

Life Skills Based Capacity Building For Young Film Makers In Schools

– An Innovative Methodology for Participatory Learning -

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ABSTRACT: Adolescence is a critical time for children because it highlights themes of identity, belonging and attachment. The International Young Film Makers Festival by “Expressions India”, Delhi announced an innovative and path-breaking crusade for adolescents, in which they created a film dealing with current issues. This was embarked with building life skills capacity in students through the art of film-making. The group process assisted participants to explore and enrich their narratives of varied issues in the company of their peers. To tell a coherent story moving one’s life is developmentally important and closely tied with identity formation, life skills enhancement and resilience. The authors present key themes that arose from the film-making project and explain why narratives are important in a student’s life.

INTRODUCTION

“Film-making is a chance to live many lifetimes.”

• Robert Altman

Adolescence is a critical time as children indulge with building identity, belonging and attachment. However, children are not only learners caught up in pre-existing knowledge

Systems, but are also active contributors and participants who form their own sense of society. By interacting with others in social systems children can learn much about themselves and the world through exposure to it, by actively participating in its organization and establishment of their unique perspectives.

An important role played in formation of this coherent identity is by, **Media literacy and Advocacy**, means “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms”. Media literacy emphasizes both analyzing media and creating media.

CREATING MEDIA: FILM-MAKING

One of the ways of creating media is through, **Film-making**. It is a process of “telling-stories”. The stories we tell about our lives are the basis of our sense of self. What make a difference are not life events and circumstances, but the way we make sense of them. This view is echoed by diverse but complementary sources. Attachment theory tells us of the healing possibility of telling coherent and resolved stories, even when the stories are of loss and grief. Resilience studies show how some people move on from adversity by finding a productive way to make sense of their stories.

The challenge of the film-making project helps teenagers, find the most enabling and coherent story to meet their specific developmental needs. Developmentally, it makes sense that for adolescents the peer group is a fitting conduit for change. This process brings into awareness about different possibilities and new ways of interpreting stories. Our scripts both reveal and determine the way we see ourselves and the way we live our lives. The direction, editing and production, shows how we understand our past and how we use this to make sense of present and future. Our creation *is* our identity.

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ANALYZING MEDIA: LIFE SKILLS

The process of analyzing media is through the education of *Life skills*. The term **life skills** according to UNICEF (2008) refers to a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills which can help individuals make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life. Life skills may be directed toward personal actions and actions toward others, as well as actions to change the surrounding environment to make it conducive to health and daily living (Obiozor, E. W., 2008).

Media literacy with Life skill education is beginning to be recognized as one dimension of the essential

competencies required for healthy development of children in an information age. Educators must distinguish between learning skills or Life Skills, such as those process-oriented cognitive, communication, and problem-solving skills and learning tools, which include information and communication technologies such as films, computers, networking, audio, video, and other media tools. 21st century comprehensive education programme must emphasize the development of students' life skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Hobbs, R., 2004).

The life Skill development facilitated through creating media that is, Film-making is as follows:-

TABLE 1: 21 ST -CENTURY LEARNING SKILLS	
Information and Communication Skills	<p>INFORMATION AND MEDIA LITERACY Accessing, analyzing, managing, integrating, evaluating and creating information in a variety of forms and media; understanding the role of media in society.</p> <p>COMMUNICATION Understanding, managing and creating effective oral, written and multimedia communication in a variety of forms and contexts.</p> <p>CRITICAL THINKING AND SYSTEMS THINKING Exercising sound reasoning in understanding and making complex choice; understanding the interconnections among systems.</p> <p>PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION, FORMULATION AND SOLUTION Ability to frame, analyze and solve problems.</p> <p>CREATIVITY AND INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY Developing, implementing and communicating new ideas to others; staying open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives.</p>
Thinking and Problem solving skills	<p>INTERPERSONAL AND COLLABORATIVE Demonstrating team work and leadership; adapting to varied roles and responsibilities; working productively with others; exercising empathy; respecting diverse perspectives.</p> <p>SELF-DIRECTION Monitoring one's own understanding and learning needs; locating appropriate resources, transferring learning from one domain to another.</p> <p>ACCOUNTABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY Exercising personal responsibility and flexibility in personal, workplace and community contexts; setting and meeting standards and goals for oneself and others; tolerating ambiguity.</p> <p>SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY Acting responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind; demonstrating ethical behaviour in personal, workplace and community contexts.</p>
Interpersonal and Self-Directional Skills	

Source : Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2003).



