School Health*. Journals in general have been one of the most potential means of sharing research based scientific knowledge and experiences not only with the larger groups of specialists, experts and activists working in the concerned area, but also with all the persons having interest in that area at large. The *Expressions India* has been doing pioneering work since long in the field of Health Education under its banner of “Holistic Health and School Wellness Programme” to enable the school education and teacher education systems to realize the goal of Health Education in Schools. The present publication is a momentous indicator of this initiative I congratulate the Advisory group, Members Editorial Board and the entire team of *Expressions India* on publication of the Journal.

It is a universally accepted fact that the precondition for all development is healthy physical, mental, emotional development, especially in young children, as it supports their cognitive development and enrichment of their holistic health and wellbeing. Which is why, right from the Report of the Bhore Committee (1946), followed by the Reports of all the Education Commissions and Committees have recommended the integration of Health Education in the School Curriculum. The National Curriculum Frameworks 1975, 1988, 2000 and 2005 also have made it a compulsory subject up to secondary stage. But the ground realities have been categorically demonstrating since long that the transaction of this subject area in schools has been far from satisfactory. So far so, that it has not even been treated at par with the core subjects.

The major bottleneck in the way of realization of the objective of Health Education has been the particularistic conceptualization of its transaction process. Even though the National Curriculum Framework 2005 made a paradigm shift and recommended multidimensional pedagogy for transaction of this curricular area, it is being transacted by adopting only scholastic approach. The goal of development of holistic health and wellbeing of young learners cannot be attained by making them gather certain information and rote-learn those. It can be attained only by laying more focus on co-scholastic methodology that ensures active participation of learners and substantially contributes to the development of life skills which enables young children to manage their lives more competently and grow as truly empowered human resource of the nation and of the human society at large. To facilitate this process it is very critical to encourage and empower the teachers, so that they act like facilitators and mentors. It is in this context that the formal school education system needs to look towards taking the support from the initiative like the one taken by Expressions India under its National Life Skills Education & School Wellness Programme aimed at realizing the Goal of HEALTHY SCHOOL HEALTHY INDIA.

I am more than confident that the present issue of the Journal will strengthen this grand endeavour and empower all who are creatively engaged in the promotion of Health Education in Schools. It is urgently needed to employ the transaction methodology well tested through the pioneering pursuits being made by Expressions India. “If there is will, there is way, and if the will is reinforced by enlightened path-breakers, the way would lead to the destination at the earliest”.

Prof. Jawahar Lal Pandey,

Professor & National Coordinator,

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MESSAGE

For a nation in transformation, education and health care are dynamic indicators of progress. Students can learn well in a healthy and safe environment. Looking into the wide spectrum of comprehensive education the schools need a serious and closer appraisal. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) to which India is a signatory, prescribes that, every child has the inherent right to life, survival and development, including the right to the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for, the treatment of illness and the rehabilitation of health.

The committee on school health (popularly known as the Renuka Ray committee), set up in 1960, recommended that "Health education should be included as part of general education in the primary, middle and secondary school." The report of the committee provided guidelines and recommendations for both content and appropriate inclusion of health at various stages of schooling. In the wake of National Health Policy, 1983, and the National Policy on Education, 1986 (Revised 1992), steps were initiated to look at school health in a more comprehensive manner.

With higher school enrollments and the Right to Education in place, schools have become nodal centers for health education programmes. It has also been noted that schools are the key forums for acquisition of health related knowledge, attitudes and life skills. They are indeed the wealth of the nation, enriching the empowerment of children towards responsible citizens.

Schools have an important role to play in equipping children with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to protect their health. Skills-based health education should be part of the curriculum frame work. Its purpose is to strengthen efforts to implement quality life skill-based health education on a national scale worldwide.

Therefore a strong need is being felt for a Comprehensive School Health journal that scientifically reinforces the vision of Health Promoting Schools and subsequently gets integrated within the education system in India. **The Indian Journal of School Health & Wellbeing** is a step in this direction.

I have the pleasant task of recording my deep appreciation for and thanks to all the Advisory group, Editorial Board and Members of the Executive Editorial for their valuable contribution, ungrudging cooperation and keen interest taken. I must also thank the Members for making available the benefit of their rich experience and knowledge.

I conclude with the note that, there has to be a ground swell of commitment from the parents, teachers, Government authorities, civil society organizations and students so far as the creation of a healthy, safe and cosseted environment in the school is concerned. It has been rightly and very aptly stated, "If there is to be a light at the end of the tunnel, it is our responsibility to hold the torch high enough to provide a beacon of light bright enough and strong enough for our children to follow."

Schools, educators & practisioners are cordially invited to contribute their good practices, research, training & specific programs for publication in this pioneering Journal.

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GUIDELINES

The Indian journal of School health and Wellbeing will facilitate the effective partnership of health and education sectors to promote effective child and adolescent development in schools. The focus would be on publishing good practices, current research, health services, training & development programs, events, etc. It is envisaged to feature articles designed to impart new information and exchange of ideas amongst all practitioners in the field of child care. It is intended for stakeholders in the field of health and education i.e., school counselors, students, parents, teachers, psychologists, teacher educators, educational administrators, research workers, doctors, nurses, policy makers, social activists and teacher trainees.

Indian Journal of School Health is planned to be published quarterly, in January, May, August and November. The journal will be overseen by an editorial board and an advisory board and all submissions will undergo a review process and refining to international standards.

AUTHOR GUIDELINES

- The article should be of 2000 – 3000 words.
 - The article should have a clear and information title.
 - The article submitted should be original and should not be in the process of consideration by other publication at the same time.
 - Begin the article with an abstract of about 150 words summarizing the main points.
 - The article should meet the highest standard in terms of the rigor and reliability of the information and provide a deeper level of understanding. At the same time they should also be engaging to read and accessible to non – expert readers.
 - Figures and tables should be numbered, with appropriate titles and should be placed on separate pages.
 - Reference should be alphabetically arranged at the end of the article.
 - Brief information and line of works of the author should be sent as a separate cover note.
 - Initial acceptance of an article does not guarantee publication. The editorial board shall do the final selection. The articles received will not be sent back.
 - The editor has the right to reject even invited articles without assigning any reason.
- If necessary, the editors may edit the manuscript substantially in order to maintain uniformity of presentation and to enhance readability.

TYPES OF MANUSCRIPTS AND WORD LIMITS

1. **Original Research Papers:** These should only include original findings from high-quality planned research studies such as experimental designs, outcome studies, case-control series and surveys with high response rates, randomized controlled trials, intervention studies, studies of screening and diagnostic tests, and cost-effectiveness analyses. The word limit is 5000 excluding references and an abstract (structured format) of not more than 250 words.
2. **Brief Research Communication:** These manuscripts, with not more than 1 table/figure, should contain short reports of original studies or evaluations and service oriented research which may not be methodologically sound but points towards a potential area of scientific research or unique first-time reports. The word limit is 1500 words and up to 20 references, and an abstract (structured format) of not more than 150 words.
3. **Case Reports:** These should contain reports of new/interesting/rare cases of clinical significance or with implications for management. The word limit is 1500 words and up to 10 references, and an abstract of not more than 150 words.
4. **Review Articles (invited):** These are systemic and critical assessments of the literature which will be invited. Review articles should include an abstract of not more than 250 words describing the purpose of the review, collection and analysis of data, with the main conclusions. The word limit is 5000 words excluding references and abstract.



5. Grand Rounds in child psychiatry/psychopathology (Case Conference): This should highlight one or more of the following: diagnostic processes and discussion, therapeutic difficulties, learning process or content/technique of training. This may be authored by an individual or a team, and may be an actual case conference from an academic department or a simulated one. The word limit is 1500 words and up to 10 references.

6. Viewpoint: These should be experience-based views and opinions on debatable or controversial issues that affect the profession. The author should have sufficient, credible experience on the subject. The word limit is 3000 words.

7. Commentaries: These papers should address important topics, which may be either multiple or linked to a specific article. The word limit is 3000 words with 1 table/figure and up to 20 references.

8. Literary child Psychiatry/psychopathology: Original Contributions are welcome which cover both literature as well as mental health. These can be in the field of poetry, drama, fiction, reviews or any

other suitable material. The word limit is 2000 words.

9. My Voice: In this section multiple perspectives are provided by patients, caregivers and paraprofessionals. It should encompass how it feels to face a difficult diagnosis and what this does to relationships and the quality of life. Personal narratives, if used in this section, should have relevance to general applications or policies. Articles should underline the need to treat patients, rather than diseases, and to understand the impact such journeys may have on patients' caretakers and families. The word limit is 1000 words.

10. Announcements: Information regarding conferences, meetings, courses, awards and other items likely to be of interest to readers should be submitted with the name and address of the person from whom additional information can be obtained (up to 100 words).

Specific innovative/new ideas or newly emerging concepts for the sections are actively encouraged.

SENDING THE MANUSCRIPTS TO THE JOURNAL

Entries are to be submitted via e-mail to:

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Research Articles



Fear in Children's Literature: Stories as Emotionally Enabling Experiences

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Abstract *This paper explores the representations of the theme of fear in children's literature. The relevance of delving into the same emanates from the understanding that the psycho-social relevance of literature cannot be dismissed. Fear, when understood particularly from the developmental stage of childhood, is a multi-faceted emotion/experience. Variety of situations, differing on the basis of contexts, contribute to the fears and insecurities that a child may encounter. In this paper we have attempted to highlight how reading/listening to stories can contribute as enabling encounters in dealing with challenging life situations. The analysis includes a selection of stories that revolve around the theme of overcoming fear and coming to terms with emotionally exacting situations.*

"Fear is a wonderful thing, in small doses."(Neil Gaiman)

Stories are an important medium to understand the world around us. The sheer expansiveness of the representational universe is ever-expanding and only limited by the flight of imagination and fancy. Storying in itself is an intrinsic part of our being and we explore our inner world and outer worlds through the prism of narratives. These may range from a child telling about an incident at school to a significant other or a teenager describing to her/his friend about how he/she went about looking for a perfect dress for the farewell party. Intrinsic to these instances is the idea that these examples include sequentially classified descriptions, with hints of dialogues, characters playing around and an omnipresent authorial presence telling us about the tale/instance.

Another important consideration is that literature has the propensity of emotive engagement which adds to its significance manifold from a mental well-being perspective. To emphasise on this idea, it may not be an over-ambitious argument to add

that literature provides a common ground for us as readers to explore our 'selves'. Reading a novel, poem, or story is novel for us in terms of how we tend to situate the 'I' within and beyond the narrative context of what we are reading. This very quality makes reading encounters as individualised and unique.

This necessitates looking at the stories from a perspective which involves delving into how they can be psychologically enabling for readers. It draws from an understanding that when we read literary works we often tend to relate with them by identifications or dismissals of situation or characters, contingent on the dynamism of the text and the context. Judgments and approvals are indicative of states of mind and life trajectories of readers. This brings to fore that stories can be identified as canvases with vignettes of a spectrum of emotions that the readers and texts generate cohesively during the reading process. Acknowledging the same concomitantly recognises that children's literature captures and evokes myriad emotions on account of the fact that



it deals with numerous issues related to children's lives.

Many of these issues, such as death of a parent, sibling rivalry, separation from a loved one, betrayal of trust and resultant guilt might be psychological realities for some children. For others, however, children's literature provides a vicarious experience of the good, the bad and the ugly that the world has to offer. Couched in folktales and animal tales with anthropomorphic characters (familiar trope used for emotional distancing) or fairytales with elements of magic, these issues in children's literature capture and evoke the innermost desires, feelings and fears which the child maybe unable to or afraid to recognise. The added advantage is that in most cases, children's literature provides a resolution to the issues and allows them to cope with their feelings through the medium of stories.

This paper is centered on the premise that fear as an affective response has several dimensions and may not be characterised only as a response to a potentially threatening situation for a child. A more nuanced argument would be that fear as an emotion is manifested in several life situations; everyday instances which may trigger emotional anxieties and prove to be challenging. Thus, the endeavour in this paper was to choose particularly those titles which encapsulate vignettes from the experiential universe of a primary school child. These storylines present characters and situations which a child may have experienced or can identify with and might have a cathartic impact on the reader.

Stories have been chosen as a medium to delve into the theme as they capture and concretise the effervescent quality of these apparently simple life events through sensitive portrayals. Keeping this in perspective, we have attempted an individual analysis of the stories with certain key guiding elements emerging from the central theme of the paper. These include delving into elements such as whose perspective the story has been written with; purposefulness of the text with respect to dilemmas faced by the characters; response to a fear-inducing situation; role of the caregiver; and

role of the story in promoting a non partisan and enabling view.

A related concern is that selection of stories was driven by the idea that they offer a possibility of dialogue between the adult/text and the child as a reader or a listener. This pertains not only to how the plot develops but also focuses upon the role of language and illustrations used within the stories, as they too contribute in enhancing the delineation of the theme and make the text amenable to an empathetic response. In the section that follows, we will undertake an analysis of those selected stories for primary school children which exhibit different levels and dimensions of fear, sometimes evoked by everyday life situations and at other times triggered by catastrophic life events.

Analysis

Mujhe Koi Nhi Khilata by David Patiddar presents the anxiety of a little boy who is troubled by the fact that nobody in school is ready to play with him. It is a cause of worry and concern for the little boy and quite disconcerting for him. The story is presented from the point of view of the character. When nobody is ready to play with him, the next few lines read as "Mujhe bahut dukh hua. Mai ek jagah baith kar soch raha tha ki school kyun nahi lag rha... Mai sochta hi reh gaya." He mentions the cause of his worry to his teacher and his mother and the very next day, his classmates invite him to play with them, perhaps because the teacher and mother had already intervened on his behalf. The illustrations represent the dejection and disappointment at not being able to join his classmates through facial expressions, the protagonist positioned at a visibly marked distance from the other characters and through a single, minimised image on a double page. This adds to the experience of loneliness and emotionally disturbed state of mind. The story highlights a significant facet of school experience. It brings to fore the idea that playing together is a social experience which is looked forward to and its absence can sadden a child. It encapsulates the fear of being singled out and distanced, if seen from the point of view of the character.

While the above story captured the fear of being left



out of a social circle of same age peers and playmates, Sam Mc Bratney's, *I am Sorry*, explores the very palpable fear of losing the companionship of a dear friend. It is a story of two unnamed friends, a young boy and a young girl; it signifies that it can be the story of any kid (or adult). The story has been narrated from the perspective of the boy who recounts the fun he has with his friend - playing with toys, playing doctor or playing in the puddles. However, things change when he shouts at his friend and she gets back at him likewise. The two start avoiding each other- "I pretend my friend's not there, and she pretends she doesn't care, but..." - but he does care and says that if she is as sad as him then she would come and say sorry to him and so would he and everything will be fine again. Thus, the story ends on a positive note with a possibility of reconciliation between the two innocent friends.

I'm Sorry derives much of its impact from the repetition of sentences which captures the most important feelings and events at different junctures of the story. For example, the boy's feelings in the happier times are "I have a friend I love the best. I think she is nice... and she thinks I'm nice, too." However, the calmness is broken with capitals in a sentence "I SHOUTED at my friend today, and she shouted back at me." Interestingly, in the next instance where the sentence is repeated, it gets reversed as "My friend shouted at me today, and I shouted back at her," signifying the fact that perhaps the onus for separation lies on both and it is immaterial as to who began the quarrel. Moreover, the cause of shouting is not specified as the pain of separation and the consequent fear of not being together ever is more important than what caused the quarrel. The book has powerful illustrations by Jennifer Eachus. For example, the separation and refusal to play with each other gets depicted with an empty swing. The most powerful sentence and the only dialogue in the book "I'm sorry" features only once in the end but provides to the kids a powerful tool to avert the fear of separation and the consequent pain of physical and emotional distancing.

Gilbert The Great by Jane Clarke and Charles Fuge

highlights the theme of loss of a friend, a fear inducing and disorienting experience for children and adults. Gilbert, a great white shark, and Raymond, a remora, are buddies and stick around playing and helping each other. Gilbert is crestfallen by the sudden disappearance of Raymond. His mother's attempts to cheer him up are of little help until one day he finds another remora, Rita, who is saddened by the loss of her best friend, Daffily, a great white shark. With the possible hints of sudden absences referring to the possibility of fishing/hunting, this story foregrounds the fear of losing a loved one. While here it is represented through the medium of a friend, Mary Murphy in her book *I like it when...* presents images of attachment and impact of a significant other's presence through a dialogue. It is interesting to note that both the stories use animal characters in order to capture the emotional intensity of being distanced from a friend and expressing affection.

The relationship of friendship, as shown above, has many complexities to be dealt with and attendant fears of lack of attachment, breaking off of friendship and disappearance or death of a friend. The stories that follow precisely deal with these fears. Among the first to be discussed here is Oliver Jeffers' *Lost and Found* that deals with the complex social act of becoming friends with someone unlike yourself.

Lost and Found by Oliver Jeffers typifies the theme of friendship and empathy in a remarkably subtle and humorous manner. Unable to find a home for the penguin who lands up at his door one day, the little boy in the story sets out on a voyage to the South Pole as he discovers where penguins live in the book at the library. It is quite a feat that he succeeds in accomplishing after a spate of untiring attempts to find out where his uninvited guest had come from. It is interesting to note that though the boy is at times fed up by the unending interruptions yet there is an untiring zeal to set things right for the penguin. This can be attributed as a compassionate response to an individual who has no place to live. The story takes a complete turn when the boy misses him on his journey back after leaving the



penguin at the South Pole and goes back to find his new-found friend. The transformation in his attitude dawns with the realisation that the maybe the penguin was lonely and not lost as he had surmised and looked sad when he dropped him off on a mighty iceberg. But, to his dismay, the penguin is not there; only to be found later on the very next page floating in an upside down umbrella towards his friend. The story captures the essence of befriending someone, highlighting that making friends may be an arduous accomplishment for a child and may be characterised by hints of doubt and insecurity.

Jeffers' story, *Up and Down*, is symptomatic of the fear young children have of their friends' leaving them in the pursuit of other interests or friends. The book captures the anxiety of being separated as experienced by the protagonists, the young boy and the penguin. The story takes off from *Lost and Found*, a humorous and yet moving tale of finding a friend. The boy and the penguin become best friends and do all the things together such as playing musical instruments, playing table football and so on. However, one day the penguin decided that he wanted to do something alone - fly. He refused to let the boy fly him in his plane and tried everything to fly. When nothing worked, the boy and the penguin went out to seek help at the zoo. The poster for a live cannonball show catches the penguin's attention and he rushes off as he fancies himself flying from the canon. While the penguin is immediately hired, the boy, finding him amiss tries to search for him among other penguins but fails. Both the boy and the penguin miss each other throughout the night and the penguin knits a cap like the one the boy wore to remind himself of him. Luckily, the boy happens to see the poster for his friend's show and rushes there. The penguin, being so close to fulfilling his dream is quite unsure whether he wanted to participate in the act and wishes for his friend to be there. Once shot from the canon, the penguin is terrified and "wished his friend was there to help him." The boy, having reached in time catches the penguin safely and "The friends agreed that there was a reason why his wings didn't work well...because penguins don't like flying." This story is a fine illustration of why

and how the presence of friends can be affirming and reassuring in moments of distress, dilemma and fear. It is not only emotionally relieving but also exemplifies that friends are significant in having a positive self concept and adjust to individual differences.

While friends are important to a child's sense of positive self esteem, family as the first social unit that the child is born into plays a crucial role with regard to the socio-emotional development of the child and the loss of love and care by primary caregivers and siblings or the anticipated guilt of hurting them with one's actions is a major cause of concern for young children which is exemplified in the stories below.

Sara Aur Uske Nanhe Bhoot is a Belgian story translated in Hindi. The book is about a young girl who accidentally breaks her mother's necklace in her absence and hides the broken pearls. Afraid of telling the truth, Sara becomes tensed. Upon being asked by her mother of her worries or the necklace which couldn't be traced, Sara lies. The moment Sara lies, a "bhoot" comes out of her mouth and starts floating in the air, singing out loud the fact that Sara broke the necklace but only Sara could hear it. As Sara keeps on denying any knowledge of the necklace or sharing her worries, the number of "bhoots" keep increasing and her guilt keeps increasing. She is unable to feel the warmth of her father's embrace or his kiss. Finally, she is so guilt ridden that upon her mother's asking, she discloses the truth and the "bhoots" disappear. The book ends on a realistic and non preachy note stating that the "bhoots" keep coming now and then because she is unable to share everything. However, she tries her best to not let them increase and come between her and her parents as she loves the warmth of her father's embrace. The book beautifully captures the fear of loss of love of significant others. The guilt of hiding one's wrongdoing and the fear of punishment from the parents exacerbates the tension and guilt in the small child which is manifested in the form of the "bhoot." Without being preachy, the book tells the small children that sharing the truth with the parents will make the guilt go away and all the same it realistically remains



open to the possibility of small lies being told by children. Philip Guzence's illustrations beautifully capture the little girl's emotions of fear, guilt and despondence for hiding the truth and anger at the "bhoot." The little white wispy "bhoot" with a mischievous look on its face is an endearing creature and on the whole the book is a joyful read.

Written by Sandhya Rao, *Ekki Dokki* is a Marathi moral folktale of two sisters. Ekkeshvali and Dokeshvali, as the names suggest are two little girls with one and two strands of hair respectively. The differential treatment meted out to the two girls is apparent from "Their mother thought there was no one quite so lovely as Dokki. Their father was very busy. He had no time to think." What is significant about this sentence is that it captures the fact that Ekki's mother is emotionally distant from her and the father is indifferent. Constant bullying by her sister makes her run away from home and into the forest. The forest, as we know, is a magical place away from civilization. In most of the fairytales and folktales, forests often are characterised by loss, absence and as spatial locations where characters overcome challenging situations. Very often it involves a personal quest, a journey of self-discovery, fighting off fears and coping with taxing situations. In this case too, the humble and helpful Ekki gives water to a mehndi plant and feeds a cow. In exchange of her kindness, they give her mehndi and milk later in the story. An old woman living in a hut in the forest gives her shikakai soap to wash her single strand of hair and as a result magically, Ekki grows beautiful resplendent hair. Dokki, on the other hand takes the same route to the forest with very different results. Neither does she stop to help the mehndi plant, nor the cow. Dokki barges in the old woman's house and orders her to prepare the bath for her after which she loses both strands of her hair. Rao avoids the predictable normative moral structure of explicitly presenting what is to be 'learnt' from the story and seems to provide a closure by giving it an unsentimental turn. So while Dokki is sad "...but she soon wiped her tears and Ekki and Dokki lived happily ever after with their mother and father." The book captures the possible self image issues and about the lack of parents' and siblings' love while it teaches sensitivity and care towards the

elements around us.

There are also stories which focus on the exploratory nature of children and their attempts at facing and overcoming their fears heads on. One such book is *I am not Afraid* which is a bilingual book for beginning readers. Written by Mini Shrinivasan, it is a pattern based story about a little girl who considers herself a "big girl" and ventures out of the home alone. Illustrations by Rayika Sen in dark blue, green and black colours punctuated with the white and red create a dark, eerie and suspenseful atmosphere. The little girl investigates the lights and shadows and the sounds around her. In a pattern that follows she wonders things like "It is so dark! Is someone there? Who is it?" and "And that sound! Creak creakcreak! What is it?" only to declare "Oh, it is only the cat. I am not afraid"; "Only my sister drawing water from the well! I am not afraid." The placement of questions on the right hand side page and the answer on the next make the book a real page turner. Sen's illustrations show the girl examining her surroundings with a look of trepidation, wonderment and fear only to declare "I am not afraid!" at each step and finally "I am not afraid of anything!" This short story beautifully captures the idea that despite fear in their hearts, young children have a deep seated desire to be "big" and to explore their surroundings. It encourages the children to overcome their fears of unknown sights and sounds and to not to be afraid of anything.

Uptil now, we have focussed upon books which have dealt with everyday fear inducing situations for young children which has had a positive outcome or atleast the possibility of one. Now we will focus upon two stories which deal with the weighty issue of the loss of a loved one and the consequent attempts of the young to deal with and surmount the pain of the loss.

Goodbye Siti, by Jumaini Ariff, primarily centres on the theme of loss, guilt and responsibility from the perspective of a child. The story begins where Ariff, asks his parents to buy a goldfish for him. He is quite happy and takes good care by feeding the fish everyday. But soon the interest wanes away and one day in a tiring hurry to go and play with his friend, Ariff happens to feed the goldfish, Siti,

Expressions India



excessively, and it dies. The young boy is guilt ridden and saddened by his act and regrets even more when he sees Qiyah, his sister, upset. The fear of being scolded or punished prevents him from revealing anything to his parents. But he is rattled by the incident and continues to be miserable. He even has a dream where Siti is blaming him for being irresponsible. He bursts out crying and reveals it to his parents. It is relevant to consider here that the response to the situation from the parents is not driven by an orientation of punishing the child but by the objective of inculcating a sense of responsible action. Asking him to clean the fish tank and deferring the possibility of having another pet can be seen as an affirmation of the same. This is significant from another perspective that by disallowing another pet being brought immediately the parents are not resorting to a facile solution to death. Death as a disturbing experience is encountered here and is not shrouded in unsubstantial and vague explanations which children are often subjected to. The death of a pet may be an unequivocally disconcerting experience, but by situating the experience of death in a relatively distanced sphere than of a significant other or a caregiver, the author tries to mellow down the harshness of the situation.

While Goodbye Siti, distances the experience of death by making the loss of a pet central to the story another of Jeffers story deals with the issue directly yet sensitively, couching the disturbing loss and consequent pain in symbolisms of an empty chair and a heart in a bottle.

The Heart and the Bottle deals with weighty and complex themes of love and loss which most children's stories side step. The book is about a little girl whose heart is filled with wonderment and curiosities about the world around her. Misfortune strikes in the form of the loss of an elderly loved one which results in the symbolic act of locking her heart away in a bottle and hanging it around her neck. Though at first she feels this act would secure her from misfortunes and that she did right by keeping her heart safe, however, soon she realises that her life wasn't same as she stopped being curious or taking note of the things around her and the bottle became heavier and "awkward"

by the day. She realises her loss when she meets a girl younger than her, with the same exploratory zest that she once had. She decides to get her heart back from the bottle. However, she doesn't succeed in breaking the bottle until the younger girl uncorks the bottle and the heart is put back in its place. The girl goes back to living her life with zeal, once again enamoured by the wonders of the world. The metaphor of 'heart in a bottle' is indicative of the difficulty and angst of responding to loss. The imagery of bottling up emotions is painfully beautiful as it the response to loss. The book encapsulates the pain felt by young children on the loss of a loved one and the consequent fear of attaching themselves to anyone or anything for the fear of facing a loss again. However, the book also emphasises that despite the loss, ultimately there is hope, a driving force. The illustrations of the book capture the poignancy of loss and one particular illustration that stands out is where the girl runs off to show her drawing to her loved one but finds an empty chair instead. As the days pass, she sits before the chair mulling over, perhaps in wait, watching the shadows lengthen and pass over the empty chair.

Conclusion

In the preceding section we have attempted to take only those books which highlight how fears and insecurities, unique to a developmental phase, find resonance in the stories for children. Incorporating them in the repertoire of print exposures for primary school students can be a mode of dealing with dilemmas that are often not verbalized. They can function as a mode of addressing concerns that are often brushed aside but want attention as they are of relevance and significance if viewed from a well-being perspective. Such texts may help in coping with situations and sharing experiences which may be ambiguous for a child. Listening or reading to such stories offer the possibility of exploring concerns that are important for children, in an open-ended manner. Eder (2010) in her study Life Lessons through Storytelling supports the idea that the interactive spaces generated are not only significant for developing self knowledge but also social and communal knowledge (Eder, 2010, ix). Eades (2006) refers to this empowering role of



stories in terms of the "social and emotional competence", that is, to "recognize one's own emotions and those of others and to manage and respond to emotions appropriately." (Eades, 2006, 119) Quite often, emotions/emotional responses that are difficult to handle explicitly are ignored and dealt with in a superficial manner. Etching out the thematic thrusts of the various stories in this paper was an endeavour to re-emphasise that these uncharted territories within the classroom etc. can be addressed through the creative medium of stories.

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Hierarchies and Power Relations between Adults and Children

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Abstract *The present paper aims to explore the nature and manifestations of power and subjugation within adult-child relations. It rests on the assumption that as a developmental stage and 'category', childhood is often defined in relation to other generational categories. Therefore, to understand childhood fully, the positional status of childhood in relation to adulthood must be explored. Childhood cannot be captured without locating it within the web of social relationships within which it unfolds. As a repository of social meanings, it has to be situated and understood through a cultural lens and its varying contexts such as schools and families. The paper revisits the portrayal of adult-child relations and attempts to bring to fore the depictions of hierarchies and power relations that appear between adults and children within school and family contexts; as represented in some select films drawn from popular Bollywood Cinema. It sheds light on the trials children face on account of lack of power, authority and control in adult-child relationships. It concludes by proposing that children do not submit to adult authority unresistingly, rather they dynamically negotiate with them.*

As is implicit in the title, the paper attempts to explore how hierarchies and power relations between adults and children are represented in some select films drawn from popular Bollywood Cinema. The paper has been organised in three sections. The first section briefly discusses some assumptions on which the paper rests, and argues for cinema being an important means of portraying societal realities, including the depiction of childhood. The second section describes the process that was followed in researching and developing the paper, presents a brief storyline of each of the selected films and delineates the themes that relate to childhood within them. The final section presents an analysis of the representation of adult-child relations as they emerge, in relation to the different contours typifying this life stage.

Section One: Assumptions about Childhood and their Representation in Bollywood Films

As a developmental stage and 'category' (Qvortrup, 1994), childhood is often defined in relation to

other generational categories (Alanen & Mayall, 2001). It is viewed as 'something' short of adulthood and a state of 'becoming' an adult (James & Prout, 1997). This creates childhood and adulthood as disjunct categories; often understood in opposition to each other. This paper looks at the depictions of the two status groups positioned as 'adults' and 'children' and attempts to uncover the hierarchies and power emanating from these positions. Further, childhood needs to be viewed and understood in terms of the locale, context and social landscape (Aries, 1962; Jenks, 1996) in which it unfolds and the spectrum of experiences that children undergo. Childhood cannot be understood without locating it within the web of social relationships within which it unfolds. Childhood is thus a social construction (James & James, 2008). As a repository of social meanings, it has to be situated and understood through a cultural lens and its varying contexts such as schools and families. In unraveling how children are defined in opposition to adults, a significant aspect of adult-child relations, that is, the authority, and perhaps



the lack of it, that define and colour these categories have been kept at the centre. An attempt has also been made to highlight the dominant social contexts of school and family within which children are embedded. These reveal the experiences that children are likely to have. Alongside, the implications of these experiences of childhood, for the mental well being of children, have been discussed.

