

Role of Neo-Humanist Education in Socio- Emotional Development of Primary School Children: A Case Study of Ananda Marga School

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Abstract:

The present study explores the role of Ananda Marga School in socio-emotional development of primary school children. The study also reflects on the teaching learning approach adopted in Ananda Marga School for developing social skills and positive emotions. The Ananda Marga School is based on Neo-humanist philosophy. Case study method is adopted to undertake this research with observation and semi-structured interview as tool. Data are collected from students, teachers and parents and analyzed qualitatively. The study found that the curriculum of Ananda Marga is designed to promote socio-emotional development of primary children. The principles of harmony and universal love are embedded in curriculum both as content and as practice. So, the role of Ananda Marg is significant in developing positive emotions and controlling over negative emotions. The different features of NHE curriculum help to promote positive development among the children. These include the possibility to form supportive relationships with peers and adults; the opportunity for building psychological, emotional, and social skills that facilitate well-being. Using these curricular inputs in primary level classroom can be

very helpful in reaching the ultimate goal of primary education in other schools.

Key words: Neo-humanist Education, Ananda Marga School, Socio-Emotional Development, Social Skills.

INTRODUCTION

Primary education by its nature, purpose and mode of action is unique and is shaped by a diversity of needs and aspirations of children. It builds the foundation of a child. Happiness, joy, satisfaction and affection from teachers and among the peers are the pre requisites of effective primary education. Any education system that is devoid of happy learning environment fails to arouse thirst for knowledge. The system that only overstresses the training of the intellect basically reinforces the imbalance. Our present educational system is information and skill centric and lacks emotional nourishment and spiritual expansion of children.

Neo-humanist education (NHE) system provides a high quality education with a stronger socio-emotional foundation that can be beneficial throughout the life experience of child. According to Neo- humanist education, positive socio- emotional development occurs when students feel that the teacher cares about them. This is an essential factor in yoga based neo-humanist education. A dynamic integration of music, drama, dance, art, craft, yoga and guided meditation are the main tools of creating happy learning environment in primary level classroom.

NHE is firmly rooted in the philosophy and principle of Neo-humanism, which stands for “practice of love for all creation including plants, animals and the inanimate world” as propounded by the sheer Indian philosopher Shree P. R. Sarkar (1921-1990). It incorporates a harmonious blending of physical,

mental and spiritual development of children. Spirituality, creativity and universal love are at the centre of this new force. Neo-humanism suggests curriculum which can be transacted in schools to foster the spirit of universal love. At their formative age, children should learn about the self, the ecological dimensions of the body and the nature around them, the role they have to play in the society, their interconnectedness with other living and non- living beings and above all a strong feeling of a connecting link between self and the Supreme entity. Therefore, NHE incorporates both theory and practice in its curriculum in a balanced way. The educational ideas of Neo-Humanism are implemented through Ananda Marg (AM) School across the Globe.

Ananda Marga schools are based on the philosophy of Neo- Humanism and run successfully across the country for last three decades. Most of the schools are at primary level means from 3+ age group to 9+ age group. The schools are the places where the values of Neo-humanism can be realized. At the primary level, the schools follow their autonomous board named Ananda Marga Gurukul which is located in Kolkata and are controlled by the special branch of Ananda Marga called Education, Relief and Welfare Section (ERAWS,1963). Near about one thousand schools are there in India, most of which are at primary level. Ananda Marga schools are there in 180 countries across the world. The ultimate goal of these schools is to awaken the divine consciousness that is hidden inside the child. In West Bengal, there are near about 130 primary schools which run in the name of Ananda Marga Primary Schools. Most of the schools are headed by Swamiji (monk) who are trained in Neo- humanism philosophy. The environment of Ananda Marga Schools maintains a balance in the individual and social needs of children. The environment is physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically enabling. The school develops socio- personal qualities of children along with academic aspects.

The behaviors that reflect good adaptation, maintain supportive relationships with peers and adults and also maintain harmony with self and with others are referred to as socio-emotional development. Social-emotional development includes the child's experience, expression, and management of emotions and the ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others (Cohen et al., 2005). It encompasses both intra- and inter-personal processes. Socio- emotional development includes the possibility to form supportive relationships with peers and adults; the opportunity for building psychological, emotional, and social skills that facilitate well-being (Pulkkenin et al.2010).

NEED OF THE STUDY

Present day primary school curriculum is information centric. There is little scope for harmonious development of children. Exploring spiritual and emotional potentiality is totally missing in the curriculum. The classroom environment is designed in such a way, where the children remain passive listeners and they swallow the information like quinine pills. Such environment fails to achieve the ultimate goal of education. But schools based on NHE gives adequate opportunities to children for the development of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of personality, which are reported by researchers.

