

## **Chapter Seven** **Understanding ‘Self’**

*I begin this chapter with an analysis of self-concept. I have reviewed how self-concept is organized and the role the parents, teachers and peers play in the shaping the self-concept of children. Additionally, I have identified the key factors that facilitate self-concept and self-esteem. Facilitating self-understanding and enhancing self-esteem is the focus of this chapter. The rationale for enhancing self-image and self-esteem is discussed in the section ‘Aims and rationale’.*

### **Section 1**

#### **Why we need a clear concept of self and how it can help.**

Self-concept refers ‘to the composite ideas, feelings, and attitudes people have about themselves’ (Hilgard, Atkinson, and Atkinson, 1979: p.605). Self-concept is also defined by Purkey (1988) as the sum of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence. We could then regard self-concept ‘as our attempt to explain ourselves to ourselves, to build a scheme (in Piaget’s terms) that organises our impressions, feelings and attitudes about ourselves’ (Woolfolk, 2001: p.73).

This model is not a permanent one nor is it unchanging, as our feelings, ideas, impressions and attitudes changes from moment to moment. Purkey (1988) suggests that self-concept is:

- learned;
- organized;
- dynamic.

Self-concept is learnt in the sense that we are not born with it; self-concept is gradually shaped and re-shaped by people who influence us. Essentially a child’s self picture is a learnt one; it depends on the description provided by their parents, family, peers and teachers. However, it may not necessarily be a correct one, as it is formed mainly by how people see the child.

When parents constantly tell their child that she/he is naughty, the child as a result begin to see her/himself as naughty, or when they tell their offspring that she/he is lazy the child begins to think she/he is lazy. However, it may not be a correct reading, as it is the

parent's subjective opinion. Thus, two children with a similar behaviour pattern would have different self-pictures according to the message relayed by their respective parents.

Teachers are the second most influential people in school-going children's life (Lawrence, 1996). Like parents, teachers also pass judgements on them. Sometimes the labels the teachers give the child may be in sync with the label the parents have given. Sometimes there may be a conflict. Fontana (1995) maintains that both reinforcement and conflicts carry potential threats. In both cases the child is denied the opportunity for developing the clear, rational notion of self.

Self-concept is organized. Most researchers (Damon and Hart, 1991) agree that self-concept is generally characterized by orderliness and harmony. It is this organized quality of self-concept that gives consistency to the personality. The idea behind this view is that if it were not organized and changed readily we would not have individuality; we would lack a consistent and dependable personality.

Success and failure have an impact on self-concept making it dynamic and ever developing. In the healthy personality, there is constant assimilation of new ideas and expulsion of old ideas throughout life, which make it dynamic.

Lawrence (1996) recommends that we look at self-concept as developing in three areas:

- self-image;
- ideal self;
- self-esteem.

Self-image is the individual's conceptualisation of his/her mental and physical characteristics. The earliest image formed by a child is given by the parents. Going to school and meeting other adults and children generates new experiences for the child. She/he now learns whether she/he is good at learning or otherwise and whether or not she/he is popular. Lawrence (1996) suggests that the more experiences one has the richer the self-image.

Cooley (1902) developed the looking-glass theory of self. This metaphor illustrated that the image an individual forms of his/herself was created by the perception of how others perceived them. That is, the appraisals of others act as mirror reflections that provide the information we use to define our own sense of self. Hence, we are in very great part

what we think other people think we are. This implies that parents, siblings, teachers, and significant others have a great power in shaping the child's self-image.

The ideal self is the picture we form within us, of the person we would like to be. Peer comparisons, values of the society we live in, media are significant factors that have effect on our ideal self, as the image of the ideal self is formed by comparing him/herself to others. The school child accepts the ideal images from the significant people around him/her and strives to attain them.

