

Connecting Arts Integration to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Among Children with Special Needs (CWSN)

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Received: 15-September-2022

Revised: 16-November-2022

Accepted: 18-December-2022

Abstract

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is the key to supporting better inclusion, better acceptance, and better living of children with special needs in today's rights-based society. It supports learners by equipping them with skills of self-awareness, empathizing with others, recognizing others' perspectives leading to better collaborations and peer group activities. It also enhances self-regulation and awareness of one's own emotions. Integrating arts-based learning supports SEL to train Children with Special needs (CWSN) in the identification of emotions, working in a team, and gaining self-awareness. The present chapter explores various facets of SEL through the integration of arts-based learning such as creating of companionate school, the use of SEL by teachers, exploring the benefits of SEL of learners with and without disabilities, gaining insight into the role of art in SEL. The methodology adopted for the present study was a survey of ten special educators working in special schools located in Delhi-NCR using a specially designed checklist. This chapter highlights the major findings of the study which clearly indicate the utilization of SEL standards in imparting teaching and learning through Art integration can support the personal, social, and holistic well-being of Children with Special needs.

Keywords: Arts integration, Children with Special needs, Emotional regulation, Self-regulation, Social-Emotional Learning, Relationship formation, Wellbeing

1. INTRODUCTION

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is critical for the child as well as the school. It promotes skill development among learners, comprising of social, emotional, and self-awareness skills. It also supports the creation of a safe, caring, and secure school climate which facilitates academic and non-academic success and all-around development of the learner ("Connecting Social and Emotional Learning with Mental Health", 2008). The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) has stressed upon the importance of SEL training towards ensuring holistic development of children by making them capable of rational thinking, and helping them develop a sense of empathy and compassion (Loomba & Chawla, 2020). According to Crick and Dodge (1996), it is essential to expose all learners to academic and social information, which they need to survive in the adult world. They require skills for analyzing, decision making, problem-solving, and correct judgment of challenging social-emotional situations in order to overcome crises and moral dilemmas. Social and Emotional Learning thereby facilitates children and adults to learn about emotions, regulate and manage them, allow for awareness about self, provides a platform for emotional catharsis, and overall is linked with the individual's growth and success. SEL programs can be impacted by teaching and learning strategies, along with state policies (Conner et. al., 2017). Therefore, socio-emotional learning needs to be integrated into the curriculum of all children including Children with Special Needs (CWSN).

Overview of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) can be broadly understood as a process of building self-awareness, having awareness about and managing emotions, establishing goals, making responsible decisions. SEL supports individuals to build healthy relationships, build awareness and management of emotions, thereby making responsible decisions and supporting success in life ("Connecting the Arts to Social-Emotional Learning, 2021). According to the Committee for Children (n.d.), Social-Emotional Learning can be understood as the process of

developing self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are critical for one’s success in home, school, and work. Individuals having better SEL are able to cope well and able to face challenges which help to promote impulse control, emotional management, and provide a foundation for effective handling of daily stressors. Social-Emotional Learning enables learners to grow academically as well as socio-emotionally, as it focuses on the development of the following interrelated sets of competencies namely:

Table 1: Various interrelated components of SEL and their description

SEL COMPONENTS	DESCRIPTION
SELF-AWARENESS	Having the awareness and the ability to identify and regulate emotions, identify personal strengths and weaknesses, know about areas suitable for potential growth, and identification of potential external resources and supports.
SELF-MANAGEMENT	This refers to the ability of an individual to regulate and control emotions, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.
SELF-EFFICACY	Ability to persevere, self-motivated, self-encourage, explore and enhance own abilities, realize self-capabilities and resources.
SOCIAL-AWARENESS	Developing the ability to understand, accept and empathize with the ideas, feelings, thoughts, and views of others from diverse backgrounds and cultures.
SOCIAL MANAGEMENT&RESPONSIBLEDECISION-MAKING SKILLS	Developing the individual’s ability to make safe and constructive choices about intrapersonal and interpersonal choices.
SOCIAL-ENGAGEMENT	An individual has the ability to consider others and show a desire to contribute to the well-being of school and community.

(Adapted from CASEL, 2012)

Macklem (2020) highlights the global interest in social and emotional learning by describing the current state of the movement, factors that are influencing it, and its present conceptualization. The work also sheds light on the challenges, confusions, and differences surrounding SEL frameworks such as cultural influences, curriculum integration, assessment of skills and competencies developed among learners, choice of activities by schools under SEL programs.

