

Making Magic...

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Abstract

Sanskrit theatre suggests that *Natya (a play)* is an epitome of the entire cycle of existence. A striking characteristic is the absence of a tragic ending, derived from the belief that there is no place for tragedy in existence. The positive messages of Sanskrit theatre and Living Educational Theory research – asking questions of the type, ‘How do I improve my practice?’ – synchronise with the message of hope, which is important in the field of social work.

I share my experiences in this paper, as I assumed the role of a mentor for grassroots social workers who support vulnerable children and adolescents in rural India. It is grounded in a dialogical enquiry based on a real-life experience and takes the form of a living-educational-theory, which developed as I, the writer, worked in the field of life skills enhancement. In this research conversation, which takes place between my students and me, we ask questions, explore and take an active role in our professional development.

Most of the in-house trainings conducted in social work in India tend to be top-down, standardized and expert-driven. However, I believe to be proficient in ones practice one needs to learn from the bottom up not the top down and that pedagogy should be transformative. Thus, I embarked on a journey with my students on a process of transformation. Even though through this workshop I have tried to provide quality training and ongoing support to life skills instructors I do not suggest I have educated these individuals. I see myself as a living contradiction; I see the values I uphold sometimes denied by my smugness. I believe in this paper with the transformation of the trainees I, the mentor, have also transformed and this has contributed to my educational development.

Keywords: Action Research; Drama in Education; Life Skills; Living Educational Theory; Reflective Practice; Social Worker’s Professional Development.

Benedictory Verse

*'I want my lost childhood where I can play again with toys and go to school with my friends.
Is it not possible?'*



Figure 1. Children at the Public Hearing on Child Labour in Agriculture.

This poignant appeal by a child labourer in Ahmadabad, in December 2010 at a special public hearing organized by Save the Children (NGO) made me, a member of the jury, sit up and think. At that function about 600 child labourers from different parts of Gujarat shared accounts of their miserable lives to mark the Human Rights Day in the city. They worked in various industries like BT cotton farming, rag picking, an incense making, forestry, salt pans, animal husbandry, ship-breaking, collection of scrap material, fisheries, jeera [cumin seed] farming and cotton, wheat and paddy fields. Of the 600 child labourers who were present for the talk and declaration thereafter, 24 spoke about their plight.

A recent survey conducted by Save the Children in 882 villages of Gujarat revealed that out of 1.6 lakh children in the age group of 7–14 years, 21.8 per cent are out of school and majority of these, over 54 per cent, are working in agriculture or grazing cattle.

In India, officially, approximately 13 million children below the age of 14 are engaged in child labour. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005-2006, identified 31.6 per cent of all children in the 5–14 age groups as working children in Gujarat. According to a recent the International Labour Organization (ILO) report, about 80 per cent child labourers in India are employed in the agriculture sector. There are 168 million children working in situations that fit ILO definition of child labour (Grant, 2013).

The **Natya Shastra** [see Glossary] composed by Bharata is the earliest surviving book on drama and stagecraft. *Shastra* is the term in Indian tradition for the holy writ dedicated to a specific field of knowledge. Bharata affirms that a range of knowledge, arts, crafts or lore, and all activity of any kind are encompassed by drama. Bharata defines drama as *'the imitation or representation of conditions and situations.'* *'Natya is an epitome of the entire cycle of existence – never tragic, because there is no place for tragedy in existence...what it has to convey is the truth, the entire truth and exact truth about the nature of the world'* (Byrski, 1974). Sanskrit drama takes place in five steps:

- *Arambha*, planting the seed or the desire to attain something,
- *Prayatna*, the planned effort to achieve the goal,
- *Prapti-sambhava*, the 'possibility of success' in relation to the efforts to complete and the obstacles to overcome,
- *Niyatapti*, assurance of success,
- *Phalagama*, realization of success.

Prastavana: Introductory dialogue

This paper is about social work and it is about me. It represents my attempt to broaden my doctoral research (Rawal, 2006) carried out in education to the field of social work. It is about the relationship between the individual and society; about quality training in social work and about my own place within it.

In 2006, I aspired to make a difference by way of researching in education (Rawal, 2006). I desired to make a contribution to the mental health practice in the wider community. Through my study I aimed to find a way to make the children's world a better place in which to live. I aspired to help children to overcome adversity and become resilient, to learn how to face the problems they have to deal with in their young world, to empower them so they can grow into well adjusted adults. Little did I know then that I would get an opportunity to work out-side the school setting to enable vulnerable children to come back to school.

In 2011, I was invited to undertake the role of a consultant for the 'Child Rights for Change' programme for Save the Children. The 'Child Rights for Change' project aimed to create a social and policy environment which ensures the prevention of all forms of Child Rights violations including exploitative child labour, particularly in cotton fields in Maharashtra and Gujarat.

This document is a personal journey which tells a story of my growth and transformation as I assumed the role of a mentor to social workers, in 2011–12. The data collected are in the form of journal entries written by me and my students, photographs, and reports written by a documentation officer representing Save the Children. In this paper I wish to share not only my voice but also the voice of others, and the context in which they occur. Through this multi-voiced text I have tried to re-create my commentary, my students and their thoughts, my lessons and additionally my learning. The varied point of views of the data and the multidimensionality of my study required an imaginative form of writing. Being a drama teacher I think like a

playwright. I have used the format of a play and dialogues, created as a *'think scene'* (Fitzgerald and Noblit, 1999, p. 175) which enables me to *'show, not tell'* my data.

I have drawn on the design of Sanskrit theatre. This I have done for various reasons. Most importantly, there is an absence of tragedy in Sanskrit dramas which corresponds to my message of hope. Sanskrit drama proposed to achieve harmony out of chaos and produce serenity out of disturbances. Significantly, the Sanskrit playwrights did not observe the unity of time and place and often shifted of scenes from earth to heaven. Sanskrit drama imitates a particular state of mind and suggested that eternal bliss is attained through the three goals of *dharma*-duty, *artha*-purpose and *karma*-actions. According to the Sanskrit dramatist realisation of sentiments and happiness is the real end of the performance. The performance of the play ends with a *Bharatvakyā*-benedictory verse wishing for the wellbeing of all.

Parikrama: Circumambulation

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2001)

With reference to my work I understand this to mean that a social work practitioner must then work with children and young adolescents to help them build resilience, maintain hope and optimism, and develop their strengths and abilities. Social workers must also meet children and young adolescents on their own terms and in their environment.

