

**Perspective on studying classroom culture and positive
attributes
(Non cognitive aspects) of children in schools**

*Presentation based on baseline and midterm studies of
Bodhs
mainstream intervention programme
in
ten government primary schools of Jaipur*

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Perspective on studying classroom culture and positive attributes (Non cognitive aspects) of children in schools

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Bodh Shiksha Samiti has mainstreamed its innovative practices in Govt. Primary Schools under mainstream intervention programme. In this contests, before intervening, a baseline study of positive attributes of children in the concerned Govt. primary schools, followed by a midterm assessment of changes occurred in children's behavior and the nature and extent of non cognitive activities in classrooms have been made. For this purpose a perspective has been developed covering the methodology, classroom observations and children's non cognitive activities, along with, interaction with children parents and teachers.

Positive attributes of children are manifested during classroom transactions and interaction between children and teachers and among the children themselves. Along with cognitive activities, the children react and do activities which contribute to the development of classroom culture. There is positive co-relation between cognitive and non-cognitive activities and a proper assessment of child's holistic development is not possible unless there is a comprehensive understanding of child's positive attributes and their impact on cognitive activities.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for studying positive attributes includes designing of the study and to have a look on positive attributes of children in terms of their creativity, cooperativeness and self confidence as reflected in their behavior in the classroom. Along with this, activities are specifically designed to asses children's performance on dimensions of creativities, divergent thinking and problems solving. Interviews with teachers and group discussion with children along with interviewing parents through a structured questionnaire form part of the methodology. Positive attributes of children are reflected through various activities and behavioral patterns such as cooperation and sharing, creativity and imagination, positive self image, sense of responsibility, obedience and conformity and positive child to child interaction. There are negative attributes also which can be observed in negative child to child interaction, fear, escapism, doubt, and lack of confidence.

Practical Aspects

Based on the above stated methodology, Bodh Shiksha Samiti carried out a baseline study of positive attributes of children belonging to class IInd and Vth in the intervention Govt. primary schools. This baseline formed the basis for assessing positive attribute after two years of Bodh's intervention in these schools. A comparative assessment of the two sets of assessment helped in understanding the changes that had occurred in children's positive attributes. It was found that there was considerable improvement in the non cognitive aspects of classroom culture in these schools owing to innovative teaching practices under the mainstreaming programme. It has been found that the children are eager to manifest their inherent creativities if they are provided with a fearless classroom environment. Positive attributers in fact become more prominent in classrooms thereby minimizing / considerably reducing whatever negative attributes the children may have. Our studies have clearly established that positive attributes are necessary for holistic development of child it is possible to realize them in a positive learning environment wherein the manifestation of such attributes is facilitated through congenial classroom culture which itself is the product of positive child teacher – relationship.

The findings

A study of positive attributes of children and classroom culture was made at two points of time in five government schools in Jaipur. The first was a Baseline study conducted prior to the intervention by Bodh (1996), and the second after two years of the Bodh programme (1997). Observations of children were divided into four categories – positive attributes of children's development, children's response to pedagogic practices, the nature of classroom management and children's response to management practices.

Children's response to pedagogic practices comprised around 50 to 60 percent of the observation of children in the two studies. These included activities that are related to learning as well as those that are unrelated to learning.

A striking difference is observed in the proportion of positive attributes in the two studies. The quality of positive attributes of children differ in the two studies- Baseline and Intervention. For instance, in the Baseline study, any attempt by the child to offer to perform a classroom task was classified under the category of curiosity and initiative, in the Intervention study children were seen to take initiative in answering teachers' questions, showing their work to teachers and making suggestions for classroom activity and expressing curiosity.

It is important to note that positive attributes in the Baseline study related largely to instances that were not essentially part of classroom learning. Typical instance of co-operation and sharing were of children sharing pencils, rubbers etc. The Bodh classroom

reflected many instances of shared learning. Peer learning emerged as an essential part of a co-operative classroom structure evolved by Bodh. Children were observed to learn in groups, discussing and sharing their knowledge and ideas. This facilitates a positive learning environment.

Classroom management practices account for a small proportion, 4-7 percent of children's observations. The Baseline observations regarding classroom management were in the nature of negative classroom management strategies such as discipline through physical punishment. In the Intervention study instances of physical punishment were negligible. The Bodh classroom appeared to use positive strategies of management.

