

UNDERSTANDING LIFE SKILLS
For Life Skills Education in VET



ABSTRACT

In the current Vocational Education and training (VET) systems, the curricula are mainly focused on knowledge, skills and competences which are essential in the labor market as they increase productivity and efficiency.

Many researches have long highlighted that employers also value other skills and competences: students need to know how to behave on workplace, how to share information, how to work in a team, how to manage their work time, etc.

These capabilities - which are commonly referred to as soft skills - to distinguish them from hard skills - are commonly already recognized as essential indices and criteria for both the well-being and success of workers and recruiters in the world of work.

But purely occupation-specific skills (both hard and soft) are not enough for vocational education and training (VET) learners to adapt to new life scenarios and to prevent risky situations. And they are not sufficient to achieve the other two tasks of VET beyond employability: developing young students' growth as people and promoting active citizenship.

It therefore becomes necessary to provide students with other key skills: Life Skills, understood as Skills for Life.

The present paper can be considered an information package with background, rationale and understanding of the 10 Life Skills for education in VET system, the skills that according to the World Health Organization (WHO) help individuals to deal and manage their lives in a healthy and productive way.

It is a tool to deepen their descriptions, the presentations of their importance, the methodologies with which they can be learned, the methods and systems with which they develop in the individual.

Keywords: Life Skills – VET learning processes – Deal Challenges – Employability, Personal development, Active citizenship

The "fundamental core" of Life Skills consists of:

- Ability to solve problems (**Problem solving**): knowing how to face and resolve various problems in a constructive way. Significant problems that are left unresolved can cause mental stress and give rise to accompanying physical strain;
- Ability to analyze and evaluate situations (**Critical thinking**): knowing how to «analyze information and experiences objectively, evaluating advantages and disadvantages, in order to arrive at a more informed decision», recognizing and evaluating the various factors that influence attitudes and behavior, such as peer pressure and the influence of the mass media;
- Ability to express oneself (**Effective Communication Skills**): knowing how to express oneself in every situation both verbally and non-verbally in an effective and appropriate way to one's own culture, declaring opinions and desires, but also needs and feelings, listening carefully to others to understand them, asking for help if necessary;
- Ability to make decisions (**Decision making**): knowing how to decide in a conscious and constructive way in different life situations and contexts; knowing how to elaborate in an active way the decision-making process can have positive implications on health through an evaluation of the different options and the consequences they imply;



- Ability to deal flexibly with any type of situation (**Creative thinking**): knowing how to find original solutions and ideas, a skill that contributes to both decision making and problem solving, allowing you to explore possible alternatives and the consequences of the different options;
- Ability to interact and relate to others in a positive way (**Interpersonal Relationships Skills**): knowing how to establish constructive relationships with others, “knowing how to create and maintain meaningful relationships” but also “being able to interrupt relationships in a constructive way”;
- Ability to read inside oneself (**Self-awareness Building Skills**): knowing oneself, one's character, one's needs and desires, one's weak points and one's strong points; it is the indispensable condition for stress management, effective communication, positive interpersonal relationships and empathy;
- Ability to understand others (**Empathy**): knowing how to understand and listen to others, identifying with them “even in unfamiliar situations”, accepting and understanding them and improving social relationships “especially with regard to ethnic and cultural diversity”;
- Ability to manage tensions (**Coping with Stress**): knowing how to know and control the sources of tension “both through changes in the environment or lifestyle, and through the ability to relax”;
- Ability to recognize one's own emotions and those of others (**Coping with emotions**): being aware of how emotions influence behavior to be able to manage and regulate them appropriately.



INDEX

INTRODUCTION	5
ABOUT THE CL4L PROJECT.....	5
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION.....	6
PROJECT RESULTS.....	6
STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT.....	7
LIFE SKILLS OVERVIEW	8
WHAT IS A COMPETENCE?.....	8
HARD SKILLS VS SOFT SKILLS.....	8
SOFT SKILLS AND LIFE SKILLS.....	9
SKILLS FOR LIFE.....	11
THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION.....	11
METHODOLOGIES IN TEACHING LIFE SKILLS.....	12
DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS TRAININGS.....	13
THE 10 LIFE SKILLS	14
PROBLEM SOLVING	14
WHAT IS IT.....	14
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT.....	14
UNDERSTANDING THE “PROBLEM SOLVING” LIFE SKILL.....	14
FINAL REMARKS.....	16
CRITICAL THINKING	17
WHAT IS IT.....	17
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT.....	17
UNDERSTANDING THE “CRITICAL THINKING” LIFE SKILL.....	17
FINAL REMARKS.....	19
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS	20
WHAT IS IT.....	20
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT.....	20
UNDERSTANDING THE “EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION” LIFE SKILL.....	20
FINAL REMARKS.....	24
DECISION MAKING	25
WHAT IS IT.....	25
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT.....	25
UNDERSTANDING THE “DECISION MAKING” LIFE SKILL.....	26



FINAL REMARKS.....	29
CREATIVE THINKING	30
WHAT IS IT	30
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT.....	30
UNDERSTANDING THE “CREATIVE THINKING” LIFE SKILL	30
FINAL REMARKS.....	33
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	34
WHAT IS IT	34
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT.....	34
UNDERSTANDING THE “INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP SKILLS”	34
FINAL REMARKS.....	37
SELF AWARENESS BUILDING SKILLS	38
WHAT IS IT	38
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT.....	38
UNDERSTANDING THE “SELF-AWARENESS BUILDING SKILL”	39
FINAL REMARKS.....	42
EMPATHY	43
WHAT IS IT	43
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT.....	43
UNDERSTANDING THE “EMPATHY” LIFE SKILL.....	44
FINAL REMARKS.....	45
COPING WITH STRESS	46
WHAT IS IT	46
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT.....	46
UNDERSTANDING THE “COPING WITH STRESS” LIFE SKILL	47
FINAL REMARKS.....	48
COPING WITH EMOTIONS.....	49
WHAT IS IT	49
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT.....	49
UNDERSTANDING THE “COPING WITH EMOTIONS” LIFE SKILL.....	49
FINAL REMARKS.....	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SITOGRAPHY.....	53



INTRODUCTION

This publication aims to help spread a concept that has never been as current and urgent as today, in line with what is supported by the World Health Organization: the concept of Life Skills.

Life Skills are 10 adaptive and positive behavior skills that allow individuals to effectively deal with the demands and challenges of daily life, promoting everyone's potential for health and well-being.

Unfortunately, these skills are underdeveloped and not explicitly taught today in current educational programs, due to the low importance given to them in school systems. In fact, institutions use to only emphasize those study programs in which students acquire technical skills and competences for what will be their future job.

However, it is becoming increasingly clear that, in various parts of the world, young people are no longer sufficiently equipped with the skills necessary to face the growing demands and pressures they encounter in their development and growth path.

These gaps emerge and result in young people's inability to manage their emotions, make decisions, solve problems, communicate effectively, be empathetic to others, etc.

It seems that the traditional mechanisms through which these skills were learned no longer work adequately. We are faced with a world in constant and rapid transformation, with complexity in multiple areas, created by the profound environmental, political, social and cultural changes of recent decades, as well as by the aftermath produced by the Covid-19 pandemic.

All this ends up increasing fear of the future and hindering the full realization of oneself and one's abilities. Young people especially, having few tools to deal with this complexity, risk feeling overwhelmed and helpless, remaining stuck in their studies and developing difficulties in multiple areas, at work and in relationships.

It is on the basis of these premises that a new project co-financed by the European Erasmus+ program was born, called "Creative Learning for Life" (CL4L), which serves as the framework for this paper.

ABOUT THE CL4L PROJECT

Our project aims to support students enrolled in vocational education and training (VET) programs in identifying and acquiring Life Skills through a more creative way of learning. Non-traditional teaching methods are used. The role of the individual teachers acquiring these creative competences is an important pillar in the project. The other pillar emphasizes understanding the concept of Life Skills and applying them through creative forms of teaching and training.

Applying Life Skills influences the way a person feels about themselves and others and can increase one's productivity, purpose, self-esteem, and self-confidence. Therefore, Life Skills can be considered as 'skills for life,' since they are relevant to many different experiences in life. In the CL4L project, we assume that students acquire these skills in such a way that they have an impact on their personal and professional lives.

Creativity has become more and more important in VET. Schools and teachers need to adapt to rapidly changing contexts. Teachers need to change their way of educating students, developing new types of services, and encouraging new ways of learning by their students. VET providers need to change the



way they deliver and facilitate education in a context where traditional education may not be effective anymore. Our project wants to develop creative teaching methods of teaching life skills with the aim of increasing students' competences.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

We believe in cooperation in an international/European context. Working together with partners from different countries with all their own expertise and experiences, learning from each other, makes us stronger. There for the project has 3 groups of partners each with its own role and responsibilities.

1. VET-PROVIDERS

In total four VET providers from The Netherlands, Slovenia, Estonia, and Italy are participating.

2. EXPERTS IN LIFE SKILLS

Two experts in Life Skills from The Netherlands and Italy are participating.

3. EXPERTS IN CREATIVE TEACHING

Two experts in Creative Teaching from Italy and The Netherlands are participating.

In 16 Transnational Meetings (6 onsite and 10 online) the partners join to work on the project results. These meetings are the core of the project. Here partners work on the coproduction of train the trainer sessions for teacher and trainers to train Life Skills for their own students and of a self-assessment instrument for students to measure already existing competences. In between the meetings the partners study concepts, develop and test the self-assessment tool and to develop, train and test methods for Creative Teaching.

PROJECT RESULTS

This document about the importance of assessing and acquiring Life Skills by students in VET is one of the 3 Intellectual Outputs of the CL4L project.

At the end of the project, the other following results will be available:

- INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 2

Self-Assessment instrument for assessing Life Skills for students in VET

This instrument which will ask students to answer questions and respond to statements. The answers will be analyzed automatically, and the instrument will provide feedback on performance on 10 Life Skills. The analysis can be carried out on individual level and on groups level. Teachers can use the outcome of the analysis for designing a tailor-made Life Skill development program for their students.



- INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 3

Compendium of successful Creative Teaching and training methods in Life-Skills Development for students in VET

This is an overview of methods of Creative teaching for all 10 Life Skills that can be used by everyone who wants to train those in his or her own classroom.

STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT

The structure of the present document consists of two parts;

the first chapter aims to introduce the general concept of Skills and to clarify the differences between Hard Skills, Soft Skills and Life Skills. Of the latter, in particular, a general overview of what they are, the areas to which they belong and how they are interconnected is presented. Their importance in the educational field is also underlined, with a brief mention of the useful methodologies to be implemented to actively involve students and encourage the process of acquiring these skills.

In the second chapter, each of these 10 skills is explored in detail, giving the reader the opportunity to obtain more information and understand their meaning and importance.

For each of them, in fact, a paragraph will be dedicated to "what it is", one to "why it is important", a third paragraph will be dedicated to "a better understanding" of the skill and some "final remarks" will be ultimately reported.

The text focuses on examining and deepening the whole range of Life Skills: Problem solving, Critical thinking, Effective Communication Skills, Decision making, Creative thinking, Interpersonal Relationship Skills, Self-awareness Building Skills, Empathy, Coping with stress and Coping with emotions.



LIFE SKILLS OVERVIEW

WHAT IS A COMPETENCE?

Nowadays competences have a very important place within society, they are increasingly in demand in the world of work and school.

But what is competence?

