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Research Paper

Strategies for Development of Life Skills and Global Competencies

Education

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary education system till date emphasizes on and is obsessed with production of individuals who confirm. There is no place of rebels and they are thrown out of the system. Independent thinking is discouraged as against possibility and conformity. According to Sir Kenneth Robison, a typical educational institution (school) has in it all the qualities of a factory, there is a ball, there are separate subjects, separate facilities, children are educated by batches and by group. Education system is based on the model of mass production and conformity and views the 'learners' as a product of mechanical system. In addition to it Robison says, 'As the whole idea was developed and conceived in the economic circumstances of the industrial revolution and was driven but the economic imperative of the time'. In perspective of 'Indian Education system', the view of vice- president Hamid Ansari in an article, "Rebuild skills of teachers- Depoliticize education: Vice President" (March 5, 2012), where he quotes the Yashpal Committee report which states that "We have followed policies of fragmenting our educational enterprises in to 'cubicles' and that 'most instrumentalities' of our education harm the potential of human mind for constructing and creating new knowledge". There are voids and lacunae in the system due to which learner is being viewed just as a product of the system. Skills defined in terms of ability to assess a problem situation and find solution, ability to communicate effectively, having effective interpersonal skills, capacity for convergent and divergent thinking are not given due to importance. This paper deals with the Genesis of this problem of our education system and provides an account of the main approaches, evidence of the education system for application of life-skills. Helping students develop a perfect importance of life skills in light of modern global competency is elaborated in this paper. And of utmost importance this paper focuses on operationalizing Life Skills Education (LSE) and a roadmap for identifying resources for institutional design that develop life skills among students.

Introduction

Children in India live in diverse circumstances and have diverse needs and rights. Along with their need to be educated, healthy and skilful, they need, and have rights to adequate nutrition, to live in a safe and supportive environment, have opportunities to reach their optimal potential and generally lead healthy, joyful and fulfilling lives so that they can productive and well adjusted citizens of tomorrow. Children in our country face many challenges. Many of them are first generation learners and face myriad problems throughout their schooling. They, due to the socio-economic and cultural determinants may be vulnerable in many ways. Peer Pressure and lack of positive role models may prompt them to make unsafe and unhealthy choices. Anxiety and depression amongst the students, to the point of turning them suicidal, have been a cause of concern in the recent past. Our children have a right to age appropriate education, skills building, a safe and supportive environment, positive role models, empowerment, and friendly health services and counselling. They require these for metamorphosing into responsible and productive citizens. Well informed and skilled children are likely to make better decisions concerning not only their careers and relationships, habits, physical and mental health, but will be socially adept, successful and an asset to the society. They, to take advantage of the winds of globalization, also need to understand and deal with emerging issues like newly available career choices, pollution, water and energy conservation, global warming, protection of environment, terrorism and disasters. Dealing with anxiety and depression, negative peer pressure, violence, accidents, are some other significant issues that impact individuals health and also the social, economic and health indicators of the country. Gender sensitivity, prevention of female foeticide and good parenting are some important social issues that all children need to understand. Children require guidance and assistance – both covert and overt-from their Parents, Teachers, peers and society in general to complete the various "task" of development and deal with such issues. No society can sit back and watch its young people remain unskilled, unhappy and unutilized in the process of nation building, feel unsafe and unwanted, or become unhealthy. Every society and nation has to strive to promote the education, skill building and health of its young ones. Children and adolescents benefit from acquiring appropriate knowledge, attitudes, values and skills in a variety of ways. Such knowledge and skills can improve their scholastic performance, foster healthy relationships, help deal with peer pressure, lead to behaviours that prevent disease and injury, and enable young people to play leadership roles. The developing child can be engaged actively in learning experiences that will enables him/her, to have a positive attitude, make 'correct choices', lead a 'value based' life, practice basic hygiene and sanitation practices; listen and communicate effectively, have healthy, respectful and mutually beneficial relationships; contribute towards environment protection, reduction in global warming and effectively preparing for their healthy and joyous future.

