Abstract

This paper describes a conceptual model for contributing to the healthy development of young: a life skills approach. A key aspect of human development as important to basic survival as intellect is the acquisition of socio-cognitive and emotional coping skills. This approach, sometimes referred to as skills-based education, builds skills in these particular areas to strengthen an young’s protective factors, promote the competencies necessary to make a healthy transition to adulthood, and promote his or her adoption of positive behaviors. Effective programs focuses skills to issues relevant to an young’s developmental tasks and social context, such as personal development, understanding peer relations, or managing emotions.

Key words: Life skills, young people, life skills education

Introduction

The early studies about life skills focus on definition of the concept. Gazda and Brooks (1985) have defined life skills as the kind of behavior-based psychological learning needed to help people cope with predictable developmental tasks. According to Powell (1985) life skills are the life-coping skills consonant with the developmental tasks of the basic human development processes. Developmental task as concept at Powell’s definition is significant for as comprehension of life skills, it is defined by Winston (1990) as “an interrelated set of behaviors and attitudes which the culture specifies should be exhibited at approximately the same time by a given age cohort in a designed context”.

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The World Health Organization has defined life skills as, "the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (WHO, 1997a). UNICEF has defined life skills as “a behavior change or behavior development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills” (www.unicef.org).

Life skills are essentially abilities that help promote mental well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life. Most development professionals agree that life skills are generally applied in the context of health and social events (Spence, 2003). They can be utilized in many content areas: prevention of drug use, sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS prevention and suicide prevention. The definition extends into consumer education, environmental education, peace education or education for development, livelihood or income generation. In short, life skills empower young people to take positive action to protect themselves and promote health and positive social relationships (McGuire and Priestly, 1981; Francis, 2007).

Margaret Francis (2007) who is Social Worker and Counselor said that “youth are considered as the most productive members of the society, due to their physical and intellectual capacity”. But it is sad to recognize the fact that most of the youth are unable to utilize their potential in an appropriate way due to lack of guidance and motivation. Now a days a large number of youth engaged in antisocial activities which create a lot of social problems like alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse, smoking etc. These habits deteriorate their physical and intellectual capabilities and also seem to be a burden to the society. Youths are engaged in many antisocial activities and which adversely affecting other members of the society. These high risk behaviors affecting society in a large extend. This new challenge requires immediate and effective responses from a socially responsible system of education. It may be noted that to date, no university or board of school education has come forward to initiate such a programme in the country which may be beneficial to our young people. In this connection life skill education plays a very vital role to increase the awareness among the youth about all social problems and to alleviate social evils from the society. Life skill education helps the individual to improve the decision making skill, ability to take every thing in the right sense and also improve their contributions to the society (Spence, 2003; Francis, 2007).
Actually, life skills are essential for activities requiring intellectual and physical activities of the individuals. Development of skills in a conscious manner for enhancing and strengthening life is an important step towards complete use of young people potential. When we think about life skills as human resources, we pointed out that they contribute to achievement of objectives and fulfillment of desires in all phases of life. In realization of most of the activities in life, young people may require one or more of the skills of cognitive- knowledge, intelligence and reasoning-, psychomotor- muscular activity associated with mental processes and the ability to do physical work -or affective- emotions and feelings. Thus, development of life skills can only be possible with a successful management process based on education. Young people acquire vital life skills like determination of values, attitudes and goal orientation, decision making, problem solving, planning, implementation, assessment and communication. Thus youths can discover themselves and learn how to cope with problems (Goldsmith, 2000).

In this point we have to ask “What are the main components of life skills?” Gazda and Brooks (1985) have grouped the 222 life skills under seven categories: personal development, problem solving, communication, assertiveness, self-awareness, critical thinking, and central thinking. Powell’s study (1985) includes life skills such as interpersonal communications/relationships, assertiveness, rational-emotive therapy, exploring leisure time, physical fitness, weight management, purpose in life, problem solving, stress awareness, yoga, relaxation and vocational development. Winston (1990) classified the developmental tasks of the students in six categories in his study: educational involvement, career planning, life style planning, interpersonal relationships, life management and cultural participation.

UNESCO, UNICEF and WHO list core life skills as:

1. Decision-making: evaluating information and advice to make informed decisions; assessing the advantages and disadvantages of different options; changing decisions to adapt to new situations; setting goals; planning for the future.
2. Problem solving.
3. Creative thinking.
4. Critical thinking: analyzing social and cultural influences on attitudes, values, and behavior; questioning inequality, injustice, prejudice, and
stigma; exploring and evaluating social roles, rights, and responsibilities; evaluating risks.

5. Effective communication skills.

6. Interpersonal relationship skills.

7. Self-awareness building skills: identifying personal strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities; clarifying personal values and beliefs; recognizing personal worth and personal happiness.

8. Empathy.

9. Coping with emotions.


The additional areas in which a culturally sensitive approach is needed include:

- Goal setting.
- Assertiveness.
- Negotiation skills.

On the other hand, Cornell University Cooperative Extension Programme and Iowa State University Extension Programme aim youth development. The programmes develop to a Target Life Skills (TLS) model for evaluating youth development experiences. The model includes some subtitle such as health, mental, emotional, physical. The Target Life Skills Model is intended to be inclusive for all possible life skills (Figure 1).

On the other hand, Life skills fall into three basic categories, which complement and reinforce each other: (i) Social or interpersonal skills, including communication, negotiation/refusal skills, assertiveness, cooperation, empathy; (ii) Cognitive skills, including problem solving, understanding consequences, decision making, critical thinking, self-evaluation; (iii) Emotional coping skills, including managing stress, managing feelings, self-management and self-monitoring (Mangrulkar, Whitman, and Posner, 2001).

