

Life Skills based learning: Why and How?

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In order to have a peaceful, happy and self-reliant life full of contentment and capabilities, one must have life skills. Dever (1998) defines life skills as “skills required for daily life in the community”. World Health Organisation defines Life Skills as “The abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable the individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”.

Our ancient Indian education system focussed a lot on imbibing life skills to students to prepare them for daily affairs. Once highly popular teaching philosophy of preparing students for life (Cronin, 1996) has seen a sudden decline and shift towards academic and literary based approaches (Browder & Spooner, 2006). Miller and Chan (2008) found a positive relationship between teaching of life skills and life satisfaction in adulthood. Steptoe and Wardle (2017) conducted a study on 8119 men and women and found that the number of core skills in men and women are associated with wealth, income, subjective wellbeing, less depression, low social isolation and loneliness, more close relationships, better health, fewer chronic diseases and impaired activities of daily living, and favourable objective biomarkers. Thus, teaching of life skills is of utmost importance and need of the hour, especially in the present uncertain times, when world is moving fast at a rapid speed.

Life Skills can be categorised as Social Skills, Emotional Skills and Thinking Skills. These three skills complement and supplement each other to ensure that the student is prepared to face real life challenges. World Health Organisation has identified ten core life skills as Self-Awareness, Empathy, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Decision Making, Problem Solving, Interpersonal skills, Coping with Stress, Effective Communication and Managing Emotions. These skills enable a person to think critically and rationally, solve issues and maintain sound mental wellbeing.

Life Skills Development is therefore very essential aspect of education and thus should be given more preference than standard academic and literacy-based learning. Transacting life skills education is a pedagogical science and teachers must ensure that their pedagogy while teaching academics should also be preparing them for the life. Students participation in dynamic teaching-learning process is essential for implementing life skills education. Life skill education is based on research and methodology for positive pedagogy and positive education developed alongside positive psychology.

As a teacher, one should indulge in lesson planning with utmost sincerity and dedication. Lessons should be carefully and cautiously planned so that teaching-learning process is not only restricted to academic syllabus but covers transacting important life skills to students. For teachers, it is not a rocket science but a slight variation in pedagogy.

Teachers must provide students with daily life situations to solve through their learnings, must involve them in a healthy dialogue, must ensure that every child is onboard these discussions, facilitate peer learning & support and integrate subjects.

Life Skills enhancing activities, also listed by Central Board of Secondary Education, when included in teaching-learning process at any level result in good blend of experiential and fun based learning. As a teacher, one must include techniques of discussion, debate, role play, games, poetry, storytelling, brainstorm, drama, case studies, questions & answers, demonstrations, round table discussions and simulations. These techniques provide a chance to every child in the class to think critically, solve problems, manage emotions, express and communicate effectively. Such activities promote healthy peer bonding and effective peer learnings.

In my school, one of the best practices is that we do a lot of collaborative and integrated activities. Students are given opportunities to collaborate and work on projects which are external to their academic requirements. These projects are related to entrepreneurship, social & community services, innovations and sustainability. These collaborative projects evoke empathy, compassion, brotherhood, problem solving acumen and critical thinking. In classrooms, usual teaching method include exploring case studies and scenarios around the world to understand the concept better and to develop important life skills.

Bringing life skills, skills required to lead and peaceful and content life, to center of our education system is need of the hour right now. The teaching-learning pedagogy needs a change and must shift towards experiential mode of learning to engage students in a more effective manner for a better future. Teachers can help kids develop life skills with easy age appropriate experiential techniques blended in their regular academics. Techniques such as debates, discussions, storytelling and case studies not only help students develop life skills but also add to rationality of learning. With uncertainty being the only certainty and rapid developments in this world, we need these skills more than ever to deal with stress, problems and uncertainties.

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