Jordon, Sid. (2013) found that strong socio-emotional bonding enhances learning. Marcus, B. (2012) reported that emotional relationship is the base for NHE classroom practice. Pelanda and Santos (2011) reported that psycho-social environment of Ananda Marga School is essential for development of positive self image. Palmieri, T. (2011) conducted an experiment on primary children and suggested

ten teaching strategies for joyful learning. Jacobson, E. (2009) explored aesthetics in Neo-humanist education.

The above discussed research studies reveal that attempts have been made by researchers to examine the approach of teaching learning of NHE in relation to different socio- personal variables and learning. All the studies have been conducted abroad. But no empirical research has been reported in India to examine role of NHE for socio-emotional development of primary children. In this context, the researcher has formulated the following research questions for investigation.

1. What is the socio-emotional development of children studying in Ananda Marga School?
2. What types of teaching learning process are followed in Ananda Marga School?
3. Whether Ananda Marga School develops socio-emotional aspects of primary school children?

OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the socio-emotional status of students of Ananda Marga School.
2. To study the teaching learning process adopted at Ananda Marga School.
3. To find out the role of Ananda Marga School for socio-emotional development of children.

METHODOLOGY

The case study method is adopted to examine role of NHE based schools for developing socio-emotional aspects of personality. The case is one Ananda Marga school, located in Darjeeling district, West Bengal, India. The school is up to primary level and follows NHE principles in its curriculum,

teaching, evaluation and other activities. The principal of the school is saffron (Nun). Both boys and girls are studying in the age group of 5 to 9. All the teachers, students and other members of school are involved in this study as sample.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

To achieve the first objective, self- developed observation schedule is used to observe the socio- emotional status of students. In case of second objective, classroom observation schedule was prepared to study different teaching learning approach in school. Semi-structured interview schedule was used for students, teachers and parents to collect data in fulfilling the third objective 'role of NHE school in socio-emotional development of the children'. All the tools are validated by taking expert comments on relevance of items. The investigator also recorded qualitative data by observing, writing in diary, voice recording, taking photographs and notes on special behavior.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A. Socio-Emotional Status of Students of Ananda Marga School

It has been observed that students of A. M. School show positive emotions and inter- and intra-personal skills. Inter and intra- personal skills are closely related with morality. Practice of morality is one of the important aspects of NHE principles. Formal and informal interactions with adults provide learning opportunities whereby children can strengthen their morality. Some of the important socio- emotional aspects are noticed among the children. The following table shows socio emotional status of the children.

Table-1: Socio- Emotional status of the children

Indicators of socio emotional development	Seldom		Occasionally		Frequently	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sharing belongings with others	6	17.4	7	20	22	62.8
Cooperating with peers	3	8.5	9	25.7	23	65.7
Taking care of peers when getting hurt	4	11.4	4	11.4	27	77
Readily accepted his foul play	7	20	9	25.7	19	54.2
Showing empathy	4	11.4	7	20	24	68.5
Resolving anxiety	8	22.8	11	31.4	16	45.7

A three point rating scale is used to quantify the observable traits of the children. The table shows the trend of positive emotions that NHE School inculcated among the children.

B: Teaching Learning Process at Ananda Marga School

Principles of harmony with others and with oneself, universal love, concept of Ideation of Great, and feeling of interconnectedness are some of the innovative features of Neo-humanist education. To realize the essence of all these philosophical expressions, Ananda Marga School incorporates some activities and practices in school hour which are discussed below:

Morning Circle: An Instrument for Socio- Emotional Development

Morning circle is one of the important pedagogical innovations of NHE School. Students can gain both the content knowledge as well as the experiential knowledge through various activities of morning circle. Physical exercise and yoga based meditation are the main activities of morning circle. Along with these, the students also practice rhythmic dance, rhymes with actions and feelings, Sanskrit Shloka, verse, songs all speak about love, compassion, courage, co- operation and many more social skills. Morning circle propagates the messages of circle of love. The programme includes multitude of activities according to child and are available to every child. The following table presents different aspects stressed in the morning circle.

Table-2: Observation of Morning Circle

Indicators	N	%	Total
Self Discipline	32	91.4	35
Silent in Guided Meditation	35	100	35
Follows Instructions Correctly	28	80	35
Enthusiastic in Participating	29	82.8	35

The table indicates that more than 90% of children are self-disciplined. This is because Neo-humanist education recognizes the limits of individual freedom by its insistence on acknowledging the ecological dimensions of human existence. All students were observing guided meditation with closing eyes. Yoga based physical exercise, high energy level rhythmic dance gradually slows down to stable state are one of the main activity of morning circle. It is the best way to channelize their energy in a desirable way. This is helpful in both physical body co-ordination and emotional balance. Morning circle is a dynamic integration of music, drama, dance, yoga and guided meditation. The mind flows along with both the idea and the rhythm of the poem.

