SELF-LITERACY: THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN THE KBE

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Abstract. Today’s Singapore enjoys the privileges of economic growth and the blossom of education and career opportunities. To sustain this growth in the KBE (Knowledge-Based Economy), it needs to improve its labour productivity & resource management and to fulfil the young people’s inspiration. The main concern here is the individual student / worker ought to take responsibility for his/her own personal and career development. “Self-Literacy” is a new literacy coined by the researcher in addressing this common concern. Quite similar to the 3Rs of Basic Literacy: reading, writing and arithmetic, “Self-Literacy” comprises mainly self-awareness, self-esteem and self-management. It refers to one’s ability in (1) reading, understanding and knowing one’s needs and potentials; (2) articulating one's feelings & ideas and relating to others; and (3) appraising, valuing & managing one’s thoughts and behaviours. The measurement of “Self-Literacy”, using the researchers’ two instruments: Self Esteem Checklist (SEC) and Well Being Checklist (WBC) will be discussed in this paper.

Introduction
In the rapidly changing world of the 21st Century & 3rd Millennium, there are several new literacies ranging from the hardware / software, Computer Literary and IT Literacy, to the software / heartware, Cultural Literacy. Based on the numerous references in psychological theories, applications, practices and research in self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-discipline, etc., the researcher ventures into a new heartware literacy: "Self-Literacy”. Its mission is to advocate "self-cultivation", which plays a very significant role in the total development of every individual and the effective management of one's life at home and at the workplace, or in school.

As a tiny island republic with a population of just over 4 millions, Singapore currently enjoys the privileges of economic growth and the blossom of education and career opportunities. To sustain this growth in the KBE (Knowledge-Based Economy), it needs to improve its labour productivity and resource management as well as to fulfil the young people’s inspiration. The globalisation of this island republic requires each and everyone in the work force, across all sectors and disciplines, to engage in lifelong learning and stay competitive in the Knowledge-based society. The main concern here is the individual students/workers ought to take responsibility for his/her own personal and career development.

“Self-Literacy” is the researcher’s new ‘icon’ (concept) in addressing this common concern. Quite similar to the 3Rs (“Basic Literacy”) which comprises reading, writing and arithmetic, it encompasses self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-esteem, self-discipline, self-evaluation and self-management. It refers to one’s ability in (1)
‘reading’, perceiving, understanding, knowing and accepting one’s needs, potentials and limitations; (2) articulating one’s feelings & ideas and communicating with / relating to others; and (3) appraising, valuing & managing one’s emotions, thoughts and conducts / behaviours. The development of “Self-Literacy” is through self-cultivation and continuing education.

The measurement of “Self-Literacy”, using the researchers’ two instruments: Self Esteem Checklist (SEC) and Well Being Checklist (WBC), is discussed in this paper. These two checklists have been validated in the NIE longitudinal study on the personal adjustment of adolescents in four Singapore Secondary Schools, during 1995 - 1999. The SEC covers the four aspects of self-esteem and the WBC assesses five areas of coping with demands in the daily life of secondary school students.

**Self-Literacy - The 3Rs of Self**

Self-Literacy has three components: self-awareness, self-esteem and self-management. It incorporates self-concept which is 'who and what' we consciously and subconsciously think we are - our physical and psychological traits, our assets and liabilities. The first 'R' is the 'Reading' of self. How a person is perceiving, understanding, knowing and accepting his/her needs, potentials, problems, strengths and weaknesses, resources and limitations, etc. It refers to "living consciously", a good practice promoted by Nathaniel Branden since early 80's. It means taking responsibility for the awareness appropriate to the action in which we are engaged. It is the foundation of self-esteem, the sum of self-confidence and self-respect.

"I Am Me
In the whole world, there is no one else exactly like me. There are persons who have some parts like me, but no one adds up exactly like me. Therefore, everything that comes out of me is authentically mine because I alone chose it.
I can see, hear, feel, think, say, and do. I have the tools to survive, to be close to others, to be productive, and to make sense and order out of the world of people and things outside me.
I own me, and therefore I can engineer me. I am me, and I am okay." (Satir, 1970)

The next 'R' is the 'articulating' of self, one's self-esteem, the evaluative component of self-concept. Virginia Satir's popular poem "I Am Me" is one of very best examples of articulating and taking ownership of one's 'properties' in total. Self-esteem is the feeling and thinking of personal competence and personal worth. It reflects your implicit judgement of your ability to cope with the challenges of your life (to understand and master your problems) and of your right to be happy (to respect and stand up for your interests and needs) (Branden, 1988). It also covers making contacts and interacting with others, in the family, school and society.

"I believe the greatest gift I can conceive of having from anyone is to be seen by them, heard by them, to be understood and touched by them. The greatest gift I can give is to see, hear, understand, and to touch another person. When this is done, I feel contact has been made." (Satir, 1976)
The third 'R' is the 'appRaisal' of self, one's self-assessment and self-management. This component helps appraise, assess, value & manage one’s emotions, thoughts and conducts / behaviours/ actions. To achieve personal effectiveness or 'Private Victories' (Covey), one needs to 'practise' self-mastery, self-reflection and self-evaluation on a regular basis, thus to form desirable habits.

