An Enquiry into the construct of social and emotional wellbeing of children: To develop Resilience
Through Bibliotherapy

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ABSTRACT

The notion of social and emotional wellbeing needs to be understood in the sphere of resilience and the scaffolding being provided to children during adverse situations. The relevance of nurture and the benefits it reaps for children has been proven beyond doubt. The aim of the paper is to explore the active role of resilience building for providing social and emotional wellbeing through storytelling. Along with this how the nurturer can provide the scaffold during the developing years of the child's life. Based on my research study with ADHD children and other learning disabilities I wish to critically examine and focus on the skills which play a positive role in furthering the child's social and emotional skills. These building blocks can be incorporated in the day to day activities by the nurtures, so as to enhance a child's skills at various crucial junctures during their developing years like relationship building, conflict resolution, facing adversityand enhancing attention for cognitive and academic performance. The study has explored the role of bibliotherapy at length in promoting overall wellbeing and resilience in children.

The researcher has developed some simple techniques in the form of a module for enhancing Social- Emotional skills during early years.

KEYWORDS: Resilience, Scaffolding, ADHD, Wellbeing, conflict resolution, Bibliotherapy

INTRODUCTION

We need to train our emotions intelligently so as to ensure appropriate responses in different settings.(Rohn, 2015).

The education system in totality is geared towards academic achievement. This emphasis recognizes cognitive and scholastic achievements as tyhe essential skills being imparted by the institutions. It is deemed essential that children grow up as adults with rounded personality who can take up life's challenges and adversities, and sail through them in a positive manner.

The research in the realm of social development are in consonance about certain factors in the child's social network which are very critical. The child experiences a safe and secure space around people whom he/she trusts. The secure bond with the caregiver and a safe home environment both physically and psychologically are most apt for developing appropriate skills in the social-emotional skill development. A children need to be given a fair chance to express their feelingswithout feeling insecure about the reactions of others.

Coping means how does an individual respond to a stressful situation and how it impacts the emotional and psychological wellbeing. Social competence is reflected in relation with peers. This skill plays a crucial role in resilience of at risk youth (Reeslund, p. 7). Access to social support systems, and positive self-appraisal of children have been found to act as buffers against stress associated with parental mental health issues, disharmony, separation and other adverse factors. This promotes emotional and psychological wellbeing.

The role of social competence and coping and the relation between the two potential resources of resilience and potential protection from psychopathology in children with depressive parents has been explored (Reeslund, 2010, December). The children with depressive parents are exposed to hostile, disengaged and inconsistent parenting (Reeslund, p. 4). Process of resilience involves coping and social competence which are the psycho-social resources of coping.

Socially competent person issuccessful inestablishing social and interpersonal relations (Chen, 2008)some descriptions of social competence tend to focus on active participation of the individual in social relations and appropriateness of the behaviour in social settings. Interactions with peers is basic (Nicholls, 1983). The children are now able to perceive themselves as others perceive them. This insight impacts the social acceptance and bond

formation. Support of peers and friends is of utmost importance for problem solving skills, socially acceptable behaviour, gaining confidence and positive self-view(Chen, 2008).

