



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Education

Brain Based Learning Strategies: An Effective Tool for Social and Emotional Learning in the Classroom

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Dr. Parul Khanna Assistant Professor, Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University), Agra.

Mrs. Jyotika Kharbanda* Assistant Professor, Dayalbagh Educational Institute (Deemed University), Agra. *Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

For 21st century learners, they need to be competent in all aspects of their personality to deal with the stressful situations of life and get success. This is possible only when the students are given opportunities to express, understand and engage themselves in such learning activities where they can acquire and develop the most required social and emotional skills, needed to be effective problem solvers and facing all challenges of life as encouraging themselves. This paper seeks to discuss the role of BBL strategies as an effective tool in the hands of the teachers for bringing about the social and emotional learning in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Children of today are the future of tomorrow. They are the assets of the nation. Holistic development of personality of our children includes all the three domains that are cognitive, affective and psychomotor but unfortunately this is not being done in actual classroom practices in the present scenario. What we focus on today is the academic achievement of the student and if a student fails to maintain his academic standards, he may move towards several undesirable means which ultimately lead him to a number of emotional problems like frustration, stress, depression, loneliness, etc.

In such a stressful environment, our young children are dealing with various kinds of emotional realities that really can't be ignored. Therefore it is the need of the hour for the teachers to work hard to explore and use such strategies in the classrooms which may help children not only to enhance their academic achievement but also enable them to cope with their emotional problems more effectively with long term effects. In other words, it can be said that social and emotional learning (SEL) of the students should be the focus of all learning in the classroom. SEL practices are also the focus of various research studies in modern times and that is a very good thing to use.

What is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Educational Learning (CASEL) is an organization which works for preschool through high school for their integrated social - emotional learning. The organization has defined SEL as "social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."

Basic Components Of Social And Emotional Learning:

There are five basic components of Social and Emotional Learning:

Self Awareness:

Self-awareness is one of the most critical components of Social and Emotional Learning. It refers to one's ability of being able to recognise and understand one's own emotions and then behaving accordingly. This includes recognising not only one's positive emotions like self-efficacy and optimism but also becoming aware of negative feelings and emotions like stress, anger etc. Self-awareness is not only being aware of one's abilities but weaknesses as well.

Self Management:

Another important component of SEL is Self-Management.

Self-management refers to one's ability to manage and regulate one's own feelings, emotions and behaviours. It is built upon the ability of self-awareness. This actually includes one's ability to control and handle anger, stress, self-motivation or persistence through setbacks.

Social Awareness:

Another important component of SEL is Social awareness which looks outward and deals with the ability of empathizing with others and possessing a willingness to understand and respect the unique experiences, norms, and behaviors of others.

Relationship Skills:

This is the ability to create and maintain healthy relationships with others in the society through cooperation, active listening, conflict resolution, and communication.

Responsible Decision-Making:

This final component of SEL is responsible decision making which is about making safe and healthy choices that abide by one's positive and healthy personal moral code and benefit their well-being — and the well-being of others.

Why should SEL be the focus of all Learning in the Classroom?

Whatever the students learn in the classroom becomes more meaningful when they are able to relate it with their real life experiences. Success and failure, both are the parts of life and no child remains untouched of them. The important thing is that they should be able to manage themselves, their feelings, understand the perspectives of others and relate effectively with them, and moreover should be able to make sound decisions at both personal and social level at either of such times. In other words, students need to learn some social and emotional skills like having positive attitude, more positive social behaviours and relationships with others, increased self-efficacy, self-confidence, risk taking behaviour and decreased emotional stress. It will become possible, easy and manageable for a teacher only if SEL is integrated as one of the important aspects of learning in the Classroom. Now the question arises, how a teacher can integrate Socio-emotional learning in classrooms. The very appropriate answer to this question is by using Brain based Learning Strategies.

What are Brain- Based Learning (BBL) Strategies?

Brain based learning is a new perspective in teaching and learning that is based on using technology and knowledge of the brain and its functions in order to get the most out of the education process. This new educational discipline unites the knowledge of neuroscience, psychology, and education, with the objective to optimize the learning and teaching process. Brain based learning is an approach to teaching and learning

which is based on research in neuroscience. It suggests that our brain learns naturally. It proposes that as long as the brain is able to function naturally, learning will occur.

- Brain -Based Education is the purposeful engagement of strategies that apply to how our brain works in the context of education.
- “Brain-based” learning activities engage both hemispheres of the brain simultaneously, resulting in stronger, more meaningful learning experiences and permanent brain connections.

It is very useful for educators as this will help them to enhance the learning potential of their students. By knowing the functioning of the brain, they can better assist their students to focus on learning material, thus help them to enhance their attention and retention, along with these objectives of learning, BBLs also helps in socio emotional development of students which is the need of the present hour as self-awareness, decision making, relationship skills, social awareness and to manage self are the necessary skills for every individual.

Brain Based Learning Strategies and SEL:

Knowing how the brain functions, teachers can create such an environment in the classroom which will enhance not only the academic performance of the students but will also assist them to enhance their socio-emotional skills. Now we will discuss some BBLs that really work and be useful in this reference:

Talking:

In this strategy, the teacher gives students a piece of information regarding the topic and leaves them with a 'turn and talk' time where they discuss what they have learned. While doing so they also get an opportunity to know each-other, understand each-other's perspective, become friendly with their peers, and build up a good relationship with peers in the class. These things when, happen with learning, can do miracles at times and improve students' socio emotional skills.