While it may be contended that films are produced primarily to entertain, there is no denying that they also mirror various dimensions of society (Dhar, 2013), particularly the existing popular culture, reflected in the dominant beliefs, values and cultural notions that prevail in the society which they are trying to depict. Popular Bollywood Cinema in contemporary times has become fairly experimental in nature, looking for different subjects and new ways of treating them. It is moving away from stereotypes and the characterizations are changing (Mooij, 2006). For instance, there are now some examples wherein certain films have emerged as cult films and the characters come almost as icons, such as in the Munnabhai series (Ghosh & Babu, 2006). Likewise, in the last few years there have been several films with a child or a group of children, as the central characters. These have been very impactful and have drawn attention to a number of issues related to childhood in general and children in specific. Thus, it was felt that the manner in which the changing creative visualisation and eventual on-screen picturisations of children's worlds are being depicted in films, makes them an interesting source to understand childhood in India.

What also makes films a potent source for study is that even though they are symbolic representations of 'created' worlds, yet the viewers participate in the imaginative recreation of those worlds and may thereby reshape and extend their thoughts (Nadaner, 1984). Further, in terms of their portrayals of children, they help to set temporal and behavioural limits to childhood as a life stage and also delineate some of its features. In addition, the symbolic content of a film may also provide some indication of the chief characteristics and

expectations from a given stage of childhood. What also needs to be highlighted is that when children watch films, they 'find' themselves and thereby find their identities as children (Smart et al., 2001). Viswanath and Malik (2009) add that films weave reality for children that allow them to be a part of the collectivity.

Recognizing this, the present paper tries to explore and explicate the hierarchies and power relations between adults and children as they come across in the selected Bollywood films.

Section Two: Selection of Films and Delineation of Childhood Issues Represented in them

To identify representative Bollywood films which lend themselves to studying the issues mentioned above, an elaborate scouting task was undertaken. To begin with, a list of films released in the last decade, which had children as the central characters or which depicted any dimension(s) of childhood as a life stage, were identified. A wider consultation with researchers and scholars who work in the area of childhood was done to build up and validate the list. Each of the identified films was then viewed analytically. From among them, six films were selected, ensuring that they addressed the diversity and variability that mark childhood in India.

Following this, each film was viewed with the objective of identifying the images which portrayed adult-child relations and culling out the issues related to childhood, that it highlighted. The themes identified helped to consolidate the framework that was used for analyzing the constructions of childhood. The section that follows presents a brief story line of each of the films, along with a delineation of issues related to childhood that it specifically depicted. The films are chronologically arranged from the most recent to the earliest.

***Chillar Party*, 2011 (Film) Directed by Nitesh Tiwari and Vikas Bahl**

The film embodies several significant themes, such as the early adultification of children in the lower socio-economic class, children's resourcefulness and commitment; their abilities of negotiation and persistence towards completion of a mission.



I Am Kalam, 2011 (Film) Directed by Nila Madhab Panda

The film shows the contrasting worlds of childhood in upper and lower class families. Transcendence of social class disparities through childhood friendships is also depicted. The agency of children in difficult circumstances is personified in the character of Kalam. The film depicts lack of voice of children in decisions pertaining to their own lives and circumstances.

Stanley ka Dabba, 2011 (Film) Directed by Amol Gupte

In terms of thematic depictions, the film highlights the subversive form that adult-child relations can take and the development of resilience in children in difficult circumstances.

Bumm Bumm Bole, 2010 (Film) Directed by Priyadarshan

The film highlights impact of deprivation on children; their struggles when faced with deprivation; the desperation that they are driven to; their vulnerability to danger in their attempts to cope, and early adultification of children. The contours of parent-child relationship are foregrounded in the film.

Paathshaala, 2010 (Film) Directed by Milind Ukey

The film serves as an important case in point to highlight childhood being viewed as an instrumental economic possibility in the hands of adult interests. It critiques the Indian education system, the web of commercialisation and the invasion of media and technology in exploiting children.

The Blue Umbrella, 2007 (Film) Directed by Vishal Bhardwaj

The film represents the gradients of human nature that lead them to sometimes exploit children's vulnerability and fragility.

After laying out the spectrum of themes identified across the six selected films, the next section takes up a detailed analysis of these in relation to the research question.

Section Three: Analysis of Hierarchies and Power Relations between Adults and Children as Depicted in the Films

This section discusses how power and hierarchy unfold between adults and children. The central plot of most of the films projected contrasting images of the world of children (and young people) and that of adults. Traditional oppositions and commonly perceived conflicts of everyday family life between 'children' and 'adults' got highlighted by the power, control, competence and responsibility that were shown, often exaggerating elements of these dichotomous relationships. As a group, children held little power and were constructed as passive recipients of adult mores and norms (McCourt 1996). The selected films placed adults at the apex of decision making for children, making them the deliverers and children, the receivers. This was seen in different contexts and forms.

In most of the films, the adult-child dichotomy stood out as a binary. Adulthood was shown to be associated with control, rationality and discipline and children were shown with the lack of these, necessitating them to get socialized into giving up their 'childish ways' in order to 'grow up' and 'become' adults. The adult-child binary found exposure in the comments made in *Paathshaala*, where when a peon interacted with the children, he was told 'not to be childish'; pointing to the sharp divide and distinction between being childish and not 'adult-ly'. Furthermore, anything that had to do with children was shown to hold lesser value and in contrast anything associated with adults was shown to be valued more. In *Chillar Party*, the Politician comments that '*Earlier Politicians were invited to inaugurate 'bridges' (here, denoting the adult world) but now they are invited to inaugurate children's playgrounds*'. It clearly points to the relatively low esteem and prestige associated with children's belongings and facilities.

The adult-child dichotomy made itself explicit in issues of power, authority and control. Adults (both parents and teachers) supposedly were shown to have more power over children, which placed them in advantageous positions. This authority was displayed by dictating children what they are



expected to do; controlling, monitoring and occasionally abusing them as well. The films carried projections of adult dominance over children which especially came out overtly in teacher-student interactions. In *Stanley ka Dabba*, neither Stanley nor his Hindi teacher brought their own *dabbas*. The teacher used his power and ate from children's *dabbas*. In addition, he accused, ridiculed and abused Stanley for eating from his 'friend's' *dabbas*. On account of holding a lower position in a hierarchically arranged society, Stanley had no means to counter this domination. The teacher in a fit of anger, disgust and frustration, went on to tell Stanley that if he did not bring a *dabba*, he need not come to school. This episode also highlights how sometimes adults project their own insecurities and frustrations on harmless children whom they know are not harmful and indeed are petite enough to raise their voice or counter argue their point of view. *'I am Kalam'*, showed how children are denied personhood and individuality (Kalam being addressed as Chotu, despite repeated objections raised by him on it). When he came to work at Bhati's dhaba, Laptan who was already working there and was much older to Kalam, told him bossily that he will have *'to work under him'*. Whenever Bhati was not around, he made Kalam clean tables, even if they had already been cleaned. This was only to establish his alleged power over Kalam. Manifestations of adult power over children were also accentuated in *'Paathshaala'*, where the photographer and the music and cookery show media persons, disregarded and disrespected children's efforts. The message embodied was that children's efforts were not worth-respecting and delaying immediate attention to them was non-offensive. The adults seemed indifferent to children's needs.

Indifference to children's needs was also shown by the fact that 'the best interest' of children were voiced by adults but whether these always pertained to children's well being, can be debated. The films did not rule out adults' agendas, purposes and interests being served in the name of children. In *Stanley Ka Dabba*, when the Principal discussed an invitation for the inter-school concert received

by the school, the Science teacher sternly asked the Principal, 'who will take the students for the rehearsals-the teacher or the parents?' Pursuits of adult interests rendered children passive as adults seemed more concerned about their own time and availability rather than children's needs and their 'best interests'.

What was also depicted was children's vulnerability and subordination making them prone to a further disadvantageous position. This was seen in the film, *Paathshaala*, which revolved around the theme of politicisation and commercialisation of education. Here, themes of subordination of children's needs and interests, overpowering adult agendas, children's lack of voice in the process of decision-making and their underrepresentation in their own matters, came to fore. The film raised questions on the subtle violation of the national commitment to education, RTE and propagation of education as a business. It exposed how children's interest are sidelined to give visibility to schools through means of media-reality television shows, participation in cookery, singing and other such competitions, bringing glory to the name of the schools. This approach was seen to establish the school as the 'best' school and fetch donations and justify unreasonable fee hikes. The film clearly highlighted the marketization and commodification of education and how adult-motives of making money drive this 'business'. The film contends the issues of dismissing children as less knowledgeable and 'too young' to understand adult agendas. Cunigford (1992) puts forth the view that children indeed do understand how power and politics operate. However, on account of lack of means, children seem unable to directly confront acts of dominance. Nonetheless, the film also brings out the positive and supportive role played by the teachers and the Principal to the audiences. However, the teacher's position as a meek dictator (Kumar, 1991) was reiterated and s/he has limited means and authority to combat the corrupting system and thus also becomes a deliverer of the same.

'I am Kalam' makes one ponder whether authority has to do with the 'position' one holds; whether children's lack of authority can be account to their



lower 'position' in the social hierarchy. Adults in the film talked to the 'Prince-child' with great respect on account of his princely position. Thus, it is not always that adults show authority over children because they consider them 'children' but because they also see them as 'lesser' on account of their lower social positions, 'bodies-in-the-making', getting socialised, lesser on experience, skill, knowledge and so forth and where the social hierarchy is reversed, the converse happens.

With regard to how children perceive their own position in the adult-child dichotomy, they seem to pick up messages from the larger community. In the films, they were shown to assume a lower social position as the 'natural' state of order, believing that their voices would seldom be heard. In *Chillar Party*, a child, scared of the situation commented, '*Hum bhool gye the, hum bacche hain* (We forgot we are children)' and commented on the girls who featured on TV programmes and offered to help save Bhidu that, '*Tum kya help karogi, tum bhi to bacchi ho ... baccho ki koi nahin sunta* (What will you help, you are also a child... nobody listens to a child)'; showed that children tend to believe themselves as 'lesser' than adults in terms of information, experience and power. They thus try to find anchors to help them decode and act on such power politics. The lyrics of the song, "*Hum chup ho jayenge* (we will be quietened)...*Baccho ka dard, koi dard hi nahin* (children's pain is 'no pain')...*behla do, fusla do* (trick us) also pinpoints at the subordinate position of children. Their lack of rationality, reasoning and economy as perceived by adults was depicted in *The Blue Umbrella*, where Khatri offered Biniya Rs 50/- (In five, ten Rupee notes) instead of the actual value of the Umbrella which was around Rs. 2500/-. Similarly, when her umbrella goes missing, the entire village gave her illogical reasons for the same.

In addition to the themes mentioned above, childhood as a stage of life was not seen in its own right but as a preparatory stage to adulthood. This accounts for why children occupy a subordinate position within the social ladder. In '*Bumm Bumm Bole*', childhood was seen as a time for 'becoming'. This was evident when Pinu's father told him to accompany him to the city to find a gardening job.

The following conversation illustrates this.

Father: *..main bhi kal jaldi sheher chala jauga, arre kal itwaar hai, tere school ki chutti hai na, tu bhi chal mere saath, waise bhi pooro din khel kood me bigaad dega, mere saath chal duniyadari seekh lega.*

(...I will also go to the city early tomorrow, its Sunday tomorrow, isn't your school closed? You also accompany me; anyhow you will waste the entire day playing, come with me and learn worldly wisdom).

While on the visit to the city, the father kept telling him what all to say while introducing themselves and their work to the people from whom they would seek the opportunity to work as gardeners. Parents envision themselves as agents of socialisation for their children. They push their children from early childhood towards ambitious and distant goals (Ananadlakshmy, 2002). Children's achievements are seen as family achievements; and education, a means for upward economic and social mobility.

In terms of children's contribution to the family responsibilities, their contribution to household chores was hardly acknowledged even when they washed, served, brought materials from the market, bartered items, made cane baskets and other handicrafts and delivered things. In *Bumm Bumm Bole*, Rimjhim engaged in various household chores, nevertheless the primary task for children was seen 'to study'. Children's 'work' of play was seen as an activity of lesser importance. As mentioned above, Pinu was told by his father that he will end up wasting time playing and should instead accompany his father to the city.

Another aspect that reflects adult control over children came through in the manner in which children are exposed to institutionalized childhood. Qvortrup (1994) suggests that childhood within social institutions is characterized by administrative procedures, organizational practices, special limitations and clock-regulated time-use. Children's free time, as shown in the films was not completely free but monitored, scrutinised and structured by adults, often in the name of their best interest and good. This happened both at home and at school. In *Stanley Ka Dabba*, the Hindi



teacher complained that children's loud noise resonated far into the corridor; hence, their free time was also put under surveillance, guarded and monitored. In the same film, as examinations approached, children's study periods were increased and recess period altered without any consultation with them. In *Bumm Bumm Bole* too children were answerable to adults for their utilisation of time. The adults weighed whether children's time was spent 'wisely' and 'constructively' or 'wasted' by their own adult standards. Children were answerable for their actions as well as 'utterances'. While disciplining their children, parents sought clarifications from them and in the garb of being 'providers' exercised their power to withdraw facilities that they provided to them. When Pinu reached home late, his father scolded him for coming home late by half an hour.

Father: *"Ye time hai ghar aane ka, 6.00 baje bola tha, 6.30 aa raha hai. Awaara kutte ki tarah sadak par matargashti karni hai to aaj se khana peena band tera. Itne mehngi school mein bhejta hoon, tujhe kya lagta hai, tere maa baap chai patti ki jagah note todte hain?...engineer-doctor kuch to bann aur nikal iss gandgi se"*

(Is this the time to come home, told you 6 o'clock, you are coming at 6.30. If you wish to loiter around in the streets like a dog then from today, no food for you. I send you to such an expensive school, what do you think, your father plucks currency notes instead of tea leaves?...become engineer-doctor, and move out of this filth).

In another episode, the following utterances were made by Pinu's father to his children:

Father: *...zindagi bhokh se bhi upar hoti hai, main apne baccho ko bada aadmi banana chahta hoon, taish me aakar sabse acche school me daal diya, ab agle 6 mahine ki fees kahan se lauga main, bahut badi galti ki acche school me daal diya. Ek baap ko apne baccho ke liye itna to karna hi chahiye"*

(...life is above hunger, I want to make my

children 'big' persons, I send you to good school, from where will I bring the school fee for the next six months, I made a mistake in admitting you to a good school. A father should do atleast that much for his children).

Parental scolding is sometimes a consequence of parents' own frustration over not being able to provide their children with the best. They wish to make their children better than themselves in terms of education and general achievements in life.

Conclusions

The films depicted a dichotomized and oppositional relationship between childhood and adulthood. Holding the position of an 'adult', brought with it a certain sense of power and authority to organise, monitor, regulate and control the lives of those who occupy a subordinate social position, that of 'children'. This subjugation has implications for mental health. Young children might feel stressed and pressurised on account of being dismissed and lacking power to choose and decide for oneself. Most decisions pertaining to children are taken by their parents and teachers and this devoids children from their legitimate right to decide for themselves. Nevertheless, children do not submit to their lower status without resistance. The nuances of the transgression of limits set by adults for children were also captured well in the films. I would like to point out that while the films brought out the variability in childhood experiences, they also helped to point out some of the universals which bind children together as a community. The need for belongingness and anchors, play, fun, exploration and action, irrespective of the milieu or context are common threads. To conclude, the paper hopes to contribute towards making a difference in the ways we understand childhood as a life stage. It urges to contextualise childhood within adult-child relations and the social contexts that colour it.

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- Screwvala, R. and Khan, S. (Producers), & Tiwari, N. and Bahl, V. (Directors). (2011). *Chillar Party [Motion Picture]*. India: UTV.
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- I am Kalam: The film is set in Rajasthan where an intelligent boy named Chotu is brought to a roadside Dhaba by his mother to work under the owner, Bhati. Chotu prepares tea and washes utensils at the Dhaba and is mistreated by another employee, who is a young man named Laptan. One day Chotu sees President Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam on television and gets inspired by idea espoused by him that a person's destiny can be changed by his/her own hard work and he immediately rechristens himself as 'Kalam.' The dhaba is located near a heritage hotel in the palace of an erstwhile royal family. Kalam strikes up a friendship with the lonely prince of his age, but the prince is forbidden by his father from mixing with commoners. The two boys secretly meet and play defying control levied upon them by the adults in their lives. In a twist, Kalam is accused of theft of



prince Ranvijay's books. In order to protect the prince from his father, Kalam does not reveal that the prince himself gave him the books. Bhati mama gets angry at Kalam and beat and scolds him. Kalam runs away to New Delhi where he tries to meet the President. Meanwhile, the prince tells his father that he gave the books to Kalam. The king realizes his mistake and sends the Prince to find Kalam, who is finally found near India Gate and is brought back home. The king tells him that he can study in the same school as the Prince. Bhati offers to pay the school fees, but Kalam says he will pay his fee himself.

Stanley ka Dabba' is the story of a talented fourth grade child. Unlike his classmates, Stanley does not bring his lunch box or 'dabba' to school. The Hindi teacher of the school also does not bring his dabba and eats from everyone else's box. He particularly likes to eat from the lunch boxes of Stanley's group of friends. One day, upon being late and missing eating from the boys' dabbas, he expresses his frustration by accusing Stanley as being responsible for this lapse. Stanley is hurt and subsequently the friends group constantly keep changing their eating venue in school to avoid the Hindi teacher. One day when the hostile teacher discovers them, he again takes out his anger on Stanley and tells him not to come to school until he brings a lunch box of his own. Stanley stops coming to school. Later in the film, Stanley brings his own dabba to the school, replete with festive food which he gives to the Hindi teacher, who realises how he had used his own ego and power to shatter a child's psychological world completely. He apologises to Stanley and leaves the school. Towards the end of the film, the truth unfurls that understanding the plight of the boy, the cook of the hotel, where orphaned Stanley washes dishes, packed the leftover food in Stanley's lunch box, so that he could carry it for his Hindi teacher.

Bumm Bumm Bhole: Khogiram, his wife and two children-Pinu and Rimjhim live in a terrorist dominated region. Khogiram and Ritu are poor and work at a tea plantation. Pinu and Rimjhim go to a respectable school, as Khogiram wishes to give his children good education. However, the financial constraints of the family leave them with limited money for buying uniforms and shoes. Things become worse when Pinu misplaces Rimjhim's only pair of shoes. They work out a plan where both of them share the same shoes-Rimjhim wears them to her morning shift school and Pinu to his afternoon school. Meanwhile, Pinu's father,

desperate for money, borrows some gardening equipment and takes Pinu along to the rich suburbs of the town to find some gardening work. They make money but meet with an accident on their way back home. The children's struggle for procuring shoes is accentuated by Pinu's dilemma to pick up shoes from outside the temple and unknowingly working for terrorists to get some money. The film ends with Rimjhim's father getting a job and Rimjhim finally getting a pair of shoes.

'Paathshaala' revolves around children on a school campus. The story begins with a new English teacher joining the school and immediately building rapport with all. The Principal of the school is a man of strong principles, who silently struggles against the school management's decision to commercialise the school. The school management engages media planners to raise the image of the school, even at the cost of compromising with student's interests. It demands students' involvement in reality shows on television and other media and public relations activities in order to build the school's image in the public eye. This creates high pressure and stress on the students, teachers as well as parents, who unify to offer resistance.

'The Blue Umbrella' is the story of a young girl child named Biniya who lives in the mountains. As the story progresses, in order to take Biniya's necklace, a group of foreigners give her a 'blue umbrella'. The Blue Umbrella becomes Biniya's prized possession. The shop owner, Khatri offers her money to buy her umbrella but she refuses to sell it. Acting out of greed, the envious shopkeeper steals it. The girl finds her umbrella missing and the shopkeeper gets a similar umbrella in red. With this, the center stage shifts from Biniya to the shopkeeper. But soon the villagers discover that the umbrella was stolen and dyed red. As a result the shopkeeper's name is tarnished in the village and he is boycotted by the entire village community. Khatri's struggle and remorse feature in the second half of the film. The story concludes with the girl giving the umbrella to the shopkeeper as a sign of forgiveness.



Including the Visually Challenged Student: Journey of the Teacher

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Abstract *This paper attempts to explore the inclusion of students with visual challenge, from the perspective of the teacher. It examines issues such as, the dynamics of teacher-student relationship, teachers' perceptions about inclusive education, envisaging the role of teachers in inclusive classrooms and pedagogic interventions formulated to respond to the diversity of the classroom. It is based on a qualitative study located in the social construction of reality. Given the variations in the practice of inclusive education, teachers across different school settings were involved. School observations and semi- structured interviews were used to collect data. Data analysis led to the emergence of significant themes, which were interpreted to build a coherent narrative. The findings provide rich insight into the journey of teachers from initial apprehension at finding a student with visual challenge in their class, to subsequent involvement. The challenges they face and their ways of coping, reiterate the importance of taking into consideration the views of all stakeholders in order to meaningfully engage with the practice of inclusive education.*

Conceptualizing Inclusive Education

The right to live with dignity and self-respect is implicit in being human and education is an integral part of this. The Constitution of India ensures equality, freedom, justice and dignity to all individuals and implicitly mandates an inclusive society for all. (www.socialjustic.nic.in)

Inclusion is an approach which takes into account the needs of all learners in mainstream classrooms. It welcomes diversity in terms of race, caste, gender, class and disability. Inclusive education is being analyzed at both the theoretical and practical levels. Perhaps this stems from an aspiration for an inclusive society and the recognition that inclusive education is a fundamental element of society where forces of marginalization are discouraged and community participation for all is promoted. The Director General of UNESCO, Matsuura (2008), has articulated his vision of inclusive education in the following words, "Inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform educational systems and enhance educational quality at all levels and in all settings in

order to respond to the diversity of learners and promote successful learning."

Journey towards Inclusion

The educational scenario for children with disabilities in India, as well as overseas, has seen a shift from segregation in terms of special education, towards integration and more recently, inclusion. There is a growing interest in inclusion, although special schools remain a popular option [Jangira,1995; Alur,1998; Alur and Natrajan,2000 as cited in Parasuram (2006), Disability and Society, 21 (3)].

The present article attempts to explore the inclusion of students with visual challenge, from the perspective of the teacher. It examines issues such as, the dynamics of teacher-student relationship, teachers' perceptions about inclusive education, envisaging the role of teachers in inclusive classrooms and pedagogic interventions formulated to respond to the diversity of the classroom.



Research Design

The research was qualitative in nature and aimed to explore the social construction of disability from the lens of the visually challenged. Guba and Lincoln (1989) explain how reality is created by a process of social construction rather than one reality waiting to be discovered. In the context of the present study, it implies that disability is not a given but holds varied meanings for the participants. The initial phase of the study was exploratory in nature, which was aimed at perspective building and understanding field realities. Field visits were conducted in order to find out the ground realities about inclusive education and the dynamics related to the school system. Whole school observations, including classrooms and learning centers of mainstream schools, were instrumental in bringing forth the varying contours of inclusive education. Differences in what constituted as inclusive practice emerged from this task.

Participants

As stated, the above exercise was instrumental in revealing differences in how various school systems viewed inclusion. Thus, participants were selected from different categories of schools in order to understand their perceptions about inclusive education. 30 teachers from class 9 -12 from mainstream schools of Delhi were selected of which 10 each were from state government schools, private schools and kendriya vidyalayas.

Research Tools

School observations and semi-structured interviews were the research tools used to collect data. A broad observational framework was built around themes identified on the basis of the exploratory task. This provided the scope to understand classroom realities, nature of learning, teacher-learner interaction, pedagogic strategies etc. Open-ended, conversational interviews provided the flexibility to mould the flow of the questions according to the dynamics of emerging field realities. The tools also helped to give credence to the multiple perspectives of inclusive practice.

Steps in the Research Process

The study began with exploratory field visits to mainstream and special schools, as well as other institutions and stakeholders involved in inclusive education. After a mapping of the landscape and conceptualization of tools, a preliminary trial was carried out in two schools. Tool validation was done with the help of experts in the field of inclusive education. Subsequently, a pilot try-out helped to further refine the tools. School permissions were obtained and the initial contact point was either the principal or teacher in-charge. After initial rapport building, school observations were initiated followed by a series of interviews spread over a month. Data from observations and interviews was weaved together to build a coherent narrative. Data analysis was based on a reflective reading of field notes.

Interpreting the data

This section is an attempt to understand the nuances embedded in the data collected. Teachers' responses have been analyzed thematically. However, because of many commonalities between the issues brought forth by teachers from the three categories of schools, they have been considered as a cohesive group. Significant differences, wherever relevant, have been discussed under respective themes.

Opinion about Inclusion

During my interaction with teachers, I found that many of them did not understand the term 'Inclusive education' in the beginning. When it was explained, they identified it variously as 'special education', 'education for the handicapped' and 'integration'. Majority of teachers gave a conditional approval to the system of inclusive education while some expressed favourable views for special schools. There was no significant difference among the views of teachers from the three categories of schools. Teachers who supported inclusive education gave reasons like a greater sense of equality, better learning outcomes and feelings of normalcy for the visually challenged students, in support of their view.

Along with the positive outcomes of inclusive education however, many constraints were also



highlighted which are captured in the specific narratives that follow.

“Practical problems are there. If 99 % children are fit, perfect and one child is blind, it's a problem both for teacher and student. Students with visual challenge writes in Braille but we can't check the copy. Plus what about safety? If something wrong happens, its risky.”

“System is fine but problem is doing group activities. Disabled have some deficiency; they are different; so how can we do activities with all students together?”

“Special schools were considered a better option because of subject considerations, class strength, workload of teachers and lack of teacher orientation towards the needs of students with visual challenge in regular schools.”

“Subject wise, the students with visual challenge are not getting their type of studies. How can we give time to them when we have so much pressure – completing the syllabus, checking copies, reading, maintaining discipline, exam duties, result making, etc. They get neglected.”

“Class gets disturbed. Our level is going down because of them. Teacher has to be slow because of them so we are wasting time of those who have already understood.”

“We don't even know what kind of behavior to have with them, what are the things required by them and how should we treat them emotionally.”

Curricular Issues

Curriculum transaction was initiated by most teachers in the class, usually through the medium of introductory questions followed by explanation of the main concepts. Writing questions and answers based on the lesson, was the next step. Textbooks served as the major resource material. Government school and Kendriya Vidyalaya teachers reported that some students with visual challenge brought Braille books to school and read along with other students, while a few students simply listened in the class and preferred to read or listen to books at home, citing excessive weight of the books as the reason for not getting them to school.

Many students in private schools used computers with talking software for reading textbook material which had been previously uploaded. As far as written material is concerned, Government school and Kendriya Vidyalaya students largely used Braille slates for accomplishing work. Students of private schools, typed class notes, assignments and other home work on the computer and submitted printouts to their teachers. Peers and parents were mentioned as a source of help in completing school work in many cases.

“I dictate questions and answers. He (student with VC) writes side by side on the laptop or his mother comes with a scanner, scans the class work and takes a hard copy. Or his classmates type for him or share their work.”

“NCERT and exercise books with questions are there which we tell students to fill up side by side. Other Braille books are given in Government schools, but Sanskrit books are not available. They (students with VC) don't write blackboard work. They listen but don't copy.”

The modifications and specific pedagogic strategies that teachers used mostly dealt with changing the seating arrangement to enable the student with visual challenge to sit in the front row, adjusting the pace, speaking out blackboard work, repeatedly asking them whether they have understood what had been taught in class, appreciating their responses and written work in class and asking peers to help.

Some teachers explained that they felt sorry for students with VC and were extremely sympathetic. In some cases, this sympathy seemed misplaced as well. Some telling narratives in this context are:

“Poor children, we should help them in everything”

“Even if their answer is not of a good standard, we give marks”

“They have to be given more marks for less work, since they don't participate much and we do not know what they are writing. They are mostly silent and not very vocal”

The teachers feel the burden of constraints which leave them with a feeling of helplessness and not being able to do justice to their profession. Lack of



time, facilities, excessive student strength and additional responsibilities given by the school are mentioned by a majority of teachers from Government schools and Kendriya Vidyalayas. These figure less often in the narrative of private school teachers although inadequacy experienced due to lack of specialized training has been commonly expressed across all categories. A math teacher from a private school narrated,

“Jaws (Job Access with Speech) and Taylor frame were new for me. I was worried about how she would keep up but she manages. I would see on her computer, tell her steps and she would calculate on the Taylor frame to find the answer.”

“Want to do so much but can't do, therefore personally don't feel happy. I think, I should have done more for her (student with VC) but if make her sit in P.T (Physical Training) or library period, I am taking away from that activity. I don't know how to manage.”

“Blind students should be able to present material to us and we should be able to give them notes. But we don't know Braille. We need resource rooms and training in Braille.”

Modifications done in evaluation activities for students with VC were usually based on converting them to oral format. For instance, in science, they were given group projects related to current topics and the student with VC was chosen to make the presentation. Projects in social studies were on tourist spots, historical monuments, creative writing, extempore speech etc. For the latter, while other students were asked to present extempore, the student with VC was given a few topics beforehand, which she had to prepare and present any one of them.

For tests, some teachers from Government schools gave them extra time during the test and conducted it orally, while the rest of the class was writing. Most teachers from private schools and Kendriya Vidyalayas took tests with the help of writers. However, finding suitable writers has been quoted as a problem by teachers.

Literary, Cultural and Sports Activities

In Kendriya Vidyalayas and private schools, activities have been given a space in the time table

whereas in some Government schools, they are linked to upcoming 'competitions' and celebrations of important days. Participation in music is a universal trend, across schools. This is supported by the notion of innate talent in the areas of vocal and instrumental music.

