DREAM a DREAM

Role of Dream a Dream in promoting life skills education for children from low-resourced schools in urban India:

A CASE STUDY

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Saloni Sinha is a 2015 Political Science graduate from Lady Shri Ram College for Women, later she went onto do her master's from Faculty of Social Sciences, Delhi University. Throughout her academic life she worked with multiple Non-governmental Organisations in the field of Education with emphasis on providing quality education by integrating classroom content and life skills. She also advocated the importance of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) by conducting workshops in schools through her stint as a peer educator with 'Know Your Body Know Rights' under The YP Foundation.

In 2019, she went onto pursue a second master's at Institute of Development Studies at University of Sussex, UK. Her Master's in Development Studies focused on exploring different dimensions of Human Capital with special interest in Education and Nutrition. Her Dissertation focused on Role of NGOs in fostering life skills in Urban India encompassing the case study of Dream A Dream.

Currently, she is engaged as an Education Fellow with Delhi Government. She works at the intersection of Education and Development through policy, research and advocacy. She is involved in teacher training project, driving the capacity building of 60,000 Delhi Government School Teachers.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NGO: Non- Governmental Organisation

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

WHO: World Health Organisation

NCERT: National Council of Educational Research and Training

NCF: National Curriculum Framework

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

DaD: Dream a Dream

ASLSP: After School Life Skills Programme

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report looks at the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in imparting life skills to children from low-resourced schools in urban India. This study analyzes the case study of Dream a Dream (a non-governmental organization), imparting life skills based out of Bengaluru, India. The major objective of this study is to understand the impact of life skills intervention and the concept of social change in understanding the transformation of individuals through the life stories of Seema and Pallavi.

The research seeks to understand the different approaches adopted by NGOs to impart life skills training and how it leads to transformative social change at an individual level. The sources used throughout the research are secondary resources with a major focus on literature on NGOs and life skills and documents provided by the partner organisation for case study research.

The findings of the study concludes that its high time for Governments to build partnership with NGOs and use cost-effective ways of addressing problems in education with special focus on life skills training in schools (Jagannathan, 2001). The time is right to analyse these models and approaches and incorporate them into the state system of education for upscaling and adaptation. The life skills initiative by Dream a Dream address relevant social issues and development needs of real world and develop a personal approach towards tackling these problems. It empowers the students to improve their quality of life and become productive and competitive members of the community. While the government addresses the bigger issue of educational development, NGOs brings effective local action. The NGOs have the potential to facilitate change and not merely be the service providers as in the case of Governments. To ensure fruitful role of NGOs in life skills development, the Government needs to recognise NGOs as resource centres of knowledge and inventive practices. An enabling environment of collaboration and partnership needs to be created to effectively implement life skills interventions in the Indian education system.

ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN IMPARTING
LIFE SKILLS

Considering the influences that shape a young mind in their formative years, traditional system of teaching life skills is no longer adequate (Yadav & Iqbal, 2009). In recent times, the role of school education has been strengthened to ensure the transfer of relevant life skills. The school has been rendered with a social environment that seeks to promote life skills and support the socialization of child with diverse learning experiences (Expressions, 2004). It is significant for the school to promote a holistic approach towards education and build responsible and resilient individuals. As a part of the school curriculum, it reduces school drop-out rate and increases student retention rate (Dinesh & Belinda, 2014).

A school is generally perceived to be a means to acquire future jobs and ensure economic stability, equipping students with relevant reading, writing and numeracy skills (Griffith, 1988). Similarly, school also plays a pivotal role in ensuring that students train on life skills, which is embedded in relevance and concern of an individual's everyday life outside classrooms. It supports students with practical knowledge, which is outside the purview of teachers' specialised knowledge of academic subjects (Nasheeda, et al., 2019). To use Foucault's theory "power over" (ideological transformation) and "power to" (a knowledge disjuncture as "emancipatory potential), life skills help students understand the social world (Foucault, 1982). The complexities faced by an individual is transformed into a series of tasks, which the individual is capable of mastering with the support of training received in schools.

NGOS AND EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

In the last few years, NGOs have leveraged their position and spearheaded the movement to mitigate various development challenges through their innovative interventions. Hajer et al (2015) describe the extent of these development challenges and inadequacy of governments to resolve them.