In the Recommendation of the European parliament and of the council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, a competence is defined as *“the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy”*.

In particular, the European Commission, in the 2016 document “A new skills agenda for Europe” affirms that:

“Skills are a pathway to employability and prosperity. With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs and can fulfill their potential as confident, active citizens. In a fast-changing global economy, skills will to a great extent determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation. They are a pull factor for investment and a catalyst in the virtuous circle of job creation and growth. They are key to social cohesion. [...] Skill acquisition and development are essential for the performance and modernization of labor markets in order to provide new forms of flexibility and security for job seekers, employees, and employers alike.”

Moreover, we have to take into consideration that the digital transformation of the economy is reshaping the way people work and live. New ways of working are affecting the types of skills needed, including innovation and entrepreneurship. Many sectors are undergoing rapid technological change and the skills that once worked are no longer enough. High skills enable people to adapt to unforeseen changes.

HARD SKILLS VS SOFT SKILLS

Categories of competences that are often used are the so-called Hard Skills and Soft Skills.

Hard skills are specific competencies, skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to perform a specific task or role. They can be learned through education, training and professional development. Usually, they are technical and easily measurable.

Soft skills are personality traits, social competencies and transversal abilities used to perform interpersonal activities and unique tasks.

The term “Soft Skills” arises in the context of work and new job-related skill needs.



SOFT SKILLS AND LIFE SKILLS

When we talk about Soft Skills, we are mainly referring to Communication, Adaptability, Resilience, Leadership, Time Management, Teamwork, Emotional Intelligence, etc.

These capabilities are now essential indices and criteria for both the well-being and the success of workers and recruiters, but they are varied and heterogeneous.

However, there is a range of basic cognitive, emotional and social skills that enable people to function competently both individually and socially and that, before being directed to a performance task (work or relationship), are the core skills related to life as a whole. They are very precise and delineated skills, called: "Life Skills".

All these "Life Skills" are a factor of success, not only in the working environment, but also in all the other daily contexts with which we come into contact throughout our existence.

There is a renewed interest in these Life Skills. This new interest focuses on the well-being of the individual as a whole. To date, much still needs to be done to implement these Life Skills throughout an individual's growth path, with a view to Life-Long Learning.

The core set of Life Skills identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) consists of 10 skills, that can be grouped according to 3 areas:

1. COGNITIVE AREA:

- Decision Making
- Problem Solving
- Creative Thinking
- Critical Thinking

2. EMOTIONAL AREA:

- Self-Awareness Building Skill
- Coping with Emotions
- Coping with Stress

3. SOCIAL AREA:

- Effective Communication Skills
- Interpersonal relationship Skills
- Empathy

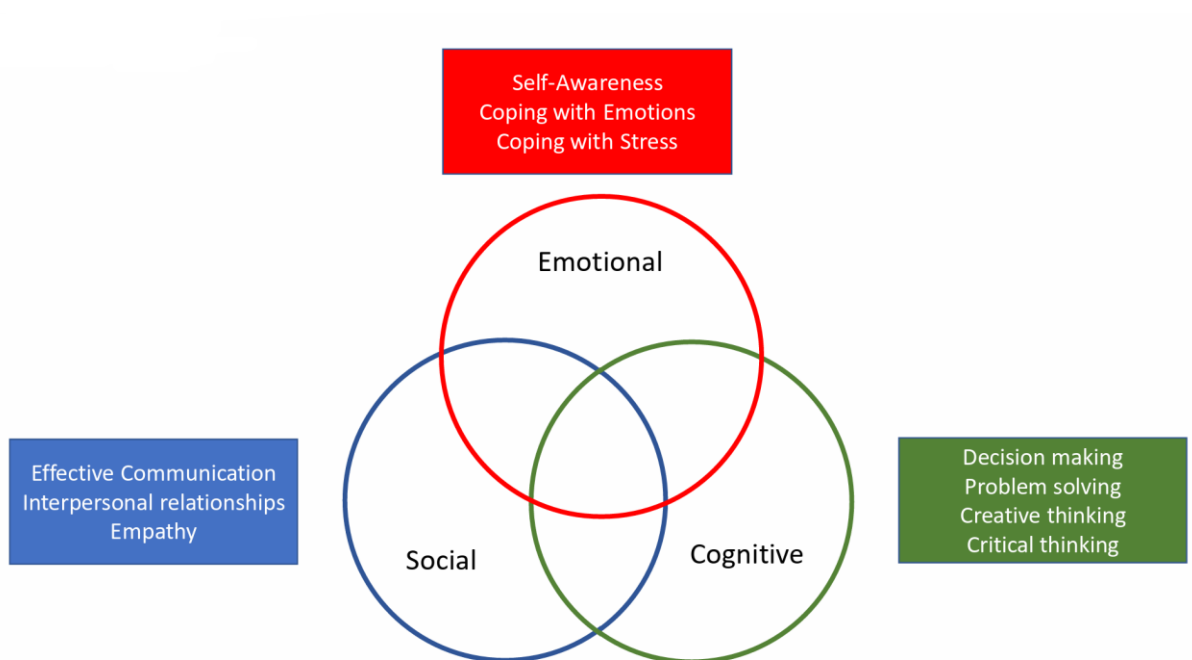
Of course, this division has purely explanatory value. Life skills are deeply interconnected and complementary. They overlap with each other in many aspects.

The improvement of a specific skill, for example the ability to coping one's emotions, also reverberates in other areas, such as empathy, communication skills and relational skills.

Another example, the ability to solve problems and to plan possible solution strategies also depend on the ability that the person has to decide, to formulate a judgment regarding whether or not to implement an action (decision making). In fact, decision-making processes can concern immediate objectives, but also objectives that are distant in time and which are usually indirect, as they presuppose preparatory activities arranged according to a hierarchical or temporal order (for example



choosing a certain course of study in order to then carry out a certain profession). Furthermore, decision-making processes can concern problematic decisions of a conflictual nature in which multiple alternatives must be evaluated or problematic aspects of not only a practical but also relational nature must be resolved. It is also important to have a good critical ability which allows you to examine situations and information freely without internal or external conditioning (critical thinking) and good doses of creativity, as a creative person, starting from known data, through a process of inducing induction, by adapting and assimilating what is available, manages to produce new and innovative solutions. We can therefore see how the different Life Skills are closely related and together they contribute to allowing the individual to behave effectively.





SKILLS FOR LIFE



WHO states that Life Skills have an important role to play in the promotion of health in its broadest sense, in terms of physical, mental and social well-being. In particular, where health problems are related to behavior, and where the behavior is related to an inability to deal effectively with stresses and pressures in life, the enhancement of Life Skills could make an important contribution. This is especially important for health promotion at a time when behavior is more and more implicated as the source of health problems. The most direct interventions for the promotion of psychosocial competence are those which enhance the person's coping resources, and personal and social competencies.

An effective acquisition and application of Life Skills:

- makes individuals capable of transforming knowledge, attitudes, and values into actual abilities - i.e. "knowing what to do and how to do it".
- enables individuals to behave in a healthy manner, given the desire to do so and given the scope and opportunity to do so.
- can influence the way we feel about ourselves and others, and equally will influence the way we are perceived by others. Life Skills contribute to our perceptions of self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION

The Life Skills identified above are dealt with here in so far as they can be taught to young people as abilities that they can acquire through learning and practice.

In school-based programs for young people in VET, this can be done by the teaching of Life Skills in a supportive learning environment.



First of all, it is important to distinguish Life Skills for psycho-social competence from other important skills that we hope young people in VET will acquire as they grow up, such as reading, numeracy, technical and practical "livelihood" skills. These and other skills are usually recognized as abilities that young people should learn, either in schools, at home or in their communities. Life Skills are transversal skills for lifelong learning and are being promoted so that they can gain recognition as essential skills that should be included in the education of young people, as they are often taken for granted. However, with changes in many cultures and lifestyles, many young people in VET are not sufficiently equipped with life skills to help them deal with the increased demands and stresses they experience. They seem to lack the support required to acquire and reinforce them. It may be that traditional mechanisms for passing on life skills (e.g. family and cultural factors) are no longer adequate considering the influences that shape young people's development. These include media influence and the effects of growing up in situations of cultural and ethnic diversity. Also, the rapid rate of social change, witnessed in many countries, makes the lives of young people, their expectations, values, and opportunities very different from that of their parents.

This is at the same time the great opportunity and responsibility of those who educate.

As adolescence is a delicate period of development and young people are considered as the productive members of a society, Life Skills education aims to provide them with strategies to make healthy choices that contribute to a better and meaningful life, to prevent drug abuse, teenage pregnancy or school drop-out, and to promote mental well-being and cooperative learning.

Ideally, this learning should take place at a younger age, before negative patterns of behavior and interaction have become established.

METHODOLOGIES IN TEACHING LIFE SKILLS

The methods used in the teaching and training of Life Skills build upon what is known of how young people learn from their own experiences and from the people around them, from observing how others behave and what consequences arise from that behavior. This is described in the Social Learning Theory developed by Bandura (1977). In this theory, learning is considered to be an active acquisition, processing and structuring of experiences.

In Life Skills education and training in schools, students are actively involved in a dynamic teaching and learning process.

The methods used to facilitate this active involvement include:

- group and subgroup work
- peer education
- brainstorming
- role play
- games and debates

A Life Skills lesson may start with a teacher exploring with the students what their ideas or knowledge are about a particular situation in which a Life Skill can be used. The students may be asked to discuss the issues raised in more detail in smaller groups or with a partner. They may then engage in short role play scenarios or take part in activities that allow them to practice the skills in different situations - actual practice of skills is a vital component of Life Skills education.



Finally, the teacher will assign homework to encourage them to further discuss and practice the skills with their families and friends.

DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS TRAININGS

Designing and implementing a life skills program will require the introduction of teaching methods that may be new to teachers, and the success of the program will depend on the efforts to include practical training in participatory learning methods in teacher training colleges.

The potential gains of life skills education are so far reaching (impact on student's health, better relationships, fewer reports of classroom behavior problems, improved academic performance, improved school attendance, less bullying, fewer referrals to specialist support services, etc.).



THE 10 LIFE SKILLS

PROBLEM SOLVING



WHAT IS IT

Problem-solving is the process of identifying and resolving conflicts or problems. It involves breaking a problem down into its component parts, thinking about possible solutions, and then choosing the best one. Problem-solving is an important skill for everyone because it helps us identify and solve problems in our lives, work, and communities.

Scientifically, problem solving is a process to bring an opportunity for a positive act. It helps a student to solve their problems by using creative and critical thinking.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

Problem solving skills and the problem-solving process are a critical part of daily life, both as individuals and members of groups. This skill enables us to deal constructively with problem that arises in our live. It is helpful to settle an issue, solve a trouble or a conflict. It enables the person to get out of the uncomfortable situation and accomplish their need without using anger, coercion, defiance, aggressive behavior, or force.

Developing and refining these skills through training, practice and learning can provide the ability to solve problems more effectively and over time address problems with a greater degree of complexity and difficulty.

Being able to find solutions to the problems that occur every day also allows us to feel more satisfied and effective, releasing the mental and psychophysical stress that the important problems left unresolved can cause in the long run.

