

Nurturing Socio-Emotional Well-being among Learners

~ Sujata C

The pursuit of happiness is a life-long affair that starts right in the cradle. It is essential to make children aware of it while they are in school.

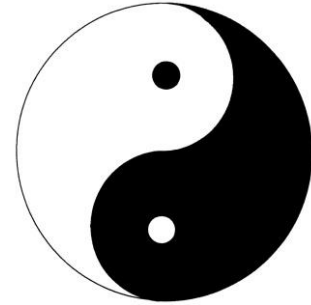
The [World Happiness Report](#) 2019 puts Finland on the top of 156 nations that were surveyed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network in partnership with Ernesto Illy Foundation. The parameters for measuring happiness in this survey were *life expectancy*, *social support*, *income*, *freedom*, *trust*, *health* and *generosity*. India stands at 140 in that list. China, Pakistan and even Bangladesh are happier places compared to India. It is worth noting that India's ranking has slipped seven places in one year, which says a lot about the state of affairs in the country. But on a personal level, happiness is a state of mind. When negative outcomes outweigh positive ones, one can tip the balance by increasing productive and helpful behaviour. Teachers can help children develop this awareness to manage their emotions and be happy.



Pandora's Box: According to Greek mythology, many of the ills that plague the world were released from Pandora's Box, which was packed with evils and never to be opened. Unable to hold her curiosity, Pandora opened the box and tiny flying creatures born out of negative emotions such as envy, hatred, malice, greed, etc., flew out and started spreading all kinds of misery in the world. Hope was the last emotion to come out of Pandora's Box, to help mankind move on, despite all the negativity around.

The nature of emotions:

- According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word *feelings* (used as plural) stands for the emotional side of a person's character, i.e., emotional responses or tendencies to respond. Some people get overwhelmed by their feelings and remain obsessed with them. Becoming hysterically happy or inconsolably sad are two extremes of such a psychological state. On the other hand, there are people who hold back their emotions to pose as perfectionists—clinical, mechanical, cut and dried. It is advisable to tread the middle path with emotions. One must never suppress their emotions, but learn to keep them in control. With practise, striking the right balance is possible.
- Negative emotions are hard or difficult to figure out, whereas positive feelings are fairly easy to understand. If we learn to recognise the impulses behind each emotion, fighting negativity will become much easier.



- Emotions are contagious and this phenomenon is called *emotional contagion* where one person's emotions and related behaviour trigger similar emotions and behaviour in others.
- Emotions can be faked easily and one might use it for their own benefit. In such situations, body language camouflages the actual emotional state. For

example, a child might pretend to be hurt to get a chocolate. Non-verbal signals indicate whether a person is honest or not. The importance of honesty and integrity of character should be taught right from childhood.

The biochemistry of emotions:

Ancient scholars believed that emotions were centred in body organs – happiness, fear and anger came from the heart, kidney and liver respectively. Modern science, of course, denounces this theory. It believes that the brain secretes certain chemicals depending on our state of mind – the stress hormones and the happy hormones. Stress hormones like adrenaline, cortisol, adrenocortical, etc., are released when we are frightened, in pain or stressed out. These hormones give us energy to run for our life or get away from a frightful scene and to cope with danger. Happy hormones like dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, endorphin, etc., boost our confidence levels and fill us with good energy that helps us bond better with fellow humans.



The science of relations:

The history of psychological studies dates back to ancient Greece. One of its branches, neuroscience, deals with the science of human relations, which requires both social and emotional awareness and directly impacts the relationships we have with people around us.

All living things have an innate ability to connect with others of their own kind. The old proverb *man is a social animal* came into existence because ancient scholars had discovered that the human brain is somehow wired to connect with others. This ability is not restricted to humans alone. Animals also display the same ability by forming groups and moving together; such as a pack of wild dogs, a flock of murmuring swallows, a herd of cattle, a school of fish, etc. They know instinctively that there is safety in numbers; their brains are wired to interlock and behave in unison. Now science is telling us that even plants communicate with other plants and help one another get their share of sunlight for growth and



survival¹. The five senses help a living being stay tuned to its surroundings. But today, in the fast paced life, the high levels of stress along with technology are making us lose touch with ourselves and our innate abilities.

Social animals live by some codes of conduct for harmonious outcomes. When this code is broken, it leads to conflict. This code in humans is called

manners. In some countries, pre-schoolers are just taught the manners of living till the age of four. They are trained on how to conduct themselves in daily life and made familiar with healthy habits.

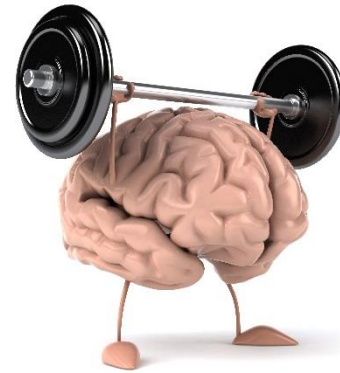
“The foundation for nurturing socio emotional intelligence is laid while a baby is still in the crib,” says well-known psychologist Daniel Goleman in his book *Emotional Intelligence*. For a newborn, the only way to connect with its mother is using non-verbal cues like expressions and sounds. If the mother is responsive, then the baby feels secure as its needs have been satisfied. If a mother is not

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/may/02/plants-talk-to-each-other-through-their-roots>

responsive, then the baby frets and cries for some time, and then finds a way to soothe itself.