The trend is to outsource the government services (Werker & Ahmed, 2008) through programmes led by NGOs to reach the vulnerable in need of essential services (Wils, 1995). One such sector is Education, which needs scaling up to provide equitable and quality education to children from underserved communities. Cernea (1988) points out the proximity of NGOs to local communities and their ability to understand their context. Moreover, there is a general understanding of NGOs being more decentralised and democratic in their functioning as compared to a private enterprise or the government (Chowdhury & Rose, 2004) . Lewis and Opuko-Mensah (2006) point out more flexibility and adaptability of NGOs in the implementation of programmes at the ground level. Serra et al (2011) argue the self-motivated nature of individuals working in the NGOs, who are less driven by financial remuneration and more by intrinsic and prosocial motivation. The role of NGOs is seen through the lens of social change, creating impact as a value driven organisation rather than working towards job security, reputation, or overtaking competitors (Lewis, 2003). NGOs adopt multiple paths to expand their impact. Expanding their operations to cover more beneficiaries at the community level amplifies impact and display outcome-driven results (Uvin & Miller, 1994). Diversifying into new services, such as education advocacy, plays a huge role in influencing policy direction. Impact can also be achieved through transfer of project guidelines and implementation techniques to a wider network of NGOs, leading to organisational replication of already established NGOs in new areas (Jowett & Dyer, 2012). As Ross (2013) points out in her research of Ugandan education system, lack of strong national education systems due to poor resources, infrastructure and standardisation pave the way for NGOs to bridge critical learning gaps. She questions, if educational NGOs have an important place in improving education. These organisations cannot reach huge numbers of children in juxtaposition with the national programmes funded by the governments, but it has the power to create substantial impact. It is much easier for NGOs to pilot interventions at low cost and gauge the efficacy through a comprehensive approach. NGO programmes are more cost-effective as the expenditure on resources, learning and training of volunteer teachers is limited. Chambers (1992) points out the self-spreading and self-improving approach of NGOs in nurturing committed individuals as future leaders and harbinger of social change.

Provision of imparting education through the means of NGO programmes is often related to non-formal approach. According to Coombs and Ahmed's (1974) understanding education cannot be place-bound, time-bound and confined to the four walls of school. The learning measured by years of exposure is a flawed system; instead, students can engage irrespective of where, how and when the learning occurs (Chowdhury & Rose, 2004). Their motive is to focus on how education is provided rather than the role of institution in imparting different forms of knowledge. Non-formal education has become synonymous with NGO programmes, while formal set up of schooling is associated with government or private schooling.

In the Indian context, the non-formal education system was introduced in 1977-78 and has subsequently expanded with the passing years. The focus was inaccessibility of quality education in the form of formal school for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The government recognised the role of non-formal education in the sixth five-year plan of India (1980-85) (Rose, 2009). Since then, the role of NGOs has become pivotal to education plans with an overarching approach to design and implement relevant programmes.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Self Determination Theory (SDT) represents a framework to study human motivation, personality and optimal functioning, rendering the scope to understand personal and psychological well-being.

It fosters the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to discern cognitive and social development; it shapes an individual's interpretation about 'who they are' and 'how they behave' (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theory emerged from researchers Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan's work on motivation in the 1970s and 1980s. The basis of this conceptual framework is embedded in one of the six theories under SDT that is Basic Needs Theory (BNT). The BNT promotes psychological needs through psychological health and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985); Deci and Ryan (1991) define needs as an essential building block for an individual's growth, integrity and health. Any compromise on these factors withholds the holistic development of humans. In the context of psychological systems, these nutriments are defined as essential needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, which ensure the reinforcement of personal growth and well-being (Ryan, et al., 1991). In this context, I see life skills training as the facilitator of these three basic needs translating into personal growth, integrity and overall welfare of individuals undertaking the training. The overall well-being of individuals is being perceived as social change in the larger scheme of things through this research (Reis, et al., 2000).

The role of intrinsic motivation is pivotal to satisfying the three needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness for psychological development. The BNT suggests how intrinsically motivated individuals explore, understand and assimilate their social environment (Deci, et al., 1996). This tendency is the result of curiosity, attempts at mastery and other internally motivated factors that advance growth and development among individuals. The underlying factor of intrinsic motivation is also internalising extrinsic regulatory process and integration of values acquired in the social environment (Ryan, et al., 1991). The social context also supports the integration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation leading to amplified engagement, enhanced learning, and personal development as a result of satisfaction of three basic needs (Deci & Ryan, 1991).

It is imperative to define the three needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness encompassing the theme of life skills. The WHO framework (1997) provides a list of core life skills that can be placed in any situation or context. Through my framework, I intend to focus on few of these life skills that are embedded in the three conditions of BNT, to analyze the case study.

1. **RELATEDNESS**
Collaboration &
Cooperation

2. **AUTONOMY**
Independent &
Critical Thinking

BASIC NEEDS THEORY

3. **COMPETENCE**
Problem Solving &
Communication

AUTONOMY

Deci and Ryan (Deci & Ryan, 1991) define autonomy as the origin of an individual's behaviour to authenticate a sense of self direction and volition. Individuals see themselves as an agent "locus of causality" of one's behaviour (Ryan, et al., 1991).

Autonomy is the origin of action towards transforming external regulation into self-regulation, where it seems possible. Previously, a number of studies have been conducted in the field to reiterate the link between a person's experience of autonomy and communication, social structures and motivational outcomes. Autonomy, in the realm of education and learning, focuses on interpersonal behaviour in which educational techniques, curriculum and concepts are embedded. The autonomy of individuals promotes cognitive and non-cognitive learning as they are self-determined and responsible for their own actions (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Autonomy-oriented classrooms have rendered more confidence and motivation among students with curiosity for learning and desire to mitigate challenges.

