

Caselets based on interactions with students as part of the Technology Integration for Inclusive Education Project

1. Behavioural issues among children

Students of class 7 are playing a dice and colouring game in a 100-grid, where one wins when they reach 100 first. However, one student, Abhi (name changed), starts multiple arguments when his peers got higher scores or he got lower scores. Abhi has difficulty interacting with his peers and teachers, and often reacts aggressively with vulgar words and displays non-cooperative behaviour. Other students have tried to reason with him, but they give up after a while. In this instance, they let him make up his score and did not pay him much heed while they continued to play as per the rules.

In conversations with the class teacher, she remarked that *Abhi* is part of some Sanghas/groups with older youth, where he may be exposed to similar controlling and boisterous behaviours and is likely imitating them in class.

Across schools, instances of similar conduct have been observed where children don't get along well with their peers and react aggressively in trivial situations. For example, most students have a preference for where they wish to sit in the classroom (usually chosen by themselves), and they fight for those seats. If a child takes someone's 'regular sitting place', that child is aggressively told to leave the place, often using vulgar language. Students are found complaining to the teacher about even small resolvable issues, for example, snatching of their pen by a fellow student. There is a lack of friendliness and co-operation among the students in the classroom. Interaction among peers is adversarial, as observed during their learning activities. If any child makes a mistake or faces any problem, others students taunt that child and crack jokes about that mistake. Some students have also been found to push, hit or tease their classmates unprovoked, even while the class is in progress, causing other students to get distracted.

To be able to rectify these issues, we might need to first understand what could be causing such a high number of students to engage in such harsh behaviours. While in some cases family and community influences may be contributing to such behaviour, in other cases movies and social media might also be playing a role. The pandemic too must have impacted the development of interpersonal skills in students by reducing the opportunities of healthy interactions with peers in these crucial years.

- **How can we make the atmosphere in the classroom more inclusive and empathetic for the children?**
- **How do the bullying, teasing, 'ganging up' affect classroom culture?**
- **What is the role of teacher in building the classroom culture/environment?**
- **Who determines the norms for class behavior and how?**
- **How to develop a sense of responsibility in children towards their classroom and learning process?**
- **How can we build collaborative / cooperative skills among the children?**

2. Attitudes towards the opposite sex

“Agalla mam, thu avl pakkana nan ninthkolalla, nan illi evn pakka nilthini” (Not possible, ma’am. I am not going to stand next to her. I will stand next to him instead) – This is what *Dhamu* (name changed), a student of class 7 told his teacher, and started questioning the teacher’s decision to make girls and boys stand in an alternating manner. When the teacher tried to explain that girls are also his peers, and when he can interact with the women in his family, he can do the same with his classmates, but he replied,

“Nang sisters illa, nan ivrnella hang ankoloke agalla. Nang girls andre agalla ashte” (*I don’t have sisters, I can never consider these girls to be like my sisters. I don’t like girls, that’s all*).

Dhamu has shown similar negative opinion of girls during our interactions in class as well. He is not friendly with girls, and hesitates to sit or stand next to them. In a language activity, where both boys and girls were required to work together in groups, *Dhamu* did not participate at all because there were girls in his group.

Such opinions, and resistance towards free interaction between girls and boys has been observed across schools. Of course, in schools with a healthy culture, girls and boys freely interact with one another. Allowing routine/ ‘normal’ transactions and activities between boys and girls is an important part of the education process.

However, the above example shows that this is not always the case. Such ‘othering’ by boys of girls (and vice versa) is likely to have long term implications on stereotypical notions of the other and unhealthy ideas and harmful behaviour like sexual harassment.

- **What are the possible contributing factors behind such negative attitudes towards the opposite sex?**
- **What can be some possible ways to handle this issue at the classroom, school, and community level?**

3. A case study on dealing with disciplinary issues

As a part of some post-baseline sessions, a story-reading session was planned for grade 6 at one of the schools under TIIE. These sessions, where images in the story are displayed using a projector, and the audio plays along, are well-liked by students across schools and grades, and all students were excited to see what the story was about.

Amidst this excitement, a facilitator noticed that *Sujatha* (name changed) – the class leader, who is usually very responsive and active in class, was in tears. She had her head down and was disconnected from what was happening in the class. Upon being asked the reason behind this, she was hesitant to answer. Her classmate and the second class leader *Kalpana* (name changed) hinted that she was upset because of a certain incident.