Education and pedagogy have an important role to play in this situation. The word pedagogy comes from the Greek word *paidagōgēō*; in which *país*-genitive *paidos* means 'child' and *ágō* means 'lead'; so it literally means 'to lead the child'. Pedagogy is described aptly by O'Neill (as cited in Taylor, 2000, p. 41) and by Dewey (1916). O'Neil articulates it very appropriately when she states that a teacher has to *'lead the way while walking backwards. A leader,'* she suggests, should accomplish the role of a guide and *'know where the travellers have come from, and the nature of the journey so far as to help to determine the kind of journey which lies ahead.'* Dewey defined the educational process as a *'continual reorganization, reconstruction and transformation of experience'* (1916, p. 50), for he deliberated that it is only through experience that man learns about the world and only by the use of his experience that man can maintain and better himself in the world.

'A quality education is one that satisfies basic learning needs, and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living' (UNESCO, 2000). This lays stress on the importance of enhancing inner capacities of the student and proposes an education framework with an essential combination of psychosocial life skills (learning to know, to be and to live together) and practical, psychomotor skills (learning to do). Education is about asking the question *'what is happening to me now?'* (Taylor, 2000), how and why is it happening and what might I do to change that? *'The role of education then should be to enable children to question what is going on around them in order to start their own journey toward freedom'* (Greene, as cited in Frank, 1973).

I believe that teachers have an important role to play in forming lives of the new generation. Social work practitioners or 'teachers' working in the field of social work have a larger and more critical role to play in preparing young people not only to face the future with confidence but to build it with purpose and responsibility. This puts a huge responsibility on teachers who are involved in enhancing life skills and imparting knowledge concerning Child Rights as they have to be agents of change, they have to be 'visionaries' and 'missionaries'. They have to be visionaries enough to see the possibility of a more peaceful, just and caring world; missionaries enough to carry out the work. This places a larger responsibility on the mentors who would train the 'teachers' and on the training of teacher/trainers (TOT).

These ideas compelled me to stop seeing social work as a limited, government and non-government organisational based activity. By deciphering it as education I began to perceive its multifaceted levels. I envisioned social work as 'social' education; concerning bringing about a change of understanding, within children and young adolescents, within social work practitioners, and within myself. My aim as a trainer was not to correct misperceptions on the part of the trainees. Rather, it was to empower them with critical faculties, so they could understand the social reality they are embedded in, and become capable of transforming that reality. I unite my perspective to the Living Educational Theory methodology (Whitehead, 1989). A Living Theory research approach is a dynamic process. In this approach the theories come from practice that is reflected upon and critiqued. Whitehead (2000) suggests that individuals can generate their living-educational-theories as explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations, which has profound implications for the future of humanity. The explanations can arise from educational enquiries of the kind that ask, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' How do I improve my practice? How do I improve this process of education here? How do I live my values more fully in my practice? Whitehead (2000) outlines the process as follows:

'I experience a concern when my values are negated in practice.

I imagine a way forward.

I act.

I evaluate.

I modify my concerns, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluations.' (p. 93)

I sought answers to the questions:

- How can I produce an effective, innovative TOT programme for social work practitioners to enable them to have a deep understanding of teaching life skills?
- How can I use drama to enhance life skills in the field of social work... and thus motivate children to learn?

Arambha: The Beginning

Bhava¹

A 7+5 day module was developed for the TOT. The contents of the module focused on life skills, drama-in-education (DiE) and explanation of action research.

Life skills are '*abilities for adaptive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life*' (WHO, 1997, p. 1). The core set of skills that follow the above description are:

- decision-making and problem-solving;
- creative thinking and critical thinking;
- communication and intrapersonal skills;
- self-awareness and empathy;
- coping with emotions and coping with stress.

However, in my doctoral research (Rawal, 2006) I had made a few changes and I implemented the same for this TOT module.

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Understanding 'Emotions' | • Understanding 'Self' |
| • Empathy | • Effective Communication Skills |
| • Creative thinking | • Critical Thinking |
| • Problem solving | • Decision-making |

The programme was designed to provide the social workers with instructions regarding understanding 'emotions', understanding 'self', effective communication skills and empathy. Issues regarding problem solving, decision-making, creative thinking and critical thinking were 'infused' into the module in that they were not taught as separate subjects but were taught within the teaching of the other life skills.

I believe that life skills education is a dynamic process it cannot be learned or enhanced on the basis of information or discussion alone. Through my work in life skills education with children I understood that expecting them to modify their behaviour merely by providing information is impractical. An effective life skills programme ought to also include experiential learning. Experiential learning involves a '*direct encounter with the phenomena being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter, or only considering the possibility of doing something about it*' (Borzak, 1981, as cited in Brookfield, 1983).

I used drama in my life skills enhancement programme as I believe that drama created an opportunity *for* children to make connections and understand complex life situations and human intricacies. Intrinsically drama is a multisensory mode of learning, and can increase awareness of self and others. It can enhance communication skills; creative thinking skills and interpersonal skills through experiential learning. At the same time drama democratises the classroom for the reason that it relies on co-creative input. Collaboration, mutual decision-making and problem-solving are central to the process of drama. Additionally, role-play in

¹ Bhava is the Sanskrit word for emotion... or devotional state of mind or 'to become'. Bhava denotes the self-surrender and the channelling of emotional energies that is induced by the maturing of devotion to one's God.

drama allows the participants to imagine what life is like for another person; even in a situation they are not familiar with, thus encouraging empathetic skills. *Importantly*, drama takes learning back to the core, connecting it to education that facilitates learning to know, to be and to live together.

***Abhava*²**

The principals and features that made this programme- Life skills education through Drama (LED) unique brought about hostility and tension. Many in the 'administration' of the NGO were unreceptive to the programme, while the trainees were intimidated by it. The root of the problem is the traditional Indian model of education wherein knowledge is dispensed in a vertical and authoritative way. It follows what Friere termed as *anti-dialogical banking education*' (1970, p.74). In such a system, the teachers are the only agents of legitimate knowledge and they impose it on their pupils. Indian classrooms are filled to the brim with students who listen to the teacher talk, are preoccupied with copying the teacher's words verbatim and repeating the lesson in a parrot like fashion. Banking education attempts to control thinking and action and inhibits the students' creative power. Professional social work education in India is commercialized and the quality, credibility and ethical standards are unsatisfactory. The introduction of distance mode of learning has made matters worse. There is a significant disparity in the contents and standards in the BSW and MSW courses all over the country. The identical anti-dialogical banking style of education is carried forward in social work education. All the trainees of this programme had received such education hence 'thinking for themselves' was a challenging task.