Growing up in this manner, when children come to school, their brains remain in various stages of development depending on how much care they have received from infancy. How we will behave as adults, according to Goleman, is more or less fixed by our attitude at the age of 4-5. Different personality types like trusting, anxious, clinging, insecure, easy-going, happy, etc., get shaped during this period.

Since the brain is easy to train, teachers can easily mould the students to a set standard so that they grow up to become balanced and well-adjusted adults. Our ability to handle emotions depends on how well we recognise them. When a feeling of jealousy strikes children, they cannot describe the feeling as it is a complex mix of negative emotions. Positive emotions resonate with our true nature of purity and simplicity.



The degree of competency in social and emotional skills determines the way interactions take place.

For example, persons with social and emotional competency

- know and understand their feelings.
- can communicate clearly about their situation.
- can understand if there is a mistake and take corrective actions.

On the other hand, people who lack social and emotional competency

- are unable to understand body language.
- are likely to be impatient, get irritated or upset and treat others unkindly.
- cannot understand whether their actions are right or wrong.

The good news about social and emotional skills is that these can be learnt easily and unlearnt at any stage of life. Learning to manage our emotions and leveraging our social skills can help us to be happy.

Sujata C is a writer and editor with more than thirty years of experience. She writes on children, environment, society as well as technology. She has also been a copywriter with an advertising agency for almost fifteen years.

Lesson Plan: Nurturing Socio-Emotional Well-being among Learners

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Teachers can try some of these activities to inculcate social and emotional intelligence among students.



1. Use emoticons to teach emotions like anger, sadness, happiness, fear, disgust, envy, hatred, etc. to pre-schoolers.
2. Call in theatre experts and hold workshops for students on emotions and how to handle them.
3. Teach manners.

Make sure to cover the following areas:

- ***Manners while talking to someone:***
 - ✓ Greeting
 - ✓ Saying *thank you, please* and *sorry*
 - ✓ Speaking in a respectful manner
 - ✓ Listening when someone is speaking without interrupting
 - ✓ Responding politely, without raising voice, etc.
- ***Manners in public places:***
 - ✓ Obeying rules
 - ✓ Showing kindness to others
 - ✓ Helping others (e.g., to cross the road)
 - ✓ Following body language etiquette (e.g., covering face with handkerchief or hand while coughing or sneezing)
 - ✓ Holding the door open for someone, especially elderly persons following, etc.
- ***Manners for day-to-day living:***
 - ✓ Refraining from judging people based on their appearance
 - ✓ Avoiding gossips
 - ✓ Doing one's share of work in the house (Small children can be taught to assist older siblings or adults; while elder children can help younger siblings in learning simple tasks.)
 - ✓ Writing thank you notes



- ✓ Taking care of oneself
- ✓ Sharing things with others
- ✓ Caring for animals and plants



- ✓ Avoiding the use of offensive words during communication
 - ✓ Learning business etiquette to help students when they grow up
4. Teach children to analyse non-verbal communication which reflects the real nature of a person.
 5. Read stories on honesty and integrity to children. Ask them to explain the morals.
 6. Encourage children to do acts of random kindness and write about their feelings after the act.
 7. Ask students to express their feelings on any deliberate wrongdoing they had committed earlier.
 8. Make children step into the shoes of a popular character and playact a scene from their life. For example, Hamlet to understand the feeling of dilemma, Arjuna to feel confusion, Rani Laxmibai to feel bravery, etc.

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Abreaction (noun)



Pronunciation: /abrɪˈækʃ(ə)n/

Meaning: Discharge of the emotional energy associated with a psychic trauma that has been forgotten or repressed; the process of bringing such a trauma back to consciousness, especially as a psychotherapeutic technique; an instance of this.

Origin and additional information: The term came into English diction in the early 20th century from ab- (meaning *away from*) + reaction, translating German *Abreagierung*. The word now is used frequently in psychoanalysis.

Use over time for: abreaction



Word section: The usual synonyms of ‘abreaction’ are *purgation, purification, cleansing, release*, etc., but in denotation the word is much closer to *catharsis*¹. While catharsis has its roots in Aristotle’s *Poetics* and is mostly used in literature in the notion of release through drama, abreaction is a much more psychoanalysis-centric word. In the article, *Catharsis and Abreaction in the History of Psychological Healing*, published in [sciencedirect.com](https://www.sciencedirect.com), Stanley W. Jackson MD, from the Department of Psychiatry, Yale University School of Medicine, wrote:

*... The late decades of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of numerous psychological healings with a cathartic basis. Catharsis came to mean the lively remembering of a traumatic experience in addition to the emotional release; and the term abreaction frequently was used to refer to the emotional release. ...*²

Usage:

1. The ab-reaction (abreagiren) is not the only form of discharge at the disposal of the normal psychic mechanism of the healthy person who has experienced a psychic trauma.

(Source: *Selected Papers on Hysteria and Other Psychoneuroses*, 1st edition, 1909, by Sigmund Freud, translated by Abraham Arden Brill)

2. The process known in England as *abreaction therapy*, in America as *narcosynthesis*.

(Source: *Brave New World Revisited*, 1958, by Aldous Leonard Huxley)

3. The abreaction experienced by this patient as well as her comments after termination of the session suggest that unblocking her emotional response, rather than her gut, was the main factor in her recovery.

(Source: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/abreaction>)

Content sourced majorly from Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary.

¹ According to Oxford English Dictionary, catharsis means *the process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from strong or repressed emotions*.

² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0193953X18300947>