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## **An Interface: How do I Overcome Challenges to Justify and Communicate Claims to my Educational Knowledge and the Educational Influence of my Practice?**

Swaroop Rawal

### **Abstract**

A living-educational-theory of professional practice can be constructed from a practitioner's enquiry of the kind: How do I live my values in practice? In this paper, I discuss the long struggle I experienced while I tried to draft the life-skills educational policy for the Ministry of Human Resource and Development, India. Through a systematic recreation of events, and my actions and reflections on the experience I seek to show my personal transformation.

I was a part of a group of people, who had participated in the life-skills education *Chintan Shivir* (workshop), after which the Government involved the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The interface was not congenial. I believe how faculty members engage in curriculum development is related to their understandings of curriculum and their teaching and research experiences. However, their values and work ethics play an important part; therein lay the conflict. In this account, I am also asserting my right to question the academic competence of the 'system'.

How well did I deal with conflict situations? How persistent was I in maintaining my goal and vision? Could I adjust and adapt my action plan? This article deals with how I confronted the 'system' and tried to create change. An important aspect of this experience is that of my learning and transformation. Reassessing my assumptions and challenging them enabled me to transform my understanding and act on my renewed perspectives and become a more socially responsible thinker.

**Keywords:** Creativity; Hope; Living educational standards of judgement; Forms of power; Relationally-dynamic epistemology; EJOLTS' 10th Anniversary edition.

## Prologue

It [was] written in rage and love, without which there is no hope. It is meant as a defence of tolerance – not to be confused with connivance – and radicalness. It is meant as a criticism of sectarianism. It attempts to explain and defend progressive postmodernity and it ... reject[s] conservative, neoliberal postmodernity. (Freire, 1998, p. 10)

What rage? What love? What hope? What is it that keeps me, unshaken, to my personal beliefs? What is it that keeps me persistent? The *Bhagavad Gita* (Glossary) says:

Perform those actions that are obligatory, for action is better than inactivity. No accomplishment is possible, in a state of inertia; complete inactivity, even prevents basic survival. For the progress of our own soul, we should embrace the duties that help elevate and purify our mind and intellect. (ch. 3, v. 8)

However, sometimes it is difficult to keep up the struggle and when that happens I am reminded of what Dewey termed as the, “inertia of habit” (1938, p. 272) and I then re-examine my values, which suggest that my practice even in a struggle will yield positive results and if I do not act, if there is inaction, I will get only hopelessness and despair. Hope encourages me to persist and struggle to attempt the impossible (Ralston, 2011).

## Introduction

### **The workshop and the process of creating a life-skills education curriculum and policy**

On the 6th and 7th of November 2017, The Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), India had organised a two-day National ‘*Chintan Shivir*’ (Workshop) to bring together key stakeholders from Government, NGOs (glossary) and the private sector to deliberate on the five key areas of school education, *i.e.* (i) Digital Learning, (ii) Physical Education, (iii) Life-skills Education, (iv) Value Education and (v) Experiential Learning. Over the course of the two days a total of 157 organizations/experts made their points *via* discussions and presentations, and finally presented the MHRD with a set of recommendations.



**Images 1 & 2:** At the National level *Chintan Shivir* (Workshop) in New Delhi

### Reflections

Writing this paper has been very difficult. I procrastinated; I wrote, read, deleted, rewrote and finally put it together like a jigsaw puzzle. In addition, through the workshop experience and through the writing of the paper I felt elation, discomfort, uncertainty, frustration and anguish. I sometimes grew in size and was sometimes reduced to a tiny midget. Peoples' words or actions sometimes belittled me or made me proud of my actions; and more often than not I was scaffolded by my practice and my educational responsibility to the children and teachers of my country.

All along I tried to realize the power and tenacity of my truth-seeking capacity; I questioned the competence of officials, administrators and other 'experts', understood the political bias holding fast my values of 'originality' and educational creativity.

This paper was a difficult one to write because it deals with a lot of sensitive issues related to education in India; I do not at anytime wish to embarrass or shame anybody, but merely want to show the situation as it is. I think that is one of the reasons I was not sure if I really wanted to put it all down in black and white. Thus, I read my reflections and the mails exchanged between the key players and myself, the curriculum, and the recommendations numerous times to determine whether this story really needed to be told. However, when I looked back at the pictures of the children and the teachers I work with, I finally decided I had to hold this conversation.



**Images 3 & 4:** My little pre-school students



**Image 5:** My student-teachers from Government schools in Maharashtra

The telling of this account brought on a fresh difficulty. Shaping the episodes of a vivid experience into a narrative, and ensuring it is meaning-making, is challenging. I believe “...experience is not a simple succession of ‘actions’ and ‘behaviour’, which can be directly observed; it requires us to engage in a process of introspection leading to self clarification” (Winter, Buck & Sobiechowska, 1999, p. 186). I therefore needed a flexible format, which could include my experiences, my retrospective commentary, my critical reflections, my self-clarification and also support the epistemology of my personal practice, holding that difficult balance between ‘the personal’ and ‘the academic’.

This narrative covers a time frame of approximately ten months and much happened in that period. So, instead of merely retelling the story in one go and then critiquing my experience, I have broken the story into parts and at every important step reflected on that particular episode. The heading of the main story is, *The workshop and the process of creating a life-skills education curriculum and policy*; and after every important episode I have articulated my difficulties, reflections, self-enquiry and/or my personal transformation.

I acknowledge the influences of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Living Theory Research as a way of Life* (Whitehead, 2018) on my personal, professional and social life. Seeing that education is a value-laden activity, it is very difficult to separate the personal from the professional.

