CHAPTER 5

SCHOOL RECREATION AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The extent of student’s engagement with the school has been one of the important considerations for educators. The extent to which students participate in their educational experiences and what they feel about the school can have critical and lasting implications. School recreation is one of the important aspects of schooling in the special schools for the children with hearing impairment based on the fact that in all the schools covered in the study; minimum two hours are devoted to co-curricular subjects and recreation activities every day. Therefore, it also constitutes important component of their daily educational experience. In the present study, three questions gauged the two dimensions – emotive and behavioural – of school engagement. One of these three questions was about whether the students feels like he/she belongs to the school; the other question looked at the attendance and the third question was whether the student took more efforts in studies than the regular homework that the teachers gave.

Organised Recreation Outside the School (i.e. organised recreation not organised by the school)

Just as the extent of opportunities available for organised recreation within the school or organised by the school was an important consideration while looking at its possible relationship with student engagement, it was equally important to gauge the opportunities students had outside the school for organised recreation as this threw light on the role played by the school as a social agency providing organised recreation.

The graph below shows the percentages of students engaged and those who did not engage in an organised recreational activity outside school (not organised by the school).
Graph 5.1 Percentages of students involved in organised recreation not organised by the school.

As the above graph demonstrates, majority of students (63%) were engaged in recreational activities organised only by the school. In other words, school was the only social agency that provided these students the opportunity to engage in organised recreation.

There was a slight difference in whether the student had an opportunity outside the school to engage in organised recreation. The graph below shows the gender-wise proportion of students who had opportunity for organised recreation outside the school.

Graph 5.2: Gender distribution of students on the accessibility to organised recreation outside the school.
There were mainly two agencies that provide organised recreational opportunity other than the school – the private coaching or classes (like drawing class and badminton class) for these activities and the social groups like the Deaf club. Only two students went for private coaching out the total 91 students; the rest, i.e. 89 students were given opportunity for recreation outside school by the formal or informal social groups like Deaf club they were a member of.

**Influence Of School Recreation on the Performance of Students Outside the School**

The students were asked whether their participation in the school recreation influences their performance in activities and competitions which are not organised by the school. The assumption here was that the exposure to activities in the school and practice of related skills due to school recreation helps performance in activities and competitions not organised by the school. The graph given below shows the students’ responses on this question:

![Graph 5.3: Percentages of students who perceived school recreation helped performance on activities not organised by the school.](image)

**School Recreation and Attendance of Students**

When the students were asked to tell the number of days they were absent the month before, majority of students (n = 192) said that they were present on all days. This was borne out by the school records. The students (n = 52) who had missed the school the previous month had missed only 1 or 2 days. Only two
students had missed more than 2 days. During the group interviews, some of the students said that they miss the school during vacations. Ten students expressed that they felt bored when they could not go the school because outside school they did not have many friends and had no opportunity of social interactions.

The students were also asked whether they felt motivated to attend the school when there were school recreational events. The graph below gives the percentage of students who said that they felt motivated to attend school when there were recreational events in the school as well as those who said that they did not feel such motivated.

Graph 5.4: Motivation to attend school during school recreational events

As the graph shows, an overwhelming majority of students (n = 218) said that they feel motivated to attend the school during the school recreational events. This does not, however, signify that school recreation events increase academic involvement, however. During school recreational events, it was informed, that very less academic studies took place in the school and this motivated the students attend school during such times. However, it reflected the enthusiasm of students in the school recreation activities. The association between perceived effect of recreation as positive and attendance during school recreational events is given in the following table:
Table 5.1: Association between positive perception of the effect of school recreation and school attendance during recreational events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive perception of the effect of school recreation</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance during recreational events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>218 (100%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7 (26.9%)</td>
<td>19 (73.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>225 (92.2%)</td>
<td>19 (7.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Missing values=0; $\chi^2 = 162.733$; df=1; **p<0.001; SIGNIFICANT** (For both Chi square test and Fisher’s exact test)

The proportion of attendance during recreational events being 100% for positive perception of the effect of school recreation and 26.9% for negative perception of the effect of school recreation; the students who perceived the effect positively were more likely to attend the school during recreational events than those did not.

