

**LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION FOR SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT**

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**Dr. Padmini Nagesh Pai**

B.A., M.S.W., M. Phil., Ph.D.

**Dean**

**Shree Devi Education Trust Colleges**

**Mangalore**

**INDIA**

During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, life, globally, is undergoing significant transition and change. Among the most affected are the adolescents. Technological advances have made the world a global village. Technology also has made adolescents more dependent on the parents economically than in the agricultural era. Today's youth is exposed to more information and cultural alternatives than in earlier periods. This provides them with culturally diverse choices, which cannot be easily exercised due to economic dependence.

Rapidly changing social, moral, ethical and religious values have ushered in certain 'life styles' in the present society especially among the youth.

Certain inbuilt buffers of the society (both as support and control) are no longer available to the adolescents of today (for instance: extended family system, the smaller community that is personal and closed – be it a village or religious community, uniform culture - in the smaller circle of living, traditional ways of thinking, behaviour with very little individual need to exercise choices. The stress faced by the adolescent in such a current situation is enormous. This is reflected by raising suicide rates and growing crime among young persons. There is an urgent need to provide today's youth with a new set of ways and systems to deal with the demands of life. Since the 'individual' rather than the 'system' is recognized as the basic unit of the society, it is essential that the youth be helped to develop skills inherently to handle a wide variety of choices, changes and stressors. The values of a stable society and the family have to be strengthened with the skills of the individual, which would enable him/her to be stable amidst rapid

transition. History has shown that values can change and vary according to time, culture and period. Even if one does not subscribe to all aspects of living style of a particular culture, it is necessary to be aware of it, address it critically with the larger society in mind; work with it to bring about positive changes which are integrated rather than working against it creating strong resistance from all fronts. What is acceptable in one culture may not be so in another.

### **Today's children**

Today's children and youth are the 1<sup>st</sup> generation to have access to many things which was not so easily available to their parents - be it weapons, drugs, internet etc.

### **Psychologically some children today have**

- ☞ low frustration tolerance
- ☞ get easily agitated
- ☞ Have low self esteem-locus of control is turned to be external.
- ☞ Instinct pleasure gratification.
- ☞ Unable to slow down in day to day activities which could be done in leisure.
- ☞ Specific faculty coping to face stress develops
  - Consciously or being unaware.

Essential life skills need to be taught to children today - of course no course is solution to a problem, but we have left "avoiding a dispute" or "handling conflicts" and other emotional components like empathy, impulse control etc to chance.

Keeping all the above cultural diversities in mind, the World Health Organization (W H O) laid emphasis on LIFE SKILLS, which are necessary to all youth alike across the globe. In 1997 the WHO addressed this issue and a well-researched package of Life Skill Development were produced. "Life Skills are

living skills or abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of every day life" (WHO 1997).

The following are the ten generic skills. They are five pairs of related skills.

***Critical Thinking:*** It is the ability to analyse information and experience in an objective manner.

***Creative Thinking:*** It is an ability that helps us look beyond our direct experience and address issues in a perspective which is different from the obvious or the norm. It adds novelty and flexibility to the situation of our daily life. It contributes to problem solving and decision making by enabling us to explore available alternatives and various consequences of our actions or non-actions.

***Decision-Making:*** The process of making assessment of an issue by considering all possible/available options and the effects different decision might have on them.

***Problem Solving:*** Having made decisions about each of the options, choosing the one which is the best suited, following it through the process again till a positive outcome of the problem is achieved.

***Interpersonal Relationship:*** It is a skill that helps us to understand our relations with others and relate in a positive/reciprocal manner with them. It helps us to maintain relationship with friends and family members and also be able to end relationships constructively.

***Effective Communication:*** It is an ability to express ourselves both verbally and non-verbally in an appropriate manner. This means being able to express desires, opinions, and fears and seek assistance and advice in times of need.

***Coping with Emotions:*** It is an ability, which involves recognizing emotions in others, and ourselves, being aware of how emotions influence behaviours and being able to respond to emotions appropriately.

***Coping with Stress:*** It is an ability to recognize the source of stress in our lives, its effect on us and acting in ways that help to control our levels of stress. This may involve taking action to reduce some stress for example changes in physical environment, life styles, learning to relax etc.

***Self-Awareness:*** Includes our recognition of ourselves, our character, strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. It is a pre-requisite for effective communication, interpersonal relationship and developing empathy.

***Empathy:*** Is an ability to imagine what life is like for another person even in a situation that we may not be familiar with. It helps us to understand and accept others and their behaviour that may be very different from ourselves.

