

EVALUATION REPORT:

**LIFE SKILLS PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION
IN
THE ARMENIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM**

**A PROJECT SPONSORED BY
UNICEF
&
THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**

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**Yerevan, Armenia
March 2001**

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Executive Summary

This report represents an evaluation of implementation of the Life Skills Project being conducted in the Armenian education system as component of an overall effort in education reform. Dialogue about the project began in 1997. A variety of meetings were held with various stakeholders interested in education reform and in 1998 UNICEF and the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) agreed to implement the Life Skills curriculum. The project was piloted in the first and fifth grades in 16 schools in 1999-2000. In 2000-2001 the project was expanded to 100 schools and to the second and sixth grades. UNICEF provided funding and some logistical support and the MOES provided administrative and logistical project support and workspace for the curriculum development team.

Section I of the report describes the methodology used. The evaluation reported here included a review of archival documents on the Life Skills project and a series of unstructured interviews with principal stakeholders including UNICEF staff, ministers and staff of the MOES, principals, teachers and students in Life Skills schools. The methodology for the research was primarily qualitative analysis as there is presently no evaluation in place to assess student and teacher short-term outcomes and long-term impacts. An external evaluator conducted the evaluation with support from a national team of education experts.

The past and current state of the Armenian education system and a description of the Life Skills curriculum are discussed in Section II. Armenia has set reform efforts in place to accomplish several goals as a result of the transition from the Soviet system that ended in the early 90s.

Three major educational aims of the reform are:

1. to contribute to the democratization of Armenian citizens of all ages,
2. to provide an education that is competitive in the current international system, and
3. to bring about the humanization of education, that is, promoting a child-centered learning environment and providing children with skills for everyday life as citizens of their country and the world.

Implementation of the Life Skills curriculum, modeled on a Canadian program, was selected as a major contributor to the reform effort because it focuses on developing a set of skills that research has shown contribute to the types of changes sought in Armenia. Those skills include:

- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Creative thinking
- Critical thinking
- Effective communication
- Interpersonal relationship skills
- Self-awareness
- Empathy
- Coping with emotions
- Coping with stress

A Canadian team trained a Core Team of curriculum developers and teacher trainers to write a curriculum tailored for Armenian students and train teachers in implementation.

Section III reviews organization and management of the project and identifies facilitators, barriers, and challenges to the implementation of the project. Administrative and resource issues such as the role of accounting procedures, lack of access to electronic communication, the development of the Core Team's capabilities, and relationships among the partners are included in this section.

Section IV provides a narrative overview of the findings from the interviews conducted for the report. These findings and a set of recommendations for the future of the project are summarized in Section V. Overall, the findings were very positive. Students were enthusiastic about the Life Skills curriculum and wanted it expanded to more of their classes. Teachers and Principals reported positive changes in the students participating in the curriculum. Anecdotal evidence that indicated students were practicing the lessons learned in the Life Skills classes. For example, children who were disruptive before coming into the classes were now calmer and more interactive. Two fourth grade classes that were troublesome were combined into a fifth grade class that studied Life Skills and became more collaborative and settled down to enjoy learning. There were many such examples offered. Interviews with the teachers, principals, Ministry officials and the Core Team pointed to severe resource deficits that may hamper expansion of the project. The Core Team's work in developing the curriculum and training teachers and teacher trainers was highly regarded. Though there was no formal evaluation of student and teacher outcomes, the interview results were strong enough to suggest that a more rigorous evaluation would probably show the same positive results but might have provided clearer data on identified problem areas to be addressed in order to strengthen the project.

Recommendations were made in several areas of program implementation and expansion. The following is a synopsis of those recommendations.

Structural and Financial:

- While the relationship between UNICEF and the MOES is a strong one, the evaluation indicated a need for stronger coordination between UNICEF and the MOES on administrative and financial processes.
- It was recommended that the MOES begin a concerted effort to bring more partners into the project.
- The Center for Educational Reform should remain the base for the project and the Core Team should receive appropriate levels of support to conclude development of the project through the seventh grade.

Ongoing Development of Curriculum, Training, and Project Evaluation:

- Continue development of materials through the seventh grade.
- Continue teacher training and expand the program gradually to other schools.
- Develop a multi-year plan for integration and expansion of the Life Skills curriculum.
- Identify resources to support the Core Team in continued curriculum development.
- Develop Life Skills curriculum for the special education population.

Capacity Building and Sustainability:

- Begin an immediate effort to identify expanded resources for funding and other types of support.
- Identify sources of material resources such as computers and copy machines for the Life Skills schools and the Core Team.
- Begin to implement teacher training in pedagogical universities as a part of pre-service.

Evaluation and Assessment:

- UNICEF and the MOES should work with others who are implementing the Life Skills project to develop an evaluation design and the necessary instruments to assess the short-term outcomes and long-term impacts of the project. Evaluation should be conducted on a regular basis with quarterly and annual reports.

CONCLUSION

It was the determination of this evaluation that the Life Skills project is well worth continuing if the standards of development and implementation can be maintained, if a plan for funding and integration can be achieved, and if an evaluation procedure is put in place to provide an annual assessment of short-term behavioral changes and long-term impacts resulting from the project.

The ultimate responsibility for the education of Armenian children must fall to the Armenian people. The recommendations provided for this report may seem overwhelming if taken all together, but if the parties are willing to develop a multi-year plan which simultaneously builds the implementation of the project while building the resource base from a wide variety of sources, this project is sustainable.

SECTION I: METHODOLOGY

This report was commissioned by UNICEF and prepared for UNICEF and its partner in the Life Skills project the Ministry of Education and Sciences (MOES) of the Republic of Armenia (RoA). The report was compiled by an external evaluator who led an evaluation team consisting of national experts in Armenian education: Mr. Karen Melkonyan, Deputy Minister, Inspection Department, Ministry of Education and Science, Ms. Lala Sargsyan, representing the Center for Educational Reform (CER), and Professor Julietta Gulamiryan of the State Pedagogical University. Ms. Marine Soukhudyan, the UNICEF Education Project Officer and a translator assisted the team. During the time period 05 March through 16 March, 2001, the external evaluator met with various parties in the Ministry of Education and Science and the evaluator and the national team visited several of the schools that are implementing the Life Skills project as well as the Syunik Marz Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Science in Kapan and a regional office of the Center for Education Reform in Goris.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with

- ❖ Edvard Ghazaryan, Minister of Education,
- ❖ Aida Topuzyan, Deputy Minister for Education,
- ❖ Robert Stepanyan, coordinator of the Life Skills project for the Ministry from 1998 to 2000,
- ❖ Victor Martirosyan, Director of the Center for Education Reform,
- ❖ The Core Team of curriculum developers and trainers of teachers for the Life Skills project,
- ❖ Karen Melkonyan, Inspection Department, Ministry of Education and Science,
- ❖ Lala Sargsyan, Coordinator for Curriculum and Methodology Implementation, CER,
- ❖ Julietta Gulamiryan, Professor, State Pedagogical University,
- ❖ Grisha Manoucharyan, Syunik Marz Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Science
- ❖ Artashes Torozyan, Director, Syunik Regional Office of CER
- ❖ Three Life Skills teacher trainers (non-core team members), one in Kapan and two at the CER in Yerevan,
- ❖ An accountant for the of the Center for Education Reforms ,
- ❖ Gloria Fernandez, UNICEF Assistant Representative
- ❖ Marine Soukhudyan, UNICEF Education Project Officer

Visits were conducted at schools in Yerevan, Lori Marz and Syunik Marz. The schools visited included:

- Lori Marz: Gaghar School, Stepanavan Schools # One, Two, and Four, and Agarak School
- Yerevan: School #198 and School #150
- Syunik Marz: Goris Schools #Two and Three, and interview with the principal of the Boarding School for Children with Visual Impairment, Boarding School #27, and Boarding School #5 for the Mentally Handicapped.

Several UNICEF and Ministry of Education and Science documents served as background information for the report. These are listed in Appendix A.

In most schools, the principal or deputy principal and one or two Life Skills teachers were interviewed, as well as several non-Life Skills teachers. Life Skills classes were observed in four of the schools and students had an opportunity to share their Life Skills experience with the evaluation team.

A final debriefing meeting was held with the Minister of Education on 15 March 2001. This meeting included the Minister, Deputy Minister Topuzyan, Mr. Robert Stepanyan, Mr. Victor Martirosyan, the three national expert team members, Ms. Soukhudyan of UNICEF, and the evaluator.

The Terms of Reference for this evaluation called for a review of the implementation of Life Skills within the structure of the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science and analysis to include:

- ✓ Analyse the pedagogical contributions of the project in the context of the national curriculum reform plans of the Ministry of Education and Science.
- ✓ Analyse the pedagogical contributions of the project in the areas of (a) teaching methodologies and (b) introduction and development of new curriculum areas into core subjects of Armenian basic education.
- ✓ Analyse the impact of the Life Skills education on the classroom environment as compared to standard classroom organization and environment in Armenian schools.
- ✓ Analyse the acceptability of the Life Skills approach on the part of teachers, students, parents, and school administrators.

The program is too new to address the long-term impact sought by the Life Skills curriculum on the participating students and teachers. Short-term results are occurring, but an accurate measure of these results was hampered by the lack of a student and teacher evaluation process. The two-week time frame allotted for onsite data collection severely limited the number of teachers and students who could be interviewed for this report and there was no time to develop, administer and analyze a survey that would have provided some baseline quantitative data. Therefore there was no opportunity to conduct a controlled comparison between the Life Skills classes and traditional subjects and methods, but the evidence gathered for this report does suggest a qualitative difference.

This report is based largely on qualitative and anecdotal evidence about the structure and implementation of the first year and a half of this curriculum. It must be said, however, that the findings identified on short-term outcomes for students and teachers are very positive and there was no evidence to suggest further analysis would change the current findings. On the contrary, the strength of the qualitative data gathered would suggest that findings would be similar across all students and teachers, though we might have been able to identify more clearly the barriers and supports to implementation. One of the major points made in the Recommendations section is the need for an ongoing assessment process for this project.

One document, the Interim Evaluation Package, provided a small amount of quantitative data on the first year of the project. The Interim Evaluation Package was an evaluation done by the Core Team with the 16 pilot schools at the end of the first year of implementation. This data reflected

the overall positive qualitative findings of the present report. (See a summary of this report, Appendix B.) Again, the qualitative and anecdotal information on classroom implementation presented here is overwhelmingly positive. Analysis of administrative and structural implementation indicates a mixture of positive and potentially more troublesome findings.