In India, workshops and seminars organized for the grass root workers are professionally organized. However, they typically follow the more standardized format with an emphasis on a top-down, more expert-driven methods. Such methods do not guarantee adoption of best-practices with grass-root workers. To increase the chances of effective implementation a bottom-up approach is needed. In contrast to the top-down approach, social work practitioners need to be facilitated with comprehensive information to enable them to engage in individualized intervention goals, about what this information means when connected with practice, professional values and ethics. Additionally, mechanical curriculums deny the life experiences of the teacher, students and the community, it ignores the truth that people construct and live through in their daily lives.

LED followed the methodology which offered the bottom-up model; focused on how people within communities could direct their own development process (David, 1993) enabling them to become self-sufficient and manage the complex challenges working with vulnerable children presents. Besides being an artist-aesthetic curriculum it follows the principle of dialectical, democratic and negotiated education.

The second tension and hostility was created seeing that that drama is rarely applied to mainstream education in India. In my TOT I had implemented the technique comparable to drama in education (DiE). Most facilitators resist the use of drama. Their reasons for reacting in this way are understandable as they lack the knowledge, skills and understanding of what

² Abhava is the Sanskrit word for nonexistence, nonentity, negation. It connotes 'not +Bhava'.

DiE requires. Whatever little understanding the trainees had with what is called drama was actually more theatrical by nature. They had heard of or knew the term role-plays. However, I believe it was very superficial and more pretentious by nature.

To elucidate the concepts; theatre is relate to the communication between the actor and the audience and drama is an art form that inspires process and 'living through' (Taylor, 2000).

The Oxford Dictionary defines 'drama' a stage play, however the Greek used the word 'drama' with a rather different meaning, 'to live through' and that is the context I use when I am considering drama for learning and a child's growth. '*Good drama is created by thoughts, expressions, and the gestures that are wrung from human beings*' (Tynan, 1957). Drama is about meaning: '*meaning indicating, meaning seeking, meaning making, and meaning finding*' (Bolton, 1999 p. 177). In this lies the key to the essential nature of drama; drama provides a learning situation. A teacher/facilitators working with vulnerable children should be mainly concerned with the growth of personality. The finished product in drama should not be of vital importance, what should be of importance is the drive and growth of the participants. '*Drama can lead the inquirer to moments of direct experience, transcending mere knowledge, enriching the imagination, possibly touching the heart and soul*' (Way, 1967, p. 1).

All this I understood was extremely difficult for the social work practitioners or 'teachers' working in the field of social work, most of who had merely had secondary education.

Natya: The Play

To recap the questions I asked in the beginning:

- How can I produce an effective, innovative TOT programme for social work practitioners to enable them to have a deep understanding of teaching and learning?
- How can I use drama to enhance life skills in the field of social work... and thus motivate children to learn?

The Characters

The cast consisted of:

- Swaroop: The mentor for the Life skills education through Drama (LED) programme
- Gauri: Programme Coordinator – Child Protection. Save The Children-Maharashtra State Office
- Keya: Programme Coordinator – Child Protection. Save The Children-Gujarat State Office
- 40 facilitators who worked for child protection in Maharashtra. They consisted of– Project manager (PM), Project Officer-Child Protection and Education(PO-CP) and (PO-E), Cluster coordinators(CC), Development Activist(DA) and Peer Educators(PE) [*Refer to Organogram in Appendix*]

- Chandu: PM
 - Vivek: PO-CP
 - Sanjay: PO-CP
 - Sneha: CC
 - Swapna: CC
 - Geeta: PE
- A facilitator from Latur who is a Project Manager and the children who attended Children together Against Child Labour-CACL workshop, in Kharghar
... and
 - 40 children who attended the LED sessions in Pune for the Save the Children TOT.

Prayatna³

ACT I

Scene 1

Swaroop's office in Mumbai, May 2011. Keya is sitting comfortably on the floor and Swaroop and Gauri on low chairs. Gauri and Keya are Save the Children representatives. It is obvious from the setting that the conversation has been going on since some time. There is an air of camaraderie revealed, they seem to like and respect each other. We realize this through the way the women are sitting. Resource material from the previous projects of Save the Children, some books that are used in schools in Gujarat for life skills education, Swaroop's thesis, photographs that were taken during the action research carried out by Swaroop for her doctoral thesis and drama camps held in Rajpur, a village in Gujarat are scattered on the floor. There are three mugs of tea.

Gauri: The life skills education work you have done in Gujarat has really excited us...we would like you to design and mentor a programme in Gujarat and in Maharashtra for the Child Rights Programme.

Keya: ...a TOT in life skills training for the grass-root workers... You know, we have already done workshops with a few agencies in Gujarat to support life skills education buuuttt... [*Fading out her sentence*].

Swaroop: Life Skills education through Drama works like 'magic'. In fact I have titled the project 'Making Magic...in Gujarat'. The two years that I worked with primary school teachers has cast a spell on them and everybody who is touched by it has changed.
Gauri: Making Magic??! [*A bit surprised, not understanding*]

Swaroop: Well.... it all started during my doctoral work. I did not know enough about educational drama, life skills or for that matter about the craft of a teacher. I chose to bank on 'Magic Hai To-Mumkin Hai' translated it means 'if you have 'magic', then anything is possible'. Do you remember that old advertising slogan of the AirTel pre-paid card that claimed to make everything possible and attainable for the user? Well, I knew I had the 'magic' - the passion to teach and I was determined to attain to accomplish something for the 'child in need'. Importantly, teaching and teaching through drama has taken on a new meaning for me now. I

³ The planned effort

have discovered that the 'magic' is in my passion for teaching and additionally 'Life skills Education through Drama' is 'magic' too..... (S. Rawal at al., personal communication, May, 2011)



Figure2. With the children at various drama and life skills camps in Gujarat.

Life skills-based education succeeds or fails based upon teaching quality. Given this, there is an urgent need to provide quality training and ongoing support to life skills teachers

and instructors. Unfortunately, in South Asia, training in life skills instruction is often of low quality and short duration; not allowing for the practice or internalisation of the skills (UNICEF, 2005). One of the many reasons for this is that most stakeholders have never experienced skills-based learning themselves. Following this generally inadequate training, facilitator head out to the field with no in-service support or supervision to monitor and improve the quality of in-field delivery.