A feature of government schools was the lack of choice in the selection of activities. They were pre-decided for the students. Each section was assigned activities like candle making, poem recitation, debates, home science tasks and drawing. As a result, teachers felt that students were not able to connect with these activities.

Some teachers also voiced that the participation of VC students was less, which was attributed to lack of modified sports equipment and feasibility issues. Some schools had modified equipment like tactile chess boards and sound balls.

Discussion

Varied shades of understanding have emerged from the responses of the teachers. Confusion exists not only at the level of terminology, but also about a deeper philosophical level which is concerned with the meaning and purposes of inclusive education. Users of contemporary terminology were in a minority. References to 'handicapped' and 'special' children were a reflection of the larger societal perceptions about students with VC. In some cases, inclusion and integration were seen as synonymous and 'learning centers' where the students spent a major part of the day were also referred to as inclusive settings. This lack of clarity was also evident in government circulars where these terms have been used interchangeably at times. There is positivity about the ideational basis of inclusive education in terms of equality, human rights, negotiation with society, increased educational and psychological benefits for students with VC as well as their peers. This has been expressed in terms of better learning, sensitization towards 'others' needs, self-esteem, confidence and independence values.

However, many 'ifs' and 'buts' cropped up at the practical level of inclusive education. The experiences shared referred to large number of students in classes, lack of training in special needs



education manifesting in not being able to check assignments and tests written in Braille, not knowing how to address the emotional needs of students with VC etc.

The 'charity' model was also evident in the interviews with teachers. Many of them looked at issues in a culturally and socially defined fashion. 'Bechara' (Poor thing) is a frequently used word. Many instances of excessive sympathy were evidenced. 'Helping them' was a key phrase used by most teachers while referring to students with VC. The 'normal' versus 'handicapped' dichotomy was also prominent with both categories of students being constantly compared. Thus, we see the importance of teachers' attitudes in students' quest for a non-stigmatized existence. At times, a few teachers used words like 'problem', 'they have their schools' to denote the sense of burden that students with VC pose for them. The extent of 'handicap' was seen as an important deciding factor for inclusive education.

Private schools made greater use of available technology whereas Braille books were the standard option in Government schools and Kendriya Vidyalayas. Techniques for fostering an interactive pedagogic climate were rarely evident. Not many adaptations in the regular classroom routine were seen, in the context of the visually challenged. Subject teachers' narratives reflected a journey from apprehension to involvement. Their first contact with the students was characterized by doubts about pedagogic strategies to be used, time requirements, behavior to be employed, evaluation procedures, etc. Sustained contact enabled them to learn on the job and gradually devise minor variations in their teaching routine. Majority of them felt a sense of helplessness at not being able to do justice to students with VC.

Evaluation procedures centered around oral recitation of projects, question and answers along with class tests. Availability of writers was a common challenge across schools, perhaps indicating the need for a dedicated pool of writers to be recruited in the scenario of dwindling numbers of 'volunteers'. Alternatively, technological adaptations available for students

with VC, can be applied to ensure their self-reliance.

Literary, cultural and sports activities were dominated by participation in musical events. Directorate of education organizes programmes to spread awareness about the variety of skills of disabled children, for instance, arranging for children to see International Abilympics competitions. (Nodal Officer's overview of IEDC implementation). In spite of these efforts, clearly our notions of acceptable activities for students with VC are straitjacketed and limiting in nature. There are many alternatives to music, which can be explored in a feasible manner but most students with VC continue to be assigned music for school activities.

The study brings forth the need for educating teachers in the areas of curricular adaptations for students with VC in terms of conceptual development and skills for daily living, orientation, mobility and communication. Familiarity with tactile aids and other specialized equipment is required for meaningful student-teacher interaction. Conveying positive feelings, an empathetic attitude and being sensitive about the language used in referring to students with VC is essential for developing self esteem. Orientation and sensitization of peers by the teacher helps to create opportunities for interaction. Collaboration between various stakeholders ensures that the student perceives her parents, subject teachers and special educators working together for an enriching educational experience. Policy makers need to listen to teachers and envisage them as partners in framing and implementing policies. Thus, we find that the positive outlook of stakeholders is tempered by many challenges which still exist. These need to be addressed meaningfully if inclusive education is to become a reality in its true sense.

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Inclusion of the Gender Diverse Child in the Classroom: Some Significant Issues

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Abstract *The vision of twenty first century education is to foster a diverse responsive environment which aims to not only celebrate the uniqueness of each individual, but also to do away with the multiplicity of stereotypes currently existing in our society. From the moment we are born, the binary world of gender categorizes us into boys and girls leaving almost no room or empathy for the gender diverse. The landmark judgment given by the supreme court of India in 2013 “allowing” the transgendered into the school system is a much awaited step towards inclusion but needless to say requires much systemic readiness and preparation before it can become a reality. The present paper seeks to delve into the various psycho social issues of the transgender community, the discrimination and rejection faced and the highly sensitive yet instrumental role of education in empowering and enabling this community to facilitate their social inclusion and rightful existence.*

KEYWORDS *gender diverse, transgender, gender identity, educational inclusion, strategies for mainstreaming*

How being Transgender unfolds in society

The gender diverse childhood is characterized by an array of traumatic experiences, rejection often leading to abandonment which gradually translate into a difficult and stressful adolescence, all resulting from a limited and an insensitive attitude of people around us. Contrary to the explicitly stated emphasis on social equality and diversity inclusion in the schooling system, much needs to be done effectively in order to bring about true equity and social justice.

Our gender identity is considered sacrosanct from the moment we are born. We're either a boy or a girl. Gender organizes our world into pink or blue. As we grow up, most of us naturally fit into the pre existing gender roles showcased by the society in which we live. Girls wear frilly dresses and play with dolls. For boys, it's trousers and trucks but the gender diverse child who is considered abnormal and a natural disaster ends up leading a traumatic, harrowing life due to his/her gender incongruence that is, an asynchronous relationship between

his/her biological sex and perceived gender orientation. Such a child, experiences a harsh invalidation of his gender expression. There is tremendous pressure on him to conform to the traditional gender structure leading to inner turmoil which often leads the child to resort to escape mechanisms, seek gender affirming communities and engage in high - risk behavior.

Seldom, does our society care to realize the trauma, agony and pain which the members of Transgender community undergo. They are often ridiculed and abused in public places like railway stations, bus stands, schools, workplaces, malls, theatres, hospitals. They are at times, sidelined and treated as untouchables. They usually have no access to education and are also denied medical and healthcare benefits. As a result, they seldom get jobs with a dignified source of income, forcing them to indulge in activities like sex work, human trafficking and begging. They are usually disowned by their families and start living with a community of persons similar to them.



Locating Transgender Persons Socially and Historically

Historically, transgenders or hijras were highly respected and were a part of mainstream Indian society. They worked as cooks, entertainers, beauticians etc but the criminal tribes act 1871 propounded by the British shunned them and since then, they have been feared, excluded and marginalized. However, despite this heritage, transgender people in India, today, face intolerance, stigma, discrimination and violence.

At present, post-modern frames challenge the essentialist notions of identity (male, female, gay, straight or otherwise) and posit gender as culturally constructed. The disharmony created between the mind and the body, creates a social as well as psychological imbalance, playing havoc with the transgender individual's subjective sense of self and identity. It often leads to an identity crisis which forces some to undertake surgical and other procedures to alter their bodies and physical appearance, so that they acquire gender characteristics of the sex which conform to their perception of gender. All this is done in an effort to synchronize the mind with the body, to end the intrapersonal conflicts and to reduce the exclusion, discrimination and humiliation that come with the territory.

For many years the medical community had pathologized being transgender. For decades they imposed on transgender people the so-called diagnosis of "gender identity disorder." Now with the advent of DSM V, GID or gender identity disorder is replaced as gender "dysphoria," meaning that one is necessarily afflicted with discomfort with one's body when in fact being transgender is an identity, not a disorder. (Erhenshaft, 2012) The inability to 'be' as culturally or societally determined, is actually a violation of one's human rights. In the words of Ban –Ki –Moon (2012; Human Rights Council), "where there is tension between cultural attitudes and universal human rights, rights must carry the day." However, this seems to be easier said than done. The actual percentage of people who are transexual (or intersex) with ambiguous genitalia is very small, between 0.1% and 0.2%. These are minor congenital abnormalities which can be surgically or otherwise treated, but due to the lack of awareness and social stigmatization, parents and

family often feel the need to discard such children.

In fact, most hijras are not kidnapped or "converted" as folk tales claim, but in fact, being born with non-binary gender, are abandoned by their parents to die or dropped off at the nearest hijra place. The parents forget about the child and never come back to visit them, and the child's only family becomes the Hijra community. The revulsion of social agencies including the family induce feelings of unwantedness and abandonment leading to a poor self- concept and low self- esteem. Owing to this, many members join the Hijra community during their teens or adulthood, by their own choice. Most transgender children still live in the shadows, hiding from a world that sees them as freaks of nature. Currently, however, several leading clinicians (e.g., Lev 2004; Malpas 2011; Menvielle, 2012) advise parents to be supportive of their transgender and gender-nonconforming children, and to follow the children's lead as they figure out how to express their true gender selves (Ehrensaft 2012). Rejected by their families, many grow up hating their bodies, and fall victim to high rates of depression, drug abuse, violence and suicide. (Brill and Pepper, 2008). Transgender and gender-nonconforming adolescents appear to have an elevated risk for negative outcomes, such as depression and suicidal ideation (Greytek et al 2009), and family members—especially parents—are deemed to play a critical role in the well-being of these youth. In a landmark study done by Riley, et al (2011), on the needs of gender-variant children and their parents, using a survey, parents of gender-variant children were asked about their needs and experiences and those of their children. The needs were reported in themes relating to (a) identification of the gender variance; (b) parents' responses and reactions; (c) seeking emotional support; (d) dealing with negative responses from others and concerns about safety; (e) seeking medical support; and (f) political, government, and legislative support. The findings indicated that parents identified the needs of their gender-variant children as the need to be accepted, loved, and respected in their gender expression. The parents identified their own needs as the need for access to information, parenting strategies, and emotional support.

More specifically, research indicates that family acceptance has a strong positive influence on



transgender youth's emotional and behavioral health, including self-esteem, substance use, and suicidal ideation (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). Much of the anxiety and distress that transgender and gender-nonconforming children exhibit is reported to dissipate immediately after the children are allowed to make a social transition (i.e., present their true gender selves to the outside world. Thus, parents, who have the power to control how their young children express gender through clothing, hairstyles, etc., may mitigate the potential negative outcomes for transgender and gender-nonconforming children through affirmation of their children's gender identities and expressions (Ehrensaft, 2012). There are no studies in the Indian context on any of these issues since till only very recently, this was a taboo area.

Strategies for the Inclusion of the Gender Diverse Child

Policy Imperatives

Due to the absence of suitable legislation protecting the rights of the members of the transgender community, it is necessary to follow the International Conventions to which India is a party. It is only as recently as April 2013, that the The Supreme Court of India in its landmark judgment honored and upheld the right of transgenders to a quality life, equality and nondiscrimination in society and access to education and healthcare. Following this judgment, admissions to the third gender were opened at many premier educational institutions. A 2% quota was also earmarked for gender variant children in the capital's schools.

The real challenge however is in developing inclusive policies that acknowledge and welcome transgender and gender fluid students. Efforts will have to be made to demonstrate an institutional commitment by using inclusive language, creating spaces where transgender and gender fluid students feel free to be themselves, and developing procedures that adequately respond to acts of intolerance and/or harassment toward transgender and gender fluid students. Spaces will have to be provided for campus dialogue on gender identity and efforts for the admission and retention of

transgender persons in higher education will also have to be made.

Facilitating a Gender Diverse Environment at Home

When families support their child's gender identity and the exploration of that identity, they create an optimal environment for that child: one that lays the foundation for building the child's core sense of self. By providing an unconditional loving environment, with openness and sensitivity where the child is able to speak to them about their feelings and ask questions allows the child to blossom into a fully functioning individual ready to contribute to society.

Recognition of Gender Diversity

Coming out and living authentically takes a lot of courage because our society still tends to be very harsh, critical and judgmental towards transgender people. Transgender children who are raised in accepting and loving communities where they are allowed to live out their gender identity authentically and are embraced for their true selves are happy and well adjusted people.

Freedom of Expression to the Felt Gender

When a child does not express a particular gender expression while growing up, he/she should not be punished nor admonished. Children who are born as male but who during their teens try female clothes and make-up could later identify themselves as transgender. These children who may later identify themselves as transgender, can become successful members of society if they receive acceptance and parental and societal support.

Early Intervention and Support by Professional Experts

To understand that gender is fluid rather than dichotomous is an urgent attitudinal need. Parents often lack the necessary awareness required to formulate an informed opinion on this matter. The role of gender specialists is very important on this regard. They can help both the gender diverse child and his/her family to anticipate and deal with the trials and tribulations faced by such a child and create familial readiness and support for the same.



Being Supported and Understood by the School Community

Several meaningful measures can be taken up to make this possible

- Organizing sensitization and awareness programs: teachers and other school staff need to comprehend that in the contemporary, diverse classroom, the gender binary is replaced by a gender spectrum wherein understanding gender non- conforming students and being sensitive to their special needs is required.
- Screening films that expose children to gender diversity as a natural phenomenon. The media often encourages and is responsible for sustaining gender stereotyping. However it can equally play an effective role in creating awareness for the gender diverse and ways of their inclusion in mainstream society.
- Employing gender diverse teachers. Gender non- conformist teachers can be very useful in creating awareness and demystifying the world of transgender persons. They exemplify that if given the right opportunity, gender diverse individuals can like any other persons contribute successfully to society.
- Having trans friendly textbooks: In an inclusive classroom, everyone should be represented in what is deemed legitimate knowledge.

Providing Safeguards and Support to Gender Diverse Persons

- To protect them against being bullied, harassed, blamed, shamed, or attacked. There is an acute need for the administrative authorities in schools and colleges to ensure that their campuses are safe and welcoming of all diverse persons, including transgender and intersexual children.
- Access to health literacy programs and referral to counselors and medical professionals. Counselors can intervene in the school environment by communicating with school personnel about the common challenges faced by transgender persons and

by addressing the systemic dynamics preventing them from feeling safe and respected.

- Transgender persons are becoming increasingly visible at secondary and post-secondary schools across the country and expect institutions to meet their needs. School personnel can thus no longer ignore this population. They have to as part of their preparation learn the appropriate language to describe transpeople, educate themselves on transgender histories, and seek to understand their lives and experiences. If institutions are to be welcoming to people of all genders, issues of discrimination and equal access to facilities and health care need to be addressed.
- Instituting programmes that prevent bullying and the verbal abuse of students and establishing a clearly spelt out action in case of violation.
- Creating a uniform classroom policy.
- Creating the classroom rules collaboratively and have the rules reflect wording that is inclusive of all students, including LGBT youth/children
- Inviting LGBT people to conduct classroom discussions about their jobs and family lives to students. It must be understood that schools are a subset of the larger social rubric under which they germinate, therefore the school -society continuum has to be firmly established.
- Providing the School Library with useful information about homosexuality and LGBT people. Creating a list of LGBT-themed children's literature that may be considered for purchase for the library.

Conclusion

The vision of twenty first century education is to foster a diverse responsive environment which aims to not only celebrate the uniqueness of each individual, but also to do away with the multiplicity of stereotypes currently existing in our society. For a society to be truly representative, every section should have its own voice and agency. The



transgender have been marginalized, rejected for a long time. It is thus high time that society, routed through its educational institutions, shoulders the responsibility of bringing about attitudinal reconstruction and sensitization of people at large, to the special needs of gender fluid children so that they are accepted and nurtured with the warmth and dignity that they deserve.

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Interface between Identity and Religion: Children's Negotiations at Home and School

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Abstract *From a very young age, children are exposed to religious practices, rituals and beliefs both at home and school. Experiences with religious undertones influence their everyday lives and the process of identity development, albeit in tacit ways. Home and school are two units of primary socialisation for children. The continuity-discontinuity between home and school is significant in its influence on children's perceptions of themselves and the world around them. In contemporary times where society is marked with incidents of communal strife, religious intolerance and insensitivity towards the 'other'. Although schools promote the value of secularism, schools themselves, as well as homes and society at large provide a myriad set of experiences that will build the context for children's experiences of growing up. This paper explores children's experiences of growing up while negotiating this complex interplay of experiences at home and school, through reflective life stories of young adults from urban middle class families in Delhi.*

Religion and Schooling in the Indian Context

The complex entanglement between religious beliefs and practices as well as secular moral values that Indian society promotes is often inseparable at the personal and social levels.

Secular literally means 'not connected to or belonging to any religion'. In popular parlance, in religiously heterogeneous contexts, it is also interpreted to mean as 'respecting all religions'. Where schools students are from heterogeneous religious backgrounds, secular attitudes and practices assume greater relevance. Experiential writings by Farooqui (2007) and Razzack (1991) stand testimony to schools being starkly religious places, even when the façade of secularity is maintained. One of the key practices that is integral to almost every school, and is considered secular but has the potential for a strong religious flavour, is the school assembly. Religious minority schools, quite expectedly, start the day with a prayer based in their own religion. Even in state run 'secular' schools, the school assembly is a common feature and often starts with a prayer or invocation to God that is sung by all school students in unison. (Payal, 2014)

Studying the impact that such practices have on school students from different religious backgrounds is thus warranted. Gupta's study (2008) highlights that religious commitments start early. Her work with children in Delhi, in the age group of four to eight years, highlights that religious identification begins at an early age, through socialization by family and community. Hindu and Muslim children made clear distinctions between objects, places, stories and ideas associated with 'them' and 'us'. They demonstrated acceptance and pride while talking about their family's religion. The study also brought to light the significant role played by the religious community. Children used the first person plural pronoun ('we', instead of 'I') while talking about their religious practices. The narrative descriptions in her work emphasise that religion is an integral part of everyday life for the children. The work also emphasises the collectivist manner in which religion is understood by the children.

This raises some pertinent concerns about the religious nature of schooling experiences. What role does religion play in the lives of children in schools? How do religious contexts influence the



experiences of children at school? How do religious experiences at home and school interact with each other? How do children negotiate these experiences while developing a sense of identity?

Fieldwork

The questions presented above warranted a study of experiences of school students. It was felt that reflected biographical accounts would help to develop an in-depth understanding of lived experiences of individuals at home and school. Thus, young adults were asked to reflect on their life experiences and their life stories were developed.

The sample of the study consisted of twelve participants, ensuring representation on parameters of age, gender, and religion. All participants belonged to middle class families based in Delhi. The sample was representative of the four major religious groups-Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians.

Men

Name	Age Group (in years)	Religious Orientation
Deepak	23 -26	Hindu (Dalit)
Dhruv	23 -26	Sikh
Hussain	27 -30	Muslim (Shia)
Joshua	18 -22	Christian (Catholic)
Sanjaya	27 -30	Hindu (Brahmin)
Sudhanshu	18 -22	Hindu (Jain)

Women

Name	Age Group (in years)	Religious Orientation
Farah	18 -22	Muslim (Sunni)
Harjeet	27 -30	Sikh
Mary	18 -22	Christian (Tribal)
Mridu	23 -26	Hindu (Jain)
Sufia	23 -26	Christian (converted)
Vaibhavi	27 -30	Hindu (Brahmin)

Discussion

The subsequent paragraphs present a discussion on the key dimensions of the interface between identity and religion as experienced by the participants during their growing up years. The discussion has been presented separately for men and women participants to highlight gender based trends. The influence of home and school in each of these has been interwoven within the discussion themes.

Developing Religious Commitments

All the men showed a shift from an unquestioning, obedience-compliance mode of religious practice during their childhood years to a more personal conviction based approach in their young adulthood. All of them underwent a period of questioning, rethinking, and reformulation of their religious beliefs during adolescence. Sudhanshu (Jain) and Joshua (Christian) participants started rethinking and reformulation of religious beliefs after religious sermons started making sense to them during adolescence. In the other cases, the process was triggered by their personal life experiences. For Hussain, the trigger was shifting to a Muslim dominated neighbourhood with a shift in his father's job, while for Sanjaya it was moving away from a family rooted in Brahminical traditions. Deepak on the other hand developed a sense of inquiry as a result of the visible contrast between Hindu beliefs and practices which he saw at home and the scientific explanations to natural phenomena studied at school that he encountered.

All the women showed a strong tendency towards obedience and compliance to instructions given by elders about what their religious beliefs and practices ought to be. Instructions were also taken from institutions of authority such as the family, neighbourhood, school and community during childhood. By adolescence, however, they showed a shift towards the practice of religion being guided by greater personal conviction. The questioning and exploration undertaken towards one's own religion was guided by a need to arrive at rational explanations for religious practices in all their cases. Despite evidence of personal agency, all of them, except Sufia (converted Christian), continued to obediently and unquestioningly follow religious



instructions given by parents. This may be on account of social conformity pressure and their allegiance to being “good girls”. This was particularly evident in the cases of Vaibhavi (Hindu Brahmin) and Mridu (Jain). For Farah (Muslim), Harjeet (Sikh) and Mary (Christian), years of obedient practice of religious rituals was internalized as faith. Sufia, in contrast to the rest, grew up in a household where little importance was given to the practice of any particular religion by her parents, owing to their inter-religious marriage. After converting to Christianity, however, the instructions given by the priest became sacrosanct for her. Thus, obedience-compliance based religious belief and practice tend to take on a different form from childhood but continue to prevail, as was visible in life stories of all six women participants.

Thus, the interplay of experiences at home and school played an important role in the developing of religious commitments of the participants.

Experiences at School and in the Community

Educational institutions have also played a significant role in the development of religious beliefs. The men in the research study, who had studied in secular schools and colleges (Sanjaya, Deepak, Sudhanshu, and Hussain) showed greater tolerance towards other religious groups. Dhruv attended a Christian school but grew up in a secular family. The discontinuity experienced between home and school helped him develop acceptance towards multiple perspectives towards religion. Joshua, in contrast, studied in a Jesuit school and experienced continuity in religious beliefs across home and school, thereby strengthening his religious beliefs. A similar influential role can also be ascribed to the neighbourhood and community. Though Deepak and Sudhanshu studied in secular schools, the neighbourhood and community consisted of the same religious group as the family. Studying in schools that were located in the same neighbourhood provided them exposure to the same social groups at school and in the community. In turn, they experienced continuity of religious beliefs at home, school and community which led them to develop a strong religious identity. In Sudhanshu's case, it was, shifting to a different city

away from his native village that was responsible for his developing openness to religious beliefs other than his own. Likewise, Deepak became more secular when after high school he shifted to a school away from the neighbourhood.

The life stories of the women, also revealed that the school and neighbourhood have played an important role in the development of a secular attitude in them. Those who had studied in minority schools and colleges showed greater affinity towards religious practices taught in the schools. Three out of the six cases studied in Christian schools and colleges. Mary experienced a continuity in religious beliefs and practices followed by her family and by her school. The continuity helped her to strengthen her faith in Christian beliefs and practices. Sufia first came across Christianity in the college where she studied. The beliefs and practices followed in the college in addition to the vast exposure to Christianity through her friends in college were influential in her later converting to Christianity. Vaibhavi encountered a contrast between the Hindu-Brahmin rituals followed at home and the Christian teachings she came across in school. This resulted in a discontinuity between the religious atmosphere experienced at home and school. Similar discontinuities were experienced by Farah, Mridu and Harjeet who studied in secular schools. Neither of them came across the same religious teachings which were emphasised at home. All four thus learned to accept religious differences with greater ease. It may be inferred that they were socialized into an attitude of secularism.

In addition to the school, an influential role was also played by the community in which they grew up and lived. Farah, Sufia, Harjeet and Vaibhavi grew up in secular neighbourhoods. Growing up with a religiously heterogeneous group of friends helped them in their acceptance of religions other than their own. Mary and Mridu grew up in places where almost all families in the neighbourhood followed the same religious traditions as their own families. They thus did not have early exposure to different religions. However, celebrating festivals and participating in community functions, such as Midnight mass, Diwali melas, and the like, were



important in their role in strengthening religious beliefs as well as developing a sense of religious pride. In sharp contrast is the role played by the neighbourhood in Farah's life. Traditional Muslim practices such as '*pardah*' were not emphasised in her family. Since her neighbourhood was heterogeneous in its religious composition, she remained unaware of such practices almost all through her life. The neighbourhood broke her kinship to the Islamic community as she did not have an orthodox or parochial exposure. It is only in recent times that she has become aware of the practices followed by her extended family and community which she is critical of.

The interplay of the influences of school and community shows some interesting images. Mary grew up in a community which comprised only Catholic Christian families. Similarly, Mridu's neighbourhood comprised only Digambar Jain families. However, as against Mary, studying in a secular school Mridu came across a group of friends following different religions. As a result she was able to look at her own religious beliefs and practices critically. Mary however, having experienced continuity in religious beliefs and practices at home, school and community, seemed to have accepted Christian beliefs unquestioningly.

Interface between Identity and Religion

As against reading scriptures and ritualistic worship, all six men assigned importance to their personal relationship with God. In fact in their life stories, all of them presented personalised images of God that range from Him being a father figure, to a friend, a confidante, a guide and a support system. For many, their relationship with God also provided them space for cathartic expression. The manifest form of their relationship with God is represented by developing a connection in the form of talking to him or conversing in prayer. The more formal images of God described by the participants, which include being all encompassing, all controlling, a symbol of power, being a preserver and a rescuer, seem to be based on their learned experiences of religion, their reading of scriptures, exposure to religious discourses and the discussions they have had with friends and family. In the cases of Muslim, Jain and

Christian men (Hussain, Sudhanshu and Joshua respectively), where community practices formed an important part of religion, discussions with religious leaders (the Maulana, the Jain Gurus and the priest at the Church) have played an influential role in the formation of beliefs about religion.

All the six women recognized prayer, worship, reading scriptures, visiting religious places such as temples, churches, mosques and Gurudwaras and other rituals associated with their respective beliefs as symbols of religiosity. Most of them accepted and followed the rituals as integral to the practice of religion. However, they maintained that personal communication with God is more important than these rituals. Except Vaibhavi, although she continued to practice many such rituals such as idol worship and fasting, none of the participants questioned the necessity for ritualistic practice or the rationale behind such practices. This attitude suggests the need to conform to the image of an ideal daughter and the acceptance of scriptures and instructions as sacrosanct. Further, all the other participants, aside Sufia and Harjeet, pointed to the necessity of having a manifest, concrete form to their faith and belief.

By adolescence, four of the women interviewed expressed a tendency to question the beliefs and practices followed by their family and/or religious community. However, for all of them, which included Farah, Mridu, Harjeet and Vaibhavi, the process of questioning, rethinking and reformulation of religious beliefs remained personal and unexpressed. In fact, with respect to certain practices, the covert, silent rebellion, which some of the women experienced in their lives, was in sharp contrast to the overt compliance to rituals practiced by their families and community. This led to experiencing dilemma and persistent inner vocal speech. However, pressure for social conformity and remaining good girls in their overt behaviour took precedence over their inner experiences and thoughts. The two Christians (Sufia- converted and Mary- tribal Catholic), interestingly never experienced a period of questioning about any belief or practice prescribed by Christianity.

All except Vaibhavi (Hindu Brahmin) believed in the concept of God as a single, omnipotent,



omnipresent force controlling the world. Apart from God as an all pervasive force, Vaibhavi also believed in the varying images of God presented by the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses. All of them believed in the benevolent and rewarding nature of God. At the same time they displayed an element of fear about invoking the wrath of God. Further, as was revealed in their interaction, fear introduced an element of accountability in them that inspired them to do good deeds. Barring Vaibhavi, none of the participants questioned the notion of God's power and will to punish wrong doers.

In the actual development of their religious commitments, for all except Sufia, the practice of religion was initiated out of a sense of obedience towards their parents in order to live up to the image of a 'good girl' as has been already described. As they grew up, however, their personal relationship with God took precedence over ritualistic practice of religion. The bond developed with God has been particularly significant in Vaibhavi's life. Throughout childhood and adolescence, her relationship with God filled up the void she felt because of the absence of her parents and siblings. For others, the relationship provides them space for cathartic expression. This is evident particularly in the life stories of Mridu, Sufia and Farah, who in the absence of freedom to express their views and opinions within their family and community, reached out to God as the only entity providing unconditional acceptance.

All the women reported relying on religion to provide meaning to their lives. When perplexed by the deeper questions of life such as those relating to the universe, existence, life after death and the like, they turned to religion. In addition, they also reported turning to God in search of peace and quiet. All of them viewed religion and religious practice as coping mechanisms for stress reduction. The life stories of Mridu, Farah, Sufia and Vaibhavi provide instances when they turn to God in the face of conflict, turmoil and uncertainty.

Religion and Interpersonal Relationships

While all the men embodied a secular attitude towards religion, yet most believe that their own

religion is more liberal in comparison to others. They seemed to have a sense of pride in their religious background. Religion thus constituted a significant part of their identity. Their religious beliefs, particularly, when they were younger, were influenced primarily by the views of their family members and the neighbourhood and community they grew up in.

Though most participants had never given active thought to their religious commitments, the impact of religion was visible in their everyday life. For Sudhanshu, Hussain and Joshua, weekly visits to the temple, mosque and church respectively, formed an integral part of their lives. Likewise, communication with God in the form of personal prayer or conversation was a daily ritual for all others, except Deepak. However, even in Deepak's case, there was extensive engagement with religion which was visible in the numerous discussions on topics such as the existence of God, veracity of Hindu mythology etc. In addition, the influence of some principles flowing out of religion on the lifestyles of the individuals was quite evident. For the Hindu and Jain participants, for instance, non-violence is an important principle prescribed by their religion. This translates into a culture of vegetarianism for Sudhanshu, Deepak and Sanjaya. Hussain and Sanjaya, in accordance with the Islamic tradition and Hindu-Brahminical culture, also showed great aversion to alcohol. For Joshua, assuaging of guilt through confession was an important part of life.