Grolnick and Ryan (1987) examined the concept of controlled learning environment where students have been visibly passive and less interested due to unsatisfactory experience of autonomy. The motivating factor in controlled environment is the presence of exams and grading system resulting in system of rote learning and non-directed learning condition. Controlling condition of classrooms and pressured learning have witnessed low outcomes of conceptual understanding and less active assimilation and integration of what was read (Ryan, et al., 1991). The teachers play a pivotal role in integrating students' motives and classroom activities; they promote meaningful learning outcomes in congruence with students' perspective (Jang, et al., 2010). Teacher's support towards students creates a conducive environment of autonomy for motivated learners.

The link between autonomy and life skills can be defined by understanding few of the life skills defined under the WHO framework. Autonomy is an important condition of inculcating the skill of critical and independent thinking (Papacharisis, et al., 2005). Learning these skills creates a productive environment to satisfy the basic need of autonomy, hence leading to positive psychological outcome of growth and well-being of individuals. A non-controlled, self-determined classroom promotes independent and critical thinking fulfilling the basic condition of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1991).

COMPETENCE

Competence under the BNT is defined as individuals feeling effective in their interactions with the social environment and are presented with opportunities that help them exercise their capabilities and capacities (Hodge, et al., 2012).

This definition is intertwined with the other two basic needs of autonomy and relatedness. Competence represents both interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviour; interpersonal emphasises on effectiveness of social interactions focusing on the relatedness dimension of the situation and intrapersonal highlights the role of exercising one's own capacities using autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2008). To satisfy the psychological need of competence it is essential to transfer skills and capabilities learned from one environment to another. This signifies the competent nature of individuals in learning transferable skills that can be used to transform societies. A strong sense of autonomy, self-determination and volition is significant to transfer skills and learnings from one social environment to the other (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Competency encourages use of one's capacities in exceptionally challenging circumstances, establishing a sense of accomplishment to effectively use their capabilities. The need for competency challenges an individual's behaviour to acquire skills that are beyond one's current level of functioning making development gains (Ryan, et al., 2019) and deriving a sense of confidence and self-esteem.

Problem solving and communication skills are seen as important capabilities to acknowledge one's need of competency. These are foundational skills in the life skills domain and equip students to identify problems autonomously and use their competencies to mitigate challenging and demanding situations. (Hodge, et al., 2012). Problem solving is a perceived skill in physical tasks of sports activities, manual labour and motor skills; cognitive task of decision-making and addressing development needs in the social environment (Nasheeda, et al., 2019). Doing pleasant things with their peers in a familiar environment and avoiding self-consciousness also enhances the need of relatedness.
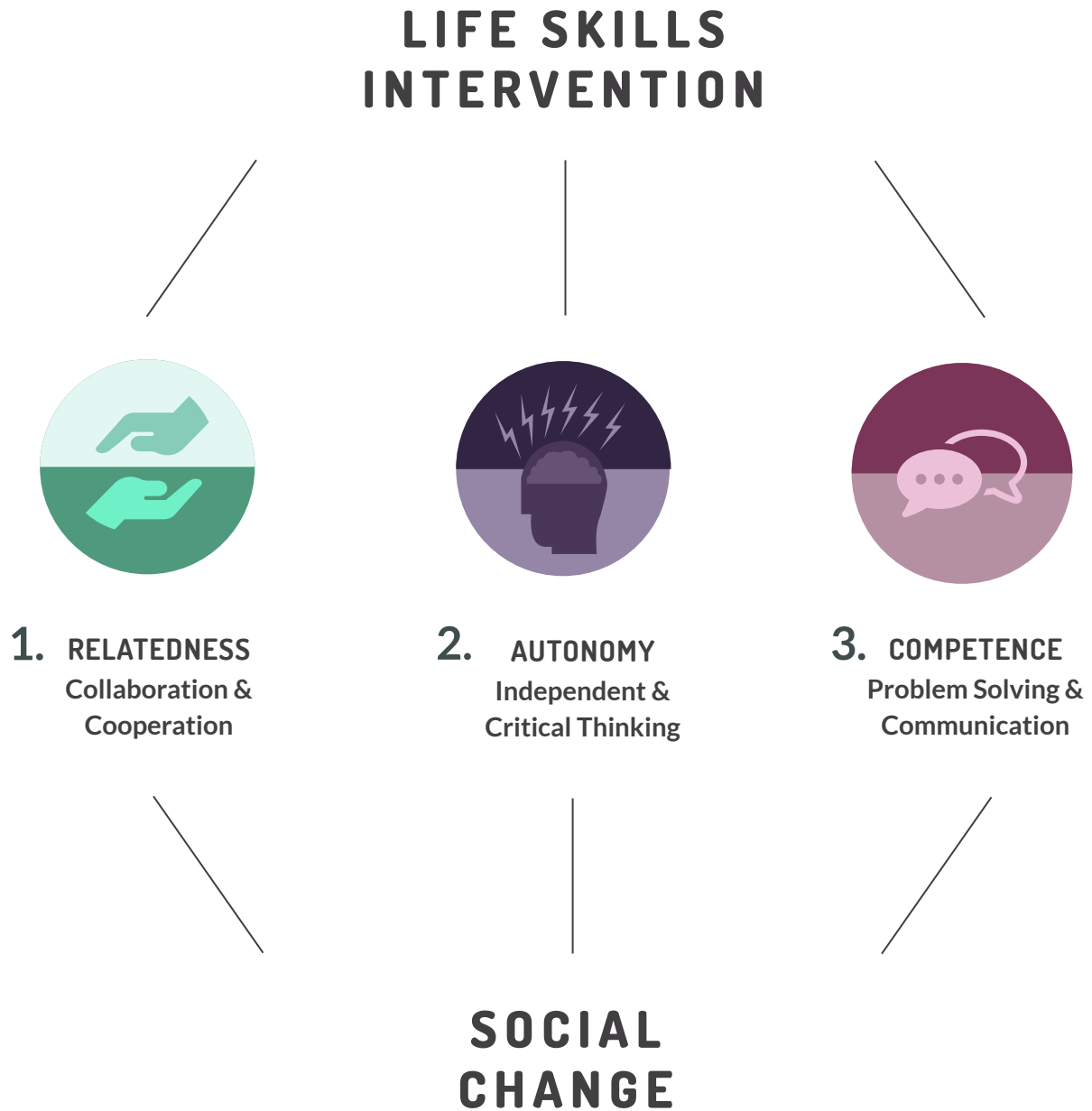
RELATEDNESS

Relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) a basic need, represents an individual's "need to belong", which explains the tendency of humans to form strong, stable interpersonal relations with their peers and the evident role it plays in human motivation. Interaction of humans in their social networks and the feeling of staying connected stimulates mental and physical health leading to growth and well-being.

Relatedness is seen in relation with social activity and the impact it creates on the individual through social involvement with other people (Baard, et al., 1997). It represents bonds for contact and support among individuals forging a connection with fellow humans. An environment of self-cohesion and well-being is created, satisfying the autonomous expression and internalisation of values (Ryan & Connell, 1989).

The integration of life skills such as collaboration and cooperation (Nishida, et al., 2007) with others have direct association with the basic need of relatedness, with increased inclination towards social interest and involvement (Brunelle, et al., 2007). The concept of relatedness incorporates caring of others and being cared by them, it is the feeling of connection with one's community, people, family and the social relationships through involvement with the social environment. In the educational context, working as a team encourages relatedness and inculcates the habit of cooperating with other team players (Hodge & Danish, 1999). Life skills programmes seek to foster the norm of team spirit among students through group engagement activities with fellow learners. (Gagné, et al., 2003).

Life skills interventions should aim to accommodate the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Conditions conducive to the satisfaction of basic needs creates an environment of learning, growth, and well-being (Hodge, et al., 2012). People are motivated, driven and engaged in the learning environment when the basic needs are fulfilled. In the realm of education, students experiencing support for their autonomy, exercising their capabilities to enhance their competency, and feeling connected with their peers are likely to be more motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The need for autonomy, competence and relatedness is fundamental to educational processes and motivation to learn the life skills.

LIFE SKILLS INTERVENTION

1. **RELATEDNESS**
Collaboration &
Cooperation

2. **AUTONOMY**
Independent &
Critical Thinking

3. **COMPETENCE**
Problem Solving &
Communication

SOCIAL CHANGE

A highly motivated individual, who has fulfilled the needs of BNT, can be seen as a harbinger of social change. Life skills training aids in equipping children with skills that seek to satisfy the condition of autonomy, competence and relatedness. This leads to the wider systematic transformation of the child's life as catalysts of social change (Goel & Dublish, 2020). This brings me to defining social change in the context of its linkage with life skills learning. Social change is a 'collective process of conscious effort' that seek specific societal transformations (Guijt, 2007). It is an iterative journey implying a longtime horizon. This collective process strives better in unpredictable and fluid conditions where conscious and unconscious learning takes place (Gaventa & Barrett, 2010). Reeler (2007) calls it an 'emergent change', the kind of change one would like to see after the life skills training in children. Through my research, I interpret social change as a change in behaviour of children undertaking life skills training to achieve personal goals and fulfil lifelong aspirations. They are the active agents of change in their own lives that allows them to imagine their lives and situations differently.

The WHO (1997) is considered as a globally influential framework, which forms the underpinning of core life skills. For my research I intend to understand few of the core skills like critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration through the case study presented in the next section. I will be studying the model of an NGO to understand their intervention and how they are satisfying the conditions of BNT to drive social change in the lives of children undertaking these sessions.

ABOUT
DREAM A DREAM

Dream a Dream (DaD) is an award-winning charitable trust based out of Bengaluru, Karnataka; working towards empowering children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds. Its objective is to train children with relevant skills to overcome adversity and flourish in the 21st century using a creative life skills approach (Dream a Dream , 2018).