I asked myself 'how can I be extraordinarily effective as a mentor?' and 'what would work best for the learners; both, the social workers and the children they worked with?'

Firstly, I asserted that I would not carry out a single session workshop. In that I would work with the trainee for seven days at a stretch and then after two month I would work with them again for five more days. I planned this to enable them to go to the field and carry out their new learning and return with problems they faced in the field. Additionally, this way I could monitor and evaluate and thus try to improve their in-field delivery.

I have observed that in typical workshops the instructor's role is to convey information in a clear and concise manner; the learner's role is to absorb it. The 'outside' expert in a 'school classroom' like setting would give the handouts and carry out a carefully outlined plan intended to convey information to the learners. The learners may have had opportunities to ask questions but they seldom did because of the fear of interrupting the presentation and/or from the fear of sounding brainless or unskilled.

To be an effective practitioner of life skills education the requisite is that we have a sound theoretical base or else we would travel unfamiliar roads leading to unstable and transient outcomes. The LED programme hoped to tackle the above said problems. According to my understanding the most TOT conducted in life skills training follow the top-down method. The trainees were not taught the theories behind the different life skills. The workshop participants were essentially taught games and activities that allowed uneven comprehension of the particular life skills, without deeper understanding of why and for what reason such an activity is carried out. Often in my workshop I heard statements like- '*Oh! We know this activity and have done it often..... but we did not in fact know how or why it made a change.*'

The second step I took was to make a comprehensive handbook on understanding the targeted life skills and educational drama. In addition to that I coordinated a translation of the manual in the language of the trainees.

The most important step I took was in my approach to the training method. I would describe learning as a relatively permanent change in mental processing, emotional functioning, and/or behaviour as a result of experience (Woolfolk, 2001). It is the enduring process by which individuals gain new knowledge or skills; there is a change of understanding in their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and actions. I believe in an educational approach that teaches learners to be self-referral in their learning. Thus my primary goal was to create of an environment where the trainees would be inspired and motivated to learn. To encourage learning I established an 'open atmosphere' that was proactive and learner-centred where the learners felt 'safe'. I strongly believe that learning of any kind flourishes better in a non-judgemental atmosphere where the learners are as much responsible for the smooth functioning of the

session as is the facilitator. To encourage an open atmosphere that is democratic and enabled negotiated learning certain qualities need to be incorporated in the sessions, as follows.

- I made learning fun. If the facilitator makes learning an enjoyable experience for the learner I believe they would achieve much better results. It would not only enhance motivation to learn but would additionally enhance the learner's self-esteem (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). When learners enjoy whatever they are doing, they are going through what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls a '*flow experience*'. A flow experience is an experiential state that distinguishes an enjoyable moment from the rest of life. Csikszentmihaly (1990) suggests that the feeling is like being carried away by a current, like being in a flow. A facilitator who understands the conditions that make the trainees want to learn is in a position to turn workshop activities into flow experiences.



Figure 3. At the first Workshop in Pune.

- I was careful not to impose ideas and beliefs upon the learner. The mentor should encourage learners to follow their own thinking and not simply repeat what the facilitator has said. Owing to cultural, social and educational factors most trainees are

not actively involved in the learning process. They are accustomed to the facilitator who is an 'expert' and a 'dispensers of knowledge'. I wanted to enable critical and creative thinking. I wanted the learners to develop their decision-making and social action skills so, in Freire's words, they could they can take personal, social, and civic action.

This dialogic process, I believe, led the adult learner to share their selves in more genuine and candid ways. It enabled developing relationships of sensitivity, dignity and nurture and also enabled insider understanding.



Figure 4. Drama game to enhance creative thinking skills, the Pune workshop.

- I modelled effective teacher/facilitator' behaviour (Hepworth, Rooney and Rooney, 2006), by encouraging the trainees to carry out their own thinking and simply not repeating what I opinionated. A facilitator must become an appropriate role model; she/he should be sensitive to the learners' level of knowledge and degree of sophistication. I believe when working with children, adults should be careful not to impose adult ideas and beliefs upon the children. This is especially true when social workers are facilitating programmes like 'Child Rights'.

Child rights by its self is a tricky issue to tackle with children as a lot of workshops are not appropriate to the child's age and stage of development (UNICEF, 2010). Furthermore, a facilitator needs to appreciate that children may view their situation in ways uniquely different from that of adults and they emphasise concern which may seem inconsequential to adults.

At a Children together against Child Labour (CACL) workshop in Kharghar, February, 2012, the children, all pre-adolescent, were oriented on 'Child Rights' which would lead them to a process of selection of their spokespersons who would represent them at various forums. The child members were instructed on how they had to fight for 'The right to Survival' of the girl child. The facilitators explained that of the twelve

million girls born in India, three million do not see their fifteenth birthday, and a million of them are unable to survive even their first birthday. Every sixth girl child's death is due to gender discrimination (Social Jurist, Child Rights, 2011). She suggested that gender-selective abortion is incorrect and should be stopped. If this was a part of awareness programme I would agree. However, she asked what tangible steps the children could take. My question is can a child really make a difference here? How can a workshop educate a pre-adolescent child to directly prevent abortion and female infanticide? In my understanding this is jargon to the child.

- I approached learning creatively by using the problems that naturally occur in everyday life and tried to seek imaginative, appropriate and ethical solutions to problems. I believe this is enabled by in-depth exploration in the pertinent subject. I consider that a teacher's goal should not be merely to produce a given behaviour but to support the students to reflect on their actions to enable them to behave as responsible and caring children

During a workshop with children from rural Maharashtra for CACL I noticed that the facilitators taught in a lecture format and merely informed them of all the issues concerning Child Rights. They used what believe are ostensible innovative methods like making charts, drawing and pointless games. However, I believe Child Rights needs to be instructed to children in a dialogic and experiential way.

Scene 2

A session on Child Rights for Save the Children and Children together Against Child Labour-CACL, in Kharghar, Maharashtra. A large hall. The children are divided into three groups and are playing a game with empty plastic bottles which they have to pass on. The atmosphere is lively and the children are really enjoying themselves. While playing a game with empty bottles Swaroop observes that two out of three teams were cheating and playing rough. She requests the children stop playing and sit down. Children sit down looking at each other.

Swaroop: What is happening here?

Child 1: They are cheating.