The children are interested in morning circle. Most of the children regularly attend because they like it. Learning through intimidation is strictly prohibited in NHE. Because when the cause of intimidation is present learning is missing. Another important factor of NHE School that children are in safe environment and are not scared of being scolded.

METHODS OF TEACHING

Practice period is incorporated into the class routine and it is designed to implement the philosophy of NHE direct into the life. Integration of extra-curricular activities with the school days. Two types of activities are organized. (i) Adult supervised recreation activities which include: solo and group dance, theme based short drama and some indoor and outdoor games. (ii) Self choice activities which include: service project, plantation,

cleaning and beautification, Art and crafts, puppet making. Play and Storytelling are two unique methods of teaching at primary level in Anada Marga School.

The story telling is the most liked methods of teaching. Story telling is used in NHE schools for primary children. Stories are the natural ways of how our brain works to understand reality. Stories help us maintain our sense of self. Stories also explain things to ourselves and integrate the feedback we get from different parts of our brain- the feeling, the thinking, the impulsive part. In a classroom setting, stories create community by entraining the story teller's and listeners' brain. Neuro-science research on impact of story-telling found that story tellers and listeners have the same areas of their brains light up at the same times (Taminga, 2012). There is transference of consciousness going on and this continues for some time after the story. The dictum "I think- so I am" becomes "we think- so we are". Thus a shared journey of experiencing a story brings children together with the teacher in classroom. It helps to increase the sense of belongingness. Story telling helps in better cognition. Role playing needs quality of good vocabulary and good communication skills which the small children have very less of it, so most of them do not like it.

Learning Environment of the Classroom

The learning environment of the classroom is physically secured and psychologically enabling. Intrinsic motivation is used frequently inside the classroom. Social interaction in classroom is appreciated and pupil's choices in study are given priority. Learner can sit anywhere they wish and with anyone they like. Learners' maximum participation in classroom activities is observed. All these activities support emotional bonding between student-teacher and among the students. NHE supports happy learning environment that create thirst

for knowledge among the learners (Mendoza,E, 2015). The following table shows the student-teacher interaction in the classroom:

Table-3: Students-Teacher Interaction

	How many times	How long minimum	max	Total (min) %	Duration of class(minutes)	
Students' response	17	1/2 min	3 min	18	60	30
Teachers' response	10	2 min	5 min	10	33	30
Utilizing laughter in class	6	½ min	1 mn			30
Teacher attending students	20	1 min	2 min			30
Sense of aesthetics used	8	In an integrated way				30
Peer interactions allowed	6					
Emotional support by teachers		In an integrated way				30

The above table reveals that a good interaction and a positive student teacher relationship are present in the NHE School. Students' response (18 min) is higher than teachers (10 min). It helps in cultivating the aesthetic capacities of mind, positive and effective communication with the children. Laughter builds a good rapport between teacher and student. Teacher avoids over communication as they used only 33% time of class with max. 5 min. Thus teacher allows students' time and activities dominating in the class.

Sense of aesthetics helps the children to constantly think the aesthetic purpose of every action, goodness of everything. Thus positive emotions and high moral values are inculcated in the classroom. Emotional supports in the form of praise, empathy, encouragement, re-assurance are constantly used by the teachers to promote socio- emotional development of children. This type of classroom climate helps in creating positive self-image and self-confidence.

C. Role of NHE School for Socio Emotional Development of Children

The investigator has observed the learning atmosphere of the school and has found that a fearless learning environment exists in the school. Good character growth results from open atmosphere that allow experimentation and from teachers guiding children in a friendly manner (Avk, Anandanivedita 1999). The curriculum of NHE consists of a series of stories, rhymes and other activities that speak about love, compassion, respect, joy and ideation of the Great (God). Ideation of the great spread in a integrated way with Mother nature, Earth, Supreme being, ourselves and with all living beings. Thus the child feels his relation with himself and the other around the world. All have to encourage the children with a sense of unity and empathy for the world around them. The role of teachers in this regard is very significant. Teachers create an informal relationship with children inside and outside the classroom. They consider students' choice in different activities.

Development of Social Skills

As a result of regular practice of high moral principles in school, students develop some of the social skills that help them to become successful human beings. Different inter- and intra-personal skills are observed among the children. The result is summarized in the following table:

Table 4: Rating scales of Social skills

	Moderate	Very good	Excellent
Inter-personal skill	23%	30%	47%
Intra-personal skill	19%	22%	59%

The table shows that most of the children possess social skills on very good to excellent. Some of the inter-personal skills observed are-i) non harming ii) seeing the bright sides of everybody iii) praising others iv) moderation v) benevolent

truth. Intra-personal skills are: i) control over aggressive behavior ii) mental resilience iii) contentment iv) sacrifice v) cosmic shelter.