*Dharma* is the first word in the *Bhagavad Gita*: it refers to the cosmic law, which created the ordered universe from chaos; it is also applied to other contexts, including human behaviours and ways of living that prevent society, family and nature from descending into chaos. This includes the concepts of duty, rights, religion and morally-appropriate behaviour. The *Bhagavad Gita* says all beings must accept their *dharma* for order and harmony to exist in the world. If an individual is following their *dharma*, they are pursuing their truest calling, serving all other beings in the universe by playing their true role.

The spiritual and practical principle of the *Bhagavad Gita* helped me to look inwards. “Elevate yourself through the power of your mind, and not degrade yourself, for the mind can be the friend and also the enemy of the self” (ch. 6, v. 5). The *Bhagavad Gita* (ch. 4, v. 34) also recommended: “Learn the truth by approaching a guru. Inquire from him with reverence ... Such an enlightened person can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth.”

The meaning of *Guru* is ‘one who dispels darkness of ignorance’. *Gu* means ‘darkness of ignorance’ and *Ru* means ‘one who removes’. Another meaning for *Guru* is ‘One who reveals the *Guri* (target) to the disciple’. Reading my *guru* – Jack Whitehead’s – works and my conversations with him and the editorial board of EJOLTS, gave me a sense of purpose, pushed me on, and made me realise certain actions are meant to be carried out and should be carried out unwaveringly.

## My Living-Educational-Theory

Humility, pridelessness, non-violence, tolerance, simplicity, approaching a *bona fide* spiritual master, cleanliness, steadiness and self-control; renunciation of the objects of sense gratification, absence of false ego; ... accepting the importance of self-realization, and philosophical search for the Absolute Truth – all these I thus declare to be knowledge, and what is contrary to these is ignorance. (*Bhagavad Gita*, ch.13, vs. 8–12)

Living Theory acknowledges that, “education is a value-laden, practical activity” (Whitehead, 1989, p. 4). Whitehead and McNiff (2006) suggest that we can often be a “living contradiction” if we do not experience the living-out of these values in our practice. In this paper I am trying to show how I have lived out my values of democracy, inclusion, dialogue, love and “Humility, absence of pride, nonviolence, tolerance, simplicity, approaching a *bona fide* spiritual master, steadiness and self-control; renunciation of the objects of sense gratification, absence of false ego” (*Bhagavad Gita*, ch. 13, vs. 8-12), through the descriptions and explanations of a quest to achieve knowledge, excellence in curriculum-drafting and policy-making.

The dilemmas I faced during the workshop and through the processes of creating a life- skill education curriculum and policy were:

- How do I live my values in practice?
- How do I work with other practitioners that have all the acceptable information/knowledge but their application is incorrect?
- How do I maintain a dialogic relationship and a collaborative dialogue with participants who do not honour these values?
- How do I honour my voice and yet not commit *hubris*?
- How do I justify and communicate claims to my educational knowledge and the educational influence of my practice?

### Reflections

Some see the soul as amazing, some describe it as amazing, and some hear of the soul as amazing, while others, even on hearing, cannot understand it at all (Bhagavad Gita, ch. 2, v. 29).

This story started in November 2017 and still continues. At every step I had to defend my values and my concept and understanding of what life-skills education is and should be. A few of us at the workshop felt education, especially life-skills education, was a mission and not a money-making business. My opinion was validated very quickly: as time progressed, members of the life-skills *Chintan Shivir* (workshop) group (CS group) dropped out one by one, until only a handful remained. Most of them dropped out because they felt there was nothing to gain by continuing the debate or that nothing would come out of this process; many felt it was a waste of time. A small number of us could not abandon this process, simply because we believed this was the opportunity we had been wanting for nearly 20 years and, if we did not use this chance, we would lose the opportunity of a lifetime. To us, the soul or the spiritual, emotional, intellectual energy which drive us told us we had to keep on trying for the good of our children.



**Image 6:** The tribal children who were re-engaged with schooling with the help of life-skills through drama class



Image 7: My students in Gujarat

## The Process of Creating a Life-Skills Education Curriculum and Policy

After the workshop, on the January 2, 2018, the participants were invited to a meeting by the MHRD and were advised to lend a hand to create an actionable roadmap for life-skills education. It was at this meeting that the participants of the workshop were introduced to a new player, Director Curriculum, NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training); this was someone who had not participated in the workshop but was a member of NCERT, the most important educational organisation in India.

I greeted the inclusion of this player with mixed feelings, especially since she had not participated in the workshop and was not clued-in to our recommendations. My feelings were acknowledged by the others in the CS group. Our fears were validated in the meeting with the Chief Secretary of MHRD, when the Director of the National Curriculum Council of Educational Research and Training negated some of the most important recommendations (see Appendix One). These rejections threw the discussions we had carried out so far into a tailspin. However, she ended the meeting by saying that, if the Chief Secretary insisted, then she would be obligated to work on the life-skills education. That was not a hopeful beginning for drafting a curriculum that was projected to change the future of education for the children of India.

### How do I live my values in practice?

My living-theory suggests that the values I live by make my practice and my life a deeply moral and spiritual activity. They reflect my power as a human being to make choices and decide which actions are morally binding. I experience a concern when my values are not lived fully in my practice (Whitehead, 1998) and try to improve the situation so as to harmonize my values and actions.

Identifying which learning processes trigger significant shifts in children's learning, attitudes and behaviour, has been the objective of Government, UN agencies and also many

NGOs. So much of the national resources, both money and time, are spent trying to form the so-called 'new education policy'. Nonetheless, there is a tendency to ignore work carried out at the grassroots level by practitioners, teachers and educators in the classroom. "East looks west and west looks east and yet there is a learning crisis in global education" (World Bank, 2017). The World Development Report (2018) says: "*Learning to Realize Education's Promise* argues that, without learning, education will fail to deliver on its promise to eliminate extreme poverty and create shared opportunity and prosperity for all." In spite of *Education for all* (Dakar, 2000), *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB, 2001), the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2015) and *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA, 2000), millions of children cannot read, write or do basic mathematics.

