

Life skill education and disability - Implications

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Abstract

The education, today, needs to enable a disabled child to deal effectively with the environment, make maximum use of resources, discern available opportunities and face the challenges of society. To enable these behavioral transformations in the child, the system needs to enrich the school curriculum with a highly researched and effective life skills training programme. Life skills are essentially those abilities that help promoting mental well being and competence in differently abled children. On the basis of an analysis of the life skills research field, WHO suggested 10 core skills: decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions, and coping with stresses (World Health Organization, 1997) which are also useful in the field of disability. It is an effective tool for empowering the children to act responsibly and handle daily tasks in their lives and develop into active and productive members of their communities. In this paper the need of life skill education has been discussed and implications to develop the life skills among disabled children.

Key words: Skill, disabled child, Life skills, WHO, Life skill education.

Introduction

Life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Described in this way, skills that can be said to be life skills are innumerable, and the nature and definition of life skills are likely to differ across cultures and settings. However, analysis of the life skills field suggests that there is a core set of skills that are at the heart of skills-based initiatives for the promotion of the health and well-being of disabled children.

In 1997, WHO produced a publication to provide guidance on life skills education for children and adolescents in schools, in which life skills are described as promoting *psychosocial competence*. "Psychosocial competence is a person's ability to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. It is a person's ability to maintain a state of mental well-being and to demonstrate this in adaptive and positive behavior while interacting with others, his/her culture and environment" (World Health Organization, 1997, p. 1).

Many countries are now considering the development of life skills education in response to the need to reform traditional education systems, which appear to be out of step with the realities of modern social life. In the United Kingdom, an important life skills initiative was set up to contribute to child abuse prevention, and in the USA there are numerous life skills programmes for the prevention of substance abuse and violence. In South Africa and Colombia an important stimulus for life skills education has been the desire to create a curriculum for education for life, called "Life Orientation" education in South Africa and "Integral Education" in Colombia. There are many initiatives of this nature in which, in addition to primary prevention objectives, life skills education has been developed to promote the positive socialization of children.

Life Skills (WHO)

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Decision-making is the ability to deal constructively with decisions about our lives. It enables the disabled children to make constructive decisions in their daily living activities with the support of their families.

Problem solving enable the children to deal constructively with problem that arises in their home, school etc. It will help the disabled children to get out of the uncomfortable situation and accomplish one's need without using anger, defiance, aggressive behaviour or force.

Creative thinking contributes to both decision making and problem solving by enabling children to explore the available alternatives and various consequences of actions or non-action. The process involves original thinking and then producing. It helps the disabled children to respond in a flexible manner to various challenges of life.

Critical Thinking is defined as logical thinking and reasoning including skills such as comparison and classification; It helps to improve the quality of children's thinking by skillfully and analyze information and experiences objectively.

Effective communication is an efficient tool for the establishment and maintenance of good relationships with their peers, neighbours, teachers and family members. It enables the disabled children to express his/her opinions, desires and fears clearly by using both verbal communication and non-verbal expressions. It also trains the children to ask for advice and help from others in times of need.

Inter Personal Relationships is needed for establishing and maintaining social relationships. This may mean being able to make and keep friendly relationships, which can be of great importance to our mental and social well-being. It teaches the child to relate to other people in a positive manner. It also helps him/her to develop the ability to end relationships constructively.

Self Awareness is the awareness about oneself (self consciousness). It includes our recognition of ourselves, of our character, of our strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. Developing self-awareness can help the disabled children to recognize when we are stressed or feel under pressure. It is also often a prerequisite for effective communication and interpersonal relations.

Empathy Empathy can help disabled children to understand and accept others who may be very different from them, which can improve social interactions. It includes understanding one's feelings as well as providing emotional support. It also helps to encourage nurturing behaviour towards their peers in need of care and assistance or tolerance. It helps child to understand and accept others who are different from him/her.

Coping with emotions Coping with emotions helps the disabled children to understand feelings of them and others to some extent. It enables the individual to learn healthy, positive and safe ways to express these feelings and to realize its effects on behavior and to respond to emotions appropriately. Uncontrolled emotions like

excessive sorrow and anger are referred to in this dimension.

Coping with Stress enable the children to understand stress effects and relax without making the situation worse to some extent. It provides the strength to face positive or negative stressful situations. Deal with accompanying emotions and look for solutions related to their daily life that are most beneficial.