As the majority of the data was qualitative, a narrative analysis method was used to analyze data and determine findings and recommendations. This analysis looked for common themes among the responses given by the interviewees. Progress was also based on comparing current reports on the status of the project with a review of background materials listed in Appendix A and a determination of whether commitments noted in these documents were met.

SECTION II: THE NEED FOR A LIFE SKILLS CURRICULUM IN THE ARMENIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Status of Educational Reform in the Republic of Armenia

The background information and statistics provided in this section are taken from the *State Program Educational Development Report (for the period of 2001-2005)* written by the Ministry of Science and Education and memoranda written for the evaluation team by the Armenian team members.

Historically, education was highly valued in the Republic of Armenia. The present system of education was developed during the first Republic of Armenia (1918-1920). This system was further developed and refined during the Soviet period (1920-1990). Education was universally available to all citizens during that time. High standards were set for academic achievement in sciences, literature and arts. Educational services were available from pre-school ages (2-3 years) through higher education (university level). Secondary schools covered grades one through 10. Teaching methodology placed a high premium on learning academic subject matter and students were expected to accept the knowledge and ideology offered them by their teachers without question. Teachers were highly trained in their academic subject area. The state fully funded most education in Armenia, with the exception of a small number of private schools, and the state determined the pedagogical methods and ideology to be used throughout the system.

In 1990, the circumstances of education began to change significantly as Armenia once again became an independent republic. The political change resulted in an economic downturn that significantly affected the state's capacity to continue to provide quality education, teachers, facilities, and materials to support children's learning. Funding went from a high of 7.2% of the GDP in 1991 to a low of 2% of the GDP in 2000 or only 11% of the total state budget. These figures are significantly lower than international standards. Teacher salaries were drastically lowered and many qualified teachers left the education system for better paying jobs or to emigrate from the country causing a serious "brain drain" in the system. Textbooks became out-of-date and the physical condition of the schools deteriorated. In 1996, the responsibility for kindergarten education was turned over to the local community, which meant that many children no longer had access to kindergarten because communities and parents did not have the economic capacity to support such a program.

In 1995, a new constitution was adopted for the Republic of Armenia and Article 35 of the constitution states that:

- every citizen of the Republic of Armenia has the right to education,
- in state educational institutions the secondary education is free, and
- every citizen has the right to receive free higher and other professional education in state educational institutions on a competitive basis.

As a result of the new constitution and a Law on Education adopted by the National Assembly in April 1999, education reform became a priority for Armenia in the mid to late 90s. Reform is being implemented in the following areas:

- decentralization of state secondary schools systems management,
- improvement of normative-legislative basis for school management and autonomy,
- introduction of new funding principles for the secondary schools to increase the efficiency of utilization of budgeted funds,
- democratization of in-school management and transition to school council governance,
- qualification improvement of pedagogical and administrative staff, and
- provision of secondary schools with basic textbooks, etc.

The pace of reform is slow due to the lack of skilled professionals to carry it out, the poorly developed self-governing mechanisms of educational institutions, the lack of substantial infrastructure to support reform efforts, and the fact that democratization of the society and of the education system will take time. Three major educational aims of the RoA reform are:

1. to contribute to the democratization of Armenian citizens of all ages,
2. to provide an education that is competitive in the current international system, and
3. to bring about the humanization of education, that is, promoting a child-centered learning environment and providing children with skills for everyday life as citizens of their country and the world.

The 1999 Law on Education has as its first principle the humanization of education, which is described as placing a “priority on values common to all mankind, of human life and health, of the free and universal development of the individual as well as the upbringing of civil consciousness, national dignity, patriotism, lawfulness and ecological attitude.” The former educational system was described in a Life Skills Project Proposal by David Selby, its author, in this way, “Though knowledge-giving and up-bringing were recognized as major objectives of the school, the first was oriented toward lecture-giving and textbooks, the latter was fulfilled through Soviet lifestyle propaganda.” A major focus of the reform effort is to not only help children to continue their academic achievements, but also to develop their self-esteem, interpersonal skills, and a worldview that respects Armenian history and reaches beyond Armenia. This is a major shift from the previous model that was teacher-centered. Teachers and textbooks were seen as the only information/knowledge sources, and they were not allowed to be questioned.

There are currently a variety of efforts underway that support these aims to various degrees. A few of them include:

- The World Bank supporting a textbook rental program which is bringing about some changes of textbook contents. However, the goal of this program has been ensuring access of students to textbooks, rather than revision and updating of curriculum and introduction of new methodologies.
- A group of Armenian experts are working on a human rights curriculum to be implemented in the schools.
- The Soros Foundation provided its Critical Thinking training for teachers.
- UNICEF provided two-years of support for introducing, developing and implementing a Life Skills curriculum in the first, second, fifth and sixth grades.

This report will review the status of the Life Skills program and its place in the scheme of Armenian education reform as summarized above. For the full description of reform efforts the

reader should refer to *State Program Educational Development Report (for the period of 2001-2005)* available from the Ministry of Education and Science.

The Life Skills Curriculum: A Description

The Life Skills curriculum used in Armenia is based upon developing skills for living in ten areas deemed important for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. The skills, as identified in a 1993 report “Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools” from the World Health Organization include:

- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Creative thinking
- Critical thinking
- Effective communication
- Interpersonal relationship skills
- Self-awareness
- Empathy
- Coping with emotions
- Coping with stress

The curriculum design developed by the IIGE (International Institute of Global Education) at the University of Toronto, involves developing activities that can be used in a classroom setting to provide opportunities for children to develop these 10 skills. The activities are generally tailored on a country-by-country basis to specific educational needs. For example, Armenia has a major earthquake fault running through it, and suffered devastating loss of life and property in a 1988 earthquake. One of the life skills that was determined to be important for Armenian children is the ability to act quickly and safely in the event of future earthquakes and other potentially life-threatening crises. The activities also address topics such as history, ecology, anthropology, physical and mental health, etc. They can be designed for implementation in a stand-alone course or for integration into classes on regular subjects such as history, literature, mathematics, etc. However, in 2000, by order of the new MOES minister, Life Skills curriculum implementation was decreased to grades one through seven. The Core Team did the necessary changes in the framework, but official adoption of the new package was delayed. To date, decision makers have not officially confirmed the adjusted framework.

A second, and equally important feature of the Life Skills curriculum is the methodology used for teaching. In this model, teachers are trained in methods of teaching that are designed to facilitate a more interactive and democratic classroom. This methodology is considered especially important in countries like Armenia that are attempting to develop a more child-centered classroom model that will support the goal of raising citizens skilled in democratic participation. Values are changing from the teacher being the one who imparts all information and the child being the vessel who takes it in without question. The Life Skills methodology trains the teacher in facilitation and group process skills and encourages the teacher to see him or herself as a fellow learner along with the students. The teacher creates a “learning community”

where everyone teaches and everyone learns. This model gives the student a sense of equality with the teacher in the areas of sharing and questioning knowledge and skills while at the same time maintaining the appropriate level of respect for the teacher as an adult guide for the students.

Initially, the LS framework, developed by the Armenian experts in consultation with the Toronto team, was planned for grades 1-10 and included the themes and skills shown in Chart 1:

Chart 1: Proposed Themes and Skills for Life Skills Curriculum

	Myself	Relationship	Community	Environment
Grade 1	All about me	Getting on with others	Home and Family	Keeping safe
Grade 2	Personal Hygiene	Communicating well	Our class	Caring for other creatures
Grade 3	Developing self expression	Coping with conflict	Our neighborhood	Exploring the local Environment
Grade 4	Healthy living	Rights and responsibilities	Making connections	Safety in our neighborhood
Grade 5	Organizing my life	Respecting and celebrating difference	Etiquette	Environmental responsibilities
Grade 6	How to solve problems	Co-operative problem solving	Future communities	Coping with stress and crises
Grade 7	Avoiding substance abuse	Gender issues	Peacemaking and peacekeeping in community	Valuing Armenian Culture and Nature beauty
Grade 8	Knowing My Mind, Speaking My Mind	Partnerships	Rights and responsibilities in the Community	Sustainable lifestyles
Grade 9	Business skills	Combating Prejudice and discrimination	Learning Democracy	Cross-cultural understanding and communication
Grade 10	Personal Futures	Parenting skills	Learning to make a difference	Global Connections

Examples of some of the activities developed for the Armenian Life Skills project are to be found in Appendix C, and will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

The UNICEF Role

Implementing a Life Skills curriculum was thought to be one way to address the needs for reform identified in the Ministry of Education and Science’s 2000 report. Thus, discussions were begun with David Selby and Graham Pike of IIGE in Canada who had a Life Skills curriculum available.

The Ministry approached UNICEF and asked for support in exploring the possibility of implementing a Life Skills curriculum in the Armenian schools. UNICEF provided the resources for an initial meeting with the Toronto team in 1997. Nothing further happened in 1997 as there was a changeover in the position of Minister of Education. In 1998, a larger meeting was held with the Toronto team and brought together psychologists, health workers, representatives of several ministries including staff and Ministers, NGOs, the local researchers, local groups

teaching methodology from pedagogical institutes, and Marz education heads. This led to the development of a Life Skills Concept Paper by a local team of interested educators with input from David Selby. Discussions started very early on the role of the Life Skills curriculum in the education system and where to place the course in the curriculum (as a stand-alone subject or as integrated into the content and methodology of other regular subjects). Life Skills was seen as an appropriate course for addressing many of the changes intended by the reform process and UNICEF support was forthcoming since this curriculum is compatible with UNICEF's mission of supporting host countries in ensuring quality education. An agreement was signed in 1998 by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and Science to implement the Life Skills curriculum. In 1999, a significant step was taken when the Ministry of Education and Science mandated the Life Skills curriculum for inclusion in the school core curriculum of the primary and secondary grades beginning in the fall of 1999.

SECTION III: PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LIFE SKILLS PROJECT

Organization and Management of the Project

The joint agreement called for UNICEF to provide the bulk of funding for the first 20 months (Phase One) of the project with the Ministry providing the following:

- a working group (Core Team) to develop the curriculum,
- work space and adequate working conditions for the Core Team,
- arrangements for introduction of the curriculum in pilot schools,
- participation in the pilot implementation, and
- based upon review of the pilot phase, begin introduction in all schools.

The parties agreed to seek other partners for funding and sustainability if the project was successful in the first phase. The Ministry of Education and Science agreed to pursue avenues to sustain the project beyond UNICEF's financial support, which would begin to lessen between the end of Phase One (20 months) and the 68 months of implementation set forth in the agreement.