Research on relationship between social competence and adjustment identifies deficits in social skills which put the individual at risk for mental health problem (Cole, 1996). Competence, resilience, social system modification and empowerment have been identified as factors which are the potentials for wellness (Cowen, 1991). The skills in the non-cognitive domains have been found to be positively related adult performance in different domains like education, employment. Significant associations have been identified with social-emotional skills at pre-school age and adult performance(Jones, online published october 2015). Mindfulness based education programs during pre-adolescent and adolescent years have been found to be positively associated with wellbeing and social emotional competence (Schonert-Reichl, 2010).
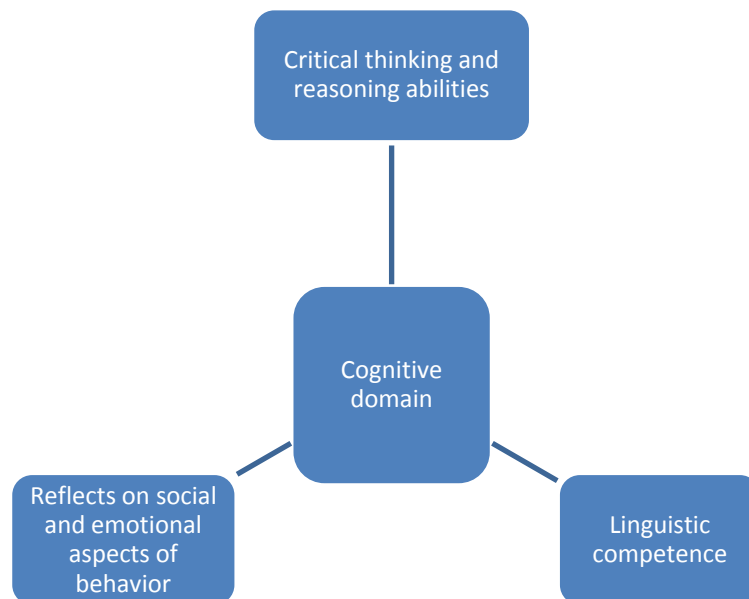

Fig. 1: Story telling to enhance cognitive ability

This serves as a fertile ground for researchers to establish a link between social competence and indicators of positive adjustment.Social-emotional development acts as a strong support in the form of a scaffold. The experiences of the child during early years are instrumental in the coping skills developed later in life. The social and emotional skills learned play a significant role in the way the child interprets the experiences with others, in the form of social emotional competence. The social and emotional development begins the moment a child is born and this continues throughout the life. The foundation for the budding social and

emotional skills of children has its roots in the mother child relationship during early formative years.

Resilience has been described as a set of qualities that facilitate the process of adaptation and change in the situation of risk and adversity in a positive and successful way (Benerad, accessed 2019).

Masten has described a resilient person as one who can withstand, overcome, or recover from serious threat (Masten, 2001). Resilience is the elastic quality of an individual which enables him/her to bounce back from adversity. Social and emotional competence is at the core of resilient behaviour.The protective factors do focus on processes like the ability to adapt in challenging situation which has been termed as resilience (Pluess & Belsky, 2010)

"Resilience refers to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaption within the context of significant adversity" (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Resilience has been termed as a 'dynamic' process where new vulnerabilities and new strengths emerge with changing life circumstances (Garmezy, 1984). The other researches too have supported the emergence of

In tribal cultures the concept of resilience is inherent and the closet translation is 'resistance' (Fromboise, 2006). Resistance to negative thoughts, negative feelings. The adversity can be viewed asa gift in the form oflesson that is learnt from overcoming it (Graham, 2001, p. 1) cited in (Fromboise, 2006). A strong sense of belongingness to the cultural traditions, values, supportive mother with positive self-esteem and self-identity, efficacy, positive feeling about themselves and environment are some of the positive factors which work against negative impact of stress and adversity (Fromboise, 2006). People who display adaptation in face of adversity become stronger by acquiring and learning new skills and coping mechanisms in a creative way and thus, learn to face and overcome life challenges (Luthar &. Z., 2003).

The protective factors across eco-systemic levels have focussed on culture and positive identification with traditional beliefsand values of the culture. In native people resilience is cultivated by focussing on spirituality, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. (Graham, 2001). The belief in the interrelated nature of all things in the universe is at the core of Spirituality. This refers to the belief in the interrelatedness of all things, a sense of purpose, search for hope and harmony, activities which give meaning and value to life and a belief in a higher being (www.mentalhealth.orguk, Retrieved 2019). Having clear thoughts, balancing the emotions and taking care of the physical self are traditional ways to buildself-esteem which help in developing and fostering coping behaviour and resilience in individuals.

