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Need for Life Skills in Education

Dr.Hitesh Vyas, Nirag Dave*

1 Introduction:

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life. This concept is also termed as psychosocial competency. The subject varies greatly depending on social norms and community expectations but skills that function for well-being and aid individuals to develop into active and productive members of their communities are considered as life skills.

2. Various Types of Life Skill

2.1 Critical thinking skills/Decision-making skills:

- (i) Decision making skills: Decision-making is a process to determine alternative and constructive solutions about problems.
- (ii) Critical thinking skill: Critical thinking skill is an ability which helps to analyse information and experiences in an objective manner. It also helps us to evaluate the influence of decisions taken on our own values and values of people who are near to us. Adolescents are most of the time influenced by media and peers. This skill can assist them to assess the pros and cons of the situation and help them to evaluate their actions.
- (iii) Problem solving skill: It is an ability to identify the problems correctly, understanding its sources and causes very constructively. These causes have to be reduced or eliminated. This skill also assists in choosing the best alternative from many to solve the problem.

2.2 Interpersonal/Communication skills

Effective communication : Communication is an important process which is used by an individual to transfer ideas, information or feelings to others. Unless

*Dr.Hitesh Vyas, Associate Professor, M.J. College of Commerce Bhavnagar

Nirag Dave , Research Scholar, M.J. College of Commerce, Bhavnagar

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- (i) the communication is effective, the purpose of communication fails. Effective communication skill helps to express oneself both verbally and non-verbally through gestures, in way that messages are not distorted and, moreover, it is appropriate to one's culture and situation.

Therefore, effective communication includes active listening, ability to express feelings and giving appropriate feedback.

- (ii) Negotiation/refusal skill: Sometimes, an individual is put in a situation, where he/she does not want to remain for a long time. This induces lot of dissatisfaction in an individual. For example, a child is bullied or abused by his/her classmates. This can put him/her in a state of depression or detachment.

Then, negotiation skill will help that child to negotiate, without getting aggressive towards them and thus helping him/her to become more acceptable.

- (iii) Empathy: It is an ability to imagine and understand what life is like for another person, even in a situation that you may not be familiar with. It is important for an adolescent to develop positive outlook towards others and feeling of cooperation, which is necessary for preparing the foundation for adulthood.
- (iv) Interpersonal skill: Team work is required to the successful completion of a project. For example, if you want to organize an exhibition in your school, then, who all will provide you help? The Principal, your colleagues, or the fellow students? The skill, which is required to co-ordinate work with the involvement of the people, is called Interpersonal skill. This skill helps an individual to relate in a positive way with fellow beings.

Development of this skill enables an individual/adolescent to be accepted in the society. He/she also develops the acceptance of social norms, which is essential to prevent an adolescent to follow delinquent behavior.

2.3 Coping and self-management skills

- (i) Coping with stress/stress management: Adolescence is a vulnerable period of development and rapid developmental changes causes stress. Erickson has

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propounded that in this period individual wants to have his/her own identity. If proper direction is not given then he/she feels stressed out. Therefore, this skill helps in recognizing the sources of life stress and directs an individual to choose a way that can control the heightened stress level.

- (ii) Coping with emotions: Briggs concluded that emotional development is complete by the age of 2 years. The adolescent generally shows heightened emotions as compared to an adult and we end up in concluding that this group is immature.

This skill is involved in recognizing the emotions and also helps to respond to those emotions appropriately. Since, emotions also influence the overt behavior, the skill becomes more important for the constructive personality development.

- (iii) Skill of self evaluation/self awareness: This skill includes the recognition of one's self esteem, internal locus of control, likes and dislikes. If an adolescent is able to recognize them, then he/she starts believing that they can make a change in the world. Therefore, they start looking at themselves and world more positively.

2.4 Time Management Skills

- (i) Time management is one of the most important skills for a person, specifically for those who have a lot of tasks and things to accomplish.
- (ii) Care must be taken on the most important step to master this skill, which is a commitment to doing one task at a time, as multitasking leads to a person being distracted and thus wasting time.