Child 2: Yeeeeeeees, we threw the bottles instead of passing them on.

Swaroop: ...and who made the rules in beginning of this workshop like no rowdy behaviour, playing fair, no hitting, no unnecessary noise etc, etc?

Most of the Children: We....buuuuuttt....

Swaroop: So if we break simple rule that we have made...how are we going to follow the adult made laws of our country? And how will we be different from the adults that take away our rights and abuse us.

Child 2: But we have so many small ones in our team...and we wanted to win....

Swaroop: So we abused the little one's Child Rights? This is just a teenie weenie problem...which I think we can work out...What will we do when we have to face the bigger problems in real life? Will we follow a path of dishonesty and aggression? Think about

this....Close your eyes...so you do not get distracted...Think.....do not give me an answer...give yourself an answer...what are the rights have we abused here...what were our responsibilities?

[The children play the same game again. To everyone's surprise the team that cheated most won all the rounds, even when they did not cheat.]

Swaroop:and now do you believe you have to be spineless..... and cheat to win?

Facilitator from Latur: *[Gets up, and comes to where Swaroop is talking to the children. Speaks softly so only Swaroop can hear]*

We have been trying to teach children about Child Rights since a long time but never managed to teach it as effectively and easily as you do!

Swaroop: Nooooo, it is not only me...but also my practice..... it works like 'Magic' (S. Rawal at al., personal communication, 2011)

Scene 3

Flashback of Act 1, scene 1- in Swaroop office in Mumbai, May 2011.

Gauri: In the year 2010–11, a facilitator's module was developed by both the states which cover the life skills as per the FHI/WHO guidelines. Thereafter, TOTs were conducted by external resource agencies.

Keya: The sessions were kind of helpful for the adolescents and they have also expressed their opinion that life skills education is important for children.

Gauri: However, there were many challenges faced at the implementation level. The TOT groups were facilitating sessions with children for the first time, and they also needed training in innovative methods to impart these sessions.

Keya: The facilitators were not able measure the changes in the behaviours of children after the previous life skills education program..... (Gauri & Keya, personal communication, May, 2011)

It is an overwhelming task for facilitators with inadequate training to effectively measure results in life skills enhancement. Some who had done BSW and MSW were introduced to research methodology to say the best. However,

...we have a very weak research base and because of this learning and teaching suffers at the higher education levels. The professors do not want to do research and some of them who are doing it they stop taking interest in teaching. Most of the research done in our universities has very less relevance for the society. (Khan, 2011).

Scene 3 (Continues)

Flashback of Act 1, scene 1 in Swaroop's office in Mumbai, May 2011 continues.

Swaroop: I strongly believe our facilitators need to be introduced to the concept of action research and reflective practice.

Gauri: ...yeh? But do you not think it would be too difficult for them to understand? You know, some have barely passed school?

Swaroop: It will not be easy but I want to do it. (S. Rawal & Gauri, personal communication, May, 2011)

Scene 4

A large hall in Pune where the TOT is being conducted. The sitting arrangement is in a circular formation; mattresses covered by white sheets are lined against the wall to make sitting on the floor easier. There is a large area in the centre lined by durries [mats] this functions as a play/ activity area. Forty student-facilitator, Gauri and Swaroop are all seated, some are taking notes and some are merely listening. All are listening carefully and are focused.



Figure 5. Teaching action research.

Swaroop: If I were to explain action research in simple terms I would say... action research is 'learning by doing' – 'I' identify a problem, 'I' act to resolve it, 'I' reflect and see how successful my efforts were, and if not satisfied, 'I' try again... Kemmis and McTaggart suggest that the procedure is a cyclical process of action and observation, and reflection on action, evaluation, planning for further action and back to action and observation..... Action research can help you to understand your own practice and also enable you to understand how to make your practice better....it is all about you...it is not about the administration...people in office telling you what to do...it is really not about your sponsors or donors either...

Swapna: So you are saying...if I have a problem in my field...like if I see a problem when I am working with children....I can act on it....reflect...and try to improve my situation?

Swaroop: Yes, the idea of carrying out an action research is to make things better. Like the situation you are in or the children you work with are in. To make that better. Action research is not like conventional research where we simply describe what happened, interpret it analyse it and theories [Swaroop quotes Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993, p. 4].

Geeta: But I am new in this field.

Swaroop: Soooooo....is it not better.... when I started my research I did not know as much as necessary about drama in education, life skills or any research methodology for that

matter...you can read it in my thesis... I drew on a methodology that 'worked' for me; this idea is like what Altrichter and Posch say, 'what's good for the practice is good for research.'

Geeta: But me a researcher?!?! I am merely a peer mentor.

Swaroop: So what? By systematically working through action research you too can become knowledge-makers, rather than merely knowledge-users.

Swapna: Child marriage...under-age girls being forced to get married is a considerable impasse in our district.

Swaroop: When individuals decide to come together, wanting to change themselves and influence others also to change themselves they can bring about a social change. Your action research could take on a wider social perspective. Undertaking action research is a social thing. It is about people caring for one another. [Swaroop quotes McNiff and Whitehead, 2002]

Geeta: Swapna is an experienced social worker, Ma'am who is going to believe me when I present my...what is it called...data?

Swaroop: Triangulation is the way to show it. You must show that your data is truthful... show the clarity of your thought and the accuracy of inferences you of make about your data. There will be messy results, awkward questions and there may be answers you don't like. I don't think numbers are more credible than the description of your work...I would like to see rich descriptions. Try using multiple sources of data to answer your questions. Multiple viewpoints..... (S. Rawal at al., personal communication, 2011)

Experience by itself is not adequate for understanding (Thompson, 2000 and Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985). So what is it that that enables experience to transform into knowledge? How can the social worker learn from the situations they find themselves in? We do not learn from experiencing in a vacuum, we learn from reflecting on the experience (Dewey). Reflective practice is also important to social work because it prompts us to evaluate our practice and gives us opportunities to learn from our experience by identifying what worked well and what we may need to change. Reflective practice helps us to keep our commitment of continuous professional development (Thompson, 2002). Reflection is a way of attending to problems of practice. Encouraging the puzzlements during the process of attending to an experience to open new possibilities, then giving shape to those problems in order to discover new ways of both acknowledging one's responses as well as seeing and implementing solutions is the art of reflection (Schon, 1983).

Prapti-sambhava⁴

ACT 2

Scene 1

Flashback of Act1 scene 1. Place – Swaroop office in Mumbai, May 2011.

