Chapter 4: Constructing ‘Life’ as ‘Skills’: A Genealogical and Discursive Analysis of Life Skills Education

Diary Entry: February 17, 2012; 5:30-7:00 am, Edigah Maidan, Bangalore.

In the cold, dark morning, with the sun yet to rise, a group of around 20 boys from the nearby BOSCO shelter home are quietly warming up as they wait for their coach to arrive. The boys seem highly organised, self-motivated and dedicated, as they wait to start the day’s game. Soon two young men arrive on a bike. As I sit and watch from a distance, they split the group into two. The senior coach, John, takes the older group of 13-14 years old, and starts a game of football. He doubles as referee and coach as the game gets into motion, calling out the rules, and instructions for how to defend or pass simultaneously. At the side-lines, a younger coach handles a group of 11-12 year olds. After passing and handling exercises with the ball, he organises them into a circle and plays a game called ‘Lion and Deer’ – a game in which children must strategise in order to prevent the child playing the ‘lion’, from catching the child playing the ‘deer’. By 7:00 am the sun is finally up, and the group breaks for the day; but not before the coaches quickly facilitate a discussion around the important ‘skills’ of teamwork, strategy, and support that the children had learnt from playing the games. Though the session seemed to be more about football and football skills, the coaches assure me that they had a discussion about these vital ‘life skills’ with the children. Then the group heads off to a nearby ‘darshini’,¹ for breakfast sponsored by IP, the NGO from where the coaches had come.

What appeared to be a visible feature of the LSPs (visited during my earliest days on field, such as this), was an atmosphere of warmth, fun and games through which a pedagogic concern with the ‘self’ was introduced. Skills such as self-awareness, critical thinking, decision making, effective communication - all of which required self-introspection, and reflective cultivation - were presented through games, songs, art, theatre-based activities, group discussion and debates by a

¹ A small, local eatery.
group of young facilitators, not more than 10 or 12 years older than the children themselves.

While the facilitators used this space to draw children’s attention towards ‘how to be’ (e.g., ‘responsible’, ‘enterprising’, ‘disciplined’), middle class organisers of these programmes like Devesh Arya (the founder and CEO of IP), explained their work as ‘social entrepreneurship’. The aim, they argued, was to ‘give back’ to the children from disadvantaged communities those skills that had made them (i.e., Devesh and others like him in the middle class) successful. Others, such as Joel Mathias (the former head of the programme delivery team, at IP), pointed out that through these programmes, they were also contributing to society’s progress and development, by preparing children in the skills considered necessary to alleviate social problems of poverty, gender discrimination and violence.

This chapter explores these multiple dimensions to the LSPs observed in Bangalore, tracing out their linkages to a host of global and historical projects associated with disciplining the self. It aims at showing how, more than any other form, LSE brings together ‘technologies of power’ and ‘technologies of self’ (Coppock, 2011) in setting the norms for childhood. Further, examining the field in relation to what Inda (2005) calls the three dimensions of ‘governmental practice’- the ‘reasons’ (i.e., the forms of knowledge, expertise and calculations through which individuals are rendered amenable to political programming); the ‘technics’ (i.e., the mechanisms, devices, procedures and apparatuses through which individuals are shaped and normalised); and the ‘subject’ (the forms of personhood, identity or self,

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2 i.e., the techniques and practices of knowledge by which individuals are determined.
3 i.e., the techniques individuals apply to themselves in subjecting themselves to the discourses of power.
envisaged by projects of power), it also aims to show how specific childhoods become the subject of regulation.

The attempt is to lay out a genealogical and discursive account of LSE, trying to show how it constitutes, and is constituted by, an ‘assemblage’ (or configuration) of dominant techno-scientific ‘governmentalities’ (Collier, 2006; Dawes, 2011). That is, by examining a whole range of discourses, from psychological theories of development, to economic doctrines and national and international policies, the attempt is to reveal the specific ideas about life and children’s selves that inform, and are circulated through its practice.

What is specifically of interest within such an analysis is the language of various ‘texts’, both local and global, and its specific usage through which meaning and understanding is effected. That is, the aim is to interrupt “…the apparently natural flow of talk and text”, and examine how institutional discourses naturalise and disguise the circulation of power, and attempt to establish social meaning and culture as though they were organic and essential (Luke, 1995-1996, p.12).

This being the aim of the chapter, I first present an account of the common themes that emerge on analysing the various above-mentioned texts. After establishing these themes, I then present a critical analysis of the broader socio-historical context within which the ideas of ‘life as skills’ has gained prominence; thus, challenging any notion of these skills as natural, universal and integral to life.

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4 See page 26.
5 By ‘text’, I use the term as used by Halliday and Hasan (1985) to refer to any instance of language-in-use, which includes the written and spoken, and shows some features of coherence and coded meaning. Thus, it includes both written documents and secondary literature, as well as narratives of various field informants.
4.1. ‘Life’ as a Set of ‘Skills’, and ‘Childhood’ as Inherently ‘Risky’: The Discourse of LSE

Undertaking a discursive analysis of secondary literature consisting of psychological studies, policy documents, curricula and training manuals, websites and other documents, as well as key informants’ narrative, what can be observed are three main themes under which LSE is discussed. These are: a. about how the programmes and the respective skills are constructed; b. about how individuals or subjects of these programmes are constructed; and c. about which skills are given prominence for ‘life’. I present below a critical reading of the narratives associated with each of these themes.

4.1.a. Construction of the programmes and skills

As presented earlier, globally LSE is understood as skills for positive and adaptive behaviours, required to manage the challenges of everyday life. Two points that are emphasised within this definition is construction of everyday challenges as a problem of individual adaptation, which can be addressed through the right set of skills; and therefore, the centrality of this particular set of skills to everyday life itself.

This understanding of life skills as intrinsic and essential to everyday life was a theme that appeared, regularly, across several texts. Within psychological literature and across journals papers, there is a repeated mention of life skills as “those skills that enable individuals to succeed in the different environments in which they live such as school, home and in their neighborhoods” (italics mine; Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004, p.40). (What is also evident from this is the emphasis on individuals to fit into various environments).
Further, within such accounts, these skills are not just presented as important to all domains, but are also considered integral to ‘success’ itself. More importantly, within this literature, what it means to be ‘successful’ (i.e., by demonstrating the said skills) is established not only in relation to social, communal and academic goals, but also to develop “…skilled adults… able to form relationships in their social contexts necessary in widening their social spectrum and intimacy” (Mofrad, 2013, p.232), thus suggesting the importance of these skills to the most intimate recesses of personal and family life as well.