Feeling of belonging to a cultural group and enhancing the cultural values through stories, folklore, providing nurturance and parents acting as role models to inculcate and balance all domains of spiritual, social, emotional and physical competence, which are instrumental in developing resilient behaviour in children (Fromboise, 2006).

The process of positive adaptation or resilience is a construct which relies heavily on critical social and emotional competencies. The interdependence and interrelatedness of the environment and individual, bi- directionality of the relationship results in both the individual and environment influencing each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

After a critical evaluation of the skills which are crucial to social-emotional wellbeing as well as resilience in children, focusses on many commonalities. Social and emotional competence is at the core of resilient behaviour which furthers the well-being of children. With this theoretical framework wherein social and emotional competence subsequently provides a strong support for a person to acquire resilience when faced with adverse situations. Inadequate levels of social emotional functioning have been found to be related to many public health problems(Jones, online published october 2015). Non- cognitive abilities like emotional regulation,attention,self-regulation and social skills are affected by the cognitive abilities.Skills both in the cognitive and non-cognitive realms are required for academic and career success; non-cognitive abilities are more 'Malleable'(Jones, online published october 2015).

Children with a low attention span, who fail to follow instructions, or have frequent conflicts with their peers(Birchwood, 2012). The children with ADHD do tend to underperform in academics and face challenges during their school years from pre-school years, childhood and adolescence (Daley. D, 2010).

The children who are faced with challenges by adversities have been found to emerge stronger with capacities which may not have emerged otherwise (Waller, 2001). It is important to examine those factors that result in positive adaptations in the face of adversity. The protective factors which have been found to enhance social-emotional skills and consequently resilience in children can be categorized into family, Individual and community factors.

Competent and consistent parenting where parents use authoritative parenting style for instilling discipline in children have been found to be effective for developing skills of emotional regulation, social competence and wellbeing(Baumarind, 1967). The attitude that parents have towards their children has three dimensions: autonomy, involvement and

warmth (Grolnick, 1989). Inauthoritativestyle parenting the parents are responsive to child's needs, actively participate in child's life and value children's ideas, and encourage active participation in decision making process (Baumarind D. , 1991). Parents who value children's accomplishments have been found to be associated with positive self-identity in children. Coupled with this, another crucial aspect for children's wellbeing is marital harmony with strong ethnic identity and self-efficacy of carers. These are some of the factors which support and scaffold a child's social-emotional wellbeing. The child's characteristic traits of the child do contribute to positive adaptation are easy outgoing temperament, positive responsiveness, sense of humour, problem solving skills, high intelligence, hopefulness, and social skills, trust in people, cooperation, empathy, emotional regulation, strong positive ethnic identity (Waller, 2001).

At the community level good schools having adequate resources to focus on instilling self-esteem and personal responsibility, and healthy ways of communicating act as strong nurturing protective factors to enhance skills needed for resilient behaviour.

Children with Behavioural Challenges

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is most commonly identified neurobehavioural disorder identified in early years(Wilens, 2010). 5-7% children are diagnosed with ADHD in early years (Barton, retrieved 2019).The impulsive andhyperactive behaviour which is inappropriate for their age along with inattention are the major behavioural challenges in children with ADHD(Diamond, 2013) (Childress, accessed 2019) .The significant problems with executive functions like memory, attention and inhibitory control have been observed in ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, accessed 2019).

The child may have difficulty inunderstanding of some sounds and words. Problem with reading, spelling writing and maths are commonly found along with ADHD. Behaviourally conduct disorders like defiant behaviour can also be present.

Researchers and child care professionals have not be able to state the precise cause for this problem. Genetic and environmental factors have been identified by research studies but with no consensus on the causative factor(Thapar, 2013).

The role of dopamine has been researched and has been found to be associated with positive emotions. Rewards, weather in the form of physical things or social behaviour help in giving

pleasure and are of great help in behave our modification and increasing the frequency of target behaviour. 'Dopamine Pathway' or reward pathway have been found to be significant in improving the motivation (kim, 2013).

