The Development of the Social/Life-Skills Training Movement

George M. Gazda
David K. Brooks, Jr.

Background and Development

The social/life-skills training movement is the product of many disciplines and individuals. It is difficult to determine exactly when the movement began to coalesce, but Larson (1984) cites Hobbs' hailing mental health's third revolution 20 years ago as a potential beginning point. Here a shift was detectable moving from "clinical to public health and educational models, from exclusively professional to nontraditional helper populations, and from remedial to preventive strategies of intervention" (Larson, 1984, p. 1). Adkins (1974) refers to Dewey's Progressive Education movement of the 1930s and 1940s as laying some of the foundation for the relevancy of a problem-centered curriculum in which content was related to life events. George Miller (1969) introduced the concept of "giving psychology away" through teaching the principles and skills of psychology to the general public. At the same time the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development published a yearbook entitled *Life Skills in School and Society* (Rubin, 1969) in which the direct teaching of life skills through a curricular approach was proposed.

The need to focus on the prevention of mental illness was promulgated by Albee (1969), with the concurrent shift from a focus on pathology to one on effective functioning, and from the individual to the social environment. From a growing need for greater efficiency and effectiveness in counseling and psychotherapy, more systematic approaches to treatment developed in the form of skills training.

Carl Rogers produced some of the early research (Rogers, Gendlin, Kiesler, & Truax, 1967) that led to the development of one of the first training models by Carkhuff (1969a, 1969b). Concurrent with the

Carkhuff model, Adkins (Adkins, Rosenberg, & Sharar, 1965), was developing a life-skills education program as a part of an anti-poverty training program in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of New York City. The term *life skills* was coined during this period "to describe the kind of behavior-based psychological learning needed to help people cope with predictable developmental tasks" (Adkins, 1984, p. 46).

Another early proponent of life-skills training was Bernard Guerney. "The roots of *RE* Therapy go back to Filial Therapy, initiated in the early 1960s. To my knowledge, Filial Therapy was the first therapeutic method to be formulated in terms of a programmatic educational model" (Guerney, 1984, p. 172).

In the early 1960s Gordon developed a model for training parents that he based on client-centered principles and named Parent Effectiveness Training.

> Drawing on my previous experience designing human relations courses for managers and supervisors in organizations, I hastily put together a human relations training program tailored for parents. My first class in 1962 consisted of only 17 parents. . . . I wanted the parents to see the program as an educational experience. To this end I used the language of education (course, training, students, instructor, textbook, homework, tuition), and I carefully chose a name to fit this educational model—Parent Effectiveness Training. (Gordon, 1984, p. 158)

Also nearly 20 years ago Kagan (Kagan & Krathwohl, 1967) developed his Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) model, for a film-based mental health skill building program. This skill training model was originally developed for mental health practitioners but has been adapted for use in the military and elsewhere.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Mosher and Sprinthall (1970, 1971) introduced the application of developmental psychology to the psychological education of adolescents in secondary schools. This psychoeducational approach proposed a curriculum that would "make personal development a central focus of education" (Mosher & Sprinthall, 1971, p. 3). It became known as Deliberate Psychological Education.

One of the early skills training modalities that was received with much enthusiasm was Assertiveness Training. It represents the forerunner of single focus skills training approaches, e.g., stress reduction, relaxation therapy, and the like. Some of the pioneers in assertiveness training were Alberti and Emmons (1970), Galassi (1973), and Jakubowski (1977).

Elementary school psychoeducational programs for mental health were the forerunners of skills training and were first developed by Ojemann (1959) in the 1950s and later by Bessell and Palomares' (1967) Magic Circle in the 1960s for both pre-school and elementary school children.

One could continue to cite other skills training models that were developed and adapted from the pioneer models. Most of the early models were developed for professional counselors and therapists or parents, but were subsequently adapted to others including the general population.

Some second generation models may be represented by those of Gazda's Human Relations Development (Gazda, Asbury, Balzer, Childers, Desselle, & Walters, 1973) for teachers and educators, Goldstein's (1973) for the poor, Ivey's (1971) microcounseling for counselors and therapists, and Egan's (1975) skilled helping for counselors and therapists.

A third generation of life-skills training models is build around taxonomies of life skills. Present models include the one developed by Saskatchewan New Start (Smith, 1982) based on a taxonomy of 222 life-skill descriptors in seven categories: problem solving, communication, assertiveness, self-awareness, critical thinking, central thinking skills used to develop self-concept, and proactive and reactive management skills. A second model is the one outlined by Gazda, Childers, and Brooks in *Foundations of Counseling and Human Services* (in press) in which over 300 life-skills descriptors were classified by developmental psychologists into a taxonomy of four generic life-skills categories: interpersonal communication and relationships, fitness/health maintenance, identity development, and problem solving/decision making. Each of these generic categories contains descriptors for major life periods of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, and applications in settings of family, work, school, and community.