PURSUIT OF LIFE SKILL CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH FILM-MAKING

International Young Film Makers Festival (IYFMF), a path breaking crusade for empowering adolescents, “*Expression's India*” team announced the festival to endeavour media literacy and advocacy. Global and Indian experiences have shown that educational interventions that focus on life skills’ enrichment, through the medium of arts, music, theatre and other aesthetic forms like short, educational films, have proven very effective for the overall excellence in schools. IYFMF was a unique innovation in the pursuit of that excellence.

The festival was embarked by varied films offering an excellent introduction to different issues, cultures and cultural norms. As the characters carry on their activities in the broader context of their society, friendships and culture, the viewer is helped to identify with the story and its protagonists. Thus the films portraying different prevailing social, political and economic mores helped adolescent identify current pressures and responses on them. It was divided into two categories, “Ahsaas”, one minute duration and “Manthan”, 10 minutes duration.

A sneak preview into the entangling young talents in the festival enfolded-

A movie on **Child Rights**, under “Manthan” category, named- “Thought in Time”, *the documentary was an attempt to highlight the rights which children are entitled to. As the human race, the children are also categorized into two – ‘the haves and the have not’s. The haves are privileged enough to exercise their rights without even having the slightest knowledge of it. They enjoy all the luxuries of life, which ‘the have not’s’ might have just dreamt of. For the majority, the family incomes are too low, that the parents force the children to go out and work following the belief of “more hands – more income”. The children then get exploited in many ways be it child labour, trafficking, small scale crimes, begging and so on. Most of them don’t attend school and the ones who do, go because of the major attractions like the mid-day meal in the government schools. When asked, a child said “ek waqt ka khaana toh milega school jaane se”. The documentary aimed at making people aware of the condition of children in our society, and making them aware that something needs to be done. It highlighted that, “We have to change to change the world. We can make difference.”*

Comments from the students team included- *“Making of this was more of a learning experience for us. We somehow discovered ourselves. We, belonging to well off families who have an adequate amount of income to fulfil our basic needs and even much more, are unaware of what the majority of the children population is going through and always used to take everything for granted. This movie has changed our perspective of looking at things and may be it has even made us a better human being than what we were before.”*

Another movie created by school students was, “**Impact of Media on Youth**” under the “Ahsaas” category, named “My Plight”. Summary about the movie included- *“The media today is explosive and more interactive than ever. It influences every sphere of our life, our emotions, thoughts, and opinions. With the onslaught of information brought in by the media came a variety of new information, like contraceptive pills. We see a lot of advertisements about emergency contraceptive pills, all giving us the idea that there’s always another way out of our problems. These pills have harmful side effects, including headache, body ache, swelling of body parts, etc., which are not advertised. And there is also no medical information supporting the claim that these pills are foolproof against pregnancy. In rare cases, the embryo slips into the oviduct and develops there, which can be fatal for both child and mother. We tried to focus on this serious issue, depicting how these advertisements for these pills promote irresponsible behaviour amongst youth. Our simple slogan at the end of the movie also conveys this message that the youth should be aware and informed, but they should act responsibly regarding how they use such information.*

Comments from the film crew highlighted that, *“It was a great experience, working together on such a project. This is the first time I’ve tried to make a film.”, “I had a great time working on this project with my friends”, “It was hard work, but the end result was well worth It.” and “I’m glad that I got the opportunity to work on this. It was enriching.”*

Therefore, the stories we tell about our lives are the basis of our sense of self. What make a difference are not life events and circumstances, but the way we make sense of them. This view is echoed by diverse but complementary sources. Attachment theory tells us of the healing



possibility of telling coherent and resolved stories, even when the stories are of loss and grief. Resilience studies show how some people move on from adversity by finding a productive way to make sense of their stories. For adoptees, building a coherent narrative is made more difficult by troubling facts, a lack of facts and reluctance to share these struggles within adoptive families (Fitzhardinge, H., 2008).

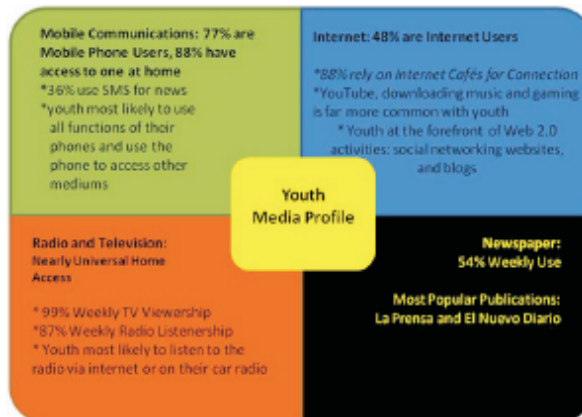
In teenage years, children need a richer and more complex way of understanding themselves and their stories. The challenge of the film-making project was to help teenagers find the most enabling and coherent story to meet their specific developmental needs. Not only was it important for these teenage students to consider their personal narratives around current issues, it was also important for them to experience their narrative within the context of other narratives. It was the sharing and layering of these narratives that most effectively led to the enriching of individual stories (Fitzhardinge, H., 2008).