It has been working towards fostering life skills education since the year 1999, having collaborated with 60 partners, 3000 volunteers to impact 1,00,000 young people since its inception (Dream a Dream, 2020). The objective of the organisation is to nurture the uniqueness of young people from vulnerable backgrounds and promote their passion for learning. As the CEO of the organisation, Sucheta Bhat, shares her thoughts on the urgency of life skills training, 'Life skills should not only serve as a supplementary intervention but as a foundational intervention. Over the years, through our research, we have been finding increasing evidence that life skills help young people overcome adversity and thrive' (Dream a Dream, 2019, p. 4).

The DaD acts as a catalyst to rebuild and reimagine the life skills training in the Indian education space though influencing policy, changing the education paradigm and equipping children with skills to thrive in 21st century. They have also built an ecosystem of evidence-based research to champion the cause of life skills and support advocacy around it. Building a tool for criticality and urgency of integrating life skills in mainstream education brings credibility to the

intervention and stimulates future collaborative efforts (Dream a Dream , 2018). It strengthens the community of key stakeholders like practitioners, organisations and governments and creates an enabling environment to incorporate life skills for positive learning outcomes through these strategic partnerships (Dream a Dream, 2019). The unique approach adopted by DaD is to work in neglected spaces, which have a higher number of young children from vulnerable backgrounds struggling in unfavourable circumstances. While they understand the critical role played by traditional education, the long-term success of any individual is based on their social and emotional well-being (Project Thrive, 2018).

The NGO works with young children through two innovation labs- 'After School Life Skills Programme' (ASLSP) and 'Career Connect Programme'. New approaches are introduced, demonstrated, documented and fed back into the larger framework to reimagine learning of life skills through the efforts of DaD (Dream a Dream, 2016). The focus of this case study will be on the model of ASLSP and how it inculcates some of the core skills of the WHO framework and satisfies the conditions of basic needs of autonomy, competency and relatedness.

AFTER SCHOOL LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMME

The central idea of Dream a Dream is to develop children who have the potential to overcome adversities of life through their life skills programmes. DaD has built the capacity to work with 10,000 young children every year since its inception through their flagship initiatives (Dream a Dream, 2019).

The ASLSP is an innovation lab for new life skills approaches to deepen the understanding of child and young people. It uses the medium of sports and arts to engage children in workshops and further develop core life skills like critical thinking, decision-making, interdisciplinary skills and collaboration among other skills (Dream a Dream, 2016). Most beneficiaries are in the age group of 8-15 years of age belonging to marginalised communities, they undergo life skills training through the process of activity based experiential learning (Project Thrive, 2018). The non-traditional teaching pedagogy allows children to explore, innovate and develop significant life skills in a non-controlled autonomous environment. It has designed a specialised Life Skills Curriculum for Sports and Arts, working with partners and experts from USA, UK and South Africa. The life skills imbued through the ASLSP are teamwork, communication, negotiation, decision-making, problem solving and critical thinking; these skills align with the core life skills promulgated by the WHO framework (1997).

To execute the ASLSP, DaD partners with non-profits, government schools, government aided schools, community run free schools and low-cost private schools who give them access to children and young people from grade 4 to grade 10. The targeted groups are children from vulnerable backgrounds in urban communities, particularly those who have witnessed tough situations through the course of their lives. For instance, a 13 year old 8th grade student who is forced to drop out of a government school because they are unable to handle the anxiety of not knowing what to do with life. A 10 year old dropping out to support parents in taking care of younger siblings at home. An 11 year old dropping out to work in unorganised sector to contribute towards family income rather than studying in school to fulfil their lifelong dreams and aspirations (Dream a Dream, 2019). With lack of family support and role models in the community, they end up making the wrong career choice or staying at home. The mental and emotional trauma of these children remains unaddressed due to the absence of relevant services in the community (Dream a Dream, 2016). This brings the role of NGOs as facilitators to the forefront to address these issues and promote life skills through their interventions.

Approach

The approach adopted by DaD is that of experiential learning through participatory techniques. For better learning outcomes, it is significant for the student to understand and engage with the information to be learnt. To understand the information, it is necessary to have higher level of comprehension, analysis, synthesis and application (Hariharan, 2010) . This leads to relatability of information to real life situation, connecting it with past experiences and enhancing their knowledge to contribute towards their community. Thus, this approach allows students to engage with and process information in such a way that they understand a particular subject critically and analytically (Garner, 1987). The NGO strives to equip students with transferable skills that can be applied to the situation of fast changing world. The participants indulge in creative arts-based activities using innovative resources to expand their creativity, learn from different people and discover their passions and dreams. The programme encourages children to use their creativity and bring out their powerful imagination. There are workshops in all kinds of creative mediums – dance, visual arts, singing, theatre etc (Dream a Dream, 2016).

