

Intervention study

The role of drama in enhancing life skills in urban –rural middle schoolers: an intervention study

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ABSTRACT

Life skills education (LSE) is an important aspect of holistic education that creates competencies that help students to face and overcome challenges in life. Students from the urban-rural sector of society come from a background of vulnerability and hence face adversities in everyday life. LSE is seen to be most effective in helping students overcome adversity. Drama has been seen as an expressive art medium that allows the individual to express openly and freely and also acts as a psychological release. The current study aimed at enhancing the life skills of middle school children, belonging to the urban –rural population, using drama. An intervention study was conducted with a sample of 50 students from Akurdi, Pune. The subjects attended a one-week drama workshop that was conjointly designed with Jazz Hands Foundation (Pune) and facilitated by the volunteers of the same organization. 5 groups of 10 students each and 2 facilitators/volunteers were created. A pre and post test was conducted by each volunteer for their respective group using the Dream Life Skill Assessment Scale (DLSAS). After computing the averages of both scorers in each group a paired t-test analysis was run. The results of the analysis showed a significant increase in the life skills of the students post the drama workshop. The average score of the students increased from 3.14 (SD 0.76) to 3.882 (SD 0.77). The P value was < 0.05 making it statistically significant. The observations made by the volunteers/assessors also revealed that creative drama increased class participation, positivity and motivation levels.

Keywords: Life Skills, Drama Therapy, Expressive Arts, Communication, Children

Life Skills as defined by WHO are “psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” Life skills are a group of competencies that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think creatively and critically, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Life skills are often also referred to as social and emotional skills or social and emotional learning.

Acquiring life skills is an important part of recovery from severe adversity. When children are faced with adversity such as trauma, abuse, neglect, war experiences etc., they display

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Received: September 01, 2020; Revision Received: November 25, 2020; Accepted: December 07, 2020

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The role of drama in enhancing life skills in urban –rural middle schoolers: an intervention study

developmental delays and mental health problems which is in turn the failure to thrive. Therefore, the development of life skills or social emotional learning is especially beneficial in empowering children to overcome the negative effects of adversity.

Building life skills along with cognitive skills can achieve high socio economic outcomes for children from vulnerable backgrounds. Research unequivocally shows that students who develop social and emotional skills are better equipped to succeed in school and can transfer theoretical concepts in to real life situations early on. A WHO publication of 1997 provides life skills education guidance for children and adolescents that consist of 10 core skills: creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, critical thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, empathy, self-awareness, effective communication, coping with stress and coping with emotions (World Health Organisation , 1997). In this study we focus on the 5 skills tested in the Dream Life Skills Assessment Scale; interacting with others, overcoming difficulties and solving problems, taking initiative, managing conflict, understanding and following instructions.

Expressive art therapy has been used as a tool to nurture personal growth and transformation of individuals since the 1970's. The current study applies the principals and goals of a specific expressive art therapy: Drama Therapy. Drama as an art form pushes one to come out of their comfort zone and explore their imagination and creativity. It begins with self-expression through the acting out of experiences and goes on to stimulate awareness of ones surrounding along with building appreciation and understanding of self and others. Drama therapy provides individuals with a safe and secure experience that encourages growth and emotional expression through dramatic and playful activity. Drama therapy as a practice aims to improve the overall quality of life by: promoting positive behavioral changes, improving interpersonal relationship skills, integrating physical and emotional well-being, and achieving personal growth and self-awareness. The goals of drama therapy encompass the life skills laid out by WHO and Dream A Dream. The current study uses the premise of drama therapy and incorporates it in an intervention workshop for urban-rural middle school children.

The urban-rural children, come from the lower socio-economic strata of the Indian society. While they live in urban cities, most of them are below the poverty line and struggle for basic essentials. Children coming from this background tend to face sever hardships in their family and school life. Developing life skills for these students can go a long way in helping them deal with the challenges that they face in everyday life. During the middle school is when students gain a deeper understanding of the world around them. It is around this time that their socio-emotional learning begins, along with their personality, attitude and moral judgments. The current study focuses on this population with the aim of enhancing the life skills of students from an underprivileged background, so as to empower them for their future.