**School Recreation and Extra Efforts in Academic as well as Non-academic Subjects**

Children are the active co-creators in their own development, which takes place in close relationships with important others in the environment. The socio-cultural perspective on learning as proposed by Vygotsky (1978), development of knowledge happens in important social contexts. Knowledge is seen neither as external objects nor as inner thoughts, but rather as embedded in the activity of knowing – as something that is jointly constructed, through communication and interactions, in activities situated in a social context. This leads to the proposition that learning in a school is not limited to books and the child, if motivated to learn through positive experiences, would continue to learn outside school, too.

In the present study, the students were asked whether they complete their homework regularly. They were also asked whether they make extra efforts to improve their performance like doing extra studies other
than homework or practicing sport related skill after school hours. Their responses were corroborated with their teachers. The graph below gives the percentages of students on responses on these two questions:

![Graph 5.5: Percentages of students on responses related to regularity in homework and doing extra study.](image)

One hundred and one students (out of total 244) said that they do regular homework as well as take extra efforts for academic as well as non-academic activities. Academic extra efforts meant that they did extra studies, other than homework. Non-academic activities were mainly practicing for their dance, drama or sports events. Seventy students complete their homework regularly but do not do anything extra in studies. There were four students who said that they sometimes missed homework but did study extra. When asked to explain, they find new information more interesting than homework. So they ask questions at home to get more information about the topic taught in the class but feel ‘bored’ to complete homework, sometimes!

Sixty six percent of the students (n = 162) who were regular in home work said that they felt engaged with the school. Forty percent of the students who are regular in their homework and also do take extra efforts in academic and non-academic activities had high frequency (more than 50%) of participation in school recreation. Nearly 25% of the students (n = 60) who felt engaged with the school did not always complete their homework on time. Five percent of students (n = 13) did not express a feeling of
belongingness with the school and were irregular in completion of homework whereas four percent of students (n = 9) were regular in their homework but did not feel engaged with the school.

When the association between very high frequency of participation (75 – 100%) in school recreation and making extra efforts in academic and non-academic activities was studied, following results emerged:

Table 5.2 Association between very high frequency of participation and extra efforts in academic and non-academic activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very High Frequency of Participation</th>
<th>Extra effort in academic and non-academic activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>57 (54.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>48 (34.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing values=0; ( \chi^2 = 8.732; df=1; \textbf{p&lt;0.01; SIGNIFICANT} ) (For both Chi square test and Fisher’s exact test)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion of students making extra efforts in academic and non-academic activities being 54.3% for very high frequency of participation and 34.5% for not very high frequency of participation; the students who participated in more than 3/4th of the school recreational activities were more likely to make extra efforts, beyond school hours, in school-related activities for better performance.

**School and Friends**

There are two types of social relationships with the other fellow students in a school. One is peer or group acceptance and the other is friendships. In the present study the social benefits perceived by the students such as ‘opportunity to work in a group’, ‘learn to accept group norms’, ‘learn to accept differences among individuals and in opinions’ and ‘learn to appreciate others’ efforts and achievements’ are
important factors for working with other students in a group and significant aspects of socialization in a school. However, though group acceptance is an important facet of children’s successful adaptation to peers, equally, or perhaps more important is the students’ ability and opportunity given to form and maintain satisfying and supportive friendships.

The feeling of engagement with the school is also enhanced by the friendships formed in the school. Special school offers the opportunity to meet and befriend other students with hearing impairment with shared experiences of a person with hearing impairment in a mainly hearing world and a shared language for communication. The graph given below shows the number of friends students said they had inside and outside the school.