All the women demonstrated a secular attitude towards religious accepting people from all religions around them without any bias. They believed that all religions point to the same God, hence, they accepted all religions as equal. At the same time, with the exception of Vaibhavi, all participants carried conviction about the appropriateness and relevance of the path that they followed. The Christian and Muslim participants (Mary, Sufia and Farah) believed that they were directed on the path that they are treading by God himself and therefore, showed greater conviction in their religious beliefs. While all of them clearly stated that religion is not a criterion for them to develop friendships, except for Farah, they had a greater number of friends following the same



religion as their own. Farah, having grown up and studied in a Hindu dominated society and school, had a greater number of Hindu friends than Muslim friends.

Despite the absence of a serious contemplation about religious beliefs and practices, the influence of religious beliefs is visible in the lives of all the participants. All of them lay great emphasis on periodical visits to places of worship, be it the temple, the mosque, the church or the Gurudwara. Prayer, worship and personal communication with God also form part of the everyday lives. Mary, Sufia, Farah and Harjeet also laid great emphasis on periodical reading of the scriptures. Vaibhavi and Mridu felt that religious books and scriptures need not be read regularly and so tended to read them only out of their personal interest.

In the absence of close relationships with family and friends, all the women reported finding comfort in their relationship with God. The religious practices they followed played an important role in maintaining their sense of psychological well being. Prayer, reading scriptures, visiting places of worship helped them develop a sense of peace and calm. The belief that ritualistic practice would please God and persuade Him to reward and fulfil wishes often led to relief in tension and stress. All of them reported visiting places of worship along with establishing a personal communication with God in the face of trouble and turmoil. Sufia, Mary and Farah also find comfort in reading religious books like the Bible and the Koran.

A sharp contrast could be seen between the Christian participants and others. Both Christians found solace in their religious community and in times of trouble, often confided in the people that they met regularly at the Church. Vaibhavi's life story also presents a similar image. Her regular visits to the meeting of Bharat Soka Gakkai (a sect of Buddhism) provided her with a sense of belongingness. It may be inferred that in religions where community based practices are emphasised, followers find greater comfort in unconditional acceptance by the community.

Concluding Note

While all participants have shown a tendency to

move from an obedience-compliance based religious practice to one based on personal conviction, women showed greater obedience in following religious practices of the family and the community. For women, the shift to personal conviction was based more on faith arising out of internalization of the beliefs of the family through years of unquestioned practice. The men in the study showed a greater tendency to look for rational explanations for religious beliefs and practices. Personal conviction was therefore based on objective reflection and acceptance or rejection of the practices of their families and communities. Where reading scriptures was given importance by both men and women, the latter showed greater tendency for subjective and faith based reading rather than a search for rational explanations. (Hussain and Farah are cases in point.) Women also showed greater reliance on family and community and the tendency to live up to the image of a 'good girl' than the men in the study.

It was seen that most of them (excepting Hussain and Vaibhavi) did not give any conscious thought to their religious commitments. All of them respected all religions and accepted people from other religious groups in their lives. However, despite a secular identity, they also displayed a sense of pride in their own religious identities. Barring Sufia, who belonged to a family of mixed religious parenting, none of the participants showed openness to conversion to other religions. It may thus be concluded that the process of arriving at religious commitments is closely intertwined with the process of identity development. Most participants depend on their religious beliefs and practices for coping with stress, need satiation, wish fulfilment and cathartic expression, as was explained in the earlier section.

With respect to schooling, it was found that all participants found the experiences at schooling to have a religious flavour. Where there was continuity between experiences at home and school, participants reported greater conviction to religious commitments. In the face of conflict between religious experiences at home and school, the participants reported experiencing greater doubt and engaged in questioning their religious



commitments at home. Even where schooling was in secular schools, the schools served as important places for exposure to people from heterogeneous religious backgrounds. Education also led participants to question religious beliefs and practices from a rational orientation. Thus, it was evident that the schooling process closely intertwined with experiences at home and community in developing religious commitments and a sense of identity.

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- Stark and Glock (1962) advanced the notion of religious commitments as a multi dimensional term. They suggested that religious commitments could be a meaningful way to know a person's sense of religion and the meaning that it holds in their lives. Accordingly, they have elaborated on the different dimensions of religious commitment. Religious belief is the ideological dimension of religious commitment. It refers to the content of the individual's belief. Religious Practice is the behaviour expected of an individual committed to a particular religion. Religious Feeling is the experiential dimension of religious commitment, which consists of the emotions, states of consciousness, or sense of well being, dread, freedom, or guilt that are part of a person's religiousness. Religious Effects refer to the influence of religious commitments on a person's everyday behaviour. Religious Knowledge refers to what a person knows about his/her belief.
- The paper is based on empirical work undertaken by author as part of M.Phil (Education) programme in Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi.



Towards the Holistic Development of a Child: Some Reflections from the Writings of Tagore, Aurobindo and Krishnamurti

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Abstract *This paper attempts to explicate the ways in which three important Indian thinkers- Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and Krishnamurti understand the holistic development of a child. These thinkers become even more important in light of the fact that despite periodic changes in the education policies of the state, and the changing view of how a child's development in school is visualised, the thoughts of these thinkers have, in a sense remained eternal and have continued to inspire schools and find expression. Their ideas present to us very unique and refreshing ways of looking at childhood and the role of the school. Rather than moving from the theoretical ideas presented by these thinkers to their pedagogical implications, the discussion in the paper would proceed from describing the practices in these schools and then explaining their theoretical bases. The primary focus in the paper is on the holistic development of a child's personality and re-thinking assessment practices in school.*

Introduction

The structure and spirit of modern liberal education is rooted in the understanding that the child is to be kept at the centre of educational planning and practice. However, the dominant practices in school education belie this supposition since the focus continues to be on formal learning, through which students are trained to seek what may be labelled as 'objective knowledge' from books, teachers, computer programmes, or internet. Further, since the spectrum of subjects to be studied is very vast, the school years are spent by the child in just assimilating objective knowledge in different subjects. This objective knowledge is then usually tested by 'objective' measures of assessment to arrive at an 'objective' conclusion about whether the child has learnt or not.

In this scenario, aesthetics, criticality, creativity, empathy, self-awareness, interpersonal relationships, and care are some aspects of a child that do not find any space in the classroom, probably because it is difficult to translate them

into measurable cognitive-behavioural objectives. They are at present referred to as co-scholastic aspects of learning, implying that they cannot be learnt, studied, or known in 'scholarly ways', and as if they are secondary in importance to the scholastic aspects of schooling like doing mathematics, science and knowing the history of the world. This division of educational activities into categories like curricular and co-curricular, and scholastic and co-scholastic establishes a hierarchy of disciplines, the notion of a child as a summation of parts and also provides insights into what the school thinks is *worth* learning.

The relegation of the more humane aspects of life to a position of lesser importance, is also probably a result of market forces impacting school education in today's world. They have commercialised the schooling process and commodified the child. As a result, learning has become synonymous with achievement and performance, reflected through objective indicators like marks, percentiles, ranks, etc, in the score cards of children. In fact the marks obtained by children across subjects have become

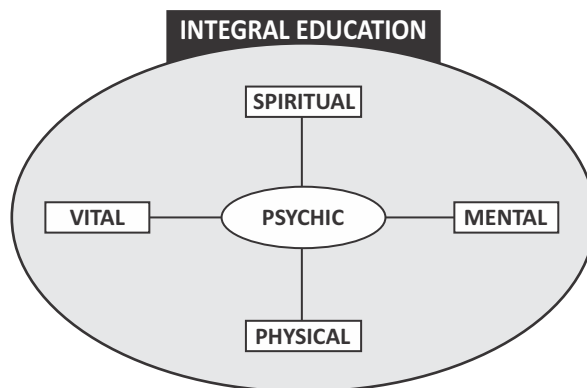


the indicators of *quality* in education and assessment has become the focal activity of educational institutions. Various kinds of assessment tools and schedules have begun to get designed, ostensibly based on criteria that are claimed to be rational, objective, and impartial. In the name of the various *innovative* assessment methods being promoted as part of school practices, the learning experiences of children are being reduced to cognitive and behavioural domains as they are amenable to standardized assessment. Thus, 'meritocratic individualism' (Hargreaves, 1980) seems to form the basis of the assessment mechanisms followed by schools. Here, individual performances and competition form the core of the educational process. Though conceptualized to facilitate learning, slowly and gradually these assessment tools start determining the conceptualization, organization, and practices of the classroom. It seems that "the tail of the test wags the body of the curriculum" (Apple & Beane, 2006, p. 10) and the teachers are now encouraged to engage in 'teaching to the test' that implies that "teachers are doing something special to help students do well on a test, often without helping them to better understand the underlying subject matter" (Firestone & Schorr, 2004, p. 2).

This paper intends to break the myth that meritocratic individualism is essential for a successful educational system. It presents a description of a few practices in schools based on the ideas of Krishnamurti, Sri Aurobindo, and Tagore, particularly with reference to the child's holistic development. Since the paper focuses on assessment practices and their interface with children's development, the subsequent discussion focuses on the ways of assessment that are used in the three institutions and some important issues about children's holistic development that emerge from them.

Mirambika, SAICE, and the Integral child in the thought of Sri Aurobindo

The Sri Aurobindo International Centre for Education (SAICE) was established in the Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry in 1943. Mirambika came into being in 1981 inside the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Complex in New Delhi. Both



SAICE and Mirambika school are entrenched in the Integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, which aims at an integral development of a child, i.e. one that unifies the development of the various aspect of the self. The various aspects of Integral development of the child can be summarised in the adjoining diagram. Assessment and evaluation are not viewed as something terrifying and stressful and neither are they a one-time activity but a part of their everyday life that the students themselves feel are important. For the students in the Integral education system, evaluation is all about finding spaces for self-affirmation as well as self-improvement. Students "are not passive recipients of knowledge... rather they actively seek intellectual stimulation..." (Baniwal, 2012, p. 246).

In the spirit of the three principles of Integral education by Sri Aurobindo, i.e. 'nothing can be taught', 'move from near to far', and 'the mind has to be consulted in its own growth', assessment and evaluation are "continuous processes, with emphasis on evaluating competence and the development of qualities... Evaluation is looked upon as part of a process, of self-awareness where one comes to one's weakness and strengths, capacities and qualities and takes responsibility for one's personal growth" (Passi, 1997, p. 64).

The various, "self-referenced assessments in the school are not related to grading, ranking, certification or upward mobility of classes... Evaluations are descriptive assessments providing a comprehensive profile of the child." (Sibia, 2006, pp. 83-84). Therefore, the children are encouraged to record, observe, and reflect while undertaking different activities. This nature of evaluation being

Expressions India



diagnostic, both participatory and individualised, and promoting self-understanding self-awareness changes the attitudes of both the children and their teachers (whom they lovingly call *diyas*, a combination of *did* and *bhaiya*).

It is also not essential that the assessment and evaluation are carried out individually; they can be sometimes “done by children in groups” and at times “jointly by teachers and children” (Sibia, 2004). These group and joint collaborative efforts during assessments and evaluations “are influenced by the school philosophy, which stresses the undesirability of comparisons and competition among students in any of the school processes” (Sibia, 2004). The assessment and evaluation system, in Integral Education thought, “gives positive feedback, is diagnostic and helps students to understand what has to be strengthened and identify the next goals in the learning process” (NCERT, 2005, p. 14). It is not seen as something threatening; a mistake is looked upon as something that helps to find out where more attention is needed (Passi, 1997, p. 64).

The intention of their assessment practices, as teachers in Mirambika believe, is not to “assess the child to show his weaknesses, but to show him how much he has learnt” (Sibia, 2004). The attempt is to let the child know how much s/he has learnt during the process. Thus, there are no tests, marks, and grades in these schools, yet “assessment is multi-dimensional. No child fails- there is never any need” (Mehrotra, 2007, p. 33).

The evaluation methods are intricately connected with teaching methods. The main teaching method is project work, which is carried out by children as research and a number of resources are provided to them for this. Though no specific books are prescribed, project specific books and dictionaries are kept in the classroom for the use of children whenever required. The library is consulted and other resource rooms like the computer room, science lab, biology lab and activity room are used by children as and when needed. The project work may include one or more of the activities mentioned above like drama, dance, music, art, craft, films, excursions, research and investigation. There is ample space for the emotive development

of the students. They are immensely self-reflective in reference to students of their age from conventional schools. They keep a note of their feelings, emotions, and thoughts even during their everyday activities (Baniwal, 2012, p. 244). The project work is then documented electronically, or in the form of charts, files, models etc. The documentation is followed by presentations, discussions, applications etc. on which the other children and *diyas* give their feedback and the evaluation is based on the feedback. The information is expected to be assimilated and utilized and integrated with the previous information. The whole process aims at self-striving towards perfection through self-improvement.

If one were to write in brief about the salient features of the 'Free Progress System', then the following words of Prof. Kireet Joshi (1970) best describe them:

“The structure is oriented towards the meeting of the varied needs of the students, each one of whom has his own special problems of development”;

“the aspiration, the need for growth, experience of freedom, possibility of educating oneself, self-experimentation, discovery of the inner needs and their relation with the programme of studies, and the discovery of the aim of life and the art of life” are all valued and given space in the institution

“In the system, each student is free to study any subject he chooses at any given time; but this freedom has to be guided; the student should experience freedom; ... the student has therefore to be watched with care, sympathy and wisdom; the teacher must be a friend and a guide, must not impose himself, but may intervene when necessary”.

“A great stress falls upon the individual work by the students”.

Studies, like (Pathak, 2002), (Sailaja, 2002), (Sibia, 2006), (Baniwal, 2012) have repeatedly affirmed that in the free-progress schools rooted in the Integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, holistic development of children is a reality.

The School, The Valley School, Rajghat Besant School, Sahyadri School, and the free child in

Expressions India



the thought of J. Krishnamurti

One of the important thinkers of the twentieth century, who refused to systematize and be systematised was Jiddu Krishnamurti. There are many schools that are managed by the Krishnamurti Foundation of India, which are spread across India. Established at different times, it is of great intellectual interest to understand how an institution like school, which needs a system, can be built on the foundations of Krishnamurti's thought that defies any systematization; and to witness the myriad ways in which freedom, a concept central to Krishnamurti's thought, has found space within school, especially in the context of evaluation.

Focusing on assessment and evaluation, which are the focus of this paper, one finds that in a Krishnamurti school, comparison of one child with another and therefore in evaluation is resisted. The various assessment tasks might include “projects, assignments, classroom presentations- testing an array of abilities, rather than just memory” (Vittachi, Raghavan, & Raj, 2007, p. 142). Parents' assessment of the learning of their own child is also considered significant in KFI schools. “In September parents send a report to school on their children based on the observation made at home. This report facilitates a joint awareness and understanding of the child by the school and home” (The School KFI Website, 2016). Parents receive such reports twice in an academic year. Thus, there is a systematic and continuous assessment of students' progress which is non-comparative yet comprehensive and it is also able to point towards possibilities for growth.

The teacher is “not evaluating in order to compare one child with another or to rank them or to hold one child as an ideal for another child to imitate or follow” (Krishna, 2001). Evaluation is not about judging the child but it is “a description of the present state of development of that child” (Krishna, 2001), physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Following Krishnamurti's ideas, these schools encourage cooperation rather than competition, fraternity rather than rivalry, respect rather than hierarchy or

domination.

Further, to develop sensitivity, calmness of mind, focus, and a reflective attitude. “sessions are held to learn self-understanding and to appreciate the value of silence” (Vittachi, Raghavan, & Raj, 2007, p. 142). Various contemporary social issues are discussed in the classes with diverse pedagogies like “group learning, films, debates and library research; there is a strong emphasis on developing the senses and learning directly from nature” (Vittachi, Raghavan, & Raj, 2007, p. 142).

The intent here is to develop the whole being rather than only one or few aspects of it. Prolonged engagements with different disciplines like fine arts, sports, music, theatre, literature, science, nature, and addressing children's curiosities are the stepping stones towards a life that is lived with wisdom, depth, and compassion for others. Thus, in Krishnamurti schools, “while developing the students' intellectual faculties, there is a conscious effort towards creating a wider awareness of the world and giving space for the development of the aesthetic, moral and emotional dimensions” (Vittachi, Raghavan, & Raj, 2007, p. 142).

Every possible attempt is made to provide an atmosphere of freedom to the student. For example, “in Classes IV to VIII, the curriculum encourages observation, working with one's hands, enquiry, reflection and creative expression” (Vittachi, Raghavan, & Raj, 2007, p. 198). In senior classes, students take a lot of responsibility for the school as well as of the surrounding areas of the school. They are expected to organise and participate in the various clubs and activities; “to name a few—film club, writers' forum, reporters' club, reading club, listening club, cosmos club, music and theatre club, sketching club, papier-mâché, macramé, conversations about life, cooking club and handyman club” (Vittachi, Raghavan, & Raj, 2007, p. 198). They also participate in programmes designed for the benefit of surrounding areas, nature as well as villages.

Since, KFI schools are till standard XII, thus, unlike Mirambika, in order to get admissions in higher education courses the “KFI students take the public examinations at the end of tenth and twelfth



standard” (The School KFI Website, 2016). To make their students at ease with such exams, term-end examinations are held after standard VIII. The students are not afraid of these exams and these are also conducted in ways that make them spaces for reflection, expression of one's thoughts, critical reflection, and a continued dialogue with oneself and the world.

Patha Bhavan and the 'Whole Child' in the thought of Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore's school, Brahmacharyashram, was established in 1901 in Shantiniketan. It was later renamed Patha Bhavana in 1925. In the natural settings of this school, the aim of education, for Tagore, was for one to become a 'total man', as “one who thinks of himself first and foremost as a human being... irrespective of his socio-economic placing, of his caste, creed and religion” (Gupta, 2005, p. 29). This spirit is clearly reflected in the prayer *'Where the mind is without fear'* from Gitanjali (1912).

Tagore envisioned “his students to think in terms of the whole of mankind. He wanted them to become universal men and women like himself and to overcome feelings of narrow nationalism in order that the world could live and grow in peace and fellowship” (Jha, 1994, p. 11). He rejected any sort of boundary that is imposed on human mind by any other human being. “He was one of the first in India to argue against the colonisation of human thoughts in evolving an educational system that aims at freedom of mind in a rural backdrop, away from confining structures and in close proximity with natural elements” (Vittachi, Raghavan, & Raj, 2007, p. 255).

Patha Bhavana strives to set an example in teaching standards by following an innovative curriculum of joyful learning, which aims to inspire the creative and scientific temperament of the children” (Vittachi, Raghavan, & Raj, 2007, p. 256). In place of the prevailing curriculum that emphasised on students to pass through examinations in order to secure some kind of job, he conceived of a curriculum “that would have the inbuilt ideas of surplus, variety, depth and utility. He wanted the curriculum to be related to daily life

by which students would be able to address the situations that they encountered” (Bhattacharya, 2014, p. 49).

In Patha Bhavan, there are no annual examinations and competition is also not encouraged among students. “Students from Class VIII sit for 'Practice Examination' sessions to test their abilities in writing examination papers, which helps them in the secondary examination” (Vittachi, Raghavan, & Raj, 2007, p. 256), which is akin to the practice in KFI schools. However, even in these examinations, the spirit is quite different from the conventional system, which is reflected in the following words of a former student:

“The system of examination too was quite innovative; the teachers would give out the questions and we could sit wherever we wanted; there was no system of invigilation. I had tried to take advantage of the situation but was rebuked by my classmate that this would be breaking the trust that the teachers had placed on us”.

(Jana, 2012, Translation cited in Bhattacharya, 2014, p.51)

One can see that Tagore was not concerned with intellectual development alone, but also the development of morals and character. Education must also be able to “develop a student's aesthetic nature and creativity”(Jha, 1994, p. 10). Here the concern is not only with the problems and challenges of life but the whole life, its meaning, the freedom to live it to the fullest, and to express one's creative potential. It was about the surplus, the beyond, transcending one's immediacy and become ever more human, ever more whole.

Concluding Remarks: Altering the 'Main-Stream'

From the discussions in the previous sections, it becomes clear that assessment and evaluation practices need to be an integral aspect of the teaching-learning process, but need not be rooted in cut-throat competition and in a form that threatens students and make them quit institutional education. The following are some ways in which



our mainstream schools can learn from the experiments of the three alternative schools described above, to make learning and evaluation an engagement rather than an imposition:

The Idea of Education and its Implications for Defining Assessment and Evaluation

Researchers like Vittachi, Raghavan, & Raj (2007) assert that the polar understanding of education as “either competitive and examination-oriented, as in mainstream schools, or learning at your own pace, and not necessarily doing well in exams ... The apparent tension between the two approaches, of pulling in opposite directions, we found to be irrelevant” (p. 133). These two understandings need to be unified by providing spaces of learning, exploration, and personal engagement to the students, for which the role of teachers, the ways of assessment, and parents' attitudes need reorientation.

Importance of the Teacher

The popular image of a teacher in a mainstream school as a meek dictator (Kumar, 2005), needs to be re-defined as an experienced partner in the learning process. The teacher is the first one to know and encounter the various curiosities, creative talents, and interests of a child and then helps to nurture them and take them ahead. Students' sense of freedom, empowerment, decision making, confidence, and various other forms of affirmations are quite often derived from how their teachers engage with them. In this regard, there is a lot that can be done in mainstream schools.

Experimentation with Assessment and Evaluation mechanisms

One of the major concern of schools is to standardise assessment mechanism in order to present a comparative report cards of students of a class. Parents must be made aware of individualised assessment reports with qualitative feedback rather than a quantified conclusion in marks or grades. Simple assessment activities may work wonderfully in classrooms but the teacher needs to be trusted and educated before such experiments can be carried out. For example,

“many a teacher will admit readily, it is far tougher to ask good questions than to answer them well. Alternative schools constantly experiment with assessment techniques so as to allow room for creativity, variety and individuality in evaluation” (Raghavan, 2007, p. 51). Similarly, peer assessment or self-assessment can also be used as a great way of understanding one's strengths and shortcomings. Rather than increasing standardisation and automatization of assessment systems, “if national examination policies demanded such innovations in the internal examinations of schools, this could trigger critical thinking and decrease the overwhelming fear of examinations that now cripples students” (Raghavan, 2007, p. 51).

Emphasise the Emotional and the Spiritual

Assessment methods and the understanding of education are interdependent. Schools using alternative pedagogies or organizational structures re-define the idea of education and of an educated person, which they constantly strive to realise. These ideas become the spirit and guiding forces of all school practices. In this context, mainstream schools, thus, need to find their own spirit rather than move with the flow of the market.

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Beyond Life Skills and Adolescence Education: Conceptualising Mental Health as the Ethic of Care

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Abstract *Adolescence Education, with specific focus on Life Skills Education, has been internationally recognised as a key area of concern in education. Life skills are defined in psychosocial terms to include personal, social, cognitive, and affective domains. In such an approach, the person is understood as a summation of parts and the notion of the 'whole person' is ignored. This paper explores the 'Ethic of Care' as a framework for school education and argues for life skills education to be subsumed within this framework. Further, the paper builds a case for life skills education to be understood within the broad framework of ethic of care. Where educational institutions provide opportunities to students to actualise and grow, life skills will develop simultaneously. The ethic of care will also ensure a more empathetic and humane society.*

Life Skills Education, conceptualised by the World Health Organisation, has been a major concern for the formal education system in India in the last decade. The Central Board of Secondary Education had introduced the concept of life skills education in schools as far back as 2003-2004 and had made it mandatory for all schools to develop and conduct these programmes, as part of their curriculum. In a more recent circular issued to all schools (2012), CBSE reiterated that life skills must continue to be an integral part of school education. The circular also spelt out that the main objective of the life skills education programme in school was to 'empower the affective domain of the learners so that they are able to develop a sense of self-confidence, eco-sensitivity and right approaches to life processes etc'. Likewise, CBSE has made concerted efforts in the last decade for the introduction of adolescence education in schools. In many schools both the programmes have been interwoven and have been introduced as a common programme. In this paper, an attempt is made to move beyond life skills education and adolescence education. However, before an alternate framework is proposed, an attempt will be made to analyse the existing frameworks in which these programmes are couched and discuss some

important issues related to them.

One of the landmark documents in life skills education was the one released by the Department of Mental Health of the World Health Organisation in the year 1999. In its opening stanza it has outlined the key objectives of promoting life skills education. The first and foremost objective is to facilitate the development of psychosocial skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate manner. Secondly, life skills education must also make contributions to the personal and social development of individuals. Finally, it must also ensure prevention of health related problems, as well as those related to other social issues. Thus what emerges is that the concerns of WHO are not confined only to the adolescents who go to school; rather they include those who are out of school as well. There is thus a need to have a more expansive notion of the nature of life skills programmes and their outreach. School, community and society at large must jointly share the responsibility.

At a conceptual level, life skills have been defined in psychosocial terms to include personal, social, inter-personal, cognitive, affective and universal domains. The major concern in such a conceptualization is that the person gets understood



as a summation of parts and the notion of the 'whole person' gets ignored. By focusing on only the psychosocial aspect, the affective and cognitive get artificially divided. It must be emphasised that the person does not function in parts. In everyday functioning in fact, it is almost impossible to segregate affective from cognitive. Further, the division of the person into different domains, also leads to a misconception that separate sets of activities need to be designed for promoting life-skills in schools and that life skills need a separate place in the curriculum. In the primary life skills document, the arguments given in favour of introducing life skills in schools are that they promote healthy development of children and adolescents. They also help to prevent children and adolescents from vulnerability to mishaps and diseases. Finally, they help in the process of socialisation and prepare children for changes in social circumstances. What needs to be pointed out here is, that these are also the broader aims of education and therefore already subsumed in the educational process. By advocating a separate programme, what comes across is that the proposed life skills programme either finds the existing school programme as inadequate, or it considers school needs, aims and goals as different from those that a life skills education programme is expected to promote.

Further, while discussing teaching of life skills, most documents support an activity based approach. The document by WHO (1999) states that life skills can be taught using experiential learning and a supportive learning environment. It also proposes the use of story-telling, discussion, debates, peer-supported learning as alternate methods. The problem with this proposition is that the activity based approach is assumed to be non-didactic. However, if a non-didactic activity based approach is used for everyday teaching in the classroom, then there will be no need for having a separate curriculum for life skills. So conclusively it may be inferred that inherent in the advocacy for a separate life skills education programme reinforces the view that what schools do in general to facilitate the development of children, is insufficient in fostering the skills that are required for the life and existence of a person.

Understanding the Ethic of Care

Drawing from the issues flagged in the earlier section, this paper explores the 'Ethic of Care' as an appropriate framework for school education and argues that this framework subsumes life skills education. The key idea in this is that life skills education has to be integrated into the everyday teaching learning processes that schools follow and woven into children's experiences of life at school, rather than introducing it as a separate discipline. It does not require a separate curriculum; rather it can be addressed and get inculcated if a care based approach to teaching is used. The basic question then is: What does it mean to care? Milton Mayeroff (1971), in his book 'On Caring' explains care as helping someone to grow and actualise him/herself. 'Caring' focuses on the actualising process, wherein the emphasis is on the whole person. It recognises a person as a physical, cognitive as well as a psychosocial entity, functioning holistically.

The actualising tendency that the ethic of care considers so significant is similar to what Carl Rogers discusses in his theory. According to him, each person is born with an innate ability to become self-actualized. All pathological conditions arise when this actualising tendency is inhibited or blocked. He further states that to help any person out of the pathological conditions, an enabling environment should be created without laying out any conditions of worth and providing unconditional positive regard. Unconditional positive regard keeps the sense of self of the person, buoyant. If we take Rogers theory away from the pathological conditions, then it may be inferred that a person can best grow in an environment that does not place conditions of worth. In his view, learning in its true sense emerges from one's own experiences; it is an act of reflection and self-discovery. So the person has to learn to trust his/her experiences instead of others' experiences. He thus finds direct teaching of little consequence in this regard. (Rogers, 1969)

Mayeroff (1971), distinguishes care from such meanings as wishing well, liking, comforting, or simply having interest in someone's life. He highlights the significance of caring, for the one who cares, by stating that care gives a purpose and



meaning to a person's life. His work describes caring in two domains: one is a general description of caring, its nature and characteristics. The second is about how care gives purpose and meaning to life. He argues that caring gives a meaning and purpose to the life of one who chooses to care. Whatever a person does for the one he/she cares for is out of choice and not compulsion. He states that care becomes the pivot around which the life of a person revolves. He also argues that care helps to harmonise one's self with the world. This harmony is not superficial, rather it is deep-seated and enduring. The basis of this harmony is the recognition that we are related to one another. He goes on to say that coupled with the feeling of care is also an element of submission. What he means by submission is that, when one prioritises things in their life according to what one cares for, a person may exclude some things that are interrupting the process of caring. This submission does not lead to bondage, instead according to Mayeroff, it is liberating. He further explains submission as recognising oneself as one is and accepting life as it is, without any pretensions.

Mayeroff uses the term 'in place' to explicate the significance of caring in one's life. This phrase is very important to understand what caring really means. In reality it means that care for something or someone, helps the one who is caring also. It helps her/him to create a place for themselves in the world. Let us see how this happens. The case of a caring teacher will help to illustrate this. If for instance, a teacher cares for a particular student, she will make the best possible efforts to ensure that her student gets maximum support to realise his/her potential. She is likely to spend extra time, energy and effort to help the student overcome his/her problems and obstacles. This enhances the teacher's involvement in the world. Thus the term 'in place' is not a social position; rather it is about finding one's own place by one's own efforts.

Nel Noddings (1984), in yet another refrain regarding 'caring', suggests that caring is as an 'active virtue' requires two feelings. One feeling is a natural feeling that flows without any effort. This can be the feeling that a mother has for her child. The second feeling emanates from the memory of

the moments in our life when we were cared for. It is this memory of having been cared for, that propels us to care for others. Thus the natural caring sentiment becomes the basis of the second ethical feeling of 'I must'. Ethical caring is similar to what Kant has argued that ethical is duty for the sake of duty and not out of love. But here the notion of ethical caring is not superior to natural caring, because the ethic of care maintains a caring attitude and that depends on natural caring (Noddings, 1984).

