Development of Pro-social Skills in Classroom

Dr Uma Krishna

Is the current education system preparing children for the real world to its best ability? In an era where changes take place at an incredible pace, are schools able to teach their students relevant skills? Among other basic skills taught in schools, teaching *social skills* is inevitable, regardless of the changing time and trends. Fine social skills are significant for the successful functioning in life, as these skills form the backbone of personal and professional achievements. These skills enable one to cope better and achieve more in diverse situations. The degree to which children and adolescents acquire good social skills can influence their performance in school and at the broad public spectrum. Also, these skills help children navigate the maze of social expectations which poses one of the intricate challenges, particularly at this age.

As children grow, they face some unique and complex social challenges which they may be predominantly susceptible to like dealing with a bunch of hooligans, being socially isolated and struggling frequently to adapt in a social setup. Children with minimal social competence will have compounded problems while mapping their way both inside and outside the classroom.

Hartup states that *the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not school grades, and not classroom behaviour, but rather, the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children. Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain close relationships with other children, and who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer culture are seriously at risk.* He also emphasizes that peer relationships in particular contribute a great deal to both social and cognitive development to the effectiveness with which one functions as an adult.

What are pro-social skills?

Pro-social skills can be defined as the potential necessary to communicate, influence and work together with other children of the school, without excessive discrepancy or dissonance and to maintain enjoyable rapport. *"The exuberant, extraverted style of interacting is not necessarily the best or the only way to relate to others. A quieter style of relating can also be very healthy,"* says **Eileen Kennedy-Moorev**. Social skills can also be defined within the context of social and emotional learning — recognizing and managing our emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically (**Zins, Weissbert, Wang, & Walberg**, 2004). Social skills constitute the ability or flexibility to regulate one's actions and performances to fit a particular situation, personal needs and desires. The ability to behave in pro-social ways is also referred to as *social intelligence*.

Why is there a dearth of social skills in many children?

Many children are not aware of *appropriate behaviour* to interrelate or manage with others at social scenarios. Either lack of guidance on *appropriate behaviour* at home by elders is the cause or probably they do not pick it up in spite of having good role models at home who promote *appropriate behaviour*, as some children need a structured atmosphere to learn any skill. Some children work hard to exhibit their newly-learnt skills, but are still rejected due to their past reputation or because of their unsure behaviour which do not appear natural. Some children have problem in observing and managing their behaviour when unanticipated reactions occur. Sometimes children display behaviour, which seem just fine to them, for instance, not assisting the teacher, arguing with adults about what they think is right, disagreeing in a non-confrontational manner with other children in the classroom, as they fail to differentiate these skills as necessary or useful, yet get the attention, objects or power they seek.
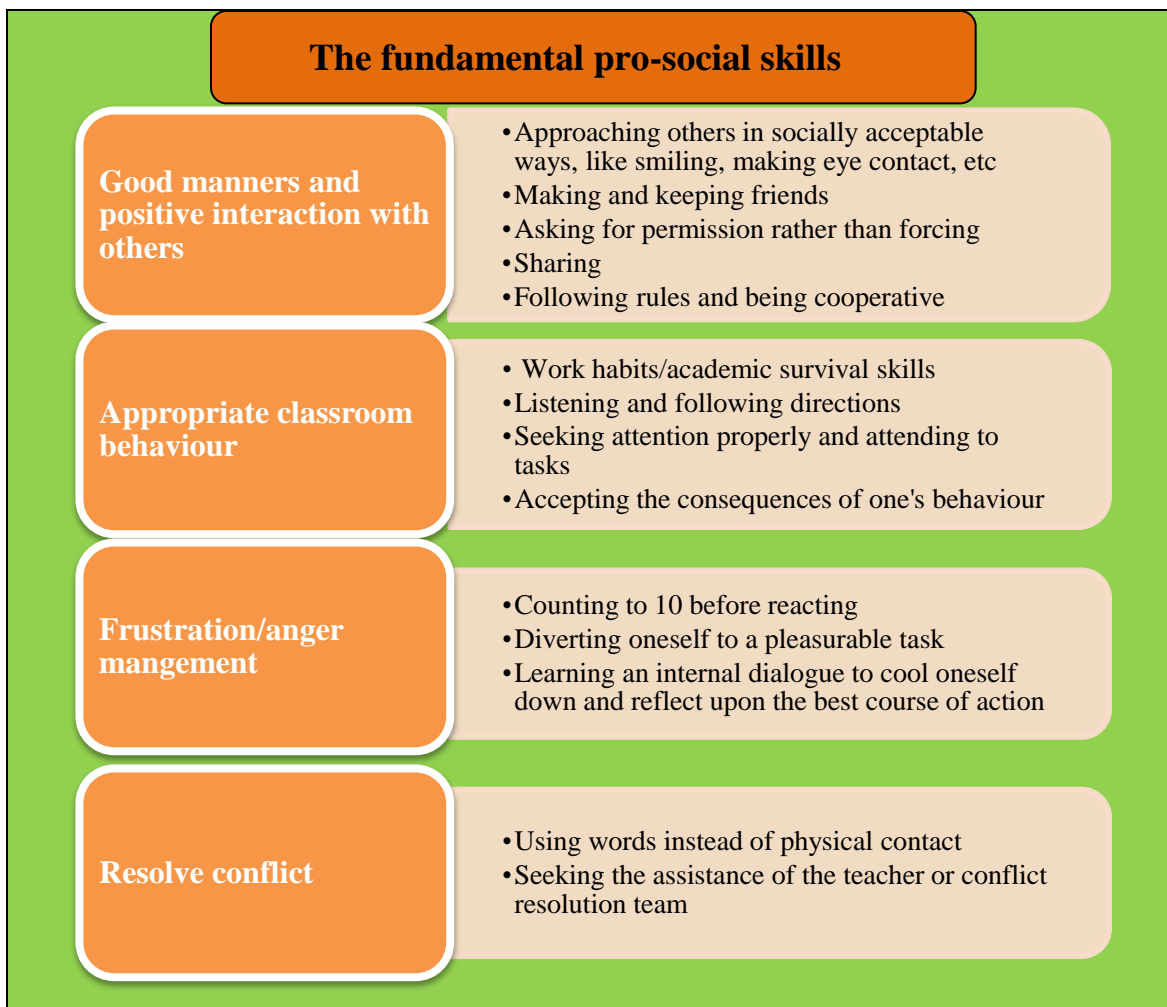
Why is it important to teach social skills?