![Graph 5.6: Percentage of students with friends in the school and outside it.](image)

The graph above shows that 122 students had more friends in the school than outside it. School, thus, for them an important social agency where they had more friends; some of them had no friends outside the school. One hundred and four students said that they had equal number of friends in and outside the school. Thus, in total, 226 students (93%) had friends in the school. Ten students said that they had more friends outside the school than in the school. Eight students said that they did not have many friends – neither in school, nor outside it. Out of the 104 students who said that they had friends in school and outside it, too; 32 (31% of the total number of students with friends in and outside school) students were involved in organised recreation outside the school. Out of the 10 students who said that they had more
friends outside the school, 6 students (60% of the total number of students with friends outside the school) said that they participated in the organised recreation outside the school.

There was no significant class-wise difference in whether the student had many friends in the school. However, as the graph given below shows, none of the students who were in class 7 and above said that they did not have many friends. Also the percentage of students who had many friends within school was higher for higher secondary classes (8th and 9th) than that for primary level classes (std. 1st to 4th).

![Graph 5.7: Class wise distribution of students with friends in or outside the school.](image-url)

As the graph given below shows, there was no gender difference in whether the student will have many friends in or outside the school.
Graph 5.8 Gender-wise distribution of students with different friendship patterns based on in or outside the school.

Ninety seven percent of the students who were involved in more than 75% of the school recreational activities said that they had many friends in the school. The table below illustrates the association between very high frequency of participation and having many friends in the school.

Table 5.3: Association between very high frequency of participation and many friends in the school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Many friends in the school</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very High Frequency of Participation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>102 (97.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>124 (89.2%%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Missing values=0; \(\chi^2 = 4.411\); df=1; \(p<0.05\); **SIGNIFICANT** (For both Chi square test and Fisher’s exact test)
The Chi-squared value at 1 degree of freedom (df) is more than the minimum required value for .05 level of significance but not at .01 level of significance. This means that the null hypothesis ‘there is no statistically significant association between a very high frequency of participation in school recreation and having many friends in the school’ may be rejected at the .05 but not at the .01 level of significance.

The students who had many friends in the school also expressed feeling of belongingness with the school. The table below shows this association:

Table 5.4: Association of the feeling of belongingness with having many friends in the school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling of belongingness</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having many friends in the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>219 (96.9%)</td>
<td>7 (3.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3 (16.7)</td>
<td>15 (83.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing values=0; $\chi^2 = 121.240$; df=1; <strong>p&lt;0.05;</strong> <strong>SIGNIFICANT</strong> (For both Chi square test and Fisher’s exact test)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The association between feeling of belongingness and having many friends in school is statistically significant; the students who have many friends in the school have a feeling of belongingness with the school.

The data from the group interviews also revealed that there are two aspects of friendship. One is the participation in friendship, i.e. a friendship that is mutually acknowledged and accepted, and another is the quality of a friendship, i.e. the intensity of the feeling ‘we’ and ‘us’ among the friends, the degree of companionship and supportiveness present in the friendship.

Peer acceptance is an essential component of school engagement of students; but what enhanced it was the feeling of companionship they felt while doing things together with ‘close friends’ in the school and
the support they received from these friends when they participated in the activities, especially competitions. The same students also mentioned that this support was also available to them when they did not do well in competitions and that was a valued part of their relationship with the school.

The support the students received during the school recreation was not only from the friends, however. The students said that the role of teachers in school recreation was not limited only to teaching skills or training them in a particular activity, they encouraged the students during competitions to give their best. When in spite of their efforts, they did not win; the teachers still appreciated their efforts, gave them feedback to improve their performance and wished them luck for the next competition.

**School Recreation and Feeling of Belongingness with the School**

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981) posits that an individual will remain a member of a group if it contributes to positive aspects of his or her social identity. Some of the positive aspects related to social identity perceived to be caused by the school recreation included a sense of accomplishment, a feeling of being equal to non-disabled peers, an identity of self as a ‘whole person – more than just the hearing impairment’ and a positive self image. Even the social benefits perceived by students included ‘learning to work with the group’, ‘appreciating others’, ‘acquiring new friends’ and social as well as communication skills, among others. Thus, school recreation, in perception of the students, seemed to be one context in which a strong social identity and a feeling of belongingness is created. The graph given below shows the responses of the students on the question ‘Do school recreation or co-curricular activities make you feel an outsider or gives you a feeling of belongingness or do you feel indifferent?’