It was decided to implement the Life Skills curriculum as a separate course, rather than integrating it into existing courses in the general curriculum. Materials would be prepared for grades one and five in the pilot year. In the second year grades two and six would be added with an ultimate goal of developing Life Skills classes up through grade seven. Dr. David Selby of IIGE helped to develop criteria for the selection of a Core Team responsible for writing the curriculum and training teachers. After selection of this group, Dr. Selby and the Core Team jointly developed criteria for the selection of the pilot schools and for one teacher from each of those schools. (See Appendix D) Dr. Selby was to continue to work with the Core Team as a trainer and as a consultant to guide their development of Life Skills curriculum activities until they were skilled at doing this on their own.

The Core Team members were teachers and a few Ministry staff who gave up their positions to work on Life Skills full time. In the beginning their work was placed under the auspices of a Ministry department head, Mr. Robert Stepanyan. This arrangement allowed the Core Team to begin work immediately on the development of curriculum materials. However, it also set in place a series of administrative obstacles that were to make payment of the Core Team difficult over the course of Phase One. The Core Team members were not considered employees of the Ministry and a department head could not legally hire "contractors" which was how the Core Team positions were viewed.

In the beginning of 1999, the Ministry's Center for Education Reform (CER) was reconstituted from three existing ministry structures plus the curriculum development department. Mr. Victor Martirosyan was made director of the CER. The CER was legally able to hire contractors and the Core Team was moved under CER responsibilities. This action partially alleviated the salary dilemma, but UNICEF was still lumping salary and training expenses together, which continued to create a bookkeeping problem for the Ministry. During the transition period Mr. Stepanyan continued to supervise the Core Team's work while the CER managed the ongoing implementation of the project. This dual "supervision" role created additional difficulties both

for the UNICEF and for the Core Team in coordination of the project activities and monitoring. The Core Team was now trained in interactive methods and were ready to train Armenian teachers. They were in the process of developing the initial activities for grades one and five and Dr. Selby was critiquing the activities for revision and refinement by the Core Team. One of the problems with the review process was the lack of access to a computer with Internet and email connections that made transfer of the materials by regular mail a time consuming process. In 1999, the Ministry created a decision making board for the Life Skills project which included division heads, Deputy Minister Topuzyn, and the UNICEF education project officer.

Project Administration

The relationship between the MOES/CER and the Education Division of UNICEF has been a positive one overall. The UNICEF education project officer works closely with the Core Team and has developed relationships with principals and teachers at the Life Skills schools in order to ensure the timely delivery of materials and to provide appropriate support to the project. The CER has provided working space for the Core Team and has supported coordination with the schools and principals as well as organizing all training workshops and using their own resources for duplication of materials.

Over the course of the project, there have been three Ministers of the MOES and changeovers in UNICEF assistant country representatives that led to a degree of slowdown in implementation each time new decision makers were brought on board. Financial obstacles continued to plague the project. The accounting procedures of UNICEF and the Ministry were not always compatible. Meetings were held between the two organizations to attempt to iron out these problems, but the outcomes were not always satisfactory to both parties. UNICEF country representatives and assistant representatives changed and UNICEF accounting procedures changed periodically leading to Ministry justification documents not always being consistent with UNICEF practices. The need for the Ministry accounting department to redo the justification documents needed for reimbursement has sometimes led to delays in payments, especially of salaries for the Core Team. The Ministry's accounting procedures make it difficult to separate the lump sum that UNICEF gives for salaries and training expenses. A dialogue regarding how to include income taxes in the payment of Core Team salaries continues to be a problem for the Ministry. UNICEF's resolution was to fall back on its tax exempt status and ask the Ministry to cover the income tax amount of approximately 30% as an inkind contribution. The Ministry claims that it has no way of doing this as the Core Team members are contractors not employees.

Another serious financial problem affecting the project was the bankruptcy in August 2000 of the bank in which CER deposited UNICEF funds. Through interviews with the Ministry accountant it was learned that the Armenian government is attempting to work out an ultimate recovery of the funds, but the Education Minister's office has not responded to UNICEF requests for a status report on the bankruptcy case since January 2001. The Ministry has also not signed off on a joint work plan for 2001 implementation of Life Skills that was developed at a retreat early in the year. Nor has it given final approval to the plan a to develop Life Skills classes only through the seventh grade from an original plan to implement through the tenth grade. These ongoing administrative and financial differences have not stopped the program, but do have the effect of

putting UNICEF and the Ministry in an adversarial stance that slows down efficient implementation of the program. The greatest impact of these differences is on the Core Team who have continued to do their work often going months without pay, and on the regular production and distribution of materials to the schools in a timely fashion.

The Core Team

The Core Team consists of eight education professionals. They have worked together since 1998 when they were involved in the early presentations and trainings done by IIGE. Later, the composition of the team was changed due to the interests of individuals towards the project, professional background and performance factors. However, the main members stayed with the project through this reporting period. They began official work as the Core Team in 1998. The group includes the expertise of three psychologists, one medical doctor, one primary grade teacher, one Russian language teacher, one English teacher/translator, and one biology and environment teacher. Their charge was to assist in the selection of the 16 pilot schools and the teachers to be trained from those schools and to develop the curriculum materials for Life Skills that were tailored to Armenian educational needs and culture. Their preparation and training included a two-day introduction workshop, participation in development of the Life Skills framework for Armenia, participation in a concept development conference, development of Life Skills activities, and training as Life Skills developers and trainers conducted by IIGE staff. They conducted their first training under the supervision of IIGE staff. Feedback from teachers who participated in this training indicated that as a result of this training they felt prepared to conduct Life Skills classes and use the interactive methods required. Four members of the team went to Canada to visit the IIGE and observe Life Skills curriculum action there.

The team first did all tasks together, but soon realized that it was not an efficient use of their time to work in this manner. They divided up the tasks of translation, organization, activities development and evaluation among the different members and found this to be a more effective process. They continued to meet weekly throughout the project to review each other's work, advise on different aspects of the project, and to support each other. They all agreed that the structure developed makes best use of each person's strengths, which in turn strengthens the team's output. In the beginning the activities developed by the Core Team were being sent to Canada for review and feedback by Dr. Selby. The materials were revised by the Core Team per Dr. Selby's review. The Core Team found this feedback very useful, but, as noted earlier, the process was cumbersome and time consuming as they did not have access to computers with Internet access allowing electronic transfer of documents. Everything had to be done via regular mail.

At some point in 1999 it was recommended to UNICEF by Mr. Stepanyan that the services of Dr. Selby and IIGE be terminated and the UNICEF Acting Representative concurred. It was unclear in interviews why this was considered an appropriate step. The impact of this decision was somewhat negative in that the Core Team did not want this connection terminated. They felt that the contribution made by the IIGE was important to the Armenian project as it prevented the need for them to develop models and materials that had already been developed. They noted that they still refer constantly to the materials they originally received from IIGE. There was also an element of morale and professional support that seemed to be lacking after this connection was

broken. While the Core Team were clearly more skilled than anyone else in the Armenian education system in the development and implementation of the Life Skills curriculum, they noted that ongoing support from the source of the curriculum would have strengthened their work and their own skill development in this area as this was still a new educational effort.

The team feels that they still need assistance in continuing to develop the curriculum. The activities for grades one and five were completed along with all materials needed for implementation, and these were piloted and revised as needed in the first school year (99-00) in 16 schools selected for a pilot phase. The activities and materials for second and sixth grade are being piloted this year. Given the present lack of resources in the Armenian education system and the lack of expert consultants such as those at IIGE, the team members feel they have few alternatives for gaining the knowledge and expertise they need to continue the planned development of activities for third, fourth, and eighth grades.

Core Team members noted that they turned to other organizations and government agencies for assistance in developing the content of new activities. The response was inconsistent at best. On the one hand, the materials provided by the Red Cross (first aid), the Armenian seismology experts on disaster preparedness, the Ministry of Transportation (traffic rules), and the Norwegian Refugee Council (human rights) were extremely useful. On the other hand, other government agencies contacted for information and support were resistant to sharing information or resources. Core Team members noted that one of the problems appears to be the proprietary attitude other agencies and ministries have toward the information they hold. There were cumbersome paperwork requests and other roadblocks to efficient communication between the Core Team/CER and these other entities. There is a lack of appropriate mechanisms for getting information, such as agreements between the MOES and others, or tender for getting materials, etc. Obtaining materials is solely based on the individual initiative of the Core Team members to contact others. This factor places an extra burden on the time it takes to develop new activities and depends heavily on the willingness and professionalism of the individual Core Team members to produce quality materials even when lacking appropriate administrative and clerical supports.

In addition to the development of the curriculum and the initial training of the teachers in the pilot schools, the Core Team's role in implementation of the Life Skills project was that of training a new group of teachers to be trainers of teachers. They also made limited trips to observe Life Skills classes in order to provide some level of quality control and assist teachers in improving implementation of the program. At the end of the pilot year, the Core Team conducted a small evaluation of the project with teachers and students in the 16 pilot schools that provided positive feedback on implementation.

The area of evaluation is one that the Core Team felt was the greatest weakness in the project. At present there is no system in place to measure the changes students are experiencing as a result of this project. The training, which was conducted for four members in Toronto, included a session on assessment of children's achievement. It was reported to the evaluator for this report that the Toronto session on assessment was not useful because the translator hired by UNICEF was not adequate and was unable to translate effectively the information that was being shared. When the Core Team members realized that the translation was useless, they requested

written materials of the assessment session and IIGE consultants refused this request. The Core Team continued to recognize the need for such a process, but did not feel they alone could develop the assessment, as they were not experts in evaluation. As with the teachers and principals interviewed, the Core Team recognized that the process for the evaluation of Life Skills needed to be different from the traditional grading process used to measure academic achievement. This issue will be discussed further later in this document.

Three hours of meetings between the evaluator and the Core Team suggested that the group is a deeply committed and highly functional team that is one of the main pillars of success of the Life Skills project to date. In these conversations it was evident that the team has followed best practices for team building and team management under very difficult circumstances. The team has often worked for months without pay due to the bureaucratic complications mentioned in the Project Administration section above. They have received no documentation that validates the special skills they now have as Life Skills curriculum developers even though the teachers they are training receive certification as Life Skills teachers.

Two-Phased Implementation of Life Skills Project

Selection of Schools and Teachers: As noted above, the criteria shown in Appendix D was used to select 16 schools and one teacher from each of those schools for training in implementing the Life Skills curriculum as a separate course of study in grades one and five. The Core Team under the supervision of Dr. Graham Pike of IIGE trained the 16 teachers in 1999. Out of approximately 50 applicants, 20 teachers were selected based on interviews, questionnaires and the jointly developed criteria. In the summer of 2000, the Core Team trained 20 teachers to be teacher trainers and 100 more schools were selected across Armenia for implementation of the project. In Syunik Marz where 32 schools were selected a thirty-third school also volunteered to participate and pay the expenses for their teachers to be trained.