Life Skills: Scope and Role

"Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". (WHO) The effective and appropriate utilization of the skills can influence the way one feels about oneself and others and can enhance one's productivity, efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence. In particular, life skills are a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build relationships, empathies with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. UNICEF lists ten life skills as most important under the domain of psychosocial and interpersonal skills. These are problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, effective communication skills, decision making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness building skills, empathy and coping with stress and emotions

Life skills are generic skills, relevant to many diverse experiences throughout life, and they should be taught as such, to gain maximum impact. However, for an effective contribution to any particular domain of prevention, Life skills should also be applied in the context of typical risk situations. Life skills may be directed toward personal actions or actions towards others, as well as actions to change the surrounding environment to make it conducive to healthy and joyous living. Life skills are needed for creating s demand and effectively utilizing the existing education, health and other services. Life skills are individual skills/abilities that each one of us possess and yet, need to enhance in order

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to meet the challenges of life. Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO definition). In particular, Life skills are a group of psycho-social competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self management skills to lead a healthy and productive life. Life Skills may be directed toward personal actions or actions toward others, as well as actions to change the surroundings environment to make it conducive to health.

A significant body of theory and research provides a rationale for the benefits and uses of the Life Skills Education. Behavioural science, and the discipline of education and child development, placed in the context of human rights principles, constitutes a primary source of these foundation theories and principles. Stakeholders in these disciplines have provided insights-acquired through decades of research and experience – into the way human beings, specifically children and adolescents, grow revealed the many spheres of influence that affect the way children and adolescents grow in diverse settings, from family and peer groups to school and community .

In the school setting, late childhood and early adolescence are critical moments of opportunity for building skills and positive habits. During this time, children are developing the ability to think abstractly, to understand consequences, to relate to their peers in new ways, and to solve problems as they experience more independence from parents and develop greater control over their own lives.

The wider social context of early and middle adolescence provides varied situations in which to practice new skills and develop positive habits with peers and other individuals outside the family.

Developing attitudes, values, skills, and competences is recognised as critical to the development of a child's sense of self as an autonomous individual and to the overall learning process in school.

Within is age of span, the skills of young people of the same age and different ages can vary dramatically. Activities need to be developmentally appropriate.

There is a growing body of research focusing on determinants and factors that influence a person's choices that form her or his behaviour. Some determinants have a promotive effect ('promotive' factors) whereas others enhance the vulnerability ('risk' factors) of children. Life Skills education (LSE) is designed, in addition to other things to promote 'protective' factors and reduce the impact of 'risk' factors. By improving decision making and focusing on appropriate choices, it contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and the protection of human rights.

LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION CAN.....

Assist in development of coping skills that are **essential components for healthy development in childhood and adolescence** and needed for making a successful transition from childhood to adulthood.

Specifically address the needs of **children growing up in disadvantaged environments** who may otherwise lack opportunities to develop these skills.

Develop social competence and problem-solving skills which are among the characteristics that promote **resiliency**, positive development and effective ways of coping.

Develop **"emotional intelligence"** and skills for managing emotions and interpersonal relationships.

Be more effective than programs that focus only on transferring information.

Positively influences the **mediators of problem behaviours.**

Have an impact on **multiple adolescent health and development needs**.

Help Institutions address multiple demands for prevention education curricula by presenting a **comprehensive unified approach** to meeting many needs.

Promote communication skills, decision-making skills, critical thinking skills, and negotiation skills needed for healthy development and are also **skills that are valued by employees in the workplace.**

Promote positive social norms that can impact the broader environment of adolescent health services, schools, staff and families.

Engage teachers, students, and their families much more that didactic approaches because no the focus on **participation and relevance** for the program participants.

Be **more exciting and rewarding** for teachers and students because the content tends to be more realistic and the methods more fun and effective than traditional (didactic) approaches.

Help to achieve the **Education for all goals** of developing Life Skills, along with literacy and numeracy among all children and young people.

