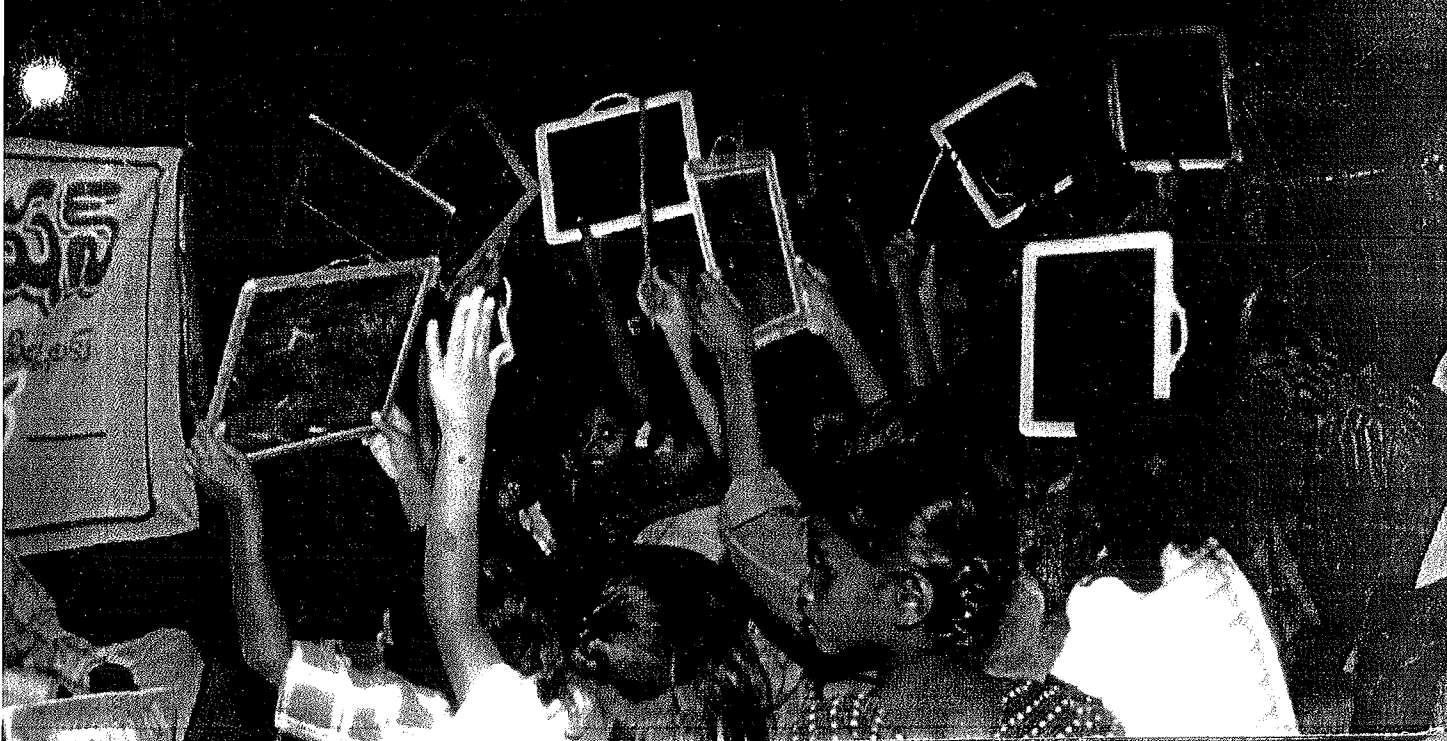


Child Rights in the New Era

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Dr. M.D. Allen Selvakumar



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## PROMISING APPROACH THROUGH LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION : HUMAN RIGHTS, PEACE AND CITIZENSHIP TARGETED TO AT-RISK YOUTH

K. AROCKIA MARAICHELVI

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There is an increasing amount of evidence that incorporating a life skills component into at-risk youth interventions can make the programme dramatically more effective and as a result, greatly improve youth outcomes. The life skills approach seeks to help young people to develop the kind of skills that will incline them to engage in positive behavior, enable them to deal effectively with everyday life, and help them to make a healthy transition into adulthood. The ultimate goal of life skills education is to help at-risk youth to (re)connect with their communities, to continue their education and to enter the economic mainstream by realizing their own rights, understanding the importance of peace within their society and appreciative of the responsibility to be exercised by a conscientious citizen.