In addition to this understanding of the life skills as important for everyday contexts, within accounts of supranational developmental agencies such as the WHO, they have also been put forward to achieve certain developmental ends. That is, they have been positioned to indirectly combat a whole range of secondary social problems such as poverty, truancy and violence. Thus, the WHO (2009, p.3) notes that

Factors such as poor social competence, low academic achievement, impulsiveness, truancy and poverty increase individuals’ risk of violence. Thus, developing children’s life skills … improving their participation and performance in school and increasing their prospects for employment can help protect them from violence, both in childhood and later in life.

In these discussions, LSE is presented, not just as solutions to personal behavioural problems, but to larger structural issues of poverty and employment from which these conditions emerge, thus, ‘responsibilising’ (i.e., making responsible) individuals for managing under difficult and unjust social circumstances. In fact, as can be observed from the account given above, personal qualities, such as impulsiveness, are placed alongside socially determined circumstances such as poverty, and all of these different conditions are levelled as
similar kinds of ‘everyday challenges’ emerging from individual deficits that can be addressed through a universal set of skills.

These ideas about LSPs, as universal solutions to problems that emerge beyond the individual level, could also be seen on the field, wherein programme organisers such as Devesh Arya presented their programmes as meant to help children from disadvantaged communities ‘escape their cycle of poverty’. Elaborating on vision further, Garima Acharya, the COO of IP, explained how such problems were a result of these children not being prepared adequately, to deal with the challenges of life. Expanding on this, she pointed out that

> Even if they get a job, they don’t know how to conduct themselves at a job or manage conflicts at work…The critical missing element for young people from difficult backgrounds is life skills. You and me, daily, use life skills to manage conflicts. …For children from difficult backgrounds, they address these challenges by substituting themselves with alcohol, crime, drugs or just being poor (personal communication, July 29, 2012).

Here again, what emerged prominently was an assumption of deficits among the working poor, an understanding of poverty as personal conduct, similar in nature to other psychological problems such as addiction itself; and the role of life skills in alleviating such social conditions.

Thus, even within the field discourses, LSE was presented as a solution to all developmentally undesirable conditions, both personal and social. In fact, noting this, some, such as Dr. Chandrika Bagevadi (an independent psychologist, counsellor, corporate trainer and mentor, with a doctorate in clinical psychology from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences [NIMHANS]$^6$), even pointed out that

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$^6$ A premier mental health institution in India.
“If you don’t know computers you can still run life, but life skills are skills that one cannot live without” (personal communication, January 24, 2012); once again suggesting the all-encompassing nature of these skills, as seen in psychological literature.

4.1.b Construction of subjects

Having presented how LSE has been positioned as central to normal life, I now present an account of how the subjects or recipients of LSE (i.e., children) are constructed within these discourses. While LSE is considered integral to all daily aspects of living, paradoxically, it is these very skills that are seen to be absent in an alarming majority of children and youth, thus positioning a large population ‘at-risk’. Within reports by WHO, and other national and international agencies, favouring these forms of skills-training, the majority of children and youth are presented as follows:

All young people today face significant stresses in their lives. Some changes are part of normal growing up, e.g., growth and hormonal changes, as well as the changes in relationships that young people experience with parents and society. Other stresses are more individual, involving pressures to advance in school and to earn a living, peer pressure, family moves, school changes, parental fighting and divorce, or pressures to engage in substance use. Sexual and physical mistreatment, AIDS, natural catastrophes and severe or chronic physical illnesses and hospitalizations may also cause significant stresses. Young people negotiate these stresses with varying degrees of resilience and mastery. (WHO, 1993, p.1)

Thus, positioning all young people as under some or the other form of risk, the whole developmental periods of childhood and adolescence itself have been constructed as ‘risky’, when, in reality, a majority of young people have been known and reported to enjoy good health (Coppock, 2011).
Against this context, LSE it is not just conceived as a positive addition or buffer against risks within psychological literature. Instead, its very absence is equated with inappropriate development, by LSE experts such as Gilbert Botvin,7 and his colleague, Kenneth Griffín, who note that

Deficits in these life skills appear to play a critical role in the etiology of adolescent problem behaviors including drug abuse because poorly competent youth are highly vulnerable to the social, environmental, and intrapsychic forces that promote and maintain problem behaviors. (Botvin & Griffín, 2002, p.42)

As can be observed from the account above, LSE is thus, not just seen as a matter of learning or training, but as an organic condition or variable for children’s development. Thus, childhood, or children considered to be on the path of normal development has now come to be equalled with the presence of the said skills.

4.1.c. The skills considered central to life

This brings me to the final theme that can be gleaned from the various ‘texts’, on the skills that are considered important for life. Within the several accounts of LSE examined, what emerged clearly is the idea of positive development and socialisation as linked to behavioural and psychosocial changes. ‘Risks’ to be prevented are psychological ones, and problems of development are related to individual behaviours.

Thus, the skills considered important are, therefore, psychosocial ones, and despite the all-encompassing term given to it as ‘life skills’ (or

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7 Botvin has a trademark LSP, which receives extensive support and funds from various national agencies of the US government in charge of tobacco and drug prevention in schools. Botvin’s Life Skills Training™ [LST] has been named as one among the few ‘scientific’, ‘evidence-based’ ‘best practices’ in the field of prevention studies (refer Gorman, 2003; 2005). He is also a consultant on LSE for various international organisations, including the WHO.
skills related to all of life), the term does not refer to all forms of skills at all. In fact, within psychological literature, ‘life skills’ is clearly separated from other ‘hard skills’, or what are considered to be ‘isolated behaviours’, such as cooking or managing money (Hodge et al., 2012), or other skills needed for livelihood (WHO, 1999). (A similar distinction was also made on field, by key informants, such as Chandrika, given above). The focus instead, is more on a set of ‘soft skills’ to do with self-regulation and personal management. Presenting this difference, the UN Inter-Agency Working Group on Life Skills in EFA has also noted that

One area of agreement from the exercise\(^9\) was that there are different types of skills – (i) psychosocial skills and (ii) manual or hands on skills. Psychosocial skills were recognised as already being defined as life skills \textit{by some groups} (italics in original). While the group struggled with terminology [sic] to describe the concept, “manual or hands on skills” were described as those skills related to “making things or objects” or doing something, especially with the hands eg. first aid bandaging skills, switching on a computer, or putting on a condom. It was agreed that these should not be considered “life skills”… (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2004, p.5)

Thus, life skills are mainly specified as the psychosocial characteristics (including the values, attitudes and knowledges) that underlie behaviour across all life situations, while contrasted with other skills that are non-psychological in nature (UNESCO, 2004). Since they are seen as characteristics that underlie all behaviour, they are, thus,

\(^8\) While, in my introduction chapter I mention that the term ‘life skills’ has been used to refer to a wide range of learnings, here I refer to the distinction made within technical-psychological literature which refers to a narrow range of skills as ‘life skills’. Though specifically defined within technical discourses, the term has taken on a wide variety of meaning in popular discourses.