The new teacher trainers provided training to an expanded number of teachers - approximately 192 teachers out of 200 who were invited (the exact number is still unclear as CER has not completed a financial report because of the problems with the bankruptcy mentioned earlier). The selection process for the 100 new schools differed from the selection of the pilot schools. The selection process was done at the regional level. The original criteria for selection was passed on to regional decision makers and other criteria were also used. In Syunik Marz, for example, the process was a joint effort facilitated by the UNICEF education project officer between UNICEF and programs being sponsored by a German NGO, GTZ. These sites were implementing agricultural and health programs that were compatible with the Life Skills project. Since the implementation in the 100 new schools, 10 dropped out of the program immediately after the training. The reason given was that after the training, eight of the schools that sent only one teacher did not receive certification and there were two from special schools who were certified, but who did not believe the materials were suitable for their student population so they decided not to use the curriculum. The plan for 2001-2002 is to add another 50 schools and train another 100 teachers. The schools participating in the project are shown in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1: Schools Participating in Life Skills Implementation

Site/Marz	Total # of LS schools	# of pilot schools (out of total)	# of students in LS classrooms
Yerevan	37	8	5,875
Kotaik Marz	4	2	658
Gegharkounik	1	0	98
Ararat	1	0	106
Tavoush	2	1	256
Syunik	34	1	1,720
Shirak	3	0	375
Lori	21	1	1,700
Aragatsotn	2	2	608
Vayots Dzor	1	1	170
TOTAL	106	16	11,566

The schools participating were asked to provide a special room for the Life Skills classes that would allow the arrangement of furniture in small groups or in a large circle instead of the traditional line of desks facing the front of the room. Not all schools were able to do this, but Life Skills materials were hung on the walls of all of the rooms used for the classes. Supplies sent by UNICEF were properly shelved and children were using them systematically.

Development of Curriculum: During 2000, the Core Team developed activities for the second and sixth grades. These activities were piloted in the 16 pilot schools in the 2000-2001 school year. They will be implemented in the 90 additional schools next year. Piloting the lessons for third and seventh grades is scheduled for 2001-2002 in the 16 original schools. At the time of this report very few of the activities were translated into English for evaluator review, however, those that were available appeared to meet most of the criteria set by Dr. Selby. From review of a small number of the activities and a final memo from Dr. Selby in February 2000, it appears that the activities are on track. The only improvement needed then was the inclusion of more learning methods such as role-play, simulation and guided imaging. The present review suggested these methods might still be weakly represented, but a more thorough review should be done to assess this. This is a minor issue however, and is covered in the recommendations.

Chart 3: Distribution of Learning Methods Across Grades and Activities

Grades and #s of Activities ⇒	Grade 1 36 Activities	Grade 2 44 Activities	Grade 5 48 Activities	Grade 6 45 Activities
Activities ↓				
Individual	25	6	12	16
Pair Work	5	8	8	5
Small Groups	28	22	26	19
Class Discussion	37	25	48	25

In a memorandum of February 2000 regarding feedback to the Core Team on lesson development, Dr. Selby wrote, “All in all, the Core Team are to be warmly congratulated. I am aware of Life Skills curricula globally, and there is little doubt that the Armenian curriculum promises to be path finding in the range and depth of its conceptualization and implementation. The Core Team have borrowed, and amended, activities judiciously and to good effect; they have increasingly demonstrated the ability to develop creative and exciting new activities.”

Evaluation: In the first year and a half of this project, evaluation methods consisted of journals kept by Life Skills teachers, a collection of student products kept in folders by most teachers, occasional observation of Life Skills classes by the Core Team, other trainers, and UNICEF staff, and a survey of teachers and 293 Life Skills students from Yerevan schools conducted at the end of the first year. Core Team members compiling information from these sources wrote an Interim Evaluation on the Life Skills project. Given that the project was in such an early stage and more rigorous documentation of its effects were not being collected, this report was well balanced in that it pointed to both the positive, short term results and the problem areas that needed to be addressed for program improvement. The findings were consistent with findings in the present report. A two-page summary of the findings of this report are included here as Appendix B. Everyone interviewed for the outside evaluation agreed that evaluation of the project is weak and a more rigorous evaluation process needs to be put in place.

SECTION IV: EVALUATION TEAM REPORT ON SITE VISITS AND INTERVIEWS

The following is a qualitative narrative description of the interviews conducted. The school and classroom visits, interviews with teachers, students, principals, the Ministry office in Syunik Marz and the CER office in Goris were conducted by the evaluator and the national team of experts. Interviews conducted by the evaluator only included the Core Team, teacher trainers, Ministry and CER officials in Yerevan, and UNICEF staff. The interviews were unstructured. In the team interviews, there was a general set of questions that were asked in almost all cases. Interviews were conducted with principals and teachers at ten percent (10%) of the Life Skills schools, while still small in numbers, the qualitative data suggests that if a larger, more rigorous set of surveys and interviews were conducted, the findings would be consistent with what the evaluation team found here. These findings were also consistent with the smaller first year study.

Principal, Teacher, and Pupil Interviews:

1. *What changes, if any, have you noticed in the students of Life Skills classes?* Teachers and principals gave similar responses in all cases. In their opinion, Life Skills students, as a result of the classes, were attaining the following qualities. Note that these qualities and behavioral changes are consistent with the 10 Life Skills listed earlier in Section II.
 - a. Critical and independent thinking skills were much improved.
 - b. Self-respect and self-esteem increased as evidenced by their new willingness to speak up in class and changed hygiene and dressing habits.
 - c. Students shared their Life Skills behaviors and knowledge in other classes.
 - d. Academic achievement appears to be noticeably improved for Life Skills students as compared to their non-Life Skills classmates.
 - e. Weaker students especially appear to benefit from Life Skills.
 - f. They experienced teachers as facilitators who invite them to question, make mistakes, and teach each other.
 - g. Respect for others and their environment was improved. Interpersonal skills were improved and children were more tolerant of difference and more willing to help those different from them.
 - h. Organization and observation skills were improved.
 - i. Skills such as disaster preparedness were increased.
 - j. Attendance was improved.
 - k. Listening, problem solving, negotiation and conflict resolution skills were increased.
 - l. Students indicate a belief in a positive future over which they have some control.

Teachers and principals gave many examples of individual children who they believe were directly effected by their Life Skills participation, such as, children who were unwilling to work in a group setting at the start of the program who are now quite comfortable in groups including speaking up publicly. Or, children whose abilities in artistic exercises were notably limited to working only in black and white and who gradually shifted to using many colors to depict the world around them. Some children with behavior problems have become model students in the Life Skills classes and a few non-Life Skills teachers also noted this change. In one school two previously troublesome fourth grades were combined into one

fifth grade class which received Life Skills. Teachers reported that the students had settled down and they attribute this change to their participation in Life Skills. One fifth grader who was just starting to smoke went home and told her parents what she learned about the hazards of smoking and reported that she had stopped.

2. *As a student, what changes, if any, have you experienced as a result of Life Skills classes?* Students reported many of the same changes for themselves. What was most notable was that the few fifth grade students who were interviewed were using the language of Life Skills, e.g., conflict resolution, respect for others and the environment, fewer complexes (the term used for low-self esteem and stress-related problems), equal relationships with adults, and an understanding of children's and human rights. The students gave examples of helping others in class who they might not have paid attention to before and spoke about how the Life Skills classes made them all equal. They reported no problems with taking their Life Skills behaviors and knowledge to other classes. And all of them wished that the methods were integrated throughout their courses. They believed that non-Life Skills teachers were anxious to learn about this course and said that many were practicing some of it in their regular classes. Students reported that their non-Life Skills friends were "jealous" of the Life Skills students' opportunity to participate in this class.
3. *Have there been any changes in the academic achievement of students in Life Skills classes?* Teachers and principals gave anecdotal evidence for improved academic achievement, but acknowledged that it is too early in the project to really be sure especially since there is no systematic evaluation of Life Skills participation in place and no official tracking of Life Skills students in their other classes.
4. *Is the Life Skills curriculum appropriate for special needs children?* Two boarding schools for children with special needs were visited and a third principal of a boarding school for visually impaired children was interviewed. The teachers and principals believed that Life Skills was even more valuable to these children than regular children. The reasons they gave were, first, that the school is home for most of these children and Life Skills helps them to live more effectively in this environment and increases the nurturing attachment between students and teachers. Second, Life Skills give these students the interpersonal skills and increased self-esteem that they need to navigate in a difficult world. One principal noted that the children have more empathy and are more adaptive after participating in Life Skills classes.
5. *Has there been an impact on your teaching or on you personally as a result of participation in this program?* Without exception, teachers reported that their participation in this project had not only changed their attitudes about teaching and teaching skills, but had impacted them personally. They noted the following qualities of the change they experienced:
 - a. They are more tolerant and patient.
 - b. They have a more open attitude toward children.
 - c. They are more able to see children as contributing to their (the teacher's) learning.
 - d. They often found that children surprised them with their capabilities, which led to an increased respect for and expectation of what children could do.

- e. Their enjoyment of and commitment to teaching was increased.
- f. They were able to use the Life Skills methods and some content in their other classes.
- g. They felt more secure in their teaching skills.
- h. Personal self-esteem was increased.
- i. They preferred the interactive method of teaching to the old lecture model, but some noted that interactive methods and group process are not appropriate for every subject.
- j. Teachers fully supported the democratization of the classroom.
- k. They all believed that the child-centered focus is a great improvement over the previous education model.
- l. Several noted that participation in the Life Skills project resulted in a positive change in their relationships with their own children and colleagues.
- m. They believe the methods and content they are teaching in Life Skills empower children.

Some teachers had previous training in other interactive methodology and were practicing interactive methods prior to Life Skills training, but felt that the Life Skills model significantly had increased their skills. Others had not had any in-service training in ten years and felt profoundly effected professionally by this training. Teachers believed that the values of Life Skills were consistent with their own values. One teacher gave an example of a discipline problem in her classroom and noted that before her Life Skills training she would have had to turn to the principal for help, but now she was able to handle the situation effectively and constructively herself.