Life Skill Education

Life skills education is aimed at facilitating the development of psychosocial skills that are required to deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life. It includes the application of life skills in the context of specific risk situations and in situations where children with disability and their families need to be empowered to promote and protect their rights. Life skills can only be learned through experiencing them in real life situations. Whatever may the term be, the whole meaning is to enhance Life Skills and to improve "the abilities individuals can learn that will help them to be successful in living a productive and satisfying life (Hendricks, 1996). As Miller (1976) defined leadership life skills development as self-assessed and organization specific "development of life skills necessary to perform leadership functions in real life." His research contribution denotes that Life skills are the key components and indicators on youth leadership life skills development. Holistically, Powell (1985) defined life skills as the life-coping life skills consonant with the developmental tasks of the basic human development processes, namely those life skills necessary to perform the tasks for a given age and sex in the following areas of human development: psychosocial, physical-sexual, vocational, cognitive, moral, ego, and emotional. Enhancing Life Skills enables oneself to adapt to situations and people and helps to lead a healthy and positive life.

Facilitating the learning of life skills is a central component of programmes designed to promote

healthy behaviour and mental well-being. To be effective, the teaching of life skills is coupled with the teaching according to the IQ, need, behaviour and severity of disabled children. The development of life skills requires modelling of life skills by special educators and a "safe", supportive classroom environment that is conducive to the practice and reinforcement of skills. Furthermore, life skills education needs to be developed as part of a whole school initiative designed to support the healthy psychosocial development of disabled children, for example, through the promotion of child-friendly practices in schools. To be effective, life skills lessons should be designed to achieve clearly stated learning objectives for each activity in different domains such as Community living, Daily living, Social skills, Occupational skills, Communication skills and Adaptive behaviour.

Implications

Mukti (2004) state that the purpose of life the skills development orientation is to provide a meaningful learning experience for learners that matches what is needed in everyday life. The methods used in the teaching of life skills builds upon what is known of how disabled children learn from their own experiences and from the people around them, from observing how others behave and what consequences arise from behaviour. This is described in the Social Learning Theory developed by Bandura (1977). In Social Learning Theory, learning is considered to be an active acquisition, processing and structuring of experiences. According to a review report by Mangrulkar et al, (2003), cognitively based competence-building model of primary prevention theorizes that teaching Interpersonal Cognitive Problem Solving (ICPS) skills to children at a young age can reduce and prevent negative inhibited and impulsive behaviours. In life skills education, children are actively involved in a dynamic teaching and learning process.

Key Steps in Life Skills Application

Defining and Promoting Life Skills

- Defining the skills: What skills are most relevant to influencing a targeted behaviour or condition; what will the disabled children be able to do if the skill-building exercises are successful?
- Generating positive and negative examples of how the skills might be applied
- Encouraging verbal rehearsal and action
- Correcting misperceptions about what the skill is and how to do it

Promoting Skills Acquisition and Performance

- Providing opportunities to observe Life skills being applied effectively
- Providing opportunities for practice with coaching and feedback.
- Evaluating performance.
- Providing feedback and recommendations for corrective action.

Fostering Skill Maintenance/Generalization

- Providing opportunities
- Fostering self – evaluation and skill adjustment.

Participatory learning

Life skills learning is facilitated by the use of participatory learning methods and is based on a social learning process which includes: hearing an explanation of the skill in question; observation of the skill (modelling); practice of the skill in selected situations in a supportive learning environment; and feedback about individual performance of skills.

Role play

A life skills lesson may start with a teacher exploring with the students what their ideas or knowledge are about a particular situation in which a life skill can be used. They may then engage in short role play scenarios, or take part in activities that allow them to practice the skills in different situations - actual practice of skills is a vital component of life skills education. Finally, the special educator will assign homework to encourage the children to further discuss and practice the skills with their families and peer groups.

Group based activities

It is useful when groups are small. It will help children get to know one another better and increases the likelihood that they will consider how another one thinks. It helps children to hear and learn from their peers.

Social skills

Demonstrating appropriate behavior and respect towards others, recognizing authority, following instructions, maintaining punctuality and regular attendance, following directions and observing regulations, helping others, skills for building positive and healthy relationships with others including peer of opposite sex. They need to understand the importance of mutual respect and socially defined boundaries of every relationship.

Story Telling

It can help children think about local problems and develop critical thinking skills. Students can engage their creative skills in helping to tell stories, or a group can work interactively to tell stories. Story telling lends itself to drawing analogies or making comparisons, helping people to discover healthy solutions by including situations of happiness, sadness, excitement, courage, serious thought, decisions, and problem solving behaviours.

Games and Simulations

Games and simulations promote fun, active learning and rich interactive session in the classroom. They require the combined use of knowledge, attitudes, and skills and allow children to test out assumptions and abilities in relatively safe environment.

Conclusion

To conclude, Life skills education should be designed to enable disabled children to practice skills in progressively more demanding situations eventually leads to determine the available

opportunities by taking positive action. It will help to improve and positive change in the disabled children to deal effectively with his/her family, school and community.

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