\(^9\) i.e., the joint meeting of the various UN Agencies held at UNESCO, Paris, from March 29-31, 2004.
also considered important for normal individual development and lifelong learning.

While psycho-social in nature, what differentiates LSE from other psychological techniques and concepts, such as socio-emotional learning, emotional intelligence, resilience, positive psychology, etc., is the emphasis on skills (Hodge et al., 2012), and conceptualisation of the tacit, spontaneous and immaterial aspects of everyday lives as a set of observable, repeatable, and practice-able abilities to be acquired through formal learning (Lau, 2012). This distinction is important, for as it will be explained below, the reconceptualisation of psychological knowledge as a matter of skills was vital to some of the socio-historical conditions and changes seen in the last decades of the twentieth century.

4.2. Development of the ‘Skills’ Turn and Training Paradigm within Psychology

In tracing the genealogy of LSE and its conceptualisation as knowledge for everyday living, in this section I trace its history to the changes within Psychology as a discipline and its new discourses, on the nature of social problems and individual behaviour, since the 1960s.

Starting during this period, and gaining momentum through the 1970s and 1980s, the behavioural health of populations came to light as ‘problems of government’. Particularly, within developed western nations, concerns around the growing rates of social unrest, unemployment, increasing rates of crime, youth delinquency and substance use became national concerns requiring urgent solutions.

10 The reference here is to the Foucauldian idea of ‘government’ (or management of conduct of the population) through techniques of measurement, calculation, and determination of the population in particular ways that was central to the security of the state.
Attributed to a number of changes within economy and society, including, the increased pace of liberalisation, globalisation, technologisation, and the post-modern conditions of living (Coppock, 2011; Keating & Hertzman, 1999; Matarazzo, 2002; Murray, 2012) that had led to changes in the social organisation of life, these conditions were seen to have huge developmental costs for the state.

Within this context of new behavioural and mental health problems that were coming to light, there was also a realisation from within the discipline about its disconnect with, and its irrelevance to, addressing these new psycho-social problems amongst populations. Alongside public movements on civil rights, and women’s empowerment, labour uprising, and the emergence of post-colonial critiques to theory, there was widespread critique, from inside and outside the discipline, with respect to its role.

Until then, considered a body of authoritative knowledge and expertise, psychological theories and models had been accepted for establishing an understanding about the individual self. However, with the development of other social movements, the nexus of power/knowledge through which the discipline had ‘normalised’ and ‘categorised’ individuals, and medicalised everyday life for socio-political control, came to light (Murray, 2012). Social theorists, philosophers and psychologists, from Foucault to Moscovici, sought to expose the excessive individualisation in psychological models, and the

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11 For details of these social changes see Bauman (2000), Beck (1992), Giddens (1991).

12 This was, both, in terms of increased expenditure on healthcare, as well as costs in terms of a loss of future manpower.
constant work it entailed upon the self, noting these to be a reflection of
the ‘governmental’ rationalities they served.

Thus, for example, Foucault in his seminal works on *Madness and
Civilization*, *Birth of the Clinic*, and *Discipline and Punish*, elaborated
on the birth of Psychology as a discipline, in its relation to the liberal
institutions of governance, showing how it instituted new forms of
subjectivities and disciplinary techniques required for the functioning of
liberal government (Foucault, 1964; 1977; 2003; Murray, 2012; Rose,
1998). Social psychologist Serge Moscovici (1972), showed how
behaviours that came to be defined as ‘irrational’ by the discipline were
all those behaviours that deviated from the norm of individualism and
the capitalist model of life (as cited in Murray, 2012).

Faced by such criticism from different quarters, there was a call
from within the discipline for it to become more relevant to human
needs by being more grounded in people’s lives; and to social problems
by addressing the escalating costs of ‘developmental health’ faced by
nations\(^\text{13}\) that were affected by these problems (Keating and Hertzman,
1999; Matarazzo, 2002). A statement to this effect was even issued by
the then president of the American Psychological Association (APA),
George Albee, who argued that

\[\ldots\] the terrible suffering that exists in \ldots society among the
disenfranchised, the poor, the havenots, can only be
remedied by direct confrontation with the establishment, by
the socialisation of our care-delivery systems, by \ldots using
social models which can only be developed as creative
people find out about the real problems \ldots The times are
right for revolution! (Albee, 1969; as cited in Murray, 2012)

\(^{13}\) I use the term as Keating and Hertzman (1999) use it to describe a wide variety of
developmental outcomes, from physical and mental health, to behavioural adjustment,
literacy and other educational achievements.
It was within this context that new models of psychological knowledge came to be developed. Described as an outcome of the ‘self-reflexive revolution’ that the discipline underwent (Hodge et al., 2012; Larson, 1984; Murray, 2012), recognising the need to democratise it and make it more socially relevant, there was a call to ‘give psychology away’ (Larson, 1984) – that is to spread psychological awareness and knowledge among the people so that they can have greater control over their lives. Efforts were made to shift away from behavioural models, epitomised by B.F. Skinner’s iconic statement, “… what do you say to the design of personalities? . . . Give me the specifications, and I’ll give you the man!” (as cited in Lau, 2012, p.89), that represented the final authority and conceit of the psychological profession.

In its place, new models for a socially relevant psychology were put forth, marked by the publication of two seminal texts - Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) ‘Belief, attitude, intention and behaviour: An introduction to theory and research’, and Albert Bandura’s (1977) ‘Social Learning Theory.’ Acknowledging the need for individuals’ participation in the process of change, these theories of learning and behavioural change posited new links between social problems and certain processes interior to the individual, and beyond the access of the psychologist, such as motives, intentions and beliefs. Rather than reducing individuals to a set of conditioned responses and doing away with any understanding of human agency, these new models of socio-cognitive learning, essentially, sought to bring the precarious effects of human agency under control, by factoring in the ‘whole’ individual/child into the learning situation (Fendler, 1998).

Drawing on these new theories of behaviour change that factored in the agent’s own ‘rationality’ and ‘affections’ into the process of
learning and change, the new approaches to psychological health placed an emphasis on the active role of the individual in bringing about his/her own behavioural change. Attempting to bring these internal aspects into a predictive and calculable model of human behaviour, through which the problems of the times could be addressed, individuals were sought to be actively engaged in the management of their own problems.

