

IN PURSUIT OF PERSONAL EXCELLENCE:
DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS

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Abstract

Personal excellence is the pursuit of developing, refining and mastering the skills that help us become the best that we can, with all that we have. It is the reaching for and realizing our full potential as human beings. To pursue personal excellence, development of life skills is indispensable. Life skills are the competencies that help to function appropriately in the environment. Life skills are essentially those abilities that help promote mental well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life. When targeting life skills it includes development through various aspects under three headings that is head, heart and hand. When focussing on development of skills through head, it includes managing and thinking. Similarly through heart it includes relating and caring and through hand it includes giving and working. Thus Life skills encompasses problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self awareness building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. Researcher has discussed life skill approach to teaching. These strategies or approaches in teaching are discussed focussing on 2 life skills, that is, Communication skills and critical thinking. Ways to enhance communication skills and critical thinking have been encompassed in this study. The present study may lead to the enhancement of practices and approaches for the progress and evolution of children.

Keywords: Personal excellence, Life skills

For the progress of a country the prime requirement is talented pool of people. The talent pool requires being adequately skilled and on which depends the growth of economy, social development and global competence. India has gradually evolved as knowledge based economy. To establish its distinctive position in the world there is need to develop skilled manpower to address the mounting needs of the economy. Skill development is a priority and is evident from the progress India has witnessed under the National Policy on Skills (2009). The National Skill Development Policy is aimed at empowering all individuals through improved skills, knowledge and internationally recognised qualifications to enable them to access decent employment, to promote inclusive national growth and to ensure India's competitiveness in the global market. We live in a world of rapid scientific and technological change. Our workforce can be globally competitive only when it embraces this policy.

Personal excellence is the pursuit of developing, honing and mastering the skills that help us become the best that we can, with all that we have. It is the reaching for and realizing of our full potential as human beings (Chorn, 2010). Personal excellence incorporates communication, leadership, interpersonal and life skills. Life skills are essentially those abilities that help promote overall wellbeing and competence in young people as they face the realities of life. Life skills are the beginning of wisdom which focuses on behaviour change or developmental approach designed to address a balance of three areas- knowledge, attitude and skills. Participation in the 4-H program is positively related to perceived leadership life skill development. The research study indicated that the level of leadership life skill development increased as the level of 4-H participation increased. (Boyd, Herring & Briers, 2004). Research also indicated that acquisition of life skills will be through adventure based activities and programs. (Moote, Wodarski & John S). Research indicated that Emotional intelligence will predict life skills. (Bastian, Burns & Nettelbeck, 2005). Hence the researcher has taken up the present study to discuss the development of life skills.

What are life skills?

The World Health Organization has defined life skills as, "the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". (WHO, 1993).

'Adaptive' means that a person is flexible in approach and is able to adjust in different circumstances. 'Positive behaviour' implies that a person is forward looking and even in difficult situations, can find a ray of hope and opportunities to find solutions.

The terms 'Livelihood skills' or occupational/vocational skills refer to capabilities, resources and opportunities to pursue individual and household economic goals and relate to income generation. Thus, Life skills are distinct from livelihood skills.

UNICEF defines life skills as "a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills". (UNICEF, 2012). The UNICEF definition suggests that shifts in risk behaviour are unlikely if knowledge, attitudinal and skills based competency are not addressed. Life skills encompasses problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self awareness building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. With life skills we can distinguish between pros and cons and can make decisions accurately. Life skills are the competencies that help to function appropriately in the environment.

Why do we need life skills?

When we are unable to tackle pain, anxiety, conflicts and frustration only the skill for life helps us tackle undesirable actions and to act in an appropriate manner. It helps us reflect what to do, how to do and the right thing to do. Life skills help us cope challenging situation in life. It also promotes overall wellbeing, managing emotions and development of psychosocial competence. Psychosocial competence is the ability to deal effectively with the challenges of everyday life and adapt to a positive behaviour while



interacting with others in the environment. It promotes our mental, physical and social well being.

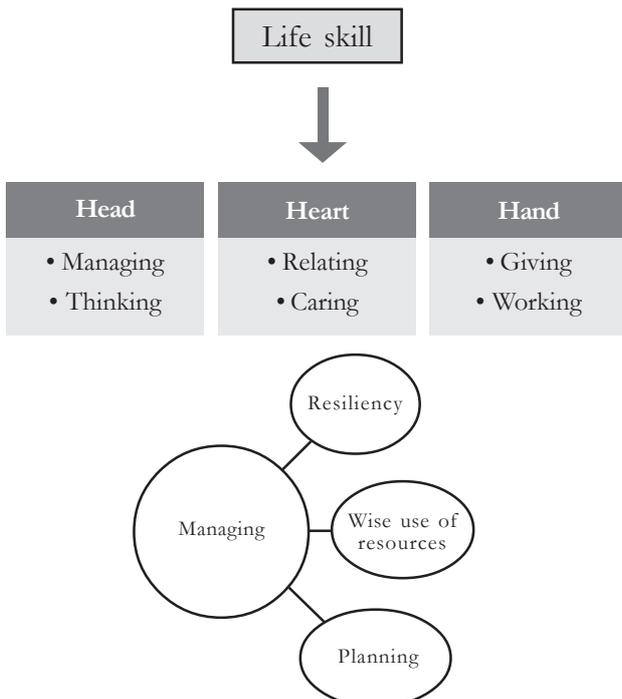
Components of life skills

The ten components of life skills as laid down by WHO are: (WHO, 1993).

