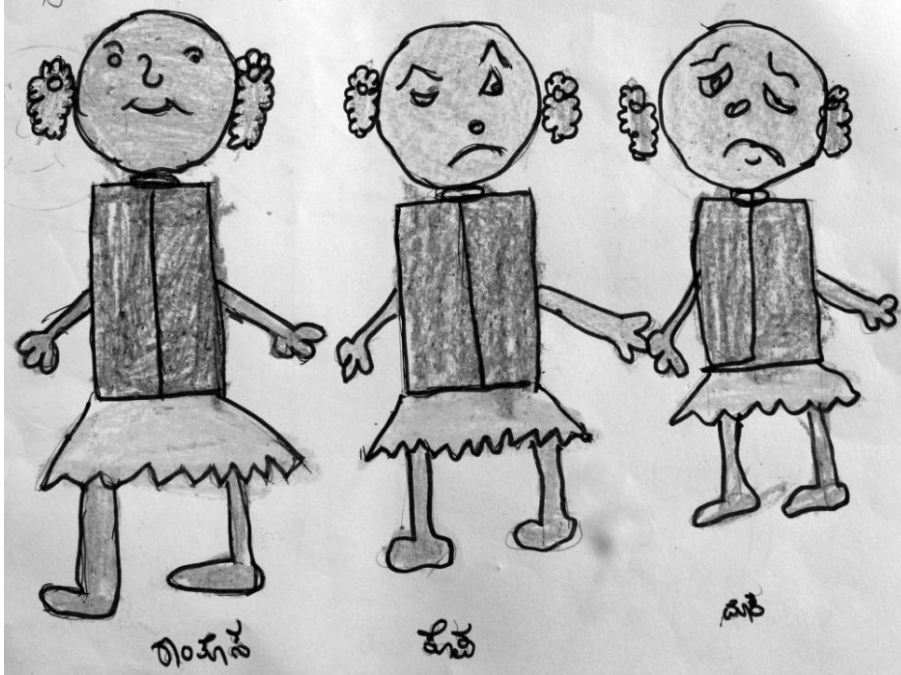


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Our World of Emotions

Exploring Emotional Literacy through Children's Picture Books



Art Work by Kamakshi, 10 yrs

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Project Location: Buguri Community Library, Banashankari, Bengaluru

Period: 16th July - 30th September 2018.

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ABSTRACT

The LEC field project was an opportunity for me to explore the development of emotional literacy with children who are at risk.

An at-risk child is a child who is less likely to transition successfully into adulthood. Success can include academic success and job readiness, as well as the ability to be financially independent and psychologically stable. It can refer to the ability to become a positive member of society by avoiding a life of crime.

During this project, I worked with children who belong to a community which, per its socio-economic location, undergoes major social, economic, and emotional upheavals. Buguri Community Library, the site of the project, is a free library for the children of waste workers in Banashankari, Bangalore. My purpose was to develop children's emotional literacy through a library program so that the children can articulate and process what they are experiencing on a day to day basis. This, I feel is critical to their overall development.

While my primary focus was on emotional literacy through children's picture books, each of the sessions was so designed that many pre and supplementary activities also served in fulfilling the aim of the project. This report outlines the processes I developed, implemented, improvised and the movement and challenges we experienced through the sessions.

I worked with 20 children from the ages 8 years to 12 years. I feel at the end of the 8 sessions both the children and I learnt a lot about how emotions play such a large part in our lives, and how critical it is that we find structured and safe spaces to express it.

The project became a first step in creating a circle of trust and empathy amongst us. We look forward to taking this preliminary work ahead and develop it into a year-long program.



BACKGROUND

Hasiru Dala is a non-profit organization based in Bengaluru that works for the betterment of informal waste pickers in Karnataka. It has organized over 7000 waste pickers and it works with them to provide social security, identity cards, scholarships, training and loans. In January 2017, they started a long term children's program for children of waste workers in the state. The first Buguri Community Library opened its doors in Banashankari. *Buguri* in Kannada means the spinning top. So the idea was to give a spin to the lives of children through bringing alive stories and books. Since then, the community libraries have expanded to three other locations, including one more in north Bangalore, and in Mysore and Tumkur.

The Community

The Banashankari community is a stone throw away from the Banashankari Metro Station, and the famous Banashankari Temple in South Bangalore. Some part of the community has been rehabilitated by the slum board into flats through the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNRUM) project, while the rest of the families still live in temporary housing. Over 200 children between the ages of 5 years to 15 years live in the settlement. The families from the settlement are multi religious and speak Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Dakhni.

The concrete settlement itself is about seven years old, yet there is no permanent connection for water or electricity. So there is a constant conflict within the community for basic resources. The *basti* is in a growing middle class, upper caste locality and the community members are further marginalized because of class and caste differences. With the arrival of the metro station, the real estate value of the

land peeking, and a sprawling 25 floor gated community apartment complex next to it, the differences have further heightened and the community is now considered an eye sore in the cityscape.

The Children

Children of waste pickers are one of the most marginalized populations of children at risk in the city. Many of them drop out of school very early and follow their parents into waste picking, making them prey not only to the vicious cycle of poverty, but also exposing them to life threatening health hazards. A few others last in schools till they are about fifteen and then drift away to do manual work. There are very few children whose parents persist and help them complete their schooling. They receive very little direct care from parents and they are left to take care of themselves from a very early age.

The lack of basic resources, space, water and electricity puts the children in the Banashankari community under great pressure. While their parents are away at work, children spend most of their afternoons filling and transporting water, sometimes multiple buckets to over three floors high. Often older siblings need to become caregivers to younger ones, pushing them into roles and responsibilities they are unprepared for. Addiction issues are high in the community, alcoholism among the adults and substance abuse among the youth. This leads to further distress in family and homes. With constant conflict and crime surrounding them, in their homes and community, children often remain vulnerable to psychological and emotional trauma.

The Library:

The Buguri Community Library is a street away from the *basti*. It is a small free library with about 2000 books catering to children between the ages of 5 yrs to 15 yrs. The library is open 20 hrs in a week. Through the week, the library reading room program is open from 4 pm to 7 pm and in weekends special art sessions are conducted. In late 2016 when the team at Hasiru Dala was looking for space to start a library no one in the locality was ready to give space because:

- 1) It was a library, something they were sceptical about, and
- 2) It was for the children of waste pickers from the *basti*.

The small 300 square feet space that we finally found next to the *basti* also came with several caveats and warnings. Three months was all we were given initially. Over the last year and a half the aim has been to work around the socio-economic-caste barriers in the area to run a library that becomes a safe space for children, who otherwise spent their evenings playing or loitering around on streets with heavy traffic around the Banashankari Metro station. About a month ago, we expanded to add another 500 sq feet of library space.

It is here that I work as a library educator. And this was the site of my field project.

RATIONALE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the socio-economic circumstances in the community the children reside in, they are at risk and are exposed to various conflicts and volatile situations in their lives. The children also don't seem to have a space to understand and articulate the related emotions they experience. This, many times show in a lack of empathy in children that I work with. Currently, bullying and physical violence are an acceptable way of solving problems and moving on.

The library is housed in an old age home. Over the last few years there has been a lot of friction between the children and the older residents. The children sometimes seem insensitive to their needs and are often verbally abusive towards them. At one point the conflict reached a level where the children were admonished from entering the street that housed the old age home. This further aggravated the conflict and the children started to throw stones and break the windows of the old age home.