It is evident that the Life Skills are comprehensive including various areas like Thinking, Behaviour, and Emotions. The final target being self-awareness, self-esteem and accepting of others. In an individual, Life Skills develop over the years continuously in an active manner. There are many skills, which are needed to successfully negotiate each and every interaction.

Life Skills occur over the developmental period of one's life. Growth and development are the two important tasks of childhood. Growth is physical and mainly observed as increase in height, weight and appearance of age related changes in the body - For example, secondary sexual characteristics in adolescence. Development on the other hand, is more complex and involves mastering those characteristics and tasks, which help one to grow into an adult who has good self-esteem, is socially integrated, faces changes and challenges, copes and adapts to conflicts and stress. He/She is independent but still is connected with others in the family and society. To be able to achieve this, the development has to take place in various areas — intellectual, social skills, communication and language abilities, emotional adjustment and moral values. A child develops mastery over tasks in the various areas mentioned in overlapping stages. Hence these stages are called development phases. Such a development occurs continuously throughout childhood and adolescence (also in adulthood). It is a dynamic process where both the child and

environment play an active role in learning or not learning a particular skill. Both 'nature' and 'nurture' play a significant role in the psychological maturity to be able to go through the developmental processes. Often the environment - parents, friends and teachers stimulate and maintain the particular task. Thus skills are developed by the person by various methods - trial and error, modeling, correction & reinforcement in an interactive manner. Certain developmental tasks are given more importance and relevance than others. Specific methods are used to nurture them. Universally intellectual tasks and acquisition of knowledge are given premium and schools are established as means to achieve them. Language and communication are stressed due to the day — to — day needs. Both of these are universal. Development of moral values and emotional adjustment are often considered innate and cultures differ vastly in promoting them in their children. However, for successful living, all developmental tasks are necessary and there is no method by which one can say one is more relevant than the other.

As an end, all development tasks provide one with Life Skills to be able to steer oneself through life competently and comfortably indicating development. While most people learn the skills to certain extent, they often lack abilities to use the correct skill at the appropriate place, time and extent. Hence there is a need for persons involved and concerned with child development to be aware of this Skill Development and nurture and enhance all in every single child/adolescent they are in contact with.

Life Skill Education in school is an important means to promote psycho-social competence among young individuals. In the Indian-Scenario considering the heterogeneity of the levels of childcare givers ranging from school teachers to grass root level NGO workers, the need of training are varied. The Indian Youth is currently at crossroads. India being a vast and diverse country, The Indian Youth is slowly undergoing a cultural transition in their outlook due to globalization,

communication and media. 40% of the one billion population of India are below the age of 16. Adolescents form about 10% to 15% of the population. In absolute numbers the Indian youth are a significant population of the world's youth population. On an average 40% of the Indian adolescents are not in school, those in school are under severe stress due to a very competitive system of evaluation, heavy syllabus, and a low teacher — student ratio. Due to the above reasons motivation to stay in the schools system is very low especially in the rural areas.

### **VARIOUS LIFE SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAMMES CONDUCTED IN MANGALORE (SOUTH INDIA)**

Training in Life Skills was carried out at various phases. **First** among them was the preliminary two-day introductory seminar on Life Skill Education for a heterogeneous group consisting of school teachers, paediatricians, social workers, member of NGO working with child care, and masters in Social Work Students specializing in Medical and Psychiatry. The total members of participants were 98. The resource person was a Psychiatrist from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) Bangalore, who herself was trained at Geneva, the Headquarters of the W.H.O. The main topics covered in the seminar was brief introduction to psychology of adolescence, special needs of adolescence, the role of W.H.O in meeting the health needs across the globe & what is Life Skill and implementation of Life Skills as a teaching aid for the current group. Through simulated group exercises the participants had a first hand experience of applying the information to themselves as Life Skills are not confined to any one period of development. Importance was given to the theoretical module itself, various methods that would be used in module delivery, group-work, brainstorming, discussion, questioning, role-play and case study/situations. The feedback and action plan at the end of the seminar focused on the following aspects: (a) Clear need and concept of Life Skills (b) To implement at least one skill to a specific target population to look into various logistics (c) to have a follow up workshop to

clarify doubts. The seminar was sponsored by a Nationalized Bank as a part of their social responsibility fund.