6. *What changes, if any, have you observed in school climate since implementation of Life Skills?* Teachers and principals believed that there was a positive change in school climate, but those in the second round of schools noted that with only a half a year of instruction completed, it was difficult to know this for sure. They reiterated the individual changes seen in Life Skills students and believed those contribute to a better school climate.
7. *How have other teachers reacted/responded to the implementation of Life Skills? Have other teachers sought information or training on Life Skills?* Teachers and principals reported that there had been very little resistance to the implementation of Life Skills in their schools. On the contrary, many non-Life Skills teachers, especially younger teachers, were asking for the training. Where there was minimal resistance, it was believed that this was due to lack of understanding of the project and that an introductory training or visits to Life Skills classrooms could overcome this resistance. Non-Life Skills teachers reported that it was easier to work with the Life Skills students. Several of the Life Skills teachers interviewed reported that they had been asked to help their colleagues implement some of the methodology in non-Life Skills classes. They recognized that they were not trained as trainers themselves, but most had attempted to transfer some of the skills to those requesting such help. At each school the evaluation team was told that it would be advantageous to have the Life Skills program gradually implemented from first through tenth grades and to have all teachers trained in the methodology. Principals stated that this program can have a major influence on changing from the previous education model to the nationwide goal of child-centered education.

8. *Are there any problems for Life Skills students when they go on to a class with a non-Life Skills teacher?* Principals, students, and teachers reported that there were no problems of significance when students went to the non-Life Skills classes. Non-Life Skills teachers noted that on occasion it took a few extra minutes to quiet the students down for the beginning of a new class when they come from Life Skills, but most of them said that they appreciated the positive changes in these students. One teacher said, “The children don’t tell other teachers to do the same as the Life Skills teacher, rather, they create an atmosphere that compels other teachers’ interest.”
9. *Have you attempted to integrate Life Skills content or methodology into your other subjects? Do you believe Life Skills should be a separate course or integrated into the regular curriculum? Is one hour a week long enough?* All Life Skills teachers said that they used more interactive methods in their other classes now that they were trained in these processes. It was less clear how much of the content of Life Skills was being applied in other classes. One teacher gave an example of how she was using it in her geography class in a discussion about the resolution of the Karabach conflict. In general, respondents preferred the separate course approach for now, but most seemed to support the idea of ultimate integration into the regular curriculum over time, especially of the methodology. Integration of the content was seen as more difficult because the teachers are not skilled in *how* to do this on a subject-by-subject basis. Opinions on the length of time that Life Skills should be taught per week varied from one to three hours, but there was no consensus. Some teachers felt that the time allowed for students to process their learning was not enough. When asked about the role of Life Skills classes versus things such as moral ethics and human sexuality, most believed that Life Skills could and should address these issues, but that these and possibly other subjects were important enough that they should not be limited to Life Skills courses alone. One school in its first year of implementation in the first and fifth grades had already adapted the materials for second and sixth grades without the Core Team’s materials for those grades because their teachers and students were so anxious to participate in the classes.
10. *How do you believe success or achievement should be measured in Life Skills classes?* As noted earlier, everyone interviewed believed that some method of assessing accomplishment in Life Skills classes needed to be developed. The Canadian model upon which the curriculum is based does not provide instruments designed to measure the short-term results or long-term impacts of the curriculum. All teachers kept folders of the students’ Life Skills artwork and writing and could point to the changes in each student from the start of the class to the present. Most were adamant that traditional grading was not the way to assess this type of program. It is important to note that it was difficult to get the teachers and principals to describe in operational terms or clear behavioral terms what was different about the students. This suggests the need for further training in how to identify the changes students are experiencing and the development of a process for documenting these changes. It was clear that the expertise to develop such an assessment process was not available in the Armenian education system at present.
11. *If UNICEF funding for this project were withdrawn at the end of this year, what would your school do with Life Skills? If you had to choose between Life Skills teacher training,*

materials development, or materials production and distribution what would be the most important for you to have funded? Everyone interviewed stated that if funding were withdrawn, Life Skills would continue in some way in their school. A few principals stated that they would attempt to get community and parental support to continue the program. Teachers did not see themselves as discontinuing the use of the methodology and some stated that they would find a way to provide the materials needed for the activities. Most principals said the continued development and provision of materials would be most useful as there was now a cadre of teachers in the system who could continue the training if funding could be found to support it. However, everyone was realistic about the strain such action would put on the system's ability to sustain the project without some level of outside support provided until a critical mass of trained teachers and prepared curriculum materials could be reached. Though their enthusiasm for this project was obvious, in actual practice, it is difficult to tell at this point how well teachers and principals would be able to surmount the barriers that would arise if the current level of resources were withdrawn.

12. *Was the training you received enough? Are the materials satisfactory? Do you ever revise them?* The teachers were very pleased with the training they received. They stated that they could always use more and they were hungry for more, but they felt they were comfortable with their initial skills in implementing the Life Skills program after the first training. If anything, they would like training in special issues or problems, e.g., how to deal with parents when a child reveals something such as abuse. The teachers stated that, with few exceptions, they did not make changes in the materials because the materials were well prepared and because they had been told at the training that the activities were to be implemented as written. The teachers felt they had direct or indirect ways of getting feedback to the Core Team about needed changes in the materials if necessary. Those interviewed at the boarding schools would like to see a special training for teachers of special education and activities tailored to the capacities and special needs of these children.
13. *Should this training be provided in pre-service training?* Respondents strongly believed that the Life Skills project should be introduced in pre-service training. They noted this would be one of the best ways to insure the spread and institutionalization of the program as it would introduce student teachers to interactive methodologies at an early stage. One of the interviewers asked the teachers why, after hundreds of hours of training in pre-service, did they believe that the Life Skills training had so drastically changed their views on teaching in only a few hours when their pre-service training had not. The teachers, most of whom went through pre-service under the previous academic model, enthusiastically responded that it was the methodology and the type of content that made this project exciting. They were able to see so quickly how it was effecting their students and themselves. One teacher said, "Many teachers come out of pre-service with excellent knowledge, but Life Skills provides *real teaching skills.*"
14. *How have parents reacted to the introduction of Life Skills classes?* Most respondents reported that parent response was very positive. Some parents were suspicious at the beginning and one even told a teacher that the forty minutes allotted to Life Skills was a waste because she was teaching the same things at home, but after the first few weeks or a month of implementation the parents became supporters of the program, including the parent

who was concerned about wasting time. At a few schools it was reported that parents had not expressed much interest one way or another. At most sites, a few parents had attended the classes. We were unable to interview parents, but did have the opportunity to interview one grandmother of a first grader who lived with her son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter. She reported that her granddaughter was very enthusiastic about the classes and the adults could see the difference in her at home. She also noted that she could see the gains her granddaughter was making that her son did not have the opportunity for since he was in the system long before such classes were available. Teachers and principals told the interviewers that parents have expressed pleasure in the changes they are seeing in their children, one told a teacher she was envious because her daughter had such a trusting relationship with the teacher, another reported that her child was attempting to get the family to practice the skills at home such as sitting in a circle to talk.

15. *What resources do you need to continue to implement or improve your Life Skills classes?*
- Funding for continued training and materials development and distribution was considered vital. The most pressing need expressed to the evaluation team was to get the pending teachers manual into the hands of the teachers. The availability of the manual was still pending due to bureaucratic approval processes required. The classroom facilities varied from school-to-school. Those that did not have separate rooms for Life Skills were still attempting to figure out how to create that space. There were two schools in Lori Marz that were preparing to move to new buildings from the temporary buildings they had occupied since the '88 earthquake. Both of these had planned for a Life Skills classroom. At every site visited, the furniture was antiquated and awkward to use in a classroom practicing interactive methods. The teachers and students in all cases had obviously worked hard to make the rooms attractive and practical. Teachers said they would like more materials and it was important to them that the needed materials arrive on time. There have been some cases where materials were late in arriving and put the teachers at a disadvantage. This problem seemed to have been worked out by the time of the evaluation visits. In most cases, there was no evidence of computer access or Internet access for the teachers or students, and it was noted by everyone interviewed that there was little or no capacity to duplicate materials on site.

The respondents do not claim that the Life Skills curriculum is solely responsible for all of the changes they observed, but they strongly believed that the project was the major contributor to these changes.

Classroom Observation:

The evaluation team was only able to observe four Life Skills classes in session, and the classes knew ahead of time that the evaluation team was to visit. Therefore the observations here cannot be considered completely objective, but the impressions from these observations were highly consistent with the findings from interviews and the Interim Evaluation Report from the first year. The overall impression was a positive one in that children participated with enthusiasm and energy. Teachers made an effort to engage as many children as possible. The noise level, which is always a concern when beginning these types of programs, was reasonable, and it was obvious that the children in both grade levels had integrated the ground rules about listening, letting one

person at a time speak, etc. As we expected, the children all stated that they loved the Life Skills classes and wanted more. They were fluent in the language of Life Skills and could describe at some level the changes that they have experienced in relationships and their enjoyment of learning as a result of the program.

Teacher Training from the Perspective of the Core Team and Other Trainers:

Dr. Pike of IIGE and the Core Team trained the original teachers for the 16 pilot schools. The Core Team conducted a training of trainers in 2000 for 20 new teacher trainers. Those trainers then trained many of the new Life Skills teachers for 2000-2001. Three trainers trained by the Core Team were interviewed for this report. Besides providing training, they have subsequently observed some of those trained in their Life Skills classes. The trainers felt that their training by the Core Team prepared them well to train the new teachers. In their experience, most participants were comfortable with the changes they were being asked to make in their teaching methods. New Life Skills teachers expressed concern that the course would take too much work, but after implementation and practice, they felt the positive changes outweighed any extra work.

In trainings conducted by the new trainers in Lori Marz and Yerevan there were a total of three participants who were not certified because they did not meet the requirements for completion. These requirements were to (1) exhibit child-centered, democratic teaching skills, (2) create an appropriate learning atmosphere for free expression, and (3) see that children are able to make decisions and develop interpersonal skills such as self-assessment and understanding the environment and the world around them. Those who were not certified will be able to try again in the future, if they wish. The Core Team expressed concern that, at present, quality control of the certification process is inconsistent because they as the trainers of new trainers were unable to have an observer/mentor at some of the trainings that were conducted in regions distant from Yerevan.

The trainers found that most discomfort was short-lived and came at the point when the teachers had to implement the curriculum for the first time. After a short period of practice, teachers reported being comfortable with their skills. This was consistent with the feedback received in the evaluation team's teacher interviews. The trainers observed that the Core Team had done an excellent job of preparing materials that were age appropriate and met the criteria of the Life Skills project. They would like to see a refresher training offered every six months. One also suggested that reference materials be developed that children might use to pursue further learning on their own time or in other classes about topics that are raised in the Life Skills classes.