Global Competencies: Developing a Perfect Fit

The growing emphasis on Life skills in higher education has several sources. One is the increasing evidence of demand from business and employer organisations for graduates to possess Life skills. There are also various economic, technological and educational arguments that have brought generic skills to wider attention. The contemporary focus on Life skills is really part of a bigger, as yet unresolved, debate about the purpose of education and how to develop well educated persons who are both employable and capable of contributing to society. What is curious here is the seemingly confident assertion that these social and cognitive capabilities are skills easily measured in a job interview, or from a job application, rather than being dispositions of character, developed in response to a variety of circumstances and the challenges of life. In order to helping students develop a perfect fit, Other than the Ten key Life Skills, following skills must be focused.

Communication Skills: Use reading, writing and verbal skills to organize and communicate ideas and information in personal and group settings.(Interpersonal Communication, Public Communication)

Analytical Skills: Use numerical and mathematical concepts, logical reasoning, principles of science/technology, information analysis and ethical reasoning to make effective decisions and solve problems. (Problem Solving, Critical Thinking, Professional and Personal Ethics, Information Seeking)

Group Effectiveness Skills: Apply social interaction skills to develop positive relationships and to work effectively with family, community groups, and co-workers. (Conflict Resolution, Social Responsibility and Effective Citizenship, Teamwork, Effective Relationships)

Personal Management Skills: Develop self-sufficiency and responsibility for effectiveness in personal and occupational life.*Career Development: Making career choices appropriate to current personal needs and to the changing nature of the labour market.* Study Skills: Use effective study skills in order to master course content.* Career Securing: Demonstrate effective job search skills* Stress Management: Manage stress in appropriate ways * Time Management: Organize activities to accomplish desired tasks in the time available * Self-Concept: Evaluating one's self concept in regards to self esteem, values, interests, strengths and weaknesses.

Let's discuss some of the prominent skills:

Critical thinking and Problem solving: Critical thinking has long been a valued skill in society. Today, every student—not just the academically advanced— needs it. While critical thinking and problem solving used to be the domain of gifted students, now it's a critical domain for every student. Teaching critical thinking and problem solving effectively in the classroom is vital for students. Learning critical thinking leads students to develop other skills, such as a higher level of concentration, deeper analytical abilities, and improved thought processing. Today's citizens must be active critical thinkers if they are to compare evidence, evaluate competing claims, and make sensible decisions.

Communication: Expressing thoughts clearly, crisply articulating opinions, communicating coherent instructions, motivating others through powerful speech—these skills have always been valued in the workplace and in public life. While education has always emphasized fluent reading, correct speech, and clear writing, there is evidence that students are not mastering these most basic skills. Additionally, there are now "global teams" that work together in business. Effective communication is essential to contribute successfully to these teams. And as technology gives rise to global work teams that span time zones, nations, and cultures, it is imperative that tomorrow's graduates communicate clearly and effectively in a variety of languages. Linguistically and culturally ***effective listening***, ***empathy***, and ***effective communication*** skills are essential skills for every person in the service economy.

Collaboration: Collaboration is essential in our classrooms because it is inherent in the nature of how work is accomplished in our civic and workforce lives. Collaboration has been accepted as a skill that's essential to achieve meaningful and effective results. In the past decade, it has become increasingly clear that collaboration is not only important but necessary for students and employees, due to globalization and the rise of technology. Various scholars and authors have emphasized the importance of collaboration. Author **James Surowiecki**, for example, explains how we use the "**wisdom of crowds**" in the new economy by saying that "under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent, and are often smarter than the smartest people in them." Not only does a collaborative effort create more holistic results than individual efforts but it also creates knowledge for a greater number of people. As a result of students/employees working collaboratively, the group can generate more knowledge, making collaboration a key ingredient to success in today's global society.