Parenting and environment factors have not been found to play a proactive role incontributing to ADHD in children (Barton, retrieved 2019). The children with behavioral challenges often have limited abilities in the various domains of social emotional skills as compared to children who do not display the behavioral issues like aggressive outbursts, violence and ADHD to just name a few. They have difficulty in understanding non- verbal cues as a result land up in social difficulties. Impulsive nature makes them misinterpret many situations resulting in peer conflicts very often and rejections.

Short attention span has negative connotations in a school learning setting as cognitive abilities are compromised. Conceptual understanding and task completion are often found to be lacking.Peer rejections, frequent conflicts and school related inadequacies often make them vulnerable to low self-esteem and confidence.

Children with ADHD often display socially immature and defiantbehaviour towards authority figures like parents, teachers or class monitor. The tendency towards argumentative and aggressive behaviour has been found to be significantly more than non ADHD children in the same age group.

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Listening skills can be enhanced by reading stories, picture stories. Activities like colouring pictures, block building games, puzzles, dominoes enhance the attention span in children (Barton, retrieved 2019).

Concentration and persistence at challenging tasks need to be developed along with the skills needed for interpersonal relations like sharing, caring, empathy, and conflict resolution both with peers and adults. These are the most important abilities that need to be developed in children.

The understanding of the emotions of self and others, and to be able to regulate the emotional expression according to social appropriates, and to be able to understand the non-verbal cues are some of the important indicators of social and emotional maturity.

The parental support, with physical presence as well as a responsive attitude can be considered to enable the child to feel secure and safe both physically and emotionally.

Emotion regulation is learnt best by a child in an accepting and warm family environment. The parental reactions in different social settings and their responses are the behaviour models which a child imitates(Sheffield Morris et.al).

Belskey's model of parenting conjecturesthat the parental behaviour is also influenced by the child's temperament.Parental aggressive and punitive responsemay be because of a difficult temperament of the child. Type of parenting and consequently emotion regulation are to a large extent also depend on child's temperament. This can become a two way problem resulting in aggressive parental responses (Taraban, retrieved 2019). It is of utmost importance to guide children's emotions in socially appropriate behaviourand express themselves in a positive manner. This sort of emotional coaching helps them to learn and regulate their responses to challenges. This academic and social competence is also facilitated.

This sort of emotion coaching helps in reducing problembehaviour in children. The ability to understand, identify and deal with emotions of others in difficult social situations is an important component of mastering this competence.

When children observe their parents' responses to smiles of others or to someone in difficult situation, the children imitate such behaviours. The type of social interactions between the parents, and with children do impact the socio-emotional development in children. Marital conflict has a negative impacts on the life skills of children (Sheffied, 2007).

The ability to understand the self, manage and regulate emotions, form relationships and resolve conflicts amicably, decision making communication skills empathy are some of the crucial skills for mental wellbeing of children.The children facing adversities like parental separation, death, abuse. Children, who in spite of challenges, and threat to their survival are able to maintain a positive mind set and achieve a reasonable level of success in school and life have been of interest to researchers in resilience domain.Playing with peers and getting involved in various activities which can be engaging and fun filled have positive impact on social and emotional skills of children.

BIBLIOTHERAPY

Bibliotherapy or story telling with a therapeutic purpose has been used by psychologists, therapists, clinicians since long. This is an expressive therapy that involves story telling as a narrative. Storytelling Therapy can be used as an "umbrella Term" for narrative psychology (Eric, 2015). The narrative can be woven into a story for children, which gives a sense of identity and direction to the child. Storytelling is considered to be an effective way of developing social skills of children. Storytelling is one of the oldest method to make children understand the nuances of social skillsin a social setting with a safety net of imaginationand mental space.