Self-esteem is the individual's evaluation of discrepancy between self-image and ideal self. It refers to an individual's sense of his/her value or worth, or the extent to which a child values, approves of, appreciates and likes him/herself (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991). The most broad and frequently cited definition of self-esteem within psychology is that self-esteem is '*a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the self*' (Rosenberg 1965: p.15). James (1890) states that the intervening variable is personal expectation. His formula is:

$$\text{Self-esteem} = \frac{\text{Success}}{\text{Pretensions}}$$

That is increasing self-esteem results when success is improved relative to expectations.

Lawrence (1996) argues that without this discrepancy, without levels of aspiration, an individual can become poorly adjusted and indifferent to progress. He adds that just like the nerve impulse is always active, even the psyche needs to be active and it would be an error to imagine the ideal state as one of total relaxation. For a person to be striving is a normal state, anything otherwise it would lead to neurotic behaviour.

### **My focus**

The focus of my work is on facilitating self-understanding and enhancing self-esteem. Kant, the German philosopher, proposed that '*self-knowledge is the beginning of all wisdom*', thus if we know ourselves well it would give a good foundation on which to build our lives. This knowledge would enable us to know our likes and dislikes, strengths and weakness, which would allow us to change our negative behaviour, maintain self-control and become more responsible humans. Franken (1994) suggests that '*when people know themselves they can maximize outcomes because they know what they can and cannot do*' (p. 439).

## **Aims and rationale**

*Asking how self-understanding can be enhanced is a critical question. Here I would like to explain my work in encouraging understanding of the 'self'.*

What I find interesting in the studies (e.g. Fontana, 1995; Lawrence, 1996; Mruk, 1999) concerning self-concept and self-esteem is the practical implication of the theories suggested by the researchers in this field. To me the teacher, it is clear that I am in a position to be able to influence a student's self-esteem through my lessons and interactions with them. My understanding of the principles of self-concept and self-esteem helped me to have a better perception of the process. My relationship with the students benefited because of the 're-newed' awareness the children had of themselves. It was a fourfold process, they learnt about themselves and others as I learnt about them and myself.

I wanted to help the children learn about themselves, to enable them to develop into competent, mature, self-motivated children. They would then feel more confident so they would be able to cope with the stress that they faced in school and in life in general. Self-esteem enhancement, as it has been observed, contributes positively towards both academic achievements as well as towards personal and social development (Fontana, 1995). Schools can aid students in these pursuits by helping them to develop the habit of excellence in scholarship while at the same time nurturing the self-belief that is necessary to maintain that excellence throughout their lives. Bandura (1986) maintained that educational practices should be gauged not only by the skills and knowledge they impart for present use but also by what they do to children's beliefs about their capabilities, which affects how they approach the future. Students who develop a strong sense of self-esteem are well equipped to educate themselves when they have to rely on their own initiative.

By the time I started teaching 'self awareness' (23.10.2002), ten months into the module, the children were competent in understanding emotions. The lessons in self-understanding and self-esteem enhancement were planned keeping in mind the four themes suggested by Lawrence (1996: p.29):

1. *Trust activities*
2. *Expression of feelings*
3. *Positive feedback activities*
4. *Risk taking exercise*

These four topics were adapted to organize the lessons on self-understanding and self-esteem enhancement, which would target:

- Sharing feelings
- Guessing the emotion
- Remembering good times
- Thinking positively
- Positive feed back
- Taking risk
- Making friends
- Trusting one another

## **Section 2- In the Classroom**

### **The uniqueness of ‘me’**

*‘the process of image-making could help them discover a part of themselves that mostly resides in their unconsciousness. Art was a way of displaying to the children, I believe...the dimensions of themselves that I desperately wanted them to discover.’*  
(Eisner, 1993: p. 5)

*The design of the lessons on ‘self’ was based on the celebration of the individuality. I used puppets and poems to enable the students to witness, experience and understand something unique. The curriculum on ‘self’ continued by introducing the children to the concept of personal metaphor. In the narrative ‘Flicker of colour’ I have reflected on and analysed the first few lessons on understanding ‘self’.*

Finding an entry point to teach the children about the ‘self’ was a daunting task. I was perplexed as to how I would demonstrate or explain the uniqueness of each child when I hit upon the idea of using the poems from ‘Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats’ by Eliot (1939). Moving away from the premise of ‘performing’ a play to ‘watching’ it, I planned the finger-puppet show of ‘Cats’ as I wished to explore a different artistic technique and incorporate it into my class. I specially designed finger puppets depicting the different cats,

like Shimbleshanks, Mungojerry and Rumpleteazer, Old Deuteronomy and Rum-Tum-Tugger.