Statement of the Problem

With life skills education at the rise, the need for studying effective ways of its execution is also increasing. Therefore, this study aims to look at the impact of one such tool. The problem statement formulated for this research was,

'Can drama be used as a medium to enhance the life skills of urban- rural middle-school Children?'

Significance of the Study

For children to reach their utmost potential, life skills enhancement is proving to be very important. The skills need to be developed in children early on so as to better equip them for the challenges in their lives. This study hopes to provide basis for the use of drama as a medium in developing life skills in students.

Hypothesis

Drama as an expressive art will enhance the life skills in urban-rural middle school students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Using Expressive arts as a medium to enhance life skills has been scarcely researched. In a recent 2015 meta- analysis research, from 1985 to 2012, the effect of drama-based pedagogy on pre-kindergarten to 16 year old was studied. It suggested that DBP has a positive, significant impact on achievement outcomes in educational settings (Bridget Kidger Lee). The research showed that DBP had positive effects on the psychological and social aspects of the students. This also shows us that research into Drama and Life Skills has been going on for long. In 1993, a study on the effect of mainstreaming on attitude and self-concept using creative drama and social skills training found that reverse mainstreaming, creative drama, and social skills training used during an academic year with a class of fourth-grade students and emotionally disturbed (ED) students improved the fourth graders' attitudes toward emotionally disturbed children and improved the self-concepts of the ED students (Buege). Research has shown that a positive correlation exists between self-concept and life skills (Vernosfaderani, 2014). A child's self-concept determines what they believe about themselves. If they have a good sense of themselves and also value themselves (high self-esteem) they are more likely to be able to tackle difficult problems and overcome life's challenges. In 2014 a research was conducted in Arak city (Iran), to judge the effectiveness of life skills training in increasing the self-esteem of 8-16-year-old students with hearing impairments in inclusive schools. A sample of 54 students of equal age and IQ were divided in two groups for the purpose of the study (experimental and control). The participants were assessed using the Coppersmith Self-esteem inventory and the data gathered was analyzed using the t test method through the SPSS software. The results showed that life skills training was effective in increasing the self-esteem of the hearing-impaired students (Vernosfaderani, 2014) . Self-esteem and self-concept have been seen to be closely related. Self-concept, self-discrepancy and role taking ability were the constructs studied in a 2006 research (Wright) into personal development and drama education in the light of an inter school role play based drama program. The study was conducted on 123 participants from five different classes of city and rural schools. The average age of the participants was 11.5 years. A pretest was conducted using Chandler Story Task on role-taking ability; the Self-Discrepancy Questionnaire for self-discrepancy; the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Revised) for vocabulary, and the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scales for self-concept. After the completion of a 10-week drama program the subjects were tested again. The results of the study revealed a significant increase in role taking, vocabulary and an improvement in their self-concept. It also indicated a significant correlation between the three constructs.

A paper published by the Australian Journal of Music Education contends that the arts provide a foundation for the intensifying effort that leadership, creative aptitude and expertise are making to existing and emerging professions. Temmerman states that participation in arts- based (school and/or community) programs “have proven to be

The role of drama in enhancing life skills in urban –rural middle schoolers: an intervention study

educational, developmentally rich, and cost-effective ways to provide students the skills they need to be productive participants in today's economy” (The role of arts education in advancing leadership life skills for young people, 2005). This paper specifically explored the capacity of art-based education experiences to develop the generic skills of team work, problem solving, communication and creative interpretations. These are essential life skills for individuals to be a participatory member of the society. Students that face severe adversity have also been seen to benefit with the use of drama as a medium to incorporate essential aspects of life skills. In a case study conducted in Johannesburg (Marovtsanga, 2010) with a group of fifteen orphaned, abused and destitute teenage girls between the ages of 13 to 19 years living in a shelter, focused on roleplay as an experimental and participatory method that was found effective amongst adolescents for the re-imagining of self. The aim of the research was to find out how practical it was to apply role play (a drama medium) as an educational medium in places of vulnerability. Specifically, the research explored the impact of role play towards the development of life skills. The research used the ten strategies and techniques listed by UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO on life skills. The findings showed that applied drama and theatre had the capacity to create transformational learning outcomes, and the role play technique enabled the re-imagining of self.

