

**PRIMARY SCHOOL 2**  
**PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS**  
**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Background**

The Project was originally established in September 1994 with a group of twelve participating children selected by the school representing a spread of classes from P2 to P6.

**Programme**

The sessions are scheduled every Thursday to suit the school timetable and follow a format which has evolved since our initial sessions. Each session begins with a half-hour one-to-one counselling session with one of the boys who has occasional serious behavioural problems in school despite being very bright and producing good school work when he is not in crisis. This is followed by a one hour session with the whole group, two therapists and a classroom teacher.

All adults are active participants in the games and exercises. The activities are especially designed to help the children develop skills which they require in order to better function in their environments, be it school or home.

Parents are encouraged to join their children at particular workshops as well as being given the opportunity to avail themselves of the Stress Management facilities.

At the instigation of the classroom teacher who participates with the therapists, a Personal Development Group for teachers meets once a week with two therapists.

The project has four main interrelated objectives:

1. To plant 'seeds' of self-awareness, self-confidence, inter-personal relationship skills and self-responsibility which can grow with the children into adulthood, giving them the understanding that they can shape their own lives regardless of their backgrounds.

Children do not have the mental maturity to understand some of the concepts related to self-development and stress management. When necessary, these have to be put to them using their language, meeting them where they are. Even more important, for the reasons given in the previous section, their experience of the types of personal relationships and concepts dealt with during games and exercises during the personal development sessions gives them the awareness (even if unconscious) that those are also possibilities in their lives regardless of their life situation just now. In the 'workshop' situation the children are able to experience a type of relationship with adults and teachers which is rare in the life of most children. As the participating children are directly involved in decisions affecting the group as a whole, they learn responsibility and how that their actions (or lack of action) have a direct effect in their lives and in the lives of others.

The different 'games' give the children the opportunity to contribute in a team effort and work with other people; give them the opportunity of appropriately expressing themselves and learn to listen to each other. The 'games' also introduce children to advanced concepts such as how their bodies reflect how they feel; what are 'feelings' and how to deal with them, etc without actually mentioning any of the above. All of those experiences will stay with them at some level and are expected to affect their school work, family life and even help shape up their personalities into adulthood.

2. To bring focus: Whatever the reasons, lack of focus is possibly one of the most important factors affecting a child's progress in school. Through special games and exercises which demand focus in order to be played, children are given the opportunity to develop their intent and develop appropriate attitudes to given tasks.

One of the predicaments of most children is that they find it difficult to maintain their focus. Sometimes this is brought about by discomfort within certain situations and/or themselves, sometimes this is because they never had a chance to learn to focus, sometimes because of physical factors (such as nutrition, allergies, etc) - the above may also be interrelated. Whatever the reasons, lack of focus is possibly one of the most important factors affecting a child's progress in school. Through special 'fun' games and exercises which demand focus in order to be played, children are given the opportunity to build up their intent and develop appropriate attitudes to given tasks. These qualities may gradually extend into other spheres of their lives.

3. To promote awareness of themselves and others. When children learn how to bring focus into themselves and develop self-respect, they can also develop healthy attitudes to deal with their predicaments in the reality of their lives. This leads to their being more open to and respect other people's predicaments, resulting in more co-operation rather than competition - to negotiation rather than demand.

As we grow up, we shape our perceptions of ourselves according to our surroundings, to the environment we live in - family, school peers, friends, culture, media and so on. This unconscious need (not to mention conscious pressure) to learn the rules, the labels in our environment, their meanings, leads us to acting (or rather, reacting) to a number of situations in a blind, unquestioning way. These are mostly learned reactions.

When children learn how to bring focus into themselves, when they start feeling and seeing who they are, they also begin to be aware of their predicaments in the reality of their lives. And, as they learn to appropriately deal with their predicaments, they can start being more open to other people's predicaments. Through their awareness they may, in time, begin to realise their true self - and understand how they have a part to contribute to their environment. Their environment would be in them and they would be in their environment. This leads to co-operation rather than competition - to negotiation rather than demand.

4. To give opportunity for expression: Throughout the sessions, children are encouraged to appropriately express themselves and their needs in a variety of ways. This may be done through dramatic games, music, decision making discussions, etc. There are a number of games which focus their awareness on themselves giving the children the opportunity to bring information to a conscious level.

These aims may be achieved by the use of purpose directed games and exercises which may be grouped roughly as follows:

Postural; Trust; Identity; Grounding; Connecting; Focusing; Perceptual; ...

The objectives of those games/exercises are directed at many levels of children's development - physical, mental/emotional, social and so on:

- to take focus away from their minds and bring focus into their bodies
- to ground them
- to develop sensitivity

- To develop sensitivity and awareness of their breath and their bodies
- To develop physical awareness and personal boundaries
- To develop harmonic personal interaction while respecting each other's boundaries
- To develop conscious breathing
- To improve body oxygenation;
- To develop sensitivity and touch
- To slow down their minds
- To release and re-direct energies in a conscious and controlled manner
- To develop focus
- To develop sense of value (self-worth) and use it in an interactive way
- To develop interactive personal touch
- To develop a sense and experience how personal action contribute to or detract from collective efforts
- To experience how individual efforts contribute to the whole

## **Impact**

At this stage in the Project, qualitative reports from children, staff and parents are most encouraging.

The feedback from children within the sessions is highly favourable. Teachers are also reporting not only a marked progress in the classroom behaviour of participating children but are also reflecting the children's expressed enthusiasm to participate in the activities.

Some of the activities e.g. children practising hand/foot/face massage at home, are having a direct impact on enhancing closer relationships within the family. A recent visit by children and parents to the stress management clinic has resulted in appointments being made by parents.

## **Consolidation and Expansion**

Once the children with whom we are presently working achieve an adequate degree of understanding of this process there are two options for future expansion of our activities: expand this group utilising the participating children as catalysts or establish two or three new groups retaining two or three of the current children as core members.