Thus, what this entailed was a new approach to psychological practice, in which the previously applied psychological techniques of regulation came to be replaced by a language of self-management and skills. Urging individuals to take control of this psychological knowledge about the self and its management, this was presented as a set of ‘psychological / self-help skills’.

Individuals were also constructed through these new discourses as desiring of this shift and greater responsibility for the self. Thus, in the first anthology on skills training approaches to psychological practice, psychologist Dale Larson (1984), argued that

People’s views of themselves and what they can achieve are changing. Many are actively seeking solutions to the demoralization (Frank, 1974) and alienation that characterize our times. We are witnessing what Rogers (1977) calls a ‘quiet revolution’ in which people are more and more, taking control of their psychological and physical destinies. We are people who have grown weary of professional mystification and whether it is the art of medical care or psychological healing, Americans have an almost insatiable desire to ‘do it themselves’ – to learn skills they can use to enhance the quality of their lives and solve their own problems. (p.2)

What is to be noted about this self-reflexive turn within Psychology, is that while, on the one hand, it was a means to address the criticisms of power/knowledge levied against it, on the other hand
these developments were linked to the desire within the discipline for greater control over the problems of social behaviour. With behaviour and its underlying motives conceived as ‘skills’ in which one could be trained, this offered the possibility for shaping individuals’ behaviours in ways that would prevent their engagement with risks. Thus, interventions using the skills approach were also seen as preventive approaches through which the incidence of development of social problems and ‘risks’ itself could be reduced (Larson, 1984) by having individuals work upon themselves. (This was actually a euphemism for the shaping of desirable attitudes, values, and behaviours).

Therefore, these various social skills training programmes have also come to be recognised as the gold standard for the prevention of social problems (Gorman, 2003). LSE has developed from these very changes within psychological therapy and practice, drawing on the influential social learning approaches of Bandura and Jessor. Within this new context in which skills came to be seen as “the competencies ... necessary for effective living (Egan & Cowan, 1979, p.8)” (Larson, 1984, p. 4), LSE has also come to be established as one of the most important forms of knowledge and training for life.

However, in critically reviewing these developments, what is to be noted, is how, in conceiving behavioural problems as a matter of skills that are “operational, repeatable, trainable and predictable within a delimited range of effects” (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1976, p.189; as cited in Larson, 1984, p.4), LSPs and other skills training still entail the techniques by which disciplinary discourses of Psychology can gain control over the individual self. In fact, they represent the extension of psychological interventions into new territories, moving from the
domain of the external (i.e., behaviour), to the internal conditioning of the ‘soul’ (Fendler, 1998) itself.

Further, as Fendler (1998) has observed, as "objects of science" that have helped demystify the vague and unknown aspects of "the inner self", and brought it under the gaze of ‘educational management’ and control, they have contributed to bringing the self, more firmly, under political control as well. As will be discussed further below, these political projects are ones for which it has become important to establish the individual as an ‘active and responsible learner’ (Larson, 1984, Peters, 2001), and personally accountable for all aspects of his/her life. Noting these shifts in political rationale that psychology has served, Rose (1999) has also pointed out that

The significance of psychology within advanced liberal modes of government lies in the elaboration of a know-how of the autonomous individual striving for self-realization. In the nineteenth century, psychological expertise produced a know-how of the normal individual; in the first half of this century it produced a know-how of the social person. (p. 90)

In the next section I elaborate on this observation by presenting the social-political context within which the skills-based psychotherapeutic education, like LSE, have gained significance.

4.3. Psycho-education and the Possibility for ‘Global Governmentality’: Development of the ‘Reponsibilised’ Subject

In drawing attention to the linkages between psychological knowledges, and the practices of ‘global governmentality’ – that is the development of “governing efforts and representational practices” that set the understanding of social, economic and political problems, as well as their solutions, at a global scale (Ilcan & Lacey, 2011), here I
aim to show how psychological practices and discourses have contributed to the governmentalisation of life.

The reconceptualisation of (what are essentially similar to earlier behaviourally-oriented, ‘corrective’) psychological interventions into a language of ‘skills’, has allowed psychological discourses and practices to gain a new attractiveness and normalcy (Coppock 2011). This acceptance, as Coppock (2011) notes, has come from its ability to remain behaviourally-oriented and remedial, yet without falling into the previous traps of categorising normality. Instead, psychological interventions and therapeutics have been normalised (ibid), allowing psycho-educational programmes such as LSE to become a part of the public discourse and imagination on solutions to various developmental problems. Made acceptable in this manner, programmes such as LSE have, in fact, become the tools through which standards for ‘normality’, ‘success’, and ‘failure’ have come to be established.

This discursive shift in the mode of psychological regulation can be gleaned through a historical examination of LSPs and how they have been constructed and applied to socio-political problems of the times. For example, even with the first LSP developed by psychologist, Winthrop Adkins, to help unemployed youth find, get, and keep jobs (Adkins, 1984), this subtle shift is observable. What can be observed from Adkins (1984, p. 45) definition of LSE as the “…‘fifth curriculum” (Adkins, 1974), …for helping people at every level of the educational system and at every stage of life [to] learn to cope with the predictable problems of living”, is the absence of pathologisation, and an understanding of problems as a natural feature of every stage, requiring learning (not isolation or confinement). Observable here is a shift in interest, which is no longer on defining the ‘unemployed’ as a
pathological category by listing out its aetiology or symptoms. The focus, as Rose (2004, quoted above) argues, is not on establishing a ‘know-how’ of the individual unemployed self. Rather, the aim here is to establish their roles and duties as members of society, within normal social life.

In its aim of making individuals “…self-reliant, self-directing, employable citizens” (Adkins, 1984, p. 45), programmes such as this have also come to set the criteria for ‘employability’ itself. That is, through its programme pedagogy that provides suggestions for how to cope with these ‘routine’, ‘developmental’ (i.e., related to the process of natural human growth) tasks of managing oneself at work, by gaining skills to “make decisions and choices, resolve conflicts, gain self-understanding, explore environmental opportunities and constraints, communicate effectively with others, and take personal responsibility for their actions” (ibid, p.44), the understanding of the ‘employable citizen’ (or the ‘unemployed’) itself is discursively set. Here, what is visible is the shift in attention from the conditions of employment to what it means, personally, to be ‘employable’.