In a recent incident there was a gruesome murder in the community in a public space. A 20 year old boy, high on drugs stabbed another young boy to death when he refused to lend him money. A few children from the library were witness to this incident. When they met me a few days later and we opened a conversation around the incident, they seemed to have some displaced emotions in terms of how they recalled the incident - a few children laughed about it and found it funny, in some there was a sense of acute fear and in few others there was a sense of aspiration (in a way to hero worship the murderer). In another incident a blind woman from the old age home, who lives in a room cut off from the main building and falls on the route for children coming to the library, asked a child to inform the help to bring her some food. She is hungry she said. The child instead brought her a plate full of stones. Thankfully, other children intervened and took the plate away from the old woman. I found these instances very disturbing.

Given these situations, I feel that as a library space we need to respond to the needs of the children by creating space and structured spaces to help them express, make sense and manage their emotions; create a space that allows them to reflect on their emotions and the consequences of their action on themselves and others.

Books can become a means to not only understand the world outside us, but also become a mirror into the world inside us. Overtone¹ in her article *Libraries need diverse books* says, "Children's books should serve two purposes: to act as (1) a mirror reflecting a child's own life and culture; and (2) a window allowing children to see into the lives of others and recognize the diversity of their world."

¹ [Overtone, Nichole \(2016\) Libraries Need Diverse Books - Public Libraries \(Jan/Feb 2016\)](#)

Dr. Zipora Shechtman² in her book, *Treating Child and Adolescent Aggression Through Bibliotherapy* says, "Through the imaginative process that reading involves, children have the opportunity to do what they often cannot do in real life—become thoroughly involved in the inner lives of others, better understand them, and eventually become more aware of themselves."

Reading is not merely the act of reading itself, it is a way to understand, decipher and internalize the world that we live in. Denis von Stocker³ in his article *The Importance of Literacy and Books in Children's Development - Intellectual, Affective and Social Dimensions* says, "Reading from a global point of view, is a very complex activity which is not merely decoding a text, but it entails too the child's capabilities to understand what he has just read, to integrate it in his own context and personal experiences by analysing it in a critical way so he is able to take a stand on what he has read. Only this kind of complete and deep reading education will take children towards a real, integrated literacy."

One way to do it is to use books as a tool to put the children in touch with their own emotions and in that process find new and creative ways to address the various problems and situations in their lives. I feel, once they are in touch with their own emotions, it would become a doorway to relate to the emotions of others and develop empathy.

The role of the library educator then is critical - is not merely to give access to books, but also to nurture children's socio-emotional and cognitive growth. Stricevic⁴ in her article *Bringing Books and Children Together: Croatian War Experiences* says, "To mediate information means to ensure access to reading material and offer reader development services because reading has a twofold role: to provide information and to facilitate social and emotional healing."

Given this premise, in my field project, I used picture books as a tool for emotional literacy with a group of children between the ages of 8 years to 12 years. Picture books are flexible: a 5-year-old and a 12-year-old can enjoy the same picture book while understanding it in dramatically different ways. The interplay between the text and illustrations promote thoughtful analysis among the children at the same time leaving space for the children's interpretation. Another advantage is that the read alouds are short and hence can hold attention of children. So in a short period of time we can present complex ideas and foster rich conversations.

² Shechtman, Zipora (2009): *Treating Child and Adolescent Aggression Through Bibliotherapy* : Springer Publication: pp 37

³ Stocker, Dennis Von (2009): *The Importance of Literacy and Books in Children's Development - Intellectual, Affective and Social Dimensions*

⁴ Stricevic, Ivanka (2009). *Bringing Books and Children Together: Croatian War Experiences*, *Bookbird: Journal For International Children's Literature*, 47(4): 9-19

Trudy Ludwig, children's advocate and author in her article *Using Children's Literature to Build Social-Emotional Skill* says, "Well-written, developmentally age-appropriate literature offers wonderful teachable moments that allow children to:

- Identify with the story's protagonist
- Acquire insight into the characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions in relation to the particular issue
- Experience catharsis (the release of pent-up emotional feelings) upon the realization that they aren't the only ones who have this problem
- Explore other possible ways of working out their own problems by seeing how the characters handled the problems themselves and how their actions or words played out
- Share personal experiences as a natural progression of discussion⁵."

Keeping this in mind, I planned to conduct read aloud sessions with the children which was followed by discussions and activities that explore the main themes in the book.

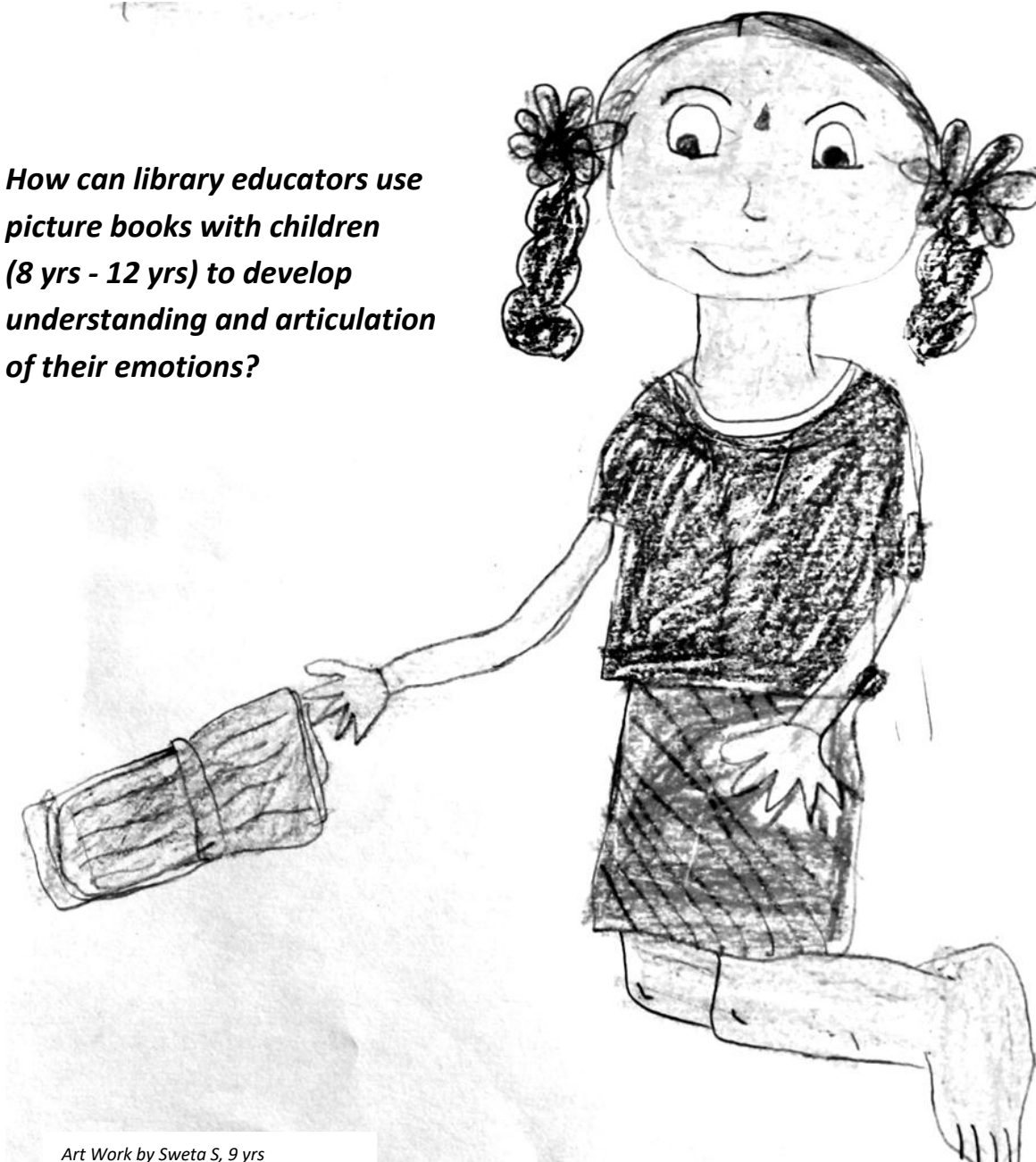
Read alouds foster intimacy and trust with the group of children. The performative element to the read alouds further builds bridges, "As we read each other's faces and emotions, a kind of call-and-response takes place, a mutual matching of facial, vocal and physical expression... This kind of listening and response is a direct form of communication that creates a level of intimacy, empathy and unity at our gatherings." (Berkowitz, 2011). It becomes a safe space where children are invited into and a story is shared. It becomes a space for open conversations on difficult topics.