Overview of Arts integrated Education and SEL towards supporting Mental Health

Art is a powerful tool for self-development and is viewed as a non-threatening fun activity that helps to engage children and learners. It is seen as a hands-on activity, which can be used for even those learners who are resistant to other types of activities. Art activities are capable of enhancing social-emotional learning by building self-awareness, increasing confidence, emotional regulation, and strengthening relationships (pathways2success, 2017). Integration of Arts allows us to harness its potential in achieving learning goals along with the development of aesthetic sense, creativity, and imagination (Silverstein & Layne, 2010; Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). Thus, Art as a subject can play a positive role in engaging learners with SEN and support development of complex problem-solving and social interaction skills. Art facilitates the creation of a sense of success and self-worth (Lowe, 2016). Mental health and well-being can be understood as a form of successful functioning which is manifested in “performance of productive activities, fulfilling relationships with others, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity” (Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, 1999). Studies have established that participation in SEL activities promotes the development of coping skills

which reduce the need for Early Intervention (EI). Integration of Arts in teaching-learning experiences within the classroom also supports educators (Menzler (2015)

Techniques to impart SEL

SEL learning programs use a combination of skills-focused and environment-focused'' techniques, as depicted in the table below. Menzler (2015) supported the use of social and collaborative components in Art, while Winner, Goldstein, and Vincent-Lancrin (2013) promoted the use of theatre education and role play which teaches emotional awareness, identification and regulation, through perspective-taking, observation, mimicry, acting, and imitation. SEL can be further categorized into: skill focused and environment focused. The following standards, components and activities for SEL have been identified:

Table 2: SEL components, standards, and activities

SEL COMPONENTS	SEL STANDARDS	ACTIVITIES
SELF-AWARENESS	SEL Standard 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing space to the learner for self-exploration. • Creating opportunities for self-reflection. • Providing outlets for emotional expression. • Risk-taking within a safe space will enhance strength and embolden the child. • It is an outlet for emotional catharsis.
SELF-MANAGEMENT	SEL Standard 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and enhance self-management through the utilization, and exploration of new artistic skills. • Navigation and handling of various challenging emotions and thought patterns • Practicing and growing which reveals a growth mindset. • Creating opportunities for self-reflection, thought for self • Building students' confidence to express ideas to enhance and strengthen resiliency.
SELF-EFFICACY	SEL Standard 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting self-efficacy through project-based learning. • Engaging learners in artwork that suits their choices and interests and at the same time helps them to learn. • Encourage perseverance and striving for excellence in an individual or group-based manner. • Generating ideas and novel products that stimulate self-development and self-exploration. • Providing opportunities for practice, taking initiative, being courageous, and demonstrating personal and collective agency.
SOCIAL-AWARENESS	SEL Standard 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping the child to explore different cultures which expands the sense of empathy by expanding one's horizons. • Developing social awareness through gaining an understanding of social diversity, the need for equality and equity, justice, and the role of Art in all cultures from ancient to present.
SOCIAL-MANAGEMENT	SEL Standard 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of interpersonal skills and communication. • Use of intentional experiences for students to express their own choice and voice when engaged in teamwork.
SOCIAL-ENGAGEMENT	SEL Standard 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social engagement which further supports sharing of experiences and feelings across cultural, gender, racial, economic backgrounds. • Engaging the learner in various performances/productions/presentations gives students the direct experience of contributing to the well-being of others and enriching their communities. • Providing opportunities to students to reflect on their role to promote well-being at the personal, social, family, and community levels.

(Adapted from *Connecting the Arts to Social-Emotional Learning*, 2021)

SEL and Educators: Understanding the relevance of Arts based intervention

Educators can be made aware of the potential benefits of SEL and they can employ it in classrooms, teaching with compassion and care. By integrating ARTs based learning in their classrooms, educators can support the development of better communication skills, self-awareness and personal management, social awareness, and peer interaction among the students. Thus, teachers can support in developing confident learners. The incorporation of such learning helps to create compassionate schools, makes employees feel valued, and allows the pupils to unlock their creative, imaginative, and empathizing skills, leading to better collaboration, problem-solving, and hiring (Kanzler, n.d.).

