3.4.6 LIFE SKILLS

The World Health Organisation (WHO) published the document 'Life skills education in schools' in 1993, which contains a list of all those skills (abilities, competences) that one needs to learn in order to relate to others and to cope with the problems, pressures and stresses of everyday life.

The basic idea is to help each boy or girl acquire that knowledge, those ways of being that will help him or her become a person, a citizen, a responsible worker, a participant in social life, capable of taking on roles and functions autonomously, able to cope with the vicissitudes of existence.

These are 'social and relational skills that enable young people to deal effectively with various situations; to relate with self-esteem to themselves, with confidence to others and to the wider community (from family, school, group of friends and acquaintances, to the society they belong to, etc.).

The 'core' of 'life skills' consists of the following skills and competences:

- *Decision making:* we make a good decision when we weigh up the different possibilities we have and the consequences that may follow. A decision is never good in absolute terms, but is good in relation to a specific context and oneself. A good decision takes into account the complexity of the human being, of oneself with: one's priorities, goals, strengths and weaknesses, values, culture and emotions; and the context: the people with their goals, values, needs; the relationships between people and the emotional atmosphere; the environment: objects, spaces, weather, etc. ... the culture.
- *Problem solving:* Problem solving means finding effective solutions to a problem situation keeping in mind the context and the people involved, including oneself. Effective problem solving means satisfying both rational and practical needs as well as relational and emotional ones.
- *Creative thinking*: creativity is about thinking of possible alternatives, having original ideas for solutions, getting out of difficult situations or behavioural patterns that block us. In this context, creativity becomes synonymous with: ability to find alternatives, curiosity, original ideas, variety of interests. Defined in this way, creativity is very useful in problem solving, decision making, allows one to find original alternatives in difficult situations and can be an excellent antidote to stress.
- *Critical thinking*: Critical thinking consists of being able to analyse information, situations and experiences objectively, distinguishing reality from one's own subjective impressions and prejudices; it means recognising the factors that influence one's own and others' thoughts and behaviour and for this reason it helps one to remain clear headed in making choices.
- *Effective communication*: communicating effectively means knowing how to express oneself in any situation with any interlocutor both verbally and non-verbally (facial expressions, voice and posture), clearly and coherently with one's state of mind.

Communicating effectively means ensuring that the message that I (the sender) wish to communicate to the other (the receiver) arrives in a way that can be understood, remembering that there may be 'background noise', i.e. there may be interference both external (actual noise, disturbed telephone line, etc.) and internal (emotions, thoughts that interfere with the expression and understanding of the message). Therefore, it is necessary to take into high consideration the signal I receive from the other person, the feedback, that is: listening to the words and observing facial expressions, voice, posture and words, to check if my message has arrived.

- *Interpersonal relationship skills*: it helps to relate and interact with others in a positive manner, to be able to create and maintain friendly relationships that can have a strong bearing on mental and social well-being. This ability may be expressed in terms of relationships with family members, helping to maintain an important source of social support; it may also mean being able, if appropriate, to end relationships in a constructive manner.
- *Self-awareness*: Self-awareness has to do with KNOWING YOURSELF. Being aware means being able to identify: one's strengths, one's weak areas, one's way of reacting to situations, one's preferences (e.g. in which situations am I comfortable and in which ones am I not?), one's desires, one's needs, one's emotions.

Emotional awareness is the basis for good self-awareness and consists of being able to recognise the emotional signals of one's body and to name the emotions one feels that 'inform' us about our preferences, tastes and needs.

- *Empathy*: is the ability to put oneself in the shoes of others, i.e. to recognise and share their emotions. Using empathy means understanding how the other person feels not only with your head, but also with your heart and belly. Active and interested listening is the basis for good empathy. Feeling empathy can help improve social interactions e.g. in situations of cultural or ethnic differences.
- *Managing emotions* involves recognizing emotions in ourselves and in others; being aware of how emotions influence behaviour and being able to respond to them appropriately. Managing one's emotions does not mean controlling them, but using them as tools to act, without getting overwhelmed or carried away by emotions, i.e. re-acting. Managing one's emotions makes one a master of oneself, because it allows us to remain clear headed, effective without losing one's mind: it means choosing one's behaviour, thus being intentional in our choices by assessing their effects on ourselves and others.
- *Stress management*: it consists of recognizing the sources of stress in daily life, understanding how they 'touch' us and acting to control different stress levels. Managing stress means returning to a state of psychophysical well-being, finding strategies to change the environment or ourselves, i.e.: thoughts, emotions, habitual reactions.

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