Many children struggle to interact freely and make or prove a point in the peer group, hence preferring to work or play alone; lack of active involvement in group activities limits their prospects to learn from others and share their own knowledge and skills. The classroom setting should give a platform to children to interact closely with peers and teacher. In addition to their significance in daily navigation, social skills can have a larger impact on a child's ability to excel in academics also. The classroom can turn into both a training ground for development of social skills, and a pitch in which these skills can be experimented and explored further. A focused approach by teachers can build and enhance social skills in children required to succeed in school and in life.

Tips for Teachers

- Teach students important life skills

- Teach and reinforce appropriate classroom behaviour

- Improve student's daily social functioning

- Help students make friends and interact positively

- Help students to fit into groups

- Facilitate students to perform to their best potential

- Teach students to follow rules, instructions, procedures, etc

- Boost self awareness, self confidence and self esteem in students

- Motivate them to practise pro-social skills

The fundamental pro-social skills

Incorporating and adequate reinforcement of the following fundamental social skills in the classroom will definitely tune up children's performances in day to day situations.

The fundamental pro-social skills

Good manners and positive interaction with others
- Approaching others in socially acceptable ways, like smiling, making eye contact, etc
- Making and keeping friends
- Asking for permission rather than forcing
- Sharing
- Following rules and being cooperative

Appropriate classroom behaviour
- Work habits/academic survival skills
- Listening and following directions
- Seeking attention properly and attending to tasks
- Accepting the consequences of one's behaviour

Frustration/anger mangement
- Counting to 10 before reacting
- Diverting oneself to a pleasurable task
- Learning an internal dialogue to cool oneself down and reflect upon the best course of action

Resolve conflict
- Using words instead of physical contact
- Seeking the assistance of the teacher or conflict resolution team

Emphasizing and reinforcing these fundamental social skills consistently will result in positive changes in a child's development.

Projecting Positive Prospects

Projection of positive prospects consistently to students will definitely foster significant impact on nurturing confidence and increasing their enthusiasm in showing pro-social behaviour. If the students are consistently appreciated for their responsible behaviour and respect for themselves and others, they are likely to increase such tendencies to feature their pleasing behaviour in their own personal traits and strengthen themselves for

possessing and acting on the basis of that behaviour. On the contrary, due to lack of recognition and appreciation, a child will not have the enthusiasm required to display their healthy behaviour and skills as often as necessary and gradually build such personal traits. A conscious and compassionate approach of the teacher can foster pro-social skills among the diverse population of students where individual differences are expected and established.