As they have traveled to observe various Life Skills classes, they have found principals, teachers and parents to be highly satisfied with the short term results of the project. When asked what criteria should be used in selecting more trainers from the teacher pool, they listed qualities such as free thinkers, not conservative, open to new methods and intellectual growth, respect for children, and a sense of humor. One trainer in Yerevan provided an excellent set of screening questions.

Institutional Support Within The Ministry of Education and Science

Interviews were conducted with Ministry officials at the central and regional levels and representatives of the Center for Education Reform. The Ministry leadership, based upon observation, believed strongly that the Life Skills program was already having a positive effect on teachers and students. Most of them had either attended a presentation, a training, or a classroom demonstration on Life Skills. In their opinion, the Life Skills project appeared to be affecting three major goals of education reform: shifting to a child-centered classroom, providing skills lacking in the previous system for independent thinking, self- and community awareness, and developing citizens of democracy. They noted the importance of the institutionalization of this course in the core curriculum by legal mandate. They believe this was done because leaders recognized the potential for Life Skills to support the democratic changes that Armenia is pursuing. Other efforts are being undertaken, but Life Skills is the only one that is officially included in the core curriculum by the MOES.

Ministry officials in Yerevan reported that, among decision makers, there are still a handful of opponents of programs like Life Skills in the Armenian education system, but those interviewed believed that exposure to the Life Skills program and participation in some Life Skills activities and classes could help opponents better understand and support the project. As one official put it, participation in the training was an “eye opener” for him, and he was convinced of the value of the program when he saw the teachers’ positive reaction and enthusiasm toward the new project.

The Ministry officials interviewed believed that the dedication and exceptional quality of the work of the Core Team was an essential factor in the success of the Life Skills project thus far. The decision to place the Life Skills project within the purview of the CER was another factor in further institutionalizing the changes Life Skills can bring about. For the upcoming school year, 2001-2002, the CER committed the first financial contribution to the project, \$5,000, and will be paying the salaries of the Core Team, albeit at a much lower rate, when UNICEF’s contribution to salaries comes to an end in June 2000.

One important factor noted that has not yet been addressed by the education system is that of providing Life Skills curriculum training for student teachers in pre-service or university setting. Officials interviewed felt strongly that bringing this program into teacher pre-service training will be an important factor in further integrating and institutionalizing the changes being sought through this program. All interviewed were concerned about how the this project will be sustained given the severe lack of resources for education in Armenia. At this level, however, as was found elsewhere, the commitment to keep the project going to some degree was very strong.

Current Status of the Core Team

Based upon the planned implementation of the Life Skills project, the lessons and activities for grades three, seven and eight were still in progress and to be piloted. The Core Team was preparing to complete this task. They were facing obstacles that will need to be addressed in order to maintain the present level of quality of curriculum development. These obstacles include:

1. The need for more support in finding content resources for curriculum development.
2. The need for clerical support.
3. The lack of expert consultation on the development of grade specific activities.
4. A deep cut in salary at the end of June.
5. No official written authority for supervision is assigned to the “leader” of the Core Team
6. Absence of clear picture of team constitution, roles and responsibilities, salary, and terms of reference for 2001 project.

Due to these barriers, the Core Team is feeling a strong sense of pressure to complete all lessons and activities by the end of June. The Core Team believed strongly that the quality of their work will suffer if they rush to complete the remaining activities within the next three months. UNICEF does not have an expectation that the work will be done by that time. It was clear that members of the Core Team will be forced to reassess their continued commitment to working full time on this project based upon their personal income needs. The loss of Core Team members at this point in the project would be extremely detrimental to continued project development. When asked for a time frame for quality completion of the remaining lessons and activities, the Core Team members stated that if their positions could be supported until the end of 2001 they would be able to complete the remaining lessons.

Life Skills Media Coverage:

The following efforts were used to raise awareness of the Life Skills project:

- A brochure was distributed to all parents of Life Skills students describing the 10 life skills and the project.
- The head of the Education Department in Syunik Marz, a representative of the GTZ, and the UNICEF education project officer met with TV and radio reporters to publicize the Life Skills project.
- A radio interview was conducted with Karen Melkonyan of the Inspection Department, Ministry of Education and Science.
- The national radio carried a series of Life Skills messages arranged by the UNICEF Education unit in collaboration with the Communications unit.
- The CER regional office in Goris published a newsletter entitled “Ousoutsich” (“Teacher”) starting in December 2000 and the first edition contained three items on Life Skills including an article describing the overall framework, an interview with a Life Skills teacher trainer at the Education Department office in Kapan about objectives and outcomes in child development related to Life Skills, and an article by the same teacher trainer about the Life Skills framework, topics, activities and methodology. Three copies of this newsletter were distributed to every school in Syunik Marz.

The UNICEF Perspective

The acting country representative and the education project officer were interviewed for this report. The history of UNICEF’s involvement and role is described in Sections II and III. As noted, UNICEF funded the bulk of the Life Skills project for a little more than two years, and the

project officer maintained good working relationships with the other parties contributing to a well-implemented project. UNICEF supervision of and assistance to the project was consistent. The funds come from the Education Division budget, which was largely devoted to the Life Skills project. Funding ensured the quality of the training of teachers and the quality of the materials produced. UNICEF's involvement in the project strengthened its relationship with the Ministry of Education and Science and it is the hope of UNICEF staff that the implementation of this project will support the demand for this type of education reform from the bottom up as well as the top down in the Armenian system. The Life Skills project is seen as a way of empowering teachers, principals, students and parents to provide quality education at the local level and that supports the democratic changes sought by the Ministry of Education and Sciences and supports UNICEF's educational mission.

UNICEF staff expressed concern that the Ministry has not done more in two years to generate more financial support for the project and to support further human resource development. UNICEF's own regulations require that the portion of funds that were applied to salaries for the Core Team must end in June, and though the Ministry has said that it will continue to pay the Core Team members, the amount will be drastically reduced. UNICEF will continue significant funding for training and materials development and distribution, but would like to see more initiative on the part of the Ministry in implementing curriculum reform moving toward ultimate, full Armenian support of the Life Skills project. A major materials development issue facing the project is that a second teacher's manual for grades two and six will be ready for development and distribution at the end of summer 2001. At this time there is no funding available for this manual. The assistant country representative is concerned that too much emphasis is being placed on Life Skills as the only major and integrated curriculum reform effort supported by the Ministry.

Budget Analysis: The budget for the project is shown in Charts 2 and 3 below.

Chart 2: Life Skills 1999 Expenditures

NN	Description	Cost
1.	Technical assistance of Canadian experts	28,758
2.	Development of materials/LS working group	15,600
3.	Training of the LS working group and training of teachers	31,011
4.	Printing of learning materials and LS leaflets	5,692
5.	Supplies and equipment for the pilot schools and the working group	28,123
6.	Project monitoring	86
	TOTAL	109,270

Chart 3: Life Skills 2000 Expenditures

NN	Description	Cost
1.	Technical assistance of Canadian experts	1,014
2.	Development of materials/LS working group	32,007
3.	TOT and training of teachers	48,344
4.	Printing of LS leaflets	220
5.	Supplies and equipment for the pilot schools	37,344
6.	Project monitoring	1,011
	TOTAL	119,940

Using the figures from Chart 3 above and the number of students served by the Life Skills project the cost per student for the second year of implementation was \$10.37 per student. When comparing this per pupil cost to that of similar curricula, for example, those for substance abuse prevention, conflict resolution and/or violence prevention¹ the cost is on the low end of the cost spectrum which ranges from \$10 to \$1600 per pupil depending on the curriculum selected. The average cost of such curricula is approximately \$235 per pupil. The cost effectiveness of this figure would be strengthened by the quantitative and qualitative data a good evaluation process would also gather on secondary beneficiaries such as teachers and parents. While this is a very reasonable cost in economically developed countries, this would still be a difficult price for the Armenian system alone to pay with its current resources.

CONCLUSION

It is conceivable that had the evaluation been able to make a wider sweep of data collection through more interviews and surveys conducted with a large number of teachers and students, more negative results might have been found, but it is the view of the evaluator based upon past experience, and upon the quality of the research questions asked for this evaluation, that such an outcome is highly unlikely. At best, we might have more clearly identified issues for improvement in quality of an already effective project and for change in bureaucratic procedures that would further facilitate the success we found in the schools.

It is important to note that while some argue that the same elements of citizenship and Life Skills can be taught in almost any subject, this can only be true if similar methodology is being used in each and every subject. Equally as important as methodology must be an intentional and overt effort on the part of the teacher in regular classes to relate the traditional subject matter to the same content areas covered in Life Skills, e.g., real life problem solving, professional work habits, and citizenship development that prepare students for practical application of learning when they leave the school environment. It is not enough to teach math for the purpose of being able to count change in a sales transaction or to teach science for the purpose of knowing how a particular experiment relates to choices of chemicals used in the home. It is unclear at this writing to what extent such methods and pedagogy are being used in the regular classroom, but

¹ *Making the Grade: A Guide to School Drug Prevention Programs and Safe Schools, Safe Students: A Guide to Violence Prevention Strategies*, Drug Strategies, a nonprofit research institute, Washington DC, 1999.

based upon the interviews for this report such integration appears minimal. The Life Skills project is well worth continuing if the standards of development and implementation can be maintained, if a plan for funding and integration can be achieved, and if an evaluation procedure is put in place to provide an annual assessment of short-term behavioral changes and long-term impacts resulting from the project. Section V summarizes the findings reported above and offers a set of recommendations for the parties to pursue should they so choose.

SECTION V: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS

Students:

- Students were reported to exhibit the behaviors expected as a result of participating in a Life Skills course. Those behaviors and characteristics include:
 - a. Critical and independent thinking skills were much improved.
 - b. Self-respect and self-esteem increased as evidenced by their new willingness to speak up in class and changed hygiene and dressing habits.
 - c. Students shared their Life Skills behaviors and knowledge in other classes.
 - d. Academic achievement appears to be noticeably improved for Life Skills students as compared to their non-Life Skills classmates.
 - e. Weaker students especially appear to benefit from Life Skills.
 - f. They experienced teachers as facilitators who invite them to question, make mistakes, and teach each other.
 - g. Respect for others and their environment was improved. Interpersonal skills were improved and children were more tolerant of difference and more willing to help those different from them.
 - h. Organization and observation skills were improved.
 - i. Skills such as disaster preparedness were increased.
 - j. Attendance was improved.
 - k. Listening, problem solving, negotiation and conflict resolution skills were increased.
 - l. Students indicate a belief in a positive future over which they have some control.
- Students interviewed expressed a very strong desire to continue with Life Skills beyond their current grade.
- Students gave testimony to the changes they experienced as a result of their participation in Life Skills (see the behaviors and qualities listed above).
- Neither Life Skills students nor teachers indicated that there were any conflicts for Life Skills students when they went on to their other classes. Non-Life Skills teachers reported that they enjoyed having the Life Skills students in their classes.
- The project is too short-lived to provide long term impact data, but qualitative data on short-term results indicate that the project is contributing to change sought by the Armenian education reform effort:
 - a. Children are learning and practicing the skills of citizenship, democratic process, and practical knowledge and skills for effective day-to-day interaction
 - b. The Life Skills classroom provides a more child-centered environment that nurtures and supports the development of self-determination and self-expression in children.