This learning crisis is widening social gaps instead of narrowing them. Children from economically vulnerable backgrounds, social minorities and girls, who are already disadvantaged by their circumstances, reach young adulthood lacking in the most basic life-skills.

Here was an educational opportunity that could be the game-changer. Life-skills education could be the factor that would potentially change the existing situation in education in India in a significant way. How could I let anybody trivialise my practice, originality and educational creativity and call it insignificant? If I did not stand up for what was wrong, I would be acting in contradiction to my values. I would be an absconder.

### **The Process of Creating a Life-Skills Education Curriculum and Policy – continued**

The following meetings were difficult and distressing. We faced many stumbling blocks and obstacles. The first was the entry of additional outside players, who joined in the curriculum-drafting in spite of not having participated in the workshop. They were the new resources-people sent to represent the NGOs that had participated in the workshop and also the ones invited by the Curriculum Director, for example, a member of UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). This meant we had to start the whole process from scratch; we had to defend the CS groups' recommendations in spite of them already having been accepted by the MHRD. This defeated the idea of the national-level workshop; additionally it was a waste of resources.

The British Council sent a different representative, someone who was not clued-in to the recommendations of the workshop. In addition, she only came for one meeting and after that no one represented the British Council in the future meetings.

With the member of the UNFPA, the CS group had a unique problem; she had set ideas, far removed from the recommendations made at the workshop. UNFPA has been assisting the Government of India since 1974 to provide family planning and health services, advance reproductive health and rights and improve maternal health. UNFPA works with adolescents and adults in the field of sexual and reproductive health and have an Adolescent Education Program (AEP) in place. I will not go into the merits of the AEP as it is outside the scope of this paper. However, I will say that they have been trying to pass it off as a life-skills education program, which it is not, because their expertise is in the area of sexual and reproductive health. The mandate of UNFPA, as established by the United Nations Economic



and Social Council (ECOSOC), is to build the knowledge and the capacity to respond to needs in population and family planning; to promote an awareness of the problems of population; to assist the population's problems through means best suited to the individual countries' needs; to assume a leading role in the United Nations system in promoting population programmes. Another issue we had with the UNPFA is that they work with adolescents and adults, and the life-skills education's recommendation was to reach children from pre-schools to secondary schools.

### **How do I Work with Other Practitioners That Have all the Acceptable Information/Knowledge but Their Application to Knowledge is Incorrect?**

First, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) did not deem it fit to participate in the workshop and only joined in to draft the curriculum. Secondly, NCERT invited 'outsiders' to the board, totally circumventing the *Chintan Shivir* (workshop). Moreover, one of their invitees was from UNFPA; this agency does little or no work in life-skills education and their main thrust is to provide family planning and health services, advance reproductive health and rights and improve maternal health.

Most importantly, the National Council of Educational Research and Training disagreed with most of the recommendations of the CS group made by saying:

- Life-skills education cannot be skills-based and can only be taught through a content based curriculum.
- Life-skills education cannot be taught in a stand-alone curriculum as the skills are generic.
- There is no need for a new curriculum as the National Council of Educational Research and Training already has one.
- There is no need for another web portal for life-skills education, as the National Council of Educational Research and Training has already done a large amount of work in life-skills education.

Additionally, she recommended that life-skills education should be taught using participatory, process-oriented, non-judgmental approaches, but no mention of experiential learning (H&W Curriculum, Appendix 2 and Appendix 8). I do not agree with these views.

Life-skills are the psychosocial competencies and abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO, 1999). Life-skills include social, emotional, and thinking skills – such as self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, decision-making, and understanding and managing emotions. The term 'psychosocial' refers to the dynamic relationship between the psychological and social dimensions of a person. The psychological dimension includes the internal, emotional and thought processes, feelings and reactions; the social dimension includes relationships, family and community networks, social values and cultural practices. Psychosocial skills address both the psychological and social needs of individuals, families and communities.

Skills are abilities. Hence it should be possible to practice life-skills as abilities. Unlike motor skills and basic intelligence, executive function and decision-making, skills are not innate but learned, trainable and can be improved with practice (Diamond, 2013; Rawal, 2006).

The questions then are: Is it correct to relate life-skills to generic skills? And, how should life-skills be taught? A generic skill is one which can be applied across a variety of subject domains and takes longer to acquire than domain-dependent (subject-area) skills (Reigeluth, 1999). I believe that life-skills should not be grouped with generic skills. WHO (1999, p. 5) reports, "Life-skills are generic skills, relevant to many diverse experiences throughout life. They should be taught as such, to gain maximum impact from life-skills lessons".

My argument is that this recommendation is not so straightforward, because I believe when we teach the core life-skills – for example, empathy and effective communication skills – they are domain-specific (dependent). I believe that "all educationally relevant knowledge acquired during instruction is, and only is, domain-specific" (Tricot and Sweller, 2013). A few examples are:

- Communication study is a separate subject in most Business Management courses.
- Understanding the Self is a compulsory subject in all the B.Ed/M.Ed courses in India created by National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE p. 4; p. 22).
- Social/emotional competence and increasing empathy are the core subjects for an evidence-based classroom program, called *Roots of Empathy* (Santos R, Chartier, Whalen, Chateau, & Boyd, 2011; Cain & Carnellor, 2008).

So, the argument whether life-skills are generic or domain-dependent is not relevant. What is applicable is the way we learn life-skills or how they should be taught. "Domain-specific (dependent) learning mechanisms are traditionally invoked when learning phenomena are observed that are not seen in other domains. By contrast, domain-general learning mechanisms are invoked when parallel learning phenomena are observed across distinct domains" (Saffran and Thiessen, 2008, p. 69). Executive function like cognitive flexibility and inhibitory control, decision-making, problem-solving and so on, should be taught using methods of learning that are domain-general.