Swaroop: This program works like ‘Magic’. I persistently say “Magic hai to mumkin hai”. Believe me when I say everything and anything is possible to achieve when we use drama it is reallllly true. Yet Gauri, my intuition tell me they will not believe me and if they do not believe me they will not use their learning when they go back to the village...back to their field. You know what? I want to use Shelley’s so well-expressed words and turn them a bit...I am going to use my creative faculty to imagine that which I know; I want the generous impulse to act that which I imagine..... (S. Rawal, personal communication, May, 2011)

A major line of attack I carried out as a part of my workshop was my sessions with the children. I believe this is a unique method used in a social work training workshop. I planned the LED workshop in such a way that I introduced the facilitators to DiE, theatre games, and life skills. I lead them through the process for 3 days, then for 2 days I worked with children and had them assist me and then worked with them again for the next 2 days (3+2+2=7 for the first workshop see pg. 15). The children who attended the LED sessions were the most ‘vulnerable’ children from Pune. The level of the vulnerability is taken from the Save the Children statistics and records.

The reason I conducted the workshop with children is because over the years I have noticed that most workshop participants do not believe me when I tell them that LED works like ‘magic’. They usually always tell me that it is next to impossible. In this case I would have been told that your research or the LED programme was carried out in schools and working with vulnerable children is a different ball game. I pre-empted all such remarks and conduct a successful two-daylong session with children. The children workshops were divided into 4 sessions per day, and for each session I took four of my adult learners as partners. This was to enable them to have a hands-on experience with me as their co-worker. When they were not partnering they were requested to sit outside the play area and note down the proceedings. This would, according to me, enable them to not only indirectly participate but would also enable us to have genuine feedback of the proceedings. At no times did I want any of the learners to replicate my workshops, be recipient of somebody else’s curriculum and merely follow the external structure my workshop. I wanted them to learn from their experience during the children sessions so they could have confidence to work independently and authentically.

⁴ The efforts to complete and the obstacles to overcome



Figure 6. Working with the children of Pune.

Scene 2

The same large hall in Pune where the TOT is being conducted. The time is late in the evening after the children's workshop.

Sanjay: I will definitely try this method when I go back to my village....

Chandu: Ma'am, you repeatedly said you work beautifully with children...and all children love you....BUT I was skeptical. Can I tell you the truth? I thought to myself, she does not know how it is to work with the poorest of poor children...she says she has worked in the villages of

Gujarat...but the villages in interior Maharashtra are something else...and these children...they have not gone to school...they follow no system...they are abused and traumatised, they come with so many baggages... She will NEVER be able to reach out to them...control them enough to carry out a session.

Swaroop: In the beginning I was a bit worried too...I did not know them, they did not know me.

Deepak: Ma'am! I panicked. I wanted to go all out and help you control them...restrain them...in the beginning they were not doing anything...some would not even say their names! How difficult is it to say your name!? But you kept saying relax...give them some time to settle down.

Sneha: They were so dirty ...not even had a bath...but you did not care.

Sonal: You just loved to each of them.

Sneha: Their escort asked me "who is this lady? She is playing with them as if she is as old as they are!..... (S. Rawal at al., personal communication, 2011)



Figure 7. Working with the children of Pune.

On the second day the children practically refused to go back home. One of their guardians remarked that they have never received so much love or respect in their lives. I pointed out to the facilitators that 'I had conducted a successful workshop with the children in spite of us being strangers to each other. Whereas they work with children they meet on

regular basis. Additionally, my sessions were daylong and their sessions are only for an hour or two at the most. If they could observe change in behaviour in two days, which they did, imagine what we can achieve in a year or two!

Niyatapti⁵

Act 3

Two months after the first TOT. The second workshop in Pune which takes places after the social workers carried out a few sessions with children in-field. There are plastic chairs placed in a huge circle in the hall. At one end there is a table and a three wooden armchairs and a portable blackboard. Swaroop who is sitting on the plastic chair gets up walks toward the table and stands near a wooden chair. She is holding a file and has the bearing of a person with authority.

Swaroop: I am the Assistant Police Commissioner, Mumbai, Swaroop Rawal. I thank the Psychiatric department of the Sion Hospital for lending a hand to enable us to solve this delicate but complicated case.

I am going to go straight to the problem. There is a young girl, 13 years old in our custody...aaaa... I should say care. Three days back her parents found her sitting outside her room on the floor in a crouched position. Something like this... (*She sits on the floor and shows the group the girl's posture*).

Her parents have tried talking to her but she is not responding. We have tried our best too. But she just refuses to talk.... [*Swaroop acts a bit flustered as if does not know what to say further*]

Ahh aha... [*Fumbling a bit*] This is the photograph of her room. [*Passes a drawing around the room. It is supposed to represent a police-photograph.*]

As you can see, her room is in shambles, books are all torn and thrown all over, her bed is as if someone has wrestled on it...her clothes...her toys.. .and yes, on the mirror of the dressing table...look at it ...she has written with a kohl pencil-'I want to....'

We asked her what she wants to do..?!? But no answer! We have come to you for help because you are experts....

[*Beckoning to Chandu who is a project manager and to Sanjay and Vivek both who are project officer, she continues*].

Dr. Chandu, Dr. Sanjay and Dr. Vivek have agreed to lead the team. Would you please come and sit at this table here...

Swaroop: [*Aside – not in role*]. We are going to do a play. A story of the 'mystery picture' (*Swaroop refers to O'Neil, 1992 & 1995*). I have disclosed the beginning. It is called pre-text.....You can choose any line of investigation you want. Discuss this amongst the three of you. You can call anybody you want to play the role of the girl, her parents, friends, teachers, and nurse ...whatever you want... (S. Rawal, personal communication, 2011)

⁵ Assurance of success

Through the use of process drama and the use of pre-text I wanted the facilitators to experience an aesthetic engagement with drama. I wanted to make possible the learners' entry into the imagined world of drama. I hoped that this in turn would facilitate transformation in the way they would help the children they work with. Styslinger (2000) suggests that when drama is interwoven into education it promotes literacy, multiple interpretations, problem solving and collaboration. Using process drama and particularly the use of pre-text I shifted the onus of the curriculum package from the teacher-facilitator to the student-facilitators. I did not want the trainees of my workshop to be sponge like; absorbing my material only to go into the field and squeeze it out devoid of perception and/or ownership of their learning. They had to understand, learn and take ownership of the intellectual and artistic contents of LED.