Many at-risk youth - especially those who are neither in school or work - do not possess the necessary social and emotional skills and information to be integrated into society. Most children acquire these skills during childhood, but at-risk children often have not received the necessary information or had appropriate role models to be able to do so. It is the absence of these key life coping skills that often leads young people to be socially excluded and to make them

insecure, and this in turn, increases the likelihood that they will engage in risky behaviours, violence and anti-social activities

Life skills education bridges this gap in two ways. First, they teach young people about social norms so that they are more attuned to the kind of social behavior that is expected of them when they participate in the mainstream society. In the process, they also teach young people the necessary social skills including how to dress, how to manage anger, how to carry themselves, how to meet people and other forms of social behavior, which are often taken granted. Second, these programmes teach young people the specific skills that are needed to be a responsible adult, including how to manage money, how to access social services, and about citizen's rights.

Teaching young people life skills equips them with the knowledge and wisdom to make good decisions about their lives, thereby reducing the likelihood that they will engage in risky behaviour. It also gives them confidence as well as the necessary knowledge to stay in school, find and keep a job and find support in dealing with risky behavior or consequences that they may be facing. Life skills should also be taught in schools to prepare young people who are in school for further education, future employment, and their citizenship, thereby decreasing the probability that they will engage in risky behavior. While teaching life skills widens the economic opportunities available to all young people, this is particularly the case for those who leave school early as they typically face more constraints than those who complete secondary education.

#### DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF LIFE SKILLS

The meaning and concept of life skill is beyond its definition. It is easy to define the concept in general but to suit the explanation in all the particular life situations and throughout life is difficult. Goody (2001) says that 'it is not enough to ask how life skills are defined in general; rather it is essential to ask how they are defined in particular life situations and throughout life'.

There are many different interpretations of Life Skills but no definition is universally accepted. Different organizations attach different meanings to the term based on their applicability. Life skills defined in a general way mean a mix of knowledge, behavior, attitudes and values and designate the possession of some skill and

expertise to do something, or achieve an objective. Some of the general definitions and interpretations are given below;

The World Health Organization defines Life Skills as “the ability for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”.

UNICEF defines Life Skills as “a behavior change or behavior development approach designed to address a balance of three areas– Knowledge, Attitudes and Skills”.

The International Bureau of Education (IBE) derived its understanding from the Delor’s four pillars of learning (learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together) and defined life skills as “personal management and social skills that are necessary for adequate functioning on an independent basis”.

Rychen and Salganik (2001) defines life skills on three general criteria

- a. They are the key competencies that contribute to an overall successful life and a well-functioning society
- b. They are instrumental to meet important challenges in a wide spectrum of relevant texts and
- c. They are relevant to all individuals

The key competencies are

1. Functioning in socially heterogeneous groups
2. Acting autonomously
3. Using tools interactively

The constituents of life skills include personal fulfillment and empowerment implying success in personal and professional life fulfilling the critical gap of the socio-psychological development of the learners. Values that are reinforced through life skills are democracy, egalitarianism, social justice, rule of law, learning to live together, secularism, peace, non-violence, self image and self confidence, respect for the others and the like (Daswani, 2002).

#### WHY TEACH LIFE SKILLS?

Life Skills are essential for the promotion of healthy child and adolescent development and preparing young people for changing social circumstances. Life skills education contributes to basic education, gender equality, democracy, good citizenship, child care

and protection, quality and efficiency of the education system, the promotion of life long learning, quality of life and the promotion of peace. It suggests that the learning of life skills might contribute to the utilization of appropriate health services by young people. Areas for primary prevention for which Life Skills are considered essential include adolescent pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, violence, child abuse, suicide, problems related to the use of alcohol, tobacco and other psychoactive substances, injuries, accidents, racism, conflict and environmental issues.

**Life Skills in the perspective of the Convention on the Rights of the Child'**

Article 29 : States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to :

- a. the development of respect for Human Rights.....
- b. the development of respect for ..... the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilization different from his or her own
- c. the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all people, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin

In order to develop positive and constructive behaviours, the skills, concepts and values of peace, human rights and citizenship have to be taught using experiential methods. Structured activities such as special games, role plays and analysis of stories lead to discussions (facilitated by a teacher), in which young people at risk reflect on, develop, practice and internalize new behavioral skills, concepts and values. The skills should incorporate inclusion, active listening and two-way communication, cooperation, analysis, problem-solving, appropriate assertiveness, negotiation, mediation, advocacy as well as emotional self-awareness, empathy and trust. They are practiced in a framework of values such as tolerance, peace, social equity and justice, gender equity, human rights and responsibilities and active citizenship based on demographic principles. Knowledge of a more factual nature, such as the history of peace theory, international declarations and conventions on Human

Rights, or national constitution and legal structures is included as appropriate.