Along with aiding in conditions of adversity, creative drama has been seen as an effective instrument in the learning of different academic subjects. As part of a doctoral dissertation study in Kansas State University, a study was conducted to explore the inclusion of creative drama into science teaching as an instructional strategy for enhancing the understanding of scientific concepts in elementary school students. The experimental group of sixth grade students were taught a Full Option Science System (FOSS), a science unit on mixtures and solutions, with the help of creative drama. Whereas the control group was taught the same using only the FOSS teaching protocol. The quantitative and qualitative data analysis demonstrated that the students who studied science with the help of creative drama showed a better understanding of the scientific concept and preferred the learning method than its traditional approach. The observations of the study also revealed that creative drama created a positive classroom environment, improved social interactions and the self-esteem of the students (Arieli, 2007).

An essential aspect of life skills is resolving conflicts. Conflict resolution entails being assertive in situations that demand it, it also requires skills of negotiation in order to solve problems effectively. It is an important part of maintaining and building strong relationships. As conflict resolution is a part of life skills education, drama has been seen to aid in its development too. In a 2007 action research project this relationship was studied. An interdisciplinary and comparative project called DRACON (Drama for Conflict management) aimed at developing an integrated programme using conflict management, and drama as the pedagogy. The key purpose was to equip students with the skills they would require to manage conflicts in all aspects of their lives. The study used different forms of self-reported data, which included, questionnaires, diaries, questions requiring problem solving, interviews and observations were also made. The drama exercise as well as peer teaching within the DRACON showed promising results with regard to empowering students to manage their own conflicts (Birgitte Malm, 2007) . A similar study was seen in the Journal of School Violence. In response to the rising levels of school conflict a study was conducted to investigate a new approach to conflict resolution in middle school and high school students using interactive drama and role play. A program called the Win-Win resolutions was created that included strategies for self-control, anger coping, self-management of feelings and interpersonal problem solving. A pre-post survey was used to

The role of drama in enhancing life skills in urban –rural middle schoolers: an intervention study

collect data of 2,440 participants. The results indicated, middle and high school's students displayed a decrease in their levels of physical aggression. The high school students also displayed an increase in their levels of effective communication, while both middle school and high school students exhibited an increase in their general knowledge regarding positive conflict resolution strategies (Kelly N. Graves PhD, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was designed to check the impact of drama in enhancing life skills in children. A seven-day drama workshop was created jointly with Jazz Hands Foundation (Pune), in order to use drama to portray life skills. The 50 children that volunteered to be part of the workshop were divided in 5 groups of 10 each. Each group had 2 facilitators from Jazz Hands Foundation that conducted the workshop for their respective group. These facilitators were responsible for administering the DLSAS (Dream Life Skills Assessment Scale) before and after the workshop. The pre and post test results were later analyzed.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of children between the ages of 8 to 11. There were 29 females and 21 males. The participants belonged to the urban-rural socio-economic class.

Recruitment

The student sample was acquired through voluntary response sampling.

Measures

Dream Life skills Assessment Scale (Kennedy, 2014): The DLSAS scale was devised by Fiona Kennedy and David Pearson (National Health Service, United Kingdom), Lucy Brett-Taylor (University of East London) and Vishal Talreja, (Dream A Dream Nongovernmental Organization, Bengaluru, India). It is a five-item scale to assess five life skills: interacting with others, overcoming difficulties and solving problems, taking initiative, managing conflict, understanding and following instructions. A 5-point Likert scale is used to score each item: 1(*does not ye do*), 2 (*does with a lot of help*), 3 (*does with some help*), 4 (*does with a little help*), 5 (*does independently*). The mean of the five skills is considered as the overall score. The scale allows the rater to note down any significant observations or clarifications if necessary.