2.5 Stress Management Skills

- (i) Stress management skills are defined as the ability that puts one in charge and gives him a sense of control, so it is the ability to control emotions, feelings, and anger toward others.
- (ii) Psychological pressures are defined as a set of external factors that affect an individual, in whole or in part, or affect the integrity of his personality.
- (iii) Stress and fatigue lead to physical weakness in humans, so you must have the ability to relax to get rid of any stress or fatigue you may be exposed to.

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- (iv) Stress management techniques help boost self-esteem, reduce stress, depression, and anxiety, and improve the overall quality of life.
- (v) Stress management skills are essential for a person to be healthy and strong.

3. Theoretical Foundations of Life Skills Education:

Mangrulkar et al (2001) analyses six theories which are not mutually exclusive but contribute to foundation of a life skills approach. These six theories are social learning, problem behavior, social influence, cognitive problem solving, multiple intelligences, and risk and resilience. They are followed two more theories theory of reasoned action and health belief model and Trans theoretical theory.

3.1 Social Learning Theory:

This theory, which is also known as the Cognitive-Social Learning Model, is largely based upon the work of Albert Bandura (1977b). Bandura's research led him to conclude that children learn to behave through both instruction (i.e., how parents, teachers, and other authorities and role models tell them to behave) as well as observation (i.e., how they see adults and peers behaving). Their behavior is reinforced, or modified, by the consequences of their actions and the responses of others to their behaviors. Children learn to behave, then, through observation and social interaction, rather than just through verbal instruction. Similarly, Ladd and Mize (1983) emphasized that children should be taught skills through a process of instruction, rehearsal, and feedback, rather than just instruction. Bandura also stressed that self-efficacy, defined as "belief in one's abilities to perform appropriate behaviors", which is important to learning and maintaining behaviors, especially in the face of social pressure to behave differently. Thus, skills development not only becomes a question of outward behavior, but of internal qualities (such as self efficacy) that support those behaviors (Bandura, 1977a). Social Learning Theory has two profound influences on the development of life skills and social skills programs.

One is the necessity of providing children with methods or skills for coping with internal aspects of their social lives, including stress reduction, self-control, and decision-making. The second is, to be effective, life and social skills programs need to replicate the natural processes by which children learn behavior. Thus, most life and social skills programs

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need to include observation, role-play, and peer education components in addition to plain instruction.

3.2 Problems-Behavior Theory:

As developed by Jessor (1992), this theory recognizes that adolescent behavior (including risk behaviors) cannot be reduced to a single source, but is the product of complex interactions between people and their environment. Problem Behavior Theory is concerned with the relationships among three categories of psychosocial variables: (1) the personality system; (2) the perceived environmental system; and (3) the behavioral system. The personality system includes “values, expectations, beliefs, attitudes, and orientations toward self and society.” The perceived environmental system concerns perceptions of friends’ and parents’ attitudes toward behaviors. And, similar to Bandura, the behavioral system is usually described as a certain set of ‘socially unacceptable behaviors’ (the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, sexual behavior by persons below a certain age, delinquency, etc.). Each psychosocial system contains variables that act as instigators or controls on problem behavior. As Jessor, Donovan, and Costa (1991) point out, the strength of these variables results in proneness: the likelihood that problem behavior will occur. Weakening instigators or strengthening controls helps decrease a child’s “overall proneness for problem behaviors” (that is, the likelihood that the child will engage in problem or unhealthy behaviors). Jessor’s early work helped to promote the development of life skills approaches that included strategies in all three systems. In more recent years, Jessor (1992) and the Problem-behavior theorists have described two other systems of influence, the social environment (which includes factors such as poverty and family structure) and biology/genetics (including variables such as family history of alcoholism and high intelligence). The biological genetic system of influence (like much genetic research) may be useful to identify children with agenetic propensity for particular risk behaviors (like alcoholism), but is still limited in its use in prevention. The social environment domain identifies other variables (behaviors such as poor school performance) that correlate with risk behaviors (such as the use of alcohol and other drugs). These variables, if changed, will affect others—regardless of the workings of the causal links among the variables. Thus, developing skills such as values clarification (to

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better understand one's own values and beliefs) and critical thinking (to clearly recognize and analyze the values of the social environment) can have an impact on behavior, and can be even more effective in coordination with programs that affect other variables, such as poverty reduction programs, clinical health services or school dropout prevention.