To be successful, Life Skills programme need to be both structured and sustained. When done properly, Life Skills education for peace, Human Rights and citizenship can render valuable benefits.

Life skills training can be provided either as a programme on its own or as a component of a programme designed to achieve other youth development goals, such as job training or violence prevention. A formal life skills development curriculum can be taught through schools, job training institutions, or a 'learning by doing' approach – for example, as part of community development projects or youth leadership training programmes. Providers of life skills training programmes ideally should be capable of acting as facilitators, should respect young people, and should have warm, supportive and enthusiastic personalities. Also to ensure that these programmes are as effective as possible, they should apply life skills to issues that are relevant to the young person's social circumstances and stage of development (for example, developing a sexual identity and how to deal with peer pressure).

#### **Educational initiatives related to life skills education**

A number of educational initiatives have areas of overlap with Life Skills Education, and with each other. These include Children's Rights/Human Rights Education, education for development, peace education and gender sensitization. Each can be thought of as providing another lens or perspective through which to examine how life skills can be mainstreamed in basic education.

#### ***Children's rights / human rights education***

Children's Rights/Human rights education through life skills complement and support each other. Life Skills is a fundamental precondition with which rights can be realized. Rights education usually includes the component of learning about the provisions of international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Young people are encouraged to understand the impact of rights violation, both at home and abroad and to develop empathy and solidarity with those whose rights have been denied. Life Skills education encourages the development of skills that will enable young people to act in ways that upholds and promote rights, both their own and others. It also addresses the responsibilities that come with rights.

### *Education for development*

Education for Development is the term used in UNICEF to describe an approach to teaching and learning which builds a commitment to global solidarity, peace, acceptance of differences, social justice and environmental awareness in young people. Its aim is to empower children and youth to participate in bringing about constructive change, both locally and globally. Five basic concepts of Education for Development are interdependence, images and perceptions, social justice, conflict and conflict resolution and change for the future. These concepts are approached as interdisciplinary perspectives that can be incorporated into the teaching of a wide range of life skills, rather than the specific skills in themselves. Interactive, participatory, cooperatively-structured teaching methods are as important as the content of Education for Development. These methods allow learners to better grasp complex concepts, build problem-solving abilities and develop social skills. These approaches can be used in both formal and non-formal educational activities, and provide a human development-oriented framework for educating about peace and social justice issues.

### *Peace education*

Peace Education refers to the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level. Life skills education gives priority to active, learner-based teaching methods, peer learning, problem solving, community participation, and conflict resolution skills. It is value-based and future oriented. Global Education provides another broad curricular framework for peace education initiatives.

### *Gender sensitization*

Gender conflict is found in societies around the globe, and gender discrimination and conflict is a leading cause of violence. A number of gender training initiatives have begun to address the prevention of violence against women, and alternative ways in which gender conflict may be handled. These initiatives promote attitude and values that emphasize rights of girl and women to safety, respect,

non-discrimination and empowerment. Some programmes focus specifically on boys, helping them better understand their relationship to girls, their roles and responsibilities in family life, stereotypes about masculinity and communication skills for dealing with conflict. Gender training initiatives have an essential perspective to add to life skill education activities.

#### **Classification of life skills**

Life skills include Generic Life Skills, Problem Specific Life Skills and Area Specific Life Skills. Generic Life Skills are the skills that are required for the overall development of the personality. Problem Specific Life Skills are the specific abilities that are needed for all individual in general and at-risk adolescents in particular to cope up with their needs and concerns and to keep away from many harmful and unwanted activities. Area Specific Skills are the skills needed to handle the different activities related with an area where the person likes to have proficiency. Generic life skills include ten core life skills. Based on its association and purpose these ten core life skills can be grouped into Mother Skills (Self-awareness, Empathy), Survival Skills (Inter-personal relations, Effective communication), Thinking Skills (Critical thinking, Creative thinking), Negotiating Skills (Decision-making, Problem solving, and Coping Skills (Coping with emotion, Coping with stress).

#### **The need for imbibing life skills**

Every individual is in need of Life Skills education and training. Life skill learning need not be confined to a specific age, or stage in life. Life Skill education and training help an individual to use their knowledge attitude and values in a better useful way to develop the positive behavior, in order to deal efficiently with the needs and challenges of everyday life. The need for understanding life skills for a life long learning rests upon integrating, learning and living both simultaneously across family and community from birth to death. Among all other stages, adolescent being the susceptible stage in the human life span, and even more vulnerable is the at-risk youth category. Hence they need immediate intervention. Their self-development and the process of socialization can be accelerated by imparting life skill education and training. They should grow up understanding their capacity, learning societal norms, values, interests and hopes.