It is with this premise that I started my field project.

⁵ Ludwig, Trudy - 'Using Children's Literature to Build Social-Emotional Skills -24/09/2018

RESEARCH QUESTION EXPLORED

How can library educators use picture books with children (8 yrs - 12 yrs) to develop understanding and articulation of their emotions?



Art Work by Sweta S, 9 yrs

METHODOLOGY

The main aim of the field project was to start a program at the library that would help address the emotional needs of the children that we work with on a long term basis. The children have very few spaces where they can express, articulate and make sense of their emotions in a structured way. Many times the pent up emotions they experience play out in ways that is damaging to them, their family and community.

The LEC field project was the first step towards building this long term program.

Identifying the children

I first started with identifying the children to work with for the project. I decided to work with the lower batch children from the library, children between the ages of 8 yrs to 12 yrs. I identified about 20 children from the batch who could attend the session. I spoke to them about the project and sought their parent's permission to go ahead with the project. While this was my initial list, I remained open to walk-ins and new children joining the group.

All children in the group of 20 go to school. About 80 per cent of the children are girls. About 50 per cent of the children could read level 1 or level 2 books in Kannada, while others are unable to read. While about 12 of them were regulars, others would come and go, and a few new children would join.

Among the 12 regular children, about 7 children's mother tongue was Kannada and the others were Tamil. However, all the children spoke both languages. About 9 children from the group were attending the library sessions regularly, three to four children had become regulars after the start of the program.

In most cases, mothers of the children worked long hours, either as waste pickers or in other jobs as fruit sellers or domestic workers. In most cases the fathers of the children had a problem of alcoholism. A few children have single parents or are orphaned.

Setting up the space and time

All the children who attended the sessions live in the community and walk to the library after they were back from school. The sessions were conducted after school during library hours between 5 pm to 7 pm. While initially the sessions were held in a small room in the old library space, by the fourth session we held the sessions in a larger room (after the library expanded into a new space).

Curation of books

In the first phase of the program, as a part of the field project, the idea was to open conversations about some basic emotions such as the following using picture books:

- 1) Happiness
- 2) Sadness
- 3) Anger
- 4) Fear
- 5) Surprise/Shock
- 6) Disgust

Most of the books I chose for the project were from the library collection.

Here is the list of books that I worked with for the read aloud and group work:

Sl No	Book Title	Author	Publisher
1	My Many Coloured Days	Dr Seuss	Alfred A. Knopf
2	Angry Akku	Vinayak Varma	Pratham Books
3	Rupa the Elephant	Mickey Patel	National Book Trust
4	Gruffalo	Julia Donaldson	Macmillan Publishers
5	Mukund and Riaz	Nina Sabnani	Tulika Books
6	The Very Lonely Firefly	Eric Carle	Philomel Books
7	Under My Bed	Aruna Lal	Tulika Books
8	Five Little Monkeys	Raghunath, Jeeva	Tulika Books
9	Sam's Christmas Present	Annie Besant	Pratham Books
10	Elephant and the Dog	Badri Narayan	National Book Trust
11	Aana and Chena	Sowmya Rajendran	Tulika Books
12	Rani's first day at school	Cheryl Rao	Pratham Books

Apart from the above books, I used another 20 books from the collection at the library as a part of the quiet reading time.

Here are a few things I considered while selecting the books:

- **Language:** Books (level 1 and level 2) from the collection in the library in Kannada or bilingual (English/Kannada) were used for individual reading and group work. English books were used for Read Alouds.
- **Context:** About 60% of the books I used for the project were ones that the children were already familiar with. This was because primarily I wanted the children to focus on identifying emotions that the main characters experienced. Starting with familiar books, I thought might make the task less prohibiting. This was also important because I wanted the children to

experience 'seeing' a story in different light when one focuses on the changes in emotions of the main characters. I mostly chose books from Indian publishers because it helped the children engage with familiar contexts and characters that were more relatable.

- **Content:** I focused on selecting books in which the main characters were going through strong emotional conflicts. I also selected a few books that showed different ways in which the characters resolved these conflicts. For example, in *Angry Akku*, the character resolves her fit of anger by drawing and speaking about the cause of her anger, as opposed to propagating violence. In *Sam's Christmas Present* Sam shows emotional regulation when he decides not to open the Christmas present that he was looking for eagerly and decides to wait and open it only on Christmas day. *Aana and Chena* and *Rupa the Elephant* both set positive messages of body image and self appreciation. While I was working with emotions, I was careful to not choose books that had any sort of forced 'moral message'.

Orientation to naming emotions:

To initiate conversations on emotions I decided to use stick puppets. Simple puppets with faces that depicted different emotions I wanted the children to engage with. This became a means to name and recognize emotions and to create instances of recall.

Session Design

1) **Reading Time** - As the children walked into the library space, I would lay out a mat and place about 20-30 books on it. Children would sit around the mat and pick up books that they would like to read and spend some time reading or browsing through.

2) **Circle Time:**

After about 20 mins of quiet reading time alone or in small groups, the children assembled for circle time. We established two rules for the session:

- i. The rule of love - that we show love and respect for everyone and everything.
- ii. To give everyone the space to talk, not to interrupt while someone was talking within the circle. We will be good listeners.

We then proceeded to sing action songs and play circle games. We also had a ritual where we would talk about the emotions the children experienced during the day. Each of the six emotions would be discussed.

3) **Introductory Activity:**

This was followed by a discussion or a small activity or game that set the tone for the read aloud or book /theme in focus for the day. This was usually a discussion around a few questions around the theme or an art activity.

4) **Main activity:**

The read aloud of a book chosen for the day or a book related group activity.

5) **Extension Activity:**

It helped the children to explore the main theme of the book for the day through an art based and/or writing activity.

6) **Closure:**

During the closure, children either shared the art works they created with the rest of the group or it was put up for everyone to look and/or read. The session ended with the children coming back into the circle to a minute's meditation and calming down. Sometimes we sang a soothing song. The children then went back home in groups.

PROCESSES AND REFLECTION

The reading time, the circle time and closure were a part of every session. They were built in as rituals and were repeated session after session so that the children flow into the session and have spaces and activities within it that are familiar to them. Over time they needed fewer and fewer cues to understand the structure of the session, and a flow was organically built. Here are a few reflections from these daily activities:

READING TIME

The laying of the mat and the books were done in absolute quiet, very slowly and deliberately. Children sat around the mat to look at the process as each book was revealed. There would be an element of surprise and murmurs when they saw a familiar book or curiosity when they saw a new title. I am guessing each of them was also making mental notes of which books they would like to pick for the day. This quiet time (more or less) experienced together became an



important time of transition into the day's session.

