

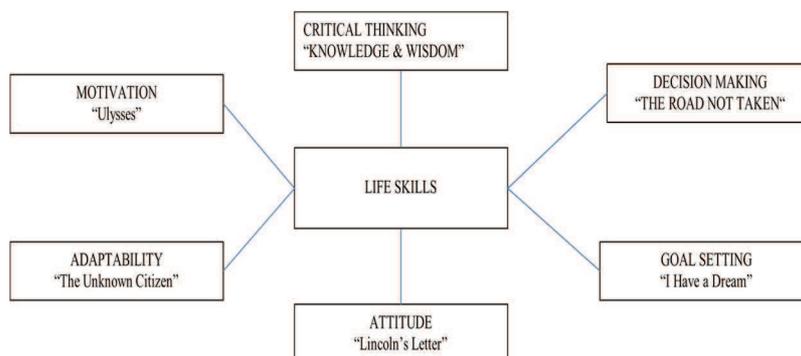
## A BIG ORDER

DR. VLVN NARENDRA KUMAR

**Abstract :** The onset of globalization necessitated the acquisition of life skills since they alone ensure employability. An enthusiastic teacher, transforms the class room into a lively laboratory to experiment in so that he/she can tap the rich potential of his/her students. An out-of-the box approach that can be adopted is a judicious use of excerpts from literature to impart life skills in a language class.

**Key Words:** adaptability, decision-making, experiential, experimentation, goal-setting, motivation, zealous,

If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too:  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated, don't give way to hating.  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise.  
- Rudyard Kipling, "If".



In the rapidly changing era of globalization, acquisition of life skills serves as an open sesame for success. Life skills are of great consequence for students as they ensure employability. They are rich resources which lie dormant in every student. A dynamic teacher creates a vibrant environment in which he acts as a facilitator in tapping the enormous reserves of his students and bringing them to the fore. He can adopt an activity - based approach in which students can be involved which ultimately results in realization of their potential. This paper seeks to demonstrate how life skills of students can be exploited through a judicious use of excerpts from literature. Six life skills, viz "Attitude", "Motivation", "Goal Setting", "Adaptability", "Critical Thinking" and "Decision Making" have been taken up for discussion.

i) Motivation: A grievance nursed by the teaching community is that students

of today lack motivation. There is a grain of truth in it. In reality, students, if properly motivated, can work wonders. Riyuho Okawa makes an interesting observation: People who put limits on themselves will never become more than they think they are. It is important always to believe that you have the potential to do better than you are now (31).

The import of motivation can be underscored by using excerpts from Tennyson's "Ulysses". Ulysses is old but he is young in spirit. He is neither senile nor senescent. His ultimate objective is to garner as much knowledge as he can before death snatches him away. He says:

To follow knowledge like a sinking star  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

However he is painfully aware of human limitations. He observes:

Though much is taken, much abides, and tho'  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are.

The old should not feel enervated but grab every opportunity to learn. His words are pregnant with meaning:

You and I are old,  
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil,  
Death closes all; but something ere the end,  
Some work of noble note may yet be done.

The concluding lines of "Ulysses" capture the essence of the concept of motivation:

One equal temper of heroic hearts, Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.

Such lines could be effectively used in the class room context to drive home the need for motivation.

ii) Attitude: Attitude involves response to people and diverse situations in a positive way. Attitudinal transformation ensures progress. Shiv Khera raises a pertinent point: While we were born with tendencies towards temperaments, there are three factors that largely determine our attitude formation.

These are the triple Es of attitude:

1. Environment 2. Experience 3. Education

Abraham Lincoln's philosophy of education precisely lays emphasis on these three vital factors. A few lines from the letter of Lincoln to his son's teacher will be an invaluable resource for a teacher. For instance, Lincoln stresses the need for probity: Teach him, if you can, that a dollar earned is far more valuable than five found. Success and failure are part and parcel of human life. Lincoln suggests:

Teach him to learn to lose and also to enjoy winning.

Lincoln's exemplary attitude is reflected in the lines:

Teach him always to have sublime faith in himself because then he will always have sublime faith in mankind.

Lincoln's conviction has an experiential dimension:

In school teach him it is far more honourable to fail than to cheat. Thus Lincoln's letter can be a potent teaching tool in the hands of an innovative teacher in

shaping the attitude of his students.

iii) Goal Setting: Life sans a goal is devoid of meaning. Goal setting provides a tangible direction to an otherwise purposeless existence. Dale Carnegie, the celebrated trainer, observes: “ So the only way to influence other people is to talk about what they want and show them how to get it (33).