**Mungojerry and Rumpleteazer**



**Old Deuteronomy**

I used puppets (Slade, 2001) as:

- Puppets encourage concentration.
- Their toy like-likeness makes them beloved.
- They stimulate imagination.
- Puppets can become life-like in one sense, but are seldom ‘photographic’ to look at, and so nearer Child Art.
- They can be used as a half-living visual aid.

After performing a puppet show, using the music from the Broadway musical ‘Cats’ I presented the children with identical cat masks to explain the concept about similarity. The audience then became participants again as the children became feline creatures.

The children subsequently made masks for themselves. Although each child made personal masks no work really displayed great individuality. The reason for this is everyone copied his/her friend’s ideas. At this stage in the lesson on self-awareness, I was not unduly worried. This was the just the second class and I had a long distance to cover and plenty of time. The children had begun their journey of exploration carried out by a process of ‘imaging’.

To help them find their personal metaphors I explored the possibility of working with Native American names (Bassnett and Grundy, 1993). After explaining how natural images are used to describe the character of a person I asked them questions to facilitate the process of imaging. These questions guided the process:

- What do you like?
- How do you see yourself?
- What are your favourite animals and birds? Why do you like them?
- How would you describe your friend?
- What are the characteristics of your friend that appeal to you?

With help of the students' input I compiled a list of descriptive words, which would help them acquire a new name with an enriched image (see Table 14, Table 15 and Table 16, Table 17).

**Table 14: What they like.**

What they like:	Samir	Chandani	Lali	Manni	Mukul
To do	Cricket		Dodge -Ball Badminton	See Educational places	
To do			Read comics		
To eat	Idli		Finger rolls	Fruits	
To drink	Pepsi	Pepsi	Limbu pani [lemonade]	Pepsi	
Animals	Leopard Cheetah	Dolphin	Dinosaurs	Deer Monkeys	
Birds	Parrot	Owl Peacock	Birds		
Flowers		Rose			
Colours	White	Red	Purple		

**Table 15: What they like.**

What they like:	Kanha	Snehal	Pratik	Sarla	Nihar
To do	Running Jumping	Cricket Running	Kho-kho [an Indian sport]	Play	Running Jumping
To do	Listening to	Talking		Talk	Talking

**Table 16: How their friends saw them.**

Mukul	Samir	Chandani	Lali	Manni
	All the time doing something	Thinks about herself	Shy	Not Shy
Shy	Naughty	Slim like a model	Colourful	
Talkative	Kanjoos [Miser]	Talkative	Talkative	Talkative
Naughty out of class	Chakri[a fire cracker which moves on circles]	Proud		
	Monkey	Dolphins Peacock	Likes Dinos And birds	
Plays well	Ashanti [Riotous and disorderly]	Graceful	Full of life	Smiles
			Naughty	Not bossy
Distracting		Smiles	Troublesome	
		Like her mother		Long hair
<b>Mr.</b> <b>Rabbit</b>	<b>Busy Bee</b> <b>Phool-jadi</b> [sparkler]	<b>Graceful Rose,</b> <b>Talkative Rose,</b> <b>Proudy peacock,</b> <b>Dancing Dolphin</b>	<b>Lively Dinosaur</b>  <b>Colourful Birdie</b>	<b>Little</b> <b>Princess</b>