Teachers:

- Teachers testified to the fact that their professional capacities have been significantly increased as a result of participating in the Life Skills project.
- Teachers offered examples of changes in their personal lives that have positively effected their relationships with students, colleagues, and their own family members as a result of participating in Life Skills.

Professional and personal changes experienced include:

 - m. They are more tolerant and patient.

- n. They have a more open attitude toward children.
 - o. They are more able to see children as contributing to their (the teacher's) learning.
 - p. They often found that children surprised them with their capabilities that led to an increased expectation of what children could do.
 - q. Their enjoyment of and commitment to teaching was increased.
 - r. They were able to use the Life Skills methods and some content in their other classes.
 - s. They felt more secure in their teaching skills.
 - t. Personal self-esteem was increased.
 - u. They prefer the interactive method of teaching to the old lecture model, but some noted that interactive methods and group process are not appropriate for every subject.
 - v. They all believed that the child-centered focus is a great improvement over the previous education model.
 - w. Teachers fully supported the democratization of the classroom.
 - x. Several noted that participation in the Life Skills project resulted in a positive change in their relationships with their own children and colleagues.
 - y. They believe the methods and content they are teaching in Life Skills empower children.
- Teachers provided multiple examples of the positive effects that they believe Life Skills has had on their students (see the characteristics above in the "Student" section).
 - Teachers experienced some difficulty in describing the behavioral changes in their students indicating the need for further training in how to assess the effects of Life Skills classes on students.
 - Principals and teachers reported that non-Life Skills teachers, for the most part, were very receptive to the project and were eager to learn more about the project and to become Life Skills teachers themselves.
 - Teachers reported that they were integrating Life Skills methodology and content into their other classes to some indeterminate degree and that other teachers were asking for help in doing the same.

Training:

- Teachers expressed satisfaction with the training they received to become Life Skills teachers.
- Teachers would like more training, especially in the areas of dealing with special situations such as learning about abuse in the home or similar problems.
- Teachers of special education children and boarding school children would like training and materials tailored to their particular teaching focus.
- The lack of financial and time resources to allow Core Team members to travel to observe teachers in the classroom and to observe new trainers may negatively impact quality control of the project.
- All respondents believed strongly that one way to further embed the benefits of the Life Skills project in the educational system was to begin immediately providing the training in pre-service at the pedagogical universities.

Institutional Support:

- There are strong supporters of the implementation of Life Skills within the Ministry and at the national government level as evidenced by the legal requirement to include Life Skills in the core curriculum and active support of the Deputy Minister and the Center for Education Reform.
- There are also those in the Ministry who seem unsure as to the contribution Life Skills can make to student upbringing as compared to experience in regular classes or other more limited interactive reform efforts.
- The quality of the relationship between the UNICEF project officer and the Armenian parties has been excellent. The UNICEF assistant country representative holds high hopes for the Life Skills project and would like to see it implemented in at least fifty percent of the schools.
- The UNICEF assistant country representative is concerned about a lack of action on the part of the MOES to find the resources to shift ultimate support of the project from UNICEF to the MOES over the next few years.
- The Center for Education Reform is committed to continuing to provide a variety of types of support including training, duplication of materials, work space for the Core Team, media focus on the project, and in the coming year will be making a financial contribution of \$5,000 to the project.
- The Core Team, supported by UNICEF funds and provision of working space in the Ministry, did an excellent job of developing the program under often adverse circumstances.
- The Core Team has modeled the Life Skills values in its work and team building.
- Mismatch and policy disagreements between UNICEF and Ministry accounting procedures and the bankruptcy case have somewhat negatively effected efficient program management.
- The reorganization of the Center for Education Reform and the placement of the Core Team within the CER improved the capacity of the Core Team to develop and implement the project.
- Changes in Ministers and UNICEF assistant country representatives requiring reeducation of new decision makers somewhat slowed implementation.
- Regional education department personnel and principals were highly supportive of the Life Skills project and believed that they could see evidence of how the students who participated were already beginning to change the school climate even if only slightly.

Resources:

- UNICEF has been the major source of funding and material resources and has contributed to the quality of the project and the ability of the Ministry to expand the program to 106 schools.
- The cost per pupil of the Life Skills project is reasonable for an international NGO, but will be difficult for Armenian education resources to cover.
- The teachers judged the materials developed for Life Skills lessons as generally excellent with only occasional minor adjustments needed.
- All teachers were anxious to receive the proposed teachers manual and noted that they were working at a disadvantage without it.
- The Core Team is lacking in outside consultation, expertise and interagency support for continuing to develop the next round of lessons and activities. This places an unnecessary burden on them to work essentially in a vacuum.

- A few principals and one education department head believed that they could find the resources at the local level to sustain this project if it became necessary, but this was not universally true. When asked, respondents were somewhat vague about what sources they could turn to for support.
- There is a serious lack of equipment and technology such as computers, copiers and Internet access that could facilitate the development and implementation of the project
- Classroom facilities are not conducive to using an interactive model of teaching and learning.

Integration

- Most of those interviewed supported the ultimate integration of Life Skills concepts and methods into the regular classroom and subjects. However, some felt it was too soon to move in this direction. This concern appeared to be related to a sense that Life Skills is still fragile as a new program and needs more time to build support and for teachers to build competency in delivering the program.
- Textbook revision will be necessary for the integration of Life Skills and other similar reform efforts to take hold in the regular classroom. Life Skills is currently a major provider of new materials for teaching in the schools where it is being implemented.

Capacity Building and Reform

- UNICEF has collaborated with other programs such as the school management project and GTZ where appropriate to facilitate the implementation of the project.
- The Life Skills project is making a contribution to the decentralization of education as described in the Law on Education.
- The Life Skills project is compatible with and supports other decentralization efforts such as the school management project. The teachers and principals being exposed to the Life Skills methods and content will bring a stronger set of decision making skills to local management.
- The Life Skills project is compatible with and supports pedagogical improvement efforts, e.g., critical thinking, human rights curriculum, text book revision, etc.
- There is strong support building from the local level or individual school level for the Life Skills project as evidenced particularly by parent acceptance and support of the project and principals and teachers' statements that they would continue to provide Life Skills lessons in some way even if funding were to be withdrawn.

Evaluation and Assessment:

- The project is lacking in a systematic formative and summative evaluation that will assess short term results and long term impacts.
- Everyone interviewed believed that some assessment process must be put in place.
- Most of those interviewed did not believe that the traditional academic grading model was appropriate for a Life Skills curriculum.
- There is a need for an assessment of the training of trainers and the training of teachers.
- UNICEF and the MOES should plan for data collection, analysis and reporting on a yearly and, perhaps, quarterly basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Life Skills project, though in very early stages and not yet using a process for documenting student achievement, is showing evidence of contributing to some of the main goals of the RoA's education reform effort:

- (1) democratizing education and raising citizens who understand their role in a democracy;
- (2) providing conditions for the self-determination and self-expression of students;
- (3) improving the professional quality of teacher skills;
- (4) shifting to a child-centered education model; and
- (5) shifting decision making to the local level.

Therefore, it is strongly recommended by the evaluation team that the Life Skills project should be continued.

The following specific recommendations are made based upon the findings from this evaluation and are meant to promote the continuation of this project. These recommendations should be considered by the stakeholders and acted upon as they see fit and as resources allow. The recommendations are not mutually exclusive; rather they should be seen as work to be done on parallel tracks. UNICEF and appropriate members of the Ministry of Education and Sciences should begin an immediate series of meetings to prioritize the recommendations, determine the specific resources needed, and develop a multi-year plan of action to support deeper penetration and implementation of this project.

Structural and Financial

- ❖ All unsigned agreements, requests for information, and plans should be finalized immediately and distributed to the appropriate partners for implementation.
- ❖ UNICEF and the MOES should develop an ongoing collaborative process for addressing bureaucratic obstacles. The goal should be to cut down on delays in payments and project implementation. This could perhaps best be done by reconstituting and strengthening the Decision Making Board that the MOES put in place some time ago, which seems to be dormant at present.
- ❖ Use this evaluation document and other appropriate documents to develop a "briefing book" which can be used to speed the process of introducing new decision makers and new partners to the project.
- ❖ UNICEF should review the resources committed to this project and resource allocation plans for the current year (2001) to see if there is any way to support the retention of a maximum number of Core Team members through December 2001 to ensure completion and piloting of the lessons and activities for grades three, four and seven at a quality level.
- ❖ The MOES should carefully review its financial resources and other sources of revenue to pursue the same goal. The MOES should also look carefully at other recommendations that address resources of time and role assignment to look at avenues of support other than monetary to balance the lack of financial resources within the government and Ministry budgets.

- ❖ Both parties should make every possible effort to maintain the key members of the Core Team to ensure the highest quality completion of the final lessons for the last three grades.
- ❖ The CER is the most logical place for placement of management and future development of the Life Skills curriculum and the CER should continue to provide work space, organize trainings, duplicate materials, coordinate with UNICEF on distribution of materials and provide media coverage and other public relations for the project.
- ❖ Within the CER and the Core Team, roles and responsibilities should be clearly spelled out and documented in written “job descriptions.”
- ❖ The Core Team has been burdened with not only developing the curriculum, but also attending to administrative and organizational matters. The CER director should assign regular clerical duties to an appropriate staff person other than Core Team members.
- ❖ The role of “leader” or “supervisor” of the Core Team, which has been unofficially filled by Louise Alexanyan, should be formalized.
- ❖ The Core Team’s work should be validated and celebrated by providing them with some type of certification acknowledging their special skills in curriculum development, education reform, etc. This is vital to morale and fair in light of the fact that teachers they have trained are being certified as Life Skills teachers.