Creativity and Innovation*:* In the past, Indians perceived creativity and innovation as secondary in our national curriculum. Today, creativity and innovation are key drivers in the global economy. Author Daniel Pink remarked, "*The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind--creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers and meaning makers. These people…will now reap society's richest rewards and share its greatest joys.*" If students leave school without knowing how to continuously create and innovate, they will be underprepared for the challenges of society and the workforce. In today's world of global competition and task automation, innovative capacity and a creative spirit are fast becoming requirements for personal and professional success. Sir Kenneth Robinson, a leading thinker and speaker on creativity said, "*Creativity is as important in education as literacy and we should treat it with the same status.*" Perhaps Pink sums it up best, "*In a world enriched by abundance but disrupted by the automation and outsourcing of white-collar work, everyone must cultivate an artistic sensibility. We may not all be Dali or Degas. But today we must all be designers.*"

Operationalizing Life Skills Education (LSE)

Efficient networking of educationists, psychologists, mental health professionals and policy makers would be required to develop a concrete workable life skills training programme. The training programme would need to transcend across all development stages of the child and should have an inbuilt monitoring and evaluation system. Facilitating the learning of Life Skills is a central component of programmes designed to promote healthy behaviour, mental health and holistic well-being. To be effective, the teaching of Life skills should be coupled with the teaching of information related to hygiene, health, environment and the promotion of positive (health promoting and pro social) attitudes and values. The development of life skills requires modelling of life skills by Academic staff and a 'safe', supportive classroom environment that is conducive to the practice and reinforcement of skills. Furthermore, Life Skills education needs to be developed as part of as whole instructional initiative designed to support the healthy psychological development of students and adolescents, for example, through the promotion of child-friendly practices in schools. Thus improvement of all teachers, principals, other staff members is essential for ensuring a successful and complete roll out of Life Skills Education in the system.

Life Skills can be operationalized through content, thematic or activity approach. Content approach focuses on information for increasing knowledge related to specific subject areas. In thematic approach, appropriate themes for the target group are built into the sessions (e.g. understanding self). The activity approach is built around activities that have scope for providing experimental learning for building Life Skills (role-play, quiz etc). In any of the approaches adopted, boys and girls can be enabled to make sound decisions about choices and relationships and stand up to those decisions, especially those which saying 'No'. Life skills learning is facilitated by the use of participatory learning methods and is based on a social learning process which includes: hearing an explanation of the skills in question; observation of the skill (modelling); practice of the skills in selected situations in a supportive learning environment; and feedback about individual performance of skills. Practice of skills is facilitated by role-playing in typical scenarios, with a focus on the application of skills and the effect that they have on the outcome of a hypothetical situation. Skills learning are also facilitated by using learning "tools", e.g. by working through steps in the decision-making process. Different combination of the life skills are emphasized depending on the purpose and topic. Life Skills education should be designed to enable students to practice skills progressively more demanding situations, for example, by starting with skills learning in non-threatening, low-risk everyday situations and progressively moving on the application of skills in threatening, high-risk situations Etc. The introduction and firm placement of Life Skills Education requires Faculty training to promote effective implementation of the programme. This can be provided as in service training, but efforts should also be made to introduce it in Academic Staff colleges. The successful implementation of a Life Skills programmes depends on:

Faculty training and continuing support in the use of the programmes materials.

A teaching manual, to provide lesson plans and a framework for

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sequential, developmentally appropriate programmes.

Concluding Message for Educators & All Stakeholders: The purpose of the life skills programme is to help students to know and understand themselves better, live life more consciously and deliberately, attain personal satisfaction and fulfilment, and achieve their goals, personally and academically. Unless schools effectively develop tolerance, cosmopolitanism, deep knowledge of global affairs and a commitment to peace, the likelihood of the civilization clashes predicted by Samuel Huntington will increase (Huntington, 1993, p. 28). The education system needs to focus on this belief that each student has the innate drive to achieve his maximum potential. The system needs to believe in the individuality of each child and to help the child deal with the vicissitudes of life. The education system needs to enable a child to deal effectively with the environment, discern available opportunities and deal with the challenges of society. To enable these behavioural transformations in the child, the system needs to enrich the school curriculum with a highly researched and effective life skills training programme. Educators and policy makers should focus on the need of students and global competencies in helping students develop a perfect fit. Because success is perfect fit.

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