

REVISITING SCHOOL CULTURE: THE SCHOOL'S ROLE IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS OF CHILDREN DURING COVID- 19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Since the abrupt change in learning mode last March 2020, schools' administrators have been looking for ways to somehow alleviate the stress and anxiety the children have to face using the online study mode. One of the things the school management tries to address is the development of Social-Emotional Skills in children amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

This paper seeks to analyze and bridge the gap on the roles of the schools in nurturing the Socio-Emotional Development of Children during the outbreak of the disease. Using Literature Review Method, this study is going to highlight key roles of the school leaders and educators in their tasks to help children strengthen their coping mechanism. It shall also discuss the importance of nourishing the socio-emotional skills of the children now that schools are adopting the Distance Learning. Moreover, it will present possible strategies to foster a school culture geared toward the safety and improvement of the child's socio-emotional skills.

Keywords: Socio-Emotional Skills, School culture, Distance Learning, Enhancing Children's skills

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) has determined the new strain of COVID-19 in Wuhan China in December 2019, and it emerged as a 'global pandemic' shortly after. The organization advised authorities around the world to execute maximized precautions against the disease (WHO, 2020). The common safety measures that authorities enforce include lockdowns, travel limitations between cities and countries (OECD, 2020; WHO, 2020). The surge of this Pandemic influenced angles of human activity, from education, religious and social gatherings, entertainment, businesses, politics and the overall economy. The whole

world is in a state of desolation in the aftermath of COVID-19 threats, the condition has been tough to deal with and the education sector is one of the most afflicted in the COVID-19 outbreak (Onyema et al., 2020).

The educational activities and educational systems worldwide were greatly affected by the viral outbreak, prompting authorities to the cessation of schools, causing serious delays in academic activities (Onyema et al., 2020). The upsetting caused by the Pandemic in Education may last longer if a solution for this virus is not developed, and the spread of the illness proceeds. UNESCO Director-General, Audrey Azoulay (UNESCO, 2020) cautioned that "the worldwide scale and speed of the instructive interruption due to COVID is unmatched and, whenever delayed, could compromise education" The US Center for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) featured the ramifications of school terminations. As indicated by the CDC 2020, "longer abeyance may bring about more children congregating outside of schools."

Due to this concern, numerous countries around the world adopted distance learning to alleviate the unplanned school cultures due to the Pandemic. The definition of this approach to education usually includes the edification among both entities, (student and teacher) that occurs in different locations and using diverse Educational technologies and instructional materials (Moore et al., 2010, as cited by Muller & Goldenberg, 2020). Within the circumstance brought about by COVID- 19 and the suspension of educational institutions, a divergence between online learning and distant blended teaching has been proposed (Hodges et al., 2020).

COVID occurrences and the relevant social ramifications that children are endangered to may also implicate their growth and progress. The WHO have acknowledged the adverse effect of COVID-19 on children's welfare and socio- emotional skills (WHO, 2020). The organization's guidance is intended for parents to help children express themselves and to be a model for their children; however, few families have the advantage to offer this encouragement and assistance (Muller & Goldenberg, 2020).

According to UNESCO 2020, social isolation is among the detrimental effects of school cessation. They stressed that, "the fact that education institutions are hubs for social activities and human interactions, school closures can deprive children of some social communications that are essential to learning, development and creativity."

Mental health, welfare, and behavior is one among the affected aspects of children's socio-emotional skills. A potential scenario that could be a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic would be that psychological problems among children will become more pervasive if the environment is traumatic (Moroni et al., 2020). This deterioration of the pre-existing psychological problems can be more obvious among young children in less affluent households who are impelled to have lower socio-emotional skills (Attanasio et al. 2020). With the given situation, school leaders and teachers continued supporting students and parents. Significant impacts on the level of discomfort were faced by children following the outbreak of the Coronavirus and as a result of the school closures. This is due to solitude, excessive shifts in their normal routines and worries about their own and their family's health (Moroni et al. 2020).

This paper aims to address the gap on children's shortfall of Social-Emotional Skills during this pandemic and the role of the school culture in helping them to strengthen their coping ability. Regardless of the variety of ideas, this paper will highlight the school leaders' critical role in promoting the culture of helping children manage their social and emotional skills; discuss the importance of these such as coping, empathy, and interaction; and present possible strategies to foster a school culture geared toward the improvement of the children's skills.