While initially the children had the tendency to pounce on books even before they were placed on the mat, over time they also learnt to wait till all the books were laid out and they had taken a good look at the collection, before choosing the book they wanted to read for the day. This I realised was an important lesson in self regulation that we learnt together.



Since there were a few non-readers, they were paired with readers who would read and share the story with them. This became an important ritual in bonding through books. Friendships were being built behind the pages of colourful picture books.

The children were encouraged to not only read the books but also to pay attention to the changes in emotions that the main characters experienced in the story.

CIRCLE TIME

The circle time was divided into three parts:

- i. **Action Songs and Games** - Children sang familiar and new songs mostly around the theme of emotions. For example - *When you are happy and you know it, I like the flowers, Karadi Bettake Hoittu* etc.

We also explored adding emotional twists to games that we were already familiar with to make the circle time more fun. For example *Circle Switch* is a name game that the children enjoyed playing: children assemble in a circle. A child from the circle initiates the game. She calls the name out of a child standing across her, and then immediately vacates the place and starts moving towards this person. The child whose name has been called now needs to call out the name of another person across her and move towards her before the first child moves in to take her place and so on.

This game was initially introduced to beat favouritism - children wanted to stand only next to their friend or near the educator, there were fights breaking out for this. The game in a fun way dissolved this tension allowing the group to mix up. The twist we added to this is the way we called each other's names. I encouraged the children to call out names while expressing a certain emotion - a happy call, an angry call, a disgusted call etc. I wanted to explore if we can use our body language and voice to express different emotions. This soon became the children's favourite circle game.

The songs and games gave the children the space to freely emote the different emotions while they were not in some way experiencing them at that time. This added an element of drama, but at the same time brought their focus on how their bodies and voices changed while these emotions were experienced.

- ii. **Discussion on emotions:** The children then sat down and I opened a discussion on the emotions that they experienced in the day. I did this by using stick puppets. Each stick puppets had faces with different emotions. The children had to guess each emotion and then they were asked if they experienced that emotion in the day. They were free to share the reason with the group or not.



Over the days I could see how a circle of trust was being formed. While initially children were a bit shy about sharing their stories, over time the enthusiasm levels peaked. Everyone wanted to share stories from their day and how they felt about it. While initially only the children were sharing their stories, one day I decided to share some from my day too. This brought a definite shift and a sense of equality within the group.

The ritual also became a window for me into their lives and gave me a sense of what affects them deeply. Stories of domestic abuse, alcoholism, relationship with friends and tension in school, the joys of friendship, the excitement of getting wet in the rain, loss of family members, and relationship with local thugs and police, the garbage issue and sanitary issues in their colony, the lack of basic resources etc. were shared by the children.

- iii. **Colours of my day:** All the children were then given a small piece of rectangular paper. They were asked to reflect on the emotion that they experienced strongly during the day and fill the paper with the colour that they think represents the emotion.

Post the discussion and sharing the children got the space and time to meditate on the emotion they experienced during the day and put it out in

colours. This was in continuation to the reading of the book *My Many Coloured Days*. It was a way to acknowledge the emotion they experienced and express it in a tangible way. Initially children were unsure about the colours they had to use to portray their emotion and they reached out to me for a solution. I encouraged them to think and feel the emotion in colours also telling them that each emotion could also change colours. So if anger feels like red today, it could feel like green the next day. I also constantly assured them that there was no right or wrong colour to depict an emotion. What matters most is that they engage and express. And in a few sessions the questions faded away.

CLOSURE

At the end of the session, the closure was the time to start the unwinding from the day's session. As some children go through a roller coaster of emotions and in their energy levels, this was the time to calm down. The children came back into the circle for a round of meditation. While initially meditation was tough after a high energy session slowly more and more children could keep their eyes closed and focus on their breathing. It allowed all of us to relax and calm down.

SESSION 1: Emotions come in many colours

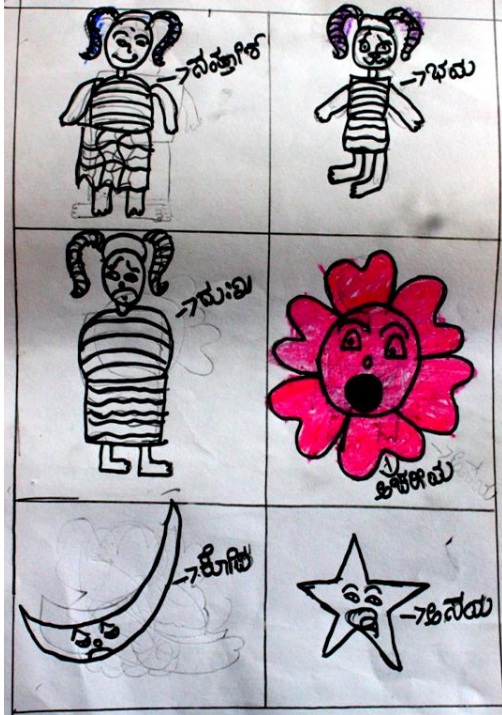
INTENT: This was the introductory session to help children to identify and name some basic emotions. It also gave the children a way to express it using colours.

Introductory Activity	Main Activity	Extension Activity
<p>Start a discussion on emotions by asking a few questions :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are emotions? • What are the different kind of emotions that you experience? • When do you experience these emotions? • Do you think these emotions could have colours? <p>Show children the various stick puppets one after the other and ask them to recognize the emotions</p> <p>Give each child a small piece of rectangular paper and ask them to colour an emotion that they experienced strongly during the day.</p>	<p>Read Aloud of <i>My Many Coloured Days</i> by Dr Seuss</p> <p>Stop from time to time to check what other colours would the children associated with the emotions depicted in the book.</p>	<p>Ask children to draw self potraits of themselves as they experience different emotions.</p>

In the first session when we started to talk about emotions, many children were not aware of the word 'emotions' - *Bhavanegalu* in Kannada. It took a while for them to decipher the difference between the reaction to the emotion from what was the trigger/cause to the reaction: A smile or laughter comes from happiness or tears come from sadness (in most cases) etc.

Initially when I showed them the puppet with a smiling face and asked the children about the emotion that they see - most responded by saying - Smiling. So the first few sessions were spent establishing the difference in naming and understanding the basic emotions. This naming was an important part of articulation for example in saying, 'I am not talking because I am sad'.

Through the emotion sharing ritual in the beginning of the session, soon I saw children using these words for expressing their emotions. Hence building the understanding of the distinction in the name of the emotion and the reaction to the emotion became the first step to the articulation of emotions.



Art work by Kavitha, 10 yrs

The related art activity, to draw self portraits of themselves in different emotions was an attempt to further build their understanding of different types of emotions. While some children drew their portraits as instructed, a few others took the cue from the book and represented their emotions through other objects and/or beings. For example, Kavitha said that she felt like a flower when she was surprised, or like a receding moon when she was sad. Lakshmi drew both her portrait and the animal/bird she felt like when she experienced the emotion.

While I had not given specific instruction to do so, the children had extended their interpretation of the book and personalized it. In some ways this was evidence that they had internalized the content of the book - about finding ways of expressing emotions through colours and representing it through other beings and objects.

Session 2: Let's talk about anger

INTENT: Anger and fear seemed to be the emotions that was spoken about the most in the previous session. And I realised that the default way of handling anger was through verbal or physical violence. This session explored other ways to regulate and react to difficult emotions.