In a similar vein, applied to other social-developmental problems of governance, other LSPs have also established an understanding of what it means to be ‘healthy’, ‘educated’, ‘successful’, and so on. For example, when observed in relation to education, LSE has been presented as that required to “reform traditional education systems, which appear to be out of step with the realities of modern social and economic life” (WHO, 1999, p.2). In reconceptualising education in this manner, a new understanding of the ‘educated subject’ has also been established, as one who is prepared for and can comply with these demands of modern socio-economic life.
Accordingly, in line with these new socio-economic conditions beginning since the 1960s (Foucault, 2008), in advanced liberal countries of Western Europe and North America, the ‘educated subject’ has also come to be conceived as one who is active, reflexive and responsible for managing oneself (Fendler, 1998). Linked to these socio-cultural, economic and political shifts towards neoliberalism, programmes such as LSE have also simultaneously, offered the tools by which even the youngest populations can be prepared to adapt to this shift that requires greater responsibility on the part of individuals in the context of a withdrawing state (Gibb & Walker, 2011). Absent from these conceptions of education and ‘educated citizens’ then, are non-economic valuations of education as an intrinsic good, or of individual or social striving for knowledge, identity, power and well-being.

First appearing in relation to these new conditions, programmes such as LSE, thus appear to be techniques for the cultural reconstruction of society along these lines, as neoliberalism, as pointed out by many scholars (e.g., Larner, 2000; Peters, 2001) goes beyond the level of economic policy or political philosophy, and becomes the rationality for government itself. Thus, it aims to establish a new understanding about the self and its relation to the world. Education (particularly, in its psychological form) was, therefore, central to this.

Closely resembling the ends sought to be achieved by this governmental rationality, LSE has also come to be adopted as an important component of several international programmes and policies, ranging from WHO’s mental health programmes, the Ottawa Charter on Health (1986), to the World Conference on Education For All (EFA, 1990; 2000).
In fact, at EFA, which was organised by the UN Inter-Agency commission, and which saw the participation of over 155 nations, 20 intergovernmental bodies and 150 NGOs (Brock-Utne, 2000), ‘basic education’ was established as a fundamental ‘right’ of childhood, and was redefined as the

...knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes...required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. (The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1993, p.4)

It was conceived as more than technical content or skills, and along with literacy and numeracy, ‘life skills’ was identified as one of its key components. In this manner, made integral to the definition of education, LSE has also, indirectly, come to occupy the status of a fundamental right of childhood.

As part of such global conventions on education and children’s development, LSE can, thus, be understood as a form of ‘global governmentality’ through which practices of self-reponsibilisation and active regulation of life have been conceived positively as rights. That is, adopting a discourse of welfare and development in presenting these new forms of education that function as ‘technologies of self’ (Foucault, 1988), they normalise neoliberal relations to the self, and convert schools and families into key sites for developing the ‘global citizen’ with the right sets of attitudes and skills necessary for the new economy and enterprise society. Thus, through a combination of a language of rights and welfare, they make it difficult to raise any alternative ways of understanding the neoliberal ethic of the self.
In fact, through ‘global governmental networks’ comprising transnational agreements and policies, aid, and non-governmental agencies (Ilcan & Lacey, 2011), they have also entered new, non-western contexts such as India, wherein they work as tools to prepare these contexts for the social-political shifts towards neoliberalism (Tikly, 2009). Though these contexts do not share a similar liberal political philosophy and rationality of governance as the advanced liberal countries of the west, LSP have still been partly successful in establishing a similar orientation towards childhood. However, interestingly, this is through a very different set of discourses, which I now examine in the final section.

4.4. Empowerment and Discipline – The Two Sides of a Coin

The entry of psycho-social or ‘therapeutic education’ (i.e., interventions for emotional well-being, skills training and other forms of social and psychological support; Brunila, 2013), has been a fairly recent phenomena in the Indian context. As Srikala and Kishore (2010) note, practices such as SMPHs and LSE have not yet been given much attention, as evident from the fact that education itself has not yet come to be conceived as ‘therapeutic’, as with the West (refer Brunila; 2013; Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009; Fendler, 1998; Nolan, 1998).

However, this is not to say that the idea of LSE has been completely absent within the Indian context. In fact, quite the reverse, the terms ‘life skills’ and LSE appear quite frequently in casual conversations with parents and teachers, in the media, on school websites and promotional material, among NGOs, educational resource providers, those who provide ‘extracurricular’ resources and training to children and so on. Yet, what ‘life skills’ means, and how it is perceived
and applied have multiple and contested meanings and trajectories. While this is pursued more fully in the following chapters, here I attempt to simply undertake a textual analysis of some policies and organisational discourses, and field informants’ narratives that show three main themes that emerge within the Indian context, all of which juxtapose LSE as ‘discipline’ leading to ‘empowerment’. Below, I present these themes associated with different actors – the state, teachers and local administrators at the state level; and finally the LSP organisers.

4.3.a. LSE as educational-administrational tools of the state

Examining the state’s approach to LSE, which was influenced by international agreements and aid for childhood and education, such as EFA, what is observable is the understanding of LSE as an administrative tool that works through the education of citizen-subjects. ‘Life skills’ was first mentioned within the Indian policy context with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in 2000, which noted that

Education, by and large, suffers basically from the gap between its content and the living experience of the students. Education ideally must prepare students to face the challenges of life. For this, it needs to be intimately linked with the different life-skills, the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life, by developing in them generic skills related to a wide variety of areas such as health and social needs. It is through these skills that students can fight the challenges of drug addiction, violence, teenage pregnancy, AIDS and many other health related problems. The skills would also make students aware of issues such as consumer rights, questioning the quality of goods and services available to them, writing to the manufactures, and civic authorities about the quality of goods and services that they expect. Besides, legal literacy and understanding of civic and administrative procedures would also be made available to
the students to make their life simple, hassle free and safe.
(NCERT, 2000, p.12)

In its first articulation within Indian policy, as with the international context, LSE was privileged within an economic framework for education, with the aim of preparing children as ‘consumer-citizens’ – a framework that has been central to India’s middle class politics (Fernandes, 2006). However, this did not see a follow-up in terms of actual programmatic interventions on the ground.

LSE once again found mention in the latest revision of the NCF (in 2005), wherein it was considered essential (as within international policies) “for dealing with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (NCERT, 2005, p.40). Specifically the NCF (2005) lists out certain key domains for the application of LSPs, which include the prevention of HIV/AIDS, to help adolescents “cope with the concerns of growing up” (p.57); and for youngsters to gain “practical life skills and work experiences of varied kinds” (p.68).