UNDERSTANDING THE “PROBLEM SOLVING” LIFE SKILL

There are different problem-solving styles:

1. A social sensitive thinking problem solving style
2. A logical thinking problem solving style
3. An intuitive thinking problem solving style
4. A practical thinking problem solving style



- A **social sensitive thinking problem solving style** is one in which you want to find the best answer for all people involved (focusing primarily on their emotions and values, and you are most comfortable when they add emotion to the problem situation.) You depend on what has been successful for you in the past, rather than focusing on the facts of this new issue. You try to put yourself in the other person's place so that you can identify with the person. You will solve problems based on your value system that respects other people in a situation. You are caring and want to support everyone involved in the problem. This indicates a high level of interpersonal skills.
- A **logical thinking problem solving style** involves the exploration of the problem and the effects of your environment. Using this style, you identify the problem that has occurred, explore alternatives in solving the problem, and develop a plan for solving the problem based on information. You carefully weigh the costs and benefits of the various ways to solve the problem. You gather and consider additional information about alternatives and the possible consequences of each alternative. The ultimate solution you find to the problem is based on a logical problem-solving approach.
- An **intuitive thinking problem solving style** is one in which you solve problems based on gut-level reactions. You tend to rely on your internal signals. You identify and choose a solution based on what you feel is the best possible solution for everyone involved. You do not spend a lot of time collecting facts and gathering information before you decide on a solution. This style can be useful when factual data is not available. It is important not to substitute intuition for gathering needed information to solve the problem. You often solve problems based on hunches or your *sixth sense* about the problem situation.
- A **practical thinking problem solving style** is one in which you take in information that is clear and real. You want to know what is happening in the situation. You notice what is going on around you, especially the practical realities and facts. You may overlook recurring themes, focusing instead on the concrete issues involved in the situation. You rely on and trust your previous experience in dealing with similar problems.

The Problem-Solving Process

There is no simple step-by-step process that will guarantee you a solution to every problem you encounter in your life. The problem-solving process is a search for, and implementation of, the best possible solution for a specific problem. As a problem solver, you will develop your own method for solving problems. One of the best ways of doing this is to try to use the most effective aspects of the four different styles. The following is an outline of how to integrate the four styles in the problem-solving process.

Thinking about a problem you are currently struggling with:

Step 1 – Define the problem by using **practical thinking** characteristics to see the problem situation as it is. You can do so by answering some of the following questions:

1. What or who caused the problem?
2. Where did it happen?
3. What happened?
4. When did it happen?
5. With whom did it happen?



6. Why did it happen?
7. What was your part in the situation?
8. What was resolved?

Step 2 – Consider the possibilities using **intuitive thinking** characteristics to brainstorm all possible solutions to the problem. You can do so by answering some of the following questions:

1. What other ways did you look at the problem?
2. What did you learn by information you gathered?
3. What were the connections to the bigger picture?
4. How did the other people fit into this picture?
5. What did you think caused the problem?
6. What were some possible ways to approach the problem?

Step 3 – Weigh the consequences of courses of action to resolve the problem using **logical thinking** characteristics. You can do so by answering some of the following questions:

1. What were the pros of each option?
2. What were the cons of each option?
3. What do you think would have been the outcomes of each option?
4. What was the result for each person involved?

Step 4 – Weigh the alternatives to each course of action using **social sensitive thinking** characteristics. You can do so by answering some of the following questions:

1. How did each alternative fit with your values?
2. How were the other people involved in the situation affected?
3. How did each alternative help everyone involved?
4. How did each alternative enhance positive interactions?

Step 5 – Decide which aspects of Steps 1 – 4 will be most effective in solving this problem.

Step 6 – Act on your decision.

Step 7 – Evaluate whether the problem was resolved successfully.

FINAL REMARKS

It is useful to make students aware of their way of thinking and help them gradually move towards a more flexible and positive integration of the different styles. This awareness can be created by an individual assessment of Problem-Solving-Style.



CRITICAL THINKING



WHAT IS IT

Critical thinking has been defined in many different ways. Very broad definitions include “thinking which has a purpose” or “reflective judgement”. However, these definitions are often too general to be useful to students. A useful definition of the type of critical thinking is: the kind of thinking which seeks to explore questions about information for issues which are not clearly defined and for which there are no clear-cut answers.

In order to display Critical Thinking, a person need to develop skills in:

- Interpreting: understanding the significance of data and to clarify its meaning
- Analyzing: breaking information down and recombining it in different ways
- Reasoning: creating an argument through logical steps
- Evaluating: judging the worth, credibility or strength of accounts.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

There is no doubt about the importance of the role of education to educate students to think and move away from indoctrination. Students now are different from students in past generation: in the past generation students depended on what information they receive from the teacher and read in the textbooks. Nowadays, information and data have become at the student to obtain it through multiple media: Information which is true, false and misleading. This confirms the importance of teaching Critical Thinking to students. Critical Thinking in general helps students to gain a deeper understanding of the information they receive because understanding and learning is fundamentally a Critical Thinking process. It requires the acquisition of logical and mental methods in deducing and interpreting information and ideas. Critical thinking is one of the most important types of thinking that requires attention and development for students o today.

UNDERSTANDING THE “CRITICAL THINKING” LIFE SKILL

What are Critical Thinking Skills?

Richard Paul (1988) defines Critical Thinking as reaching to the conclusion according to the objectives and knowledge, while Norris (1985) mentions it as students’ application of previous knowledge and changing it after evaluation process. Generally, Critical Thinking is a kind of ability to look at events, conditions or thoughts with a careful eye and making comments, decisions, studying on the reliability and validity of the knowledge according to standards of logic and the mind. This way of thinking ability provides the opportunity to reason the existed knowledge or situation to correct the mistakes.



Critical Thinking skills involve identification and analysis of information, indicating previous knowledge and making connections and deducing to conclusions. Shortly, the general characteristics of critical thinking can be listed as the following:

1. Reasoning and suspecting
2. Looking at situations from multiple perspectives and dimensions
3. To be open to changes and innovations
4. To look at thoughts without prejudices
5. Being open minded
6. Thinking analytically
7. Paying attention to details

Advantages of Critical Thinking are;

1. People who are critical thinkers think freely and independently
2. People don't behave without thinking
3. Individuals can state the problem explicitly.

Skills that have been practiced in the workshop Critical Thinking are:

1. Inference

An inference is a conclusion that a person can draw from certain observed or supposed facts. For example, if the lights are on in a house and music can be heard coming from the house, a person might infer that someone is at home. But this inference may or may not be correct. It is possible that the people of the house did not turn the lights and the radio off when they left the house. Sometimes, in deciding whether an inference is probably true or probably false, you will have to use certain commonly accepted knowledge or information that practically every person has.

2. Recognition of assumptions

An assumption is something presupposed or taken for granted. When you say, 'I'll be a qualified solicitor in two months', you take it for granted that you will be alive in two months, that you will pass the relevant examinations, and similar things.

3. Deduction

Deductive skills are abilities that help you use reason and logic to come to conclusions, validate information and make informed decisions about a situation. Using deductive reasoning involves considering the factual details of a situation, then using them to determine other facts.

4. Interpretation

Critical thinking has been described as an ability to question; to acknowledge and test previously held assumptions; to recognize ambiguity; to examine, interpret, evaluate, reason, and reflect; to make informed judgments and decisions; and to clarify, articulate, and justify positions.

5. Evaluation of arguments

In making decisions about important questions, it is desirable to be able to distinguish between arguments that are strong and arguments that are weak, as far as the question at issue is concerned. For an argument to be strong, it must be both important and directly related to the question. An argument is



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weak if it is not directly related to the question (even though it may be of great general importance), or if it is of minor importance, or if it is related only to trivial aspects of the question.

FINAL REMARKS

Critical thinking is one of the fundamental requirements of individual maturity, as it allows us to examine the different situations that arise in daily life with a view free from excessive internal and external conditioning. The critical capacity of adolescents is still incomplete because their cognitive abilities are in the process of being formed, but this does not mean that it is not possible to facilitate their ability to observe and analyze the factors that can lead to free and responsible thinking.



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS



WHAT IS IT

Communication is a fundamental process of transmitting information, which responds to physical, social, psychological and instrumental needs; it is an exchange of meanings between people.

In particular, Effective Communication is more than sending and receiving messages. It is the process of exchanging ideas, thoughts, opinions, knowledge, and data so that the message is received and understood with clarity and purpose. It entails sending accurate information and receiving feedback that the message has been received without distortion. Skills of coding and decoding are crucial in this process. Not using and understanding about the way the information is coded and decoded leads to misinterpretations and misunderstandings.

When we communicate effectively, both the sender and receiver feel satisfied.

This skill enables a student to express their opinions, needs and fears clearly by using both verbal communication and non-verbal expressions. It also trains the student to ask for advice and help from others in times of need.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

Communication is a central aspect of our life and an efficient tool for establishing and maintenance of good social and working relationships with others. Effective communication allows people to express themselves effectively, consistently and appropriately, knowing how to use verbal language as well as non-verbal behavior in ways that are coherent and also appropriate to different cultures and situations. On the other hand, it also allows to listen carefully and actively to others to understand them.

By delivering and receiving messages clearly, there is no room for misunderstanding or alteration of the content it is intended to convey, which decreases the potential for conflict. In situations where conflict does arise, effective communication is a key factor to ensure that the situation is resolved in a respectful manner. How one communicates can be a make-or-break factor in securing a job, building and maintaining a healthy relationship, and healthy self-expression.

UNDERSTANDING THE “EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION” LIFE SKILL

It is important to distinguish what we communicate from what others understand about us.

Communication is not about speaking what we think. Communication is about ensuring others hear what we mean.

We can distinguish between the act of listening and the art of listening:

- The act of listening has to do with the perception of sound and the sense of hearing, as well as with visual (non-verbal communication) and olfactory aspects.



- The art of listening, instead, creates an environment that allows the other person to feel listened to. Listening, in fact, means paying attention to a message in order to hear it, understand it, and physically or verbally respond to it.

Circular communication model

Communication is not something that one does to another, but a process in which subjects create a relationship, interacting with each other, and contribute together to creating the meaning of exchanges, to creating a common communicative project. Communication is therefore not linear, but the result of a circular process. The ability to produce and understand messages and therefore to interact is defined as communicative competence.

The sender encodes ideas and feelings in a sort of message, and sends it through a channel (words, writings, etc.) to a receiver. Any force that can interfere with effective communication is considered as “noise”. The noise can be external (e.g. telephone ringing), physiological (e.g. impaired hearing), psychological (e.g. internal forces that interfere with expressing or receiving the message). Feedback is the receiver's response that allows the sender to understand whether the message has been received, and to make any changes if necessary. The interaction can be represented as a verbal and nonverbal tennis match, where messages go back and forth.

It is therefore necessary to adopt a change of mindset, as well as acquire awareness, knowledge and techniques in order to learn to communicate in a more functional way with others. If we take full responsibility for the way we communicate, this will be to our advantage as it will trigger a positive change in the messages that others will also send back to us.

The 5 Axioms of Communications

In 1967 a book was published that became the basis of the theory of interpersonal communication: "The Pragmatics of Human Communication" written by Paul Watzlawick, a psychologist and communications theorist, together with a collective of scholars from the Palo Alto School in California. The focus of the book is that every behavior communicates a message and is, consequently, to be considered a communication. We communicate with gestures, with words and sometimes we do it unconsciously. In fact, lots of communication is carried on below the level of consciousness. The five axioms of communication describe the processes of communication that take place during interaction. They also help explain how misunderstandings and conflict can occur.

- Axiom 1: One cannot not communicate

As soon as two people perceive each other, they start communicating. Any perceptible behavior, including the absence of action, has the potential to be interpreted by other people as having meaning. In other words, we communicate even when we don't particularly want to.

