

LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION: A POTENT TOOL TO COMBAT SOCIAL MALFUNCTIONING IN ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable us to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life, in other words psychosocial competency (WHO, 1999). They are a set of human skills inculcated through teaching that are used to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in daily life.

The benefits of life skills education include a combination of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills with a particular emphasis on those skills that are related to critical thinking, problem solving, self management, communication skills and inter-personal skills.

This article emphasizes on the importance of life skills

for adolescents to cope with stress and other emotional problems, the significance of life skills to give a constructive environment to students to make important career choices to excel in their lives.

Life skill sessions on topics like stress management, time management, anger management and coping up with peer pressure in Laxman Public School has helped students of classes 8th-12th to plan and manage their study schedule, sports activities and relationship with family and teachers in a more organized, efficient and harmonious manner. Thus, life skills based education in Laxman Public School has shown positive results in the behavior of teenage students (13-19 yrs) and is an integral part of the school education system.

KEYWORDS: life skills, life skills education, adolescents,

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the internet and information technology, access to knowledge is just a click away and it is something which teenage students are good at doing. However, the application of knowledge which is one of the key aspects of learning is missing from the life of adolescents in schools today. The practical application of the vast array of knowledge available to them from books, internet and other sources need the imbibing of certain skills. In the absence of these skills this huge pool of knowledge becomes detrimental for them instead of proving to be a boon.

Too much knowledge clutters their understanding of life and the absence of skills to crunch this knowledge accompanied by the physical and psychological changes that occur during adolescence hamper their basic social functioning as well as their ability to take effective life decisions and manage their emotional and physical conduct. This is exactly where life skills step in.

Life skills have been defined by the World Health Organization (1999) as “abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.”

Life skills based education has a long history of supporting child development around the globe. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) linked life skills to education by stating that education should be directed towards the development of the child’s fullest potential. The Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (1990) took this vision further and included life skills among essential learning tools for survival, capacity development and quality of life. The Dakar World Education Conference (2000) took a position that all young people and adults have the

human right to benefit from “an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be,” and included life skills in two out of the six EFA Goals.

This article tries to bring to fore the emotional and psychological problems which adolescents face in their school and family. It also details the importance of life skills for teenagers to cope with this stress and the significance of life skills to give a constructive environment to students to make important academic choices to excel in their lives.

This article is based on the work undertaken by the authors on the impact of life skills education on teenage students in Laxman Public School, an English medium private school located in Haus Khaas, New Delhi, from the period of August, 2015 – March, 2016.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RATIONALE OF THE PROBLEM

One of the major causes of social malfunctioning in adolescents is attributed to their risk taking behavior which emerges from their ambition to carve out an attractive and exciting identity for themselves. **According to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development**, adolescents experience identity vs role confusion as a major psychological crisis which they need to tackle and more often than not they rely on their peers to differentiate between the right and wrong behavior and align with the behavior which gives them greater acceptance in their peer circle.

This is where the social malfunctioning begins as social relationships of adolescents consists a web of relationships which expand far beyond their peers from whom they are deeply influenced. Thus, in the absence of skills and understanding to critically and rationally assess their behavior and decisions, adolescents engage in risk-taking behavior such as substance abuse and sexual experimentation which eventually leads to social malfunctioning. Therefore, it becomes important to study that to combat social malfunctioning in adolescents, life skills education plays a major role in making them informed and rationale beings who are capable of determining their greater good.

SAMPLING DESIGN

The students of Laxman Public School of classes 8th-12th were the sample frame for this study and out of the sample frame the respondents were chosen by convenience sampling method which falls under the non-probability technique of sampling since the authors did not want to disturb the study hours of students and used to interact with them during the break time based on their easy availability about the impact of the life skill sessions on them and would note down their feedback on different sessions attended by them.