The **level two** one-day workshop was arranged. This workshop was on a purely voluntary basis and those participants who would immediately implement the same in the field, participated. The other participants who were present for the first seminar and gained knowledge about the same were kept informed about the discussion in the second workshop. The present workshop was also a mixed group of all child care givers numbering 37. The resource persons were 2 faculties from the NGO promoting Life Skill Education in government schools, a Psychiatric Social Worker from a medical hospital and the Presenter herself. This was a 1-day workshop. Topics covered were practical aspects of training, input to develop lesson plan and work sheets, how to handle emergency questions that may be generated in the group discussion. This workshop was intense and focused, keeping in mind that the W.H.O Life Skills module only gave authentic theoretical information to be included under the Life Skill module and does not provide ready made techniques in skill delivery. Thus the Life Skill Education can be tailor made to suit any culture specific group and not necessarily a particular method only. This also gives the freedom, flexibility and added responsibility to the implementers of the programme and also an opportunity to design and formulate necessary teaching aids, worksheets, games etc. The feed back of the workshop was satisfying from the angle of motivating the participants to implement Life Skills with more ease and challenge. Smaller support groups for further discussions were set up. All the resource persons also committed to meet the participant individually, in groups or in the field of need be, to initiate further classroom activities. The Post Graduate students of Social Work in-turn had decided to work on 2 specific skills each, in detail so as to compile the work as part of their academic endeavour. This workshop was self-sponsored.

The **third level** training in Life Skills was conducted by the presenter on request by the Rotary Club's Annual RYLA programme. This was a two-day residential camp for the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> standard (boys and girls). Life Skills Education

as a module was chosen to be the broad framework and various activities gain to live in residential experience was planned to cover all 10 skills in condensed short modules. The Rotarians and Rotary Anne's also volunteered to manage 98 participants. Lecture and small group discussions were the main methods used. The challenge of this programme was to popularize life skill and also to test out how two or more Life Skills are used at one and the same time during practical performances. It also brought to light that all these skills are part of Child's socialization and is identified and enhanced when focused on. The Rotary Club also came forth in accepting the presenters request to support the endeavour of formulating and printing work books which could carry Life Skills worksheets so that implementation of Life Skills could be carried on in all 30 identified Government Schools.

The **fourth level** training was an off shoot of the second level training when the students formed 'training of trainers' group. This batch of 22 students was on the verge of completing their masters programme shortly. Each of them initiated to work in groups of two and two other were the overall co-ordinators. Intensive reading and discussion in a phased manner was conducted keeping in mind their academic as well as practical outcome to develop condensed project report on specific skills.

The **fifth level** training was for school teachers. Teachers form Mangalore and neighboring schools were given 2 days of interview training in this field. Issues in using life skills as part of the teaching schedule and identifying children needing special attention was also focused on. A total of 128 school teachers were trained in four batches. The school teachers also expressed the need for such interventions and their inability sometimes to involve in co-curricular activities due to academic processes. Nevertheless the feeling of rejustification and wanting to do more was clearly expressed.

## **SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT.**

It is said that the home is Child's first school and the school is a child's second home. A child spends the best part of the day at school. The teacher's personality has its maximum influence in the child.

Teaching is a helping profession. Unlike any other helping, the impact of a teacher's goodness is powerful and long-lasting on the development of a child.

Child care-givers unfortunately today are worried, hurried, tired, stressed and distressed and some of us are even poorly motivated in this huge task.

Academic responsibilities are definitely the responsibilities of a school and parents are partners in this process. With the high demands on schools today, it is also noticed on how a school meets the needs of a child's overall development.

**School Effectiveness** therefore is the way the administration; teaching and child development is balanced by the vision of each school. Improvement processes and services is the biggest challenge today for each school.

## **IMPORTANT GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS WHILE CONDUCTING LIFE SKILLS WORKSHOP**

### **Life Skills Development Programme By Teachers**

- One hour a week.
- Games/theater/story telling brain storming as techniques.
- Encourage group work among children.
- Active participation.
- Equal chance to all children.
- Being open & non-judgmental.
- Avoid providing solutions to situations at the outset

### **Getting Life Skills Workshop Started**

- ❖ In the beginning of a session with a new group it is important to develop the groups OWN IDENTITY-its LIFE.
- ❖ This creates a comfortable, safe and secure learning environment
- ❖ The need for this "climate building" should be explained otherwise participants may feel these activities are irrelevant

### **Lesson Design**

- For which age group.
- Skill.
- Content area.
- Objectives.
- Material needed.
- Introduction to lesson purpose of activity (ies).
- Processing.
- Follow up.
- Home work.

### **Debrief**

- Set in a complete circle.
- 1<sup>st</sup> the presentation group comments on what they felt were the strengths of their lesson.
- How they operated as a group.

- What they learned from the activity.
- How it feels to be pupils/students rather than teachers.
- What I would do if I were to teach that lesson for my class.

### **Finishing A Session And Closing The Course**

#### ***Proceeding:***

What? (following an activity, what did I do?)

So what? (what did I learn about my own behavior?)