1. Self awareness: It is being able to recognise ourselves. It means to be able to know and realise our instincts, desires, strengths and weaknesses.;
2. Decision making: It is being able to weigh options available and wisely make decisions and also know and be prepared for the consequences of the actions.;
3. Problem Solving: It is being able to resolve conflict causing situation and deal effectively with problems.;
4. Critical Thinking: To analyse effectively the situation, information and experiences this helps us to encounter any problem.;
5. Creative thinking: It is divergent way of thinking that gives novel ways of perceiving situation and experiences.;
6. Empathy: To be able feel oneself in the place of others or in others shoes so that it nurtures relationships and be accept others and elicit support from others.;
7. Effective communication: To be able to effectively express opinions, views and desires verbally and non verbally and also decode information that is passed on.;
8. Interpersonal relationship: To nurture relationships by relating, understanding others and strengthening bond constructively.;
9. Coping with stress: being able to recognise the sources that cause stress and effectively learn to unwind by changing our environment or conditions that causes stress.;
10. Coping with emotions: To recognise emotions and deal effectively with intense emotions like anger, frustration and sadness.

Development of Life Skills

When targeting life skills it includes development through various aspects under three headings that is head, heart and hand. (Hendricks, Pat. 1998).



Head: Under the head managing and thinking are involved. Managing includes resiliency, wise use of resources, planning or organising and setting goals. Thinking involves critical thinking, problem solving and decision making. It means management through scheduling the tasks and best use of available means and assets.

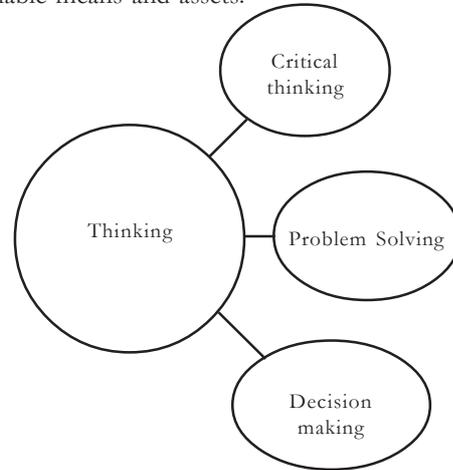


Figure 1: Development of Life skills by Head.

Heart: Under the heart there are two aspects that is relating and caring. Relating includes accepting differences or conflict resolution, cooperation and communication. Caring includes concern for others, empathy, sharing and nurturing relationships.

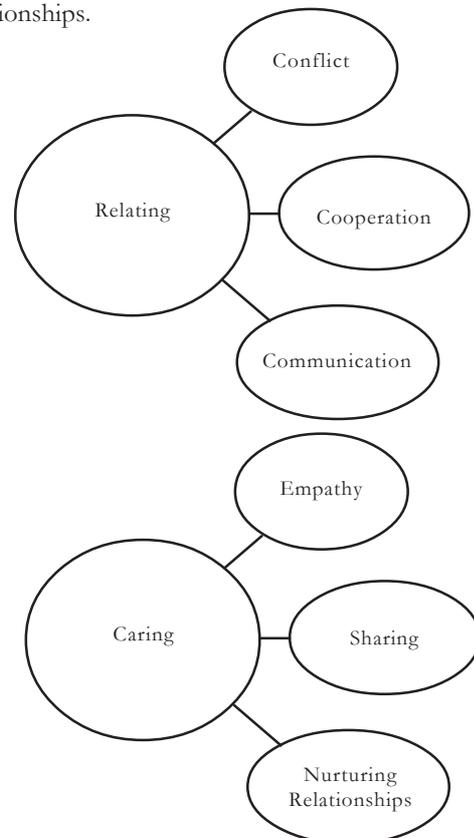


Figure 2: Development of Life skills by Heart

Hands: Under the hands giving and working are involved. Giving includes community service volunteering, leadership

and responsible citizenship. Working includes teamwork and self motivation.