The virtue described by the ethical ideal of caring is built up in relation. It is based on reaching out and responding to the needs of others. Noddings sees the initial impulse to care as spontaneous and natural. According to her, each one of us has an 'I must' feeling as an initial response. But we do not often respond to the 'I must' because either we feel we are incapable of doing anything or we remove ourselves from the set of agents, who can actually do something in a given situation. Caring requires that the person responds to the initial impulse with an act of commitment. This act may be overt or the one caring may also abstain from acting if it is in the best interest of the cared for. The most important test of caring is the understanding of the intentions of the one who is caring. It also depends on whether the one who is caring, has in any way assisted the cared for in accomplishing his/her project (Noddings, 1984).

The second question is why should we choose to care? The reason why we choose to care is because of the genuine moral sentiment that arises from evaluation of the caring relations as good or as better than, other forms of relatedness. The person responds with the expectation that his/her response will enhance his/her ethical ideal. This value arises as a product of actual caring and being cared for and one's reflection on the goodness of these concrete caring situations.

Virginia Held (2006), highlights the interdependence of human beings on one another. In her view, the ethic of care thus values emotions such as sympathy, empathy and responsiveness. However, instead of focusing on raw emotions, the ethic of care places importance on emotions that are tempered with education and reflections. She also



states that care alone may not be appropriate because care also can become misguided. Benevolence and empathy may sometimes become overwhelming, leading to problems. Therefore, care has to be subjected to moral scrutiny and analysed.

The 'ethic of care' thus places the ethical ideal of care above principles. It is not that principles are unimportant, but the argument here asserts that they may not be able to say what to do in a given situation.

Life Skills Education and the Ethic of Care

When the aims of education emphasise the development of caring relations, then life skills are automatically subsumed under this umbrella. If we revisit the definition of life skills education, it states that the purpose is to empower the affective domain of the learners so that they develop a sense of self-confidence, eco-sensitivity and right approaches to life processes etc. The ethic of care gives voice, freedom and choice to the learners and thus it places the affective domain in the forefront without creating the cognitive - affective dichotomy. Even during the teaching learning process, Noddings has highlighted that importance be given to the learners instead of the subject that is taught.

The ethic of care also places emphasis on the teacher student relationship. If this relation is driven by compulsion and not by will, it may not lead to establishing a caring relation. So, caring relations are best guided by free will and choice. The obligations that are associated with this relationship are thus not forced, rather there is a convergence between what the teacher feels she is supposed to do and what she wants to do.

Caring for oneself therefore is an important aspect of the care theory. It implies that we become responsive to our own needs and become responsible for our own lives. Caring for oneself has important implications for mental health. By choosing to care for oneself a person will then take their own decision and also bear responsibility for his/her actions. The person will also be able to discipline oneself and strive to achieve what he/she wants.

To care for someone requires that one apprehends the reality of the other. In the school context it can be said that the school understands the social context of every child and then enables him/her to grow fully. There is no fixed direction that is predetermined. By asserting that each person inherently has a tendency to grow and the environment only facilitates the natural growth of a person, this framework rejects any predetermined and fixed objectives. Not everyone is expected to reach the same target. So there is provision for diversity and uniqueness.

Further, the ethic of care does not see teaching as a role; rather it is seen as a special relationship based on caring. The maintenance of this relationship is the primary responsibility of a teacher and every other function is secondary to it.

Every teacher works closely with her students and the caring teacher tries to see the world from the lens of her students. She also takes into account, the feelings and needs of her students and in the process, demonstrates to them how to be caring persons themselves.

Noddings discusses three means of nurturing the ethic of care: dialogue, practice and confirmation.

Dialogue in school would mean that everything that interests students should be brought to the classroom. It can be related to God, killing, sex, loving etc. School is an important site where these issues should be taken up and discussed critically. In fact schools must discuss things that are closer to life including talk about happiness and grief. The dialogue should include both thinking and feeling. This would lead us to move from our own feelings emanating from our deeply held values, towards understanding the feelings of others.

Noddings further extends the notion of 'dialogue' to teaching of subject matter too. She argues that teachers should also listen to their students and respond to them. The teacher should allow them to initiate the discussion. The purpose of dialogue is to come in contact with ideas and understand the other. It also entails engaging parents in dialogue.

As **practice**, schools must provide opportunities for shared efforts. These efforts could be in the



school garden, office, maintaining a clean environment or can be outside school where students can work with some agencies. The purpose here is the development of skills, but these are skills for caring and not for vocational purposes. Work as conceptualised by Noddings (1984) does not equate work for money. She suggests that the association between remuneration and dignity weakens the community based on care. Therefore, every person should be engaged in some form of work so that hierarchies get dissolved. She also feels that sometimes students should be forced to take up some task for which they do not have natural aptitude and talent. The rationale for practice is to enable people to share their success and failures. It should also help people in understanding what others are doing. It helps in developing respect for those who perform those tasks regularly.

The approach argues for cooperative learning and emphasises that students learn better in groups than individually. Thus the entire curriculum could be revisited to make it more experiential and engaging.

Confirmation, within the ethic of care suggests that we attribute the best possible motive to the cared for, even if he/she is found engaging in a task that goes against the rules. An example of this is when a teacher finds a student cheating, she says that 'I know you want to do well in exams' or 'I know you are keen to help your friend' instead of admonishing him/her. The contention is that the ethical ideal is present even in a young child. The

purpose of education is to enhance it. The young child should be treated gently and lovingly even in a situation where the school rules are violated, so that he/she develops a caring attitude towards others. It is not about promoting wrong doings but about the manner in which they are handled, so that the ethic of care builds up.

It is in light of the above discussion that I propose that we reconceptualise life skills education under the broad framework of ethic of care. If schools fashion themselves as institutions that give learners the opportunity to actualise and grow, then life skills will also develop simultaneously. The ethic of care will also ensure a more empathetic and humane society.

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Addressing the Developmental and Psychological Needs of Adolescents through Mental Health Service in Schools

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Abstract *There is no debate about the fact that mental health services in schools must become an integral component of the school curriculum. While this is not a new assertion, the truth is that despite reiteration for the need for mental health services in schools expressed in various policies, programmes and forums, their organised availability in most schools remains negligible or at best, gets restricted to very scanty and piecemeal efforts. An attempt is made in the present paper to understand what mental health in the school scenario means and spell out the significance of a mental health programme in schools. The key idea expressed is that the developmental needs and challenges of adolescents can be best addressed through an effective school mental health programme. The essential components of what constitutes an effective school mental health programme have also been discussed. The paper also highlights the role and participation of teachers in the school mental health programme and how they can be built into a rich resource.*

Keywords: mental health, school mental health programme, adolescence.

Understanding the meaning of Mental Health in the context of Schooling

There are various ways in which mental health has been conceptualised. For instance, psychoanalysis defines the “healthy” state of mind as one of self-awareness of one's unconscious and repressed feelings. Behaviourism defines it as adjustment towards societal demands and expectations. The humanistic paradigm sees mental health as the development of self along with the ability to lead a meaningful life in society (Ranganathan, 2012). The development of self here means the ability to become self aware and self directed with the ultimate goal of realizing one's fullest potential and deriving maximum satisfaction from self and society. The World Health Organisation (2001) defines the contours of mental health as “having the ability to adapt and adjust to the changing demands of the environment, enjoy fulfilling relationships and lead a satisfactory life”.

The position that I would choose to support is the humanistic perspective. For one thing, it is a refreshing departure from the definitions used in clinical psychology wherein the focus is on the

presence or absence of mental disorders. It instead emphasises the positive development and subjective well-being of persons as indicators of mental health. It takes cognisance of the fact that children and adolescents, during the process of growing up face numerous stressors and challenges, but recognises that these are transitional and so, with some support and preventive steps, they can be enabled to remain happy and buoyant. It reposes faith in their intrinsic abilities. The role of the significant adults around them is seen to be that of facilitators, who can provide support and a conducive environment within the given set of conditions. Thus mental health should be understood as a state of being that has to be promoted in all individuals, rather than be considered as the treatment of a disorder. It is in the promotional aspect of mental health in the lives of children and adolescents that the role of the school is of utmost significance.

Need for Mental Health in Schools

Malvika Kapur (1997) in her work on “Mental Health in Schools”, almost two decades ago, perceived schools as the “best places to develop



mental health programmes.” Spreading awareness about mental health issues, planning and implementing preventive, promotional and curative activities, providing adequate guidance and counselling services are all initiatives and services which can reach children and adolescents only through the medium of school. The argument that favours schools for housing mental health services also rests on the growing need for facilitation that children and adolescents have, given the complexities and pace of modern life. Also, since schools have as their main aim the holistic development of all students and enabling each one of them to build a firm sense of self and identity, the need for nurture, support and facilitation is immense.

The Kothari Commission (1964-66), more than fifty years ago had also advocated the importance of mental health services in schools. It held that, “Guidance services have much wider scope and function than merely that of assisting students in making educational and vocational choices. The aims of guidance are both adjustive and developmental. Mental health related services were therefore advocated as an “integral part of education” and “meant for all students” (Grover, 2006).

However, the kind of school services for addressing the mental health issues of students continue to be very inadequate and somewhat indifferent to the needs of school children. I would like to cite an incident to illustrate this. A sixth class student from a government school was asked by the principal to call up her home and ask her father to come and pick her up in the middle of school hours. The reason, it was said, was that the girl was “not well”. She was working on some school assignments in a free period, when she suddenly heard a voice asking her to bang her head, which she obeyed. Her sudden head banging on the classroom wall near her seat startled her classmates and the teacher. She was escorted to the principal's office by the substitute teacher. While she was waiting for her parents to pick her up in the school playground, a few other teachers and staff members came to inquire, consoled her, and then they walked away to take their respective classes. The sports teacher was given the responsibility of

staying with her till her parents came to take her home. One of these teachers interpreted this incident as a spiritual visit by a Goddess. He concluded confidently that Goddess Kali had appeared and ordered the girl to do so. This was followed by a ritualistic muttering of mantras and silent prayers to Goddess Kali by the teacher. He placed his hand on the girl's forehead and asked if she was feeling better now and whether her head was lighter, to which she meekly nodded. When her father reached the school, the same teacher explained his version of the incident and its causation and prescribed some articles for donation to the nearby temple as a solution, which the father noted down diligently on a piece of paper. This incident draws attention to how mystical and unscientific approaches in the belief systems of teachers can constitute the basis of classifying and reaching out to students in need. In this scenario, the real problem that the student is facing ceases to be important. Since adolescents are prone to various stressors, early identification and handling of their problems more scientifically, in tandem with established guidance and counselling approaches can be carried out only if mental health services become an integral part of the school organization. Apart from dealing with the problems, concerns and issues of students, an effective mental health programme can be also utilized to spread awareness about mental health issues and how life can be lived and experienced more positively. For instance, the challenges at different developmental stages that require transitions to be made, can be better addressed. During adolescence, preparation for puberty and the emotional highs and lows that accompany it, issues related to friendship and relationships, getting into appropriate academic schedules to deal with growing academic demands, dealing with peer pressure and resisting substance misuse are some clearly identifiable adolescent mental health concerns that need facilitation and guidance. Mental Health services can take care of these.

Parents and family members tend to rely on schools for the well being of their children and trust the recommendations made by school for their children. Given that this is a big responsibility, it is necessary for schools to have the readiness for this.



Mental health services would ensure this readiness.

Guidance and awareness programmes such as life skills, sexuality education, adolescence education etc. that help students to lead more informed and happy lives, can also be subsumed under the school mental health services. Individual counselling for students on a need basis can be subsumed within this service, irrespective of whether it is a simple guidance issue or a deep seated problem for which help is being sought. I would now like to discuss some features that characterise adolescence in India so that a better interface can be established between their needs and mental health services in schools.

The Indian Adolescent

The Indian adolescent is a unique entity. In contemporary times, he/she faces the situation of being in a transitional phase of Indian society - traditional values at one end and technological advancement and globalization at the other (Brown, Larson and Saraswathi, 2002). In such a scenario, the ambiguity of values that adolescents observe in the adult world, absence of powerful role models, increasing gaps between aspirations and possible achievement, not surprisingly lead to alienation and identity diffusion. Compounding this problem is the fact that because of the pluralistic nature of Indian society, there is not one but several adolescences. Caste, region, gender, linguistic group and religion all impact adolescence, creating several adolescent experiences (Choudhary, 2014). Adolescent vulnerability and proneness to 'at risk' factors have been highlighted as important adolescent issues that merit attention. Globalization has led to fast changing family dynamics in the country. Increasing migration and urbanisation uproots families and situates them in a vulnerable position due to lack of social support and firm cultural ideals (Brown et al., 2002). In the face of marginalisation this increases the risk of adolescents towards crime and delinquency. Globalization and its consequents such as the overpowering use of information and communication technology, increasing consumerism and exposure to media have altered

the experience of adolescence (Thapan, 2004). Television and social media dominate the lives of urban youth. They define their choices and shape their ideals and expectations.

Acquisition of knowledge and learning of various subject matters in the formal schooling format is in itself a challenging task. Inflexible and demanding academic tasks can become burdensome for students. Setting up of mental health services in schools usually counters the stress created by such demands and helps the students develop their intellectual capabilities without compromising on their emotional well-being.

Aims of School mental health services

Based on the above, some of the features and objectives of effective mental health services in schools may be understood as follows:

Nurturing human potential: Here the underlying belief is that the individual is inherently good and “given certain conditions, an individual's potential to make choice and decision can be utilised for maximum benefit to the individual as well as society” (NCERT, 2008). Hence, the focus is on developing the human uniqueness, worth, dignity and potential.

Building Self-Reliance: The methods adopted for engaging with the students should aim at making them understand and accept themselves better and become more self-directed. They will then take responsibility for their own lives. The assumption underlying this is that each individual is seen as having potential, which can be nurtured through providing them basic guidance in the form of life skills and counselling. The relationship of the mental health professional, which may even be the teacher with the students is seen as that of a facilitator, who enables the student to overcome and resolve their problems on their own.

Promoting Holistic Development: The requirement here is to give the developmental needs of adolescents due recognition not only in their educational, but also in their personal and socio-emotional spheres. This would mean that the school mental health services would encompass very diverse activities like career guidance, socio-emotional counselling, life skills development, nurturing creativity, awareness activities and so on.



This would also mean that the school mental health programme is not limited to a disease-treatment and is envisioned to support each individual student in their developmental journey. The focus of student services would be on building capacities and enhancing capabilities that include promotion, prevention, treatment as well as rehabilitation. Accepting diversity: The pluralism and socio cultural diversity that mark adolescence in India require an attitude of acceptance of the diversity and catering to varied contextualised needs of students. After RTE (2009), inclusion and accepting diversity have become mandatory. School mental health services can help to build up acceptance of this and propagate the attitude of inclusion. Professional development of Teachers as Counsellors: Teachers, by virtue of their roles and responsibilities are inadvertently counsellors as well. Students' needs, well-being, conflict resolution, harmony with peers, goal development process etc, are all part of their spectrum of responsibilities. This should thus get professionally acknowledged and as part of their professional development at both the pre-service and in-service levels, their roles as counsellors must be acknowledged and addressed. They can be provided training for this so that the everyday issues of students and their developmental needs can be taken care of by them. For more complex issues, networks with other professionals can be created. Here also teachers can play the referral and mediation role. Generating awareness in the Community: The school mental health programme is an important link between the school and community. Teachers' awareness about the community and interaction with community members that include parents and other significant influential persons, can go a long way in tapping and using community resources and build better home-school-society continuity for students. *On a Concluding Note.*

As can be seen from the above discussion, the aims of mental health services in schools are very broad and deal with a variety of different issues. The NCF (2005) talks about “connecting knowledge to life outside the school” for students, “enriching the curriculum to provide for overall development of children..” and, “nurturing an over-riding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country” as some of its basic aims. These aims converge with the overarching goals of school mental health services and programmes. They point towards the need for an integrated approach which once again supports the need for mental health services being integral to the school.

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Mental Health Concerns of Elementary School Children

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Abstract *The study attempts to locate the mental health concerns of children within their lived realities and everyday experiences as they unfold in the contexts of family life, school and society. It revisits the factors at home and school which impact mental health from the perspective of children and teachers. It also explores the role of school in promoting and maintaining the mental health of students. The mental health concerns of school children were identified through focus group discussions and interviews. The findings revealed several that a significant number of mental health concerns of children can be located and understood in the specific contexts of the school in which they study and their homes. Most teachers were found to be engaging in counselling functions.*

Keywords. Mental health, Elementary school children, Psychological well being

Focus of the Study

Schools play an important role through engaging with a large segment of population and preparing them for future roles in society. Thus, the acknowledgement that everyday mental health concerns need to be addressed to prevent serious mental illnesses later in life, has also led to the recognition that schools must be proactive in their engagement with students.

The present study thus attempts to locate the mental health concerns of children within their lived realities and everyday experiences which are located in family life, school and society. Each of these spheres is characterised by conflicts and dilemmas within which they live. The presence of someone with whom they can share their concerns, issues, anxieties, stressors and dilemmas is likely to help them maintain positive mental health. The study has attempted to relook at and rediscover these factors from the perspective of children and teachers and also see how school can help children to maintain their mental health.

A number of articles in magazines and newspaper reports have highlighted the concerns of children, which include: examination stress, increasing parental expectations, parental conflicts, adjustment problems such as change of school

from Hindi to English medium, depression and suicidal problems, emotional neglect and physical abuse, dilemmas regarding choice of career, peer pressure, queries perplexing them such as physiological changes and issues pertaining to sexuality, lack of communication between parents and children which manifests itself through stress and the “no-one understands me” syndrome and imitation of the role models that they see in media which lead to the inculcation of negative traits such as bullying and authoritarianism. (Vaidyanathan, 2012)

The context in which children grow has a significant influence on their mental health. The home and school are important contexts in the lives of children and thus need to be studied and understood. In the present study, it is the role of the school that is focussed upon.

Role of School in Fostering Mental Health of Children

Traditionally mental health has been looked at from an illness perspective which focuses on the cure dimension of mental health rather than its prevention, promotion and conservation. The implicit assumption in the illness perspective is that it locates the problem in the individual. Recent researches have however changed the negative



illness conception to bring in a more positive, realistic conception which includes the crucial dimension of 'health' in it. This conception makes an effort to view children in the context of their environment, which includes the socio-cultural milieu in which they live. It urges schools to also view children from the same perspective and recognise the fact the children too could have mental health concerns which can be prevented from becoming clinical concerns by use of promotional and preventive measures by the school. Ranganathan (2012) writes that mental health services in school cannot be derived from what happens in clinical practice. Rather, they have to be based on a set of needs, assumptions, and ideas which emerge from the practices in education, particularly schooling. Schools' role in mental health should be promotional, preventive, conservative and curative and unlike the clinical approach where the main emphasis is on curative aspects. So schools need to look at children as active beings who are affected by the unique contexts in which they live and accept that their mental health is also influenced by these contexts.

It is in this backdrop that the present study attempts to focus on the following objectives:

- ◆ To identify the mental health concerns of elementary school children.
- ◆ To explore the influence of teacher's behaviour and peer relations on the mental health of elementary school children.
- ◆ To find out the views and perceptions of teachers and the principal about the mental health of children.
- ◆ To examine the interface between children's schreasts.

Method

The study was undertaken in an elementary school in Delhi. The participants were children in the age group 11-14 years covering three grades - six, seven and eight, teachers associated with these children and the Principal of the school. Observation of the classes, focussed group discussions with the children of these classes and interviews with the teachers were undertaken as

the research strategies. The aim of the observations was to see the place of students in the teaching-learning process and identify the mental health concerns if any, that would emerge. Children were observed in their classes, the playground and during the lunch break. Subsequently, focus group discussions were carried out with each of the three classes, comprising of 30-40 students per class. The themes covered in the FGD were: Favourite Teacher, Preference for school or home, Reasons for fights with friends, Most boring and interesting days of the week, and Best and Worst Things about School.

Based on the data collected from the FGD, semi structured theme based interviews were conducted with three children from each class to get more detailed insights. The interviews also included a writing task that focused on tapping their inner world of dreams and fantasies and unexpressed feelings and emotions. The themes covered in the interview were: Teacher-student relationships, Family relationships including parents and siblings, Peer relations, and Personal interests.

To gain a more holistic understanding of the mental health concerns of children and how the school addresses them, the class teachers of the three classes and the principal of the school were also interviewed using a semi-formal interview schedule. The themes that were covered in the interview were: Mental health concerns of children of class 6, 7 and 8, How teachers address these concerns, Influence of peer relations on children's mental health; Challenges faced in addressing children's concerns; and What they visualise the role of the school to be.

Discussion

Mental Health Concerns of Elementary School Children

A number of factors that affect the mental well-being of elementary school learners emerged in the study. These include **issues related to studies**, such as incomprehension of a subject, problems in memorising subject content, expectation of parents regarding performance in tests; **issues related to home**, such as unsupportive atmosphere and/or



economic conditions at home for studying, harsh behaviour of parents, including violence; **relationship with siblings**, such as a difficult relationship with a younger sibling who gets more attention; and **peer relations at school and in the neighbourhood**, such as name calling, bullying, difference of opinion with friends, particularly during games.

The influence of these factors was visible in students in many ways. Non comprehension of a subject and problem of retrieving what has been learnt often led to associating feelings of fear with the teacher and developing a dislike for the subject. It also led to negative associations. For instance, many students reported that if they had seen a teacher scold someone for not being able to recall content in class, the child developed an unfavourable attitude towards the teacher, even though the child himself/herself may never have been scolded by that teacher.

Many students' developed a fear of the Parent Teacher Meeting that often arose out of not meeting their parents' expectations in academics. Most parents expected their children to be good in studies and well behaved in class. When teachers shared the performance of children with their parents, parents often resorted to scolding and even beating the children at home. Most students also shared that they like the teachers' friendly and non-discriminatory attitude towards them, and that teachers are concerned about them. The most frequently reported reason for liking teachers was that they do not scold or complain about them. This shows that a majority of the teachers' complaints are also attempts at suggesting improvements to the students.

The manifestation of home related issues such as an unsupportive atmosphere and/or conditions at home for studying was evident in the difficulties that children faced in completing their home tasks. These difficulties showed up behaviourally in some of them as being irregular in studies and less participative in class. Some children tended to lose concentration and became disinterested in classes. Some used to hit other children and become verbally abusive.

The next factor which is relationship with siblings is also related to the behaviour of parents. Paying more attention to one of the children leads the other to feel ignored and the child often develops negative feelings towards his/her sibling. As a result, the child may engage in attention seeking behaviour. The influence is generally negative where the child goes astray and develops wrong habits. This was also reported by teachers in the case of students they had come across in earlier batches.

While most students reported having several friends, all of them also reported fighting with friends and feeling troubled by it. Some of the common causes of fights included name calling, teasing, passing unnecessary comments, and bullying. Students also reported dislike for particular students in class who used abusive language or were rude in their behaviour.

Influence of Teacher's Behaviour and Peer Relations on Mental Health

The children were more comfortable with teachers who were nice, friendly, and understanding. The caring attitude and behaviour of their teachers made them feel more confident about themselves. They found teachers to be easily approachable. These aspects also made them like school, studies and look forward to coming to school, interacting with their teachers and learning new things. In the class, they also shared that they feel free to voice and share their concerns as they feel that their teachers would hear them out and their concerns would be addressed. They also felt confident about their learning abilities and were optimistic about the transient problems that they face.

On the other hand, if a student had witnessed a teacher scolding any student, then it created a fear in the mind of the child. The children also tended to associate the behaviour of the teacher with the subject that she taught. Thus, children started liking a subject that their favourite teacher taught and disliking a subject where they found the teacher's attitude unfavourable and vice versa. Most children appreciated a balanced, non-discriminatory attitude of teachers.



In terms of peer relations, the interaction with the children and teachers revealed that children had both good and bad relations with their peers. Good peer relations were most evident in their preference for spending time in the school, for it allowed them space to play, talk, study and eat with their friends. Friends were seen as a source of positivity and happiness in life as, persons to joke with and have fun and ease out their tension and worries through sharing their inner most feelings. Students also reported petty fights with their peers that they resolved on their own.

The negative form of peer relations became evident in the dislike that a few children expressed for few of their classmates. In specific cases, a child remained isolated in class because of few friends. Teachers also reported incidents in which specific children were ignored by their classmates.

Other forms of negative influences that teachers reported were in the form of bunking classes, not paying attention to studies and engaging in socially unacceptable behaviour. Positive influences included making children better performers in academics and encouraging them to take interest in learning. Teachers' interventions in the form of organising group discussions and also peer learning situations, such as a 'buddy system', played a significant role in improving peer relations.

The principal made a very significant point that if peer relations in class were good, then learners tended to cooperate a lot with each other.

Perceptions of School Teachers and the Principal on Mental Health

The various teachers were seen to conceptualise mental health differently. One of the teachers viewed it in the context of learning and studies and another as equilibrium between self-discipline and socially accepted behaviour. Anger and aggression among children was a common area of concern identified by all the teachers. The root cause of it was identified by them as exposure to aggression shown by parents at home and observed by children in the larger society.

All of them were of the view and sensitive to the

fact that students' socio-economic-cultural and familial background were quite diverse and unique and it was in this background that they made the attempt to understand and locate the mental health concerns of students.

The teachers also felt that there was lack of time, support and resources to address the concerns of children as the focus in school largely remained on syllabus completion. Some of them also felt that they were not trained in addressing the mental health concerns of children.

They also recognised emerging adolescent issues as a significant area of concern for elementary level learners. A special feature of the school is Adolescence Education which the principal of the school had started. Another programme which was conducted in the school was the Girls Guidance Programme which followed as a result of some instances of heterosexual relationships that developed among students. Teachers recalled that after the programme children expressed their concerns which they were otherwise hesitant in expressing.

Teachers felt that the most effective strategy in addressing students' concerns is talking to them. Scolding and hitting were not preferred. However in difficult situations teachers found themselves in a dilemma about the strategy to be used. They also felt that the strategies to be used vary according to the age of the learners.

The principal emphasised the fact that they enable learners to reason for themselves and choose what is right and what is wrong, rather than using punitive measures.

Another strategy which was emphasised by most teachers was to build up a bond between the parent and child. Constant communication with parents is maintained. Teachers intervene in parent child relationships and even visit their homes when deemed necessary.

Teachers were also of the view that teachers' attitude should be friendly and supportive. They should not view the child as only a student but as one of their own children.



One of the teachers also felt that the present system does not make any provision to train children to deal with their mental health concerns. Most of them talked about the situation in an all-boys' school being comparatively unhealthy. Also the class size was seen as a hindrance to addressing the mental health concerns in government schools where 60-70 students study in a class. They felt that the school was at an advantage since class sizes are small.

However, they also said that often concerns of most children don't come to forefront and remain unaddressed, particularly because of paucity of time.

Interface between School Life Experiences and Needs and Interests of Students

According to the need structure given by Maslow, until one's physiological needs are not addressed to some extent, other needs will not emerge. One of the teachers also emphasised this and was of the view that it is one of the most important determiners of mental well-being. After this the next need which may be a hindrance for children's well being is the love and belongingness need. Its deficiency was observed in many students. Those who get beaten up at home, those who get neglected in comparison to their siblings and those from dysfunctional families were not able to fulfil these needs. They were often also not able to pay attention in school. When their concerns remain unidentified and teachers also fail to recognise this, their situation becomes worse. If teachers recognise their concerns and satisfy their need through their love and affection, students felt motivated to study and develop positive mental health.

As for children's interests, students of this age group are in a transition phase between the concrete operational and formal operational stage. They like to explore, engage in activities, develop different interest areas and are full of energy and enthusiasm. All students in their responses showed a great liking for sports, computer, music, work experience and other activity periods. Their favourite subject and days of the week that they

found interesting or boring were also related to their interest areas. They wanted more and more periods of the things that they were interested in. They eagerly looked forward to the days which would have those periods. Play is another significant area of interest for school children and hence, many students wished for a bigger play ground in school.

From the above discussion, some implications have been drawn for schools to aid them in fostering students' mental wellbeing. Teachers' attitudes were significant in influencing mental health of students. A friendly, caring, and supportive attitude is the need of the hour. Teachers can benefit from being aware of the background of learners and the school can play a facilitative role in this context. A detailed profile of the students taking admission in the school can be prepared and handed over to the teachers of the respective classes. This will help the teachers to be aware beforehand of what kind of concerns a student might be dealing with. Organisation of discussion slots in the time table can also help in developing teacher-student bonds as well as their learning. Teachers can also play a strong role in building harmonious relationships and strong bonds with parents and children. Working in collaboration with parents can go a long way in ensuring learners' mental wellbeing.

Schools need to emphasise the preventive, promotive, curative and conservative aspects of mental health. They should organize guidance programmes and workshops with students. These would enabled students to see for themselves what is right and wrong and check for itself negative peer influences to a large extent. The school principal and teachers must have a positive attitude of belief in students' abilities to make judgments and take decisions. Their role has to thus be facilitative rather than instructional. The system needs to provide time and support services to teachers in the form of counsellors and expert help to maintain children's wellbeing. The school also needs to ensure it fulfils basic infrastructural requisites which cater to children's needs and interests.



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Understanding Middle Childhood in Urban Locales: Some Illustrations from Popular Bollywood Cinema

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ABSTRACT *Childhood is viewed as a unique period of life that lays the foundation for adult life. During middle childhood, there is a steady rate of growth of children and a continuous increase in their competency in various domains, including physical, linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional. There are multiple agencies that socialise the child. They increase in number and shift in importance as children grow older. The present paper focuses on presenting a description of the psychosocial world of children, during middle childhood in urban locales and uses illustrations from films to substantiate them. An important objective of the paper is to draw implications from their lived realities, for fostering their mental health*

Introduction

Children go through various stages of childhood as they grow up, namely infancy, early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence. My focus in this paper is on the middle childhood stage which in terms of schooling, covers the elementary school years. Conventionally, this stage is considered a period of 'calm years', where primarily, refinement of achieved milestones occurs (Richardson, R.A., 2005). During this stage, there is a steady rate of growth and a continuous increase in their competencies in various domains. Children are also expected to make many transitions such as, a new school environment; difference in expectations from parents; increased interaction with peers and teachers and a wider range of activities and exposure. There are multiple agencies involved in their socialisation. These increase in number and shift in importance as a function of the child's age, locale, gender and class. Academic pressures, cut throat competition, and comparison with peers are some important pressures that emerge. This period also demands adapting to the demands made by the school. These include: adjustment to a tightly packed time table, uniform, following rules and multiple teachers. Adjustment to peers and making friends with one's own and the other gender, are some further

challenges that they face. There is also a strengthening of beliefs about what it means to be a boy and a girl, and concomitantly, exploration of sexuality which takes place during this stage.