Procedure

The necessary permission to conduct the research was taken from the organization. A consent form was duly signed by the participant's parents/ legal guardians. Instructions were given to all the facilitators on administering the LSAS scale, before and after the workshop.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

After the initial sorting of data, the assessor 1 and assessor 2's Overall Score (OS) was averaged to create a Combined Score for each participant. This was done for both, the pre evaluation and post evaluation. Running basic data analysis on the results of both evaluations saw a slight increase in the average scores of the evaluation ($3.14 < 3.882$) (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Pre Test		Post Test	
Mean	3.14	Mean	3.882
Standard Error	0.107930439	Standard Error	0.109644695
Median	3.2	Median	4
Mode	3	Mode	4.1
Standard Deviation	0.763183451	Standard Deviation	0.775305075
Sample Variance	0.58244898	Sample Variance	0.601097959
Kurtosis	-0.74121965	Kurtosis	-0.459820512
Skewness	-0.253371526	Skewness	-0.455801829
Range	3.1	Range	3.2
Minimum	1.5	Minimum	1.8
Maximum	4.6	Maximum	5
Sum	157	Sum	194.1
Count	50	Count	50

(h1) The drama intervention will cause a significant increase in the life skills of middle school students.

To test the above hypothesis a Paired Two sample for Means: t-Test was conducted using the Combined Scores of the Pre Evaluation and Post Evaluation (Table 2). The analysis found a significant increase in life skills of the participants, post the intervention. The P Value was found to be < 0.05, making it statistically significant.

Table: 2 t-Test Paired Two Sample for Means

	Pre Test	Post Test
Mean	3.14	3.882
Variance	0.58244898	0.601097959
Observations	50	50
Pearson Correlation	0.717958974	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	49	
t Stat	-9.079698082	
P(T<=t) one-tail	2.2432E-12	
t Critical one-tail	1.676550893	
P(T<=t) two-tail	4.48639E-12	
t Critical two-tail	2.009575237	

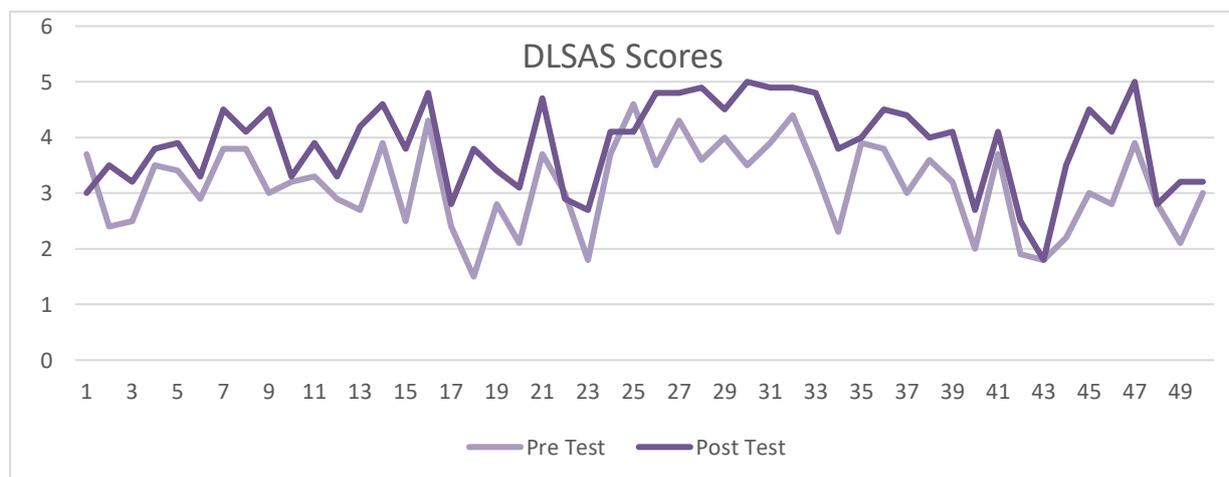


Figure 1 DLSAS Scores

The role of drama in enhancing life skills in urban –rural middle schoolers: an intervention study

As symbolized in the above graph, the sample showed an increase in the Life skills assessment score from the pre evaluation to the post evaluation. An increase in the score exhibits the impact of the drama workshop on the sample. The workshop had a positive impact that led to an increase in the life skills of the sample.