Using Emotions:

Many researches done in the field of BBL (Sara Bernard 2010) suggest that happy learners are healthy learners. Both positive and negative strong emotional experiences are closely related to strong memories and our brain works better in a positive emotional state. This information can be utilized by the teachers and they should make the students feel a physically and emotionally safe environment before their brain gets ready to learn anything. It will help them to keep any negative feeling like depression, anxiety, frustration away from them and foster their positive and healthy moral code to make safe and healthy choices in their life. Emotional thoughts become the platform for learning, memory, decision-making and creativity both, in social and non-social context.

Music:

Music is one of the most powerful strategies of BBL that can help develop socio-emotional skills in students. Teachers can give some tasks related to a concept to students in class involving performing art. (Example: explaining periodic table through music) Music activities in a group help children to work with their peers and perform together. In this task they learn the importance of respecting oneself, others and also get a chance to express themselves. Also while practicing together, they are working as a team considering themselves to be an important part of a single team which will help in developing the 'we' feeling which is an important social skill to be developed in students.

Visuals:

Vision is one of the strongest senses. About 50 percent of individuals are visual learners. Posters, images and colors help in engaging the brain and helps in crystallizing learning

.This important strategy of brain based learning can be used either with the curricula only or can be used separately for developing Socio emotional learning skills in students. Students can be shown beautiful pictures and ask to reflect on it either individually or in group. Students will try to visualize the picture by which self-awareness, and other socio emotional skills can develop. Another thing a teacher can do is put a board full of feelings like (angry, dull, energetic, Happy, sad etc.) and the student can mark for him/ her how they are feeling today in school. In this way feelings of students will be known to the teacher and students will feel safe, positive and learning can be improved.

Shake it up:

One of the important BBL strategies is to make changes in the learning environment and the process of learning because the brain likes changes and performs better when it's not boring. Doing exactly the same thing, exactly the same way brings boredom and the brain turns out. Changing the seating arrangement, doing one part of the day completely different will bring fun and excitement. Moreover learners will enjoy learning which will boost up positive emotions in them which is the basic requirement for the development of various social and emotional skills in them.

DISCUSSION:

Discussion as an important BBL strategy can be used to provide students an opportunity to reflect on their thoughts related to the topic. This will not only enhance their understanding of the topic but also let them peep into each other's perspectives. They will come to know a particular concept and its implications from various perspectives which will develop relationship skills in them.

Brain Breaks or Energy boosters:

Brain functions energetically for about an hour and then needs a break for five to ten minutes to become energetic again. Students also need a break of short durations after so much information overload to them. Break can be given to students by providing them energy boosters. After teaching a concept teacher can show a video to students and ask questions in the form of a quiz by dividing students into teams .Students will enjoy such kind of activity and also their brain might get relaxed for some time and team spirit and group cohesiveness will develop. Healthy competitive spirit will also develop in working in teams. These kinds of activities can last for about five to ten minutes and can refresh students' thinking by breaking the chain of continuous information overload and can lead to healthy child development as it affects students memory, concentration and learning in a positive way .

Time For Reflection:

After completion of every topic taught in the class, children must be given time at least for 5-10 minutes to discuss and reflect their understanding on that topic. Just like whatever we intake in our food, it takes time to get digested, in the same way the brain needs time to digest/understand a given information. After giving input to the brain, it must be given some processing time because understanding may or may not occur immediately. If the teacher switches over from one topic to another without giving time for reflection, students may feel dissatisfied and suppressed which is definitely not a good sign for developing socio-emotional skills in students.

Encouraging Creativity:

Schools today are completely under the burden of completing the syllabus of the course in which a student is enrolled and while doing this are neglecting the skills of a student which is most important for today's existence .i.e. creativity. Creative expression provides opportunities to children to express their emotions and to understand emotions and feelings of others which further give them comfort and ease of understanding in a better way. In this way

they are expressing their emotions and also learning social rules like cooperation, give and take, listening to others etc. This is the strategy of brain based learning that helps students to renew and transform from within.

Stress Management:

Life is so complex in present times that everyone be it parents, teachers and students feel stress out. Little amount of stress is good as it helps to motivate students and helps in enhancing their performance but in higher amounts it can lead to mental discomfort or mental tensions which may be harmful. Students should be taught how stress can be managed. It can be done through different strategies. Teachers should teach students through different methods such as discussions and its implementation which will help them in having a firm foundation of self-awareness which further will help them to get aware of themselves and know when they are stressed so that they can execute the strategies and lead to success.

CONCLUSION:

The 21st century learners need to be equipped with a number of social and emotional skills to cope up with a variety of problems and hurdles in the way of their success. For this teachers also need to update their knowledge regarding new methods, strategies and researchers done in the concerned field. BBL strategies, if used by the teachers with proper planning, can help them to create a generation of learners who will be able to implement their learning in the real life situations, be good problem solvers and be able to develop their potential in a wholesome manner.

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