According to Stephen Covey (1989), there are Seven Habits that could provide an incremental, sequential, highly integrated approach to the development of personal and interpersonal effectiveness. They are in harmony with the natural laws of growth, and not a set of separate or piecemeal psych-up formulas. A 'Habit' is the intersection of knowledge (what to do and why), skill (how to do) and desire (want to do). The Seven Habits are: (1) Be Proactive, (2) Begin with the end in mind, (3) Put first things first, (4) Think win / win, (5) Seek first to understand…then to be understood, (6) Synergize and (7) Sharpen the saw. They move a person progressively on a Maturity Continuum from dependence to interdependence to interdependence.

The principle of being proactive was what Viktor Frankl learnt in the Nazi death camps. His approach in coping with hardship is "Logotherapy", which emphasises the elimination of emptiness by helping the individual to detect his unique meaning, his mission in life. Another good example is R.W. Emerson's "What is success?":

"What is success? To laugh often and much; To win the respect of intelligent people; and the affection of children; To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; To appreciate beauty; To find the best in others; To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived; This is to have succeeded."

Writing personal mission statements, setting personal life goals and defining or redefining success could enhance one's personal functioning, and help develop one's Self-Literacy. Habits like "Begin with the end in mind" and "Putting first thing first" are also practical strategies in self-care, time and stress management.

**Measurement of Self-Literacy: Self-esteem, Well-being and Performance**

Self-Literacy is a brand new concept or construct. The measurement of its relationship with personal functioning and performance at work / in school is yet to be verified and validated. However, foreign and local research has validated that self-esteem is a key factor in enhancing work performance and improving employee behaviour. In the 1992 Gallup Survey, 89% of the respondents said that self-esteem was very important in motivating a person to work hard and succeed. Indeed, self-esteem was ranked higher as a motivator than any other variables. A recent study involving 202 managers in Malaysia found that self-esteem is one of the fundamental traits of high performance managers; and there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and leadership. (R.S. Malhi, 2000)

In Singapore, the National Institute of Education conducted a 5-year longitudinal study on the cognitive, psychological development and school adjustment of some 1000 secondary school students (1995-1999). For the section on psychological
development, two instruments were administered together during the annual survey in the four secondary schools taking part in this study. The Self-esteem Checklist (SEC), an instrument of 4 subscales 25 items, validated in Singapore in 1987 by Lui, was used to measure of these students' self-esteem. The SEC has concurrent validity (0.84, <0.005) with the widely used Self-esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1967). The Well-being Checklist (WBC), a new instrument of 5 subscales 30 items, was used to measure these students' anxiety and coping strategies. Based on the responses of 344 students, male 158 and female 186, who completed all the items (repeated measures), significant and positive correlation (0.40, < 0.01) was found between self-esteem and well-being.

The Self-Esteem Checklist (SEC) has four areas of self-esteem: (1) general self-esteem, (2) school-academic self-esteem, (3) peer-social self-esteem, and (4) home-parent self-esteem. The SEC sub-scale on school-academic had significant correlations with Secondary 1 mid-year results and the Primary School Leaving Examination results. (Lui, 1987)

The Well-being Checklist (WBC) was designed to capture the adolescents' self-assessment of how do they respond to and cope with the demands in their schools, families and peer groups. The five sub-scales are (1) Getting On, (2) Get Help, (3) Get Going, (4) Getting Sick and (5) Getting Depressed. The first three sub-scales feature the perception of coping and the last two indicate negative feelings and responses.

The findings of the NIE longitudinal study showed that male students had slightly higher WBC mean scores than the female by 1.7 to 2.5 points in 3 years (F = 14.46, p = 0.05). This may mean that the male students had less anxiety and could cope better with stress. The findings in D'Rozario and Goh's research: "Adolescent ways of coping: a study with a sample of Singaporean Students" (1998), also showed male students tended to use positive coping strategies more than female students. In a local doctoral study by H. K. Khoo on adolescents' coping behaviours, with a sample of 2293 students (levels 1-5) in 7 secondary schools, found significantly strong negative correlation between self-esteem and anxiety (-0.46, p < .01). And there was a significantly positive relationship between self-esteem and problem-focused coping behaviour, and also gender differences in the levels of anxiety.

**Some Suggestions for Self-Literacy Research**

In a KBE, it is vital for our students, future citizens, to have healthy self-concept and effective communication skills, know how to cope with daily demand, learn and be creative problem-solvers. It's not good enough to know vast amounts of knowledge that are passively received. Parents and teachers need to focus on mental processes and project work that will help students become highly effective persons with good character. It's a timely move to promote and conduct research in students' Self-Literacy (self-esteem, well-being, self-management, etc). Self-Literacy research could address various issues such as gender and level differences, impact on performance & discipline, youth at risk, parental influence, teaching strategies, community involvement, career planning, lifelong learning, continuing education, and so on.
Self-Literacy research could help enlighten the HR personnel and employers in terms of workers' motivation, productivity and career development. In concluding, the researcher would like to make a mission statement as follows:

"To work in collaboration with teachers, educators, counsellors and human resource managers to promote Self-Literacy as the key to success in the Knowledge-Based Economy in Singapore and beyond."

References