2. Literature Review

2.1 School Culture

Research literature emphasize the significance of school culture on a range of vital outcomes. A shared set of moral beliefs, a reliance and a sense of responsibility, appreciation of employees and commemoration of achievement are all attributed to Student performance. Culture affects all aspects of an educational institution and it influences informal conversations between students (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Positive school culture gives students a safe, accommodating, motivating and a challenging environment and the school administrators have an important role to play in the improvement and advancement of this (Confeld, 2016). Moreover, it involves adaptation, integration, sharing and learning. These processes are vital for school leaders to understand to provide the necessary changes in the school's vision, mission and norms to meet challenges or capture the best experiences in any crises.

The central objective of attending school would be to boost the ability of a child, and that is why researchers say that school is one of the most important settings for the acquisition of skills. While school time can be enjoyable, it can also enhance social relationships and social consciousness. Missing school, even for a short while, will have consequences for skill development; (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020).

2.2 The Importance of Social and Emotional Skills

Individuals adjust to their environments with the help of their acquired social and emotional skills that play a crucial role in their lives. The importance of socio-emotional skills has risen significantly because it contributes to the well-being not just of individuals, but of the whole community and in an increasingly transforming and diverse world (Chernyshenko et al. 2018).

Research and practice among social-emotional aspects such as understanding and supporting children has been in existence for years. The social and emotional skills in schools and other contexts are essential to the success of children (National Education Goals Panel, 1995; Thompson and Lagattuta, 2006, as cited by Darling-Churchill, 2016). Children acquire skills to establish social relationships as they are learning social and emotional skills (Denham, 2006; Denham and Brown, 2010, Konol & Pianta, 2005, as cited by Darling-Churchill, 2016). In addition, competencies, both social and emotional, may lead to successful school achievement.

The social and emotional aberration can, however, impair the ability of children to operate in their own families, school and other environments (Campbell, 2006, as cited by Churchill, 2016). If effective social and emotional skills are not established, emotional interaction and leadership can subsequently be difficult, as well as establishing successful relationships with people (Soufre, 2005; Brauner and Stephen, 2006, as cited by Darling-Churchill, 2016).

A variety of efforts such as classrooms, extracurricular activities and fostering a supportive school culture would provide social and emotional education for all children. Many institutions have curriculums designed for social and emotional learning and through collaborative strategies, educators can help enhance the children's skills (Gueldner et al., 2020).

Educators, particularly teachers, hold a big role in integrating values in the learning activities aimed at building their social and emotional skills (Rusmayadi & Herman, 2017). Researchers conclude that the development of children's emotional and social skills rely heavily on the school and its culture (Setiawati et al., 2016).

2.3 Distance Learning and Risks on Socio-Emotional Skills

In the aftermath of this pandemic, the greatest transition children will undergo is the drastic shift from face - to - face classes to online classes. Gearing up these children to be a part of the various online learning activities makes it difficult for them to cope when education is remote (Bhamani et al 2020).

The education system has been under a definite pattern, and certain major changes unbundled the system. It is very clear that this revolutionary form of educating not only seems odd to children, even to educators who have to shift instruction from books, chalkboards and classrooms to their computer. Furthermore, the absence of meaningful physical lessons means that there is no longer social learning, which implies that the education of children is compromised, and their careers are legitimately impacted (Bhamani et al. 2020).

During the pandemic, children's social growth had become a concern of education institutions, especially the younger children who experienced a significant loss in their interaction with peers (Bhamani et al., 2020). Furthermore, researchers stressed that physical interaction is vital for both the tolerance and stability of a child which will ultimately become an essential part of their social development.

Although children account for a small percentage of the COVID cases worldwide (Hamzelou, 2020; Pavone et al., 2020), children were prohibited from leaving their homes or using communal properties, such as shared gardens or terraces (Granda, 2020; Grechyna, 2020). Physicians and psychologists have warned the schools and the educators that this confinement might have an adverse effect to a child's social and emotional skills (Greychna, 2020; Léon, 2020; The Spanish Children's Rights Coalition, 2020), and stressed the importance of their knowing what is happening around them to alleviate the trauma they might experience (Dalton, et al., 2020; Wang, et al., 2020).