A third model, the Psychosocial Development Matrix (Akridge, 1979) is a life-skills taxonomy developed for use with rehabilitation clients. The 114 skill statements are organized into six skill "strands" that are subdivided into 27 clusters. The strands are: emotional self-control, interpersonal relations, objective self-understanding, securing self financially, self-celebration, and conceptualizing experiences.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The theories and disciplines that have contributed to the development of the social/life-skills training movement are numerous. Some of these have already been acknowledged, e.g., the theory of Carl Rogers

that hypothesized the necessary and sufficient conditions for personality change, and that resulted in a model for helping by Carkhuff.

With the development of the community mental health movement and the Swampscott Conference in 1965 in which community psychology originated, a shift was made away from the medical model and emphasis on defects to one of effective functioning and competence. About this time the humanistic movement in psychology, led by theorists such as Maslow and Rogers, also aimed to unleash people's strengths by focusing on these in therapy. Counseling psychology also began to assert itself as the discipline within applied psychology that focused on maximizing the development of normal individuals through successful coping with everyday problems.

Paralleling the humanistic movement in psychology was the reemergence of behaviorism with applications for clinical interventions. The behaviorists rejected the medical model with its emphasis on intraindividual defects and shifted to approaches favoring an environmental control of behavior (Wine & Smye, 1981). The original mechanistic behavioral interventions have given way to cognitive-behavioral positions. Social learning theorists have developed complex models that highlight cognitive structures and capacities and the mutually interdependent relationships between the individual and the environment (Bandura, 1977).

Although much of the social psychology research has been focused on contrived laboratory situations bearing little resemblance to real life situations, nevertheless "experimental social psychology has provided theoretical models and impetus to the cognitive revolution and to the shift to concern with environmental variables" (Wine & Smye, 1981, p. 24).

One must also include the group counseling and therapy explosion of the 1960s and 1970s that led to the small group as the primary medium through which the social/life-skills training models have been implemented. Although the skills training is applicable to one-on-one interactions, most models are designed to be implemented through the small group.

Drum and Knott (1977) recognized the shift in the group movement away from unstructured interview methods to more structured approaches. They were among the first to relate the skills training models to the small group process. They defined the structured group as "a delimited learning situation with a predetermined goal, and a plan designed to enable each group member to reach this identified goal with minimum frustration and maximum ability to transfer the new learnings to a wide range of life events" (Drum & Knott, 1977, p. 4).

According to Wine and Syme (1981), the single concept that best encapsulates the model of human functioning underlying these developments in psychology is *competence*:

> The defining characteristic of competence approaches is a concern with the environment. . . . In terms of individual behaviors, they usually emphasize, in combination with the effectiveness of overt behaviors, cognitive capacities such as response repertoires, coping skills, problem-solving abilities, the capacity to generate appropriate matches between behavior and situation requirements. . . . The shift to competence models has encouraged more broadly based, optimistic views of the nature of human beings. (Wine & Smye, 1981, p. 24)

Appropriate Texts

Several recent texts have appeared that provide excellent samplings of both the research on social/life-skills training procedures and various models. Bellak and Hersen (1979) edited *Research and Practice in Social Skills Training*. "The purpose of this volume is to present. . . an evaluation, to discuss the state of the art, identify strengths and weaknesses, and point out directions in which future research should proceed" (Bellak & Hersen, 1979, p. x).

Wine and Smye (1981) edited *Social Competence* in which they sampled the most influential work in the area. They described the contributions in the text as follows:

> Part I of the book presents broad perspectives on the social competence construct, including historical background, conceptual models, and critical reviews. Part II presents works on the assessment and enhancement of social competence in children, while Part III focuses on institutionalized psychiatric populations. In Part IV a British social interaction approach to social skills training is contrasted with the popularized North American assertiveness model. The approaches presented in the book vary in their target populations and settings and in their concepts of social competence from those that focus on packages of specific overt behavioral skills to those primarily concerned with cognitive structures. They will share an emphasis on the effectiveness of interpersonal intervention. (p. xi)

Similar to the texts cited above is *Social Skills Training*, edited by Curran and Monti (1982). They describe its content as follows:

> We have tried to strike a balance in the volume between the applied aspects of social skills assessment and treatment and more