People present at the festival were moved through feeling connected under similar narratives and also by seeing differences between student's narratives – different stories and different ways of making sense of them. The group allowed a canvas of narratives to be explored concurrently, each affected by and affecting another. Developmentally, it makes sense that for adolescents the peer group is a fitting conduit for change. This process brought into awareness different possibilities and new ways of interpreting stories. Our narratives both reveal and determine the way we see ourselves and the way we live our lives (Bruner, 1987). They show how we understand our past and how we use this to make sense of present and future. Our narrative *is* our identity. Within their stories, adoptees reveal perceptions and beliefs, internal working models of relationship, hopes and fantasies. Putting language and story to these fragmentary ideas reveals, both to the listener and to the self, what lies beneath. Once made conscious, it is then available for review, challenge and adjustment (Fitzhardinge, H., 2008).

ROLE OF MEDIA STUDIES

Table: 2- Statistical overviews of the consumption of valuable time spend into the access of media by our YOUTH:

Media Studies or literacy turns the passive act of receiving media messages into action through the



practice of decoding, reflecting, questioning, and ultimately creating media. It encompasses the ability to recognize propaganda and bias in the news, understand the impact of media ownership and sponsorship, and identify stereotypes and misrepresentations of gender, race, and class. Commercial and entertainment content targets young people as consumers, yet many youth feel that mainstream media do not reflect their lives as they truly live them. Their peers and communities are often portrayed in a stereotypical, negative fashion, and stories in the news are rarely more than crime reports. When youth find or fail to find themselves reflected in the media, there is an opportunity to discuss feelings of isolation and address issues of disparity, bias, class, and equity. Media-literate young people define their relationship to media content rather than let the content dictate their place in society.

Media-literate young people ask critical questions that help them better understand the intent behind a media work. When listening or viewing media, youth may ask:

- Who produced this work?
- Where are they from?
- What are their attitudes and values relative to my own?
- What are they attempting to achieve through this work?
- Are they trying to change my perspective in some way?
- Do I agree with their point of view?
- How can I respond to their work?

Media literacy fundamentals

Building upon ideas from communication, literary theory, cultural and media studies, and semiotics, educators internationally have developed key concepts (with slight differences in different places):



- All messages are constructions, created by authors for specific purposes.
- People use their knowledge, skills, beliefs, and experiences to construct meaning from messages.
- Different forms and genres of communication use specific codes, conventions, and symbolic forms.
- Values and ideologies are conveyed in media messages in ways that represent certain worldviews, shaping perceptions of social reality.
- Media messages, media industries, and technologies of communication exist within a larger aesthetic, cultural, historical, political, economic, and regulatory framework.

CORE PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Media literacy education:

- Requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create
- Expands the concept of literacy to include all forms of media
- Builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages with integrated, interactive, and repeated practice
- Recognizes that media are part of culture and function as agents of socialization
- Affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs, and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages

Core teaching methods practiced by media literacy educators include:

- Close analysis and deconstruction
- Formal and informal media production

CONCLUSION

The schools that encourage the young minds in authentic journey through film making “discover” media literacy as an instructional tool, to motivate students’ attention and interest in learning. It offers teachers to transform the culture of the school into a place where students’ voices are valued and respected, where classroom learning is linked to students’ lived experience, and where students can develop the confidence to express themselves in a wide variety of forms using language, imagery, and

multimedia technology. Therefore by promoting media creations such as film-making by young minds, the children’s meaning-making in response to the popular culture, school as well as the education system can seize on what they want to say, learn, and do in their classrooms. The paper will deliberate on the emerging research and innovative methodologies.

Also young children’s inquiry of popular culture can be seen as an effective way of deliberating the social issues by connecting school learning to their real life experiences. Therefore by promoting media creations such as film-making by young minds, the children’s meaning-making in response to the popular culture, school as well as the education system can seize on what they want to say, learn, and do in their classrooms.

Thus, including young children’s astute creations and their perspectives on it can be a critical approach toward multicultural education by means of which teachers can make an effort to give a voice to every child in making decisions about his or her own learning and knowledge.

The tall-order need is to create many platforms so as to promote media creations such as film-making by young minds so as to provide learning experiences where students strengthen Life skills to reach their own understandings about how to fully participate as citizens and consumers in a media-saturated society.

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