Although initially quite reluctant, *Sujatha* later explained that the school has a *mantri mandali* (student governance body) comprising of ‘good’ students from grade 8 (which is the highest grade in the school at present). One of the duties of the *mandali* is to monitor classes when there is a shortage of teachers in the school (when they are on leave/busy with other work). On that day, sometime between two classes earlier in the day, there was no teacher and *Sujatha* and *Kalpana* (class leaders) were managing the class. Though the class was fairly disciplined, the head of the *mandali* – *Madan* (name changed), came to their class, and started hitting some of the girls in the class. *Sujatha* then stood up to him asking him why he did that and to leave their class, and for that, he slapped her as well and used offensive language. With a lot of anger and sadness she said, “*Why did he have to do that? Why did he have to speak about my mother? In spite of his actions I was still addressing him as anna, requesting him to leave us alone*”. *Sujatha* added that the members of the *mandali* are specifically instructed not to touch any of the girl students and not abuse them physically in any way.

When after the incident *Sujatha* went to a teacher (male) and the Headmistress (female) to inform them of what had happened, they paid no heed and disregarded her saying, “*yenu agalla hogamma*” (nothing will happen), further upsetting her. Although the facilitator tried to console her and appreciate her for the way she stood up for her classmates and herself, there was little else that could be done. As an external entity, facilitators do not have the authority to question the school on these matters.

While *Madan*’s aggressive, abusive behaviour may worsen as he grows up, especially if unchecked, *Sujatha* may grow up believing that there is no use in standing up against or reporting such incidents as there is no one on her side and the environment she’s in enables such behaviour.

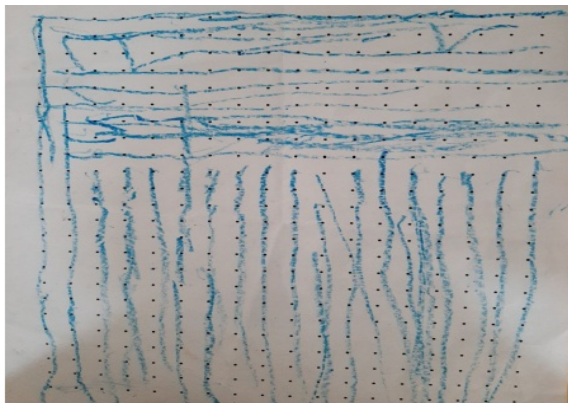
- **What could be the reasons for the school handling this incident in the way they did?**
- **What could be the short-term and long-term consequences if such incidents are not resolved appropriately?**
- **Can the Child Welfare Committee(CWC) be involved to create awareness, counsel these children and guide teachers?**
- **What can NGOs such as ours working in school do to address these issues?**

4. Padma - Case of a child with possible learning difficulties

Padma (name changed) is a student in 7th grade studying at a school in Bengaluru. She is the youngest in her family and there is a huge age gap (~ 10years) between her and her 3 brothers. She is a quiet child, who only responds with a smile when someone tries to strike up a conversation with her. Despite her age, she is cognitively behind her classmates. Her class teacher has stated that *Padma* has difficulties in reading and writing. The teacher gives her one or 2 pages of homework daily to trace numbers and the Kannada alphabet. Though she remembers those in the short term, she soon forgets and makes mistakes in repeating the same word.



Daily practice of numbers and Kannada alphabets by Padma.



Padma's response for an activity on following instructions & directions on a dot-sheet

She does not write anything by copying. If anyone forcefully insists that she writes, she tries to write something but it is usually unrelated to the task given.

When we interacted with class 7 students through the 'Are you listening?' (listening) activity, *Padma* participated with a lot of interest and was able to identify a few objects that she heard in Kannada such as *Fan*, *Kurchi* (Chair), *Motte* (Egg), *Kannu* (Eye). In the 'Pick and Speak' (speaking) activity, she could speak a few words about the Pongal festival, which she celebrated recently and what

she likes about it such as eating food, sweets, wearing new dresses, and going to the temple. She also participated in the colouring activities and classroom games. But she was not interested in reading and writing work and she failed to recognise any letters in reading activity. In the worksheet activities she was not able to recognise any shapes, patterns and colours. Despite the facilitator explaining the activity multiple times, she was unable to understand it complete the task.

The teachers initially made her sit in lower grades (grades 1-3) as a possible solution. However, they had to have her sit in 7th grade again as she would disturb children from the lower grades by bullying/ beating them. It was also observed that her peers from 7th grade often tease and beat/ bully her for minor mistakes. If they continue to bother her, she scolds them using vulgar language, perhaps because she lacks the ability to distinguish between what is right and wrong.