Role of the teacher in developing pro-social skills in children

An efficient and confident teacher who has a vision beyond teaching or classroom management can foster children's prosocial skills to a larger extent. The ability to remain patient and focused on seeking solutions, and not get frustrated will help the teachers achieve better results from students. An attitude of *caring with firmness* is critical for shaping pro-social behaviour in students. Teachers can create a major impact on the students by developing their roles as facilitators of students' socialization into the learning environment. With good bonding with children, teachers will be in the position to take direct action in helping students to cope up with their shortcomings. The most effective way to teach a social skill is to break the curriculum of a specific skill into small, progressive steps, and encourage the students to understand, discuss, reflect and practise. This approach helps the students to be acquainted with the intricacies of certain social skills that many of us take for granted. Thus students must be taken along the way by laying out the steps first. The three important objectives with which students need to be mentored are
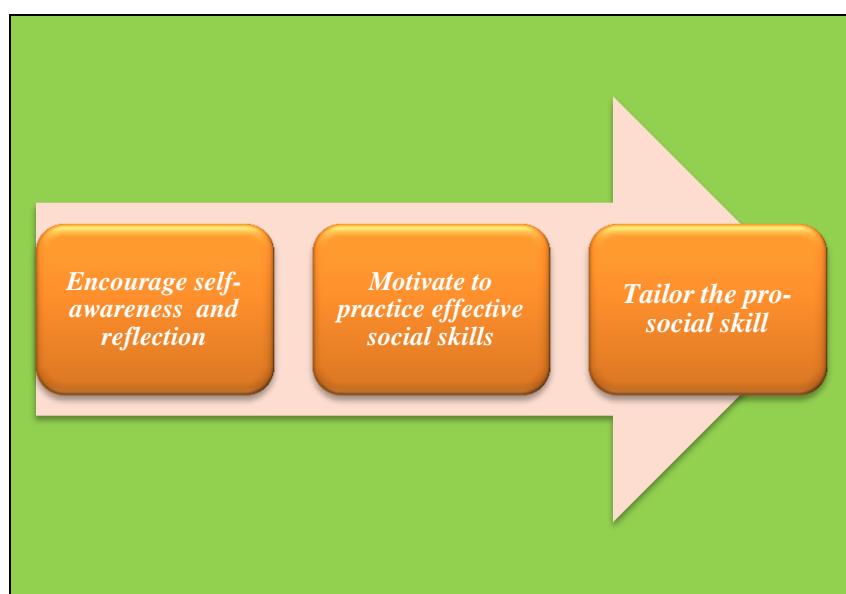
a. ***Encouraging self-awareness and reflection*** will help students to understand and differentiate how individual actions and words have consequences and to be responsible for their actions and words. Teachers can formulate strategies to develop students' abilities to think through situations and take different perspectives by practising the possible outcomes.

b. ***Motivating students to practise effective pro-social skills*** inside and outside classroom, by appreciating the appropriate behaviour along with repeated positive reinforcement will facilitate students to do better. By being a role-model, a teacher can craft situations that rally round to build social skills.

c. ***Tailoring social skills*** is essential to assess and categorize the nature of a child's social skill deficits in order to devise and execute the most appropriate interaction. Thus providing direct support in developing pro-social skills in the classroom environment often lead to consequent display of certain skills in other social settings also.

Stories can be also be designed to help children understand confusing social situations or be used as a tool to prompt student feedback about the inappropriate behaviour displayed. Each story breaks down such situations into understandable steps, descriptions, and images to help a child understand an entire circumstance. It can help them to incorporate the messages found in the story and use them in their daily activities.

Conclusion

Pro-social skills are essential for good relationships and interactions. Through modelling and positive reinforcement, teachers can facilitate prosocial skills in children. Accurate diagnosis of social skill deficit and tailoring a strategy specific to the child and the situation, and constantly monitoring and evaluating the child's progress will help them to reach their full potential. Children who are able to get along well with others most are likely to have cultured a variety of prosocial skills and have a high level of social intelligence.

Dr Uma Krishna *is an ex-Market Research Consultant at Lumière Business Solution, Navi Mumbai and has seven years of teaching experience in CBSE-affiliated schools. She has done market research, writing & facilitating workshops for educational institutions and has published several articles for magazines and online portals.*

Lesson plan on developing pro-social skills
Dr Uma Krishna

The most effective way of teaching a pro-social skill is to break the curriculum of a specific skill into small, progressive steps, and encourage students to understand, discuss, reflect and practise. This approach helps the students to be acquainted with the intricacies of certain social skills that many of us take for granted. Thus students must be taken along the way by laying out the steps first.

Objectives: To teach pro-social skills

Topic/Theme: *Following Directions*

Character Education Trait: Respect, cooperation and responsibility

Context: All settings

Time duration: 30-35 minutes

Activity: Group activity with role-playing cards

Purpose: Emphasis on active listening to follow directions

Materials required: a. poster of *active listening* steps

                      b. role-playing cards/poster

Introduction: The session begins by asking questions like *'What does it mean to follow directions?'* and *'Why is it important?'* and continues by discussing what it means to be respectful and responsible with other fellow students. A chart needs to be prepared on the same.

