



+SEE LEARNING AMONG EARLY EDUCATION LEARNERS AS BEST PRACTICE OF BIRLA OPEN MINDS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, HYDERABAD - A CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

We at Birla Open Minds International School, Hyderabad celebrate and respect diversity in our classroom but extending the required support to the diverse group of learners is always challenging. Keeping in mind the importance of early interventions, we proposed to integrate the Social Emotional and Ethical Learning strategies to address the learning needs of the students. The Social, Emotional and Ethical Learning framework is built on the evidence- based work of SEL and parallels the model suggested in Goleman and Senge's 'The Triple Focus': a focus on self, a focus on others, and a focus on interdependence and systems. It is based on three dimensions, which focuses on the types of knowledge and competencies it seeks to foster in students:

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- (1) Awareness,
- (2) Compassion, and
- (3) Engagement.

Moreover, these three dimensions can be approached in three domains:

- (1) Personal,
- (2) Social, and
- (3) Systems

To evaluate the effectiveness of SEE Learning it was integrated as a pedagogical approach by the Teachers. The students' Portfolio Activities, Parents and Teachers' Reflection of the performance of the students were compared. The analysis of the results reflects that the students are more engaged with their learning, were able to manage their emotions in a better way and fostered a collaborative learning environment in the class. The Teachers of Birla Open Minds International School, Hyderabad also demonstrated mindfulness in their behaviour during implementing SEE Pedagogy, which made every student feel the compassion and care. The Parents' expressed that there was an elevated a sense of emotional safety and belonging which led to sustainable happiness in the Early Years Learners.

Researcher in this paper intends to proliferate the idea of integrating social, emotional and ethical learning among early education learners and proposes to extend the Best Practices of Birla Open Minds International School, Hyderabad among teachers, administrators, parents and educationists.

Key Words: Ecological Learning, Community Engagement, Creative Expression, Cooperation Learning.



Mission Statement of the School:

The school strives to be a community of open-minded global learners. All members are the flag bearers of the peaceful world and care about one another, value and respect intercultural and individual differences. Encompassing the learner profile of collaboration and creativity by engaging in challenging skill-based competencies, pushing the boundaries to maximize the potential of the learners.

Philosophy:

The School firmly reiterate and restore what Tagore called the hallmark of childhood-'joy of Learning' and the 'Creative Spirit'. Birla Open Minds believes in the uniqueness of each child thereby fostering holistic development through integrated learning opportunities. The teachers are aware of each student's emotional, social, psychological and physical development as well as their cognitive growth. They provide a motivational framework for each learning opportunity. A learner at Birla Open Minds develops global perspective and life skills to help and excel in his or her desired field and become a life-long learner.

We focus on the well-being and progress of every child; recognize, respect and value difference. We understand that diversity is a strength. We believe that diversity should be respected and celebrated by all those who learn, teach and visit the school. All students share a common entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum which meets their social and learning needs. We want all students to feel a sense of belonging within the school and to know that they are respected and able to participate in all events and activities in School.

Adapting Social Emotional and Ethical Learning approach to address the needs of diverse learners:

We strongly advocate the concept of 'strengths in our differences' and we understand that every student has a preferred learning and thinking style and we encourage different approaches to learning. We believe in extending equal opportunities to all learners, irrespective of their age, gender, ethnicity, impairment, attainment, and background. All students should have meaningful and equitable access to the curriculum offered. The pedagogical framework of the school supports for student diversity and respects individual learning differences and their unique way of learning. This framework allows learners a greater degree of autonomy and independence.

As early years learners are very sensitive towards the learning environment and the learning experience, SEE Learning facilitates greater "emotional literacy" and "ethical literacy" as well. Research suggested that if we focus only on the cognitive skills and neglect the emotional intelligence, the emotional awareness and social skills, the ability to cooperate and collaborate with peers is not developed which leads to incompetence to resolve conflicts in an amicable manner.

Relationship to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Distinctive Features of SEE Learning:

The SEE Learning framework is built on the innovative work done in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and other educational initiatives that contribute to the holistic education. It includes Dr. Daniel Goleman's work on emotional intelligence, or the five sets of competencies identified by CASEL (**Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning**) will certainly find great similarity between these approaches and the SEE Learning framework. Additionally, this framework is deeply influenced by Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge's



book, *The Triple Focus: A New Approach to Education*.

In their book *The Triple Focus*, Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge suggest several pedagogical principles that follow from uniting systems thinking with Social and Emotional Learning.

These include:

- I. Respecting learners' reality and processes of understanding.
- II. Focusing on issues relevant to the learner.
- III. Allowing students to build their own models, construct and test their own ways of making sense of problems.
- IV. Having students work and learn together.
- V. Keeping the focus on action and thinking.
- VI. Building students' ability to be responsible for their own learning.
- VII. Encouraging peer dynamics where students help one another learn.
- VIII. Recognizing teachers as designers, facilitators, and decision-makers.