> basic research and philosophical issues. This book is divided into four parts. The first two parts deal with social skills training, with the first concentrating on schizophrenics and the second dealing with other populations. The third part focuses upon the assessment of social skills with an emphasis on the issues involved in assessment and the development of assessment strategies. The fourth part is oriented toward a philosophy of science and indicates potential future directions for social skills training. (p. vii)

A recent text that illustrates the social skills training movement in England is edited by Spence and Shepherd (1983), *Developments in Social Skills Training.* The editors describe their text in the following manner:

> We have tried to cover the range of common psychological and psychiatric problems involving adults, children, and adolescents. We have also included contributions on what we see to be some of the potentially important growth areas for the future. We selected our contributors because of their extensive experience as practitioners and asked them to concentrate on the practical, rather than the research, issues. (p. vii)

Two recent texts provide descriptions of models of life-skills training with applications to varying populations and reports of research on these populations. Marshall and Kurtz (1982) edited *Interpersonal Helping Skills*:

> In this book we attempt to capture the multidisciplinary uses of helping skills. The contributors document the generic applicability of both helping skills models and their accompanying training methods to a wide range of helping fields. Application illustrations were drawn from the fields of education, clinical and counseling psychology, special education, vocational rehabilitation, psychiatry, health care, nursing, and social work. The book is intended for those actively engaged in training helpers, whatever their orientation or affiliation. It constitutes a guidebook as well as a reference for graduate and undergraduate courses in helping skills. (p. x)

In addition to the models presented in this book by the various developers, the authors abstracted all skills training research publications from 1970 through 1981 and reported these in Resource A. "Resource B is a comprehensive compilation of existing packaged training programs, films, audiotapes, videotapes, simulations, and organizations offering training and consultation services" (pp. xi–xii).

A second text, edited by Larson (1984), *Teaching Psychological Skills*, also contains representative models of social/life-skills training. This book contains 14 models, most of which have been described by the originators. It provides and excellent overview of social/life-skills training.

A third text, similar to these, is under development by L'Abate and Milan (in press), *Handbook of Social Skills Training and Research.* L'Abate was also instrumental in the development of the Interpersonal Skills Training and Research Association (ISTARA). This organization represents the first attempt, to our knowledge, at organizing the social/life-skills movement. A set of bylaws and committee structures have been developed and the association is now in a position to coordinate the efforts of this movement. (Persons interested in more information about this association should write to ISTARA, Box 654, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA 30303.)

Contributors to this Special Issue

The remaining articles in this special feature deal with selected aspects of current activity in the social/life-skills training movement. Mildred Powell reports on the Interpersonal Group Processes/Life-Skills Training program at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Augusta, Georgia. This program is one of several promising skills training endeavors aimed at psychiatric populations.

Dale Larson and Ruth Cook present an overview of skills training programs in educational settings, particularly elementary and secondary schools. The reader will notice the similarities between the approaches they describe and those utilitized by Powell and her colleagues with psychiatric inpatients. This demonstrates one of the strengths of social/life-skills training, viz., that psychoeducational interventions such as those described here are eminently flexible and adaptable to a wide variety of settings.

James Gaudin and David Kurtz review the literature of skills training programs developed for abusing parents. While research results are inconclusive at this point, they find reason to be optimistic that skills training will emerge as a preferred modality in dealing with this tragic social problem.

Saskatchewan NewStart was an innovative effort by the Canadian government in the 1960s to provide skills training for elements within the population who were functioning at less than socially contributory and self-enhancing levels. The project was so successful that it is now a nationwide effort coordinated by Employment and Immigration Canada, an agency for which there is no single equivalent in the United States. The

stated goal of these programs is to help develop "balanced self-determined persons." Joan Hearn focuses on aspects of current concern to skills training advocates not only in Canada, but worldwide, viz., how to accommodate the inevitable values imparted in skills training while respecting the cultural heritage of various groups.

The editors hope that readers will be sufficiently intrigued by the elements of skills training provided by these articles that they will seek out some of the additional resources outlined above. Our aim is conversion, convinced as we are that the potential of skills training in its various forms for alleviating the human condition is just now being glimpsed. We are confident that this is a movement whose time has come.

REFERENCES

Adkins, W. R. (1974). Life coping skills: A fifth curriculum. *Teachers College Record, 75*(4), 507-526.

Adkins, W. R., Rosenberg, S., & Sharar, P. (1965). *Training resources for youth: A comprehensive operational plan for a demonstration research training center for disadvantaged youth.* New York: Training Resources for Youth.

Adkins, W. R. (1984). Life skills education: A video-based counseling/learning delivery system. In D. G. Larson (Ed.), *Teaching psychological skills.* Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole.