Most life-skills are interconnected and that creates a misunderstanding about how life-skills should be taught and, therefore, they are treated as generic skills. I believe life-skills should be taught using domain-general learning theories of development. Domain-general learning theories suggest that, although learning different types of new information may be processed in the same way and in the same areas of the brain, different domains also function interdependently. Because these generalized domains work together, skills developed from one learned activity may translate into benefits with skills not yet learned (Greiff *et al.*, 2014). For example, when I started teaching the lesson *Understanding and Managing Emotions*, my students learned by, "expressing and appraising emotions of self or others" (Rawal, 2006). Empathy is understanding and appreciating the other person's feelings and communicating meaningfully with the person. Therefore, when they had learned about emotions, my students had already begun tacitly to understand the vital

concepts of empathy. A year and a half later when they learnt empathy, they benefited from their prior learning in the *Understanding and Managing Emotions* class.

Teaching techniques that integrate active learning need to be incorporated into a life-skills educational programme to increase its efficiency (Rawal, 2006). As life-skills education is a dynamic process, it cannot be learned or enhanced on the basis of information or discussion alone. Orley (1997; WHO, 1999) writes, that expecting children to change their behaviour merely by providing information is impracticable. I recommend that it must also include experiential learning. I believe that experiential learning plays an important role in the acquisition of life skills. Experiential learning is ‘whole person’ learning: it functions integratively, combining the affective and behavioural dimensions with the cognitive domain always found in the educational process (Hoover, 1974).

Surprisingly the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) curriculum missed out experiential learning. In a meeting on April 14, 2018, we had a discussion on experiential learning:

Swaroop: Experiential learning is a great way to teach life-skills...perhaps the most important method.

NCERT: Yes. But experiential learning is applicable in all the five *Chitan Shivir* topics.

Swaroop: (I was very surprised to hear this) How? What!

NCERT: We need experiential learning in Digital Learning also.

Representative of an NGO: (Seeing my shocked expression) She means as in ‘doings’.

Swaroop: But that is not experiential learning! You cannot have experiential learning in digital learning *per se*.

NCERT: (uninterested) Oh! So, you tell me what experiential learning is?! Is using the keyboard not experiential learning?

Swaroop: Activity-based learning is not experiential learning. Many people mistake activity, ‘the doing of things’, with experiential education. Experiential education is actually an internal process by which people can ‘wake up’ and construct a coherent world on one’s own quest for freedom and transformation by integrating a variety of perspectives and vantage points (Greene, 1978, p. 173).

This is an example of a discussion with National Council of Educational Research and Training that made me question their academic competence (also see comments in H&W Curriculum, Appendix 2).

## Reflections

My point here is not really about the application of the National Council of Educational Research and Training and anybody’s knowledge concerning life-skills education, but it is about my values. I believe that, “what we become, what we make of ourselves, depends upon what we do in our lives. And what we do cannot be simply routine and mechanical; it must be conscious, interested, committed” (Greene, 1978, p. 26). How could I keep quiet and agree with them when I knew they were incorrect? How could I keep quiet when I knew their actions would ultimately affect all the children of India? I could not but be

concerned about the casualness of their approach, especially considering they were drafting the National policy that would affect the educational lives of 401,479,872 young people under 15 years old.

### **How do I Improve my Practice? How can I be the Scientific Discoverer Polanyi Described as a Person who is Responsible, Committed and Makes full use of Tacit Powers?**

Learn the truth by approaching a guru. Inquire from him with reverence ... Such an enlightened person can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth. (*Bhagavad Gita*, ch. 4, v. 34).

The soundness of my work was questioned again and again and now I saw the necessity to make my tacit understanding explicit. I had to demonstrate and justify my claim to understanding as educational knowledge. Whitehead (in Newman, 1999, p. 9) suggests that 'ways of knowing' and 'knowledge' which is central to research, draw attention to the importance of 'validity' in the sense of testing the validity of a claim to knowledge. The idea of validity is important to action researchers who seek to make significant and original contributions to knowledge (Whitehead, in Newman, *op. cit.*). The question of proving the validity of my understanding now became important.

I began to understand what was missing in the explanations of my theoretical account of life-skills education so far. In this paper I am trying to make my tacit knowledge explicit and thereby resolving the contradiction I experienced; I am making a contribution to life-skills education by producing a valid explanation of how life-skills education can be learnt and taught.

The first step I took was to draft a curriculum framework for life skills. I did not wish to abandon 'validity'; therefore, my validation group and critical friends played an important role as my peer debriefers. They evaluated the efficiency of my framework. For a solo researcher, 'peer debriefing' is an important process. According to Guba (1981, p. 85), peer debriefing, "provides inquirers with the opportunity to test their growing insights and to expose themselves to searching questions". Feedback from my peers also helped me to improve the quality of my enquiry (see Appendix 3).

### **The Process of Creating a Life-Skills Education Curriculum and Policy - continued**

The CS group spent approximately six acrimonious months working with the National Council of Educational Research and Training. There were serious differences between us, as one group consisted of social workers and the second group of educators. The Director of Curriculum invariably began the meeting and left it to the social workers to continue the drafting of the curriculum. Sadly, we could not reach any kind of conclusion. Feeling frustrated, and with the permission of some of the educators in the CS group, I sent a curriculum drafted by me to the Chief Secretary who emailed it back to the CS group as an anonymous curriculum asking them to have a look and comment.