Stories are the best form of coping where they learn to face challenges like difficulties in family, trauma, disability or other issues and concerns like parental neglect, poverty, racial or ethnic discrimination, war, natural calamities etc. Stories are an interactive medium which helps the child to handle their own life challenges and crises in effective manner. Storytelling has been aptly called a two way process, it has the power to enhance healthy attachment with an echoing effect (killick, 2007). Storytelling in a very natural and interactive way where the child listens to as well as speaks about feelings, relationships and appropriateness of a behaviour. A narrative is primarily a way of cognitive understanding both for the self and others.

The stories need to be selected which are in consonance with the challenges being faced by the child. By identifying with the protagonist in the story, who might be in a similar challenging situation, the child is also able to handle the situation in an effective manner. The non-verbal cues and communication are effective in making the children understand the emotional tones and gestures through non- verbal modes.

The fears and anxieties about peer rejection, social isolation, academic failures, and parental separation can sometimes have a crippling effect on the coping skills of children. Stories are a powerful medium to help children to re-write their narratives in a positive way. Based on the social and emotional needs of children stories can be woven around those needs with the culmination in a positive and mature perspective on the problem and better coping and adjustment skills.Stories which can act as models with a positive approach, are of help to children facing difficult situations and life challenge. The main character in the story facing similar life difficulties can initiate realistic thinking and problem solving in the child's mind
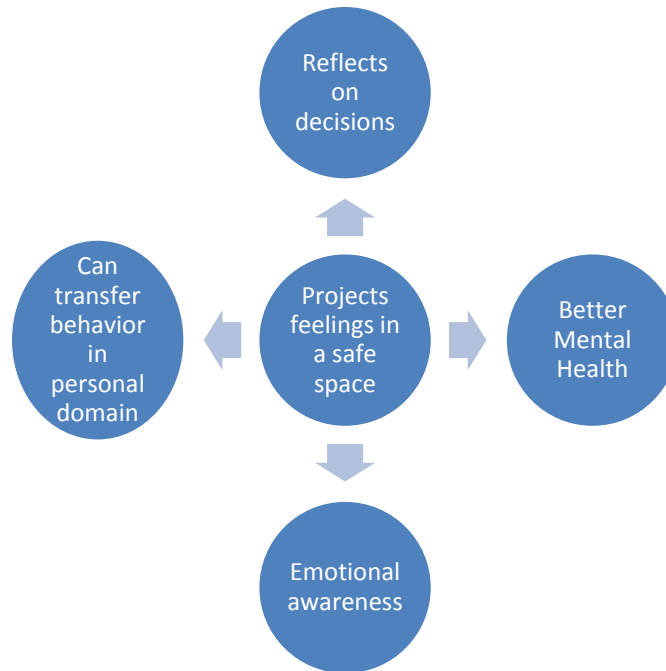
Fig. 2: inculcation of social emotional skills through narratives

Neurobiologists have focussed on the brain's activity during storytelling. It has been established that story line is instrumental in changing the activities of the brain if the narrative is well constructed. Neurochemical 'oxytocin' is released and sends the signal to the brain "It is safe to approach others" (Zack, 2019). Oxytocin is responsible for emotions like empathy, trust, kindness and elicits cooperation. Bed time stories have been found to have a calming effect on children's brains, foster bond with parents, and enhance brain development (parents.com/fun/entertainment/books, accessed 2019).

Evidence from reading research has been of significance as it tries to understand what it takes to learning to read. The early education programs have traditionally focussed on social emotional skills and interpersonal relationships. Children who are high on social and emotional skills but low on reading abilities are at a disadvantage in grades three onwards ((Lyon). The children with learning challenges tend to avoid print, and become extremely active and display behaviours akin to ADD. Attention deficit in these cases were just avoidance of reading task (Lyon). Performance in academics is obvious through ability to read and write. Vocabulary during later years is the result of reading. Children whose parents read stories or narrated stories either through books, orally or using dramatization have been found to be able to learn to read better. Researches from neuroscience are in agreement that the children's brain develops robustly when they are exposed to books, stories from as early as six months (Lyon). The brain scans have revealed that when a person reads or listens to a

story with descriptions, emotional exchanges or metaphors, corresponding part of the brain lights up. Using Magnetic Resonance Imaging(MRI),the research has shown that along with language processing part of the brain, sensory cortex, motor cortex also lights up. The brains of the narrator and the listener are synchronized (Widrech, accessed 2019). The 'Neural Coupling' can be used as Stories stimulate the brain and can even act as powerful source to change the behaviour of an individual. The narrator can plant ideas, emotions, thoughts into the listeners' brain (Hasson, 2012 February 16(2)).