Point of attention:

- What do you communicate with your absence of action?
- What are you telling your peers when you are quiet and not expressing your ideas?
- Do you start to communicate as soon as you are in somebody else's vision and hearing range?
- Are you really aware of when communication starts?



- **Axiom 2: Content & relationship**

Every communication has a content and relationship aspect, such that the latter classifies the former, and is therefore a meta-communication; a secondary communication about how a piece of information is meant to be interpreted.

For example, communicating with a friend is different than communicating with an acquaintance or stranger. When providing a friend with feedback, you could use words that might be considered offensive yet still have your feedback accepted quite happily. However, if you would use those same words when providing a distant colleague with feedback, you could be considered impolite and you might leave a negative impression with that person.

Point of attention:

- Are the words you're choosing proper for the context and people present?
- Are you aware of the relationship aspect within your communications?
- Are you certain that the words you use don't fall outside the level of communication you share with your listener?

- **Axiom 3: Communication is punctuated**

The nature of a relationship is dependent on the punctuation of the partners' communication procedures. In other words, Watzlawick suggested that how good or how bad a relationship is, depends on how the involved parties decipher each other's intentions, actions, or way of communicating.

In this context, punctuation refers to the point of view of the parties involved. Everyone structures the communication flow differently and therefore interprets their own behavior simply as a reaction to the behavior of the other.

For example, when you are talking to a friend, they might say something that upsets you, but you don't tell them and the next time you see them, you may act differently around them. They notice this and think you are angry for an unknown reason, so they also act awkward around you, which leaves you feeling upset.

Point of attention:

In this example, the interactions create a cause-and-effect cycle because there is no real dialogue that allows you and your colleague to see what is really happening. By understanding this axiom, you can break this communication cycle!

Communication is cyclical, which means both the sender and receiver are contributing to the conversation in a unique way.

- **Axiom 4: Digital & analogic modalities**

Human communication involves both digital and analogic modalities. The digital mode is what the person says what their words actually mean. While the analog mode has to do with how something is said or the nonverbal cues that go along with it.

We can sometimes send two opposing messages at once and this may cause misunderstandings and conflict. When a person sends a message with conflicting verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal information, the nonverbal tends to be believed.



Example: A teacher tells the student they did a good job but says it with an upset tone. They might be confused by what the teacher really means, because of their nonverbal communication. They might wonder were they being sarcastic, are they annoyed, are they upset, and they might end up feeling like they didn't really do a good job.

Point of attention:

The trick here is to be consistent. If you are confident about something, make sure you backup your words with the tone, pitch, and pacing of your voice, as well as with your body language.

- Axiom 5: Communication can be symmetrical or complementary

Interpersonal communication procedures are either symmetric or complementary, depending on whether the relationship of the partners is based on differences or parity.

Symmetric relationships are the type of relationships where everybody is equal from a power perspective, (i.e co-workers, brothers, sisters, friends, etc.), and complementary relationships are the ones where there exists some type of hierarchy (Boss-employee, father-son, Lead Developer-developer).

This is helpful to know since in symmetric relationships both parties can bring their ideas and solutions to any situation since they come from the same place, where this relationship could end badly if no limits set are set, which could lead to a power struggle between both parties.

Point of attention:

- People understand what you say in the light of the relationship of communicative power that you have recognized in a complementary reaction.
- Do not be the bearer of a message that requires a role of which you are not recognized as complementary.
- Messages that require complementary position, carried by symmetrical, generate conflict.
- Things of which we are not recognized are not understood even before they are not listened to.
- Fake news are messages without source, in which complementarity is abolished and everything is true everything is false.

Communication Styles

The way a message is accepted and interpreted is conditioned on character and style of people. Communication styles are personality traits that influence how we interact with other people. Each person has a dominant style, and our personality influences our preferred way of communicating. In 1921, the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung published the volume "Psychological Types" in which the psychological types identified by the author on the basis of his experience and research carried out over time are described.

The 4 personality types are:

- **Extroverted thinking:** prefers dealing primarily with understanding and organizing the external world. Wants everything to make logical sense and has very little patience of unproductive activities.
- **Introverted thinking:** wants the world to make sense in a logical manner.
- **Extroverted feeling:** deals with understanding others' emotions and feelings in the present moment.



- **Introverted feeling:** deals with the person's own individual feelings and beliefs.

Knowing what style characterizes us and what style the people with whom we interface have can be a compass that helps us direct our communication to make it more effective.

FINAL REMARKS

As school-age children and youth grow, self-expression becomes a very important aspect of development. They are beginning to have more sophisticated and purposeful feelings, emotions, and thoughts. It is important to encourage children and youth to share their thoughts and feelings in a healthy way. In many school-age programs, character education is being taught and communicated to children and youth in a manner that will help them develop as moral, respectful, healthy, and successful citizens. Developing this skill will significantly improve the way children and youth interact with adults, as well as with each other. Cultivating this ability also involves teaching children and youth strategies to deal with managing conflict effectively and positively.



DECISION MAKING



WHAT IS IT

Decision making is the process of identifying and selecting a choice among possible alternatives or options in different life situations, analyzing and weighing the pros and cons of alternatives and accepting responsibility for the consequences of the decision made, with confidence.

Having good decision-making skills means being able to master the phases that constitute the decision-making process.

This skill allows the student to make constructive decisions about their life, such as choosing a career or a partner, the type and quantity of food intake, etc. It teaches the importance of making decisions only after assessing different options and their effects.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

Decision making helps us to deal constructively with decisions about our lives. This can have consequences for health if young people actively make decisions about their actions in relation to health by evaluating different options and what effects different decisions might have.

Each of us, at every moment of the day, must make more or less relevant decisions. There are small decisions (what I eat today, what I do this evening, how I dress, etc.) and big decisions (what job I will do when I grow up, what values govern my life, etc.).

Ideally, important decisions should be made having the necessary skills to best implement them, in conditions not dictated by urgency and that allow for reflection. The reality is that this is not always true, and still is less in young adults, who have personal conditions that are not entirely favorable.

In fact, young adulthood is a particularly critical and complex period, characterized by substantial physical, cognitive and emotional changes rooted in the development of the brain, as well as behavioral changes associated with basic psychosocial developmental tasks. All aspects are involved: the body, social life, psychological life. In particular, young people are faced with the task of individuating from their parents while maintaining family connectedness to facilitate the development of the identities they will take in adulthood. At the same time, their brain's overactive motivational/emotional system may contribute to suboptimal decision making (Crosnoe and Johnson, 2011). As a result, many young adults tend to be strongly oriented toward peers, responsive to their environments, limited in self-control, and disinclined to focus on long-term consequences. All these elements lead to compromised decision-making skills in emotionally charged situations (Galván et al., 2006; Steinberg et al., 2008). This combination of characteristics is implicated in increased rates of risky behavior among adolescents (and young adults) compared to childhood and later life.

It then becomes the adult's task to provide the tools that can allow young people to make the right decision for themselves at that moment.

Indeed, there are different ways of making decisions:



- on impulse
- postponing the decision
- not deciding
- letting others make the decision for us
- evaluating the pros and cons and deciding accordingly

This last method is by far the most functional, but it must be taught and trained. Therefore, learning decision-making skills for students is of utmost importance.

Developing decision-making skills can:

- give people a sense of greater control over their life
- allow people to face the choices they must make in a constructive way
- be helpful in embarking on a path making fewer mistakes
- increase efficiency and self-efficacy
- help students be more independent, responsible and confident
- encourage self-exploration
- allow people to achieve personal and professional goals

UNDERSTANDING THE “DECISION MAKING” LIFE SKILL

Learning decision making skills in today's society is a big challenge. Below we will consider 5 aspects that can help us better understand this competence and its complexity.

1. What does “to decide” mean?

From the Latin “de-caedere”, the verb “to decide” means: “to CUT DOWN”. To decide it is therefore inevitable to exclude (cutting down) all the other alternatives to choose one or a few.

In order for a decision to be as correct as possible, it is necessary to evaluate all the consequences it may have in terms of costs and benefits. Having to choose between several alternatives, the choice should finally fall on the one or those that express the maximum gain with the minimum loss, even if every decision involves having to make a sacrifice.

Renunciation can be experienced as a loss, a "mourning", an often difficult and painful experience. To avoid giving up, many people avoid making a choice, but also not choosing implies a loss, the loss of the possibility of following a new path, of growing and looking to the future.

We can better explain this concept through an apologue traditionally attributed to the medieval philosopher Jean Buridan (ca. 1300-1358), called the "Buridan's donkey paradox". This apologue tells of a donkey who is both hungry and thirsty when he finds himself standing between a pile of hay and a bucket of water. He just keeps looking to the left and then to the right, as he tries to decide whether he should go for the hay or the water. He's unable to decide which one to go for and he eventually falls over dead from both thirst and hunger.



2. Why is it increasingly difficult to decide?"

Making decisions about one's life and future often requires a lot of mental energy, involves cognitive processes, but also deep motivations and depends on many different environmental and personal factors. Nowadays, information has become more and more available every day and the world is changing faster than it ever has. Our contemporary society, which is increasingly complex, offers potentially unlimited opportunities and options on every front, but centered on an abused and mystified concept, that of freedom. If it is true that we are free to choose between many scenarios, we are bound to a single moral obligation: to choose.

About this, the American psychologist Barry Schwartz theorized "The Paradox of Choice", according to which the abundance of choice options can negatively affect our happiness. When we have less choice, we are more satisfied with what we are given. Technological development, corporate evolution and the widespread diffusion of social networks - which not only offer us infinite material possibilities, but also infinite aesthetic, moral and political models of reference - have made it increasingly difficult to make informed and rewarding decisions.

The experience of never having reached one's maximum potential, or of not being able to choose who to become, are often the basis of some increasingly frequent forms of anxiety and depression.

3. Inefficiency Risk of The Decision-Making Process

Often, decision fatigue can lead to making hasty choices with the sole purpose of reducing the strong feelings of anxiety and stress, ultimately deteriorating the quality of our decisions. To lower the risk threshold related to a possible regret or a possible loss resulting from a wrong choice, we tend to lower our expectations regarding it and therefore do not reap all the benefits that we could obtain from a better and more thoughtful decision.

4. Risk of Cognitive Dissonance

A psychological characteristic linked to the fear of regret is the desire to avoid cognitive dissonance, that is, the tendency to reject an event when it conflicts with our preconceived ideas.

Researchers have found that one way to avoid regretting a purchasing decision is to (irrationally) filter the information received (or believed) after a decision has been made. If one of the two beliefs is supported by an emotional predilection, the brain will try to avoid or minimize a conflicting belief and will seek support for the preferred belief.

For example, once a person has chosen and purchased a particular automobile, they will carefully avoid advertising for competing models and will seek out advertising for the models purchased.

The belief we hope to maintain is defended by many mechanisms, even if the strong desire to maintain existing beliefs has a less than rational basis.

5. Learning from Experience

"Sometimes you win, sometimes you ~~lose~~ learn."

Generally, we brag about good decisions and sweep bad decisions under the rug. However, both can offer good learning opportunities about which decision-making style is best. Furthermore, if the outcome of a decision is negative, the opportunity for growth lies in evaluating it honestly and looking



for ways to redirect it. Admitting mistakes and reflecting on them, considering the whole experience, is part of the learning process and better prepare us for the next time.

Making decisions can be risky, and when other unknown scenarios are in play, it's tempting to avoid them. But having awareness of the decision-making process and taking a factual and analytical approach can make the process less risky and more likely to produce good results.