Recognition of the role of life skills in the promotion of mental well-being accelerates the need for imbibing life skills. Life Skills helps to identify the 'capacity' of the child, increase his 'capability' and achieve 'competency in each endeavour in his life. The potential gains of life skill training are far reaching and can have remarkable impact at several levels of at-risk youth. The immediate benefits include prevention of behavioural problems such as substance abuse, immoral activities, negative peer pressure, promotion of self-esteem and academic competency. In the long run, the overall development based on values will improve the behaviour of adolescents. It improves personal quality, develops positive behavior, competency, protection of self, promotion of health, family and social relations, development of career path and apt employment.

#### Findings of the previous researches related to life skills

##### Life Skills Education and Training can

- Delay the onset age of abuse of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs (Hansen *et al.*, 1998; Werner, 1991; Caplan *et al.*, 1992; Griffin and Svedsen, 1992; Postrado and Nicholson, 1992).
- Prevent high risk sexual behaviour (WHO/GPA, 1994; Sheeran and Abirahan, 1996; Kirby, 2001, Maraichelvi and Jayapoorani, 2010).
- Teach anger control (Feinled *et al.*, 1986; Deffenbacher *et al.*, 1995; Deffenbacher *et al.*, 1996; Maraichelvi and Jayapoorani, 2010).
- Prevent delinquency and criminal behaviour (Englander golden *et al.*, 1989; Tolan and Guirra, 1994).
- Improve health related behaviours and self esteem (Young *et al.*, 1997).
- Promote positive social development (Elias *et al.*, 1991, Maraichelvi and Jayapoorani, 2010).
- Reduce emotional disorders (Brandon - Muller and Sayette, 1991; Mc.Conaughey, Kay and Fitzgerald, 1998).
- Improve academic performance (Brandon-Muller and Sayette, 1991; Elias *et al.*, 1991, Maraichelvi and Jayapoorani, 2010).
- Prevent peer rejection (Mize and Ladd, 1990) and bullying (Oleweus, 1990).

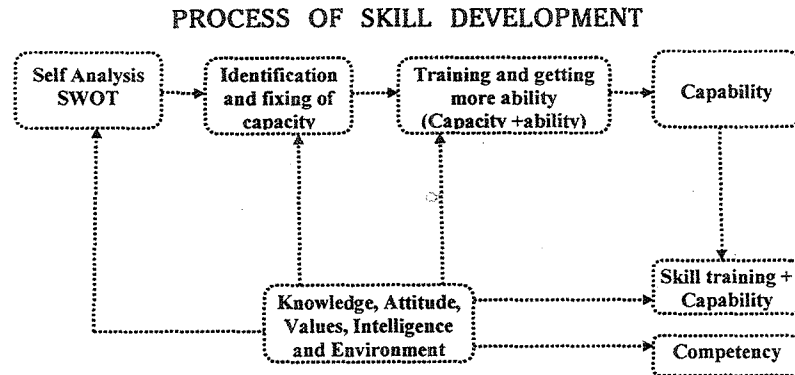
- Motivate and orient towards a meaningful vocation (Rao *et.al.*, 2010)
- Reproductive health care and education and Value oriented education could be introduced through Life skills education (Deb and Chakraborty, 2010)
- Reduce school drop out rate and increase adolescent's health seeking behavior (Galagali, 2010)
- Increases the awareness about social issues and enables the beneficiaries to get into the development process of the nation as active and responsible citizens( Varghese and Jayan, 2010)

#### The process of internalizing life skills

Life Skills cannot be internalized by reading books or mere understanding of what it is. However understanding what life skills is, is the preliminary requirement for the process of acquiring it. Life Skill training is a long-term process where hard work only will be able to create a better impact. Periodical review and assessment is the unavoidable requirement of the process.

Practicing life skills to improve the skills is a life long process. There is no end to the level of the quality of the skill. Dedicated and sincere attempt will pave the way for increasing the skills. But assurance of perfection or the end of acquisition will not be attained. The skill goes on increasing as we try to increase the skill by practicing and correcting the defects by training and evaluations. Life skill education empowers the youth. They enable them to do things in a correct perspective. This in turn leads them to positive development.