![Graph 5.9: Percentages of students regarding feeling of belongingness with the school.](image-url)
Two hundred and twenty two students out of the total of 224 said that they had a feeling of ‘we’ and ‘us’ with the school as well as with the other students. Three students said that such a feeling also made them happy doing things together in the school.

**The Mode of School Engagement: When and Why Do the Students Feel Connected to the School?**

School recreation, according to students, enhances a feeling of belongingness through certain ways. When asked why or how does school recreation leads to a feeling of belongingness, the students answered in terms of nature of activities, their level of participation and aspects of relational networks during the activities and after the victories or failures. The table given below presents the responses related to the factors of school recreation that leads to students’ engagement with the school.

Table 5.5: Modes of School Engagement of Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Aspects highlighted in the responses of the students related to mode of school engagement</th>
<th>Percentage students who gave the response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Most of the activities organised by the school were required to be done in a group. Doing things together led to group identity.</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The training and the practice sessions taken for the recreational events were enjoyed by most of the students. The happiness and excitement felt at such times led to overall positive feeling about the school.</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>School organised activities of different nature. This ensures that no child is left behind.</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Certain activities such as exhibitions showcased the talents of students in the external world. Sometimes the name of the school was printed on the things made by the students during exhibitions as well sale. This led to the ‘team’– ‘me and my school’ feeling.</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. The fact that school recreation activities were organised throughout the year kept the feeling of ‘our school’ alive, especially during inter-school competitions.

6. When the teachers asked for suggestions for activities or how to organise them, the students felt more engaged with the school. In one school, students were asked for suggestions for a social project. The students suggested that they raise funds for treatment of the poor admitted in a hospital nearby. Their suggestion was accepted. The students expressed that they felt very proud of themselves as well as their school when they raised funds and donated it to the hospital for the medical sponsorship of a few poor patients.

7. All the schools had budgeted for the school recreation activities and did not require students or their parents to shell out money for participation in these activities, except for some of the competitions. The competitions and events where participation meant expense for the students were voluntary and decision was left to the students and their parents. This helped in students’ and their parents’ relationship with the schools. If the recreational activities would have meant expenses, according to some students, it would have not only hampered their participation, they would not have felt ‘so close’ to the school. There was also a feeling of ‘school doing so much for the students’ which was expressed by a few students.

8. Students agree and identify with the values expressed by the teachers and reflected in the school activities – altruism, acceptance of differences, tolerance, collaboration, creativity, discipline and patriotism.

9. Not many students have opportunity to engage in recreational activities other than those organised by the school.

10. School recreation gave the students opportunities to make new friends. As one student explained, the children who have been admitted in the school newly, found it easier to make acquaintances during group activities and this led to
friendships. As the Social Contact theory proposes, the amount of time spent together doing things helped to build relationships with the peer. This facilitated a strong group feeling linked to the school.

The students said that when during the competitions, there was a cheering from the school-mates; it helped them identify with the school and the group identity as specific school students.

The above responses can be categorized into nature of activities, school as a resource and social support. School engagement or engagement of the students with the school, according to the students, was experienced in situations that highlighted the school’s role as a resource and a social agency and specific aspects of recreational activities provided opportunities for school engagement.

The figure below shows the modes of school engagement – when and why it happens:
The data from the group interviews as well as questionnaires also revealed that school engagement seemed to have three dimensions – school engagement during daily life, school engagement during challenges and school engagement during transitions. The enjoyment, the learning in a group, attainment of desired goals, satisfaction of physical (for e.g. fitness) and psychological (for e.g. feeling of belongingness) made school recreation an overall positive experience and engaged student with the school through participation. This could be termed as ‘ongoing engagement’ – also a factor behind high level of school attendance of students (as shown in the attendance of students for the two previous months).