Children possessed with high rate of positive emotion will show more intra- and inter-personal skills. Neo-humanist education inculcates such values through its integrated curriculum of morality, creativity, spirituality and universal love. NHE specifically suggests ten moral principles for inter- and intra-personal skill development

MAJOR FINDINGS

- The students of Ananda Marga School show positive socio-emotional status.
- Morning circle is one of the major aspects of effective teaching learning process in Ananda Marga School. It helps in promoting emotional balance among children. Different activities of morning circle helps to promote positive emotions in children.
- The effective and innovative methods of teaching in school mainly focus on learners' active engagement and learning with joy. Thus there exists a strong emotional bonding that ties all the children and teachers together.
- The pedagogical and curricular innovations of NHE help in developing some of the positive behaviours like, sharing, cooperation, empathy, love etc.
- Fearless and psychologically enabling classroom of Ananda Marga School fosters happy learning environment where the learners get constant emotional support from teachers. It helps in creating positive self-image and self-confidence.
- NHE creates a happy learning environment where the children are happy, relaxed and safe. They actively take part in all the activities.

- Regular practice of high moral principles in school helps the children to develop social skills like, harmony with self and harmony with others.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The first objective is to explore the socio-emotional status of the children of Ananda Marga School. The study found that the children of Ananda Marga School possess positive socio-emotional development which was supported by Eric Jacobson (2013) who reported that teachers' positive communications with students put great emphasis on expressing desired behaviours.

The second objective is to find out teaching learning approach and different curricular inputs and practices that are adopted for socio-emotional development of children. The study reveals that different activities incorporated in NHE curriculum that promotes socio-emotional development among the students. Morning circle helps in nurturing positive emotions. The physico-psycho-spiritual atmosphere of morning circle helps in promoting emotional balance. Ada Merz (2000) supports this result who reported that the magic in Neo-humanist schools is in the morning circle, where benevolent energy is generated from all minds, the individual feels uplifted and carried out of personal problems he or she was struggling with alone. The collective rhythmic activities, dance drama, yoga and guided meditation regulate the interaction among mental propensities, hormones and nerve cells and control their effects on child's behavior. All these activities also regulate the secretion of the endocrine system which is most important for expression of different types of emotions and other mental propensities. Meditation, the important aspect of morning circle helps the child to become still and focused. Alister (2000) found that regular practice of meditation is one kind of mental

training that fosters inner joy. Storytelling and play methods have contributed significantly in developing positive social skills and emotional balance. Bussey (2000) reported that place of story and fantasy in primary level teaching learning process. While acting out stories, children practice and learn social skills and their learning experience is widened.

The third objective is to explore the role of Ananda Marga School in socio emotional development of students. The study reports that the teacher- student interaction in Ananda Marga School is flexible, supportive and cooperative. Children are intrinsically motivated in taking part in learning activities. NHE curriculum suggests strategies for creating fearless and happy learning environment. Sid Jordon (2009) found that the learning environment of NHE School is conducive for socio-emotional development of students. The study also highlights the role of NHE in developing social skills. The study also indicates positive signs for children's inter- and intra-personal skills. Children adopt good social skills- simultaneously experiencing from curricular practices in schools and directly observing and imitating from the teacher. The practices of NHE focus on inter-connectedness of self with others and feelings of belongingness to the Supreme consciousness. Both of these are essential in developing social skills.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

1. The present study has significant implications for primary education in particular and school education in general for socio-emotional development of children. True education occurs when the teachers, students and culture interact with each other. Therefore, NHE based pedagogy can be implemented in primary level education system for all round development of children. The socio-emotional climate need to be created in school which will

be acting as motivating factor for learners and parents for sending their children to school. It can be said that school drop outs and wastage can be minimized by adopting NHE based education.

2. The study also found that morning circle is the instrument responsible for children's inner transformation which is very essential in the present competitive world. Majority of students have favourable attitude towards the activities of morning circle. Students enjoy in participating morning circle. It is also observed that students remain active in morning circle and thus channelize energy in a desirable way. Therefore, it is essential in resolving anxiety and hyper-activity as well as essential for development of values in children.
3. The primary education curriculum and curriculum transaction need to be relooked and revised as per the philosophy and principles of Neo-humanist education which is based on Universal love, harmony and Awakened Conscience. Culturally sensitive and individualistic approach integrated with spirituality should be adopted to explore the inner world of the children.
4. Emotional support and emotional nourishment are essential in childhood. This part is totally neglected in our present primary curriculum, whereas, NHE principles focuses on socio-emotional development of children. Hence, our primary curriculum may incorporate NHE principles for development of a whole child.
5. The study has implications for the pre-service and in-service teacher education programme at primary level. The teacher education curriculum needs to incorporate the pedagogical innovations of NHE which will help in

training prospective teachers. The in-service training programmes need to be organized for teachers on using morning circle in the classroom.

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