The process of internalizing starts from our awareness about self. This is an analysis of strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of an individual. Every individual has got basic capacity to do many activities. Some of this may be developed while some other will be underdeveloped or hidden. Self-analysis gives a clear picture of one self with regard to quality and quantity of the capacity to do a particular activity. Appropriate training is to be undertaken to improve a particular activity. All the process is being influenced by our knowledge, attitude and values. This is the general process of development of all the skills.



### Self managed learning

Life Skills can be imbibed only by Self-Managed Learning. Self Managed Learning means that the individuals take responsibility or satisfying their own learning needs. The importance of encouraging Self Managed Learning is that people learn and retain more if they find things out for themselves. Self Managed Learning is about self development and this will follow by self-assessment, which leads to better self-understanding.

### Evaluation of life enrichment programmes

Evaluating the effectiveness of a Life skills education or training programme requires a clear programme design. Evaluation must relate directly to the objectives or stated outcomes of the lesson or programme.

### *Types of evaluation*

Evaluation is an important strategy to be considered from the outset and throughout any programme. The needs of a programme should be assessed, objectives set and activities planned at the very beginning and then the groundwork for evaluation should be laid. At the same time, a formal evaluation plan is essential to track the progress and make certain that the evaluation design is feasible to implement. Formative evaluation is the gathering of generally qualitative data to help design and modify a new programme. It refers to the process of gathering information to advise the planning, design stages and decisions about implementation. Thus information can be gathered using methods such as observation, individual and group interviews to gather feedback from students, teachers and other interested personnel.

Comprehensive evaluation designs include both process evaluation and outcome evaluation. Process evaluation is gathering information about what has been done and with whom. Ongoing monitoring is needed, so that it will be obvious what services have been delivered, to whom and when. This will help to assess progress towards goals and objectives. Information can be gathered through written student diaries, school records and interviews with teachers. Outcome evaluation assesses the results and impact of the intervention and determines if and to what extent the interventions are effective in achieving the desired objectives. The cycle then starts again, with the question of what further change or maintenance is desirable as a new goal.

#### *Indicators of the Programme*

The indicators selected for the programme depend on the desired goals of the same. The key indicators of a well planned learning sequence are:

- Enhanced teaching methodology
- Teacher / facilitator confidence / satisfaction and
- Effectiveness evidenced by student learning outcomes.

Teachers / facilitators can evaluate the worth of lessons and programmes by using their professional judgment, monitoring their own feelings and reactions as well as seeking feedback from students.

#### *Evaluating knowledge, attitude/values, skills towards Life Enriching activities*

Interviews, informal discussions or questionnaires can be used to gain relevant information from children and sometimes parents about knowledge, attitude and beliefs that may influence behaviours and conditions associated with life. Such information will enhance understanding among teachers and is also important in developing complementary educational efforts.

*Evaluation process should* be consistent with the programme goals, be based on outcomes and reflect the programme content, make a positive contribution to student learning, recognize and value the diversity of religious, social, cultural and family background, and provide a basis to plan for improvement

*Collecting evaluation information involves* systematically observing children, participating actively in learning activities,

interacting with children to gain a more in-depth knowledge of what they know, understand and can do, analyzing the work of students.

***Tools for Evaluation include***

*Tests:* where specific questions relate to knowledge, attitudes and intentions of life enriching activities.

*Observation:* when students are participating in role play preparations and presentation.

*Item assessment:* when students create a pamphlet, poster, song that reflects their learning.

Self assessment and peer assessment.

Teacher interviews.

***Evaluation of Life Skills Education and Training programme should encompass the following***

*Does it,* Focus on the immediate, short term effects and problems? Cater to all students? Recognize the importance of other strategies, such as policies and services?

*Is it* Based on sound concepts of health education and promotion? Is the information presented accurately, and relevant to the objectives? Relevant to the target group, where they live? Appealing to students? Easy to use and flexible? Durable in terms of lasting over time and the content remaining relevant over time?

*Does it have* Clear learning objectives and outcomes related to knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours? Clear concise accurate background information on the topics? A balance of knowledge, attitudes and skills related to Life skills?

*Will it* Encourage students to make responsible decisions? Encourage student's action and interaction in the activities?

***Other considerations regarding teaching and learning resources:-***

- How much training will be required for teachers to use the resource?
- Are the resources effective enough to justify replacing existing resources?
- Are the resources different enough to justify replacing existing resources?

- Does the resource fit with existing resources, practices or programmes?

With all of these observations and implementation techniques in mind Life Skills Education and Training comes handy as a tool that not only educates the at-risk youth but also moulds their personality and orients them towards a positive and promising life style.

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