Introductory Activity	Main Activity	Extension Activity
<p>Movement - Ask the children to walk around the room quietly. On cue ask them to show emotions through their body language. How would they walk when they are happy? Or sad? Or angry? Or afraid?</p> <p>Encourage children to freely emote.</p> <p>Settle for a discussion: What do you do when you are angry?</p> <p>Gather their responses.</p>	<p>Read Aloud : <i>Angry Akku</i> by Vinayak Varma</p>	<p>Ask the children what they would have done if they were in the same situation as Akku.</p> <p>Begin a discussion on alternate ways of dealing with emotions other than through violence. What could help them deal with the anger and calm down? Invite children to write their responses on a large sheet of paper.</p> <p>Once the ideas are gathered ask children to closely look at the list and draw themselves doing one of the acts on the list that they like. Would they consider doing this the next time they are angry?</p>



During the read aloud of the book *Angry Akku*, I stopped at a juncture where Akku is distressed about the embarrassing incident in school and asked the children what they think she should do. Most of the children reacted by saying that she should beat up the bully. But as the story proceeded and the children realised that that is not how the protagonist reacted, I asked them again to share why they thought she didn't react that way. One of the children said, 'She had self-control'. This triggered the discussion on what makes us angry and how we choose to react to these emotions. Among other incidents like personal conflicts with friends or teachers, children spoke about how domestic violence in their homes made them angry.



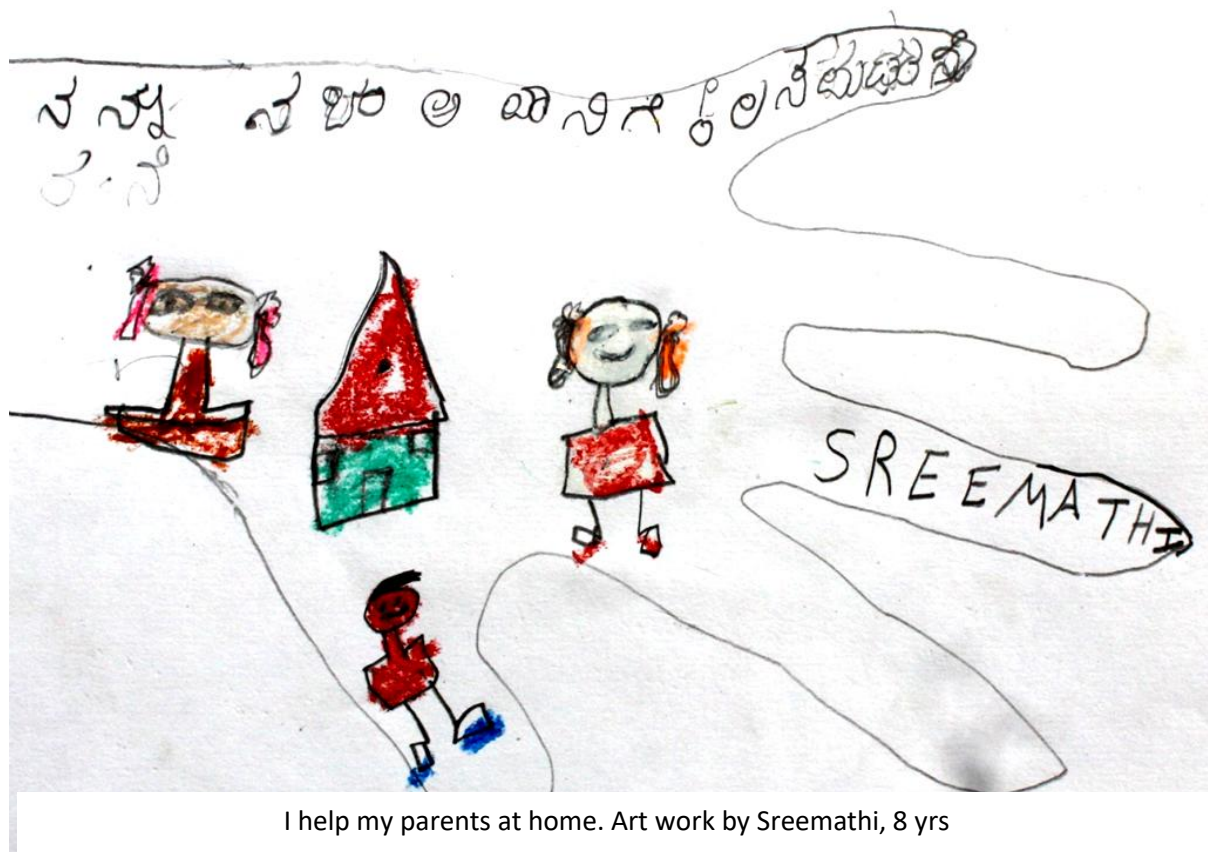
The post session activity helped us to explore other ways to deal with our anger. We made a list of ideas that the children gave - Play with a balloon, eat *idlis*, scribble in a notebook, take a walk, eat an ice cream, read your favourite story book etc. This allowed us to have a conversation about how we react to some of these difficult emotions is a choice - maybe we can choose to do things that don't propagate the violence, just like Akku did.

When I am angry I can eat ice cream or play with a balloon. Art work by Harisha, 9 yrs

Session 3: Exploring the goodness in us

INTENT: Bullying emerged as another issue within the group, which showed up in poor self image in a few children. This session was to put a focus on reflecting in the goodness within us, and appreciating each other for it.

Introductory Activity	Main Activity	Extension Activity
<p>Ask children if they would like to change something about themselves.</p> <p>If yes, what would that be?</p>	<p>Read Aloud of <i>Rupa the Elephant</i> by Mickey Patel</p>	<p>Ask children to put down things that they like/appreciate about themselves.</p> <p>Share it with the group if they would like to.</p>



The elephant in the story *Rupa the Elephant* feels that she looks ugly. Her friends in the zoo, lend her beautiful colours. Though she is initially happy, she quickly realises that the children who come to meet her everyday are not as excited as she is. She then feels that she is beautiful just the way she is and washes away her colours in the pond.

At a certain point in the read aloud of *Rupa the Elephant* when Rupa realizes that she is ugly, I asked the children if they have felt similarly about themselves. Would they change something about themselves? The children shared how they felt bad, and were sometimes bullied for the colour of their skin, for the way they looked or the way they dressed.

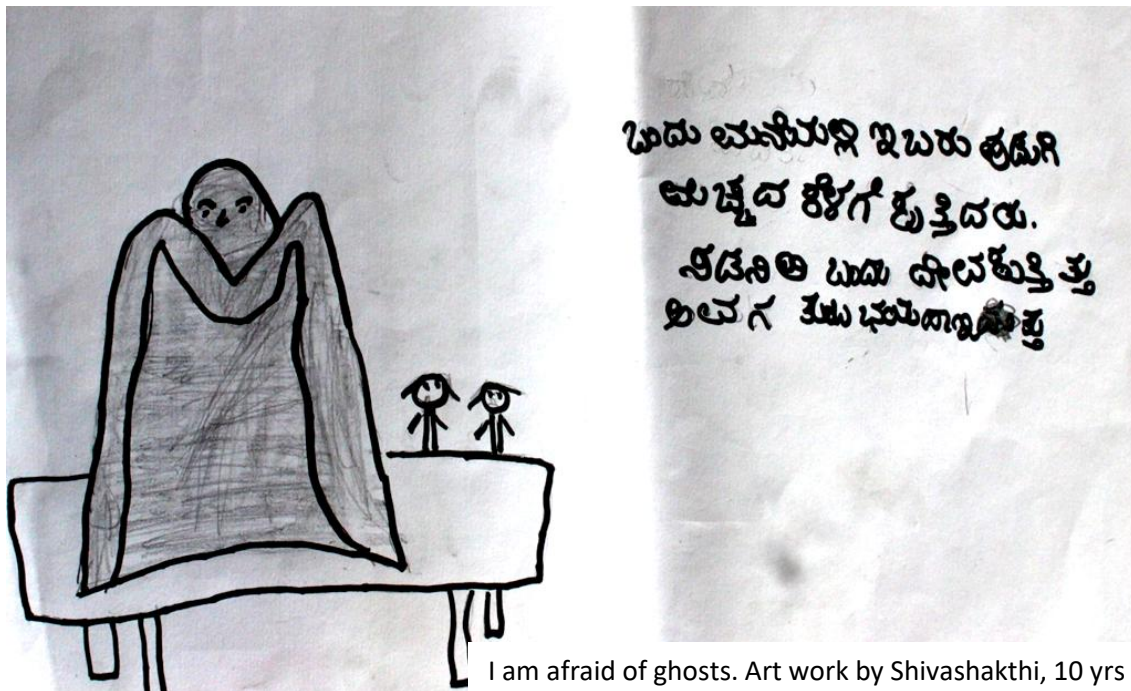
The extension activity where the children had to identify what about themselves they love and appreciate was particularly tough. It was a struggle for the children for them to recognize positives in them. They confused it with what they liked doing or what they wanted to become.