In the present study on children (6-10 year old) with ADHD and other learning challenges, **Bibliotherpy** was used as a technique for behaviour modification and enhancing social emotional skills of children (Sapra, 2015, 2018). The stories chosen for the children were individualized taking into consideration, emotional and social needs of children. The stories were selected from Panchtantra, which is a Sanskrit word meaning 'Five Treaties'. It is an ancient Indian collection of fables in Sanskrit using metaphors of animals. It is believed to be 200 BCE old based on oral tradition (Panchtantra, accessed 2019). Vishnu Sharma has been attributed the contributed these stories in Hindi literature. It has been translated in almost all Indian languages and fifty languages around the world (Panchtantra, accessed 2019). It is a series of interwoven fables which were the narratives for the three ignorant princes to make them understand the principles of 'Niti' or 'wise conduct of life'. The stories have animal characters with human virtues and vices. The fables focus on crucialaspects of human behaviour. The five aspects on which these stories are based are related to loss of friends, winning friends, owls and crows, loss& gain as well as considered action.

The English translation for these five principles as well as stories have been provided by Ryder (Ryder, 1925).

Along with storytelling otherinterventions that were activity based to enhance emotional awareness, emotional regulation, self-awareness, attention span enhancement and social skills. The activities were developed for behaviour and challenges which were being faced the group selected for the study. The issues addressed by the intervention were Bullying and aggressive behaviour, attention deficit, hyperactivity, and peer relations (Sapra R. , 2019).

Traditionally storytelling as a technique has immense potential in enhancing social and emotional skills of children. The potential of storytelling as a powerful tool need to be skilfully woven around the school curriculum. Listening to stories helps children in enhancing

their skills of communication, with enhanced ability to reflect and focus on feelings, nonverbal cues. These are critical components to learn to regulate emotions.

The story telling helps a child to imbibe the values of their culture. Katha, stories and narration from religious texts have been part of Indian culture for centuries. This is didactic in nature. This sort of narration usually refers to religious texts. These stories intend to instil the moral and social values like honesty, selfishness, humility, empathy, sharing caring and so on. This serves the function of guiding the individual to remain composed in the face of challenges, controlling anger and at the same time reflecting on interpersonal and social awareness skills. Story narration using Sangeet (song), Abhinay (derama)in different Indian languages like Sanskrit, Hindi and other Indian languages is called Kathakalashepa. The objective is to mould the behaviour in a way which reflects the values of the culture and promotes skills of self-awareness, critical thinking, decision making and emotional regulation. These skills are the building blocks for socio-emotional wellbeing.

Bibiotherapy as a method with theme based storytelling sessions were organized using colourful audio-visuals. In the present study on children facing behavioural and school related challenges, conflict resolution issues. Storytelling in aninteractive mode is most beneficial as a therapeutic tool. The children behaviour or lack of it in the narrative. During narration the child's reactions, emotional expressions and body movements were observed intently. These cues provided a lead to the stories. The stories were selected based on the emotional and social needs of the children in the group. The major themes focussed on peer relations, challenges in personal life of the child, empathy, emotional reactions. The stories were selected with the central character displaying socially appropriate behaviour even under stressful situations. The children react to stories, either with joy, excitement, sadness, anger, happiness to name a few. The narrative keeps the child engaged and helps the child to learn to empathize with the character in the story as well as evaluate the choices made and emotional reactions and social skills of the central character in the story.