The first component of SEE Learning is the cultivation of the skill attention as it is the fundamental skill that impacts all aspects of learning. As Goleman notes, "Because it is such an essential element of helping children better manage their inner worlds and enhance learning, training in attention seems to be the next step for SEL." The second component is a more comprehensive focus on ethics that is grounded in basic human values such as compassion. The benefits of kindness and compassion are explored in SEE Learning, and the caring attribute is nurtured skillfully for themselves and people around them.

Third, SEE Learning incorporates the latest developments in trauma research and trauma-informed care to provide a way for educators and students to explore emotions, self-regulation, and reflective practices in the safest and most effective way. Human beings experience a varied level of safety and threat, and they need to master the art of regulating stress and the cultivation of "body literacy."

Lastly, SEE Learning includes a focus on increasing awareness of interdependence and systems thinking. We are nurturing global citizens, it is important to acknowledge and appreciate each other's contribution, an explicit teaching of systems thinking and the approach as well.

The SEE Learning framework suggests nurturing universal human values and the importance of interdependence to collaborate and learn from each other.

SEE Learning is based on three dimensions which encompasses the types of knowledge and competencies that we wish to nurture in our students:

Awareness – It refers to the understanding of thoughts, feelings, and emotions. This type of awareness requires practice and the refinement of attention, and SEE Learning approaches consider attention as a skill that can be developed like other skills.

Compassion – The SEE Learning framework is grounded in the principle of compassion, which lies at the center of the three dimensions of SEE Learning. Compassion refers to cultivating a way of relating to oneself, others, and humanity as a whole through kindness, empathy, and a concern for both happiness and suffering. As the



cultivation of compassion and kindness cannot be reinforced by simply instructing the students to be compassionate, critical thinking is a critical dimension of compassion. This includes critical thinking with reference to understanding of one's needs, wants, and values of oneself and others.

Engagement - One may have awareness of a need or opportunity, and also a sense of care and concern, still lack the ability to take action skillfully and engage effectively is very important. It refers to the methods by which one puts into practice what he or she has mastered from the awareness and compassion dimensions. This dimension refers to learning the behaviours and habituating the attitudes, dispositions, and skills that are conducive to personal, social, and communal well-being.

The Three Domains of SEE Learning:

- i. The Personal Domain** – It is focussed on making the learner aware of the interactions at an individual level, the decisions that they make and how they influence them. The awareness of Emotional Literacy is also focussed at in personal domain and it includes recognizing and identifying emotions, connecting emotions to a larger context including one's own needs, to justify the effects of emotions, and to learn to control emotions successfully. Moreover, emotional literacy allows students to refrain from reactive and impulsive behaviour that could distract oneself and others, and holding the calmness of mind necessary to make sound decisions in the best interest of him / her.
- ii. The Social Domain** – We all understand the importance of emotional literacy and the ability to self-regulate emotions. These skills have immense benefit without any doubt. However, human being is social by nature and the ability to relate / communicate well with others is of equal importance. Scientific research suggests that prosocial behaviours can be cultivated through learning, reflection, and disciplined practice. The results of such cultivation include measurable changes in the brain, body, and behaviour, with associated benefits for physical, mental, and social well-being.
- iii. The Systems Domain** – As we do not interact with people individually, so for effective ethical engagement it is important to complement compassion with responsible decision making based on an understanding of the wider systems within which we live. Being interdependent of each other's action, it is important to think strategically and collaboratively for addressing a problem in a systematic manner.

The Pedagogical Model:

In the Pedagogical Model of SEE Learning the students are guided to move through three levels of understanding as they gain proficiency in the fundamentals of each

competency. This is due to received knowledge what the students learn by listening, reading, discussing, exploring, and experiencing. This level exposes students to basic information and experiences related to the competencies and it helps in developing a good understanding of the acquired knowledge.

The learners to be encouraged to use their critical thinking to investigate on the concepts deeply, using many different lines of approach, and apply them to their own situations so that they can reach the second level of critical insight. It is referred to as "a-ha moments" in which students gain personal insight, connecting the knowledge they have received to their own lives and existence. At this level, the knowledge is not merely



received but it enables the learner to develop a new perspective.

The teachers are encouraged to help students reinforce these insights through reflection practices that is included in the curriculum. This gradually leads to the level of embodied understanding. The acquisition of knowledge at each of these successive levels of understanding through Critical thinking.

A vital learning thread in SEE Learning is engaged learning. This term refers to learning strategies and methods that are active, participatory, and embodied for students, in contrast to approaches where students receive material in a passive and static way. Engaged learning involves cooperative learning (group projects, student-led discussion, collaborative

games); creative expression (arts, music, writing, performance); community engagement projects (such as service projects); and ecological learning (such as engaging directly with the natural world). Engaged learning is complementary to the other key learning threads like Critical Thinking, Reflective Practices and Scientific Perspectives that allows students to experience and further explore what they are learning in a direct, embodied, and practical way, by seeing what it is like to put into practice.

Roles of the SEE Learning Educator:

- **Educator as Facilitator:**

The SEE Learning Curriculum is different and a new learning to both students and educators. The Educator need not be an expert in compassion, awareness, and engagement in order to teach SEE Learning. It is very important for the educator to act as facilitator and take interest to ensure that the students are engaged in the subject matter for student inquiry, critical thinking, reflection, skill practice, and creative expression.