I feel this is an aspect that I will have to work on in future sessions - helping children to recognize what they like about themselves, and also what they appreciate in others. This, I feel will help them build their self image and appreciation for what they have in their lives.

Session 4: What we fear

INTENT: Build an understanding of and put out in the open what we feared the most - how it looks and how it feels.

Introductory Activity	Main Activity	Extension Activity
Discuss with the children when they experience fear. Invite the children to make a list of all those things that they fear.	<p>Read Aloud of <i>Gruffalo</i> by Julia Donaldson</p> <p>Stop at the point when the mouse sees the Gruffalo and ask them to guess what would happen.</p> <p>At the end of the read aloud ask the children how the mouse saved himself from the Gruffalo.</p>	Ask children to articulate through a drawing or writing what they fear the most.



As a part of initial discussion, we made a list of everything that scares us - ghosts, the elephant, becoming late to school, being unprepared for an exam, crossing the road, anger of their parents, loss of someone they love etc.

The session on this day was disrupted multiple times. We had moved the session to a larger space and I was struggling to hold the attention of the children as they moved around the larger space and seemed more interested in discovering the new space. So

before the start of the read aloud, I switched off the lights and read the book *Gruffalo* in a torch light. As the mouse described the features of the *Gruffalo*, I used my hands to project hand shadows on the walls of Gruffalo's scary claws and turned out toes. The children soon pitched in to add their own version of Gruffalo's scary features - bleeding eyes, black horns, scary voice etc. This drew the children in and made the read aloud a lot more engaging.

In the extension activity the children formed groups and sketched out what they thought scared them the most - ghosts, elephant, tiger and deer.

Session 5: People we miss

INTENT: To explore and start conversations on friendships and longing.

Introductory Activity	Main Activity	Extension Activity
<p>Discussion of what makes us sad. List the reasons.</p> <p>Have we ever experienced a situation when someone from our life disappeared forever?</p>	<p>Read Aloud of <i>Mukund and Riaz</i> by Nina Sabnani.</p> <p>Allow sometime for the children to absorb the story</p>	<p>Ask children to draw or write about the person they miss in their lives.</p>



Mukund and Riaz by Nina Sabnani was an important reading - for both the children and me. It triggered conversations on friendships lost because of changing circumstances that were not under our control and the sadness and the grief that it brought. I shared one such incident from my own life. Children shared stories of friends that they left behind when they moved towns, schools or homes. Slowly the conversation progressed to talking about those loved ones who we may not see again, because they had left this world. We soon broke into the extension activity which was to write about or draw from memory the person we missed

I am playing with my unborn sister. Art work by Anitha, 10 yrs yrs

Anitha, drew a picture of her unborn sister. She had lost her in her mother's womb. The picture shows her playing with her sister in a garden.

Session 6: Recognizing Emotions in Books

INTENT: To identify different emotions in the books that we read.

Introductory Activity	Main Activity	Extension Activity
Divide the children into groups of three. Lay down five books on the mat. Assign a book to each group through a game. Ask the children to read the book in a group.	Ask children discuss within the group recognize and list the main character/s in the book and the emotions they go through.	Ask each group to put their findings through an art work. They are free to write or draw their findings. Once done, the each group gives a book talk of the book assigned to them and shares their findings.



Art work by Anitha, Sandhya and Shalini

This session was an opportunity for children to get a closer reading of the text during their reading time. The children were divided into groups and we had a small game to assign the books to each group. The group then closely read the book and then identified the emotions that were depicted in the text.

While some groups found the task considerable easy, two groups needed some help. We sat together to first identify the main characters in the text and then to understand the story and later map the emotions. One particular group had got *Sam's Christmas Present*, was able to identify the emotions sadness and happiness easily, while it took a while for them to identify 'surprise'. So while Sam finds his present at the end and feels happy, we wondered what he would have felt as soon as he discovers his name on the gift tag - Surprise maybe?

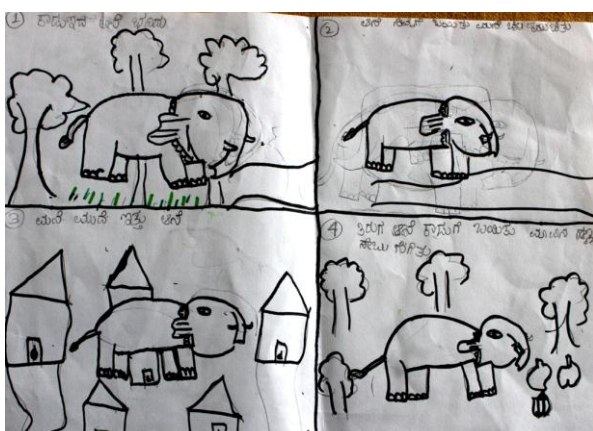
Session 7: Building our own stories

INTENT: During the circle time discussion it was revealed that out of enthusiasm to share, a few children were making up stories about the emotions they experienced. I took that as a cue to build this activity where the children built their own stories around emotions experienced by familiar characters.

Introductory Activity	Main Activity	Extension Activity
<p>The children are divided in groups. Each group is given an emotion that they need to discuss and come up with a visual scenario. They then come up to present the scenario using (without dialogues) to the rest of the class. The others guess the emotion being expressed.</p>	<p>The children are divided into groups of three. Each group is given a character that revealed through a chit they pick up and an emotion, that is revealed when they pick up one of the stick puppets.</p> <p>The group needs to come up with a story in which the character they picked up is the main character and it stringly experiences the emotion that they picked up.</p>	<p>Each group sketches out their story as a six panel comic strip.</p>

This session was an attempt to integrate children's understanding of how emotions are used in stories. Children were given an emotion and a character, slowly as children started to build the story, they started to realise that their character were experiencing multiple emotions within the story, the given emotion being one of the them.

Kamakshi and group's story *The Little Fish* was about a shoal of fish which had one little fish who was always scared of being trapped in a net. She then made sure that she never left her mother's side. Her mother taught her how to identify the net and escape it, she was then happy.



Jessy and group's *The Hungry Elephant* story was about an elephant. The elephant did not find any food in the forest. He grew very angry. He went to the city in search of food. But all the houses had locks on them. There was no one in sight. The elephant became very sad and went back to the forest. There he saw monkeys were playing on trees. They dropped fruits from the trees - apples, mangos and bananas. The elephant ate them. He became happy.