The important point of emphasis here is that this stage of life must be perceived as the foundational base for nurturing sound mental health for the adult years, as well. Attitudes, beliefs, ways of coping, all begin to get shaped and formed. There is thus tremendous potential to guide children and develop in them positive life orientations and skills that will enable them to lead more self-directed and relatively stress free lives., The World Health Organisation(2005) conceptualises mental health as the capacity to achieve and maintain optimal psychological functioning and well-being. Mentally healthy children have a positive orientation and outlook to life and can function well at home, school and in their communities. In real terms, when the psychological needs of children are satiated, when they experience freedom and fulfilment of what makes them happy, when they can be natural and spontaneous, when they can experiment with the world, when they have the assurance of being safe and protected, they begin to feel good about themselves and the world in which they live. All these experiences contribute to the development of positive mental health in them.

Expressions India



When these needs and experiences are thwarted, children's well-being gets threatened and what emerge are mental health problems and concerns.

The paper tries to examine all the above mentioned issues, as they unfold in the lived realities of children's lives both explicitly and implicitly. Some illustrations have been drawn from popular films to fortify points and ideas. The underlying assumption is that films provide a visible platform for expression of different cultures and societal concerns. Also, the relationship between popular media and society is reciprocal as movies represent reality, and at the same time, in the real world, people portray what is depicted in movies. To make the analysis more focussed, some important films pertaining to children at the stage of middle childhood were identified and analysed. The themes which came up through this process and which pertain to children's development during middle childhood, were then used to build up the framework through which the description and analysis are presented. The sections that follow focus on these.

Parental Expectations

The parent-child relationship is a very crucial factor that influences a child's sense of wellness. Parents' attitudes, values and beliefs majorly define the context of parent-child attachment, as they are the primary caregivers and the first socialisers in a child's life. Parents act from different conceptions of how to raise children. Their perceptions about their child's development and socialisation are important to know since they form the basis of their parenting style and expectations from their children. They also determine the dreams that they hold for their children's future, particularly their aspirations for them.

Many movies, such as *Gippi*, *Paa*, etc., have presented the myriad aspirations voiced by children ranging from becoming an astronaut, a tennis player, a businessman, a police officer, Miss India, a jockey, a veterinarian, spider man, a lawyer or a dancer etc. In the movie *Paa*, one child tells another "I want to be a dancer as everyone learns algebra and geometry. There should be a difference between you and me." Another movie, *Bombay*

Talkies, tells the story of a boy who did not want to join a football coaching class, much to the chagrin of his father. The father tells his son disapprovingly: "What you do not like is not important. What is good, for you is what is important. If you play football, you will become tough." This reflects that parents propagate various stereotypes and the established notions of society and also feel they know best about what is good for their child. A child's preferences and choices are either not expressed or are not given any importance. Parents push their children towards aspirations and goals that are usually set by them. These can often be a reflection of their own unfulfilled desires or their ways of earning social respect through their children's achievements. So, the child's academic achievement is seen as the achievement of the family and a matter for societal engagement. This phenomenon is especially visible in urban middle class families where education is considered important for upward mobility.

Children at this stage also begin to look outside the family for new ideas, associations, activities and various belief systems that exist in the community. This may lead to a conflict between the beliefs and values at home and those of the child's peers, school and community. Contact with a wide variety of peers probably contributes to children's awareness of different viewpoints. They become a part of the child's significant others and share almost equal importance in the child's life, as do parents. In fact, their growing influence may present a challenge to the family. There is for instance, usually a change in the parent-child relationship in the context of duration and frequency of interaction, content and sharing of school experiences, etc. Children also become conscious about what their parents can and cannot do and begin to evaluate them in the context of societal standards. This is depicted in the movie *English Vinglish*, where the central character's daughter admires her friend's mother for speaking English and rues over the inability of her own mother to do the same. The girl is embarrassed in taking her mother to school for a parents' meet or in letting her mother socialise with her friends' mothers, since she fears being ridiculed by her peers. Thus the desire for peer acceptance may at times, threaten the nature of the parent-child



relationship

Interactions in School

Children's interactions in school on a voluntary basis, are mainly with peers of usually the same gender. What needs to be highlighted is that the experiences that a peer group provides become a unique context for social learning- one in which children practice cooperation, leadership and develop a sense of loyalty. Peers also form a distinct reference group for comparison and for competition. It is observed that children in urban settings increasingly spend time away from family, in school and in other academic or physical activities, that parents themselves have enrolled them in. This leads to further expansion of their peer group. Cues about what to play, what to study, how to spend time, hanging out together, etc. are all drawn from their peer group. Children thus tend to engage in activities or actions that will help them to retain their peer group membership. Failure to conform to the rules of the peer group may make the child susceptible to ridicule and bullying within and outside the school, which he/she understands and thus avoids.

In today's fast paced and competitive world, the child is involved in many after school activities, leaving very little time for engaging in his/her own preferences. This is shown in the movie *Chillar Party*, where a child's parents are sending him to all kinds of classes after school. The child goes to a karate class, skating class, cricket class, scouts and tennis class all without any interest or motivation on his part. Such coercion by parents may lead to unhappiness in the child who may remain passively obedient or else become a rebel. The child may also find no space to engage in activities with peers that he would like to take up and lament about this

Another point of significance is that when a child joins school, there is a change in routine and he/she learns to manage the biological clock accordingly. What needs to also be encashed upon is the fact that schools are miniature societies which become a platform for socialization and also thus carry the potential to build life skills in children. School is the place where friendships are forged and broken and the child learns the rules governing

relationships with peers and elders. Supporting and enhancing the child's self- esteem and self- confidence are critical during this period and teachers can play a very important role here. Constant criticism on their poor academic performance and comparison with high achieving students leads to demotivation and loss of self confidence in the child which may have far reaching repercussions like feelings of self- doubt, loss of self- esteem. It is thus important to see middle childhood as deeply significant in building the base for a happy and meaningful adulthood ahead. As stated by Kapur (1997), "Schools play a crucial and formative role in the spheres of cognitive, language, emotional, social and moral development of children."

Sexuality

Sexuality encompasses feelings such as masculinity, femininity, desire, satisfaction, loss, love, hurt, joy, intimacy, loneliness, caring, sharing, rejection, self-esteem and joy. The later years of middle childhood are marked by the onset of puberty. Children start exploring relationships that go beyond friendships. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviour, practices, roles and relationships. An instance in *Bombay Talkies* depicts a boy dressing up like a girl, dancing on a song that has been filmed on a female actor. His father slaps him and tells the siblings that gender roles should not be taken lightly and that they need to think more seriously about what they wish to be, when they grow up. The movie *Rockford* carries depictions of school children, their struggles and childhood romances. Family, school and media, are important agents in transmitting behaviour patterns and values expected of the children by the society. One can find instances in films where a boy wants to grow up to be a female actor, his idol being Katrina Kaif, or a boy not being interested in joining a football team, wanting to be trained in ballet instead, or a girl wanting to join a football team and later playing it professionally, and the disapproval shown by the parents since these are contrary to societal expectations and normative beliefs. These instances highlight that sexuality and gender roles are issues of importance during middle childhood and so should be examined from



the lens of facilitating mental health instead of being dealt with punishment. The reluctance of parents and schools to provide relevant information is a matter of concern. They are not comfortable in initiating or participating in discussions about these issues. Providing children with education about sexuality will impact all aspects of a growing child. On the other hand, dealing with what is termed as 'deviant behaviour' of the child in a heavy handed manner can be detrimental to the mental health of the child.

Bullying

Bullying is characterised by deliberate intention to inflict hurt repeatedly. This may be done by taking advantage of being superior in strength, either physically or psychologically. Bullying can be direct such as teasing, threatening, name calling or manifested in physical behaviours such as hitting, pushing, cornering or by intentional exclusion as is depicted in the films, *Get educated: Paatshaala, Gippi* etc. School children may engage in bullying for no particular reason and may simply indulge in it for fun or they may be motivated by the desire of asserting supremacy and establishing their status over peers and maintaining control over their peers. Children who bully do not lack social skills, instead they deliberately select strategies to maintain dominance and power in social relations and purposely choose to bully the weak. Other factors that can be associated with bullying are school factors, like unhappiness in school and being disliked at school; and family factors, such as punitive parenting, lack of warmth, insecure and ambivalent parent-child relationship, and parental restrictiveness or over protectiveness. One cannot deny the role of aggressive models in perpetuating bullying. There is exposure to violence through mass media which the child gets. Families do not feel the need to discuss instances of bullying with their children unless their children are getting bullied. There is a need to increase awareness among parents and need to work together to handle the issue of bullying.

Media technologies and Internet

Media, technology, and internet have become an integral part of the lives of children all over the

world. These include computers, laptops, mobile phones, gaming consoles such as X-box, Wii, play station, Nintendo etc. In order to survive, there is a need to be familiar with internet and technology. The various activities that children engage in on the internet are for social networking, playing video games, and fulfilling educational needs.

The prolonged use of computers has replaced children's playtime and diminished their interactions with neighbourhood friends. Computer activities have also substituted children's interests and hobbies such as artwork, sports, reading etc. New media have permeated young lives and culture so much that they are constantly and always in contact with their friends, peers and teachers. This may impact their sense of identity and autonomy (cited in U. Nayar, 2012). Social networking sites make it easy for children to project an image that may be or may not be their real self. This may bring about a distorted sense of self, leading to difficulties in the child adjusting to the real world (cited in U. Nayar, 2012). In cases where both parents are working, children's presence on the internet is both unrestricted and unmonitored. Sometimes parents do install software on computers that monitor their child's internet usage, however, it is nearly impossible to monitor such usage effectively and completely. Another side to internet usage is that parents are also apprehensive and undecided about restricting internet usage as it is considered essential for learning and is supported by schools. This increases the chances of interactions with strangers, in turn increasing their vulnerability.

Another form of bullying that children can be exposed to is cyber bullying. "Cyber bullying is a typical type of online harassment, which can be defined as hurling harsh, rude, insulting, teasing remarks through the message box, or in open forums targeting one's body shape and structure, educational qualifications, professional qualifications, family, gender orientation, personal habits and outlook." (Deccan Herald, 2015) The best and safest strategy would be to provide younger children with a safe, secure and private experience that allows them to interact with verified friends and family members without having to lie about their age.



In a country like India, the experiences of childhood may vary depending on various factors, such as socio-economic status, caste, class, gender, languages spoken at home, and the like. Children's capacities are growing and their competencies and perceptions differ from adults even when the context and situations are same. The manner in which children are perceived by society and by child rights experts, emphasise on the importance of listening to children's voices. This paper presented a description of the lived developmental realities of children during middle childhood in urban locales. It also highlighted the complexities of a child's world and his/her engagement in society. Some film depictions were used to also illustrate this. The main objective for such an approach was to highlight the potential that this holds for nurturing a child's mental health and the important role that the different socialisation agencies can play, particularly home, school and peers.

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Exploring the Notion of Teacher as Counsellor in Municipal Corporation Schools of Delhi

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Abstract: *The paper aims to explore the possibility of every teacher in the MCD school system becoming a helping professional and counselor, in addition to being a teacher. It focuses on the mental- health and emotional well-being of children and growing adolescents, especially girls. The paper also develops an understanding of how teachers view counseling and guidance and their own roles in this regard. Further, it provides insights on what all teachers can do, drawing from the experiences of those who are already engaging in this role. The idea is to explore the ways and means through which guidance and counseling can become integral to a teacher's role.*

Introduction

The routine tasks that an MCD school teacher is typically expected to discharge can be quite mechanistic and dull since they involve very detailed and elaborate record keeping activities, community based activities, participation in different data drives and tasks commissioned by the government, leaving very little effective time for teaching and interaction with children. Teachers wishing to engage with children find very little time to do so since their work profile precludes this. This does not however mean that MCD teachers don't want to teach or engage with children. However, most often despite their best intentions, it is very large classroom sizes, excessive administrative work and inadequate number of teachers in the school that skew the teacher student ratio which pose major hurdles and challenges to their intentions.

While the developmental expectations are similar for all children, the public opinion about MCD schools tends to be very negative. The belief is that almost no learning takes place in these schools, most teachers are disinterested in their jobs, children come essentially to derive benefits like the mid-day meal, scholarship money etc. and not out of interest in Education. Worries about low achievement in MCD schools, a high rate of absenteeism and drop outs have been articulated in

different researches since the last twenty years. And yet what is lost sight of is the fact that since vast numbers of children enroll in MCD schools, especially since the implementation of the Right to Education Act 2009, and the efforts of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in the last decade, the challenge is even greater. Children remain children and

irrespective of the kind of school in which they are located, they need guidance and facilitation in dealing with their developmental needs. The transition from early to middle to late childhood is not automatic. It has to be facilitated. What compounds the problem is the secular trend in puberty wherein it is observed all over the world that there has been an acceleration in the age of puberty (Ranganathan, 2006; Vaidyanathan, 2012). Breast budding and menarche for many girls commence around the age of nine. Puberty is in any case a process marked by bodily changes, their psychological concomitants and rapid hormonal activity. The sense of bewilderment and awkwardness that accompany it, especially for the growing girl have been documented in many studies (Ranganathan, 2010; Andana 2010; Unger and Crawford 2000). Many life changes begin to mark the girl's life. There are regulations on dress, going out, social interaction and a long list of moral injunctions that the girl has to abide by. For many girls, especially in MCD schools, homes are not



supportive or sensitive to the problems of growing up. This makes it all the more imperative for teachers to play the facilitative role.

It would be important at this point to highlight some of the problems that arise from the socio cultural backgrounds from where most children enrolled in MCD schools come from. I have observed since the time that I joined the MCD system that most of the students enrolled in these schools come from the lower income group and their parents, either one or both, spend most of their time, earning their living. It is also seen that such parents are either partially educated or simply non literate. In a few of the cases, parents are not even able to exhibit good moral standards to their daughters, because they consume liquor or indulge in some form of substance addiction or the other. The mothers are usually completely pre-occupied.

Mental health concerns and the developmental needs of children do not find clear mention or explicit articulation in the role profile of MCD school teachers or in the in service training programmes. It appears as if the psychological well-being of children is peripheral to the process of their education and best left to individual teachers to interpret it in their own way. Most teachers thus do not consider guidance and counseling of children as their responsibility.

Since the number of trained helping professionals in Mental Health are few in number and grossly short of what the needs in schools add up to, the vision plan of school mental health services, vests the teacher with the major responsibility of taking on the guidance and counseling function.

The present study attempts to explore the readiness of MCD school teachers to take on this role. The intent is thus to know their views and perceptions, their notions about the learners whom they teach, their understanding of what counseling involves and map what they see as potential barriers, if any. The attempt is also to explore the problems, difficulties and hardships that students face with a view to identifying their counseling needs. Since parents are very significant persons in the schooling process of their children, an effort has been made to gauge their perspective as well and know from them what their expectations from the

school are regarding the development of their children.

Design of the Study

The study has been designed as a qualitative research where the main aim is to capture the voice and experiences of the different critical actors in MCD Schools. These include the teacher, the students and their parents. Since the nature of the study is also exploratory in terms of gauging the need and readiness of the school for taking on the guidance and counseling function, the perceptions and views of all the three participant groups have been given importance. Their narratives as verbatim are what have been compiled and analysed. To provide spaces and gather data from a multi participant approach, tools and techniques which were open ended were designed.

The study was undertaken in one large MCD school of Delhi. In terms of socio economic background, the population of the school could be divided into high, middle and low socio-economic groups. However, a very substantial portion belongs to the low-socio-economic group. Among the Hindus, the Gujjars are the dominant group because they are land owning and wealthy. Most of the Muslim families hail from the low-economic strata. The school is an all girls' school having three different mediums of instruction: English, Hindi and Urdu, a nursery class and a special Pratibha section. There are 65 teachers in this school, of which 23 are permanent and 42 are contract teachers. Out of 65 teachers, 35 are female and 30 are male teachers. All teachers belong to middle-class families and stay near to the school. Maximum teachers have B.ED+ JBT+ Master Degree and belong to Hindi or Urdu medium. There are 20 Urdu medium, 40 Hindi medium and 5 English medium teachers.

There are various activities that are organised for students in which children participate and get prizes also. These include: Celebration of Independence day, Republic day, Organising Gandhi-Mela, Bal-diwas, Science-fair, Delhi darshan and Bhart dharshan, Sports and tournaments.

Teacher Participants

The teacher participants were 10 in number. I did



elaborate interviews with them and also observed some of their classes. Of these, 3 teachers were from the Hindi medium section, 3 from Urdu medium and 4 from English medium. All of them gave their voluntary consent to be part of the study. The following themes were covered in the interview:

- Teachers' perceptions about the nature of their learners.
- Their reflections on the areas in which they needed guidance and support
- Their views on whether they could assume the role of a counselor
- The ways in which this could be done
- Sharing of experiences of those teachers who are already performing the role of a counselor.

Student Participants

Approximately 240 girls were part of the student participants, covered through focused group discussions. They were distributed equally across classes 3, 4 and 5 and across the three mediums of instruction.

The Focussed Group Discussion was organized on the following themes:

Problems and issue area, where you want help.

Problems and conflicts you have with your parents and teachers.

Disagreement points with mother and teacher.

What should your teacher do regarding your personal issues?

You get angry on: teacher/parent/school?

Parent Participants

No specific strategy could be developed for parents since they all work and are not very forthcoming when asked to come to the school. I requested the students of my own class (5th standard) to ask their parents to come to school. 10 parents turned up and so I interviewed them. Since the sample size was small, I consulted teachers on the views that parents usually hold and share and they endorsed the fact that the views obtained from the 10 parents, typified the views of most parents.

Non participant Observation was used to gauge classroom processes and student related and teacher related behaviour. One month was spent on doing the observations. Broadly I did observations of the following:

Observations of students while in class

Observations of students outside the class

Observations of teachers while in class

Observations of teachers while in the staff-room

These were noted down as detailed descriptions and then analysed.

Conclusions

Perception of teachers about their learners

In the interview, when asked their views on the nature of learners, six teachers gave their views which in turn were very varied. In general what was seen was that most teachers used a lot of adjectives, phrases and metaphors to exemplify the nature of the learner. Some teachers felt for instance that the learners are children and therefore they are innocent, pure, 'mast' (carefree), good and pure at heart. Some other teachers focused on highlighting the high energy levels of their learners. The high energy is perceived in two different ways. On the one hand, the learners' energy makes them capable of doing anything but on the other hand, the energy is held responsible for the commotion that they create in school.

The narratives of a few teachers indicate that they perceive children as blank slates, who can be shaped and moulded. To define the relationship of a learner and the teacher, one of the teachers used the simile of wet mud and what a potter does with it. Similarly, other teachers also said that they can 'mold', 'paint' and 'polish' their learners.

Some of the teachers have used metaphors to characterize their learners, such as,

“Khalistan” (unfilled space), “Lotan kabutar”(Nuisance), “Kawwa” (Crow) etc. The use of these terms is to spell out that the learners according to them, are destructive, non-manageable and a nuisance. Interestingly, only one teacher has indicated that he/she perceives the learner as capable of doing whatever they want to



do. This teacher sees learners as having agency.

The narratives of teachers also provide insights about the ways in which they perceive the learning environment. They have used terms like: free, independent and self-exploring to describe the environment in school. Thus the perceptions about students are seen to be mixed. While some teachers do see students as repositories of potential and feel the need to facilitate them, some others perceive them as deficient in school readiness and in their behaviour and carry a negative attitude about their potential, capacity and propensity to study.

Problems and difficulties faced by students for which they need guidance and counselling

From the responses that emerged in this regard, what could clearly be seen was that the students report more of psycho-social problems. Since the participants are all girls, the school being only for girls, a gendered pattern has emerged in the nature of responses obtained. Most girls feel that their gender influences the way they are treated. The changes in the body make them more conscious of themselves and they start noticing that boys are staring or sometimes even following them. They also experience that there are too many restrictions that are imposed on them by the elders in the family. These include prohibition from standing at any place where there can be an easy interface with people of the opposite gender. Girls also regret the loss of their freedom because of the suspicion of their parents.

These reflections show adolescent characteristics like puberty, mental and physical change, mood swings etc. Many girls want that teachers should interact with their parents and make them understand their feelings. Here, the adolescent changes are clearly visible e.g. *“Baar baar meri comparison dusre bachchon se mat karo”, “Papa ko hamesha boy friend hone ka shak rahata hai”, “Mammi mujhe meri pasand ke kapde nahi pahanne deti”*. The girls also experience some kind of distress which is evident from such statements where they report feeling irritable, angry and also express a desire to cry.

The girls also want that their parents should allow them to study further. They have expressed the

need for assistance in speaking English. This signifies the social emphasis on learning of a language as an indicator of formal education. Probably from her experience of learning the first language the girl feels that if someone interacts with them in English they will probably learn better. So they want the teachers to interact with them in English.

They also have a strong sense of what typifies a 'good girl'. One of the girls said that she wants the teacher to assist her in learning good habits and refrain from bad ones. They have also named some of those habits which they classify as bad habits. Probably, they have developed this understanding in school only where the teachers constantly remind them of these habits. Another statement that indicates their sense of good and bad is the one that says that the teachers should protect them from bad people. Here the girl does not specify what kind of person is bad, yet it is evident that she has made such a demarcation.

The girls also want to reach out to their parents but do not know how to communicate their point. They want teachers to facilitate the dialogue between them and their parents.

Readiness of teachers to take on the role of counsellor

There are two dichotomous views that have come out from the responses of the teachers. Some teachers accept their role as a counselor while some are reluctant to take it up. The reluctance is voiced in the form of an apprehension because most of them feel that counseling requires special training and they are not trained for it. On the other hand, the teachers who are willing to take on this role, see counseling as integrated with the process of teaching and learning, although many of the willing teachers also expressed the view that an added training would help them to perform the role of a counselor. Perhaps, few teachers may be underestimating their capabilities which is why they have doubts about taking up something that they see as an additional role. A few teachers are uncertain about taking on an added responsibility. They feel that they already have too much work and do not want to take up another task. Counseling is therefore seen as an added burden by them. What



emerges clearly is the need to subsume counseling as part of the teacher's role at all levels: during pre-service training, during in-service training and as part of the role profile and expectations spelt out by MCD at inception point. Several myths and fallacies that shroud understanding about guidance and counseling have to be dispelled and the promotional aspects of mental health and how teachers can contribute to this need to be highlighted. Teachers have to also be told that as class teachers and in charges when they are expected to ensure the well being of every student and take action for it, they are anyways taking on the role of counselors. Thus the two roles have to be perceived in conjunction.

Experiences of teachers who counsel

The teachers who are already playing the role of a counselor perceive their role as one in which efforts should be made to reach out to those students who they feel are in distress. They also voiced the view that teachers who act as counselors must be patient and should try to understand the needs of their learners. By narrating anecdotes from their life they have made an attempt to explain the role of a counselor as they understand it. However, the emphasis of these teachers is more on students who are distressed and anxious due to some special incident in their life. Only one of the teachers referred to a common problem that most girls undergo and that is anxiety related to the menstrual cycle. They also feel that teachers have to maintain a demeanor that gives confidence to their learners to approach them in case of any difficulty. Another teacher also used a phrase 'learning hunger' for learners. The phrase may imply that she sees learners as essentially curious and eager to learn.

What appears from the teachers' narratives is the curative aspect of mental health.

Most of them are of the view that the counseling role of the teacher emerges only when students are facing serious problems. The promotional aspects of guidance and counseling for self and personality development and building resilience are not recognized as integral to the teacher's role. Likewise the everyday guidance and counseling needs of students are not recognized.

Expectations of parents from the school for the development of their daughters

Many parents want to make their daughter "Qabil" which can mean capable in English. However, the word 'qabil' ought to be situated in the cultural context in which they are located, for purposes of analysis. The statements that parents have made in response to the researcher's question indicate some of the probable meanings of the term. For most of them, school education is seen as a means to get better professional opportunities. Besides professional growth, parents also expect their children to understand social etiquettes that are associated with the notion of a good girl such as obedience to elders, deftness in household chores and ability to carry out day to day work. They also feel that school must teach their children good manners and should not make them argumentative. With respect to their girls' education, parents were especially concerned about their suitability for marriage. They felt that it would be easier to find a groom if the girls are well-educated. The term 'Qabil' is thus used in the context of gender expectations.

Most of the parents linked school education with the development of intelligence. A few parents associated it with other qualities like smartness, expertise, creativity and upgradation in life.

Specific area in girls lives, where they need counselling and guidance support

This was reflected through the girls' drawings which provided very valuable insights into the counseling and guidance needs of the growing girls. The feelings and experiences associated with their problems and difficulties found expression and articulation through their drawings. The main emergent concerns relate to body image and appearance consciousness, issues of growing up, the search for freedom, the need for friendship, the desire to have more understanding parents, the wish for more indulgence on their part, wanting to have a sense of feel good about oneself etc. These also helped to corroborate what emerged from the FGDs with the girls and interviews with them.

Educational Implications of the Study

Students' lives are getting more and more complex,



day by day. They are faced with a plethora of wishes, dreams and aspirations for which they require a lot of guidance and support. They have to make wise curricular and co- curricular choices, acquire basic study skills for optimum achievement, learn to adjust with peers and societal expectations. In its initial conceptualization, guidance as a helping activity, focused on problems relating to vocations. Now guidance and counseling have gone much beyond this. They are now concerned with the entire individual, covering all aspects of his/her growth, development and adjustments. The areas of guidance and counseling are very vast as presented below:

The school teacher cum counselor's first responsibility is to the students. The educational, academic, career, personal, and social setting, from nursery to grade 5, should be the focus in planning and delivering a developmental, comprehensive guidance and counseling program.

The diverse needs of students may require specific counseling expertise and so school teachers cum counselors must recognize their boundaries of competencies by providing only those services for which they are qualified by training or experience.

When students require specialized, intensive or

long-term counseling beyond, the role of the teacher is to make the referrals.

School should provide such opportunities for girls, so that they can flower and can identify their rights and develop their self-independence. Teachers must focus on their personal problems like early advent of puberty, bodily changes, relationships, sexuality and their security issues.

Guidance and counseling done by the teacher must aim at empowering the girls to learn to solve their own problems.

The focus should be on helping them to become more self accepting and self-directed.

Teachers as counselors can provide education, guidance, and counseling to all students in the school/ classroom through activities such as:

- Direct instruction
- Guidance education
- Team teaching
- Group and individual counseling
- Student support team planning

There is thus no denying that teachers can be very efficient counselors.



Field Notes and Personal Experiential Accounts



Classroom Guidance Program- An Essential Tool for School Counseling

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Abstract: *Children belong to a vulnerable and constantly changing phase of the developmental process. These changes require consistent monitoring, adjustment and support. The wellbeing of a child does not just ensure the smooth transitions during childhood, but it increases the chances of adding to society an adult (of tomorrow), with balanced physical and mental health. Hence, the counseling services in schools are important to ensure primary intervention, prevention and promotion of the well-being needs of all. Whereas, the task of intervention requires counseling expertise and availability, the prevention and promotion of well-being part needs constant outreach programmes, feedback and evaluation. To achieve these goals, the counselor takes on various roles including, individual student counseling, parent counseling, guiding teachers for dealing with referred student, and career counseling, etc. Each of these modes of counseling has its own significant effect on the counselee and on the objectives of counseling. In all of this, one method that often stays neglected, but undoubtedly serves as an effective preventive and educative program, is the classroom guidance program.*

Significance of School Years in the Developmental Process of Personality

To understand the effectiveness of the classroom guidance programme, it is important to view it through the eyes of a school student. Children in schools belong to the age group of 4 to 18 years. School aged developmental milestones include social, emotional, physical, moral, and cognitive development. The process of learning to communicate, share, and interact with others takes many years to develop. Children continue to develop their social-emotional skills well into their teenage years, or even into young adulthood.

Research shows that effective counseling programs are clearly based on human development theories that have universal relevance in understanding the developmental process, like those of Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg. These counseling programs are proactive and preventive; helping students acquire knowledge, skills,

attitudes and self-awareness, necessary for mastery of these developmental tasks. According to Eric Erikson, it is the stage of Initiative versus Guilt when a toddler begins school in India. The child experiences a need to copy significant adults around her and takes initiative to create play situations. Frustrations around these natural desires may easily cause guilt. Classroom guidance can be effectively used to instill the basics of socializing and accepting through story, narration and play. The counselor can prevent many a damage through prevention of guilt, by providing opportunities to initiate and encourage efforts.

The elementary years of grade 1 to 5 (6-7 to 11-12 years) correspond to Erikson's stage of Industry versus Inferiority. The virtue that they imbibe as a result of appropriate reinforcement is 'competence'. Throughout these school years, children continue to develop self-confidence through learning new things. If they are not encouraged and praised properly at this age, they may develop an inferiority

Expressions India



complex. According to Piaget's cognitive developmental stage they are transitioning from pre operational to concrete operational stage. Their language use becomes more mature. They also develop memory and imagination, which allows them to understand the difference between past and future, and engage in make-believe. Till grade 2-3, their thinking is based on intuition and still not completely logical. So very wonderfully can these years be moulded through classroom guidance programs on social issues like friends, family, virtues such as being fair, facilitate self control and appreciate diversity! A stage where hero worship comes naturally; a patient and caring adult (read counselor), presenting a food for thought in an activity based interesting method (classroom guidance programme) can work wonders.

As children enter Piaget's Concrete Operational Stage (7 to 11 years), they demonstrate logical, concrete reasoning. Their thinking becomes less egocentric and they become increasingly aware of external events. They begin to realize that one's own thoughts and feelings are unique and may not be shared by others or may not even be part of reality. The classroom guidance programs in this stage can focus on developing empathy, preventing bullying, identifying feelings, communication skills (using 'I messages'), being responsible (in school, home, on the street) and preparing for adolescence (physical, social, emotional and cognitive self care).