Now what? (How to implement this in other areas of my life?)

#### ***Evaluation:***

- What I have enjoyed is...
- What I have learned is...
- What I have appreciated is...
- What I will do as a result of the workshop is...
- What I found difficult is...
- What is most useful ...

### **Outcome Of Life Skills Education**

#### **How do we know it has worked?**

##### **➤ Product outcome:**

- ◆ knowledge (what young people know)
- ◆ attitude (what young people feel)
- ◆ skill (what young people can do)

##### **➤ Process outcome:**

- ◆ In which activity did you learn the most and why?
- ◆ Did you feel comfortable/uncomfortable with any of the activities?
- ◆ How did you perform as a group member? What have you learned about your own behavior in a group?
- ◆ How will you evaluate your own practice in the future?
- ◆ What have you learnt which will help you?

**LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO DECISION  
MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING:**

**(SAMPLE OUTLINE)**

**MAKING DECISION STEP BY STEP**

The students are asked to explore the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of making decisions, such as:

- ◆ By impulse.
- ◆ By procrastinating or putting off making decision.
- ◆ By not deciding.
- ◆ By letting others make decisions for them.
- ◆ By evaluating all choices and then deciding.

The teacher then tells the group that the last way - evaluating different aspects of the situation - is the best process to use when making important decisions. And the following model for decision-making is presented.

**Step 1.** Name of the choices and alternatives involved in your decision.

**Step 2.** Gather information about the business (considering values, goals, and list what facts you need to know).

**Step 3.** List the advantages & disadvantages of each choice.

**Step 4.** Make your decision & list your reasons for this choice.

The students go through the model, for example, decision-making dilemma situations, first together and then in small groups. Then the students compare how the different groups handled the same dilemma. The teacher asks if anyone wants to share a real dilemma that the group could try to look at using the decision-making steps.

**The Following Questions Are Raised**

1. Has anyone in the group ever made a decision that did not turn out well?

2. Would the decision-making model have helped? How? Which step?
3. How do you know if you have all the facts you need to make a decision ? Who could you talk to?
4. Do you feel you could really use this model?

## **PROBLEM SOLVING**

'Steps to solutions & four questions for problem solvers'

The lesson is based on four steps to problem solving, with activities designed to help students work through each step.

### **1. What is the problem - what happened?**

A short role play is use to show an argument, & the students are asked to define what the problem is, without making judgments about who is right or wrong. The group is asked to consider what effect defining a problem has on the way it seems to us.

The group is asked to write a short play, showing an argument developing & taking place followed by a definition of the problem.

Problems that the children experience are introduced as examples of problems for the class to work on together.

### **2. How does it feel?**

A quarrel is illustrated using role play. The group then considers each person in the role play in turn and they write down the feelings each person may have had, without judging how justified the feeling was.

### **3. Option building**

The student's brainstorm to show how many possible courses of action could be taken to solve the problem.

The groups look at the list of feelings generated at stage 2 & suggests what could be done to meet the needs each feeling represents. Once something has been suggested for each feeling and for each person in the problem scenario, the list of option is compared to the original problem situation, and the group put suggestions for an appropriate solution.

### **4. Goal setting**

Finally a plan is drawn up, composed of small steps that each person involved in the argument could take to bring about a solution.

## **EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAMME**

The main **objectives** of the Life Skills programme, was also to study –

- Effectiveness of the programme and its implementation.
- Compare the effectiveness across different levels.
- How the transformation of these programmes can be done in day to day activities of a school.
- To critically appraise the methods used and use this methodology for future programmes.

From the various **feedback** received, few inferences can be drawn. To collect feedback, a structured feedback form and informal discussions with the participants focusing on strengths and limitations of the programme was used.

### **FUTURE CONCERNS:**

# One main concern of the consolidated activities is to plan to reach out to all schools in the district and make the Life Skills module accessible and affordable. For the above, it is important to convince school authorities, educational authorities and have more personnel trained.

It is also observed that

- Consistency
- Intense motivation
- Minimum financial assistance is required

# A constant feedback methodology needs to be evolved where schools are visited and matters in implementation of what is thought during the Life Skills programme should be carried out and put into action. These matters needs to be addressed on a continuous basis.

## CONCLUSION

Overall the accomplishment of the above modules has been a concrete step towards implementation of Life Skills Development. The Presenter wishes to mention that the trained group has a limitation of changing constantly in its composition and therefore it is at an advantage of carrying the W.H.O's mission of Life Skills all over India but at the same time new group training is inevitable. When the Life Skill Development programme is implemented effectively in schools in is inevitable that school effectiveness and improvement well follow

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