Creative Arts

The creative arts-based workshops focus on instilling multiple skills through the innovative design of these activities. The two life skills training sessions, I will be focusing on are 'Goals and Agreements' and 'Beautiful You'. The first one, 'Goals and Agreements' emphasises on instilling skills of independent thinking, collaboration and communication (Dream a Dream, 2016). The activity focuses on expanding the child's creativity, learning from people who are different from themselves, exploring their inner life and discovering ways to work on issues that impact them in the community. Using resources such as flipcharts and colours, children put down these goals on chart papers and channel their creative interpretation of these ideas. Furthermore, they have conversations about working together, supporting each other, and taking responsibility for themselves and each other. The 'Beautiful You' sessions focus on questioning the beauty stereotypes reinforced by media and popular culture. The sessions try to instil the feeling of self-belief and self-confidence and encourage participants to accept and appreciate themselves for the way they are without aspiring for perfection. It also helps understand the impact of messages conveyed through media on their communities. The activity starts with children observing the images in magazines and newspapers and making two columns in the flipchart with column 'perfect man' and 'perfect woman'. These columns are filled by students on the basis of questions like 'What do the perfect man and woman look like?', 'What do they have?', 'What do they dream of?', 'What are their relationships like?', 'Where do they work?'. Children further reflect on questions like 'Do you know real people who are like this?', 'What is the result or benefit of trying to reach their level of perfection?', 'Is it worth it?' (Dream a Dream, 2016). Children are encouraged to create a new picture that gives out a positive image and message; they are further encouraged to reflect on the changes that they have made. In the end, children are asked to discuss qualities that they love about themselves with their co-participants and how these unrealistic images can impact the communities they are a part of.

Sports

Football is played incorporating "Street Football" rules, such as multiple balls, mixed- or single-gender, no referee, etc. The 'Goal Setting' activity starts off with a small discussion on scoring goals during the football games leading to questions like 'Who here has scored a goal in a Dream Life Skills through Football match?, 'How did you do it?', 'What do you want to achieve in football?', 'What are your goals?', 'What small steps can you take to achieve these goals?'. These questions are discussed in smaller groups among children, which are gradually linked to overarching questions like, 'What does it mean to have a goal in life?', 'Why is this goal important to you?', 'What small steps can you take to achieve these goals?', 'Why is it important to think about the small steps you must take to achieve a long-term goal?', 'Is it OK to have very big, or hard to achieve goals?', 'Is it OK to have small goals?' These questions push the child to think about the real life goals and interlinking it with the game of football gives them a better understanding of the subject of setting goals in real life context (Dream a Dream, 2016). Post the game of football, the children sit in reflection circles and ponder upon questions like 'What were your goals when you were younger and how have they changed?' and 'Who can you talk to about your goals in life?'. The session ends with the final task of setting a short-term goal by the child that can be accomplished before the next session. The child is briefed to track their progress towards the goal by writing down each small step that they take on their way to achieve the goal. The 'Gender Norm' session starts off with explaining the term gender norms with relevant examples and how some time these terms are used to justify harmful behaviour like harassment, abuse and discrimination. The participants play a game of football and post that, they get together in a reflection circle to contemplate on questions such as 'Where have you seen gender norms in sports?', 'In school? In employment?', 'Does anyone have a story about someone challenging gender norms?' 'How have gender norms changed in your community?' 'How do gender norms need to change in your community?', 'How would you describe gender norms to a younger brother or sister?' and finally a task is given to identify a gender norm in their community that they don't agree with (Dream a Dream, 2016). They have to come up with a list of ways to challenge that gender norm.

ASLSP works towards building an ecosystem of teachers, parents and young people. In its endeavours to promote life skills, the intervention continues to deepen the impact by improving the life skills of participants. For young people who lack critical skills, ASLSP continues to improve their skills through events like 'life skills day'; this helps in deeper understanding of young people and the skills they lack (Dream a Dream, 2019). Another important area that the organisation focuses on is the quality of sessions through regular monitoring and evaluations. This helps the organisation to reinvent and reimagine their programmes for better output and impact.

IMPACT

It is important to follow a data and evidence driven evaluation methods to gauge the efficacy of the programmes. The DaD has developed a Dream Life Skills Assessment Scale to measure the impact of life skills interventions through the ASLSP (Dream a Dream , 2018). It is a one-of-kind impact measurement tool in the world to measure life skills improvement among students from disadvantaged communities. Since the beginning of ASLSP, 46,934 children have been a part of the programme, with 94.1% seeing a positive change in their life skills and 95.9% in their academic scores. For the batch of 2018-19, there has been a substantial jump in total participants, average attendance, and retention rate among students. Figure 7 depicts the impact in numbers for the year 2018-19 (Dream a Dream, 2019). A baseline and end line assessment is undertaken at the beginning and end of each programme year.

Social Change and Life Skills

Dream a Dream help young adults mitigate adverse situations, thrive in life, and redefine success. The definition of success is not limited to just scoring exceptional grades in exams but by reinventing themselves and driving social change at an individual and community level. The adversities that the children encounter in life are not limited to difficult economic situations, but it is also the space inside oneself which always feels a lack of emotional sustenance and validation (Talreja, et al., 2018).