The selection of the stories can be made based on the age, challenges being faced/ life skills that the nurturer wishes to develop in children, cultural appropriateness in different social settings like home, school, clinic, or peer interactions.

In the present research design (Sapra 2015, 2018) for the study bibliotherapy was used along with other intervention strategies for enhancing social and emotional skills. The children were able to sustain their attention for longer period, better able to pay attention to their academic

tasks, there was a marked improvement in social behaviour. For detailed understanding of the various approaches used, the readers can refer to the report and the module (Sapra, 2015, 2019).

DISCUSSION

The social and emotional skills are acquired by children in home environments which are safe, responsive and non-threatening. Positive relations with parents act as a strong scaffold for children's mental wellbeing and appropriate social and emotional skills. The socio-emotional competencies and resilience can be considered as two sides of a coin, where each influences the other. Further studies can be taken up to explore the nature and extent of relationship between the two. It is further imperative to form a continuum between the school and home environment so as to facilitate the social and emotional wellbeing. Positive and nurturing attitude of the teachers provide the opportunities to children to develop important social and emotional skills. Schools with nurturing relationship with the teacher can be safe secure spaces for children to develop critical social, emotional and resilient skills. In the study Bibliotherapy was used with 6-10 year old children with ADHD and other behaviour issues. Storytelling as a technique was found to be very effective for improving the abilities of interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, cooperative behaviour and emotional regulation. The children who participated in the study were able to regulate their aggressive behaviour to a large extent.

The scope of bibliotherapy can further be explored with adolescents and youth facing adverse life circumstances.

The benefits of Bibliotherapy or storytelling as a therapeutic tool are summarized in a concise form as follows:
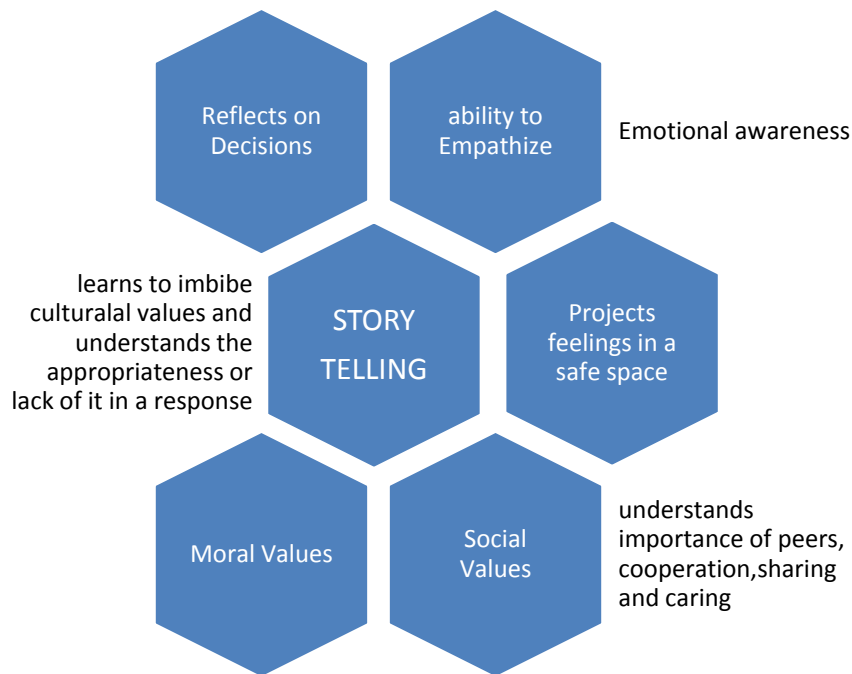
Reflects on Decisions

ability to Empathize

Emotional awareness

learns to imbibe culturalal values and understands the appropriateness or lack of it in a response

STORY TELLING

Projects feelings in a safe space

Moral Values

Social Values

understands importance of peers, cooperation, sharing and caring

Fig. 3: Storytelling as a therapeutic tool

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