Figure 5.1: Modes of School Engagement: When and Why the Students Feel Connected to the School
The other dimension of school engagement was, in most loose terms, adding to the strength of the students in the face of challenges. These challenges could be academic or recreation-related. During competitions, when students felt (as expressed by 23 students in the group interviews) victory difficult, the school-group identity motivated them to try till the end. In terms of academic challenges, two students said that when they received low or failing grades, they preferred to work harder to improve their performance rather than feeling bad or not show up in the school the next day. The third dimension of school engagement was continuation of bonding with the school during the transitions such as transition to adolescence.

The figure below shows the dimensions of school engagement:

Figure 5.2: Dimensions of School Engagement
The engagement of the students with the school are associated with the satisfaction of the students with the benefits accrued from school recreation and student identification with the school as reflected in the involvement of the students in the activities, feeling of belongingness expressed with the school and identification with the values.

![Image](image.png)

Picture 6: “I love my school and school mates very much.” – Drawing by a child in Class II.

**School Recreation and Student Engagement with the External Community:**

*The socialization of deaf children has historically happened – and for most children, still happens – within school (including preschool) contexts.*

- Wilkens & Hehir, 2008, p. 277

One of the major outcomes of school recreation, as discussed earlier, includes socialization and social network formation by students in the special school. Social theorists have long posited that the relational networks that people have influence the resources they have access to (Putnam, 2000 cited in Wilkens & Hehir, 2008). This also provides grounding for understanding the role played by school recreation in building the social capital.

The Social Capital theory (*ibid*) states that two types of relations emerge from relational networks: social bonding and social bridging. Social bonding consists of relationships that have direct reciprocity, mostly within homogeneous group. Social bridging, on the other hand, consists of relationships that are built beyond the immediate environmental contexts of the child and connects socially heterogeneous groups.
Students perceived that school recreation leads to interaction and working with their peers in the school, supporting and helping friends, having a ‘we’ feeling with the other students in the school – all factors related to social bonding. Majority of the students (93%) had friends in the school and 50% of the students said that they had friends mainly in the school, not in the neighbourhood.

Social bridging was inherent in questions related to forming and maintaining new friendships outside school, connecting with the external community through exhibitions and competitions and inclusive recreational events. Though festival celebrations, according to some of the students (n = 55) led to a feeling of connection to the society in the sense that sharing the same culture and celebrations as the others, these events were within the school. Similarly, students felt patriotic during celebrations of the days of national importance such as Independence Day and Republic Day but, again, these celebrations were in-house.

The special schools interacted mainly with other special schools. Though the schools had regular PTA meetings, recreational events with the parents and family members of the students were less – once or twice in a year. However, two schools encouraged students to be members of informal groups of students with hearing impairment outside the school and some of the students in these two schools were active in such groups.
The graph given below shows the mean number of opportunities the students said they had for social bonding and that for social bridging.

Graph 5.10: Average opportunities in school recreation for social bonding and social bridging as perceived by students.

There was a significant difference in opportunities for social bonding and that for social bridging for students, $t(\text{df243}) = 24.086$, $p < .001$, with students getting more opportunities for social bonding than social bridging through school recreation.

**Conclusion**

Svartholm's (2007) study showed the potential of social bridging of students with hearing impairment with the external world. He found that communication and interaction – two important aspects of language development – take place across a wide variety of settings – informal settings such as family and friendships – to more formal settings such as membership with associations and organisations. The study provided a strong support to increasing relational networks of students with hearing impairment within both informal and formal settings to increase access to the widest possible modes of communication and norms of different social domains.

Though schools have programs which allow for some contact with the most nearest informal network – that of family – and with the other agencies and groups outside the school, it is not to the extent of social bonding within the school. Increasing the access for social bridging could be extremely valuable. Though
further research is required for confirmative analysis, the study pointed out the potential role the schools can play, in whatever capacity and programming they provide, for promoting and maintaining relational networks on as wide a scale as possible. What matters for the students goes beyond the academic subjects and curriculum of a special school.