

Research Article

Emotional Expression and Self Concept of Children with Learning Disability

S. Kapoor¹ and S. P. K. Jena²

Abstract

Much research has focused on the self esteem deficits among children suffering from learning disabilities. Yet not many programmes are carried out to enhance self esteem for these children. It is reasonable to believe that any intervention that focused on enhancing self esteem would lead to increments in academic performance as well. The present study attempts to ascertain the effect of emotional expression (group activity) on self concept of a group of 10 school going children, between the ages of 6 – 10, diagnosed with Specific Learning Disability. The children's self concept was assessed on Child Self Concept Scale. Children were given non-academic intervention and again they would be evaluated on same scale. Results reveal significant improvement in self concept of children with learning disability.

INTRODUCTION

A child with a learning disability cannot try harder, pay closer attention, or improve motivation on their own; they need help to learn how to do those things. Children and adults with learning disabilities have trouble processing sensory information because they see, hear, and understand things differently. A learning disability cannot be cured or fixed. With the right support and intervention, however, people with learning disabilities can succeed in school and go on to be successful later in life.

Currently, SpLD cannot be conclusively diagnosed until the child is about 8 years old. The cornerstone of treatment of Sp LD is remedial education. Apart from the academic performance, the emotional lives of students with Learning disability have lately come under scrutiny. Problems of low self worth, lack of emotional connect, poor peer relations etc are increasingly on the rise.

METHOD

The aim of the present study was to see devise a preliminary module for non academic intervention for enhancement of self esteem in children with learning disability. To this end, the present paper focuses on effect of emotional expression in the form of group activity on self concept. It was hypothesized that emotional expression would enhance self esteem in

children with learning disability.

A sample of ten students was drawn from a private sector school in New Delhi. Male and Female students between the ages of 6 to 10 (classes II to V) and diagnosed with specific learning disability were included in the study. S P Ahluwalia's Children Self concept Scale (2002), an adaptation of the Piers Harris self concept scale was used to assess self concept along six domains.

This was followed by a period of intervention, for roughly 10 sessions, after which the self concept assessment was repeated. Group sessions were carried out in an isolated room in the morning for a duration of 50 minutes.

MEASURES

The Children's Self Concept Scale (CSCS):

The CSCS was developed by Dr. S P Ahluwalia, after the Piers-Harris Children's self concept scale (1969), to measure different aspects of the self concept of mostly school going children. It is essentially a verbal, paper pencil test, and contains 80 items in all, 14 of which are Lie items. The scale items are scored in positive or negative direction to reflect evaluation. The items are scored as 1 for a Yes/ No response. The higher the score, the more favorable the self concept. The maximum score possible on the score is 78, while the minimum is zero.

1 & 2 Department of Applied Psychology, South Campus, University of Delhi

The Subscales Test are as follows:

- I – Behaviour
- II – Intellectual and School Status
- III – Physical Appearance and Attributes
- IV – Anxiety
- V – Popularity
- VI – Happiness and Satisfaction

The plan of the study was as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Plan of Study

| | |
|--|---|
| Informed Consent+Pre-Intervention Assessment on CSCS | |
| ↓ | |
| | Rapport Building |
| Session 1 | Understanding Emotions. How they feel. |
| Session 2+3 | Understanding Emotional Expression-in self and others. Feelings Matrix |
| Session 4+5 | Graded Disclosure. How sharing makes you feel. |
| Session 6+7 | Bag of Feelings |
| Session 8 | Positive and Negative ideas about Self. |
| Session 9+10 | Talking about 'Feelings'. Facilitate more open sharing. School, Family etc. |
| | Conclude. Benefits of Sharing, Future Activities etc. |
| ↓ | |
| Termination + Post - Intervention Assessment on CSCS | |
| ↓ | |
| Statistical Analysis using Sandler's A | |

Post the first assessment, and 2 sessions that focused on rapport- building, the intervention sessions were started. The intervention was planned out over a period of 10 sessions, each roughly 50 minutes long, and carried out in the group setting. Each session focused on enhancing emotional expression, or seeding the idea of beneficial expression, in the mind of the children, as also establishing firmer relationships within the group members so as to help build a social network and buffer.

In the first few sessions, activities such as those involving trust building, sharing etc were carried out. Games were introduced, and an introduction to the different feelings and how

they affect us was brought about. The idea of positive and negative feelings was discussed.

These sessions were then followed by more structured tasks. The Feelings Matrix was used to understand expression of feelings, in terms of non verbal behaviour. Each child was required to adopt one feeling from a matrix and act in accordance. Understanding such expression helped them get an idea not only of their own feelings, but enhanced understanding of others' affective states as well, thereby aiding in more effective interpersonal interaction.

The technique of Bag of Feelings (Binney & Wright, 1997) was used, where children were required to draw a bag and mark out the various feelings they were experiencing at the time, in varying proportions. The causes of such feelings were then discussed, and possible ways to modify or eliminate certain feelings were considered. Gradual and subtle effort was then made to bring about changes in proportion of the feelings; for example, larger proportion of positive feelings over negative ones.

Towards the end of the intervention period, feelings of group cohesion were enhanced. The idea of social support, friendship and its benefits were discussed. The children were encouraged to actively seek out friendships, and ideas of increased sharing were discussed. The last session was used to gather assessment data about the child's self concept again, for post-intervention reference.