Padma is also unable to communicate her needs with respect to using the toilet and sometimes soils herself in the classroom. Sensing that there might be an underlying issue that needs to be diagnosed by a medical professional, the teacher suggested to her parents that *Padma* be taken for a consultation, but her family did not seem keen on taking it forward. They only want her to go to



school and come back, and are not really concerned about whether she learns anything. They are also unwilling to send her to a special school. The reasons for this might be unaffordability, lack of awareness of special education, ignorance or disregard for her education since she is a girl child.

This case shows that special education is simply not affordable to the poor. The parents perhaps have no idea about what they can do here and having the child in a safe space (or some space) for a part of the day may itself be adequate from their perspective.

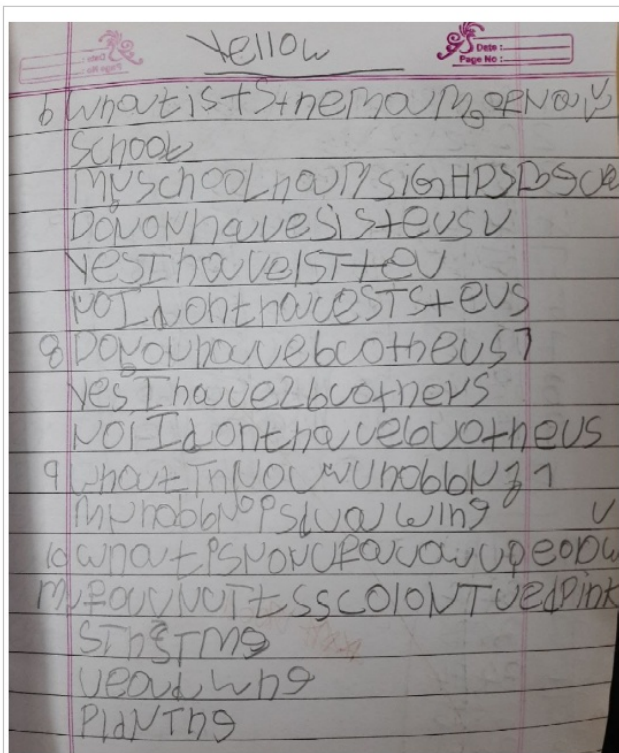
- **What are some teaching strategies that can be used to improve *Padma*'s reading and writing skills?**
- **What are the measures that could be taken to improve *Padma*'s social skills?**
- **How can the parents be made aware of *padma*'s situation, its possible implications in the future and ways in which to support her as she grows up?**

5. Shanmukha - Case of a child with possible learning difficulties

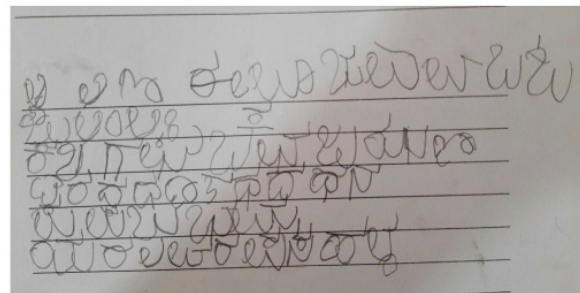
Shanmukha (name changed) did his primary schooling from a Telugu-medium school in Andhra Pradesh, but struggles with reading and writing in Telugu. After the pandemic, his family moved to Karnataka, where he is currently enrolled in 6th grade at a government school in Bengaluru. He can understand and speak Kannada, but his accent makes it difficult for teachers to understand him since at times he tends to speak too fast. It was observed that *Shanmukha* is unable to fully understand instructions given by the teacher and his responses are very slow. If a teacher scolds him for any reason, he cannot control his bladder and soils himself.

In one instance during the baseline study, he could only partially follow the facilitator's instructions. He was unable to recognize two-digit numbers and was unaware of any number operations (not even single digit addition)- concepts that are covered in lower primary grades. In a language reading exercise, he was only able to identify a few letters. He was unable to identify the given words, or construct words from letters in Kannada or in English.

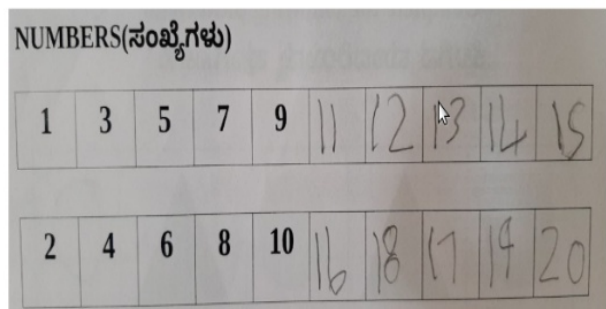
In the English writing activity, despite being provided hints or alternative words and phrases, he was unable to write any of the words dictated by the facilitator. On being asked to write in Kannada, he made few mistakes like ordering or sizing some letters incorrectly, and not using proper spacing. It seems that he finds it difficult to copy down anything the facilitator has written on the board.