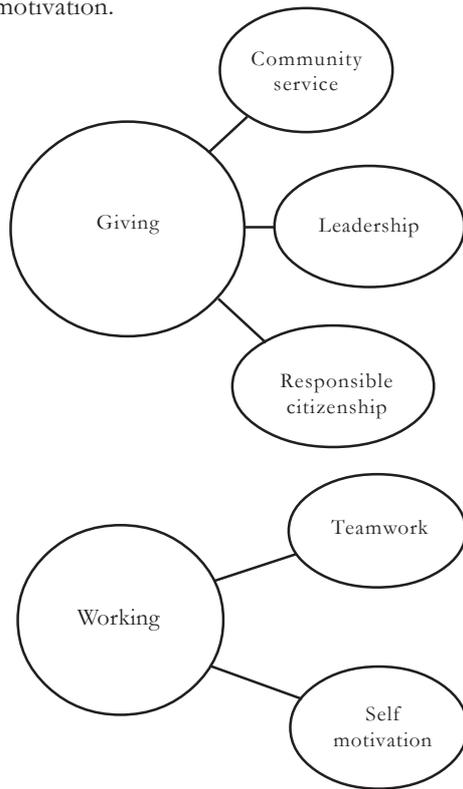


Figure 3: Development of Life skills by Hand

Life skills Education

For the inculcation of life skills, life skills education is indispensable. It is acquired by adopting teaching techniques that the learner can learn from his own experiences or others by observation and realising the consequences that arise from certain behaviours. In life skill education learner is actively involved in the process of teaching and learning. It can be put in practise by involving in questioning, discussion, storytelling, riddles, poem, brainstorming, role play and group discussions. It involves presenting a situation and exploring various ways of solution, viewpoints by the children and use of a particular or combination of life skills. School is the place where life skills education is imparted because of access of children on large scale, it being the agent of socialisation, having trained teachers and linkage with community and members of society.

Thus life skills teaching are crucial and have to be introduced as it supports the learning of abilities that contribute to good health, interpersonal relationships and behaviour.

Life Skills Approach to Teaching: Communication skills and critical thinking

Life skills education can be imparted by accepting and

implementing various strategies in teaching, these strategies affect children having varied type of intelligences. It helps them to relate to outside world and making them capable to face circumstances that have dire outcomes. It will enhance their abilities as well. The teacher can implement such approaches. These strategies or approaches in teaching are discussed focussing on 2 life skills, that is, Communication skills and critical thinking.

Communication skills

Successful leaders are effective communicators. Communication skills hone our personality. It is important for success in life as a person who is able to effectively communicate will stand out than others and can articulate and convey his message.

Communication is composed of words, voice, tone and non verbal cues. The non verbal cues are 55% effective, tone of voice is 38% effective and words are 7% effective (Bloomer, K. & McIlroy C. (2012). The channels of non verbal communication comprise the major part. Non verbal communication consists of para language, body language, facial expressions and objectors which is the way we dress or define ourselves.

Ways to enhance communication skills

Enacting postures, gestures and emotions or showing pictures of people with varied gestures and emotions. The children can identify the message being conveyed and what the people in each picture are feeling and the reason and how they have made their choices.; Asking children to tell a story without using words conveying excitement, sadness, fear and so forth. Discussing differences between children’s interpretations and meanings.; Role play of a situation. Listener will grade the act and suggest ways for better conveyance.; Random observation of one child by the other and notable viewpoints and what he has observed along with inference.; Discussion of a national or global problem. Voting suggestions on a debate.; Place the children in mixed ability groups of around five. Remind them of the agreed ground rules for discussion and listening. Select a chairperson and a scribe for each group, according to ability. Give each group a photo of a piece of playground equipment, e.g. a skipping rope, a large hoop. The children make a list of questions they could ask another child about how to make best use of that equipment in the playground.; Let the children go through a situation in which they speak in a



warm and friendly tone of voice and also in a situation where children sound rude, give order, shout. Compare the difference.; Observe the way actors on television use their eyes to convey meaning and the differences in them.

Critical thinking

It is the ability to think constructively. We need critical thinking to believe or not to believe based upon evidence. It is required to perform independent inquiry to discover reliable knowledge. People possessing critical thinking can take correct decisions based on reason and value. It will enable us to think and analyse both about ourselves and others as well. It will help us develop ability to imaginatively put ourselves in the place of others and understand the view points of others.

Techniques to enhance critical thinking

Giving students opportunity to identify and state reason for their opinions.; Group discussions where each member of the group is willing to reconsider their own opinion and judgement.; Give students exercises in which they must identify if critical thinking is there and how do they now, where there is no critical thinking and how it can be added.; Read stories and ask children to analyse it, relate his/her feelings and experiences to those of characters, do character analysis, anticipate actions of characters and express findings.; Open ended questions and sufficient time to answer them.; Reflective thinking to be encouraged.; Encouraging questions from students.; Role play in which assumptions, previous experience and results to be analysed by the students.; Debate in class with counterarguments.; Making predictions of activities.; Brainstorming sessions to be inculcated in classroom practise.

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