As the session continued and the trainees in the group gained more confidence, they became comfortable, and began to share more feelings and experiences; even the timid ones able to share 'expressions of self'. They remarked that DiE was not really as difficult as they thought it would be. Through the drama games, process drama and importantly understanding core life skills they could now read body language, interpret an array of emotions, accurately and positively, and also express their own emotions. This in turn made their field-work easier. Through the experiences of the workshop they could now connect theory and practice; additionally they could link their previous learning to the newly acquired knowledge.

The trainees during that session became experts as they explored a new role. Through the drama they tried out and experimented with various personal choices and solutions to very real problems; problems from their own lives. This happened in the safety of the workshop, where their actions and consequences of their actions could be experienced without the dangers and risks that such experimentation would lead to in the 'real' world. I recognized this to be true. I knew that learning becomes more active through DiE; it becomes memorable as it is more 'alive' as it was linked to the students' lives and experiences.

Importantly, the use of the pre-text was a critical experience in my learning too. A crucial aspect of reflective practice is that it requires commitment to learning from experience (Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck, 1994). The term critical incident (Tripp, 1993) '*refers to some event or situation which marked a significant turning-point or change in the life of a person...*' (p. 24). They can be commonplace events that occur in routine professional practice however they compel us to look at our practice with a new eye as they reveal gaps in our espoused beliefs (Newman, 1987). Why was the incident exceptional? What made it noteworthy? What did I learn from it?

I had not discerned the pre-text drama from the view of a facilitator trying to solve a case with 'vulnerable' children. The participants lead the drama into a completely different exploration. They navigated the story of the 'mystery picture' into a case study of a girl and how she was abused by her tuition teacher which led to her emotional and behavioural problems. This part of the curriculum promoted active learning and enabled the student-facilitator to understand more deeply how human beings interact. Through solving the case of the girl they acquired confidence to be able to solve case in their field. When they expressed these views during reflection time I made quick alterations and built-in mock training sessions into the rest of the workshop. These mock sessions, not a part of my original design, were carried out on the final day to build the capacity of the group to facilitate the life skills sessions effectively in the community.

Phalagama⁶

The idea that we can produce our living-educational-theories as explanations of our educational influences in our own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work and offer them as gifts to others (Whitehead, 2008) is not an easy one. It makes us most vulnerable when we are studying our own person. The image that we hold of our self and the contradiction we see in our practice exposes us to our fallible pedagogy. However, if we challenge ourselves, question our practice we are in a position to re-learn, re-shape and adhere to the values that matter most to us. This needs a huge personal and professional commitment on our part. Revisiting our values we as teachers can in truth follow the idea of life-long learning. I believe this is extremely important if we want to create a good social order through our education.

During the workshop I experienced 'I' as a living contradiction when I realized what I had planned and what the student-facilitators actually learnt was different. During the 'mystery picture' drama I merely wanted then to experience how process drama is carried out. I resisted the idea that they could also learn something other than what I had planned; like how to approach a case study through the proceedings. That was I believed similar to what Heathcote (1984) suggests, that the teacher and the learner make different journeys. In this particular session the learners and the teacher made a different journey and 'play for the pupils' and 'play for the teacher' were diverse. Initially, I did not approve of the idea in my somewhat narrow approach I resisted the perception that the students learned something I had not planned for them.

It shocked me. I was taken aback and that was because I was being mulish and was adapting a know-it all attitude. I was in spite of my values of negotiated and democratic education trying to hold an omniscient position in relation to the student-facilitators. *A reflective conversation with a unique and changing situation*' (Schon, 1987: p.83) added a new dimension to my teaching methods. This was the first step towards a change in my perspective. I maintain that I achieved this by predicting a viable learning opportunity in the students' request and my willingness to explore the learning area within it. This was possible given that I maintained a flexible approach while teaching, stayed true to my curriculum plan and at the same time tried to accept the students' views. Without a receptive open mind, teachers find it difficult to let go of their attachment to meticulously prepared lesson plans. O'Neill (1995) suggests that in drama work the '*essential qualities in a leader or teacher are the toleration of anxiety and ambiguity, as well as a willingness to take risks and court mystery, and the courage to confront disappointment ...*' (p.65).

I re-learnt that the teachers must be prepared to build on the knowledge and experience, which pupils bring with them to the work. They must value their pupils' contributions to the lesson more than their own and built their lessons on the already learnt skills of their students.

Explicit in my actions was that teamwork and shared decision-making are central to the approach of the drama class and it, in turn, encouraged respect, equality and empowerment. Such sharing of power in the workshop is analogous to Freire's (1970) dialogic

⁶ Realization of success

education based on the assumption that everyone brings to the classroom experiential knowledge that can strengthen the learning environment. It also ensures that no student remains invisible in the classroom and contributes in a meaningful way to the class discourse which consequently, empowers all the students.

The dialogic elements required me to be engaged in the process of attitude change, emancipation and collaboration. This form of teaching enabled me not only to attempt to understand but also change social reality (Lather, 1992) and it fitted well into the idea of transformation that is at the heart of my study in drama education and life skills enhancement. My aim was not to correct misperceptions on the part of the students. Rather, it was to empower the learners with critical faculties, so they could understand the social reality they are embedded in, and become capable of transforming that reality. Yet for a moment, I was prepared to argue for my curriculum design and not pay heed to their experience. The modification of my fallible pedagogy endorsed my views that drama is centrally concerned with transformation and is uniquely positioned to deal with life skills. This confirmed my philosophy of a dialectic form of education.