Connecting Social and Emotional Learning with Mental Health and benefits for CWSN

SEL is closely connected with intrapersonal and interpersonal development, however, most research studies focus on connecting the benefits of arts to the neurotypical population (Casciano, Cherfas & Ahmed, n.d.). Children with SENs face numerous challenges such as recognition of emotions in self and others. SEL allows such children to be trained in the identification, recognition of emotional expressions, facial expressions, and social cues. There is a dearth of research studies that focus on linking the benefits of Arts integration to SEL learning among CWSN.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research objectives: The present chapter highlights the key objectives framed for this study which are stated below:

- Exploring and gaining insight into SEL and integration for arts-based learning towards SEL training.
- Analyzing views of educators towards various strategies that can be used to impart SEL training among CWSN through the integration of arts.

Research Questions: The research questions framed for the study are:

- What are the benefits of SEL training with special reference to CWSN?
- What are the views of educators towards imparting SEL training among CWSN through the integration of arts?

Method: A short survey was adopted involving 10 special educators selected using convenience sampling from 02 private run special schools located in Delhi-NCR. The details of the participants are stated below:

Table 3: Sample details

VARIABLE	DETAILS	NUMBER (N)
Gender	Male	04
	Female	06
Age group (in years)	>30 years	02
	31-40 years	06
	41-50 years	02
Work experience (in years)	<5 years	03
	>5 years	07

The table 3 displays the sample profile which reveals the ratio of male to female as 4:6 respectively, while those belonging to greater than 5 years of experience are more (n=7) compared to those having lesser experience and 06 educators belong to the age group of 31-40 years while remaining educators are less than 30 and more than 40 years respectively.

Table 4: Responses of participants towards SEL training for CWSN through Integration of Art

S.NO.	ITEM	YES	NO
1.	SEL training can be provided through training in recognition of emotional expression in self.	9	1
2.	SEL training can be provided through training in recognition of emotional expression in others.	10	0

3.	SEL can be imparted to CWSNs through the use of art and craft.	10	0
4.	SEL can be imparted through painting activities.	9	1
5.	SEL can be imparted through role-play activities	10	1

Table 4 shows the responses of the participants towards SEL training for CWSNs. The participants agreed on the use of arts and crafts, role play, and painting activities to teach social and emotional skills to CWSN.

Art integrated SEL: The participants suggested the following techniques for promoting and utilizing Art integrated learning within special and inclusive classrooms:

- **Emotional expression training:** Teachers responded that as part of the SEL, emotional expression training can be provided using the following teaching-learning materials: video modeling, flashcards, images, and pictures. Providing sheets of paper and asking the learners with SEN to draw faces expressing various human emotions.
- **Value training:** Use of role modeling to teach value-based lessons like sharing, caring. It is also essential to provide opportunities to practices such socio-emotional skills during art and craft class by asking students to share their art materials.
- **Addressing children's mental health:** By providing freedom and risk-taking in secure environments, learners with SEN can be encouraged to express their emotions freely without fear. The children can engage in activities like- playing with water, blowing bubbles, play using sand.

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In order to survive in today's social world, learners must be equipped with numerous skills such as impulse control, emotional regulation, emotional understanding, self-motivation, and belief, and the ability to form positive social relationships within the home, school, and community (Pianta & La Paro, 2003; Raver, 2002). Worldwide, SEL is gaining momentum in usage by educators, therapists, and curriculum developers. SEL framework, its standards in activities need to be given due recognition by professionals and caregivers of CWSN (Macklem, 2021). CWSN are benefited from the use of multisensory methods of teaching. Visual arts like drawing, painting, coloring, sculpting, collage making can promote observation, imitation, concentration, active engagement, and problem-solving. When a child participates in any art activity, he/she assumes the important role of creator, who is capable of making useful decisions, and learns through trial and error, art rooms and art integrated curriculum offers a unique opportunity to such children to gain socio-emotional learning and skill development through hands-on experiences in art (Lowe, 2016). This chapter recommends the use of Art integrated curriculum and learning experiences for CWSN in order to support SEL and holistic development of such children. Through the use of Art, observation, motor, spatial awareness, self-awareness, and skills are enhanced. This promotes a sense of personal, physical, social, and emotional wellbeing. Developing arts-integrated lessons across the general curriculum should address many of the needs and goals of students with special needs. It also enhances the teachers' professional skills, heightens teaching-learning innovation, and supports effective teaching practices (Ruppert, 2006). Art integration accommodates students with diverse learning styles and needs by rebuilding emotional regulation, self-esteem, and self-belief through its therapeutic qualities of emotional catharsis. Such use of art symbolizes a holistic teaching and learning approach which supports mental and physical well-being (McCarthy, n.d.).

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