*Note: the names chosen are boxed.*



**Table 17:How their friends saw them**

Kanha	Snehal	Pratik	Sarla	Nihar
Bird	Tiger monkey	Eagle	Likes birds and flowers	King/ royal
Slim	Chatter box	Shy	Fat	Shy
Fast		Talks less	Round cheeks	Proud
Smiles a lot	Smiles	Clever		Anxious
Shy Talks a lot in the school bus. Out of class he is talkative, naughty, full of life	Shy, kind	Talks sensible things	Likes to sleep Talks a lot	Mischievous
Giggles			Proudy (sic)	Smiles a lot
Laughs				Simple
Is troublesome				
Forgetful				Draws well
Smiling bird Swift Eagle Naughty bird Lively trouble <b>Running leopard</b>	<b>Chatterbox</b> <b>Monkey</b>	<b>Blue Eagle</b>	Talking Moon Princey <b>Raat Rani</b> [Lily of the Night]	Shy Painter Anxious lion Royal Bull dog <b>Lion King</b>

Note: the names chosen are boxed.

### **A flicker of colour**

The material of the story is taken from the transcript of five classes (Class 20-24) held on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> October and 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2002. The puppet show and the mask making and using masks classes were held in October 2002, during the Diwali vacations. Sarla narrates the following story. I choose Sarla as the narrator to re-present my analysis, as it was she who used masks and the understanding of the 'self' again, in Class 48-18.10.2003. Nihar, Lali, Manni, Samir are the students and the 'Wise-one' is me. The lines 'sensible everyday names', 'names that never belong to more than one cat', 'a name that's particular...', 'a name that never belong to more than one...' are lines quoted from the poem 'The Naming of Cats' by Eliot (1939).

In the narrative 'A flicker of colour' I have reflected on the lessons in which:

- I performed the puppet show, with finger puppets ('In the last meetings she had cats dancing at her fingertips...'),

- *the children performed with identical cat masks (... we begged her to makes us into cats. ... but we all looked same and behaved in a similar manner.)*
- *the children made individual masks (.. Then we gathered together the next day, and tried to created new identities for ourselves...)*
- *the children played a American Indian naming game(The Wise-one suggested we should begin by giving ourselves unique name...)*

*The lines 'She would often carry music...' refer to the cassette player I carried to play music during the sessions when the children did the 'walk' and 'statue' activities, the manuscript- my journal, which I always carried to class and 'food'- refers to the snacks we partook during longer classes.*

All the travellers sat on the floor crossed legged and wondered what we would do next, when the 'Wise-one' came in. She was older than us, not grey haired and all, but older in years than the rest of us and therefore we decided she was wiser than us. She would often carry music with her, a manuscript...always, and sometimes food for us. She is kind and we like to be with her ...we trust her.

The Wise-one is a storyteller and magician. Even when she talked everyday, ordinary stuff she made them magical and we liked to listen to her. Sometimes, Samir flew around like his namesake, the wind and created chaos, but the Wise-one never got angry and was patient with him. She could control the wind! The Wise-one made us realise how important he was to our group. He was the first of us to do something well. So what, she said if he does not do anything now besides ruffling us up. The wind- Samir would settle down one day and do something creative again.

In the last meetings she had cats dancing at her fingertips. These cats came from a far off place called England; they actually belonged to someone called Eliot. With her husky voice she sang songs of cats that were fat, were wicked, were thieves, were good and were proper. These cats experienced affection, pain, warmth, and hatred, just like us. We thought she was entertaining us but No!! She was helping us see ourselves.

We liked her songs so much that we begged her to makes us into cats. Which she did, but we all looked same and behaved in a similar manner. That did not suit us. How could we be the same? We were different.

Chandani said, "he is a boy and I am a girl!"

"We are wearing different clothes," said Nihar.

"Our hair is different," said someone else.

The Wise-one agreed and said we could be as different from each other as much as we know ourselves. We did not understand what that meant but we were excited just to know we were different. We impulsively threw away the masks which made us same. Then we gathered together the next day, and tried to create new identities for ourselves...but we were still pale and looked nearly like each other. How were we to become our real vibrant selves?