The challenge is to learn from the experience gained and to be able to transform all the phases of the decision-making process, its effects and the causes that conditioned it into facts and evidence. In fact, we talk about the decision-making process, because it is impossible to identify a single moment in which a decision is made. The decision is always the result of a journey, of a process. And the goal is to be aware of it.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Using a step-by-step decision-making process can help people make more deliberate and thoughtful decisions by organizing relevant information and defining alternatives, before choosing.

Here are 4 steps to consider:

- 1. Identification of The Problem:** To make a decision, you must first identify the problem you need to solve or the question you need to answer. Clearly define your issue.
- 2. Identification of Alternatives:** gather information and identify possible solutions to your problem. There is usually more than one option to consider when trying to meet a goal.
- 3. Identification of the risks:** Once you have identified multiple alternatives, weigh the evidence for or against said alternatives. Identify potential pitfalls for each of your alternatives, and weigh those against the possible rewards.
- 4. Selection of Alternatives:** Here is the part of the decision-making process where you actually make the decision. Hopefully, you've identified and clarified what decision needs to be made, gathered all relevant information, and developed and considered the potential paths to take. You should be prepared to choose.

It is important to underline that there may be several factors that can influence our decisions or choices, for example: personal experiences, close friends, parents and family's opinions, peer pressure, feeling or emotions, personal values, advertising and television, etc. and that each of us can be more easily influenced by some of these than by others.

ELEMENTS INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS

- Absolute Rationality Vs Bounded Rationality

There are two prevalent conceptions of rationality:

Paradigm of Absolute Rationality: it assumes man's infinite ability to gather information on a choice, man's ability to process information instantly and the ability to calculate the optimal solution to the problem he faces.

Paradigm of Bounded Rationality: It assumes that man's ability to collect and process information is limited; that we never have all the choice options and we are unable to calculate the consequences of each choice option.



In the hypothesis of absolute rationality, the individual will arrive at choices according to an optimization criterion, in search of the absolute best solution. In the case of limited rationality, instead, he will use the satisfaction criterion, in search of the most satisfactory solution in the situation date.

Therefore, a decision must be made following a careful analysis of the facts and evidence available to us, but we cannot ignore another important factor to consider within this process: self-acceptance and the renunciation of perfection.

- Thinkers Vs Feelers

Thinking and feeling are different ways of evaluating situations and making decisions. As their names suggest, thinkers prefer to use logic and objective criteria when making decisions, while feelers place more emphasis on emotions and personal values.

Carl Jung classified thinking and feeling as modes of judgment. They are responsible for evaluating information, making decisions and drawing conclusions. The main difference between judgments of thought and judgments of feeling is the nature of their evaluation criteria. In more detail, Thinkers tend to use impersonal, logically based criteria, while feelers consider tastes and feelings, both their own and those of others, when making decisions.

Thinkers and feelers also differ in their areas of interest and expertise. Typically, these are directly related to their preferred judging criteria. That is, thinkers tend to engage in activities that require the application of impersonal logic, while feelers engage in activities that tap into their tastes, feelings, and people-related concerns.

FINAL REMARKS

In conclusion, it is necessary to help young people develop this Life Skill, so that the process gradually becomes more familiar and easier for them to practice. This can be achieved by helping young people to dwell on their actions. What drove them to make that decision? What consequences did that action have on them and on the outside world? Could it have been done differently? If yes, how? This attitude also has another consequence; it helps them to reflect and to move to find possible alternative solutions, thus developing their cognitive abilities (reasoning, thinking, creativity).



CREATIVE THINKING



WHAT IS IT

Creativity is the ability to generate original and innovative ideas and manifest them from thought into reality, within a process that involves original thinking and the production of new ideas, approaches, or actions. Creative Thinking is the ability to produce work that is both new (original and unexpected) and appropriate (useful or satisfying the constraints of the task). It helps a student respond flexibly to various challenges in life. It allows him to explore the possible alternatives available and evaluate their consequences. This skill helps in both problem solving and decision making.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

Creative Thinking may mean inventing new ways to carry out tasks, solve problems and meet challenges. Creative Thinking brings a new and sometimes unconventional perspective to your life and work.

This way of thinking can help to create more creative and smart ideas, to explore different point of view, to be more productive and self-confident. It provides courage and self-awareness and gives us the opportunity to interact with the world without judgments and preconceptions.

UNDERSTANDING THE “CREATIVE THINKING” LIFE SKILL

Although creativity represents one of the most appreciated human qualities, the multitude of studies carried out so far have not been able to give a univocal explanation, so much so that there does not seem to be an acceptable scientific description. It has often been thought that creativity could be a characteristic that only a few people (artists, poets, painters, etc.) were able to express.

Various research has then argued that great artistic production is only one of the ways in which creativity can manifest itself. Creative Thinking has to do with the ability to form new combinations, to produce new solutions starting from known data, through a process of inductions and deductions, continuously adapting and assimilating existing mental patterns.

Creative people appear, from the examination of the various research, as individuals capable of managing their feelings, impulses and emotions in the best possible way thanks to a notable ego strength which does not give in to the pressures of conformism but which, vice versa, affirms its own individuality, thanks to their own inner security and their own ability to put on the line.

Creative thinking is all about developing innovative solutions to problems. Creative thinkers brainstorm not only a large number of ideas but also a variety and range of them.

First, creative persons brainstorm their ideas, then they'll experiment them. They look at ideas from multiple perspectives and examine how their solutions fit into the scope of what they're working on. Creative thinkers aren't afraid to take risks and try new ideas. In fact, this ability to develop, test, and implement original solutions makes them a valuable asset to just about any situation.



Creative thinking might look like:

- Holding an interactive brainstorm to gather initial thoughts on a issue
- Evaluating a current process and offering suggestions on how to improve it
- Researching different ways to do something
- Identifying the opportunity behind the problem
- Developing an innovative way to reach out the goals
- Discovering new perspectives to see things

Creative thinking includes the process of innovative problem-solving — from analyzing the facts to brainstorming to working with others. Creative thinking examples include analytical skills, innovation, and collaboration.

- **Analytical Skills:** are problem-solving skills that help you sort through facts, data, and information to develop rational solutions. These skills aid you in the first part of the creative thinking process as you brainstorm and start to generate ideas.
They include: Data analysis, Research, Forecasting, Reporting, Interpreting, Communication, etc.
- **Innovation:** is the ability to come up with something new; however, you don't need to develop the first flying car to be an innovative thinker. "Something new" might mean experimenting a method you haven't tried before. Innovators aren't afraid to step away from tradition and explore something original, even if it might fail.
Innovation skills include: Risk-taking, Brainstorming, Imagining, Critical thinking, Ambition, Resilience, etc.
- **Collaboration:** Creative Thinking doesn't have to happen alone; you might have your most creative ideas when you work with others. Collaboration skills ensure you consider multiple perspectives and ways of thinking when you develop and refine ideas.
Collaboration skills include: Written and verbal communication, Active listening, Empathy, Feedback, Inclusivity, etc.

Creative thinking seems to be facilitated by characteristics of fluidity and freedom of exploration. On the contrary, it is hindered by rigidity, authority and emotional blocks. Like any skill, creative thinking can be learned, and it is important to encourage it in school. Contrary to the tendency of some contexts to reduce the performance of the creative student due to the difficulties that his/her diversity compared to the common program may entail, it would be appropriate to use an attitude of acceptance and openness.

The literature in this regard suggests that the implementation of activities that facilitate divergent thinking (brainstorming, problem solving) helps the development of creative abilities.

Six Thinking Hats

Everyone has a creative potential within themselves which simply needs to be trained.

The Six Thinking Hats technique by Edward De Bono, a Maltese essayist and psychologist considered one of the greatest scholars of creative thinking, was born precisely from the need to train one's thinking. Indeed, it represents a method capable of guiding individuals towards new approaches and, above all, creative perspectives.

In fact, often, when faced with new challenges or the emergence of problems, individuals tend to seek solutions in ways already known. By acting in this way, however, there is a risk of falling back into the same dynamics that led to the impasse. Only by questioning one's usual reasoning is it possible, therefore, to arrive at new solutions and inventions.



The starting point of Bono's theory is the same as that implied by the theory of lateral thinking: to broaden one's horizons it is necessary to break down the verticalism of traditional thought which, with its rigidity, prevents one from observing reality from multiple angles. Thinking creatively is indeed possible: all we have to learn is to get out of the comfort zone.

De Bono uses the image of hats because wearing a headdress is in fact a deliberate choice. Similarly, to broaden the perspective of their thinking each person can choose to "wear" a certain point of view. The author identifies six hats, each of which has a different color and refers to a thought pattern to follow and train. Just wearing the one that we feel most similar to us is not enough. In fact, we will have to train ourselves to use them all to free our creativity.

- **The white hat:** it requires you to adopt a neutral and objective point of view. This type of thinking applies perfectly to data analysis, which must be carried out without judgments and preconceptions. It is, therefore, the phase of concreteness, in which the information necessary to have a clear and objective vision of the reality in front of us is recovered.
- **The black hat:** it represents the logical-negative side of thought. You might perhaps think it's best not to wear this hat. In reality it is the exact opposite: with the black hat we are forced to consider all the variables that may affect our project, especially those that may function poorly. This type of thinking stimulates us to be realistic, to identify possible obstacles and to stimulate our creativity in identifying ways out. It's not about being negative but using rationality to identify the points that need to be taken into consideration before making decisions.
- **The yellow hat:** after having investigated the possible adversities thanks to the logical-negative approach, it is time to put on the yellow hat and train our thinking in the opposite direction. From the analysis of critical issues it is in fact possible to bring out a constructive and optimistic approach that guides us to discover the new paths to follow. Even in this case, wearing the yellow hat we must not forget logic and rationality: it is not a question of embracing blind enthusiasm but of opening ourselves up to new possibilities in a constructive way.
- **The green hat:** it is the headdress of originality and creativity. It is precisely at this moment that thought can free itself and venture into new paths. The key, according to Bono, is provocation, understood as a point in which reasoning is stimulated towards unexplored paths. In this phase we need to put our thinking to the test, investigating what means are necessary to achieve our objectives and overcome the obstacles that stand in our way.
- **The red hat:** When you wear the red hat your thoughts open up to emotions, sensations and passion. This hat should not be confused with the yellow one, in which open-mindedness was weighted by logic. In this phase, on the contrary, thought is totally free, guided only by sensations, intuition, and instinct.
- **The blue hat:** it is the one that holds together all the phases of thought that followed one another in the previous phases. We could define it as the unifying hat that represents the structured process and controls the creative process by transmitting calm and balance. In fact, blue should be worn both at the beginning, when it is necessary to decide how to structure the reasoning and at the end, to bring order and make a decision. In fact, it is structured thinking that brings together all the experienced angles, from logical to irrational thinking and from positive to negative thinking. More than analyzing individual ideas, the blue hat monitors the flow of the creative process.

De Bono's Six Thinking Hats technique helps us understand how, to open up to creativity, we need to use different thinking strategies. Sometimes we think that rationality has little to do with creation: quite the opposite. To arrive at innovation, we need to bring together all the nuances of our thinking, training those that come less naturally to us and strengthening those that we master better. Thanks to this method, those who tend to focus only on the negative aspects of reality will be able to learn about logical positivity. On the contrary, overly optimistic people will be able to understand the need to go through moments of rational negativity.