A bigger challenge both for the children and adults around them arrives with the phase of adolescence. Erikson perceived adolescence as the time of identity formation (Kroger, J, 1993). Adolescents struggle, by essentially bouncing their provisional identities off significant others in their midst—groups, gangs, girlfriends and boyfriends, heroes and villains—and seeing what sticks. Consequently, adolescence is an intensely social time, when the hunger for belonging, community, social status, and emotional closeness provide the context within which teens discover their identity. Failing this, they risk falling into what Erikson called role diffusion or the development of a negative identity such as “addict,” “slut,” “doper,” or all-around “loser.” What Erikson could see

decades ago through his studies, any counselor can observe happening in high schools around.

Hence, this stage of development brings enormous risk and long-term cost of any mishandling, miscommunication of the growing adolescent. The need of the hour is prevention and outreach. A structured, effective, classroom guidance program has tremendous potential to avail this opportunity of developing a child into a healthy and empowered personality. From a self directed child to a mature youth (journey from Kindergarten to Grade 12) one continues to consistently go to school, hence, the counselor with her focus on well being and preventive objectives, can utilize the teenager's innate desire and curiosity to learn, express, and be recognized. Can these young, energetic, trouble mongers (often misjudged) be helped to find direction and purpose? Yes, intervention is the answer. But the deterrence to the failure (of identity formation) through structured classroom guidance is certainly more cost effective and less damaging.

Influence of a Guide/ Positive Adult

During the classroom guidance program, the basic psychosocial needs for being respected, approved, achieving appreciation, are served through a counselor who approves of diverse views about the issues discussed. This provides students the opportunity to gain confidence of expressing themselves. Such programmes and respectful acknowledgement of their views help to bolster their sense of identity, and promote their cognitive and moral development. It is amazing how many youth are hungry to discuss these issues with a trusted adult, and how few are offered the opportunity.

With teachers getting more and more occupied with documentation in schools, they are not left with enough time to indulge in informal classroom discussions. Even the interactions during zero periods are now events of the past. In such a scenario the only solace the system has is the counselor. Whether in India or abroad (the USA) the students interviewed about the need for classroom guidance programs, have always expressed a need for regular guidance classes with a counselor. In India, most schools have just one



counselor hence, the workload often does not include classroom guidance. In the U.S., classroom guidance occurs in elementary and middle schools but high school counselors are busy preparing schedules and providing for college counseling, resulting in teenagers having no opportunities for direct interactions in class about their concerns. While teenagers may often exhibit a need for independence and freedom, at heart they look for guidance, a patient ear to listen, and an understanding adult who responds to them respectfully (Sehgal, 2014). The truth is that adolescents, despite occasional or numerous protests, need adults and want them to be part of their lives, recognizing that they can nurture, teach, guide, and protect them on the journey to adulthood (APA, 2002).

Numerous studies have shown that the presence of an adult—a parent or someone other than a parent—with a strong positive, emotional attachment to the child is associated with resilience (Garbarino, 1999). For some youth, it is also a source of safety and stability. Some of the same qualities that characterize families of adolescents who do well—a strong sense of attachment, bonding, and belonging, and a feeling of being cared about—also characterize adolescents' positive relationships with their teachers and their schools. One additional factor, adolescent perception of teacher fairness, has also been found to be associated with positive adolescent development (APA, 2002). Because schools are such a critical setting for adolescents, it is the most effective medium that the society has, in order to create a support system. And none can do the required justice to this prevention program, as a counselor can.

The Structure of Classroom Guidance Programs

The effectiveness of classroom guidance comes from the structure of the program. The counselor uses professional skills of being friendly, respectful of different opinions and non judgmental. She eases the difference of viewpoints in a way that nobody tries to play defensive, one can participate in a non-critical and unthreatened

environment, use rationale and logic in deriving key messages and use day to day events and concerns that are age appropriate, and students can relate to the topic personally.

During adolescence, transitions can present challenges, both to academic performance and psychological well-being. Therefore, the structure of classroom guidance includes age appropriate topics. The objective is to empower students; hence the curriculum of the classroom guidance program must be according to their choice. Choose a topic that is relevant to adolescents (e.g., deciding how to deal with an interpersonal conflict, identifying strategies for earning money for college) (Keating, 1990). Discuss ethical and moral problems that are in the news. Encourage the adolescent to think through the issues out loud. Without challenging his or her point of view, wonder aloud about how others might differ in their perspective on the issue and what might influence these differences (Santilli & Hudson, 1992). Hence, outreach goal is to include relevant topics related to student's life and psychosocial development that go on consistently to empower, to develop life skills and resilience.

Yet another aspect of structure includes the methodology used to deliver the key messages. The most relevant messages are the ones that come from within, and to elicit a response from within a participative and interactive technique need to be used depending on the type and age of the class group. The combination of techniques (e.g., brainstorming, small group discussion, role play, case study, etc.) however, works better in order to involve each student in class activity. This contribution by each student will bring real learning. All students must be given the message that they are worthwhile, there are people who care about them, and that there are resources available to meet their needs.

Topics of Developmental Relevance

Suggestive Classroom Guidance Plan

As mentioned before, classroom guidance allows school counselors to address student needs, work on issues that are of concern to the particular age-group, inform students of school-wide



opportunities, prepare them for transitions in psycho-social process of development, distribute information about educational resources and postsecondary opportunities, etc.

A tentative plan is presented as an example; although all the listed topics can be designed for each age-group and many more significant themes added.

Grade 2- Identifying and expressing feelings, being kind-(hard words and soft words)

Grade 3- Being fair, making friends, following directions

Grade 4- Be a safe and smart kid 'Good touch –bad touch', understanding our bodies and preparing for menstruation (girls)

Grade 5- Complementing versus complaining, saying no to bullying, preparing for teenage, life skill- empathy

Grade 6- Introduction to counseling, study habits, cyber safety

Grade 7- Self awareness-a life skill, handling peer pressure, accepting diversities

Grade 8- Growing up issues-changes in body/mind and attractions, preventing bullying, world of work (careers), staying safe from substance abuse-refusal techniques

Grade 9- World of work, building confidence and self esteem, effective communication, managing emotions, body image, and personality development

Grade 10- Selecting subject stream, anger management, adolescent reproductive and sexual health, interpersonal relations, family bonding

Grade 11- Application of life skills, stress management, no no's of life (value clarity), making impressions, handling examination pressure

Grade 12- Career guidance, balancing priorities (relations/ studies/ interests)

Scope of Classroom Guidance programs

Mental health is still stigmatized as a profession. Even in contemporary times, a number of parents

or teachers consider it a matter of shame to be referred to the counselor. Hence, a majority of students would rather avoid seeking help with the fear of 'what if' someone notices! However, instead of them going to the counselor, if the counselor comes to the room and addresses all the students together, the brilliant, average and below average, irrespective of gender, or any other discrimination, and talks about issues that are close to the heart, the effectiveness of counselling can be maintained. Moreover, the stigma about a mental health professional disappears with familiarity due to regular interaction. Most begin to see the counselor as a friendly guide and hence feel comfortable in walking to her room, even after the class.

Many children suffer due to poor social skills, shyness or low self esteem. They go through the stresses of being teased, isolated or inability to sustain friendships. Most of these children are unable to speak out these concerns or consult the counselor and often their parents/teachers consider the issues too insignificant to refer. Through classroom guidance, however, all such social adjustment issues can be addressed and the shy students can benefit in a non threatening way. The introductory program, 'Introduction to Counseling' by the author in sixth grade in every academic session resulted in a number of students seeking appointment for individual counseling. Hence, it certainly reduces stigma and enables the child feel comfortable in seeking help. The students who are referred for counseling by teachers or parents are few but those in the classroom constitute the entire population of students.

In conclusion, besides individual counseling, parent and family counseling, advocacy programs, age-appropriate workshops, etc; an effective tool for reaching out to all the school students is a structured, regularly conducted classroom guidance program. This would ensure healthy attitude and wellbeing, give students an opportunity to express their opinions and feelings and provide alternatives to their conflicts. Most of all it would reduce hesitation of students in general to approach the counselor in times of distress and de-stigmatize the counseling services.



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Understanding and Reaching out to the Psychological World of Children with Autism

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Abstract: *This paper tries to capture the essence of the psychological world of children with autism through describing their characteristics, their ways of social and institutional engagement, discussing what peers mean to them and knowing how they display their emotions and their sense of community. The text of the paper is based on extensive field observations and interviews with significant stakeholders in two varied settings: a special school for children with autism and an inclusive school where children with mild autism are given admission. An attempt has also been made alongside to suggest and describe how engagement with teachers, attitudes of parents and other students can be tapped as resources and strategies to reach out to these children and facilitate their inclusion in schools and society.*

One of the main obstacles in the life of children with autism is the inability to communicate with the world outside of their families, care givers, teachers, and friends. Kanner (1943), was one of the first few persons who described autism as a 'disorder of social affect'. Given this reality, inclusive schools face major challenges in promoting the socio-emotional well-being and inclusion of children with autism. The attempt in this paper is to build understanding about the psychological world of these children and suggest what parents and schools can do to meet their needs and characteristics and promote their socio-emotional well-being. The ideas expressed in the paper have been drawn from a year's fieldwork with children with autism in both a special school and an inclusive school. The fieldwork involved doing school and classroom observations, engaging in continuous dialogical interaction with the teachers and families of these children and also interacting with the children themselves. Some of the observations and insights that emerged are described below. They may be useful ways of descriptively knowing how children with autism behave and need to be dealt with. The strategies for reaching out to these children have been

interwoven with the description of their needs and characteristics. The main aim of this article is to demystify and reach out to children with autism.

I would like to now share my field observations about the features and aspects that best explain their psychological world.

Emotions and their expression: These children often find it hard to recognise and control their emotions. They also find it hard to recognise the facial expressions of others, are not able to comprehend the emotions shown by them, especially those that they themselves lack. As a consequence, they come across as completely lacking in empathy towards others. This can be observed very clearly in inclusive classrooms. They have a hard time identifying subtle expressions of fear and anger. This persists through childhood and percolates to adolescence as well. There is some variation within the autism spectrum however in how emotions are identified and expressed. For instance, children with mild autism tend to show their feelings in a similar way to normal children, but usually find it hard to describe their feelings. They often say that they don't feel any emotion. At the same time, the same age



children with more severe autism seem to have flatter emotional expressions than those of normal children.

In general with all children with autism what is seen is that they rarely take the initiative to reach out or draw the attention of others. They are never seen to point out interesting things to other people and likewise, nor do they respond to interesting things that others point out to them. They are thus unable to engage in any kind of joint attention, which in fact is one of the early warning signs of autism. This deficit in joint attention is often what leads them into showing less concern for others and poor ability to comfort others. It makes them misread situations and respond with emotions that are off the mark. For example, a child with autism might not comfort a sibling or a classmate who falls over, or might laugh because he doesn't recognise that the child is hurt.

What was also observed was that children with autism have trouble understanding other people's emotions because of the way they scan faces. They spend less time looking at the eyes and more time focusing on the mouth. This means the information they get from a person's face tells them less about what that person is feeling.

Thus teaching children with autism how to 'relate' to others is important and the schools where I did my field work were emphasizing this, in addition to other 'social skills'. The focus was on teaching them appropriate ways to interact. What I observed however was that they always seemed a little out of sync, even with good training with normal children. Somewhere, they felt rejected or out of place. They were teased or left socially isolated.

I also saw that not only do children with autism have difficulty in interacting with normal children; it is also normal children who struggle in interacting with children with autism. Thus, it is important that both groups be taught how to relate to the other and feel comfortable in the relationship.

Socialization: The other important aspect where I found that a huge challenge for children with

autism exists, is socialization. Learning by observing and following the leads of those who are more experienced, is one of the most natural ways of learning. In fact socialization occurs through interacting with others. It however requires the ability to relate to and stay engaged with others and follow their thoughts, feelings, and perspective. Since children with autism are deficient in these, their development does not follow the natural course of the process of socialization. Further, there is no social reference point for them from which they can know the other. Neither do they recognize that others could have thoughts, feelings, and perspectives that differ from theirs. They don't realize that the other person has information that is valuable to them, and so they can learn and "do better" by referencing those around them. As a result, they don't learn to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with even those who nurture and care for them. During my observations I saw that once the normal children feel comfortable with the child with autism, they enjoy being with them. They play with them from which their strengths and preferences can be inferred.

In fact, based on what I observed, I would recommend that teachers, aids, support staff, etc, should regularly set up and facilitate reciprocal interaction and cooperative play between children with autism and their normal counterparts. For, if the normal children feel "safe" with the children with autism, they will feel free to ask questions about behaviors and differences, as they play along. They can then be taught by the teacher how to support the children with autism through cooperative play, and ways to truly "include" such children. Peer support mediation works as an effective strategy in building relatedness.

How the need for emotional bonding with care givers unfolds: Children with autism do not perceive their primary care giver, be it a parent or a teacher as persons who are interchangeable. Rather they see the person as a secure emotional anchor in a relationship that needs nurturing. It is thus the relationship with the primary care giver that should become the focus and the catalyst for building



further social interaction and joint attention. Adjusting to multiple and varied care givers is difficult for them.

Friendship patterns: These children find it difficult to make friends. Parents and teachers can help them however to remain in contact with their peers and alongside work on the children's social skills. It was seen in the case of these children that even small friendships made them cheerful and happy. The problem areas identified in the case of children with autism in making and sustaining friendships, cited by their teachers and parents were: difficulty in starting and keeping conversations going; not comprehending what other people are thinking and feeling; inability to take part in other children's activities; not being able to understand their facial expressions and body language and difficulties in adjusting to new social situations. So these are the specific arenas in which they need skill training.

Peer mentors: A friend can also become a peer mentor to a child with autism on a voluntary basis. During my field observations I sensed that children with autism in an inclusive set-up gain more if peers volunteer and act like mentors. Typically, when the peer mentor sees his/her contribution to the child with autism, his/her emotional bonding with the child becomes stronger. It was seen in the inclusive school that teachers often use group activities in their classrooms, which become too overwhelming for children with autism. A single peer mentor works much better.

I would like to describe how a particular teacher prepared children to become peer mentors for children with autism. She began by discussing how a child with autism would probably not talk at first, but that did not mean that he didn't want to play with his classmates. She then instructed the children to begin by playing alongside (parallel play) the child with autism, do what he was doing and simply talk about how they felt doing it; without trying to direct it, change it, or prompt another activity. She told them to speak out only one sentence statements at a time, and not expect a response back. It was okay she said to simply sit

and “play with him” (parallel play) with minimal interaction. She then organized a role play with the students to practice playing with a child with autism. The only additional suggestion given was to smile whenever the child with autism looked at his/her peer mentor. Peer mentor training was then gradually extended to outdoor playground activities.

What emerges is that facilitated play through peer mentors should be built into the IEP of children with autism as early as possible, it builds up the social skills of these children. Peer mentors can be the child's friend at both home and school. Here is where home school continuity is important.

Promoting Social and Emotional Development:

Teachers can use everyday interactions to help child with autism learn about feelings and improve their ability to express and respond to emotions. Some specific strategies that work, taking cognizance of the socio-emotional needs of children with autism are as follows:

- **Labeling emotions in natural contexts or activities that the child engages with:** For instance, when reading a book with the child, watching a video or visiting friends, teachers or care givers can point out different emotions to him/her. This will help the child to learn to identify emotions and their expression.
- **Be responsive to the emotions of the child:** Teachers, care givers and even peers must respond to the emotions that the child shows, by saying, for example, 'you're smiling, you must be happy' etc. This will encourage the child to show his/her emotions and learn reciprocity.
- **Encouraging looking at others and building eye contact:** These children must be encouraged to look at the person they are interacting with and making eye contact. This can be done gradually but must be an important target goal.
- **Using emotion cards** that have pictures of faces, either real or cartoon, to teach

Expressions India



children with autism how to identify and name basic emotions.

- **Using 'The Transporters'** which is a DVD that uses transport characters can be helpful to teach emotions to children with autism. Likewise, 'Mindreading' is a DVD that uses actors to show emotional expressions in faces and voices. It uses computer game formats to help children learn emotions.
- **Social Stories'** is a highly structured program that uses stories to explain social situations to children with autism. A story or comic strip conversation that incorporates how a child feels and how others feel might be useful for some children with autism.

Children with autism can learn to be more emotionally responsive, but even when they have these skills, they tend to use them less than other children. This deficit is common across the spectrum. It simply does not come naturally for them. Teachers and parents have to make this a target goal and 'teach it' or 'strive to achieve it through sustained inputs'. Some suggestions that may help which I observed in both the institutional contexts that seemed to work are:

- Engaging in frequent group activities, where sharing, taking turns, helping each other out, and coordinating actions together are emphasized and practiced. These can be routed through any daily activity from playing catching, or with a toy, doing planning together, shopping, anything else where two or more persons are involved in doing something together. This will encourage some emotional responsiveness.
- Position them in a manner that the child with autism can see the face of the person trying to interact with him/her and make eye contact more easily.
- Using more non-verbal communication (animated facial expressions, exaggerated gestures, excited vocal noises) and fewer words to guide and share emotions. The less the words, the

more the child with autism has to make face contact for information.

- Creating moments of uncertainty by leaving out information, pausing and hesitating, or creating simple barriers or breakdowns in the interaction. This requires the child to refer to others to find out what to do, or repair the breakdown

Conclusively I would like to say that the socio-emotional needs of children with autism are no different from those of normal children, but their social and emotional characteristics require special engagement. At the same time, there is no one strategy that works with all children or matches the needs of all children, since their contexts and severity on the spectrum vary. What cuts across as a basic need for all of them is to be listened to, feel respected, safe, secure and accepted. It is important to also understand that when children with autism are part of an inclusive classroom, the social behaviors of normal students also get enhanced. Inclusion thus has a dual advantage.

During my field observations what I saw was that every child with autism had a desire to connect with others. It was difficult to see it visibly at first but it could be perceived in a more nuanced way. Basically, when teachers, care givers and peers made reaching out gestures towards children with autism, especially when through their gestures they could communicate to the children that they knew what they wanted, helped them to feel safe in the relationship or knew what their preferences are, they were able to connect and make some effort to relate. What I would like to emphasise as an overall picture is that children with autism in inclusive schools get overshadowed by children who are mentally challenged, physically disabled or affected by cerebral palsy. This is because their disabilities are visible and teachers know some ways of handling them. In contrast, children with autism, especially those with mild autism do not draw that much attention since they appear to be normal and they are also fewer in number in inclusive schools. In fact it is only in the last few years that they have begun to get admission to inclusive schools. In the special school in contrast,

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the variations in their behavior are a function of the degree of severity of their autism, but since they are with peers of similar abilities, they show fairly close social bonding with them and seem quite secure in their school environment. The unanswered question that thus remains is: Whether children with autism are better off in a special school or in an inclusive school?

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In the Era of 'English-Vinglish': Dreams and Aspirations of First Generation Learners of English

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Abstract: *This paper presents the case profiles of two aspirational young adults, who are first generation learners of English. Their dreams and hopes of wielding respect in society and getting white collar jobs, which they perceive as being well paid and more prestigious in society are tied up with they call being 'English speaking'. To be English speaking to them means proficiency in the ability to read, write and speak English, which they also perceive as the mark of social success in contemporary urban Indian society. In their own jargon they call it the era of 'English-Vinglish.' Being third language learners of English, they harbour feelings of inferiority at not being able to come up to the standard of first language speakers of English. Their trials and tribulations in becoming part of the English- Vinglish culture are discussed in detail in the paper.*

Background and Context of the Study

This study is about two male young adults whose dreams and aspirations for success in life and the utopian future that they visualize for themselves, are centred in the singular belief that competence and dexterity in the English Language, particularly in being able to speak the language competently is the means to achieve them. They consider knowledge and proficiency in the use of English Language as a window to a new identity and as the ladder to upward social and occupational mobility. "Identity" can be described as the distinguishing character or personality of an individual. "Self" is a concept often used in a more abstract and global context, whereas "identity" is linked to specific aspects of self-definition (Deaux, 1992). Interaction with the world and sense of self give rise to an individual's identity.

The zest for upward occupational and social mobility can be related to their socio-demographic background which they wish to transcend and change. Their life stories begin in the humble origins of a childhood spent in a backward village, where till date there is no electricity, potable water that is readily available, no pucca houses or roads

and non- existence of public services for health-care, banking or postal exchange. The village has a population of about 10,000 persons who live in different hamlets. The dominant population group is that of Muslims whose socio-political position is also very strong by sheer largeness of their number and the fact, that they hold the position of office bearers in the Village Panchayat and other local bodies. Both the young men belong to Dalit Hindu families, the population of which is about 400 people. They constitute the minority in their village by caste and religion. The occupations available to them are subsistence farming and selling of goods and wares in local shifting village haat markets. This is the image of the village they reconstructed from their childhood but also emphasized that not much change has taken place even today.

The condition of basic education in the village is particularly abysmal. Both boys recall 'being part of a single teacher school in which they went to school, ate their mid-day meal, sat in a group of 300 odd children, did what they wished, and passed out of class 5 without having learnt anything.' Struck by the hopelessness of their life situation, one of them, Rohan ran away with a friend and came to Delhi in



the hope of studying, earning and making a better life for himself. The other boy, Rahul was actually brought to Delhi at the end of class 5 by a benevolent relative, who was already living there and admitted to the local government school.

How their Stories Unfolded

This section traces their present status and experiences and also captures their dreams and aspirations. I gave both of them tuitions in English and thus had the opportunity of interacting with them closely. As their tutor, I not only taught them English but inadvertently became their mentor and adviser as well.

Rahul is 18 years old at present. Rohan is 25 years old. They are cousins. Rohan works as a helper with a family where he is being encouraged to pursue his education through the National Open School System and is given immense support physically and psychologically for the same. Rahul has just completed Class 12, has taken up a job in a food chain and is also pursuing his graduation through Distance Education. He aspires to become a teacher since he sees this as a job which wields social respect and dignity and places a stamp of being 'educated and knowledgeable' on a person. If not a teacher, he would like to work in a managerial position in a private company, preferably a multinational one since once again this will accord him status, money and a comfortable life.

Rohan had seen extreme poverty and started working at a very young age. He had been working since the age of 12. He managed to work hard and get a good salary to support his family back home in the village. His persistent hard work had finally moulded him into 'self-made human being' and he felt that with all the struggles that he was used to facing, he would like to resume his education and change his life further. He aspires to work in an office for which he feels that knowledge of English and computers is necessary. He has already obtained proficiency in computers through a three year certification programme that he attended. At present it is the pursuit of English that is haunting him.

For both the boys, being able to speak fluently in

English and being able to do work in English are tied up with a large number of social beliefs and personal dreams and aspirations. They see English as a means to getting a prestigious blue collar or white collar job. They feel those who do not speak English, remain have-nots and remain relegated to doing menial jobs. English is thus seen as a passport to upward mobility in status and work. Their sense of adolescent identity is also tied up with this. They carry the adolescent dream of having good jobs, their own vehicle, their own home, enough money to enjoy life and be socially known. For Rohan, being a waiter in a good five star hotel or even a chef are seen to be of far more social worth than working in a private home where the money and comforts are better. He also feels that in a public place, those who speak fluently in English immediately draw attention whereas those who don't are looked upon with contempt. His view is that society has a peculiar classification system which places non users of English into a lower category.

Implicit in his desire to get a good job is also a concern for improving the circumstances and future of his own family. He wants to make his house pucca, start a small business for his father and educate his younger siblings in private schools.

Rahul has all the dreams that Rohan holds as well but he has had the advantage of attending school for twelve years with regularity. His role models are thus drawn from what he has studied, his own school teachers and also persons in corporate jobs. To fund his education, he worked part time as a courier boy with a firm of Chartered Accountants. That is where he developed a yearning to be financially literate and know enough English to be able to converse with everyone. The top company managers and executives whom he saw, in a sense became his sources of inspiration.

After a prolonged stay in the city, both Rahul and Rohan have adopted a lifestyle characterized by owning motor bikes, android mobiles, watching movies in PVRs, visiting malls, dressing in trendy clothes etc., so they want that the persona that they have acquired, gets matched with proficiency in English as well. Rahul's aim is to acquire the status of a **Sahib** who is more respectable and dignified in society. In Rohan's dreams is also the possibility of



working in a good foreign country for which once again, English is necessary. In a sense both of them want to quit the menial jobs which they are at present engaged in, get trained and free themselves from the subordination of higher educated employers.

Tutor's Observations

I would like to present my own analysis of the scenario described so far. While the boys' dreams and aspirations related to being English speaking are an important aspect, of equal significance are the reasons that account for the difficulties faced in learning English, especially since they are first generation learners and English is a third language for them. As a starting point, I believe that it is important to know their sociolinguistic context. Both hail from the interiors of Bihar, bordering with Bengal. Their first language is Bengali (dialect); in Delhi NCR they are comfortable with Hindi. While using Hindi, they occasionally mix the intonation of Bengali. In school, Hindi is the medium of instruction. Neither of these languages support the acquisition of English. Rather, they interfere with it because sentence construction has to be significantly altered in English. It cannot be a one to one translation. The grammar and lexicon of English are much more complex and there are many words and phrases which have no equivalent words in Hindi.

Further, learning English requires an appropriate environment and some cultural capital which they severely lack. Although, Rahul studied English in school, the quality of teaching in his own judgement was very poor. Since the medium of instruction was Hindi, this was given much more importance. What compounded the problem was also the no detention policy in which Rahul went from class to class with little addition to his knowledge or competence in English. I also observed that there is no differentiation in the curriculum and pedagogic approach used for first, second and third language learners of English. This needs serious attention.

The other important inference that I drew was that in the case of Rohan, he was not able to study during his impressionable years in a formal learning environment. At the expense of education,

he set out to work for his family. However, while he was working for the family he got access to banking work since the family he worked for were senior bank officials. Several bank officers used to visit their home. He was influenced by them and also wished to acquire a status similar to them. Here the place of work influenced his dream and aspirations and his imagined sense of identity.

Both of them believe that English is the ladder to reach the height of success in this globalized and industrialized society. In this era where English is given utmost importance, they aspire to learn to it. It was also seen that the prolonged period of work with the English speaking persons motivated Rohan to work hard on listening to the language and trying to comprehend what he was hearing. He was also able to learn new ways to communicate and some new vocabulary in his work place.

I would like to end by explaining the use of English Vinglish in the title of the paper. It is drawn partly from the film wherein identity issues and social recognition were tied up with knowing the English language, but has also been drawn from the booming quest to learn English which can be seen in different metropolitan cities. The conversation of those aspiring to learn English for upward occupational and social mobility usually carries the refrain, "English Vinglish seekh lo, to naukri pakki aur future bhi better ho jayega" (If we learn English, we will get a job and our future will be better).

Conclusively it may be stated that Rahul and Rohan are prototypes of a growing community of persons in today's world!

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Educational Experiences of Children with Handicaps

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Abstract: *The paper presents an experiential account of the engagement of students with handicaps in educational settings. It begins by discussing the notions of handicaps and the role of society in creating a sense of disability. The key challenges faced by students in psychological, physical and mental domains have also been highlighted. It goes on to present four case studies of students with physical handicaps and their personal struggles in creating a niche for themselves. The paper concludes by discussing key areas in education that warrant immediate attention for successful inclusive practices.*

The word handicapped, in its literal sense, refers to a lack of an external or internal organ or amputation of an external organ of the human body. In contemporary research literature however, handicap does not refer only to the absence of an organ, it has many other connotations. It is thus important to understand what a handicap is somewhat more elaborately. To achieve this, many questions can be raised. For instance, is the mere absence of an organ or amputation of an organ actually as problematic as it is assumed to be by the society at large? Or is it just a condition of the human body? Or does the presence of a handicap render a person unable to lead a normal life? Or does it make a person disabled to the extent that his/her existence is reduced to being characterized merely by the sympathy and mercy of others?

Here, it is important to note that being handicapped is a biological phenomenon, and the term disability refers to a social phenomenon. In other words, being handicapped exists in its real sense and disability is a social creation. Such an image can be created by the person with a handicap himself or herself, by his or her family members, and/or by the society at large.

The process of socialization changes a handicap into a disability. This can be detrimental to the development of the individual. The situation does not improve much with age and experience, as

disability tends to continue throughout life. Man is a social animal. As part of social life, humans tend to be dependent on each other. This dependence and cooperation become the bases of all social relationships among human beings. Smooth co-operation among all the humans and other living beings gives birth to healthy and happy relationships in society and it helps to develop a human being into an all-round personality. But sometimes, an individual may face problems with reference to this co-operation and relationship management. Let us try to understand some of these problems. Throughout the growth years and in their educational experiences, people with physical handicaps face certain problems and challenges. These may be categorized as:

- a) Problems emanating from physical disability
- b) Problems emanating from mental disabilities
- c) Other Problems that relate to social, economic and cultural status.

Problems emanating from Physical Disabilities

Persons with physical handicaps face difficulties in maintaining social relations and reciprocal co-operation with others. In general, they tend to need a lot of help and social understanding from others. In some cases they may need extra care and facilities as well.



Problems emanating from Mental Disabilities

Some people have mental behavioral disorders, neurological problems etc. They are known as people with mental handicaps. They need special attention and care from others.

Other Problems

The social, economic environment, and cultural milieu of the family affects the social growth of a person with physical challenge. Variations in socio-economic status of families can bring out starkly different behavioral patterns and lifestyles. Availability of resources may provide an environment to a person with physical challenge, in which he/she can develop fully in all spheres. But in an environment characterized by poverty and lack of resources, the struggles can be of a different nature.

In contemporary literature, the disability discourse looks at disability in various forms including physical, psychological, social, moral, cultural, spiritual and religious etc. This perspective expands the meaning of disability to include all aspects of life. It highlights that a person can face handicaps in various spheres of life. The shadow of a handicap in the form of disability will be cast on all aspects of life preventing him or her to be free from negativity.

Another aspect highlighted by the disability discourse is that 'normal', physically healthy people also face disability in various ways. For instance, the person may have poor concentration or face difficulty in managing the personal or social behavior etc. A person with dark complexion may face an inferiority complex. I would like to substantiate how this works.

