


“Education today is much more about ways of thinking which involve creative and critical approaches to problem-solving and decision-making. It is also about ways of working, including communication and collaboration, as well as the tools they require, such as the capacity to recognize and exploit the potential of new technologies, or indeed, to avert their risks. And finally, education is about the capacity to live in a multi-faceted world as an active and engaged citizen.”

So what are life skills? A definitive list is something educators, governments and employers continue to discuss. But no matter if you call them life skills, 21st century skills, soft skills, etc. students who are able to understand and use these skills, along with their educational qualifications, will be better placed to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities.

Dr. Spencer Kagan is an internationally acclaimed researcher, presenter and author of over 100 books, chapters, and scientific journal articles. He is a former clinical psychologist and full-time Professor of Psychology and Education at the University of California. He is the principal author of the single most comprehensive book for educators in each of the four fields: cooperative learning, multiple intelligences, classroom discipline, and classroom energizers. His instructional strategies are used in teacher training institutes in many countries. Dr. Kagan provides





workshops and keynote speeches in over 30 countries and his books are translated into many languages. Dr. Kagan developed the concept of structures; his popular brainbased, cooperative learning and multiple intelligences structures like Numbered Heads Together and Timed Pair Share are used in classrooms world-wide. Dr. Kagan has been featured in the leading educational magazines including Educational Leadership, Instructor, Learning Magazine, and Video Journal.

1 Andreas Schleicher, OECD Education Directorate (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) 2 Addressing the Life Skills crisis, Dr. Spencer Kagan, Win-Win Discipline: Strategies for All Discipline Problems (St. Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing, 2004)

Addressing the life skills crisis by Dr. Spencer Kagan We face a life skills crisis. This crisis can be conceptualized as a catastrophic imbalance between supply and demand. Much is being made these days of the need to to boost academic achievement. In reality, though, in terms of importance, the need to boost academic achievement runs a distant second to the need to boost life skills. For the happiness and success of our students and the productiveness and success of our society, as educators we need to admit, face and address the life skills crisis.

Thinking skills Creativity/imagination Problem solving
Decision making Self-knowledge Critical thinking
Accessing and analyzing information




Working skills Communication/collaboration/ Cooperation
People Management Time management Organization
Negotiating Leading by influence

Learning skills ICT Agility and adaptability Receiving and
giving feedback Handling criticism Innovation/exploration
Learner autonomy

Social skills Citizenship Social Responsibility Cultural
awareness Social development Respecting diversity
Networking

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“The work world has changed so that social skills are at a premium. Over 70% of jobs today involve membership of a team... Increased technology in the workplace is associated with interdependence ...teams cooperate with teams. In today’s world teamwork skills are employability skills.”

The dramatic changes in global economies over the past five years have been matched with the transformation in technology and these are all impacting on education, the workplace and our home life.

“I can guarantee the job I hire someone to do will change or may not exist in the future, so this is why adaptability and learning skills are more important than technical skill


To cope with the increasing pace and change of modern life, students need new life skills such as the ability to deal with stress and frustration. Today’s students will have many new jobs over the course of their lives, with associated pressures and the need for flexibility. As medical science advances, homelife and the community will place additional demands on future generations. Those who are ‘youngsters’ today will be called on to care for more elderly citizens. Kindness, compassion, and care giving skills will be in demand. As mobility increases, society will be more and more heterogeneous, so tolerance and diversity skills also will be at a premium.

Emotional intelligence and character development

Development of emotional intelligence and the development of character virtues are very closely linked. An advantage for educators of the character educational approach over the emotional intelligence approach to life skills is that the character virtues are concrete and specific and more easily translated into teachable, learnable curricula. It is much easier to deal with “empathy”, “cooperation”, or “fairness” as discrete, teachable values.

Rather than teaching lessons on virtues a teacher can choose instructional strategies that include virtues as an embedded curriculum topic, so no time





is taken from academic content; the virtues are acquired as the teacher delivers regular academic content.

Helping students to gain life skills therefore isn't about developing a new curriculum, it's about teaching the same content but structuring and incorporating opportunities for students to develop life skills into the organization of the class.