RESULTS

Subjects' scores on Children's Self Concept Scale are presented in Table 1,

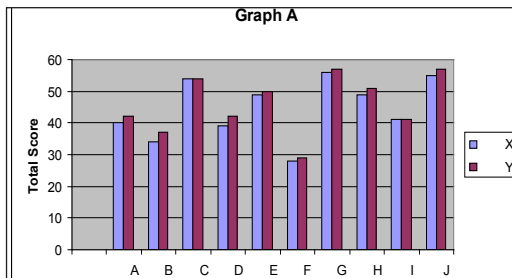
Table 1 : Scores on CSCS

| Subjects→ Subscale↓ | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J |
|------------------------|----|---|----|----|----|---|----|---|----|----|
| I | 13 | 9 | 11 | 11 | 10 | 6 | 11 | 8 | 10 | 7 |
| | 13 | 9 | 11 | 11 | 10 | 6 | 11 | 8 | 10 | 9 |
| II | 3 | 4 | 12 | 6 | 11 | 4 | 12 | 7 | 6 | 13 |
| | 4 | 6 | 12 | 7 | 12 | 5 | 12 | 9 | 6 | 13 |
| III | 6 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 9 |
| | 7 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 9 |
| IV | 8 | 4 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 5 | 9 |
| | 8 | 4 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 9 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| V | 5 | 2 | 9 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 11 | 10 | 7 | 11 |
| | 5 | 3 | 9 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 11 | 10 | 7 | 11 |
| VI | 5 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| | 5 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| Total | 40 | 34 | 54 | 39 | 49 | 28 | 56 | 49 | 41 | 55 |
| | 42 | 37 | 54 | 42 | 50 | 29 | 57 | 51 | 41 | 57 |

Sandler's A was calculated for the data, owing to the small sample size. The value of A was found to be 0.147 and is significant at 0.01 levels.

Graph A : Total Scores on CSCS

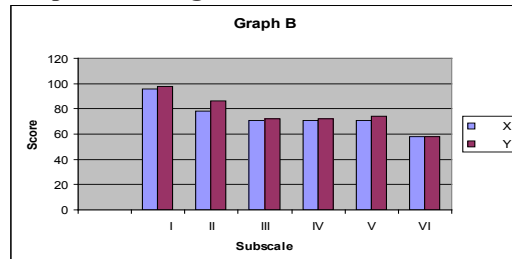


Total subscale scores presented in Table 2.

Table 2 : Total Subscale Scores : Pre- and Post- Intervention

| Subscale | X | Y |
|----------|----|----|
| I | 96 | 98 |
| II | 78 | 86 |
| III | 71 | 72 |
| IV | 71 | 72 |
| V | 71 | 74 |
| VI | 58 | 58 |

Graph B : Change in Subscale Scores



DISCUSSION

The value of A has been found to be 0.147 and is significant at 0.01 levels. Hence, it can be said that the intervention program has shown

potential effect on the children. The hypothesis, stating 'emotional expression would enhance self concept in children suffering from Learning Disability' stands verified.

Maximum change has been effected in subscale II, i.e., Intellectual and School status; followed by subscale V, i.e., Popularity. The substantial increase in subscale II scores is in concordance with the findings of the meta-analysis conducted by Elbaum and Vaughn (2001), where they reviewed effect sizes and outcomes for different self concept interventions on school children suffering from learning disabilities. Amongst other findings, they found that intervention had more of an effect on the academic self concept than on other dimensions. Such has been the case in the present study also. This trend can be explored in terms of the different activities in the intervention program, and their effects. Since the intervention mostly had activities that fostered emotional expression, friendship, group work etc, it is reasonable to expect that the intervention would enhance functioning along these lines. Most questions revolving around such domains are to be found in subscales that deal with intellectual and school status as well as popularity, and hence the increase is reflective of changes in these domains.

Much research has documented the positive effect of friendships on self perception. This increase is in concordance with Kloomok and Cosden's findings (1994), where they stated that positive perceptions of one's parent and peer relationships, are associated with higher self esteem in children with LD. This data also supports a compensatory hypothesis, which suggests that children with LD may form positive global self perceptions on the basis of their nonacademic skills and strengths (Hagborg 1996).

The present study reports findings consonant with much of such research, by reporting an enhancement in self concept. It is somewhat in consonance with the findings of Berndt, Hawkins and Jiao (1999) who found that sociability and leadership increased across

the transition if students had high-quality friendships. Similarly, a study by Bishop and Inderbitzen (1995) found that subjects with at least one reciprocal friend had higher self-esteem scores than subjects without a reciprocal friend, thereby implying the strong link between friendship, and the social support it provides, and self esteem.

Another possible reason for the increase could be the purely non-academic nature of the intervention. It is believed that involvement in extra curricular activities yields higher self esteem estimates. Since the intervention was seen as extra-curricular and took the focus away from studies while keeping the children involved in some form of activity, it could have fostered higher levels of esteem. This can be seen in the light of findings by Steitz and Owen (1992) where they found that girls involved in extracurricular activities, for example music, had higher self esteem than their non involved counterparts. Another study by Hietolahti-Ansten & Kalliopuska (1991) found the same results for a sample of 55 students.

By facilitating effective communication, much can be gained in the domain of self concept. Not only does emotional expression act as a cathartic relief and aid in emotional processing, thereby helping cope with what may come to children as a stigma or traumatic experience; it also routes the enhancement of self concept through various other channels, i.e., enhancing friendships, creating social buffers etc. Though a causal link may not have been established, the results provide direction to psychologists, educators and parents; as also point to a need for further research in the area.

LIMITATIONS

The small sample size is a limitation of the study, leading to problems of generalisability. Since the study employed a test-retest method for assessment, the possibility of the children remembering certain responses and marking them out again in the post-intervention evaluation cannot be ruled out.

SUGGESTIONS

Within the school setup, initial counseling during the diagnosis is essential as is regular follow up with the counselor. Establishment of peer groups and teams within the study centre structure can be beneficial in engendering social support.

Parents must ensure complete awareness, support and acceptance of the child. Involvement in extracurricular activities may benefit the child in developing a self concept that is not entirely focused on their learning disability.

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