FINAL REMARKS

In conclusion, students should be encouraged to be curious about the world around them. They should be left free to explore the environment, so as to experience this activity with the pleasure of discovery. A discovery that concerns oneself, the surrounding environment, others, one's own ways of approaching the outside. The adult's role then becomes that of facilitator of exploration and understanding of what is happening. Through this integration between the students' push towards the environment and the subsequent reflection on what is happening, it is possible to achieve the "creation of a new product", i.e., a product of individual creativity. If we consider the school context, this can happen more easily in an environment where sources of anxiety are minimized: time, outcome evaluation and teacher judgment. Creative thinking is a productive power, an energy contained in precise but not rigid patterns, which generates "novelty". Only in the presence of a welcoming but delimited climate with agreed rules is it possible for it to emerge. It is therefore important that the final grade does not coincide with the judgement of the person, and that the level of production is balanced on individual abilities.



INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP SKILLS



WHAT IS IT

Interpersonal Relationships Skills refer to reciprocal social and emotional interactions between the person and other people in the environment.

Interpersonal Relationship Skills are some survival competencies very imperative for establishing and maintaining good relationships; or to de-link unconstructive relationships, with minimum disturbances to both. Having good interpersonal relationship competencies help to live in harmony with others and is thus essential for psychological and mental well-being. Also, relating with others is one of the most important forms of human intelligence. It provides warmth, caring, support and collaboration that give life its excitement and potential for joy and personal fulfillment. It teaches a student to relate to other people in a positive manner. It also helps him/her to develop the ability to end relationships constructively.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

In today's world nothing can be done all alone. We need people around who can help and guide us at the times of crisis and trustworthy people with whom we can share our emotions and feelings.

It is no exaggeration to say that Interpersonal Relationship Skills are the foundation for success in life. In fact, throughout our lives we must communicate and interact with other people on a daily basis and in many different contexts. Good Interpersonal Relationship Skills allow these interactions to be functional, making them more solid and pleasant for all the people involved. They allow people to build better and longer-lasting relationships, both at home, at school and/or at work, reducing stress and frustration.

The development of these skills is significantly important especially in young adulthood. The period of puberty presents the individual with one of the greatest challenges of life: the separation from the family context and the identification of oneself as a single and separate person, free and responsible. These two great tasks can be facilitated or hindered by the surrounding environment: the school, the peer group but also the family itself. In these contexts, it is important to create and maintain positive and functional interpersonal relationships, characterized by the expression of needs, feelings and opinions and by mutual respect.

UNDERSTANDING THE “INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP SKILLS”

Interpersonal relationships model

Interpersonal Relationship model explains an individual's outlook towards relationship and how one's perception changes in due course.



Two people come together, like each other and enter into a relationship.

According to interpersonal relationship model, two directional components go a long way in creating an individual's perception about relationships:

- Other to Self: The component "other to self" represents an individual's awareness of his partner's attitude, thoughts and beliefs towards himself. The other to self-component is more to do with the awareness of an individual as to how his/her partner treats him/her.
- Self to Other: The "self to other" component signifies an individual's awareness of his own behavior, attitude towards his/her partner. How an individual treats the other person in relationship is denoted by self to other component.

Phases In Interpersonal Relationships

It takes a lot of time for a relationship to grow and be ready to endure the effects of time and hardship. At the start of a relationship, several things may happen. In case of the development of co-worker relationships, the order of the sequence may differ slightly.

Phase 1: In the first phase, two people get to know each other. Knowing each other is a requirement for any relationship, whatever its form. People get to know each other through mutual friends, social gatherings, employers, and in other ways.

Phase 2: This is the phase in interpersonal relationships where we start talking about an actual relationship. In this phase, the bond between two people grows, and they are no longer strangers to each other. Mutual trust, too, begins to increase.

Phase 3: The third phase is also known as the continuity phase. This phase is where the foundation for the future is usually laid by engaging in permanent commitments. Trust and transparency are important for keeping the relationship healthy.

Phase 4: In the fourth phase of the interpersonal relationship model, the relationship with the other deteriorates. Not all relationships pass through this phase. It is, in effect, a period in which the relationship is tested.

In this phase, the reasons for failure are often found in a lack of compatibility, trust, love, or care. This often leads to serious misunderstandings and problems in the relationship. Some, if they feel things are not working out, decide to end the relationship.

Whether it's a co-worker relationship or a romantic relationship, ending a relationship is often a drastic event for both parties. Often, however, the relationship can be salvaged. Compromises are an important part of that.

Phase 5: In the last phase, the end of the relationship is final. Reasons for a definitive separation may range from death to estrangement or other problems.

Interpersonal relationships styles:

There are different patterns observable in an individual's dealings with other people that can influence the quality of the interaction with them.

These do not represent rigid methods, but more or less prevalent ways of relating to individuals, both adolescents and adults. Each of us, in our own way of relating to the people around us, tends to adopt a relational style more recurrently than others. This does not happen, however, by virtue of free choice.



The person, for example, may also realize that the style adopted is not the most advantageous for him and yet may have many difficulties in freeing himself from it.

Relational style is the result of everyone's individual history: the consequence of identifications with primary affective reference models and the result of ways of adapting to growth conditions that may have been very difficult.

It is also possible that the relational style can vary, albeit significantly, from situation to situation. The person, for example, may have learned in more positive conditions to adopt assertive attitudes while in other areas, experienced as difficult, he cannot do anything but lock himself into passive behaviors. We can briefly describe the three main styles as follows:

- **a passive style:** it allows others to benefit from the violation of its rights; he almost never manages to achieve his goals; has a bad self-image, feels frustrated, unhappy, anxious, has no self-esteem and feels his narcissism is constantly wounded; he is unable to make choices and allows others to choose for him; his communication is often inhibited and not very expressive, contracted and ineffective. He may seek an outlet for his chronic sense of frustration by trying to take revenge on individuals who are weaker and more defenseless than himself.

- **an aggressive style:** it violates the rights of others to try to gain some advantage. Achieves one's goals at the expense of others. He is always on the defensive and ready to lash out at others, his motto could be "the best defense is the attack". The self-image is therefore weak and negative even if aggression is experienced as legitimate because it is ego-syntonic. It fears disintegration and annihilation, which is why it has built such massive defenses and maintains them; moreover, he evaluates others as fundamentally dangerous, a threat to be guarded against.

Tends to intrusively interfere in other people's choices. Has a choleric and explosive communication style.

- **an assertive style;** it manages to assert their rights while respecting the rights of others; achieves one's goals without harming others; has a positive self-image, adequate self-evaluation ability, a good level of self-esteem and confidence; he is capable of deciding for himself; communicates clearly, openly and effectively.

Adopting an assertive relational style facilitates functional relationships. Functional is a relationship in which needs are met and a good boundary exists; both parties will be agents of free, responsible choices. Each of the members of the relationship is aware of their needs, rights and duties.

How To Create a Win-Win Relationship

A win-win situation is a resolution in which both sides of a negotiation feel they've gotten what they want. Learning how to negotiate a win-win can help all parties involved feeling more satisfied within their relationship.

Here are some small attentions that can facilitate this process:

- Listen actively
- Ask questions not only of others, but also of ourselves; they are essential to knowing how to get what you want
- Express your feeling and interest in the relationship
- Use the first person in communicating: take your responsibility in the relationship
- Ask starting with giving value to you and your need, so it turns out the value that the other has for you
- Say no to the question, not to the person



FINAL REMARKS

With adolescence, the need to establish a rapport and a relationship with a group of peers with whom to interact, compare and identify also develops. Friendships play a fundamental role in the social development of children: they allow them to feel special and appreciated by someone outside the family unit.

In fact, relational skills in adolescence develop not only by comparing themselves with parents, but also with peers of the same or opposite gender.

The lack of points of reference and the need for independence and autonomy, typical of the adolescent period, often result in relationships managed in a complex and confusing way. The reactions are polar opposites: some adolescents behave in a shameful, shy and withdrawn way, while others, on the contrary, demonstrate attitudes of exhibitionism and poor respect for the rules. Adolescent problems with relational difficulties lead to sentimental suffering, isolation from the peer group and discomfort in communicating with them.

Developing strong Interpersonal relationships skills in Young Adolescent is therefore one of the vital facts that determines teenager's quality of life.



SELF AWARENESS BUILDING SKILLS



WHAT IS IT

Self-Awareness is how we see ourselves and the effects we have on our environment that influences our behaviour and the type of person we want to become.

Researchers published the first major theory of self-awareness in the early 1970s. They said that self-awareness is the ability to look inward, think deeply about your behaviour, and consider how it aligns with your moral standards and values. They argued that when your behaviour is out of alignment with your standards, you feel uncomfortable, unhappy and negative. By contrast, when your behaviour and values are aligned, you feel positive and self-confident. Self-awareness also gives you a deeper understanding of your own attitudes, opinions, and knowledge.

The content of Self-Awareness has internal and external components. Internal self-awareness includes our affect, beliefs, cognitions, interests, goals, personality, values, and meaningful life patterns. External Self-Awareness includes our perceptions of our physical appearance and our behaviour. External Self-Awareness also includes a social aspect of self-awareness, specifically, our self-evaluations in relation to what others tell us (feedback), our perceptions of how people relate to us and the effects that our behaviour has on others, and the extent to which we act in ways that are sensitive to others.

Self-Awareness is sometimes confused with self-consciousness, but there's an important difference between these. Self-consciousness is a hyper-sensitized state of self-awareness; it's the excessive preoccupation with your own manners, behaviour, or appearance, and is often seen as negative. Self-awareness is focused on the impact your behaviour has on other people, and, as such, is much more positive. Concepts that have slight distinctions but may be used as synonymous with Self-Awareness: self-insight and self-knowledge (what we know about ourselves and our environments) and self-image and self-identity (how we see ourselves and how we think others see us in our various roles).

Self-Awareness is one of the most important elements of emotional intelligence. It gives you the ability to understand and control your own emotions and actions, and it helps you understand how these affect the emotions and actions of others.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

Self-Awareness brings benefits in both your personal and professional life.

Self-Awareness is important to our behaviour, satisfaction, and performance. It contributes to better decision making and team performance, increased leadership success and more opportunities for career advancement. Self-Awareness brings many psychological benefits, including increased self-regulation, more attention to others' needs (pro-sociality), and less stress and anxiety. Self-Awareness affects behaviours and outcomes through internal states (e.g., self-confidence, self-identity) and accuracy of how we believe others view us and how we perceive others. Individuals who are low in Self-Awareness are likely to exhibit self-protection mechanisms such as denial, withdrawal and fear of



failure. As people become more self-aware, they become more resilient and better at adaptive performance. They have the ability to analyse uncertain, stressful situations, to identify possible solutions, to improvise and maintain composure.

Research shows a strong link between Self-Awareness and high-performance in managers. You're simply more effective in a leadership role when you understand your internal state, as well as your team members' emotions. If you're aware of your own strengths and weaknesses, you have the power to use your strengths intentionally and to manage or eliminate your weaknesses. When you can admit what you don't know – and you have the humility to ask for help when you need it – you increase your credibility with your team.

Knowing your strengths and weaknesses also has positive, long-term benefits for your career, as well as for your long-term health and happiness. In one study, researchers found that leaders who were aware of their strengths were more self-confident, were more highly paid, and were happier at work.

On a personal level, having Self-Awareness allows you to approach people and situations with confidence. This means that you gain control of your own life, direction, and experiences.

UNDERSTANDING THE “SELF-AWARENESS BUILDING SKILL”

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How to Develop Self-Awareness?