In quantitative terms the Baseline study classroom and the Bodh classrooms differ in terms of the amount of teaching and learning and the development of positive attributes among children/ However, what is important is that the two contexts appear to reflect qualitatively different learning environments as well. The nature and frequency of positive attributes, their intermeshing with learning activities as well as strategies of management in Bodh classrooms are indicative of a positive learning environment that have evolved in these classrooms.

The observation of children in Bodh classrooms as well as responses to specific activities point to a classroom environment that provides space for the development of positive attributes among children. It is evident that Bodh classrooms have a qualitatively different culture as compared to the traditional classroom studied under baseline.

As far as the management of classroom is concerned, it has been observed while comparing the two situations, that whereas the management of children in the baseline study classroom appears to be primarily through physical punishment, in both classrooms teaches have evolved strategies of classroom management that create a positive environment which is conducive for the development of self discipline and control in children. Bodh classroom therefore projects a child centered learning environment while the baseline study classroom projects an obvious inclination towards a teacher centered situation.

In terms of pedagogic practices, a comparative analysis of the findings of baseline and midterm studies reveals that the baseline study classroom are dominated by a text book oriented pedagogy. On the other hand, the Bodh curriculum is transacted largely through activities- asking questions from personal experience, facilitating learning through demonstrating and responding to children's suggestions. The Bodh classroom consciously uses pedagogic practices that center on the child while in baseline study classroom teacher is mostly engaged in giving instructions that are to be followed by the children in class. Repetition or revision of text lessons is absent in Bodh classrooms while repetitive activity in baseline study classes emphasizes rote memorizing as an aid to learning. Interactive teaching is also integral to the pedagogy of the Bodh classroom. This is in contrast to the baseline study classroom in which dialogue and interaction

between teacher and the child is virtually absent. This is also visible in the very nature of the organization of Bodh classroom wherein children sit in a semi circle or in groups with the teacher seated in their midst on the floor. The distance between teacher and children is dramatically reduced in such an organization of the classroom. It is common to see Bodh teachers going to individual children, reaching out to them rather than expecting that children approach the teacher for being evaluated. In baseline study classroom the teacher sits on the chair thereby automatically creating a distance between him and the children. There is no attempt to reduce the distance and there is a sense of aloofness from children's non-cognitive activities.

Conclusions

By way of summing up the findings of the two studies, the following broad suggestions may be thrown up for wider discussion.

Curriculum

- Problem solving tasks allow for creative and divergent thinking among children. There is need to consciously structure such activities within the primary school curriculum to create this space for children .
- Teachers need to understand that the nature of the problems solving task itself can set limits to possibilities for divergent thinking. Hence, the kind of tasks given to children has significant pedagogic implications for primary schooling.
- The Baseline and more so the Bodh study clearly suggested that children naturally innovate. When provided with opportunities, their natural capacity to create and innovate unfolds to a greater extent than what manifests in the daily routine of classroom learning.
- It is important to strengthen the base of learning among children. This is firstly in terms of enhancing abilities of comprehension and communication which in themselves lay the foundation for future learning. There is also need to democratize learning thereby bringing within the ambit of classroom instruction, all pupils rather than a select few.
- Drawing is an activity that provides opportunities for creativity and self expression among children. It also kindles and sustains their interest. It is hence important that drawing activities pervade the primary school curriculum.

Pedagogy

- Classroom pedagogy as well as evaluation necessarily be based on the reality that children are at different stages of development and that they think divergently as well as innovatively.

- It is hence necessary to provide learning experiences for children to help them transit from one 'stage' of development to another and to allow for guided learning at the primary stage.
- Primary school teachers should be trained to understand the above mentioned functions of drawing in the primary school curriculum. For children, drawing should be viewed as a medium for individual self expression and in that sense should not be structured as a learning outcome.
- The use of drawing as an aid to teaching and learning of specific content areas must also be appreciated. It facilitates the visual representation of concepts, processes and interlinkages, and thereby aids understanding in specific subject areas.

Evaluation

- Evaluation that aims at setting mechanical standards of comparison between self expression of children or leads to standardization of outcomes defeats the very purpose of drawing at the stage of primary schooling. Drawing must encourage free expression which is critical for creativity and thereby the overall development of children.
- There is need not only to appreciate and provide space for individual styles for learning, but it is also important that evaluation is redesigned to capture dynamic processes of learning.