- **Educator as Learner:**

The Educator need not be an expert to facilitate an exploration of the mental and emotional attitudes and skills presented in the curriculum. When the Educator feels like a Learner, the joy of being a student of SEE Learning is enjoyed during the training and professional learning communities, and the development of personal practice; it will deepen the understanding, develop new skills, and will empower them to deal with the challenges and successes like the students do.

Adapting SEE Learning for the Students:

SEE Learning is a universally-applicable curriculum that does not promote any particular philosophy or culture. It promotes the development of secular ethics that can provide a basis for just and peaceful relationships between people of all backgrounds. The Educator needs to set it according to the classroom context and situations.

As illustrated below, SEE Learning embraces a growth model, promoting the continuous enhancement of capabilities through different age-appropriate activities and assignments for Early Years Learners.



Component: Attention and Self-Awareness
Attending to our Body and Sensations
Attending to Emotions
Mapping the mind by categorizing emotions
Component: Self Compassion
Understanding Emotions in Context
Self-Acceptance
Component: Self-Regulation
Balancing the Body
Cognitive and Impulse Control
Navigating Emotions
Component: Interpersonal Awareness
Attending to our Social Reality
Attending to our Shared Reality with Others
Appreciating Diversity and Difference

In each component of SEE Learning, the educator will need to facilitate learning on all three levels of understanding—received knowledge, critical insight, and embodied understanding—by introducing age-appropriate activities, assignments, discussions and projects, helping students deepen their understanding so that they can achieve critical insights, and then reinforcing this knowledge and these insights through practice and repeated familiarization of SEE Learning strategies.

Self-Assessment of Students:

The early years learners are involved in the self-assessment by asking them to reflect on the following questions:

- i. Their Learning and their experience on each Components mentioned above.
- ii. How the SEE Learning activities influence their feelings and behaviours.
- iii. Their choice of actions in different situations and demonstration of Kindness and Compassion; how do they expect the others to behave.
- iv. Situations in which they identify their emotions and controlling it appropriately.

Teachers’ Observation of the Students:

The students’ learning progress is observed with special focus on critical insights and embodied understanding in student behaviour and student work. Reviewing the individual work and reflecting on the student abilities to get a sense of the ways in which they are developing their skills:



- How they are using their resilience skills and making the right choice.
- Demonstration of compassion, empathy, kindness.
- Participation and quality of attention during mindfulness activities.
- Ability to identify and name their feelings and emotions.
- Being non-judgemental listener to consider others' perspectives.
- Willingness and capability to resolve conflicts by suggesting or proposing appropriate solutions.
- Demonstrating team goals and team values.
- Reviewing student work (drawings, writing, projects) to check for evidence of developments.

Parents' Observation Report:

A communication is sent to the Parent with the objective of the SEE Learning Activities planned for the learners. This helps in receiving the parental observation at home and some activities and assignments are given at home as well according to the objective of the skills to be reinforced in the few activities mentioned below:

- Learners conduct interviews at home during family festival or celebrations to understand the perspectives of different family members.
- Learners participate in the neighbourhood in sensitizing people for eco-friendly celebrations of Diwali or Ganesh Festival
- Students participating in the Donation Drive of used toys, story books, stationery items to be donated to the Underprivileged students.
- Celebrating birthday in an Orphanage or Old Age Homes.
- Helping a friend to complete Homework if he or she is unwell.
- Assisting parents in household chores.
- Gratitude Note to the Gardener for Saving Soil
- A message for the Soldiers as they are always protecting us.

Results: The Self-Assessment of the Students and Reflection of the Teachers and Parents based on their observation reflects the following:

- Improved attention, compassion, self-regulation, interpersonal awareness and understanding of the assigned tasks.
- The learners demonstrated more responsibility in their behaviour in the classroom and at home.
- The decisions taken by the learners in response to the situations were dealt in a very balanced manner keeping in mind the values and sentiments of the others.
- A significant higher level of engagement of the learners observed in all the assigned tasks.
- In every attempt, they tried to make meaningful contribution by their thoughtfulness and understanding.
- The thinking level of the learners have been considerably enhanced to critically analyse and sight logical reasoning for seeking solution.


Conclusion:

The United Nations' 2016 edition of the World Happiness Report contains a chapter on secular ethics, which notes that "We should assess human progress by the extent to which people are enjoying their lives—by the prevalence of happiness and, conversely, the absence of misery... [W]e should in all our dealings truly wish for the happiness of all of those we can affect, and we should cultivate in ourselves an attitude of unconditional benevolence."

The report goes on to cite the Dalai Lama's statement that "We need an approach to ethics that can be equally acceptable to those with religious faith and those without. We need a secular ethics."

The Social Emotional and Ethical Learning leads to sustained happiness in the early years learners when they experience the joy of learning and is aware of own self and the others around them. The implementation of the SEE Learning requires the support of all the stakeholders to maximize its effectiveness. The implementation of SEE Learning Programme is very important as it boosts confidence and enthusiasm in the learning community. To prioritize and model compassion, respect, awareness and engagement in all professional interactions by all community members is mandatory for effective execution of SEE Learning.

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