## How do I Honour my Voice and yet not Commit Hubris?

Lord Krishna said: 'The mind is indeed very difficult to restrain. But by practice and detachment, it can be controlled. *Yog* [see glossary] is difficult to attain for one whose mind is unbridled. However, those who have learnt to control the mind, and who strive earnestly by the proper means, can attain perfection in *Yog*. This is my opinion'. (*Bhagavad Gita*, ch. 6, v.35-36)

A few of the members of the CS group had strong differences with the National Council of Educational Research and Training (Appendix 4); however, in this paper I will only refer to my dilemmas. I could see the life-skills education curriculum (see Appendix 8) drafted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training going astray. At the same time I believed my curriculum to be stronger. I experienced professional anguish in this situation and therefore most of the time I kept quiet. I did not share my work in the meetings, not because I believed myself to be better than the rest, although I definitely believed my curriculum was far superior to any of the work shared, but because I felt badly cornered. It was as if my life-affirming energy was being sucked out.

In hindsight, I feel I was sometimes wrong: I should have spoken up; I should have shared my curriculum. But in my defence I will say I have suffered many unethical practices, especially by recognized NGOs and their members misappropriating works of research and passing it off as theirs (Hindustan Times, 2018).

For example, a member of an NGO partner with Save the Children, India, who had attended my life-skills workshop in 2010 and with whom I was in communication, had told me in 2014 that he had a photocopy of my life-skills education module created for the Government of Gujarat, Child Protection Unit.

Another reason I did not share my curriculum in the meetings was because I did not want the team to tamper with it. My fears were well-founded because after the Chief Secretary shared my curriculum, the CS group actually made so many changes that I could not recognize it as my own.

## The Process of Creating a Life-Skills Education Curriculum and Policy – Continued

Finally, the CS group was called for a meeting on the May 23, 2018, and the Chief Secretary's room felt like a war room: the NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) Team and the CS group were sitting on opposite sides of the table. Neither group was ready to listen to the other. To most of the CS group members' surprise, the NCERT had presented the life-skills recommendations and roadmap to the government in the form of another document called *The Curriculum on Health and Wellness of School-Going Adolescents Under the aegis of School Health Programme of Ayushman Bharat* (henceforth referred to as the *H&W Curriculum*. See Appendix 2).

The Ayushman Bharat scheme is the National Health Scheme which hopes to cover over 10 crore (a crore is 10 million) poor and vulnerable families. In addition, the Chief Secretary informed us that he had already signed the curriculum drafted by the NCERT

(National Council of Educational Research and Training). When I pointed out that this focussed only on adolescents and we had recommended that the life-skills education be created for all age groups, the Chief Secretary advised me to work with the NCERT and carry out the additions.

My journey home from Delhi to Mumbai was in great distress; the night was spent in a state of dispiritedness. Everyone I knew or had worked with were overwhelmed with my pursuit and kept telling me to relinquish my claims. However, there were important reasons which I could not ignore.

Before dawn I started working on the NCERT curriculum. I did this because I value the idea of inclusion and an authentic dialogue even when there are differences and disagreements. I strongly believe that my 'truth' is not the only 'truth'; I had to listen to the others. To be open and inclusive to others I believe that we need to continually critique and reconstruct our knowing because as Thayer-Bacon (2010) suggests we are fallible knowers. And so I started reading the H&W curriculum.

### **How can I Work with People who want to find the 'Magical Solution' Without owning the process? How can I Challenge Someone's Construction of Knowledge when I Know it Epitomizes Misconstruction?**

If, however, you refuse to fight this righteous war, abandoning your social duty and reputation, you will certainly incur sin. People will speak of you as a coward and a deserter. For a respectable person, infamy is worse than death. (*Bhagavad Gita*, ch. 2, vs. 33-34)

To my disbelief I found the curriculum absolutely un-workable. It was a poorly drafted curriculum (Appendix 2). There are approximately 124 comments made by me, though some may be repetitions. However, the most important issue is the use of term 'life-skills education' used in a 'Health' document; in addition, life-skills education is barely touched on. I will try to explain in details taking one point at a time.

If we take the title of the H&W Curriculum into consideration – see above – we understand that this is a curriculum aimed at enhancing Health and Wellness. Quoting the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition: "health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity", the authors have linked health and wellness to life-skills enhancement (p. 2; pp. 5–26). However, the curriculum is in all actuality not targeted towards life-skills, and the term 'life-skills' is just used as a token gesture.

Let us skip the word 'school' and for a moment and go to the term 'adolescents'. The authors have created this important health document for School-going adolescents (studying in Grades 6–12) missing out non-school going adolescents and children, missing out early childhood, childhood and pre-adolescent years! My question is – do children not need a health and wellness enrichment programme? Why are the children studying in Pre-school and Primary school ignored in this curriculum? The answer to this may be that the co-creator of this curriculum is the member of a United Nation's sexual and reproductive health agency, and this agency works with adolescents and adults making it apparent that they

think adolescence is “a critical phase in the life-span” (H&W Curriculum, p. 1) and not early childhood nor pre-adolescent years. I believe that early childhood development, – that is, between 0–8 years of age – should be the priority area of work, as it is a window of opportunity to improve health and equity (WHO, 2018; UNICEF).

Returning to the term ‘school-going’, 84 million Indian children don't attend school (Varma, 2016), yet the most important health document of India in 2018 focuses only on school-going adolescents. What about the children and adolescents not in school? What about *their* health and wellbeing? The argument could be that this is a school health programme, at the same time the Government has planned to run this program in wellness centres. In that case should the H&W Curriculum not be designed for out-of-school children and adolescents, making it more inclusive, broad and far-reaching?

I take this discussion a step further by discussing the form of the H&W Curriculum. The term ‘curriculum’ refers to the lessons and academic content taught in a school or in a specific course or program. Depending on how broadly educators use the term, curriculum typically refers to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which include the learning objectives they are expected to meet, the units and lessons that teachers teach, the assignments and projects given to students, the books, materials, and readings used in a course, and the tests, assessments, and other methods used to evaluate students’ learning.