How can you develop yourself if you are not aware? To make this possible, it is important that you are aware of your own thoughts and actions. If you are not consciously aware of this, it is difficult to determine what you are already doing well and what could be improved. Without self-awareness it is difficult to grow as a person.

If you want to develop more self-awareness, it is important that you ask yourself critical questions. By breaking down questions to the core and giving an honest answer, you will become more aware of your own thoughts and actions.



1. Being aware

The meaning of self-awareness is actually already in the word itself: the extent to which you are aware of yourself. From your thoughts, your emotions, your behavior, your feelings and your actions. In combination with the person, you really are, this makes you the person you are. If you are self-aware, you have insight into this for yourself. You are aware of yourself. You can develop self-awareness in a number of areas: mentally, physically and emotionally.

2. Self-analysis

To stimulate your personal growth, it is important that you are aware of yourself. If you have self-awareness, you have developed your own values, you can look at yourself realistically and critically, you have sufficient self-confidence and you accept yourself as you are. Even though your personal growth is a continuous process, a self-confident person feels one with themselves. There are a number of aspects involved in developing self-awareness.

To find out who you really are, it is important to do a self-analysis. There is a good chance that you will gain new insights about yourself that can help you with your personal growth and the development of your self-awareness.

3. Personal values

In addition to analyzing your personality through a self-analysis, it is important to look at what you want and what you really find important. To get to know yourself in this way, it is important that you determine your personal values. This way you become aware of your own values and you can start living according to them.

4. Personal status

If you have prioritized both the positive and negative values for yourself, you can supplement this with your personal rules. This together will form into your personal status. You can see a personal statute as your own regulations, which are always applicable. This is where you describe who you are, how you want to be and what you want to do. It gives meaning to your existence and gives you direction in making choices and how you act. Of course, it is important that you actually do something with it.

5. Critical questions

If you want to develop more self-awareness, it is important that you ask yourself critical questions. By breaking down questions to the core and giving an honest answer, you will become more aware of your own thoughts and actions. Examples of good questions to ask yourself are:

1. How do I feel about myself right now?
2. What are my moments of happiness?
3. What are my greatest strengths and weaknesses?
4. Where do my beliefs come from?
5. Which people inspire me?

By asking critical questions you will develop more self-awareness. You get closer to what you really want and whether you are currently living it. It is important that you answer the answer not with your rational side, but with your feeling. Listen to what comes into your mind.

The process of Self-Awareness includes thinking about ourselves such that we become aware of our characteristics, sustain this awareness, and use it as we behave and interact with others. Thought processes include introspection, self-examination, and self-absorption.

There are several ways to develop Self-Awareness. Keep in mind, that development of Self-Awareness takes time and efforts.



6. Know Your Strengths and Weaknesses

You can start building self-awareness by learning where you are strongest and weakest. You may carry out a personal SWOT-analysis to get a better understanding of yourself. You might also want to take a self-test, which helps you identify your five greatest strengths.

When you understand how your personality compares with the personalities of other people, you can discover what motivates you, and how you relate to the world. Both of these are important aspects of self-awareness.

7. Reflect on the Impact You Have

When you are self-aware, you understand how you instinctively think, connect with other people, communicate, and make decisions. A way to understand these things is to keep a journal, where you write about your day, the things that you did, the emotions you experienced and expressed, and the consequences of these. This helps you think about what does and doesn't work for you, and helps you be more aware of your impact on other people.

Alternatively, you may take a break for five or 10 minutes a day and meditate. Meditation helps broaden and strengthen your self-awareness, and it can also lower stress.

Or take time in the evening to reflect quietly about your day, and think about how effectively you worked with people. What did you do really well? And what could you have done better?

8. Focus on Others

People who are self-aware are conscious of how their words and actions influence others.

To become more aware of how you affect others, you may learn how to manage your emotions. Take time to weigh what you say carefully, and think about how it will affect the person that you're speaking to.

If you find yourself taking your stress, anger, or frustrations out on others, you may decide to stop immediately. Instead, see if you can find something positive about the situation. Take a few deep breaths, or even walk away if you find that you can't control your emotions.

When you manage your own words or actions, it doesn't mean that you're being false. Rather, it shows that you care about other people enough not to say or do something that might affect them in a negative way. Showing humility is an important part of this. When you're humble, you focus your attention and energy on others and not on yourself.

9. Ask for Feedback

Getting feedback is important for developing Self-Awareness – after all, this is often the only way that you can find out about issues that you may not be able to face directly. You can get feedback from your colleagues and team members, either with direct questions or with 360 feedback. When you ask for feedback from the people around you, this gives you a chance to see your behaviour from their point of view. What's more, it can help you identify weaknesses that you can't see, or that you'd prefer to ignore.

The dark side of self-awareness.

Processes that contribute to self-awareness can have dysfunctional consequences. Just because you are aware of something about yourself does not mean you can benefit from that awareness. Alcoholic persons know they are alcoholics but do not take positive actions to address their issues. Instead, they try to use their mind and willpower to fix it. Self-Awareness can lead to excessive self-inspection, making it difficult to function or perform. Self-serving biases and self-deception cause us to invent answers that are not necessarily true. Indeed, people need to learn to manage discrepancies between self and feedback from others, particularly when the feedback is unfavorable and unexpected. Feedback about one's behavior that is inconsistent with one's self-view can be disconcerting and lead



to withdrawal, denial, depression, or other such negative feelings that have negative impact on our ability to function.

FINAL REMARKS

Self-awareness represents one of the main aspects of evaluating individual maturity. An individual who is aware of himself, of his own needs, of his own ideas and values, of his own strengths and of his own limitations has a greater chance of making choices as an autonomous individual and not subjected to unnecessary constraints. If there is greater self-awareness, a more informed, freer and more conscious choice becomes possible. The satisfaction of needs, the ability to recognize them and commit to ensuring that they are gratified, lead the individual to perceive himself as an effective being, able to face both the obstacles and challenges posed by the external world. Particularly in the process of self-discovery in adolescence, comparison with others, with the reference group which slowly replaces the family, takes on great value.



EMPATHY



WHAT IS IT

Empathy is one's ability to understand and accept different kinds of people around them who are different in many respects. Empathy is our mental capacity to accept without emotional disturbances, of people in distress as if we are in such a distress situation. It includes understanding one's feelings as well as providing emotional support for that person. Empathy also helps to encourage nurturing behavior towards people in need of care and assistance or tolerance. It helps a student to understand and accept others who are different from themselves.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

Empathy is important in almost every aspect of daily life. It allows us to have compassion for others, relate to friends, peers, loved ones, co-workers, and strangers, and it can have a large benefit impact on the world.

It helps:

- in **personal life**: healthy relationships require active listening, nurture, care, and understanding. A friendship or romantic relationship that lacks empathy and understanding will soon flounder. When people only think of their own interests, the other people in the relationships will suffer.
- in **school and work life**: for things that require a group effort, it's extremely important to take the time to relate to peers and to get along with them. Using empathy is a vital part of a smooth working relationship. Without it, it's much easier to fall into disputes and disagreements. Higher amounts empathy in the workplace have been linked to increased performance, increased success, and better leadership abilities.
- for **the world**: empathy from a global perspective is incredibly important, especially when it leads to compassion. This type of empathy pushes people to help and to give support when there are major disasters. People are willing to help out others that they have never met because they know that they too would need help if circumstances were reversed. Without compassionate empathy, the world would be a less functional place to live.



UNDERSTANDING THE "EMPATHY" LIFE SKILL

The term "empathy" means describing the ability to identify with another person to the point of understanding their thoughts and feelings. It is a founding element of relationships with others and with the world.

Analyzing the evolution of the concept of empathy, it is the German philosopher and psychologist Theodor Lipps who, in the 1906 essay "Empathy and aesthetic enjoyment", defines it as a fundamental psychological function for the aesthetic experience. Today Lipps is remembered as the father of the first scientific theory on the concept of "Einfühlung" (literally "identification", "feeling inside"), although the term was coined by Robert Vischer in 1873.

The most striking example of the object, created to be perceived "empathically" is identified in the work of art. In particular, Lipps studied optical illusions of distortion and suggested that the observer tends to identify with parts of the scene, remaining emotionally involved.

With Lipps begins the extension of the discussion on empathy from aesthetics to intersubjective communication, therefore, not only how people experience inanimate objects, but also how they understand the mental states of other people.

Empathizing, in fact, means feeling the same emotion as the other while recognizing that this emotion is derived from the other and not from ourselves.

For Edith Stein, recognizing the problem of empathy means realizing what the other does, feels and wants. Empathy therefore becomes the combination of two elements:

1. Feeling the other person's emotions (emotional level)
2. Understanding each other's thoughts (rational level)

Scientific investigation is focusing precisely on the themes proposed by Stein on empathic experience, after the impulse given by the discovery of "mirror" neurons, in search of the neurobiological mechanisms of mirroring and resonance that allow us to combine what I see and feel firsthand to what I see and feel in the other, making it possible to share experiences, beliefs, goals and internal states. It is an area still to be explored on a neurobiological level as it concerns a complex neuronal architecture.

According to psychologists Daniel Goleman and Paul Ekman, we can consider three types of empathy: cognitive, emotional, and compassionate.

- **Cognitive empathy:** it is the ability to understand how someone else feels and to work out what they might be thinking.
- **Emotional empathy or Affective empathy:** it refers to the ability to share another person's emotions. This would mean when you see someone else who is sad, it makes you feel sad.
- **Compassionate empathy or Empathic concern:** it is when you take feelings to actions. It goes beyond understanding and relating to other people's situations and pushed an individual to do something.

The dark side of empathy

In recent years, a reflection has developed that has aimed to stem the simplistic caricatured vision of empathy, appropriately exploring its darkest, most insidious and disturbing sides.

Max Scheler distinguishes between three types of subjects:

- the insensitive, who does not feel the experiences of others



- the brutal, who feels the experiences of others but is disinterested.
- the cruel, who feels the experiences of others and takes pleasure in the suffering of others.

The individual can be only in the cognitive comprehension sphere and not to act, however, in the act of sympathizing with the other's experience.

FINAL REMARKS

Being able to truly understand the other allows the person to experience daily relationships in a more profound way, having as a point of reference their own feelings and the correct perception of the feelings of others.



COPING WITH STRESS



WHAT IS IT

Coping with stress means recognizing the sources of stress, understanding its effects, being able to face positive or negative stressful situations, dealing with accompanying emotions, looking for solutions that are most beneficial.

In coping with stress, a student also discusses methods to control stress and to overcome it.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

In life, when we find ourselves facing many challenges all at once and within a short space of time, we often experience a sense of fatigue and tension. This also happens in adolescence. Especially when developmental tasks arise one after another and in the same short period of time, teens often struggle to deal with them and solve them successfully (Coleman J.C., 1974, cit. in Palmonari A., 1993). Let's think, for example, of boys and girls who must take on family responsibilities due to the death of one or both parents; those who find themselves involved in the conflicts of separated or divorced parents, or those who drop out of school to enter the world of work early or, in the worst-case scenario, neither study nor work.

Not all adolescents approach developmental tasks in the same way. This happens because interconnected biological, cultural, social and psychological aspects come into play.

Since adolescence is the developmental period in which personal coping strategies are consolidated, it is necessary to equip students with competences that allow them to face the challenges of their lives in the best possible way, as they unfortunately they don't have the knowledge and skills needed to manage their stress.