Here, the references to ‘life skills’ appear to be general, set within the larger framework of Indian education that is largely content-heavy and didactic. There is neither a mention of the difference in its epistemological or pedagogical approach to knowledge, when compared with the traditional education system in India (and how this could create conflicts for its practice), nor to its function as specific forms of psychosocial skills dealing with the internal aspects of self in relation to these various domains. That is, as within the international documents, there is no mention of LSE as an overarching ‘approach’ to education, or of its nature as psychological processes that underlie all forms of learning. Rather, it merely appears to be seen as an additional set of ‘skills’ to be given to students, in addition to the knowledges and values
inculcated by the traditional education system. Further, this post-2000 articulation of ‘life skills’ has also dropped the connotation of developing ‘consumer-citizens’ engaged in civic life, as was seen in NCF 2000, although the importance of life skills for ‘employability’ and preparation of a work force has been retained. While, LSE has loosely been framed in this manner within the NCF, the national LSP that developed following this, mainly adopted a health focus, thus providing a clue for what maybe the rationalities underlying practice within this context. Here, unlike what is seen in the West, the aim is not to develop self-responsible individuals, but to prevent certain ‘risks’ and manpower costs for the state through an educational (rather than therapeutic) approach.\(^\text{14}\)

Reflecting these administrative goals, in fact, even the Working Group on Youth Affairs and Adolescents’ Development of the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) has reiterated that the “Education of adolescents has a direct bearing on the development of the country and in addressing the social concerns. The nation loses the potential manpower if education of satisfactory quality is not provided to adolescent persons” (as cited in Boradia, 2009, p.9). Along with this, it also recommended counselling for adolescents for the “special needs and challenges related to this age”, with special emphasis on substance abuse, and life skills that must be particularly related to the emerging world of work. Among other recommendations, two recommendations were related to emerging concerns of sexuality during this

\[^{14}\text{The distinction I make between an ‘educational’ and ‘therapeutic’ approach is in terms of their points of application. I argue that an educational approach is externally regulative, seeking to influence the understanding of the problem, while the therapeutic approach is internally-regulative, seeking to change learners conceptions of themselves.}\]
period and preparing adolescents to face the challenges associated with “the overwhelming reality of HIV/AIDS pandemic” (Boradia, 2009, p.9).

Thus, clearly the bulk of the attention given to LSE has been in the context of adolescent risks. Further, what can be seen from documents such as that mentioned above is how LSE is placed along with other techniques of ‘counselling’, thus seeming to imply how it is mainly conceived in relation providing adolescents with guidance, rather than developing self-responsibility in them.

Drawing on these various articulations on the educational needs of youth in the country, starting in 2005, the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT), the apex educational planning and implementation body in the country introduced LSE, along with the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), as part of the national Adolescent Education Programme (AEP). The AEP was to be made available as a co-curricular subject to all high school children (Boradia, 2009; UNPFA-India, n.d.). Within this context, LSE was understood as an “educational intervention focusing on critical elements of adolescent reproductive and sexual health (ARSH) including HIV/AIDS and substance (drug) abuse” (NCERT, 2010, p.3-4).

4.3.b. LSE as ‘discipline’ in the local context of the school

With the primary interpretation of LSE being one of preventing ‘adolescent risks’ through education, even at the individual state level, there has been a penetration of this approach. Thus, in Karnataka, where my study has been conducted, the Sub-Assistant Director of Public Instruction (SADPI) for Adolescent Education and Life Skills, from the DSERT, explained that

Why they (children in government schools) require this (life skills) is, if there are suicide cases also, this will work… when the results come, what will happen to them? They’ll
try to commit suicide. For other things as well... (personal communication, August 22, 2013).

Stating this, she also pointed to aspects such as menstrual hygiene, and other behaviours such as distance to be maintained between boys and girls, and how to behave appropriately in different social contexts, for which these skills were considered important.

Further, what was noticeable in her account was how LSE was presented as a set of decisions (such as those mentioned above) that adolescents should be aware of (rather than make). Thus, she also pointed out that the programmes mainly focused on giving information, rather than using activities as a means of building skills.

While the context of ‘risk’, health (e.g., maintain menstrual hygiene), and ways of ‘behaving appropriately’ (e.g., ‘...how to behave with whom’) repeatedly occurred in our discussion, largely, it seemed that there was a lack of a clear understanding of what ‘life skills’ itself were. Despite articulating the need to ‘think critically’, and make appropriate decisions, there appeared to be little psychological emphasis in her usage of the term ‘life skills’ itself, which she interchangeably used to refer to a wide variety of other forms of learning, including yoga and meditation to increase concentration and health, learning to maintain a kitchen and school garden; learning about a balanced diet and so on. Thus, her account of LSE seemed to include all the ‘isolated behaviours’ (Hodge et al., 2012) that, as discussed above, have been left out of life skills discourses in the international context.

A similar kind of unfamiliarity and confusion also seemed to exist within government schools, among teachers and students. For example,
when asked about LSE, government school teachers, like Neeraja (a Social Science teacher at GGHSM\textsuperscript{15}) explained it in vague terms:

The department gives us some training. From this year, how to conduct the new syllabus, how to teach in a new way. We have to bring changes in children…children who don’t concentrate, those children will improve in examination (personal communication, February 4, 2013).

Thus, what appeared to be the primary understanding of LSE here, within the local government schools and among local officials was the idea of socially, morally, intellectually reforming the child, or disciplining them according to external norms or expectations for behavior. Rather than referring to the practices of self-disciplining or responsibilisation,\textsuperscript{16} encountered within western accounts, approaches to the programme fundamentally diverged in the Indian context along the lines of how they conceived the child. (This is an important distinction that will be discussed in more detail later).

In fact, seen as information and means to ‘guide’ children in appropriate behaviours and the right path, the new cultural demands placed by the pedagogic project of LSE, in discussing topics such as sexual and reproductive health with children, as a means of developing self-regulation in relation to these aspects of life, itself stirred a controversy and brought the LSP and the AEP to a halt. With the culturally appropriate view to ‘prevention’ being one of ‘protecting’ children from exposure to such information and experiences, rather

\textsuperscript{15} A government girls’ high school in north Bangalore
\textsuperscript{16} Wakefield and Fleming (2009) state that “‘Responsibilization’ is a term developed in the governmentality literature to refer to the process whereby subjects are rendered individually responsible for a task which previously would have been the duty of another – usually a state agency – or would not have been recognized as a responsibility at all. The process is strongly associated with neo-liberal political discourses…”
than teaching them to self-regulate their behaviours, the SADPI explained how the LSP came to a halt in 2007:

Biology teachers themselves hesitate to do these topics when it comes in the syllabus – like the reproductive system. Our values and culture are like that. Nowadays everything is very advanced...and because of mass media there is a chance of children getting spoilt. By giving this education, they will know of the parts...what is there... it’s natural. Every human being has these parts. Gender-wise also they will know there are different parts. Otherwise it will be like we are hiding some secret from them. That shouldn’t be done. But there will be opposition against this also. They say we are teaching sex education. Someone has written a letter (opposing this)...we are discussing that only currently. It’s not sex education ….this is about the changes in adolescents’ bodies... (personal communication, August 22, 2012).