The design and goals of any curriculum reflect the educational philosophy of the educators who developed it (Curriculum, 2015). In the H&W Curriculum there is no educational philosophy except a fuzzy reference to “the transformational potential of education”, “flexibility in terms of content, context and processes”, a “rights-based perspective” (H&W Curriculum, p. 2) and so on. For example, the curriculum claims to be anchored in a rights-based perspective (p. 3) and makes mention of The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 and The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006; however, there is not a single reference to Children’s Rights and The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The teaching methods section first has a heading, entitled, *Suggested transaction methods and methodologies*. I have no disagreement with the word ‘method’. I have a disagreement with the word ‘methodology’.

Method is a way of doing something – the tools, processes, or ways by which one would teach in the classroom. On the other hand, methodology still refers to method but with an extra ‘ology’ at the end of the word. Ology means the scientific of study of a particular subject or branch of knowledge (Cambridge Dictionary). Therefore, ‘methodology’ as a combination of ‘ology’ and ‘method’ is essentially a study of methods. A methodology provides the theoretical analysis of the methods and principles associated with contribution to knowledge being made in the research (Whitehead, 2018, p. 159).

Additionally, for teaching methods the H&W curriculum has a list of arbitrary suggestions like case studies, comics, engaging parents, theatre, survey, role-reversals, and situation management. I use the word ‘arbitrary’ because I do not understand which teacher might use case studies or survey-methods to teach in the classroom. This is a classic example of “the mismatch between the problems faced by teachers inside the classroom and training

programmes designed by administrators and teacher educators (who have very little idea of a multi-grade class)” (Ramachandran, 2005, p. 2412).

Assessment and evaluation has been completely missed in this curriculum. The content outline reads more like a list of everything under the sun and there is no developmental process or a logical sequencing.

Furthermore, in one column, labeled *life-skills enhanced*, the authors have randomly mentioned the names of life-skills. Some are core and some peripheral. I believe this column was inserted merely because the ministries had insisted that life-skills must be included in the curriculum. There are many issues concerning life-skills in this document. For example, there are terms such as *life-skills* and *core life-skills* missing as well as *learning outcomes* and so on. The details can be read in the H&W Curriculum (see Appendix 2). However, as a case in point, I will mention a few errors that I perceive and my thoughts on them:

- In the *Life-Skills Enhanced* column, there are Self-awareness, Self Esteem, Empathy and Critical Thinking (p. 5). However, self-esteem is the overall subjective and emotional evaluation of one’s own worth. It is not an ability, therefore not a life-skill.
- Theme 3: *Gender Equality* (Understanding and Challenging Stereotypes & Discrimination) empathy is not referred to and negotiation, which is not a core life-skill, is listed (p. 9).
- Theme 4: *Interpersonal Relationships* – Interpersonal relationships are listed as a life-skill (p. 11). How can relationships be a skill?
- Theme 5: *Nutrition, Health and Sanitation*; the life-skills learned include only critical thinking, creative thinking and decision-making (pp. 13–14) There is no mention of managing emotions, problem solving, communication skills or understanding of self. They are missing because the author does not realize or think the other core skills are relevant or important. If they are missing in the content they will be missed in the learning. Whereas self-awareness is an important aspect of nutrition and sanitation.

Students should be able to clearly identify problems related to personal hygiene, sanitation and their causes. They should be able to ask for help and advice, and seek information when needed, as well as give their opinions, share information and communicate. Furthermore, they should be able to identify personal eating habits that may either contribute to, or limit, good nutritional self-awareness.

### **How do I Maintain a Synergy and a Dialogic Relationship with Participants who do not Honour These Values?**

Therefore, the doubts which have arisen in your heart out of ignorance should be slashed by the weapon of knowledge. Armed with *yog* (see glossary) ... stand up and take action (*Bhagavad Gita*, ch. 4, v. 42).

Whenever the whole CS group met and discussed life-skills education, my mind was filled with doubts concerning my knowledge and practice. That was another reason why I could not honour my voice. I reflected that the best way was to study my work again. As Whitehead (2018) suggests, I too wanted to engage in a dialogue with others, but most importantly I wanted to engage in a dialogical process with my own work. I wanted to do



this to question my practice, and because I perceived my work lacked clarity. I believed what was clear to me was not clear to others. I wanted to negate the contradiction I experienced when I claimed clarity and lucidity. I therefore studied my work and the H&W curriculum to solve the contradiction – to negate the negation. Lomax (2000) suggests that the intra-subjective dialectic is the process through which one's own understanding is transformed as one engages in the struggle to represent what one means.

After May 23, 2018, I sent an email (see Appendix 5) to the Chief Secretary and the NCERT with my comments on the H&W curriculum and the NCERT's life-skills curriculum (see Appendix 8) with my comments. The mail was also forwarded to all members of the CS group. By doing so, I tried to engage in an inter-subjective dialogue. "The inter-subjective dialectic is an engagement with the imagined or actual responses of others, so that the 'struggle' is transformed into 'argument' " (Lomax, 2000). However, I was unsuccessful here as I received no reply from NCERT or from the Chief Secretary. I suppose they did not want to engage in a dialogue with me concerning these curriculums.

### **The Process of Creating a Life-Skills Education Curriculum and Policy – Continued**

Now a new battle had started. I decided I would take my issues to the two ministries concerned, the MHRD (Ministry of Human Resource Development) and the MoHFW (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare – see Appendix 6). I had to include the MoHFW as the *Ayushman Bharat* policy was supported by them. The issues I raised were:

- This is not a Life-skills Education Curriculum, because it barely touches life-skills education as life-skills is the not the focal point. It is more of a health document than a life-skills education curriculum. Additionally, it is badly drafted.
- Accordingly, I appeal to you either to request the National Council of Educational Research and Training to re-draft the curriculum or remove all the references to life-skills, given that it is not a life-skills education document.
- It does not touch pre-school and 6–8 years of the most important school years, nor is it skills-based.
- Because, if we retain the title *life-skills education*, the experts in life-skills education like WHO and NIMHANS etc. will find a million flaws in this curriculum and ridicule it.
- Additionally, if the MHRD and MoHFW implement this curriculum (which is not a life-skills education curriculum) the MHRD will not implement the more beneficial life-skills education policy in schools because we cannot have two life-skills education policies for one country.
- If we use this curriculum as life-skills education we will be doing a grave injustice to the children of our country.