It should also be noted that long-term stress can lead to health problems. Being able to manage it can help people, from a young age to:

- Sleep better
- Check their weight
- feel less muscle tension
- Be in a better mood
- Get along better with family and friends



UNDERSTANDING THE “COPING WITH STRESS” LIFE SKILL

Definition Of Stress

The English term «stress» appears as early as the 17th century with the meaning of «difficulty, adversity, affliction», transformed into "strength, tension or effort" in the following century.

The first author to have proposed a process model of stress was Hans Selye, a Canadian researcher and physiologist, who defined stress as a type of physiological and psychological response of the organism to any request coming from the environment, intended to restore homeostatic balance.

In this definition, stress is a syndrome of adaptation to “stressors”, which are internal and/or external conditions that are difficult, upsetting, or scary. External stressors include any concerning event, situation or circumstance that has the potential to negatively impact a person or something they care about. Internal stressors include distressing thoughts or memories, physical sensations like pain or discomfort, and also emotions like sadness or anger. For example, it can be linked to one's perception of not being as they would like. This is particularly true in the adolescent period, in which the evaluation of oneself and one's value is subjected to continuous attacks from bodily and emotional changes and relationships must be reviewed in light of the adolescent's new capacity for independence.

Selye distinguishes different types of stress, including “eustress” and “distress”.

Eustress is a word used to describe stress that is positive, motivating, and enhances functioning. Low levels of stress, in fact, have been found to increase alertness, performance, and health. Distress, on the contrary, refers to bad and overwhelming stress that impairs functioning and can have long-term adverse effects.

Distress usually flows in three directions:

- physical ailments (headache, difficulty in digestion, tachycardia, sleep problems, loss of appetite, etc.)
- inappropriate behavior (grinding teeth (even during sleep), attitude to arrogance, increased alcohol use with repeated occasional abuse, compulsive eating, criticize others constantly, inability to complete things (even daily and routine activities), forget things or get distracted easily, etc.)
- decreased energy and attention (ease of crying, nervousness, sense of loneliness, tension (feeling that you are about to explode), unhappiness without a valid reason, feeling powerless to change things, feeling agitated or upset, etc.)

Is stress subjective or objective?

Although there are some conditions that can be universally considered a source of danger, the evaluation and response to the stimulus can be considered mostly individual. Stress, in fact, is not an absolute value, but it is experienced differently by each of us. What is stressful for some is not stressful for others. The level of stress strictly depends on the interaction between the type of stimulus and the evaluation that the individual gives of it.

Coping Strategies

To deal with a stressful situation, the individual, already alerted by his own physiological system, will be able to implement various coping strategies, both psychological ones of reevaluation of the meaning



of events (if possible), and those of actual action (information search and direct action where possible). All this is briefly referred to as "coping skills".

There are different coping mechanisms we may choose. These mechanisms help individuals to manage, to tolerate, or to reduce stressors.

As far as active coping strategies are concerned, there are two aspects to managing a stressful situation:

- **Problem-based coping:** the practical steps that you take to manage the problem. Problem-based strategies may include practical, action-based tools that allow you to manage the situation. This might involve setting up an Action Plan, delegating tasks, or accepting that you may need to escalate the issue or confront someone about the problem.
- **Emotion-based coping:** how you manage your emotions when you become stressed. Emotion-based strategies might involve positive coping strategies, such as taking ownership of the problem, or seeking emotional or moral support. However, they can also spark negative behaviors, like self-blame, avoidance, or even anger and frustration.

Tend and Befriend Theory

According to Shelley Taylor, professor of psychology at the University of California, humans have a biological system that regulates social behaviors and that lead them to tending to young ones and by seeking connection or befriending one another in situation of stress.

When social interactions are comforting, stress levels decrease. So, when there's a stressor, people will instinctively seek out support from others.

According to this theory, the instinct to tend and connection comes from the rising levels of oxytocin, which is a hormone that acts in the opposite way to cortisol, playing an important role in reducing tension and stress.

Taylor proposes that when we have "positive contacts", oxytocin connects with the body's opioid system. This system regulates reward- and pain-related behaviors. When activated, the opioid system is thought to reduce the fight-or-flight stress response.

FINAL REMARKS

During adolescence, the numerous external demands and all the internal conflicts can combine to cause painful feelings of tiredness, incompetence, fear or discouragement. Furthermore, the evaluation of the stressful event is closely linked to the perception of each individual student. It therefore becomes an objective to help them improve their personal abilities to read possible stressful events and implement effective coping skills.



COPING WITH EMOTIONS



WHAT IS IT

Coping with emotions helps the student to understand feelings of them and others. This skill helps to know that it is normal to have strong feelings and that feelings are neither positive nor negative. Accepting feelings is the first step towards learning to have more control over them. Life Skills enable the student to learn healthy, positive, and safe ways to express these feelings. It enables a student to recognize emotions in oneself and others, to realize its effects on behavior and to respond to emotions appropriately. Uncontrolled emotions like excessive sorrow and anger are referred to in this dimension. Understanding and managing emotions is also called emotional regulation. It's an important part of one's self-regulation.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

Accepting our own emotions allows us to view our thoughts and perspectives objectively, instead of making negative judgement about ourselves and others.

Understanding and managing emotions is important for development and well-being during adolescence:

- Understanding them allows the student to become aware of triggers, so he/her can gain insights on how to respond in constructive ways.
- Managing them helps the student to make better decisions, big or small.

Students who can understand and manage their emotions are more likely to:

- express emotions by speaking calmly or in appropriate ways.
- bounce back after feeling strong emotions like disappointment, frustration or excitement.
- control impulses.
- behave appropriately – that is, in ways that don't hurt other people, things or themselves.
- learn, make friends, become independent and more.

Student's ability to understand and manage emotions develops over time. When the student is young, they will need help with understanding emotions. This mostly involves recognizing and naming emotions, which lays the groundwork for managing emotions as they get older.

UNDERSTANDING THE "COPING WITH EMOTIONS" LIFE SKILL

What emotions are

The word emotion derives from the Latin *movere* (to move) with the addition of the prefix *e-* (movement from) to indicate that a tendency to act is implicit in every emotion. Emotions, in fact,



involve a physiological deviation from homeostasis, the normal level of activity of the organism, producing an internal "movement". This altered state allows you to direct your attention towards a specific stimulus and prepare for action. They are functional to adaptation and survival (e.g., if I see a lion, fear makes me run away, or pain makes me hold back from putting my hand in the fire). We can, therefore, define emotion as "a complex system of interaction between the organism and the environment".

Primary and secondary emotions

The emotional world of the human being is extremely rich. However, based on cross-cultural research, Ekman (1994) came to distinguish six primary emotions. In them, in fact, there exist neurophysiological programs of spontaneous facial expression, which are common to all cultures, and which can therefore be considered innate. These emotions are:

- Happiness
- Fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Surprise
- Disgust

These primary and implicit emotions of the relationship with others can then be declined and articulated according to different nuances, thanks to the intervention of more complex processes, giving rise to different emotional phenomena (secondary emotions).

Secondary emotions, in fact, are those that originate from the combination of primary emotions and develop with the growth of the individual and with social interaction. They are more complex emotions and need more external elements or heterogeneous thoughts to be activated. Some examples are: cheerfulness, envy, shame, anxiety, resignation, jealousy, hope...

Coping strategies

Managing your emotions does not mean controlling or suppressing them, but it means knowing how to govern them rather than letting yourself be overwhelmed by them. It means being master of yourself, remaining clear and effective without losing your mind.

Emotions contain important information about our needs and values and knowing how to manage them allows us to direct our actions, therefore being intentional in our choices, evaluating their effects on ourselves and others. That is, it means ACTING rather than RE-ACTING to stimuli, or choosing how to behave in response to our moods, rather than letting ourselves be overwhelmed or carried away by them.

It is important to underline that emotions are neither negative nor positive, they can be pleasant or unpleasant, but all emotions are useful and functional, even anger and fear... emotions are fine as they are, they are neither right nor wrong. These are the behaviors that need to be changed.

It is possible to transform unpleasant emotions into pleasant emotions, but only after having recognized them. For this reason, self-awareness is also the basis of good self-management.



Therefore, to learn to manage emotions, especially when they become strong and intense, it is very important first of all to have good self-awareness and then to train constantly.

How to do it?

- First of all, learning to understand when the emotion occurs, catching the signs of its growth.
- Feeling in which part of the body we feel it.
- Recognizing whether the emotion we feel is pleasant or unpleasant.
- Giving the emotion a name, for example: "anxiety".
- Decreasing the intensity of the emotion, for example telling someone how we're feeling, writing and journaling, singing, going for a run, etc.

Only later, when the emotion we feel is less intense and approaches tranquility, can we make it more pleasant, until we reach serenity.

Communicative aspects

The communication aspect is another fundamental component of emotions.

The expression of emotions is a communication process, not just intentional and voluntary, which is able to influence the relationship between the subject and the environment by activating, through signals, a social response. They can be expressed through verbal language, vocal and paralinguistic indicators, posture, gestures, and other body movements. The face represents the most important area on an expressive and communicative level, it constitutes the channel reviled for the expression of emotions, but it is also the area that can be most controlled. Furthermore, it provides fundamental elements for the recognition of the specificity of the emotion, while gestures, other body movements and posture do not provide sufficient elements of the emotions themselves, but for the recognition of their intensity.

Emotions and behavior

Always, at least in our culture, emotions have been opposed to reason. In fact, they have been seen as a disturbance to be repressed and rejected, that is, as a threat to cognitive aspects. Emotions, from this perspective, determine a compromise in the capacity for meaning: in cases of high stress, one loses the cognitive or linguistic tools to interpret, express and rationalize one's internal states. A deficit in the cognitive component is therefore produced.

This can lead to a hasty evaluation of the event, setting up quick solutions, which if in some cases appear to be the only possible ones, they may then prove inadequate.

Emotions have been subjected to control, regulation and inhibition, in favor of more rational components. A contrast was therefore created between aspects of activation physiological, considered "lower", and cognitive aspects, considered "higher", as if these the latter were considered the only ones adequate for a correct knowledge and evaluation of reality.

It therefore seems important to state that there are no positive and negative emotions and that a distinction must be made between inhibition/control of emotions and regulation/management.

This last modality can be seen as a mediation as conscious as possible between the internal aspects of activation and the aspects of analysis of the stimulating situation in relation to oneself. In fact, if the emotion is produced, there is a signal and an internal definition that cannot be repressed, but which



must be explored, in order to understand what the valid and less valid aspects are to take into consideration for the organization of the own behavior.

If, for example, a reaction such as anger occurs, there is no use in inhibiting or repressing it, except as a temporary containment action. More useful, however, could be the exploration and understanding of the aspects of the relationship that produce this reaction. Only starting from this analysis is greater awareness possible which allows the modulation of the emotion itself.

In summary we can state that reason and emotions are two different and strictly interdependent systems of knowledge: cognitive processes influence the manifestation and processing of emotional experiences, this complete cognitive knowledge. The meeting between affections and reason is central to the good functioning of the personality. The "healthy", well-integrated individual is the one who manages to integrate both systems together.

FINAL REMARKS

Emotions and feelings are an integral part of our existence and represent a motivational drive for our daily actions. The ability to recognize them in oneself and in others is fundamental for the development of the individual and for his relationships.

Consequently, it is important that young people focus on the meaning of emotions, increase their awareness and improve their ability to express them in a fluid and conscious manner, integrating emotional and cognitive aspects together.



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