Ongoing Development of Curriculum, Training, and Project Expansion

- ❖ Complete curriculum development through seventh grade for implementation in school year 2001-2002.
- ❖ Ensure support and resources for the continued development of teachers’ manuals covering grades one through seven. This is a product that another NGO might be willing to help support financially.
- ❖ In light of earlier feedback from Dr. Selby, and in an effort to continue to improve the quality of the lessons and activities, the Core Team should develop a matrix of all lessons and activities developed that tracks the learning methods and processes used, e.g., paired, individual, large group, etc. and visioning, drawing, role playing, etc. This will ensure a holistic approach to curriculum design.
- ❖ Continue expansion of the program to other schools. Develop a plan for incremental expansion at a rate that resources will support.
- ❖ This might best be supported by continuing to provide training of trainers and training more teachers. This is also a capacity building recommendation. The more teachers that are trained the more embedded and routine implementation will become.
- ❖ The Center for Education Reform should work with the Core Team to identify possible sources of expert support and/or local agency and organizational support for content development. The Ministry should then work with other agencies and organizations on developing a collaborative process for information sharing that will ease the present bureaucratic snags the Core Team is experiencing. Perhaps someone in the CER other than Core Team members could be assigned responsibility for coordinating this effort.
- ❖ The Core Team should be provided with access to at least one computer with Internet access so that they may also have electronic capability to reach out to other experts and areas of expertise. Such computer access would be preferable if provided at their work site.
- ❖ Training and curriculum materials should be tailored for teachers of special populations. This effort should be a collaborative effort between the Core Team and teachers of special

education and boarding school students. This program should be made available in pre-service also.

- ❖ Provide curriculum materials in an organized collated version to be used as a training text for in-service and pre-service. There should be a periodic update of the teacher's manual or an addendum made to the present teacher's manuals after the materials for all grades are developed.
- ❖ After the development of the basic lessons and activities for the three remaining grades, the development of added resources should be considered, e.g., bibliographies and reference sheets for students who would like to deepen their learning about something they experience in a Life Skills class or something they would like to carry into study for another class.
- ❖ A multi-year goal and timeline should be set for gradually moving the Life Skills content and methodology into specific courses after the Core Team has completed materials for grades one through seven. This will truly embed the learnings from this model and will more broadly build the capacity of teachers to transition to the child-centered, democratic model promoted in Life Skills curriculum and desired by the education reform effort. The Life Skills project can be a major contributor to the reform effort if a plan is developed for integrating it more fully over time.
- ❖ There was not enough time in this evaluation to assess the relationship of Life Skills to other educational reform efforts such as the human rights curriculum development or other similar efforts. At this time, it is recommended that dialogue be held with other reform efforts to determine compatibility and interrelationship. However, no attempt should be made to combine these efforts in the near future. Life Skills brings a very specific set of learning objectives to the education process and should not be combined with other efforts without a careful assessment of compatibility and a plan for ensuring the integrity of the Life Skills curriculum.
- ❖ Depending upon the availability of future resources, a long-term plan should be developed for integration of Life Skills in specific subjects in eighth through tenth grades. This recommendation is tied to the development of the skills of curriculum developers in building Life Skills content and methodology into specific subject matter.

Capacity Building and Sustainability

- ❖ The Ministry of Education and Science and UNICEF need to immediately begin a joint effort to identify further sources of funding for the Life Skills project. Contact should be made with other NGOs that provide support for educational reform efforts to invite them in as partners. The Ministry should begin a serious effort to work with regional offices and schools at the local level to identify a variety of possible sources for funding and/or resource development including private business or citizen contributions. It is recognized that resources are scarce in Armenia, but that makes it all the more important that an attempt be made to identify a wide variety of sources even though they may be small.
- ❖ Contact should be made with organizations that provide funding for direct supply of equipment such as computers and copiers. If it is feasible within local resources or access to Internet connections, every Life Skills school should have a computer, a copier and Internet access for teacher, and possible limited student, use.
- ❖ Discussions should begin immediately with Armenia's pedagogical institutes on developing plans for building Life Skills curriculum training into pre-training programs. The Core Team

continuing to provide training of trainers and training more teachers might best support this expansion. This is also a capacity building recommendation. The more teachers that are trained the more embedded and routine implementation will become.

- ❖ Efforts should be made through every possible media and public relations outlet to build awareness of and support for Life Skills as a major contributor to educational reform. The present receptivity to this project and the growing parental support suggest that this curriculum is an avenue not only for helping students become better citizens, but also for increasing capacity for community involvement of community members as they are exposed to the premises of Life Skills and encouraged to support schools in implementing this and other reforms.
- ❖ To build a wider ownership of the project, identify decision makers and potential supporters of the Life Skills project and hold mini-trainings to introduce them to the concepts and practice of the project, e.g., pedagogical professors, broader exposure in regional education departments, other ministries who support education in any way.

Evaluation and Assessment

- ❖ An immediate plan should be developed for this project for assessing student achievement, changes in school climate, and changes in teaching quality.
- ❖ A consultant should be identified who has experience in developing assessment of curriculum that is designed to build coping and life skills in children. If a consultant is used, this person should be expected to use a collaborative design process engaging everyone who will be effected by the evaluation. These types of programs, very popular in other countries, are rarely, if ever, assessed using academic grading models. There are many models for doing this type of assessment, and at the very least someone should be engaged to help the Core Team identify other curricula that have assessment instruments that might serve as models for the Core Team to tailor to the Armenian Life Skills project, e.g., a first through twelfth grade Life Skills curriculum and Character Education curriculum used in the United States.
- ❖ If the Core Team is expected to do this, their involvement in the development of an evaluation process should be considered a separate task from curriculum development. This task should not be added on to the current responsibilities of the Core Team.
- ❖ Teachers and principals working with the children directly should be invited to provide input into the identification of indicators of student achievement in Life Skills.
- ❖ The evaluation model chosen should include both formative and summative evaluation strategies. Formative information collected at periodic points during a year should be used to assess short-term results and to feed back to the project for continual improvement. Summative evaluation should be conducted at the end of each school year to look at the cumulative long-term impacts of this project.
- ❖ Teachers and principals should be trained in the administration of evaluation methods or instruments for regular data collection. Principals should be provided with strategies for assessing fidelity of implementation of the project.
- ❖ UNICEF and the MOES should plan for data collection, analysis and reporting on a yearly basis.
- ❖ A rigorous assessment process, which includes a follow-up survey to assess actual application, should be developed for the Training of Trainers and for the Training of

Teachers events in order to support quality control efforts and maintain the integrity of the curriculum.

- ❖ At an appropriate forum and through media outlets, publicize the findings of any evaluation done on the Life Skills project in order to build ownership and support.

While it is recognized that the Armenian government and the Ministry of Education and Sciences have limited resources to commit to this project, UNICEF cannot be responsible for supporting the project for many years. There are other children's education issues in Armenia that also need support, e.g., addressing the 79% of children who do not have an opportunity for kindergarten. UNICEF has a project at present that addresses the parents of these children. For the moment, this is an appropriate response, but ultimately, UNICEF's role is to spread the effects of its support to the greatest number of children. The ultimate responsibility for the education of Armenian children must fall to the Armenian people. The recommendations provided for this report may seem overwhelming if taken all together, but if the parties are willing to develop a multi-year plan which simultaneously builds the implementation of the project while building the resource base from a wide variety of sources, this project is sustainable.

APPENDIX A

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED FOR LIFE SKILLS EVALUATION REPORT

Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools: Introduction and Guidelines to Facilitate the Development and Implementation of Life Skills Programmes. Division of Mental Health, World Health Organization, Geneva, 1993.

Project Proposal: Life Skills Education in Armenia. Dr. David Selby. Prepared for the Ministry of Education and Science, Armenia, 22 January 1998.

Life Skills Concept Paper developed in 1998 by a team appointed by the Ministry of Education.

Agreement on The Implementation of the “Life Skills” Project in the Schools of Armenia. UNICEF and the Armenian Ministry of Education and Science, April/May 1998.

A Situation analysis of Children and Women in Armenia 1998 prepared by UNICEF, the Government of Armenia, and Save the Children, 1999

“State Program Educational Development Report (for the period of 2001-2005)” written by the Ministry of Science and Education, 2000.

Mission Report, Yerevan, Armenia, Nov. 14-18, 2000 by Robert Fuderich.

“Life Skills” Pilot Project: Interim Evaluation Package (End of 1999-beginning of 2000) prepared by the Core Working Group, Yerevan, Armenia, February 2000.

“Ousoutsich” (“Teacher”) (three Life Skills articles). A newsletter published by the Goris Teachers’ House. December 2000.

UNICEF/Armenia Basic Education Programme, Annual Project Plan 2001

APPENDIX B

**SUMMARY OF THE INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT OF YEAR ONE OF THE
LIFE SKILLS PROGRAM CONDUCTED BY THE CORE TEAM**

APPENDIX C

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES DEVELOPED FOR LIFE SKILLS CURRICULUM

[INSERT SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITES FOR EACH GRADE (1, 2, 5 & 6)]

APPENDIX D

CRITERIA FOR SCHOOL AND TEACHER SELECTION FOR PILOT PHASE

As defined in a Mission Report of June 1999, the school and teacher selection criteria included:

Schools

- The school must have a principal with a proven genuine sympathy for Life Skills education theory and practice, who was prepared to guarantee personal attendance at training workshops of both teachers and principals.
- The school should have an open, democratic, and tolerant climate, with a majority of teachers likely to be sympathetic to and supportive of Life Skills education.
- The school should be prepared to hold Life Skills workshops session for all teachers, and for parent, in early September 1999.
- All schools chosen should be within two hours driving time of Yerevan.
- The group of 16 schools should include at least three schools from the 1988 earthquake zone.
- The 16 schools should include a mixture of city, town, and village schools
- The school should agree to commit to participation in the Life Skills project for its five experimental years (199-2005).
- The school must agree to regular visits by Core Team members and occasional visits by Consultants for the purposes of training and evaluation.

Teacher

- Teachers should be dynamic, flexible and change-oriented with a strong sense of professionalism.
- Teachers should have a proven track record of using interactive and participatory learning; if they are newly trained, they should have shown real promise as facilitative teachers during their training.
- Teachers should be prepared to open their classes to colleagues, Core Team members, Consultants, and parents; their style and approach should be open and collaborative.
- Teachers should possess attitudes and skills that lend themselves to influencing colleagues and effecting change in their schools.
- Teachers must commit to participation in all Life Skills training sessions.
- Teachers must commit to participate fully in the Life Skills evaluation process.
- Teachers must commit to co-facilitating workshops for other teachers and for parents (alongside Core Team members).
- The group of 16 teachers should represent proportionally the ratio of female and male teachers in elementary schools.
- Teachers must have at least fifteen years more service to complete before retirement.