Akridge, R. L. (1979). The psychosocial development matrix: A taxonony of intermediate objectives in the psychosocial domain. *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal, 3*, 27-37.

Albee, G. W. (1969). Emerging conceptions of mental illness and models of treatment: The psychological point of view. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 1*, 870-876.

Alberti, R. E., & Emmons, M. I. (1970). *Your perfect right.* San Luis Obispo, California: Impact Publishers.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Bellack, A. S., & Hersen, M. (Eds.) (1979). *Research and practice in social skills training.* New York: Plenum Press.

Bessell, H., & Palomares, U. H. (1967). *Methods in human development.* San Diego, California: Human Development Training Institute.

Carkhuff, R. R. (1969). *Helping and human relations* (Vol. I): *Selection and training.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. (a)

Carkhuff, R. R. (1969). *Helping and human relations* (Vol. II): *Research and practice.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. (b)

Curran, J. P., & Monti, P. M. (1982). *Social skills training: A practical handbook for assessment and treatment.* New York: Guilford Press.

Drum, D. J., & Knott, J. E. (1977). *Structured groups for facilitating development: Acquiring life skills, resolving life themes, and making life transitions.* New York: Human Sciences Press.

Egan, G. (1975). *The skilled helper: A model for systematic helping and interpersonal relating.* Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole.

Galassi, J. P. (1973). *Assertiveness training in groups using video feedback.* Final progress report in National Institute of Mental Health Small Research Grant MH22392-01.

Gazda, G. M., Asbury, F. R., Balzer, F. J., Childers, W. C., Desselle, E., & Walters, R. P. (1973). *Human relations development: A manual for educators.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Gazda, G. M., Childers, W. C., & Brooks, D. K., Jr. (in press). *Foundations of counseling and human services.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Goldstein, A. P. (1973). *Structured learning therapy: Toward a psychotherapy for the poor.* New York: Academic Press.

Gordon, T. (1984). Three decades of democratizing relationships through training. In D. Larson (Ed.) *Teaching psychological skills.* Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole.

Guerney, B. G. (1984). Relationship enhancement therapy and training. In D. G. Larson (Ed.), *Teaching psychological skills.* Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole.

Ivey, A. E. (1971). *Microcounseling.* Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas.

Jakubowski, P. A. (1977). Assertive behavior and clinical problems of women. In R. E. Alberti (Ed.) *Assertiveness: Innovations, applications, issues.* San Luis Obispo, California: Impact Publishers.

Kagan, N., & Krathwohl, D. R. (1967). *Studies in human interaction: Interpersonal process recall stimulated by videotape.* East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University.

Larson, D. G. (1984). *Teaching psychological skills: Models for giving psychology away.* Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole.

L'Abate, L., & Milan, M. A. (Eds.) (in press). *Handbook of social skills, training, and research.* New York: Wiley.

Marshall, E. K., & Kurtz, P. D., & Associates. (1982). *Interpersonal helping skills.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, G. (1969). Psychology as a means of promoting human welfare. *American Psychologist, 24,* 1063-1075.

Mosher, R. L., & Sprinthall, N. A. (1971). Psychological education: A means to promote personal development during adolescence. *The Counseling Psychologist, 2*(4), 3-82.

Mosher, R. L., & Sprinthall, H. A. (1970). Psychological education in secondary schools: A program to promote individual and human development. *American Psychologist, 25*, 911-924.

Ojemann, R. H. (1959). *A teaching program in human behavior and mental health.* Cleveland: Education Research Council of Greater Cleveland.

Rogers, C. R., Gendlin, E. T., Kiesler, D., & Truax, C. B. (1967). *The therapeutic relationship and its impact.* Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

Rubin, L. J. (Ed.) (1969). *Life skills in school and society: 1969 Yearbook.* Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Education Association.

Smith, P. (1982). *The development of a taxonomy of the life skills required to become a balanced self-determined person.* Ontario, Canada: Employment and Immigration Canada, Occupation and Career Analysis and Development.

Spence, S., & Shepherd, G. (Eds.) (1983). *Developments in social skills training.* London: Academic Press.

Wine, J. D., & Smye, M. D. (Eds.) (1981). *Social competence.* New York: Guilford Press.

George M. Gazda is research professor of education and director of the counseling psychology program, University of Georgia, and clinical professor of psychiatry, Medical College of Georgia. David K. Brooks, Jr., is assistant professor of counseling and guidance, School of Education, Syracuse University.

Date of Acceptance: August 17, 1984

Addresses: George M. Gazda
Department of Psychology
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602

David K. Brooks, Jr.
370 Huntington Hall
Syracuse University
Syracuse, NY 13210