The authors also used the observation method of data collection and the research was qualitative in nature as the authors also studied unique cases of students in depth apart from his observation in the field setting for a prolonged period of 7 months from the period of August, 2015 – March, 2016. The qualitative nature of the study reflects in the findings of the study with specific case examples.

The data was analysed as a collective entity with students reflecting interest for life skill education classes on one hand and improved social functioning on the other as corroborated by their teachers and family members with the students also heuristically feeling the same. Some, unique cases have been cited in the findings to analyse the data as an individual entity to highlight the improved social functioning of students as a result of their exposure to life skills education.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Life skill sessions in classes 8th – 12th on topics like anger management, time management, self-esteem, stress management, peer pressure, communication and interpersonal skills in the school led to a positive and significant change in the behavior of students as well as an increase in their level of interest and enthusiasm for life skill classes. These sessions were conducted with innovative teaching techniques and methods including storytelling, role plays, graphical and audio visual aids.

At least, two life skills sessions in a week were conducted with the students and the duration of one session was 35 minutes with the last 5 minutes being used for garnering feedback to gauge learning of the students. The use of storytelling technique by relating stories to the life skills which were being taught in the class kept the students engaged and these stories also served as situational examples for the students.

The students were able to share their problems as well as negative experiences of their daily life in a life skills session when they saw their peers addressing or coming up with similar problems like conflict in relationship with elders, exam pressure, peer pressure, stress, infatuation and attraction towards peer. A life skill session gave them a platform to address concerns which they were otherwise hesitant to voice out in individual capacity.

It was observed that after attending the life skills sessions the students approached the school social worker and the school counselor with individual problems. This could be due to the confidence gained by them after participating in the

session and also getting a sense of real time association with their problems to voice out their concern. It can be argued that life skill sessions also act as a base for identifying students who face trouble in their daily social functioning and find it difficult to cope up with their existing realities.

After a life skill session on self-esteem in class 11th, a girl approached the school social worker and conveyed that she felt that she was suffering from depression and needed help. This could have happened because the life skill session on self esteem touched on the concepts of the importance and value of the self to which that girl could make a real life association due to her existing problems and she could realize that something was going wrong in her life and she could just not sit over it and has to do something about it and hence approached the school counselor for professional assistance.

A student of class 10th took keen interest in life skills sessions conducted in her class and approached the social worker and the school counselor after the life skill session to inform about the change in her behavior and state of mind after attending these sessions and expressed her willingness to start a peer educator group along with her friends with the guidance of the counselor and the school social worker so that she can not only learn but also impart life skills in her peers. The Peer Educator approach to life skills based education is one of the key methods of inculcating life skills in students and is also mentioned in the CBSE guidelines as an important method of propagating life skills education in schools.

CONCLUSION

Keeping in mind the larger context of adolescents engaging in high risk behavior such as drug abuse, suicide, sexual experimentation and the role of life skills in preventing such behavior, the importance of imparting life skills in schools has become indispensable and is the need of the hour. A few measures have been outlined for the effective implementation and imparting of Life Skills Based Education in schools.

Mandatory implementation and monitoring of Life Skills education in schools by Central and State Boards through the process of integration of Life Skills in curriculum instead of being added as additional subjects, the integration should begin with language subjects like Hindi and English and later extended to science and Mathematics.

Evaluation of Life Skills studies through objective psychological and behavioral tests and end year group activities and presentation.

Formation of a Peer Educator Group in Schools to encourage peer learning and confidence of students.

Integrating life skills with the school's environment. For example: Naming rooms like critical thinking arena, stress management corner, self awareness room.

Involving parents in awareness of Life Skills Teaching through regular workshops and training sessions so that life skills can move beyond the school and reach the homes where students spend the bulk of their time.

Introducing a reward and reinforcement system centralized around life skills, similar to the house system in schools and engaging the students during the academic calendar in various activities to test the knowledge of their life skills.

Introducing a new dimension in life skills education advocating judicious and application based use of technology, for example: Technology Management.

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