Session 8: Yes, we have many coloured days

INTENT: To go back to where we started, of discussing that we have many emotions that we experience and in most case they are transient.



Introductory Activity	Main Activity	Extension Activity
<p>Quiet activity</p> <p>Children gather around bunch of rectangular sheets of paper that was gathered through the last eight sessions depicting the various emotions that they experienced. They work in groups to gather their emotions in a bunch. The children are asked to lay them out in front of them.</p>	<p>Read aloud of <i>My Many Coloured Days</i> by Dr Seuss.</p> <p>(We went back to the book we used on Day 1).</p>	<p>The children are given a sheet of paper and glue and asked to stick their patches of many colours on to the white sheet as they like it.</p> <p>All of the children's creations are put on display and children walk around it and discuss the creations.</p>

On the last day, the children were given all their pieces of coloured paper and asked to paste them on a white sheet of paper. Interestingly, Sandhya made a three dimensional house from the coloured paper and stuck it on the white paper.

ANALYSIS

NAMING EMOTIONS

Using the stick puppets to start conversations with the children on emotions worked well. First, there was the suspense of the emotion that would appear from the bag; second, the enthusiasm of identifying it; and third, opening a space to share the stories made the ritual not only enjoyable but also an important part of the session to share feelings and stories in a free flow.

As the group matured into naming the basic emotions and sharing stories about them, we slowly opened conversations on mixed emotions. For example, when a child expressed how she felt after her mother scolds her she said she felt angry but she was also crying. I asked her if that was so because she was feeling something else too? She nodded as I held up the sad puppet. This opened conversations on mixed emotions.

This, I think, is an important phase in developing self awareness - to be able to tie thoughts and feelings to behaviours.

While this exercise helped them to identify and share emotions among themselves, they seem to also become more aware of the emotions experienced by others. The read aloud of *Mukund and Riaz* is one such example. During the read aloud of the book, the children were very captured by the story. All the children were lying on the floor on their bellies, with their chins cupped in their palms. I was feeling the tension build up too and was feeling a bit overwhelmed by the intense attention. Also, I was personally very moved by the theme of the story. As I turned the last page, my voice cracked, and immediately one of the children and then the others reached out to me to ask if I was 'sad' or crying. Another child offered to bring me some water.

A poignant point of personal reflection was when I as an educator also became more aware of the various emotions that I was experiencing during the sessions. This was true especially for tough days when I felt that the sessions were being constantly interrupted or were not proceeding the way I had imagined it to. This made me realise of how I am also a part of the process and I am evolving with the children.

USING CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

Books used for the read alouds and for group work were a vital part of the project. They triggered conversation around the topics of emotions and helped children to reflect on their own emotions and behaviours. Here are a few examples of how the books helped children associate with characters in the books and opened conversations:

Rani's First Day at School by Cheryl Rao was a book that was not a part of the read aloud but was used as an example to identify emotions in the main characters in the book. The book triggered several personal stories about what the children remembered as their first few days at school.

At this point they were identifying with the character in the story and what Rani was going through. While some shared that they were happy to go to school, many shared their anxieties not only about being in school but also about the things that they encountered on their way to school, or the constant fear that they experienced about missing their school auto, or in some cases even crossing a busy road. A few children spoke about how they had overcome these fears - by making friends, and by going around their school and building familiarity with their surroundings.

My Many Coloured Days by Dr Seuss remained the overall theme of the sessions. We started the sessions with this book and ended it with it as well. Every day, as a part of the circle time children meditated on the emotion they felt strongly that day and put it down on a piece of paper. One the last session, they could themselves see how their emotions and colours had changed through the days. The last day the children had some spontaneous sharing about how they felt like different animals and plants on different days. This showed me how they had reflected and accepted the association of emotions with colours and animals/plants, which was triggered by the content and illustrations in the book.

Books that dealt with difficult themes such as fear, anger and sadness helped children relate to the characters in the stories, and open up conversations not only about the issues that they faced in their school or homes but also their communities. One such conversation was about the things we fear. Police and thugs were people who came up multiple times. Children shared stories about frequent Police visits to the community, visiting police stations to meet their family members and the sadness they felt when they learnt that their siblings were locked up. As an organization, we plan to take this issue ahead and meet the CDPO officer to discuss how to make the local police station more child friendly.

The characters of the fox, owl and snake in the story *Gruffalo*, a child thought reminded him of the local thugs who were always trying to pin down children to get some of their work done. 'We always try to make excuses and run away from them,' he said. This incident showed me that some children were able to connect to the characters and place them in local contexts. In the process making a more intimate connect with the book.

It was also interesting to observe the responses to the books presented as a part of the project during their quiet reading times. The English books that were read aloud to the children were some of the most popular. Though most children could not read the books in English, they chose to browse through these books, sometimes telling the story to themselves. On other occasions they sat with a friend and narrated the story to them. The children invented a game by themselves (when they sat in pairs to read) where they read the story and had to identify the emotions experienced by the main characters by picking the stick puppets that depicted the corresponding emotions.

GROUP DYNAMICS, AND PARTICIPATION

As the sessions progressed I noticed that most of the regulars were siblings. Among the 12 regular children - Lakshmi, Ramai, Shalini and Sathya were siblings, Jessy and Harisha, Shalini and Anitha, Subbalakshmi and Kavya, Shweta and Ajith were also siblings. I noticed that while in the regular sessions the siblings were not always able to influence each other to be regular; in this case they were able to do that.

Attendance and participation was high when the siblings attended together.

Kamakshi and Sandhya who became regulars at the Field Project Sessions were earlier relatively reluctant library goers. Their regularity and attendance in all the library sessions has improved since then.

BUILDING A CIRCLE OF TRUST

The most vital element of creating a space for sharing is building a circle of trust. The children from the group had odd dynamics. While some were friends, the others were not. The reasons were varied. They were related to conflict among themselves or parents or because they lived in different settlements (some lived in concrete homes while others lived in temporary shelters) or gender issues.

Given such a dynamic it became critical that the discussions in the group didn't further cause damage to the relationships and instead the sessions became a space for friendship and healing. Group activities, games and singing together, helped children bond more organically. During the sharing, I decided to only hear the child out. I was careful not to make any comments on their feelings, especially on incidents that were related to their homes and close relationships. I also refrained from conflict mediation during this period. If conflicts came up, they were just a part of the sharing.

While initially some children would comment on the sharing(s) of others, we worked on establishing that the circle was a free space of sharing and that we were not to make any unwarranted comments.

USING ARTS AS A MEDIUM

Since I was working with a group where many children were struggling with reading and writing art - visual art and role plays became an important tool for expression.

After the first few sessions, I realised that there were a few children who were very enthusiastic to share their stories, while others remained shy. Art then, became a medium for them to start expressing their feelings. I noticed that children like Swami and Sharanya who were shy to talk within the group were more engrossed in the art activities. They remained intensely involved in their drawing, in most cases, withdrawing from the group and working alone.

This rang true especially when there were sessions that discussed difficult emotions. For example during the extension activity, after the reading of *Mukund and Rias*, eight year old Sharanya⁶ drew a picture of her father. He committed suicide last year.

I have known Sharanya for the past year and a half. When the library started, she would often invite me to her house. Work kept me busy and I was unable to visit her. A few days after her father's untimely death I visited her house. She received me with a wide smile. She then introduced me to her mother who was sitting on a mat and to her father as she pointed to the picture on the wall.