The Wise-one suggested we should begin by giving ourselves unique name. We all had '*sensible everyday names*', but the Wise-one said Eliot's cats had '*names that never belong to more than one cat.*' She said even we needed '*a name that's particular,*'... '*A name that's peculiar*'... '*a name that never belong to more than one...*'

She then acquainted us with a custom of the natives of America. The Red Indians had names like Running Brook and Flying Eagle. We had not heard about these people and were interested to learn more. So the Wise-one told us about a girl, who had blue-eyes, like the clear brook and she ran fast...her name was Running Brook.

We all sat down and started talking about what we liked and did not like...it may sound to you like it was a quiet and organised process. But do you know what it sounds like when all eight (Mukul and Pratik rarely travel with us) are talking? So much noise and excitement! "I like this" and "I like that"... "No, I said that first"... "but Wise-one I like such and such too!"

To help us remember what we said the Wise-one wrote for us, in her manuscript. We found that all of us liked to run, and jump, play cricket, eat chocolates and drink Pepsi. Did this mean all of us would have one name?

The Wise-one, not giving up, went on asking us questions about ourselves and we went on answering... We began with different animals and went on to details about our character.

Kanha runs fast, smiles a lot, is shy, he laughs a lot, 'he is trouble some,' said Lali.

'He is forgetful,' said Nihar.

Putting all his characteristics together we thought of the name Naughty-bird or Lively-trouble. However, Kanha did not like the names and we left it at that and went on to Nihar.

Nihar is an enigma, he is so quiet, he always sits a little behind when we sit in a circle. Even when we sit all huddled up he is always in the back. He doesn't do things with us but sits back and watches. When we all

met for the first time he would not even tell us his name. Just imagine!?? Telling your name is the simplest thing possible. We all do know him now, after eleven months of travelling together, but he is still very quiet and shy. He has a fascination for things that are grand. Good cars, nice bungalow, lions and peacocks- they are our national animal and bird, he said. His mother told the Wise-one 'Nihar ko proud se reheneka mangta' meaning Nihar wants to live with pride and dignity. He is good at drawing.

"Should we name him 'Shy Painter'?"

"No," we all protested ...what a boring and drab name...

"Royal Bulldog?"

"No, no." Nihar is not ferocious or ugly.

We went on concocting names...at last we reached a name for him...Lion King.

We had begun an exciting journey of self-discovery...

### **Annual program**

*Most schools in India have an annual program, after the half yearly examinations (Chapter 5, p.145). It is an important function attended by the families of the student and usually showcases the talents of the students studying in the school.*

*In this section I moved towards a 'product' dance- drama (Chapter5, p.145) however lessons followed a 'process-oriented mode'. I have described and reflected on the particulars of the process. The account includes a step-by-step description of the process of making and performing and ultimately assessing the dance-drama. I have included my reflections, in Times New Roman Bold, as they occur, as they are interrelated and interactive with the process.*

I sought to encourage the students to develop a strong sense of themselves as capable persons and that each one's ideas are valuable. The school annual program, though not timed by me, came at an opportune moment. I decided to take a calculated risk of agreeing to execute a presentation for the annual program.

The children by now had:

- Attended drama class for nearly twelve months. Showed an understanding in drama skills and were at an advanced-beginners level.
- Fairly strong competency in emotional understanding.

- Revealed a growth in their creativity.
- Moved at a good pace towards self-understanding.

The lessons were geared towards using drama to teach pertinent current issues and building on them in an on-going way. They were partially planned in that I had an idea of what I wanted as the final shape. I had wanted to use the concept and design of street theatre (see Glossary) for the play even though the play was to be performed on a conventional or proscenium stage.

The children had witnessed a rehearsal of another group of students who were to represent the school for a street theatre competition (Chapter 5, p.146) where they watched me work with their older school friends. After the rehearsal my students and I had a discussion about street theatre. Therefore when we started working for the annual program, the children had a clear idea about street theatre.

The making of the annual program play had a feel of an open lesson, as the initiative of the direction of the drama and the dialogues was negotiated with the children from the outset. I had planned the lessons in such a manner that I would lead the children to the point where the drama would need to be focussed and brought to a resolution. I had taken a flexible route as I could not in the beginning anticipate with a degree of certainty what the possible outcome of the play would be. I was prepared to bailout the children if need be and bring the drama to a resolution. However, I planned to do that only at the very end.