The acknowledgement of these situations and support to find stability becomes the source of strength for these children. A sense of self provides safety net to no longer be defined by the external circumstances they are born into. This section will focus on some of the success stories that have come out of the programmes of Dream a Dream. These children, namely Seema and Pallavi, have been able to ameliorate their lives and bring social change by imbibing the relevant life skills fostered by the ASLSP.

SEEMA

She is a 15-year-old girl studying in the 9th standard and a participant of Dream a Dream's ASLSP, pursuing football. Her father is a mechanic, and her mother is a housemaker. Seema attends school regularly and is friendly with her classmates but is often quick in losing her temper. She would often pick fights with her classmates and use foul language. She would also disregard her teacher's instructions and would not pay attention in class lessons. During one of the workshops, the facilitator addressed Seema's problem of bad temper and had a one-on-one conversation to understand her behaviour (Pavithra, et al., 2017). Seema confessed about her father's problem of alcoholism, which lead to abusive behaviour towards her mother. Being exposed to these conditions at home, left her feeling disoriented and demoralised, making it difficult for her to concentrate on her studies or be at peace with herself. She did not share her feelings with anyone, resulting in her being rebellious and aggressive. The facilitator organised a role play activity, making Seema relate to the situation at her home and how her family members and friends were unhappy with her behaviour. She reflected on her behaviour, which helped her realise the problems and also come up with tangible solutions to pacify her anger. She became actively involved in football workshops and reflection activities with her classmates and friends. Gradually opening up, exuding confidence and seizing opportunities for her personal and emotional growth. Her involvement in life skills sessions gave her the courage to address the issue of alcoholism with her father and the impact it left on her and the family. Moreover, she was selected for a football workshop and got an opportunity to play with the captain of the Indian football team. Life skills training of critical thinking and problem solving enabled Seema to exercise her autonomy and competence and address the issues that was hampering her well-being (Dream a Dream, 2019). She was able to make informed choices and act as a catalyst for social change in her family.

PALLAVI

Pallavi had a troubled childhood as she never received any affection from her mother due to her ill health, resulting in a difficult relationship between the two. This led to lack of emotional sustenance from an older family member in Pallavi's life. The relationship between her parents was also difficult with regular incidents of violence erupting between the two. She would have fears and nightmares, and would wake up screaming in the middle of the night. There was a place within her that could not be reached, she could not deal with the issues that confronted her and would feel very lonely (Project Thrive, 2018). Her neighbourhood was a rough place for a growing child, with regular incidents of ragging by the boys.

Pallavi came across the life skills classes in her school, when DaD had come to demonstrate their workshops on sports, creative arts and computers. She enrolled in football classes in ASLSP and gradually developed interest in the sport. Travelling with her football team brought different experiences into Pallavi's life. This changed her worldview and her view of herself, bringing about the possibility of viewing oneself in a larger context.

Today, as a football facilitator with DaD, she is financially independent and a provider for her family. In this role, she has gained the respect of her father, siblings and transformed into the primary decision-maker of the household. Pallavi has slowly transformed into a spokesperson. She is direct, clear and precise when she communicates. She networks, maintains ties with builders, corporators, politicians and non-DaD schools to fulfil the goals she has in mind. People now appreciate her and seek her out for advice and help. She does not think of poverty or lack of means as a structural problem but believes that the solution lies in the perception about oneself. It has also brought the power to affect change around her, which empowers her in turn. 'What I can do is to help them break out of old ways – for example, I teach young children from my neighbourhood to wear neat clothes, to wear shoes instead of slippers to school', remarks Pallavi (Project Thrive, 2018, p. 22).

The life skills training model of Dream a Dream is designed to permeate every aspect of the lives of young children. The ASLSP is innovative, experiential and fun, where participants enjoy and socialise; the social environment of these sessions motivate children to participate and engage for a longer duration of time. To this end, it is significant in creating a motivationally supportive learning environment for positive learning outcomes (Treasure & Robert, 2001). The sessions such as 'Goals and Agreements' and 'Beautiful You' satisfy the individual needs of autonomy and competence, where individuals are not constantly told what to do and how to perform perfectly. They are given the independence to list down their own goals and critically think about issues affecting them in their daily lives. The sessions focussing upon breaking the beauty stereotypes give them the freedom to create an image of self-confidence and self-awareness and the will to think independently. They are in more control of their learning and are allowed to explore their functional movement (Renshaw, et al., 2012). Competence drives the choice to use their capabilities and strengthen their confidence levels. The desire to express their own choice to do something, for instance participate in these activities, enhances their autonomy to analyse situations and independently take decisions.