Observations

The Dream Life Skills Assessment Scale (DLSAS) includes a section for comments and observations. While this is optional, a majority of the scorers mentioned certain key observations about the sample. The common observations made included,

1. Improvement in participation.
2. Increase in the level of confidence.
3. Better understanding about self.
4. Increase in motivation levels.
5. Improvement in time management.

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted in order to study the relationship between drama and life skills. Throughout the paper life skills has been referred to as abilities that equip students to face challenges and solve problems in their life. The study emphasizes on the need for life skills education in school children and the benefits it entails especially for students coming from vulnerable backgrounds. The sample in focus of the study belonged to the urban rural socio-economic strata of the society. Students coming from this background face severe adversities in their daily lives and are not equipped enough to deal with it. Therefore, life skills education for the students from the urban-rural background is very essential. Drama as an expressive art medium to develop these life skills in students was the focus of the study. Drama has been seen to explore emotions, give platform for expression and act as a psychological release from everyday life's hassle. To study the impact of drama in developing life skills in students an intervention study was conducted with a sample of 50. The subjects attended a one-week drama workshop that was conjointly designed by the researcher with Jazz Hands Foundation (Pune) and facilitated by the facilitators of the same organization. The drama workshop in the study enabled the students to design a play and by the end of the workshop to present it. This created scope for students to work and learn from each other. The facilitators were responsible in administering the DLSAS (Dream Life Skills Assessment Scale) on the students before and after the workshop. The DLSAS consisted of a 5 point Likert scale that scored each child on 5 factors: interacting with others, overcoming difficulties and solving problems, taking initiative, managing conflict, understanding and following instructions. Apart from this the facilitators recorded key observations. 5 groups of 10 students and 2 facilitators was created. An average of the scores of the two facilitators per group was calculated and a paired t-test analysis was conducted. The results of the analysis showed a significant increase in the life skills of the students post the drama workshop. The observations made by the facilitators was also studied and revealed a visible positive impact on the students. Some of the observations made include, increase in class participation, increase in motivation levels, higher positive attitude and better management of self and others.

Delimitations and Limitations

1. The current study was conducted on a very specific population of 8-11-year-old students from the urban-rural area. This restricts the study from being generalized to students coming from other socio-economic strata of the society.

The role of drama in enhancing life skills in urban –rural middle schoolers: an intervention study

2. The sample size used in the study was 50 which is a small number given the vast population in the city of Pune.
3. The subjects in the study came from different schools in the locality of Akurdi in Pune and therefore is not a representation of all the students in the city.
4. The drama workshop was conducted for a short span of one week, a longer workshop would show better results in life skills education.
5. While reviewing literature it was evident that there is a lack of research in the impact of expressive arts on life skills education. Most studies conducted are specific to that geographical location and cannot be generalized.

Recommendations

The current study could not accurately represent the population and therefore further studies should be conducted on a larger scale to accurately measure the impact of drama on life skills. A longitudinal study on drama and life skills development would also help in drawing conclusive evidence to support the idea behind the current study.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the current research has shown the positive impact of drama on enhancing life skills education in students. However, more research is required on the current topic. Further research will strengthen the conclusions drawn in this study and allow drama to be applied in life skills education across countries.

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The role of drama in enhancing life skills in urban –rural middle schoolers: an intervention study

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Acknowledgement

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Singh A. (2020). The role of drama in enhancing life skills in urban –rural middle schoolers: an intervention study. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(4), 619-627. DIP:18.01.077/20200804, DOI:10.25215/0804.077