Errors in spacing, capitalisation and punctuation



Errors made in kannada writing



Errors made in number sequencing

Shanmukha also faced some difficulty in identifying shapes, tiles, and number patterns. Even though he wrote some numbers, there were sequencing mistakes in his answers.

In spite of the teachers being aware about the challenges faced by him, we could not ascertain if any special efforts or provisions are being taken by them to accommodate students like him.

- **What are some teaching strategies that can help students like *Shanmukha* overcome learning gaps and improve their skills in language and mathematics?**
- **What kind of support should be offered to the school, and within the school system to identify signs and symptoms of specific learning disabilities?**

6. A blurry future? - Case of a child with eyesight problems

It is a regular school day at a government school in South Bengaluru. The teacher writes something on the blackboard, encouraging students to pay attention and respond. A little later, she shares a worksheet to assess what students have learnt. However, amidst the eager responses and student chatter, one child is distracted. *Pritam* (name changed) is struggling to understand what is being taught in class. He squints to focus on what is written on the blackboard but is unable to understand the letters. He tries squeezing one eye shut and bringing the worksheet within 2-3 inches of the other eye. This helps a little, but before he can decipher all the questions, the class is over and the worksheets are collected back. Pritam doesn't perform well in this test.

Reading, writing, referring to the blackboard and using computers are a part of students' daily visual tasks. If a child's vision is compromised, it can have grave consequences for their education. The child will have to work harder than his peers to learn as effectively. Such children also struggle with headaches, eyestrain, fatigue and a general disconnect from what is being taught, as is evident in *Pritam's* case. Pritam is often distracted in class whenever classroom transactions/ activities involve a visual component. It is important to note that the lack of interest in studies only presents itself when he is unable to decipher what is written/ depicted on the board, in books or in worksheets. He answers fairly well when there is a listening or speaking component. We can assume that apart from the cognitive aspect, this likely also impacts his self-confidence, attitude towards learning, social interactions, and ability to participate in sports.

Since a child's vision tends to change frequently during the school years, all school students should receive an eye examination as a part of their annual medical checkup, more frequently if they have existing eyesight-related problems. Under the National Program for Control of Blindness (NPCB), the Karnataka State government is supposed to organise 'Eye Screening' at all government schools. Due to their proximity, school teachers are trained in primary eye screening. The identified children experiencing difficulties in reading are expected to be immediately referred to the Para-Medical Ophthalmic Officers (PMOOs) for a detailed eye screening. Under this scheme children detected with refractive error are provided free spectacles. However, in the above example, although *Pritam's* teachers were cognisant of his eyesight-problems, and aware of several schemes under which *Pritam's* case could be addressed, they did not take any of the requisite steps. The issue had not even been brought to the Headmistress' notice.

- **What are the responsibilities of the teachers and the HM towards children with special needs?**
- **How can we strengthen our existing systems to avoid cases such as *Pritam's* from escalating and resulting in long-term damage? How can awareness regarding applicable government provisions and schemes be raised among the parent community?**

7. Learning challenges brought on by a long learning gap

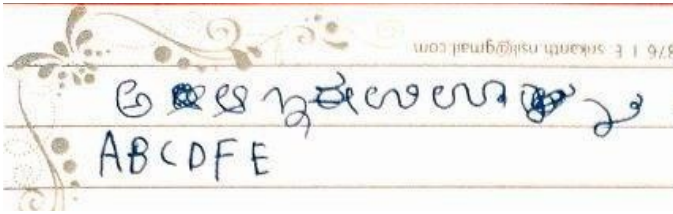
“ma’am avanige akshara ne baralla!” (He doesn’t even know the letters!)

“avanige yenu baralla bidi ma’am!” (He doesn’t know anything!)

These are responses, or taunts, received from other students when a particular student, *Karan* (name changed) was called to complete a reading language assessment by facilitators. In fact, upon receiving the reading the assessment sheet, *Karan* said, “nanage odakke baralla” (I don’t know to read).

This was observed at one government school during the baseline study.

“After some encouragement and prompts from the facilitator, it was observed that *Karan* could only recognise a few letters in Kannada and in English. When asked to write the Kannada *varnamale* and English alphabets, he ended up writing only 7 letters in Kannada and 6 letters in English.