The sessions imparted through the football game 'Goal Setting' and 'Gender Norms' promote learner-centred interactions, involving the need to feel connected, supported and guided by facilitators throughout the training (Renshaw, et al., 2012). When the focus of learning is on the students, there is greater connectedness that is experienced by the learners. These sessions create a constructive relation between the facilitators and students as they evolve and create together and learn to work cooperatively with fewer arguments. The interactions are associated with interpersonal relations facilitating basic need of relatedness; forging connection to develop valuable communication and collaboration skills. The satisfaction of basic needs of the children promotes increasing internalisation of values and self-determination. Internalisation is the process of accepting the skills and learnings of training and integrating them into their real life contexts of school, family and job. Individuals progressively accept and internally regulate these values rather than external factors influencing their behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The success of ASLSP also lies in the fact that it provides a needs-supportive motivational climate of tasks, recognition and non-controlling competence feedback. The facilitators steer clear of use of guilt, criticism and control, which encourages engagement and productivity by the participants (Gagné, et al., 2003).

Conducive conditions to autonomy, competence and relatedness motivate children to learn, to do and to grow. They are engaged in activities and workshops fulfilling their basic needs periodically in a needs-supportive environment. This is the inherent approach of Basic Needs Theory, specifically in the educational context (Connell & Wellborn, 1990). The needs expressed by students are interpersonal and intrinsic in nature; receiving support for their basic needs highly motivates them to learn effectively and efficiently. As compared to context of controlling environments where they feel disconnected and demotivated. The life stories of Seema and Pallavi is testimony to the fact that life skills training underpin the satisfaction of three conditions of BNT facilitating social transformation. The skills equipped them to at least initiate the process of social change for themselves and their respective families.

While the case study of DaD was analysed through the conceptual framework of BNT, indicating the satisfaction of three conditions, however it is also important to shed some light on the limitations of the framework. The BNT has primarily been applied at the individual level to gauge personal and psychological well-being of students involved in the workshops.

The framework lacks an institutional approach towards analysing the functioning of DaD as an organisation and how they satisfy the three conditions under the BNT. To ensure the personal and psychological growth of students in educational institutions, it is imperative for the major stakeholders to create a conducive environment to satisfy autonomy, competence, and relatedness at an institutional level. The DaD should foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness by ensuring independence in their major institutional decisions and regular overhauling of programmes with the ever-changing discourse of education and life skills. The example of DaD has recognised role of life skills training to promote social change among participants, however it is important to understand social change as a prolonged process. To facilitate transformative social change, it is significant for students to apply life skills training beyond the four walls of their educational institutions long after the training sessions are over.

Critical Reflection

The case study aimed to look at the role played by NGOs in scaling up and mainstreaming innovative practices of imparting life skills education within the larger educational set up. The NGO operates in the urban setting of Bengaluru in India, gradually introducing the model to other parts of the country. The NGO sector has developed new approaches towards quality and sustainable learning, promoting child-centred teaching-learning process. The approach adopted by Dream a Dream has emphasised on multiple life skills concepts, reinforcing them through inventive techniques. Effectiveness of childhood interventions fosters motivation, which in turn satisfies the needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness by learning life skills as established through the evidence base.

For scaling up the interventions of NGOs, innovations should be encouraged to move from micro to macro level of implementation. Creation of enabling structures and institutional capacity through partnership with governments is critical in mainstreaming life skills education to reach a wider audience. Successful models have evolved in the form of institutional partnerships to promote the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education between government and NGOs (Jagannathan, 2001). While NGOs are normally associated with small projects and limited outreach, tapping their potential to support life skills education programs will strengthen cooperation with governments in a macro setting. The goal of bringing life skills education to the forefront cannot be fulfilled by NGOs alone; a sustainable and enduring link with governments will contribute towards achieving the desirable goal (Blum, 2009).

In the case of Dream a Dream, three state governments in India have strategically partnered with the organisation to design their non-cognitive skills curriculum for the public schools (Dream a Dream, 2019). The state of Delhi collaborated with DaD on the 'Happiness Curriculum', promoting mindfulness and the WHO framework of ten core life skills. They also have successfully executed skill building and facilitation techniques for teachers in the form of 'Master Trainers' program in Delhi. In the states of Jharkhand and Karnataka, life skills approach is being implemented in the state teacher training programmes and the academic curriculum (Dream a Dream, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Acquiring socio-cognitive and emotional coping skills is a key aspect of human development and pivotal to basic survival (Griffith, 1988). It has shown to have impact on human behavior and functioning; acknowledging these skills and promoting desirable behaviors lead to improved critical thinking, communication, problem solving and collaborative skills. Life skills can be applied to various aspects of life as recognised by the UNICEF and WHO (Yadav & Iqbal, 2009). The case study of Dream a Dream addresses the main research question of the role of NGOs in promoting life skills among children from disadvantaged backgrounds and how it translates knowledge, attitude, and mindset into actual abilities. The success stories of Seema and Pallavi further describe the transformative role of life skills in facilitating social change. The need of the hour is to conceptualise life skills as capabilities for students to thrive and adapt to the changing world in their lived realities (Kennedy, et al., 2014). Capabilities that allow students to navigate through challenges at pivotal junctures of life in diverse contexts.

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