Youths require both formal and informal education for development of their life skills as well as other individuals who are at different age groups. The objective of life skills education is to help young people cope with daily problems in a successful manner and thus provide to their development (Gazda and Brooks, 1985).
In other words, life skills education is training for life. While the youngsters develop their life skills, they acquire the primary skills required for their physical and emotional well-being. The life skills motivate the young people to know, to think, to feel, to value and to act (Larson and Cook, 1985). In fact, life skills enable young people to achieve a healthy and high quality life. At this point, it is stated that skills related with coping with life must be incorporated into the education program as an essential component. Education program generally focus on development of skills such as friendship behaviors, values clarification, conversation, planning, health maintenance and promotion, time management, assertiveness and listening, which are important in terms of preparing the young people to life. (Larson and Cook, 1985).
Life skills development program aiming at achievement of primary developmental tasks by the young people cover psychosocial, physical, vocational, sexual, cognitive, moral, ego and emotional domains of development (Gazda and Brooks, 1985; Picklesimer and Miller, 1988). Also we can put in order the aims of life skills education:

1. To provide young people with strategies to make healthy choices that contribute to a meaningful life,
2. To enable young people to analyze their capacities to enhance the function in a most productive way,
3. To allow the youth get along with other people, able to adjust with their environment and making responsible decision,
4. To enable the learner to develop a concept of oneself as a person worth and dignity,
5. To help one to understand oneself and lead to growth in personal responsibility,
6. To help the young people to empower in challenging situations (Francis, 2007).

We need to create life skill education as the cornerstone of various youth program. An effective implementation strategy will help the youth to practice it in their life.

UNESCO’s report (2000) in Dakar offers a conceptual basis for a life skills approach to education that not only reinforces the definition of life skills as psychosocial abilities, but also proposes and education framework for the essential combination of life skills: Learning to know, learning to be, learning to live together and learning to do (Figure 2).

**Learning to know: developing reasoning**

It relates to cognitive life skills, such as critical thinking (analyzing different sources of information, interpreting motivations), problem solving and decision-making skills (collecting information, evaluating consequences, defining alternatives, choosing a solution). Learning to know thus refers to both the acquisition of knowledge as well as the use of the knowledge.

**Learning to be: enhancing agency**

It relates to self-management life skills related to self awareness, self esteem and self confidence (building an identity, valuing oneself, setting goals, building dreams, etc.), and coping skills (skills for managing feelings and stress). This element is linked with seeing oneself as the main actor in defining a positive outcome for the future, and is close to the concept of “power” or “agency”.
Learning to live together: building potential through social capital

It relates to interpersonal and social life skills such as communication skills, negotiation skills, refusal skills, assertiveness skills, interpersonal skills, cooperation skills, and empathy skills. Skills under learning to live together are essential to define a human being as a social being.

Learning to do: functionings and capabilities

This pillar is linked to what actions a person takes, and is closely related to practical skills. When addressed alone in an educational programme, or when an individual is “on survival mode” the results of this pillar is overpowered by practical or psychomotor skills for immediate needs and day to day functioning (“Life” and “Bodily Health”), whereas addressed in an educational approach taking into account the four pillars, this pillar represents an achievement linked to “refined” functionings (“Bodily Integrity” and “Control of One’s Environment”) (Radja, Hoffmann and Bakhshi, 2008).
Conclusion

As a result, developing life skills helps the young people to translate knowledge, attitude and their health behavior such as acquiring the ability to reduce specific risk behavior and adopt healthy behavior that improve their lives such as planning ahead, career planning, decision making, and forming positive relationships (WHO, 1997b). Hopefully, developing life skills among young people will empower girls, especially, to avoid pregnancy until they reach physical and emotional maturity, develop in both boys and girls responsible and safe sexual behavior, sensitivity and equity in gender relations, prepare boys and young men to be responsible fathers and friends, encourage adults, especially parents, to listen and respond to young people, help young people avoid risks and hardships and involve them in decisions that affect their lives (WHO, 1999; WHO, 2003).

Life skills as an approach may now enjoy several advantages in the face of challenges. First, the focus on skills development can defuse social tensions around approaching certain public health issues with adolescents, such as HIV/AIDS. Secondly, life skills can be seen as a unifying framework for life promotion that can cut across many different health and development issues. Substance abuse, citizenship, sexual health, building friendships, life planning and anger management can all be addressed within a comprehensive life skills program. And, exploring the connections between these issues and the related behaviors can enrich understanding. Therefore life skills development can be and has been incorporated into programs in a wide variety of settings, including health clinics, schools, hospitals, community centers, early childhood centers, schools, and youth centers. Life skills can develop with effective education programme. Life skills programme a piece of the foundation for justifying skills development and differing perspectives on why these skills are important. Some focus more on behavioral outcomes, justifying skills development as a way to move adolescents towards the behaviors that developmental expectations, cultural context and social norms find appropriate. Others focus more on the acquisition of skills as the goal itself, since competency in problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and resolving conflicts can be seen as crucial elements of healthy human development. Finally, some theoretical perspectives view life skills as a way for adolescents to actively participate in their own process of development and the process of constructing social norms. By teaching young people how to think rather than what
to think, by providing them with the tools for solving problems, making decisions and managing emotions, and by engaging them through participative methodologies, skills development can become a means of empowerment.

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