I believe now, if we are to be good teachers, good artists we need to be shocked. We need to be shocked enough to question our pedagogy. We need to be shocked to see the contractions in our practice so that we look inside to our untapped resources and genuinely transform into better teachers and artists. As Brook (1988) suggests, '*a way of life is way to life.*'

Bharatvakya⁷

There is an awakening involved, I believe, when we learn to notice what is there to be noticed, when we attend to what cries out to be attended to. It has been said that the opposite of aesthetic is anaesthetic--being numb, passive, blankly indifferent. Wide-awakeness frees us to see more--the grass, the trees, the city streets, the abandoned ones, the homeless ones, the broken windows,.....what is absent, what is realized. To be enabled to activate the imagination is to discover not only possibility, but to find the gaps, the empty spaces that require filling as we move from the is to the might be, to the should be. To release the imagination too is to release the power of empathy, to become more present to those around, perhaps to care... (Greene, 2007)

⁷ The epilogue

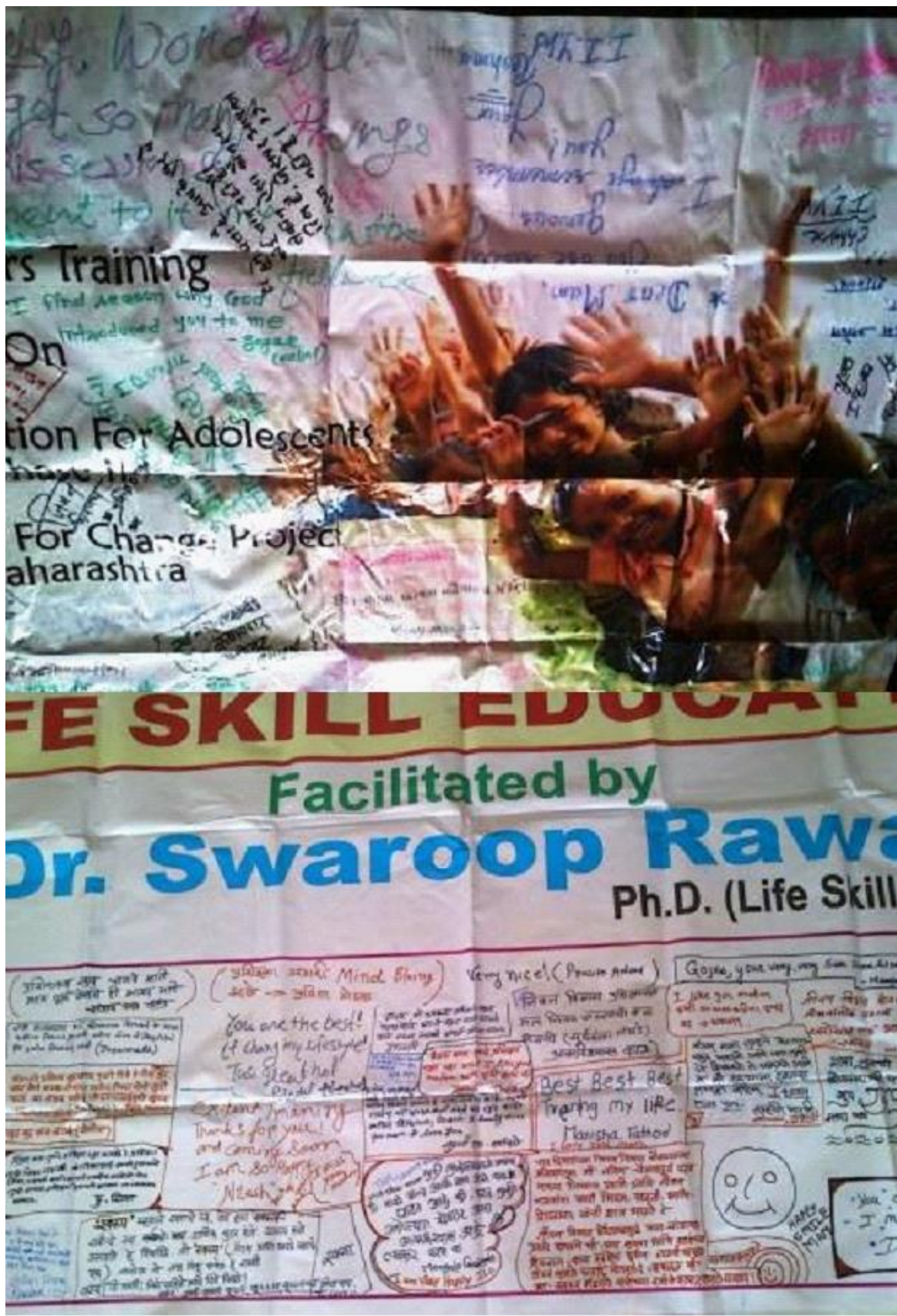


Figure 8. Banners gifted to me after the TOT.

Glossary

- Benedictory Verse – At the beginning of a Sanskrit play a benediction is offered to invoke the national deity in favour of the audience.
- Gujarat is a state in the North-West coast of India.
- BT Cotton – BTcotton is a genetically modified variety of cotton producing an insecticide.
- A lakh is a unit in the South Asian numbering system equal to one hundred thousand.
- The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) – the latest (NFHS-III) was conducted in 2005–2006.
- The Natyasastra – the Natya Shastra is an ancient Indian treatise on the performing arts, encompassing theatre, dance and music. It was written during the period between 200 BCE and 200 CE in classical India and is traditionally attributed to the Sage Bharata.
- Natya – corresponds to drama. Natya means dramatic representation or drama with speech, music and dancing.
- Bhava – the Sanskrit word for emotion, mood or devotional state of mind or ‘to become’.
- Abhava – the Sanskrit word for nonexistence, nonentity, negation. It connotes – not +Bhava.
- Prastavana – A Sanskrit play begins with a Prastavana or the introductory dialogue which refers to the play and its author, seeks to win public favour by praising the intelligence of the audience, reveals past events and present situation, clarifying the plot, and ends by skilfully introducing one of the characters of the play.
- Maharashtra is a state in the western region of India
- Parikrama refers to circumambulation of sacred places in Hindu context. The Parikrama is performed as a part of prayer to God, to be connected to him in the temple we visit. It is performed to help unburden yourself of the baggage of stress, negative emotions and materialism with which you have walked in to the temple. It helps you and to be able to get into your spiritual self to connect with God in the temple. The first circumambulation is to shed and unwind yourself from your worldly possessions and materialism. The second circumambulation you need to disconnect yourself from relationships from your near and dear ones and your relatives, that means no attachments .The third and the final circumambulation you should unwind and disconnect from your own ego and sense of self. When you have successfully disconnected from all these three barriers then you can really connect with God.
- TOT– training of trainers.
- LED – Life skills education through Drama
- BSW – the Bachelor Degree programme in Social Work

- MSW – Master Degree programme in Social Work
- DiE – drama in education
- FHI/ WHO – Family Health International /World Health Organization
- CACL – Children together Against Child Labour. A platform for children through which they can raise their voice against child labour and advocate for themselves.
- Bharatvakya – the concluding sentence uttered by the Bharata or actor or the playwright's last message to the spectator: the wheels of time must not be turned back; it is the future and the larger welfare that matters.

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Appendix

Organogram