Procedure: The teacher elucidates the purpose of the activity: practising *active listening* to help students follow directions given by elders. He/She also explains four *active listening* steps-

a. *Look* – establish eye contact
b. *Respond* – nod your head or say something to show you understand the direction
c. *Act* – Do what you are asked to do in the way you are expected to do
d. *Check* – clarify again with the teacher

Example	Non-example
• responding in an appropriate way when asked something • carrying out instructions in the expected way	• talking and laughing with one another when someone is speaking • ignoring or not responding when asked to do something

Activity:

One of the students in the group is asked to pick up a role-playing card, e.g. *'teacher'* or *'doctor'*. He/She plays the role - gives instruction and explains what has to be done. Other students need to demonstrate *active listening* and follow the directions. When one person is done, the students say '*thank you'*. All the students in the group should get a chance to use one of the role-playing cards. The teacher provides supportive and corrective feedback and shares some of the *good* things she saw during the role-plays that supported the activity. He/She should also emphasize the need to always follow the directions given by elders using the steps that the students have just learned and practised.

Check for Understanding

Make a chart of *active listening* and following directions and keep a track of student involvement and response.

- ❖ Whether they maintain eye contact when directions are given? [*Yes/No*]
- ❖ Whether they respond to show that they understand directions? [*Yes/No*]
- ❖ Whether they follow directions always? [*Yes/No*]
- ❖ Whether they let the teacher know that they have followed directions? [*Yes/No*]

Review:

- Tailor students' skills before character traits are formed and displayed at various school settings.

- Give frequent encouragement.

Reinforcement

- Ask students to create a poster to show how active listening helps in following directions in their assigned setting.

- Display students' posters in their appropriate school settings.

Some pro-social skill activities for the classroom setting are listed below:

Activity	Skills
a. *Small games*	Positive interaction, respect for other members of the team, being polite, etc.
b. *Cooperative construction projects*	Respecting each other's efforts, and accordingly communicate, negotiate, and cooperate.
c. *Maintaining school gardens*	Respecting each other's efforts, communicate (give their suggestions) and cooperate.
d. *Team sports/games*	Team spirit, being a modest winner (not bragging), being a sporting loser (congratulating the winner, not blaming anyone), showing due respect to the referee and others, solving conflicts, etc.
e. *Poster making/group discussion*	Sharing ideas, respecting other's ideas, understanding situations and giving individual perspectives.
f. *Dumb Charades*	Forming perspectives, reading and interpreting body language and other social cues.

Dr Uma Krishna is an ex-Market Research Consultant at Lumière Business Solution, Navi Mumbai and has seven years of teaching experience in CBSE-affiliated schools. She has done market research, writing & facilitating workshops for educational institutions and has published several articles for magazines and online portals.

Words Section

Altruism (noun)

Meaning

> ➢ disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others; also behaviour of an animal that is not beneficial to or may be harmful to itself, but that benefits others of its species.
> *(Oxforddictionaries.com)*

Origin (and additional information) ~ The term's first known use was in *1853*. It was derived from French *altruisme*, from Italian *altrui* meaning *somebody else*, and from Latin *alteri huic* meaning *to this other*.

Altruism or *selflessness*, the opposite of *selfishness*, is the principle or practice of concern for the welfare of others. It is a traditional virtue in many cultures and a core aspect of various religious traditions, though the concept of *others* toward whom concern should be directed can vary among cultures and religions.

The concept has a long history in philosophical and ethical thought. The term was originally coined in the 19th century by the founding sociologist and philosopher of science, *Auguste Comte*, and has become a major topic for psychologists (especially evolutionary psychology researchers), evolutionary biologists, and ethologists. Whilst ideas about altruism from one field can have an impact on the other fields, the different methods and focuses of these fields always lead to different perspectives on altruism. In simple terms, altruism is caring about the welfare of other people and acting to help them.

Altruism can be distinguished from feelings of loyalty. Pure altruism consists of sacrificing something for someone other than the self (e.g. sacrificing time, energy or possessions) with no expectation of any compensation or benefits, either direct, or indirect (e.g., receiving recognition for the act of giving).

Much debate exists as to whether *true* altruism is possible. The theory of psychological egoism suggests that no act of sharing, helping or sacrificing can be described as truly altruistic, as the actor may receive an intrinsic reward in the form of personal gratification. The validity of this argument depends on whether intrinsic rewards qualify as *benefits*.

<u>Words Section</u>

The term *altruism* may also refer to an ethical doctrine that claims that individuals are morally obliged to benefit others. Used in this sense, it is usually contrasted to *egoism*, which is defined as acting to the benefit of one's self.

Usage ~

i.   *Most health professionals are motivated by <u>altruism</u> and concern for patients' best interests.*
ii. *The notions of duty and <u>altruism</u> are vital for a tolerant, healthy society.*
iii. *These enlightened and evolved people believe in <u>altruism</u>, idealism, and activism.*

Derivatives ~ *altruist,* singular; *altruistic*, adjective