I received immediate replies from both the ministries. However, they kept referring me back to the National Council of Educational Research and Training. I took exception to this and wrote to the ministers. Here is an excerpt from the email communication from me to MHRD and MoHFW, dated August 16, 2018:

I really don't understand the exercise of referring back to the National Council of Educational Research and Training every time; they are not going to agree that their curriculum is weak.

You yourself have stated in May 2017, that 'NCERT needs to be updated' and that it is at least 10 years behind. And I do not understand the need of the implementation of the life-skills education *Chintan Shivir* when only a few chosen life-skills education experts were invited by NCERT to participate in the drafting of the curriculum. Moreover, the National Council of Educational Research and Training and their chosen 'friends' did not participate in the *Chintan Shivir*. In his earliest speech (Jun 8 2014) the Hon PM Narendra bhai said: "the nation needs to think big and focus on skill, scale and speed to revive India's growth story" and called for substantially enhancing the "input of intellectual think-tanks for better policy frameworks".(See

[https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/36257813.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/36257813.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst))

Please sir, I do not see it happening if we have to keep going back to The National Council of Educational Research and Training. We all know how incompetent they are. Please sir, do something.

This time I received a telephone-call from the Director of The National Council of Educational Research and Training, informing me that the Minister had called and requested him to get in touch with me and sort out the problem with the H&W curriculum. To cut a long story short, as it stands the curriculum is not yet included in the policy, even though the *Ayushman Bharat* scheme was officially launched on August 25, 2018. I am in the process of overcoming this contradiction by carrying on a focused and intentional conversation with MHRD (Mail to the Director- National Council of Educational Research and Training, see Appendix 7). The partial success I have got is that the MHRD has compelled the National Council of Educational Research and Training to review the H&W curriculum.

### **How do I Overcome Challenges to Justify and Communicate Claims to my Educational Knowledge and the Educational Influence of my Practice?**

Besides, considering your duty as a warrior, you should not waver. Indeed, for a warrior, there is no better engagement than fighting for upholding of righteousness. (*Bhagavad Gita*, ch. 2, v.31)

I am a Living Theorist and I take a living-educational-theory to be an individual's explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live, work, and research (Whitehead, 2018, p. 160). These explanations are the value-laden practical principles I use to give meaning and purpose to my life (Whitehead, 2013, p. 33). I believe the self is in continuous formation through choices of action, learning, and also in the act of resolving the negation of values one experiences through actions in daily life and in practice.

I have valued, and continue to value, democracy, equity, inclusion, dialogue and love. Throughout the *Chintan Shivir* and the writing of the curriculum and creating a road map for the MHRD, I experienced a lack of collective responsibility to 'education', a want of academic freedom, justice, truth, and a lack of work ethics. Seeing this, I was obliged to take action

because if I did not I would be acting in contradiction to my values of justice, excellence in practice, truth, love and hope. Greene (1978) says that it:

... seems eminently clear that the freedom of wide-awakeness has to be expressed in intentional action of some kind. The one who drifts, who believes that nothing matters outside of his or her own self-preservation, can hardly be considered to be free (p. 153).

The only claim I make is to have educated myself by continuously trying to answer the question: How do I live my values and, by doing so, how do I improve my practice?

I believe that creating a good society involves committed action by everyone in the society, a collective responsibility. I hold a vision that enables teachers to be the creators of what they teach and that, if as teachers we abandon this vision, we will be pretenders. Lindsey (2000, p. 272) suggests that a teacher is a 'pretender' when s/he fails to recognize the role teachers play in supporting unjust social structures in education. My values in education and my principles as a member of a "caring profession" (Nodding, 2012), restrain me from turning a blind eye to the chaos created by the 'system' in drafting the life-skills education curriculum. My actions were positioned in my belief that I have to make a personal commitment to assist in creating a good social order.

Throughout the *Chintan Shivir* and the writing of the curriculum I believe I have reinvented myself and transformed. Revisiting my practice and learning from each re-examination has transformed and empowered me. The criticisms I faced challenged me to reconstruct and sharpen my curriculum for life-skills-education and to answer questions I had left unanswered in my doctoral work. It was, "wonderfully motivating in its ability to bring home a painful or a beautiful truth", and helped me, "appreciate and even bring about [some of my] most meaningful moments as teachers" (Mitchell & Weber, 1999, p. 232, in, Whitehead, 2018). See video 1.



**Video 1:** [Meaningful moments as teachers](#)

<https://ytcropper.com/cropped/sJ5bf67aeed3dd7>

I have transformed myself through this act of persistence. Transformation for me is a deep personal change. A personal transformation requires individuals critically to examine their own beliefs, assumptions, and rules, take risks and reinvent themselves (O'Sullivan, Morrell & O'Connor, 2002). Transformation (Marsick and Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow, 1991) is the conceptual domain of consciousness-raising, improving, becoming free from the past,

undoing twisted views of the world, rising above self-limitations, being orientated towards the future, becoming enlightened, unfolding spiritually, metaphorically like butterflies emerging, and all this through an inner awakening, creating a stirring of discontent that generates a drive in a person to enlarge their understanding and appreciation of life.