'A girl of 4th standard in a higher secondary school was rejected by her teacher for her performance as Saraswati in a cultural function of school because of her dark complexion. She expressed her views: "After that rejection I always lived in depression that If I want social acceptance I have to make myself intelligent in academics. I continue live in the stress of having to present myself better and better, and because of this notion I am unable to live a normal or relaxed life. I always live with this condition (dark complexion)." In another

example, a woman who finished her doctorate said "I stopped smiling fully since I was in 10th standard, because my teeth are very ugly, and also because of oral smell. I have always hesitated to talk with others." These are also examples of handicaps, which have prevented a person from leading a smooth and confident life.

Right from childhood a person with handicap is socialized into being disabled. Childhood is seen as a life stage during which the child is nurtured, loved and cared for by his/her parents. Besides parenting, economic, cultural and ethical values etc., also influence the childhood experiences of a person to a great extent. It is during this time that a child learns to see the world, understand the different phenomena of life where he live and experience, develop different perspectives of thoughts and attitudes, develop the ability to maintain relationships life.

At such a sensitive stage, suffering from a handicap along with effects of disability can have a detrimental effect on the development of a sense of identity. The identity of a person with disability thus becomes a mixture of self and others' views. Some experiences of children with handicaps reveal their understanding of themselves:

At the age of 3-4 years, a child with a handicap is rejected by his/her friends from their games and play. This rejection can hurt the sense of self of the child. Dhruv, an 8 year old boy said: "Children don't allow me to play with them in all games. They say that my long jump is very good with help of crutches so I always win. So they always put a condition on me that play with us without crutches. How can I (starts to weep)?"

Through observation of and interview with six year old Ankita, it was seen that during lunch time, she walks by taking support of a wall so that she is always in the position to save herself from being pushed by children running in the corridors.

During visits to ten MCD schools, I also observed the following:

- Teachers are not aware about the mental and physical needs and requirement of the students with handicaps. They always



underestimate the needs of children as future citizens of society.

- Most teachers seemed disinterested in accommodating students with handicaps in their classrooms. They looked at children with handicaps as a problem: Problems in sitting arrangement, Problems in arrangement of extra curricular activities, Problems to give special attention to them.
- Students who are deaf and dumb or blind face problems in social adjustment. They need special arrangements for studying which are difficult to arrange. Further, there is a greater problem of security, particularly for girls. Many teachers thus avoid giving admission to children with handicaps.
- Many parents experience feelings of inferiority as they are parents of a child with handicaps. In a similar manner, teachers also feel embarrassed to be known as the teacher of a student with handicap.

Teachers also expressed unawareness about the following:

- What are the laws for the welfare of students with handicaps?
- Which NGOs and government institutes are working for the welfare of the students with handicaps?
- Not only the teachers but school as the educational institution and education offices are also unaware about the agencies working with children with handicaps. This was also true for parents.

When persons with handicaps are appreciated, they tend to develop a false sense of identity. Being showered with appreciation, the child tends to forget his or her basic traits or qualities and is unable to identify his/her weaknesses as well. Such a child is likely to spend his or her life on the basis of perceptions of others.

In such an unaware and insensitive environment of

family, school and society, it's tough to create a happy and healthy experience of life for a child with a handicap. Thus, the need of the hour is to work towards building a cohesive environment characterized with sensitivity. In the paragraphs that follow, case studies of four participants have been presented.

Meena

Meena is a thirty year old woman, belonging to a middle class family. She was one year old when she was paralysed from her neck down. Although there was improvement in her condition with treatment, she has remained paralysed from her waist down. Some of her internal organs are also not functioning properly. She is dependent on her mother for performing everyday tasks such as bathing, clothing etc.

Her father is retired from the armed forces and her mother is a housewife. She lives with her parents and two brothers. Meena is the eldest amongst the siblings. In fights with her brothers, she often gets to hear that she is her given the privilege of being heard because of her physical condition, and not because she more sensible.

Meena was homeschooled and started schooling at the age of eleven when she was admitted to class three along with her younger brother. She struggled a lot for admission in middle and secondary education when most schools in the area refused admission on grounds of her physical challenge. She was then admitted to a private school where the principal did not even charge fee. The principal continues to be an inspiration and support system for Meena even today.

However the school was only till class eight, after which she was admitted into a government school. The school lacked basic infrastructure and the struggles for Meena and her mother increased manifold. Her mother sometimes had to carry her to classes on the first floor. Meena also had to wait for her mother to come to school if she had to use the toilet. She would often stay thirsty during summers. The school did not provide any support in organizing classes on the ground floor during the entire duration of her education there. During this time, she was not able to participate in co-curricular



activities owing to her physical challenge.

During school, she wanted to become a doctor. She was never encouraged by her teachers to take up medical profession and eventually pursued a course in Bachelor of Business Administration through distance learning. Subsequently, she joined a degree course in law and wants to become a judge. She was also suggested by many to take up teaching as a profession as this would help her physical condition, however, she feels that the profession is not very high paying and thus is not considering teaching as an option.

Sadhna

Sadhna is twenty four years old. She was born in a middle class family and is the eldest of three brothers and sisters. She is shorted than average and has a challenge in her left leg as a result of an injection that was incorrectly administered to her at the age of one year. She is presently working as a primary teacher in a government school in Delhi and has taken responsibility for her young siblings' education. Her parents are uneducated and her house does not have any special facilities for her. However, her family is otherwise supportive.

She is generally seen as an optimistic and happy girl. She gives credit to her parents for the same as she feels her parents have raised her to be independent. Although she had to struggle initially, but she is not adept at washing clothes, taking care of her clothes and cooking etc. Her parents also ensured that she get used to wearing a caliper by insisting that she walk regularly while wearing it. She gives credit to them for insisting as she feels it has made her independent.

In school, Sadhna was a meritorious student. She was her teachers' favourite because of her merit, ambition as well as her physical challenge. During school, her teachers often stopped her from participating in certain activities for fear of her getting injured. She was also never able to participate in sports activities during school. But she participated in other activities such as poetry recitation, debates, etc. Later, she started feeling that she was selected only because she was physically challenged and was expected to win prizes out of sympathy. She stopped participating

in activities after that. It was during college that she got the opportunity to participate and win in sports activities. She was also able to visit Panchmarhi where with every trek she felt confident that she is capable of doing everything. She feels that it is because of education that she has been able to build a status and identity for herself. Education has helped her overcome boundaries and limitations in her life. She is now contributes like any other productive member in her family and society. Yet, she feels sad that her peers often walk ahead of her instead of her walking with her when they meet her in the corridor.

Snehlata

Snehlata is thirty six years old and belongs to a middle class family. Her family consists of her parents and five siblings. Her brothers and sisters are married. Her father remains unwell and mother is a housewife. She started taking tuitions to support her family financially and had to discontinue her education after her graduation. She is loved and respected by her family. Once her younger brother started earning, she was in a position to continue her studies and is now pursuing her M.Phil in Education.

She did not face any discrimination in school owing to her disability. However, she was also never offered extra support or provided with special facilities. She thus had to make an extra effort for routine activities. Classes were often not held on the ground floor and she faced difficulty in climbing stairs. This continued at the level of university education also.

She looks at herself as an independent, confident and determined girl.

Neeru

Neeru is twenty nine years old and is working as a contract teacher in government run primary school. She lives with her parents and has two siblings. Her father is a businessman and mother is a teacher. Her family looks at her physical challenge as her destiny. Otherwise her family is loving and supportive. She is financially independent and has the freedom to manage her income as she wishes. She was five years old when she developed a



problem in her leg. Her right leg did not grow at the same speed as her left leg. Despite treatment, she was not able to recover. In fact, her condition further deteriorated due to a surgery. She now walks by using an artificial foot.

She studied in a private school where she developed close friendship bond with one of her friends who accompanied her to school everyday and even carried her school bag. Besides her friend, the teachers and non teaching staff at her school did not provide her any extra help or support in school. The school did not have adequate infrastructure that would facilitate her learning. She learnt to make adjustments herself or used to ask one of her classmates to help her with her tasks. She was never asked by her teachers or peers to participate in games or sports. Although, at home she used to play hide and seek, carom etc. with her siblings, her teachers were unaware of specific games that can be played by children with physical challenges. She also did not participate in other co-curricular

activities during school years. However, she was active in cultural activities during her graduation and post-graduation in Commerce.

Concluding Remarks

The case studies corroborate the insights drawn from observations in schools. These raise important concerns for the educational system. The teachers and non-teaching staff showed little concern in their thoughts and behavior towards the needs of children with physical challenges. Thus, they were not able to contribute fully towards their development and growth. The schools also need to work towards developing a facilitating infrastructure. The case studies also highlight that education that leads to professional independence serves the purpose of developing a sense of confidence and independence. Education also serves the important purpose of developing reflective human beings who are better adjusted. The participants showed that education helped them to accept their own limitations better.



Book Reviews and Ideational Extracts: Learning from Existing Literature



Beyond Labels: Recognising the Hidden 'Gift of Dyslexia'

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The Gift of Dyslexia (Why some of the smartest people can't read... and how they can learn)

**By Ronald D Davis (with Eldon M Braun)
[Penguin Publishers, ISBN 978-0-399-53566-6
, 257 pages, first published in 1994]**

Teachers often experience students with different ability levels in the classroom. There is not a single class wherein each and every student has the same skill, aptitude, and interest as all his/her peers. Within the context of such a heterogeneous teaching environment, it becomes doubly difficult to recognize and address students with genuine learning difficulties properly. The term Dyslexia today has come to encompass a wide range of behavioral manifestations which include, but are not limited to, symptoms like an inability to pay attention, spelling errors, difficulty in reading, poor handwriting, and an over-all tendency to learn slower than the rest of the class.

As Ron Davis points out in his excellent book on the subject, dyslexic students are not actually slower in learning; they are simply learning in a way that is very different from the normal – and by “normal” I only mean more prevalent – human experience of learning. It is this difference that, when inadequately addressed, makes the process excruciatingly painful for the student and frustrating for the teacher.

Students with dyslexia have a drastically different worldview than other students. Davis claims to have found in his years of research that most dyslexics think in pictures, rather than in words. This isn't just a small difference, the kind where some people are said to learn better through diagrams and others through paragraphs. No, this

difference goes all the way down to how the brain perceives the world around itself, what Davis refers to as the “Mind's eye”.

In the book, Davis suggests that dyslexics have no internal monologue, they aren't hearing themselves think, they only have images of concepts and words. This makes it very difficult to think with words that can't be represented through images. For example, a dyslexic who reads the word “horse” should have no difficulty with it since his mind's eye can visualize a horse. However, the same student would have immense difficulty with words such as 'I', 'the', 'it' etc. When confronted with such words, known as trigger words, a dyslexic's mind is unable to form a mental image and therefore goes blank. It is this state of blankness that is the root cause of the difficulties faced by students with dyslexia. This may lead the reader to give up in frustration, or double their efforts in concentration. Either scenario, according to Davis, is counterproductive. Giving up is of course not a good idea, but even concentrating too hard is not useful. Davis argues that concentrating twice as hard on a blank image is still going to turn up a blank image. This sounds like an impasse but it doesn't have to be.

Throughout his book, Davis insists that dyslexia is correctable given the right environment and cues. He gives examples of students who have undergone training under the Davis Dyslexia Correction program. As a reviewer, I have my reservations about the claims made in the book about how effective these measures are for all those who are treated. Davis claims to have successfully re-oriented tens of thousands of dyslexics through the Davis Dyslexia Correction



program. While this is an impressive claim, the validity of such a claim can only be verified through independent studies carried out by other researchers. Having said that, Davis does give some very interesting suggestions on how to engage with students with dyslexia in the classroom and outside, and as an educator I'm more than willing to try his methods if it means that I might gain some success with even one of my students. Reading this book has made me more empathetic to some of my students in whom I recognize the symptoms described. Even this empathy has gone a long way in improving the teacher-student dynamic between us.

The title of the book makes it clear that Davis does not consider Dyslexia to be a curse, but instead a gift. The list of famous dyslexics he cites includes eminent personalities from various fields including science, art and sports. He goes on to make the point that these people are not masters of their fields *despite* dyslexia, but in fact *due* to dyslexia. He says that the same defects that hinder dyslexics from formal reading and writing tasks, make it easy for them to do difficult, abstract thinking much faster than others. Thinking in pictures, he claims, is anywhere between 2000 to 4000 times faster than thinking in words. It is this ability to think fast, when harnessed properly, that can lead to what Davis refers to as the "gift of mastery" over a subject or a field. He cites many examples both from his own research as well as from history of such mastery.

While the first half of the book serves to inform and educate the reader as to the various aspects of dyslexia, how to think about them, and how to change one's own perspective in order to help dyslexics, the second half of the book is dedicated

to giving specific practical exercises that can be done with students with dyslexia to improve their learning experience.

Over the course of almost a hundred and fifty pages, Davis provides the interested reader with a complete toolkit to engage with students with learning disabilities. He starts out with an exercise to help orient the student and ensure that their perception is correct. From here he leads the students through various exercises designed to help them with reading, speaking, writing, listening, and mathematics. All of the instructions given are simple to follow and there is no special qualification required to use them as part of your teaching methodology. The only things that Davis says are important, are the willingness of the teacher to help and the consent of the student to be helped. Once these two things are in place, the program can begin.

In summation, this book is an ideal read for teachers. The strength of the book lies not in the actual practical advice, although that is very good, but in its ability to force the reader to be more empathetic of the dyslexic condition. The book emphasizes the difference in worldview that dyslexics experience and how it is important to teach them in the way that they learn, not in the way that teachers think they *should* learn. I recommend this book as essential reading for both novice teachers who are just starting out in the field of education and will soon meet their first "difficult" child, as well as to experienced teachers for whom I predict this book will confirm a lot of their personal observations and will provide a theoretical framework in which to place the nuggets of wisdom they have gathered through their careers.



Emotions, Identity and Mental Well-being of Teachers: Some Lessons from 'Divaswapna'

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In India, it is systemic to link the learning outcome of students with the performance of teachers. Hence, the current reports (NCERT's National Achievement Survey, 2014; ASER, 2014) which have highlighted low learning achievement levels in primary grades, have led to a vehement societal attack on teachers, particularly government school teachers. '*Why teachers are not performing*' has become the central issue of serious discussion and debate all over, including among the community of teachers, themselves. The standard line of thought is that the problem lies in the system, so nothing can be done. But, if we really uncover the layers in which this issue is embedded, then we can find that it has a deep connection with the emotions, identity and mental wellbeing of a teacher, which were never acknowledged as the key dimensions of the teaching profession. They have never been accorded space in teacher education curricula. In addition to this, the image of the 'professional' teacher places much more emphasis on '*What teachers do*' and not on '*What teachers feel*'. Human emotion has been one of the most neglected dimensions of research in the practice of educational change for a long time (Hargreaves 1998a). Contemporary discourse on teachers has also failed to recognize teachers' emotions, identity and mental wellbeing as crucial factors in teacher development.

To begin with, there is an urgent need to perceive school as an emotional site for teachers, which nurtures their identity and mental wellbeing and also to understand the complementarity between emotions, identity and mental wellbeing. This is being attempted by drawing from the classic book *Divaswapna*, written by *Gijubhai Badheka* during the early twentieth century. The book is the imaginary story of a protagonist teacher who

rejects the traditional approach of teaching, and does his unusual experiments to discover new approaches for learning. At first sight, it seems that the story is a romanticized script for highlighting various child-centered pedagogical approaches. But, at a deeper level, the story is full of emotional situations where a teacher is struggling with his identity and searching for ways that accord him a sense of mental wellbeing. The school practices to achieve these are set in a time frame of about a hundred years ago. However, they continue to have contemporary relevance. A few group discussions on *Divaswapna* as a treatise for teachers in this regard were conducted with some participant teachers. They have also been woven into the text of the paper.

The story of *Divaswapna* begins with an emotional grounding where a teacher-*Laxmiram* is keen to do his experiments in school because he is upset with the traditional school practices. No one has forced him to teach in school, neither was he a formal teacher, but his emotional commitment drove him to school to practically understand the impact of his experiments on the learning of primary grade students. During the group discussions with teacher participants, many of them personified him as a teacher on a mission, full of emotion and positive energy to transform the school. However, some of them were of the view that this was his fantasy. According to them, at present, even teachers are not allowed to do their professional work peacefully, then how would it be possible for a person who is not a teacher to have the freedom to teach in a school. This kind of response is an example of the emotional crisis that teachers are currently facing in schools, on account of being distanced from their profession and instructed to accomplish the imposed educational changes, whether they believe



in them or not. They are seen as 'deliverers' in the system. According to Sikes (1992), the work culture of teachers can be significantly influenced by imposed changes. To some extent, it can be argued that the non-performing attitude of teachers is the result of various imposed changes in school. One recent example is the poor implementation of the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) System in schools. A large number of teachers are attitudinally and emotionally resistant to this change because it has been imposed on them without understanding the ground realities. As a consequence, the learning achievement levels of many schools are dipping because the teachers are not emotionally bonded to this change.

The story of *Divaswapna*, focuses on the emotions of both: the one's who have the will to change and the others, who are resisting it. Both sides are full of emotions but in oppositional ways. The enthusiastic teacher is keen to do experiments in teaching. But, the headmaster is advising him to teach the pupils as the other teachers do. This is because, the headmaster is himself undergoing a kind of emotional turbulence in which he automatically resists a new comer from breaking the conventional style of teaching. During the group discussions, many participant teachers have linked this to the controlled environment of their schools where they have no agency to transform themselves. This they feel gradually kills the zest in them and renders them into becoming disinterested professionals. So, while physically, they are present in school, emotionally they remain uninvolved.

However, the emotional disturbance within a teacher is not just the result of school practices; it is also affected by the social norms of the community. *Divaswapna* has various instances where the protagonist teacher has no option except for surrendering before the will of community, anticipating adverse consequences. For example, when the teacher notices that the caps of students are very dirty, he tells them to come without caps. The school administration does not take this well and asks him not to interfere with the social practices. He is asked to restrict himself to what the school stands for. The teacher still appeals to students, but their parents do not relent either. His

efforts thus fail. This specific incident points to the importance of preparing teachers for negative experiences as part of their training. They need to be emotionally ready for things that don't work out. During the group discussions, the question about whether 'avoiding failure' was better than 'facing the failure,' came up. The views were divided. In *Divaswapna*, facing the failure is advocated. The underlying notion is that this will incentivize future efforts for success.

What was also discussed by the group was recognizing the continuous pressure to perform that teachers live with. The protagonist teacher of *Divaswapna* was no exception to this. In the story, the education officer and head master of the school continuously remind the teacher about his responsibility for getting good results or suffer the consequences that follow. Thus there is no scope for a teacher to escape the conditions of worth that schools impose, not even in an imaginary story, like *Divaswapna*. It shows that the driving assumptions of our school reforms are grounded in a punishment oriented, rather than a positive psychology- a view fixated on weaknesses and deficits rather than on learning and growing. What is recommended in *Divaswapna* as the mechanism that can build resilience towards professional pressures is the emotional readiness of a teacher.

With respect to teachers' emotions, two basic perspectives can be seen. According to first perspective, emotions are primarily conceptualized as private components of the personality structure of an individual. This perspective frequently reduces emotions to little more than internal personality dynamics, most often divorced from social and cultural contexts. It assumes a teacher's emotions to be problematic for the school and thus supports the image of a teacher who is emotionally void. The second perspective in contrast, conceptualizes emotions as socially or culturally constructed, within the dynamics of the school system, giving shape to teachers' emotional experiences and expressions (Hargreaves, 2001). A synthesis of the two perspectives, leads to the emergence of the concept of identity.

Identity is the way we make sense of ourselves to ourselves and the image of ourselves that we



present to others. It is culturally embedded. In much educational literature it is recognized that the broader cultural, policy and social structures in which teachers live and work, the emotional contexts and the personal and professional elements of teachers' lives, experiences, beliefs and practices are integral to one another, and that there are often tensions between these which impact to a greater or lesser extent upon teachers' sense of agency, which in turn affects their sense of professional identity. Previous researches suggest that identity can be stable (Nias, 1989), affected by work contexts (Beijaard, 1995) or fragmented (MacLure, 1993). The story of *Divaswapna* establishes that teachers' identities are neither intrinsically stable nor intrinsically fragmented, and it depends upon the capacities of teachers to manage a number of influences, within a number of scenarios or sites of struggle. The protagonist teacher of the story initially bears a *soft* identity as a teacher. But, the experience of struggles in school transforms his identity fundamentally into an *accepted* teacher. In the views of the teachers who participated in the group discussion, the pedagogical challenges in teaching are also central to a teacher's identity. When the teacher learns to use appropriate strategies, his acceptability among students also improves. This provides affirmation to his sense of identity.

But the identity formation of the protagonist teacher is not just limited to his students. His colleagues also have a crucial role to play. In *Divaswapna*, he initially lacks the support of his colleagues, recounted as, *"My colleagues, the teachers, have no faith in me. They look down upon me as an out and out, impractical person. Maybe, I am rather. Besides, I have no experience"*. About this, the view that came up in the group discussion was that even today, many teachers feel that often they work in isolation, with little or no support from colleagues. They attribute this to the growing sense of individualism in today's world and the communication gap between older and younger teachers. The result is loss of a sense of collectivism and community. *Divaswapna* provides ways of dealing with this problem.

The protagonist teacher tries to compensate for

lack of colleague support by strengthening his emotional bonding with students. He thus moves towards affirming the stronger part of his identity. His inner reflection brings to him solace in that, *"My boys don't run away from me. They love me, respect me and obey me, whereas the boys of other classes run away from their teachers. I have seen them mimicking their teachers behind their backs. Not a single boy approaches his teacher with a smile or with affection.I have given reasonable freedom to my boys in this respect"*. This then becomes the source of his identity and mental wellbeing. If we analyze this more carefully, then the clear learning is that every teacher must be in search of sources and experiences at school which can give them feelings of self-worth and intrinsic happiness. The teacher in *Divaswapna* finds this in his students. Many teachers may find it in the appreciation that they receive from senior officials or the community.

Usually the concept of mental wellbeing is understood very narrowly. Teachers link it to economic incentives or lessening of their work related burden. In reality it needs to be looked at more holistically and located in the school culture. The school culture through its ideology and the environment that it creates, must kindle a sense of hope and happiness. This must be a permanent feature of it. Also the receptivity to change must be a part of it. Accepting change and innovation brought in by individuals and having the readiness to incorporate these themselves, are also important components of a dynamic and supportive 'hope and happiness' school culture. The school in *Divaswapna* is no exception to this. So even when the older teachers saw the impact of the new pedagogy practiced by the new teacher as being successful, they were reluctant to accept it and showed no semblance of happiness. In fact, some teachers of the school countered the experiment of the new teacher, with the argument that he could afford it because he did not have to worry about money, nor was he bothered about the results. Another argument to legitimize their own inertia was that they have no time to think and prepare for all this because they have to report at the Education Officer's Office every evening, look after their children, fulfil their social commitments and so



on. While such arguments are not baseless, they distance teachers from deriving a sense of intrinsic joy and happiness in the very act of teaching. Thus what is required is some re-definition and re-thinking about one's experiences since these then become the sources of one's mental well-being. This in turn helps to create a readiness for change which also contributes to mental well-being.

Fullan (1997) argues that hope is crucially important for educational renewal. Under the current social, economic, and work pressures that teachers work with, how they can be helped to avoid disenchantment and to remain or become more hopeful themselves is a challenging issue. In *Divaswapna* it comes through the feeling of happiness inside a teacher. This happiness can be achieved by having a relatively high degree of control over one's own work life, rich and loving relationships with those one teaches and works with, and being supported in pursuing highly valued ethical goals.

As a conclusive point I would like to emphasise that the development of self and identity of teachers and not just their academic and cognitive functions in the educational process should find space in their training, development and lived experiences in school. Teachers' voices and agency, their initiative and innovativeness must all find articulation. The micro universe of the school is the legitimate space that they have and even if they can make a difference to the lives of a few children, a lot can be achieved. There is thus a need to go beyond the issues of low achievement of students and the complaints and critique of teachers without recognizing dimensions of their self and identity. *Divaswapna* by Gijubhai Badeka is thus both a simple story and a profound self-reflective text. It demystifies what it means to be a happy teacher and helps all teachers to discover the power within. It also draws the attention of policy makers towards important issues and concerns in teachers' lives and provides a framework for teacher education and development.

Note: The story of *Divaswapna* has deliberately not been summarized since it is a must read for all teachers. Only excerpts and incidents have been drawn from it to build up issues for contemplation

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Peeping through the Window: Lessons from Children's Experiences at School

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Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window by Tetsuko Kuroyanagi (translated by Dorothy Britton), Kodansha International Ltd., 1984; pp. 232, Rs. 772.

Also available in Hindi, New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 2013; pp. 140, Rs. 65.

Totto-chan is an autobiographical account, first published in 1981. The author, Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, wrote a memoir of her school life at Tamoe Gakuen and how the many experiences that she had in the school, deeply shaped her and the life of her peers later. A uniquely constructed school, Tamoe Gakuen presented a vision of education that was different from the mainstream education system, from which Totto-chan had been expelled, owing to her curious restlessness. The teachers at her old school failed to understand her inquisitive mind and keen spirit that refused to bow down to rules in the name of discipline. At Tamoe Gakuen, Totto-chan met a completely different atmosphere where children were treated with as much respect as adults and were given the free space to learn and grow, in their own style and at their own pace.

It is no surprise that the book seems to have found resonance across cultures and ages, as many people young and old, are able to relate to the little girl and her experiences till date. It has been translated into more than a dozen international and Indian languages. It raises many pertinent questions on different aspects of education, which seem relevant even now when we are struggling to improve the prevalent system of education.

The book provides many instances of self-discovery and encouraging curiosity in children. These could be through the lesson or the activities planned for them. I would be substantiating these with a few examples from the book. At Tamoe

Gakuen, the curriculum was flexible and the learners could decide what and when they wanted to study. They were free to plan their time-table. The teacher would list all the problems and questions in the subjects to be studied for the day, and the students would begin with whatever interested them. Children would study subjects independently and consult the respective teacher, if help was required. The teacher was a facilitator, attending to the students, one by one (p. 18-19). We see how learners' agency was given space and they had the full freedom to question, request, decide, and act. They had no fear in voicing their opinions, as the teachers treated them as individuals in their own right and listened to what they had to say, rather than talking down to them. They were asked what they would like to do after all the hard work done in the morning; this also served as a motivation for children to complete their tasks on time (p. 25). The children were encouraged to discover and develop the 'good nature' innate in them, and were encouraged to do well by reinstating their goodness time and again. These echoed the underlying philosophical bases of some of the educational thinkers who shape our education system, namely, Tagore, Gandhi, and Rousseau (NCERT, 2006).

Further, the curriculum and pedagogy, focussed on the holistic development of the child. Besides academics, space was given to sports, music, and drama as well. Children were encouraged to participate in all the activities, and encouraged to go to library and read books. Plus, the children were provided opportunities for field visits; visiting a historical site, an old temple, or going on a nature's trail. Much of the learning, in terms of content as well as skills development, was happening beyond the prescribed subjects and outside the classroom. Though for the children these walks seemed like 'time for freedom and play ... (they) were in reality precious lessons in science, history, and biology' (p.



26-27). I would also like to highlight the episode when a local farmer was invited as a resource person to facilitate the children's learning. On the one hand, the children were learning about the agricultural practices, on the other hand, they learnt to acknowledge different sources of knowledge and developed a sense of dignity of work, which goes beyond simply reading about it in the textbook (p. 108-110).

The experiences of the children also highlight the issue of self-esteem and how it impacted their positive development in later years. All the children received encouragement and were constantly reminded about how good they were, in consonance with Rogers' notion of 'unconditional positive regard' and 'developing a sense of self-worth'. Totto-chan's experiences at this school were exactly opposite from her experiences in the previous school. It is also worth highlighting that being accepted as equals and having been provided opportunities to show their capabilities, helped children with physically disability to develop positive self-esteem. The school also sets an example as a step towards inclusive education where students with different abilities study together, and never feel less competent from each other in any way.

The reason for the little girl, Totto Chan, to change school was because of being expelled. Here, an important lesson is highlighted for parents as well. Credit is due to her mother for never divulging this detail of expulsion, until she grew up to her twenties. Just imagine the stress and guilt the little girl would be carrying with her if she had been told about being expelled! It might have led to her feeling incompetent and being a failure, during her growing up years. The way in which her parents handled the situation and how the teachers in the new school were non-judgemental, are two real learnings for present times as well, where we tend to be obsessed with discipline, good grades, and appropriate behaviour.

The book also subtly raises the issue of respecting each other, whether it's the headmaster making a young boy understand why he shouldn't disturb the girls; or it's Totto-chan's mother explaining to her that all people are the same and should be treated equally, and not identified as belonging to this nation or that. Another instance worth mentioning

was where the headmaster enquired about her ribbon and requested her not to wear it to school, the reason being that his daughter had wanted a similar ribbon, but he wasn't able to procure it. This straightforward request was understood by her, and she stopped wearing her favourite ribbon as she wanted to help and not cause any problem to others (p. 122). Although young children may not have grasped the full meaning of what they were being told, such conversations and focussing on sensitive issues at an early age, go a long way in developing healthy attitudes and a sense of respect and acceptance towards all. In fact, such forms of learning will have a stronger impact in the long run. Another important practice was of everyone eating lunch together in a circle, and singing a song collectively before eating, to remind them to chew the food properly. The headmaster also ensured that the meal was balanced, as it had to be 'something from the ocean and something from the hills'. On one hand, it was fostering the bond amongst the children and on the other hand, they were getting to learn the different sources of their foods (p. 20-24). This is particularly relevant to the Indian context, where we are struggling to implement the mid-day meal scheme in its true spirit.

The struggle for a progressive and child centred education has also been on, for long. The pedagogical practices of the headmaster and his attempt at providing a holistic educational experience to the young children in the 1940s, played an important role in giving wings to students' dreams. This is documented in the epilogue where the writer traces and gives an account of her peers, who have all followed their dreams which were shaped by their experiences at Tamoe Gakuen. It suggests a sense of accomplishment and a belief that the struggle will definitely bear result, if schools keep trying and moving towards the goal of providing holistic educational experiences. In conclusion, I want to say that the book is a must read for teachers, teachers educators, parents and all other adults.

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