In the session, I noticed Sharanya as she started her drawing. She made several attempts at drawing a picture of her father. Every time she would draw a face, she would erase it. She finally drew two figures. Initially I thought it must be a picture of her with her father.

As she left the session that day, I gently asked her about the drawing. She said the figure to the right was her father and the one to the left was her mother. I observed that the mother figure was bigger, maybe depicting her mother's larger presence in Sharanya's life today.

Role Plays and theatre games were also a critical part of expression that was beyond just the verbal form of expression. When the children started to participate whole heartedly in the session I saw how their bodies and voices opened up to respond to their emotions. They were becoming more aware of their bodies and those of their

⁶ name changed

friends. Since the emoting of the expression was through play, they were experiencing it with detachment. It also helped dissolve earlier conflicts and biases. For example, the boys and girls were more willing to sit with each other and work together.

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

While the project started off with the intent of articulating and expressing emotions, it became clear to me during the period of the program that the project was also looking at the aspects of regulating emotions. Many children in the group were disruptive and had issues controlling their instincts and thus also to the reaction to their emotions. Calming rituals, reflections and meditation was in some way helping them become a little mindful of their actions and feelings. Learning to wait for their turn, negotiation skills, overcoming temper tantrums and short attention spans were some of the ongoing issues among many children.

CHALLENGES

Selection of books: A challenge I encountered while selecting the books was that while I can converse in Kannada, I cannot read in the language. So, I decided to have two sets of books:

- 1) Books in English that would be used for the read aloud.
- 2) Books from the collection in the library in Kannada or bilingual (English/Kannada) that would be used for individual reading and group work.

My initial selection of read aloud books and group work were not mostly from our collection. I was planning to introduce many new books to the children. However, after the first two sessions, I changed my plan. I chose to use new books only in the Read Alouds whereas work with the books in the collection that the children are familiar with for the quiet reading and group work. This was because of the following reasons:

- Language - most children couldn't read in English.
- I wanted the children to focus on identifying emotions and starting with familiar books. I thought familiar books might make the task less prohibiting.

Time Constraint: Eight sessions, I felt were just a beginning. This project requires a lot more time in terms of being able to open conversations and work with children's understanding and articulations of emotions at a deeper level. With more time, we can work on the various emotions, exploring different possibilities of behavioural responses and reflections.

Classroom Management: One of the constant issues I struggled with was classroom management. While about 60 per cent of the children who attended the sessions were regulars the rest were comparatively new. We also had walk ins from time to time. The children attended sessions after school hours and they sometimes seemed tired to engage constructively. This made them disruptive.

I sometimes saw myself struggling with holding the group together for read alouds. Also by the third session, we had moved into the new and larger space. I found the children distracted by the new space, wanted to move around freely and explore it from time to time. Sometime gliding, dancing and swaying. While this annoyed me initially, I realised that this too was in some way an expression of joy, an emotion. I soon started to devise ways to get children's attention and bring them back to the circle.

Taking conversations ahead: On many occasions children shared several personal stories that were difficult - of domestic abuse, deaths in the family, addiction etc that I felt needs addressing. However, I many times felt ill equipped to handle it immediately. I saw myself restraining from engaging. I was being just a listener. I hope to take the program ahead so that I can address these issues. But I do know that much of what is happening outside of the library is not under in my own control.

THE WAY FORWARD



We at the Buguri Community Library are looking forward to taking this program ahead and making it a year long program for children between age 8 years to 10 years. During the course of the project, we also expanded out library to have more space. On the day the new space opened the children along with artists and volunteers painted the walls of the library. We dedicated a wall as the 'Emotion Wall' which has flowers on which faces can be drawn. The children now draw faces (in the black circle which is a blackboard) different emotions that they feel during the day or sometimes when they are unable to express their emotion or don't want to speak. This has become a regular feature at the library.

The themes that the Social -Emotional Literacy Program would like to explore are:

Self awareness - Creating a deeper understanding of their thoughts, emotions and behaviours. Build an understanding of the impact of their words, emotions and action on others. We are considering doing this by:

- Using children's books for building emotional literacy. The LEC Project was a part of this component.
- Trust circle and sharing. Circle games and songs will continue.
- Journaling - written and picture journals

Self - Management: The ability to manage and regulate one's emotions and actions. We are considering doing this by:

- Breathing and mindfulness exercises.
- Working with books and activities that help children manage stress and anger.

Social Awareness: embracing diversity, resolving conflicts in a peaceful manner, showing empathy for others. We are considering doing this by:

- Getting children involved with projects along with the elders in the old age home.
- Working with children on themes of bullying, conflict management and appreciating diversity.
- Role Plays

CONCLUSION

Social and emotional learning helps to centre the children's mind and body. It reduces tension and allows them to become open to learning. My experiences and findings from this field project shows me that the library can address the emotional literacy needs of the children at risk and children's books are an excellent medium to achieve social and emotional development.

In the context of my work and the population of the children that I worked with, I feel that an intervention that creates positive and safe spaces for expression of emotions adds great value in the emotional and psychological well-being of the children. I also feel that this needs to go hand in hand with the library reading programs, creating conditions that allow children to calm themselves and build the readiness and openness to learn and understand the world that they inhabit.

I look forward to developing this method further and using it for not only our library in Banashankri, in our other branches, and other spaces where I get a chance to conduct such sessions.

APPENDIX 1

A NOTE FROM MY DIARY

An ongoing issue between the old age home where the library is housed and the children have been the noise levels and interruptions that the children create when they come and spend time around the library premise during non-working hours, and the littering in the premise by the children. They ring the calling bell of the old age home just to annoy the elders during their sleeping time. They often carry packets of chips and other eatables that they throw around the library premise. This understandably upsets the elders. Over the year and a half we have discussed this situation with the children multiple times and while the instances have come down, it does reoccur from time to time.

On the day of our 6th session when we sat down in a circle, one of the senior ladies from the old age home came to the library window called out to me and complained about littering again. It was upsetting. I told her that I will talk to the children...again. I noticed the children had overheard the entire conversation.

I brought the issue to the circle and told them that we will have to find a way around discussing and solving it. I had had a long difficult day and I was exhausted. I told them that I really felt tired and exhausted by the situation repeating itself again and again. I told them that I was upset. I wasn't sure if I was right in pulling my guard down, but I did it. The children immediately broke into complaining about others in the circle, of how they had seen them making mischief. I listened for a while and expressed my disappointment. I asked them if instead of blaming others, can we as a group reflect on our own behaviour and admit if we have been involved in any of these activities. There was a long pause, and a few hands went up. I thanked them for being honest. Soon more hands went up. I asked if they wanted to share what they had done and how they feel about it. One after the other they admitted to making noise, littering the stairs or making fun of the elderly. I shared with them the story of how the library space had been found a year and a half ago after three months of search. How everyone in the neighbourhood had denied giving space and if we were to lose it, it might mean that finding a space like this would be close to impossible. The children became very quiet.

I then asked for ideas they had to solve this issue. Some suggested that we remove the names of those who create such issues from the member list. 'This space is for everyone, all are welcome here' I said. They then suggested that we should appoint leaders who will keep track of the others. I shared that while each one of us are reflecting on our action and regretting it, is it possible that the next time we stop or regulate our action? Can we become our own leaders?

After this incident I noticed a difference in the way the children interacted with me. They seem more trusting, making the interactions more intimate. They were reaching out more often to be helpful (though sometimes unwarranted). I wondered what had changed. I had shown my vulnerability by expressing exactly what I felt before the discussion - tired, exhausted, disappointed. Maybe the children were responding to this me - the one who had pulled down her guard.

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An art work done during my own meditative practice while reflecting on the work with children