In my persistence to find truth and justice and at every step when I tried to resolve the contradictions of values in my actions, I was inspired by one very significant verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* (Ch 2, vs. 47–48):

You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction. Be steadfast in the performance of your duty...abandoning attachment to success and failure. Such equanimity is called *Yog*.

On the November 7, 2018, I received an Honorary Doctor of Letters, from the University of Worcester in recognition of my work with the vulnerable and marginalised children in India. One of my guests was able to take the following video of my 6:54 minute response to the award in Worcester Cathedral.



**Video 2:** [Response to the award of Honorary D.Lit. in Worcester Cathedral](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLlygbX8DCY)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLlygbX8DCY>

Here are the details published in the University of Worcester Award Ceremonies for 2018:

Dr. Swaroop Sampat-Rawal

Former Miss India and Bollywood superstar, Dr. Swaroop Sampat-Rawal, is an alumna of the University of Worcester, who travels across India training teachers, while also campaigning to get more children, such as those in tribal communities or street children, into the classroom.

Dr. Sampat-Rawal studied for a Ph.D. in Education at Worcester, graduating in 2006, and since dedicated herself to community development and advocacy within the field of education. She aims to help children overcome adversity and become resilient. She is a member of the Governing Council for 'Save the Children', whose mission is to create lasting change in the lives of disadvantaged children in India. She developed a training curriculum for *Jeevan Kaushalya* (life-skills education), an adolescent girls project in Gujarat, which was a drama-based life-skills intervention implemented across 5,400 villages in six districts reaching out to 38,000 young members of the village-level adolescent girls' network.

Below is the 13-minute video that includes both the introduction to the award of the Honorary D. Litt. and my response which is given separately above.



**Video 3: [Introduction and Response to the Award](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7GpmNK5OhU)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7GpmNK5OhU>

I believe that I have worked with a continuing passionate commitment to education without feeling complacent. I can watch the video with a feeling of equanimity of Yog, with the feeling of being recognised for who I am and what I am doing with values that I believe carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

## Glossary

- *Bhagavad Gita*: The name, *Bhagavad Gita*, a Hindu sacred text, means *Song of the Lord*. It is a narrative that is told through a dialogue between Arjuna, a warrior, and his charioteer, Lord Krishna. Scholars believe it probably dates somewhere between the 5th and 2nd century B.C.E. The *Bhagavad Gita* is composed of 18 chapters with 700 verses. It is said that the study of the *Bhagavad Gita* will lead to an understanding of God, truth, purpose and liberation. One of the unusual aspects of the *Bhagavad Gita* is its battlefield setting, which may seem strange for a spiritual text. However, commentators regard the battlefield as a metaphor for 'the war within'. This could be the struggle for self-mastery, or the war against the ego or ignorance. All references from the *Bhagavad Gita* were retrieved from <https://asitis.com/> November 21, 2018.
- *Bhagavad Gita* (ch. 3, v. 8) means Chapter 3, Verse 8 in the *Bhagavad Gita*.
- *Yog*: The theory of *Yog* is to go beyond the mind. According to the *Bhagavad Gita* and from a religious point of view, this could mean the connection of human spirit (soul) with the divine. A more secular meaning is the union of body, mind and spirit or the soul's connection with its origin. For those who believe in non-dualistic philosophy, *yog* would simply be the achievement of that stillness and concentration of the mind that leads the spirit (soul) to higher realms.
- *Chintan Shivir*: workshop

- CS group: *Chintan Shivir* group
- MHRD: Ministry of Human Resource Development
- NGO: Non-Government Organisation
- LSE: life-skills education
- NCERT: the National Council of Educational Research and Training
- NCTE: The National Council for Teacher Education, which sets guidelines in respect of minimum qualifications for a person to be employed as a teacher in schools or in recognised institutions. It is an advisory body for the Central and State Governments on all matters pertaining to teacher education, with its Secretariat in the Department of Teacher Education of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).
- Chief Secretary: is the highest ranking bureaucrat
- UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund
- H&W Curriculum: Curriculum on Health and Wellness of School Going Adolescents Under the aegis of School Health Programme of Ayushman Bharat'
- MoHFW : Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

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## Appendix 1

Life-Skills Education Recommendations General

[http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/Life-skills\\_education-recommendation-general.docx](http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/Life-skills_education-recommendation-general.docx)

## Appendix 2

Curriculum on Health And Wellness of School Going Adolescents Under the aegis of School Health Programme of Ayushman Bharat' – H&W Curriculum with my comments

<http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/health-and-wellness-under-the-agies-of-ayushman-bharat-14-may-2018-2.docxrevised-1.docx>

## Appendix 3

Comments:

Radhakrishnan Nair – [http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/Life-skills\\_education-curriculum-framework-radhakrishnannair.docx](http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/Life-skills_education-curriculum-framework-radhakrishnannair.docx)

Moira Laidlaw - [http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/Life-skills\\_education-curriculum-framework-moira.docx](http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/Life-skills_education-curriculum-framework-moira.docx)

## Appendix 4

Letter from a CS group member to NCERT:

<http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/letter-from-a-cs-group-member-to-ncert.docx>



## Appendix 5

Mail to Education Secretary May 24, 2018:

<http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/mail-to-education-secretary-24.5-2018.docx>

and

<http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/mail-2-edu-off-24.5.2018.docx>

## Appendix 6

Mail to MHRD and MoHFW:

<http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/dear-sir-aysuhman-bhartan-cert-and-Life-skills education.docx>

## Appendix 7

Mail Director NCERT:

<http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/dear-sir-directorncert.docx>

## Appendix 8

NCERT's Life-Skills Curriculum:

<http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/lse-curriculum-28-2-2018.doc>

## Appendix 9

Mail to New Education Secretary:

<http://www.spanglefish.com/makingmagic/documents/ejolts/mail-to-new-edu-sec aug-2018.docx>