2.4 School's Role

Social and emotional growth encompass skills needed for building relationships, managing behavior and setting goals. There is substantial and accurate evidence showing that students learn more when they have the skills to manage emotions, navigate relationships with adults and friends and to problems solve (Jones & Khan, 2017). In view of the considerable time spent by children in schools connecting with their peers and adults, schools have now become a primary context for the learning and success of children's social, emotional and academic skills. Accordingly, in children's social, emotional and academic development, schools play an important role.

Integrating a curriculum which focuses on social and emotional development into the school culture, is a way of building a safe, inclusive, learning-friendly school environment. One of the most common and important results of social-emotional learning, including organizational processes, improvements in the atmosphere and environment of the classroom (Jones & Khan, 2017). Moreover, classrooms characterized by a warm engaging teacher- student relationships permit students to acquire deeper learning (Allensworth et al. 2018). However, in the present time due to the pandemic, this is not possible.

While educators deliver instruction with utmost motivation and dedication, students are going to highly benefit from the social and emotional learning (SEL) in the school environment and school culture (Jones et al. 2017; Allensworth et al. 2018). Furthermore, students are more likely to benefit from SEL if the educators are trained and the program of the strategies are implemented well.

Research suggests that social and emotionally strong teachers have more positive ties to children through effective instruction and management, given this context, educators must also consider the development of their own abilities in these fields (Jones et al. 2017). Following this premise, school leaders must come together to accomplish shared objectives, share the responsibility for leadership and co-create the framework for success, and the organization of their schools including the structures they established (Allensworth et al. 2018).

2.5 Building Social and Emotional Skills in Children during COVID-19

Isolation and online classes have an important and detrimental influence on children's learning processes (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). The success of students is influenced by online communication and technical readiness; therefore, schools are establishing guidance and counselling services through the use of technology as a tool for providing children an opportunity to communicate openly regarding their concerns and feelings (Aliyyah et al. 2020). In addition, numerous challenges students are facing right now includes concerns with mental health problems, misinformation, educational issues and coping problems, and it is being aided by Individual counselling through the use of technology, distribution of disease prevention brochures, short films, online forums and discussions through social media, and other means (Ifdil et al. 2020).

Most research studies explored the wider effects on the social and emotional learning of children of the use

of technology, such as mobile telephones or social robots; however, there are few researches addressing young children in general (Goagoses et al. 2020). Schools have invested on tangible technologies and invested applications catered for children such as PlayPal, applications which encourage physical activities that are widely being used by educators during their online classes (Frauenberger, 2016). In addition, schools have also created an application which reads stories for the use of younger children.

When we shift from reactive to proactive actions to wellbeing, it is apparent that schools must demonstrate what it is to invest heavily in social and emotional learning because of this crisis (Cipriano, 2020). Having regular check-ins with the students is a commonly adapted strategy of schools, asking the students to self-reflect on the way they are feeling towards the pandemic, which supports the development of Social and Emotional Skills and helps to build interpersonal connections. Moreover, school leaders have engaged educators and parents to work together to develop and virtually incorporate a supporting plan for the entire school community (Cipriano, 2020).

3. Conclusion and Future Directions

It is essential for School Organizations to foster a school culture designed to cultivate children's social and emotional skills amidst the Pandemic as it is essential for children to develop said skills as to help them in coping with the "new normal". Schools have to create a positive, supportive and a safe school culture for the children. In collaboration with families and community members, schools must invest in the preparation and continuing support of educators, leaders and administrations, leaders must use their collective consciousness to dissolve the ubiquitous bias and capacity and restore one another's commitments and schools must make the responsible decision to learn from this reality and improve Social and Emotional Learning to include all learners effectively and to serve every school group in a sincerely caring way. Social and Emotional skills should not have to go to the wayside during virtual learning. By thinking outside the box and adapting recent trends and innovations to work through distance learning inside the school can continue to provide social skills instruction with ease. Researchers must be encouraged to use qualitative research methods to propose creative strategies to enhance positive social and emotional skills of children during crisis.

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