Karan's attempt at writing letters in Kannada and in English

Since such a response is far below the level of a 6th grade student, some further digging into his background and schooling was done. *Karan* had attended a school near his village in Kalaburgi till grade 2. Soon after, his family moved to Bengaluru. However, for a period of 4 years, of which 2 were during the pandemic, *Karan* was not enrolled into any school. Further, upon seeking admission after such a long break, he was sent to grade 6 instead of grade 3 due to his age. The learning gap was completely unaccounted for.

The results of this upheaval are evident in his academic performance. *Karan* finds it quite difficult to follow what is being taught in class. In mathematics, he is able to solve simple addition sums using the standard algorithm (with carry over and without carry over), but cannot solve subtraction, multiplication and division sums as he is not aware of these concepts. He also struggles with pattern recognition.

That being said, he shows potential in language assessments. He was much more comfortable speaking in Kannada (demonstrating fluency and relevance to the given questions) than in English. He was also able to listen and comprehend sentences in both languages and complete the corresponding tasks accurately.

- What can be some teaching strategies to help bridge the learning gaps in *Karan's* case?
- What can be done to avoid such cases from happening in the future?

8. Language as a barrier to learning and classroom interactions

Language barriers in the classroom are ubiquitous in a country that has over 19,500 spoken languages. Such diversity brings its own set of challenges, but from an educational perspective the results are especially disastrous. UNESCO estimates that 40% of school-aged children don't have access to education in a language they understand. Following are the cases of such children in government schools in Bengaluru whose home languages are different from the school's medium of instruction and they need to learn a new language to understand their teachers and peers.

Students Neha and Nisha (names changed) are in class 6 in a government school in Bengaluru. Neha's family moved here about 2 years ago and Nisha's family migrated just after the second wave of the pandemic (June 2021). During one of our initial sessions when we asked in class if everybody can understand Kannada, their classmates had informed that Neha and Nisha don't understand or speak Kannada and need to be spoken to in Hindi.

During the reading assessment it was observed that neither of them could identify any letters in Kannada, let alone read words. In class, they are seen copying down long sentences written on the board in Kannada, without understanding. Neha struggled to read Hindi words as well but Nisha could read Hindi fluently. This was perhaps because she had been in touch with Hindi more recently than Neha, who has lost touch with the language script after over 2 years away. They are often seen seated together in class and mostly remain quiet, but they get along quite well with their classmates and are not treated badly/teased/bullied.

In the class sessions, we try to communicate as often as possible in both Kannada and Hindi when giving instructions for an activity or while interacting individually/in small groups. However, when it's a common discussion and the whole class is participating, the conversations end up being mostly in Kannada. But we observed that there are quite a few of their classmates who know Hindi and they translate what is being discussed or team up with them in the group activities so that Neha and Nisha can participate too by conversing in Hindi itself.

In another school, there are several students from different language backgrounds. Most belong to migrant families from all over India – some having settled a decade or two ago, while others have arrived as recent as last year. Those who have been here for a few years have picked up Kannada but others still find it challenging to understand and speak the language.

Student Amith in class 6 joined the school this academic year and his home language is Hindi. He does not know Kannada but understands a few English words. If instructions are given in Kannada, he becomes completely disconnected from the activity and begins bickering with other students, or else he begins to draw and doodle in his notebook. It happens usually in all classes, but he recently mentioned that his teacher beat him for drawing in class. He said he felt very bad about the incident and started to dislike that teacher. While on some days he stops the drawing in the class or just avoids doing it in those particular teachers' class, at other times he uses a chalk to draw on his table so that it can be easily rubbed out and the teacher won't scold him for spoiling his notebook. Though there are 1-2 students who know Hindi, they don't seem to get along well with Amith and team up with the other non-Hindi speaking students in teasing/fighting with him. They also complain about him to the teachers and call him names. Even when other students are being too noisy or mischievous, the class leader and other students attribute the disturbance to something that Amith is doing and blame him. There is one child who has been made to sit next to Amith by the class teacher in order to help translate/interpret. It was noticed that while this child understands Kannada and can translate basic conversations from Kannada to Hindi, it is difficult for him to

translate academic content into Hindi.

These experiences are sure to have short and long term consequences on the learning and development of these children. Currently, their struggle with Kannada is impacting their conceptual clarity in all subjects. In the long run, their language skills in both languages would be affected because firstly, they are losing touch with Hindi and secondly, they are finding it challenging to learn Kannada as it is already at an advanced level in school.

- **What could be the short and long term consequences of the experiences of these students?**
- **How can these children be helped to make better sense of the transactions in the classroom**
- **What additional measures can be taken?**