While the SADPI’s account clearly shows how LSE are conceived as educational (rather than psycho-educational) interventions meant to provide ‘information’, in 2007 the AEP, along with the LSP came to a halt in several states, including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Kerala, Chattisgarh, Goa, and Karnataka, with parents and teachers protesting over the details presented in the books.

4.3.c. LSE in the context of ‘empowerment’ and ‘employability’

Yet, while the fate of these government-run programmes remained in question even up to the point of completion of my fieldwork (in 2013) there was no dearth to the LSPs available in schools, including government-run or aided schools. Many programmes, run by non-governmental agencies and private organisations, with widely differing aims and agenda, continued to operate on field, many a time remaining outside the purview of the education department itself. Sometimes, they continued to operate simply by changing the name of their programmes.
(e.g., from ‘Jeevana Kaushalya’ [life skills] to ‘Jeevana Amulya’ [Precious life]), in the light of the controversy over sex education.17

While these LSPs were available to all, both within elite, private schools, as well as government and aided schools, what was particularly noteworthy was the number of organisations offering programmes that were targeted at the poor (i.e., children from government and other aided or private schools catering to low-income groups). Within this study itself, five of the seven organisations visited catered exclusively to government schools, the rationale being that children from elite homes already had access to such skills due to the practices of socialisation available at home and/or school. For children from underprivileged homes, however, LSE was seen as required to compensate for their ‘culture of poverty’, and the lack of skills and attention provided by their parents.

This is seen in the accounts of middle class managers of these programmes such as Garima (given above), and Pavan Raghunath (of VYB’s Inspire project), who argued that these skills were already available to ‘us’ (i.e., the middle class). Pointing to the ‘unsupportive’ homes and culture of alcoholism, single parenting and poverty that these children in government schools came from, Pavan and others argued that these LSP would ‘empower them’, help them ‘taste success’, and build confidence.

Heads of these organisations, such as Devesh Arya (the Founder-CEO of IP) and Aamir Raza (Managing Director of MFCL) pointed out that these skills of communication, creativity and enterprise were the skills that had made them successful, and thus, these programmes would

17 Mercy D’Souza (Programme Director, Protection of Children and Society; personal communication, September 6, 2012).
help the poor “escape their cycles of poverty”. Others such as Rajesh Sridhar (the Director of VYB’s Inspire programme) saw it as a form of ‘social vaccination’ that would protect society against the risk of delinquency and crime.

In presenting ‘life skills’ as middle class skills, what was actually emphasised were the attitudes, mannerisms and behaviours that have become significant in the context of (mainly, service sector and white collar) work. This includes the completion of schooling, as well as the specific ‘soft skills’ required for the expanding service sector demand within the country. Thus, managers such as Pavan explained:

> Whether we like it or not SSLC becomes important. Life is in a very different dimension if you do not cross this. Therefore, we want to push them to pass and give them that confidence. When we are pushing for academic needs, we understand that just tuitions is not enough…personality is important in making them successful (personal communication, February 23, 2012).

Similarly, linking life skills not just to education, but to ‘employability’ as well, another of my key informants, Devesh Arya (the CEO of IP) pointed out that

> Whatever you study, in five to seven years is going to go waste – the technical skills. But what we can take ahead is our ability to be adaptable and flexible. This is a life skill.

Twelve to 14 million people graduate from our country but don’t get jobs. If the ultimate aim of education was to help you lead a high quality of life, and one part of quality of life was a job, then education is failing us somewhere. One part of that was skills for a job. Only a small part become engineers, but others become auto drivers, call centre executives, etc…. [there’s a] mismatch between skills and the job…

[Our vision] is to empower every child in this country with life skills. ‘Life skills’ sits at the foundation of our values. Our values is (sic) that every child deserves a quality of life,
quality education, and that every child is unique and special (personal communication, May 15, 2012).

While these accounts bring back the attention to the internal aspects of self, through an emphasis on ‘personality’ and ‘values’, the emphasis on health and health-related risks, that formed a prominent part of the state discourse on life skills, as well as international psychological literature, seemed to be by and large absent here. Instead the focus seemed to be more on developing behaviours and attitudes (towards education, society) that were valourised within the middle classes.

‘Life skills’ seemed to be presented as the ‘merit’ that would make children from these ‘underprivileged’ homes successful, while the ‘ideology of merit’ (Upadhya, 2011) served to mask other factors such as caste and class, which enabled access to certain resources, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1991), and played a crucial role in one’s success. ‘Misrecognising’ these instead, managers such as Sukumar G. (of MFCL’s LSPs for government schools) commented that in ‘today’s globalised world only one’s skills mattered’, when asked about the role of factors such as caste and class that influence individual success (personal communication, June 7, 2012).

LSE appeared to be presented as a strategy of ‘empowerment’. Yet, their role in ‘disciplining’ came out strongly in accounts of facilitators such as Nayanika Ramesh (of VYB’s Inspire project) who noted that they had to use “nasty”, “manipulative” NLP techniques to ensure that their programmes changed children to adjust to their circumstances since they could not change the child’s social or economic environment (personal communication, March 29, 2013). Here, disciplining just did not refer to self-introspective change characteristic of the international literature, but also to forms of
‘conditioning’ to accept certain ideas about the self, although practices such as interactive pedagogy and reflection were deployed. (This will be further discussed in the later chapters). Further, along with more conventional understanding and practices of ‘discipline’ within Indian schools, to which these programmes also had to be subjected to, LSP also appeared to be understood as a supplement to regular classroom teaching of academic content, classroom behaviours, and civic awareness.

Having thus analysed LSE within a range of contexts, it is clear that while it has been hailed as a democratic turn within psychology, the field has discursively established certain linkages between ‘childhood’, ‘risks’, and ‘education’, valourising certain kinds of solutions to this. Thus, in the chapter, I have tried to show how it has been commonsensically understood as a strategy to prevent a wide variety of risks, ranging from crime, health, and to poverty itself, putting all of these very different kinds of social problems on the same plane – as developmental problems to be addressed through ‘skilling’ and ‘responsibilisation’ of individuals.