3.3 Social Influence Theory:

Social influence approaches are based upon the work of Bandura(1977 a) as well as the psychological inoculation theory developed by researchers, including McGuire (1964, 1968). Social influence approaches recognize that children and adolescents will come under pressure to engage in risk behaviors, such as to because. According to Evans (1998), social pressures include “peer pressure, models of smoking parents, and smoking-related messages in the mass media that feature attractive smokers”. Social influence programs anticipate these pressures and teach children about both the pressures and ways to resist them before they are exposed(much like vaccination builds resistance to diseases before children are exposed to those diseases in the environment). This theory was spurred by research demonstrating that programs that merely provided information on the consequences frisk behaviors (such as smoking), and/or used fear to try to prevent children from engaging in these behaviors were unsuccessful. Research by Mangrulkar (2001) into these programs found that, “Fear induced by knowledge of the long-term dangers of smoking appeared to be insufficient to prevent its onset among many young adolescents, when exposed to social pressure to engage in the behavior.” This approach was first used by Evans and others (1976, 1978) in smoking prevention programs. The approach is now usually referred to as “peer resistance education,” and is used in a broad range of curricula to prevent the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, as well as high-risk sexual activity. Meta-analysis of prevention programs by Hansen (1992) revealed that social influence programs were more effective than programs based solely on information or affective education. Usually, these programs are targeted at very specific risks, tying peer resistance skills (as well as the classroom exercises used to teach that skill) to very particular risk behaviors (such as marijuana use), attitudes (such as the opinion that using marijuana is wrong), and knowledge (e.g. the consequences of using

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marijuana on a child's memory, lungs, and reproductive health). Social resistance training is usually a central component of social skills and life skills programs.

4. Need for Life Skills in Education:

Empowerment of the adolescent in India is very essential in today's context. Bharath (2001) states that almost 40 percent of India's population falls under the age of 19 years and 10-19 years age group makes up about 21 percent, almost quarter of the total population. Hackett and Hackett (1993) observed that, Indian families have eastern culture and child rearing practices that are different from west.

Here the consensus and collective is more important than the individual freedom and independence. Children are encouraged to be interdependent and under the care of parents even in early adulthood. Indian family with its control systems seems to offer relative protection to the adolescents from deviance. Despite this, there is need for Life skills promotion in Indian youth for the following reasons:

- (i) Bharath (2001) states that conventional education (school curricula) lack components which train the child in necessary skills which are requisite for being psychosocially competent. However, efforts are being made to incorporate Life Skills education in the regular curriculum.
- (ii) Rapid industrialization, urbanization, globalization, breaking up of joint families, unhealthy competition in the academic and career fronts on one side with high illiteracy and unemployment on the other side are some of the factors that make adolescents vulnerable.
- (iii) Gender discrimination, suppression of minorities, child marriages, teen pregnancy, abuse violation of human rights make the situation worse and highlight the need for skills education.
- (iv) According to Weiss, Wheelan and Gupta (1996) though the prevalent culture is sexually less permissive, India is the second leading country in the world for density of HIV/AIDS population and its rapid spread.

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- (v) Poverty, school dropout, child labor, homelessness, lack of infrastructure for effective redressed of these social problems puts the economically disadvantaged adolescents at risk.
- (vi) Lack of comprehensive health services exclusively for adolescents, lack of supportive and guidance services at school, stigma for seeking help from professional in times of distress are also major reasons.
- (vii) WHO (2005a) emphatically states that , there are three compelling reasons for developing effective interventions for children and adolescents: (i) since specific mental disorders occur at certain stages of child and adolescent development, screening programmers' and interventions for such disorders can be targeted to the stage at which they are most likely to appear; (ii) since there is a high degree of continuity between child and adolescent disorders and those in adulthood, early intervention could prevent or reduce the likelihood of long-term impairment; and(iii) effective interventions reduce the burden of mental health disorders on the individual and the family, and they reduce the costs to health systems and communities.

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