Martin Luther King Jr’s triumph lies in making the coloured realize what they should aspire for and he, as a shining symbol of suffering, showed them how to accomplish it. His legendary speech, “I Have a Dream” ignited the minds of the oppressed and the downtrodden in the White-dominated U.S.

King’s dream is the liberation of his race. His thundering speech marks a new dawn in the history of the nation as it sets a goal for a suffering community. He observes:

Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice.....

Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

King’s goal is a dream without a deadline. He sets out to emancipate his race in manacles. He proclaims:

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

The end is as noble as the means. He firmly declares:

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline.

We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence.

Thus King’s “I Have a Dream” can be a handy aid to stress the importance of goal setting.

iv) Adaptability:

Adaptability is an essential survival skill which enables an individual to fit into new situations in order to be successful. It also involves the ability to respond positively to change and new ways of thinking.

W.H. Auden’s poem “ The Unknown Citizen” is the case in point. The protagonist just conforms to the norms of the State. He remains ‘normal’, despite having no identity of his own. Auden’s use of the word, ‘saint’ is deliberate:

And all the reports on his conduct agree

That in the modern sense of an old fashioned word, he was a saint.

For in everything he did he served the Greater community.

The unknown citizen’s survival in a hegemonic order is due to his adaptability:

The press are convinced that he bought a paper everyday

And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.

Auden makes his protagonist’s stand very clear:

When there was peace, he was for peace when there was war he went.

In a nutshell, the protagonist is highly adaptable to change. Thus Auden’s poem highlights the need for adaptability, a skill which every student should acquire.

V. Critical Thinking: Critical thinking is an essential life skill which every student possesses to some degree or other. An argument always serves a purpose the five parts of which are claim, reason, evidence, acknowledgement and response and

warrants/assumptions. A critical thinker always employs logic and weighs the pros and cons of an issue before arriving at a conclusion. This skill can be demonstrated by taking up Bertrand Russell's essay, "Knowledge and Wisdom". Russell's investigation of the concept of wisdom is clinically precise.

i) Claim : Russell commences the argument with a claim:

Most people would agree that, although our age far surpasses all previous ages in knowledge, there has been no correlative increase in wisdom.

ii) Reason: He points out that the extent and complexity of the specialized knowledge of various kinds of technicians is largely responsible for this phenomenon.

iii) Evidence: According to Russell, Hegel's knowledge is wide but his feelings are narrow. Hegel's philosophy of history is comprehensive but it includes only the intellect but not feeling. Thus he lacks wisdom, concludes Russell.

iv) Acknowledgement and Response: This involves admission of counter arguments or reassertion of one's own argument. Russell defends himself thus:

It is commonly urged that a point of view as I have been advocating is incompatible with vigour in action. I don't think history bears out this view.

He gives an illustration:

Abraham Lincoln conducted a great war without ever departing from what I have been calling wisdom.

v. Warrants: Warrants are assumptions that underlie one's argument. Russell concludes his argument thus:

The world needs wisdom as it has never needed it before; and if knowledge continues to increase, the world will need wisdom in the future even more than it does now.

Thus Russell's essay serves the purpose of imparting critical thinking skills.

vi. Decision-Making: Decision-making or choice-making is a vital part of life.

Very often, decision making is agonizing as it involves responsibility for consequences. Thus it creates apprehension which often leads to a predicament:

Frost's "The Road Not Taken" can be taken up to teach this life skill.

The poet makes a choice after a long deliberation:

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear.

He is aware that there is no chance of return:

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

He opts for a road less preferred. Frost ends the poem on an ambiguous note:

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence

Two roads diverged in a wood and I -

I took the one less travelled by

And that has made all the difference.

The poem throws light on the painful mental process of choice -making. Students

should be trained to examine the issue at hand from different perspectives before making a choice and be prepared for the consequences.

Stephen Covey rightly observes that 'Personality Ethic' which lays emphasis on attitudes, skills etc., is illusory and deceptive (36) whereas 'Character Ethic' stresses on basic principles of effective living (18). Life skills can be imparted by making a judicious use of literature. It is both challenging and satisfying for a zealous teacher to supplement the activity – based approach with literature. The environment may not always be conducive to experimentation but handicaps can be overcome with perseverance

In a nutshell, the protagonist is highly adaptable to change. Thus Auden's poem highlights the need for adaptability, a skill which every student should acquire.

### References

1. Okawa, Riyuho *Invincible Thinking*, Jaico Books, 2008
2. Khera, Shiv *You Can Win*, Macmillan, 2007
3. Carnegie, Dale *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, PocketBooks, 1982
4. Covey, Stephen *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Pocket Books, 2004.

\*\*\*

Govt. Polytechnic, Nellore (A.P.)