The language of ‘skills’ I argue, presents new opportunities and avenues for the knowledge/power strategies of ‘psy’ to intervene within daily life, and bring new populations of subjects under their ‘gaze’. While essentially remaining behavioural correction (or remediation) approaches that fit individuals with ‘governmental’ rationales, they are ones that are different from previous behavioural correction programmes, in that they also bring previously inaccessible aspects of the self into the calculation. Control over inner aspect of the self has become possible by recasting it in the language of ‘skills’ that present
the appearance of such changes as being neutral, transferable, repeatable, and acquirable.

While the language of ‘skills’ and training seeks to normalise and make acceptable these interventions, by construing them positively in the language of abilities, they achieve three things: first, they come to extend the influence of the psychological discourses and interventions into everyday life, and to all populations that are considered to be potentially under risk (what would have fallen under the category of the ‘normal’ in previous psychological discourses. Paradoxically, while claiming to move away from the medicalisation of the previous models, it appears that a larger group of the population has in fact been brought under the psychological gaze now, through such programmes). Thus, risks are those to be mitigated in the present, but also prevented in the future.

Thus, the ‘everydayness’ of these skills discourses has served to construct everyday life itself as a set of skills, amounting to what Lau (1999) calls a ‘skillization of life’. With each individual’s life cast as an equation of skills, they do not transcend either the ‘individual remedial’ approach of psychology, or the categories of ‘risk’ and ‘normality’, but in fact bring a larger proportion of childhood under the category of ‘risk’ through the use of progressive and liberal language such as ‘skills’, ‘growth’, ‘mobility’, and self-help, participation and activity.

Second, by establishing a discourse that sees everyday life as a set of ‘skills’, and ‘skills’ as the ‘competencies’ for adaptation, positive living and development, they bring in a certain normativity to the conceptualisation of childhood. With the linkage of these skills through education-as-a-fundamental right, to international frameworks such as the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC),
for the protection of childhood, what constitutes a ‘normal’ childhood itself comes to be conceived in particular ways, as access to particular sets of skills and knowledge. The language of rights and education associated with the programmes give it an appearance of being a phenomena integral to childhood itself, as a normal aspect of growing up – and thus, not only informs our commonsensical understanding of the appropriate ways of socialisation, but also constructs childhood in ways that mask the possibility of alternate childhoods. They invoke a particular version of childhood in which the period itself is seen as ‘risk’, and all aspects of childhood must be regulated, intervened upon, and governed, in order to keep it on a ‘positive trajectory of growth’. Such a ‘positive’ trajectory takes a universal approach to childhood (much as the other psychological theories they draw from, be it behaviourism, cognitivism or social learning), and fail to recognise different versions or circumstances of childhood (although most literature provides a mention of cultural contextualisation), in favour of a universal preparation of childhood for adult lives, responsibilities, and roles.

Finally, they also reconstruct the structural aspects of disadvantage (e.g., poverty) in the language of individual deficits and skills, as shown above. As many critics have noted (e.g., Ainley & Corbett, 1994; Gibb & Walker, 2011; Jackson & Jordan, 1999; Vasavi & Kingfisher, 2003), the language of skills and ‘self-work’ seeks to shift the responsibility from governments, that were previously responsible for welfare, to individuals, for ensuring their own well-being. Contributing further to this discussion, Jackson and Jordan (1999) have also noted how the skills emphasised are the ‘soft’ skills, of communication, team work, attendance, discipline, punctuality, and
other social and life skills that have changed the conception of what is means to be ‘skilled’. Similarly, speaking of the changes within education, Ainley and Corbett (1994) have argued that rather than the emphasis being on ‘empowering’ individuals through the actual ‘hard skills’ of operating machinery, gaining IT or foreign language skills, or even higher level cognitive skills of scientific reasoning, there is an emphasis within the social and life skills curriculum on “…a behavioural ideology combining the calculating rationality of the boardroom with the social niceties of the bourgeois drawing-room. (Cohen, 1985; p. 124)” (p.367). Arguing that this essentially represents middle class ideas of social convention and ‘respectability’, they have further pointed out that

…[while] external situations conspire to make 'being able to cope in most normal circumstances' impossible, when the 'normal circumstances' are those of poverty, homelessness, domestic instability and high local youth unemployment… the social and life skills curriculum was one which served to measure the behaviour of these young people against a middle-class 'norm' … to find it wanting. (p.367)

This recognition of the life skills curriculum, and other skills curriculum as technologies of self-responsibilisation has also come from within the discipline of Psychology itself, with critical psychologists such as Michael Murray (2012) noting that despite the shift towards a socio-cognitive approach, the new theories of health and development still continue to emphasise individual responsibility and rationality as solutions, without any reference to social structures of power in mediating individual behaviour (Murray, 2012).

My fieldwork was replete with such experiences of life skills such as self-awareness, decision making, and critical thinking always being discussed in the context of one’s ‘roles’ and ‘responsibilities’,
but never in the context of one’s rights, or discrimination in access, which is also constitutive of one’s experiences, self and identity. As will be shown through the excerpts of classroom session and curricula, in the following chapters, there was only a focus on the transference of responsibility to the individual child, for assuring his/her own success, while avoiding critical questions about inequity in access, educational privileges afforded to the middle class, and other resources that frame the context of children from working class homes. Modules on ‘self-awareness’ and ‘critical thinking’ were thus silent on aspects of ‘class’, ‘caste’ and ‘gender’, while they actively worked on developing identities such as that of ‘responsible student and citizen’, obedient child and worker. During classroom transactions of modules on self-awareness, values of motivation, obedience, discipline, and completion of ‘basic education’ (till the tenth grade) were emphasised by the facilitators.

Further, the privileging of middle class ways of ‘being’ and ‘seeing’, also came out most strongly in the kinds of campaigns conducted by some of the organisations to ‘responsibilise’ the poor – for example, on using energy-saving CFL bulbs in the place of ordinary bulbs, as ways of developing civic responsibility and environmental awareness, without a thought given to the cost-factor of such options, which may not be accessible to the poor. Instead the onus was simply placed on them to be more environmentally responsible.

Similarly, with respect to questions such as hygiene, and cleanliness in the neighbourhood, there were no discussions on the availability or access to civic amenities such as safe drinking water, sanitation, and other services, important for health and a good quality of life, but the focus was instead on the individual’s responsibility in
ensuring this. Thus, even within the Indian context, wherein LSE were associated with conventional ideas of discipline, ‘responsibilisation’ remained a key feature of the programmes, as within the international context.