### **Introducing the topic:**

I invited the students to discuss the problems faced by the people of our country. Through discussions and reflection I sought to assist them to gain awareness of their role as citizens of India and decided which of the problems faced by Indians was most significant to them.

Swaroop: Tell me what are the problems in our country?

Lali: Miss ...all are fighting, they are not moving (sic) in peace.

**Lali was now beginning to express her views and after a year somebody besides Manni answered first (e.g. Chapter 5, p.105, Appendix 5, p.30-1).**

Nihar: Atankvadi [terrorist].

Sarla: Population [population explosion]...

Swaroop: You said population ...yes, and you even said pollution?

Sarla: Yes.

Swaroop: Samir?

Samir: What?

I repeated my initial question, however he did not have an answer, he said, 'I no facing'. Meaning he did not have any problems, nor did he see any problems around him.

**Not listening during reflection time was a problem I faced with Samir.**

### **Opening the drama and enlarging the argument:**

We reflected on the problems faced by the India at great length. The children were concerned about the lack of cleanliness, poverty, the rising prices, computer viruses and violence against animals. However, the problem upper most on the children's mind in January 2003 was terrorism. In 2002 we were faced with the burning of the train in Godra, Gujarat (Vakil and Gohil, 2002) and the subsequent violence in that state which started in February 2002 and went on till August 2002. That brought terrorism near our doorsteps. The repercussions of the violence were felt strongly in Mumbai. In 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of December, 2002 there were two bomb blasts, one in a bus outside a crowded railway station and the second at a McDonald's restaurant (Times of India, 2003). The fact that they should do something to change their lives was a suggestion that came from them.

Lali: We should keep our surroundings...

Snehal: ...World clean and peaceful.

Swaroop: What is peace?

Manni: Peace ...is when we be friends with everyone ...we should even consider them [people of different caste and religions] as a person ...

Swaroop: How can we as children make a difference?

Chandani: We should go to the temple [and pray for peace].

Sarla: ... give [donate] money.

Manni: We should not fight.

Snehal: We should share ...

Chandani: We should share our happiness with others.

**All the while Samir went on distracting others, especially Nihar. However, Nihar in spite of the distraction would answer questions directed to him, and would also give his opinion to statements made by others. Manni at one point even commented that Samir should do whatever he is doing during recess time. All the children were extremely involved in the discussion and could pick up the links even though I had to often stop to correct Samir's behaviour.**

Transcript: Class 27-7.1.2003

### **The pledge:**

'How would I like my country to be?' was something I suggested the children think about and answer in the next class. I was pleased hear the children's observations in the following class.

Manni: First we have to bring peace and how do you say ...Shanti [spiritual peace]?  
Peace and shanti in our country then ...violence will go away.

Chandani: Pollution is a problem and because of that hole...[in the ozone layer] is getting bigger ...we should do something to stop pollution.

Nihar: Miss, the computer virus.

Sarla: Miss, what about the Hindu-Muslim fighting ...we are all brothers and sisters ...are we not?

Manni: Yes, Miss ...what about 'Gandhiji's India'...?

Samir wanted to know what the name of his character would be.

Swaroop: Your name is Samir. Everybody in the play uses his or her own name. So you have to say ...I am Samir. I don't like what is happening in my country. And I will do this and that ...to make our country better. You are going to be the scriptwriters.

Transcript: Class 28-8.1.2003

### **The play:**

- The play began with a bhajan [prayer/hymn] 'Raghupati raghava raja Ram', which Gandhiji popularised during the Indian Independence movement. All the children walk in chanting.

Swaroop: In this play there is no story ...but it has a very strong message.

Manni: ...like Gandhiji's three monkeys (see Glossary); see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.

Transcript: Class 28-8.1.2003

**Manni's idea of the Gandhian message of truth verses evil was the reason I chose the bhajan, which introduced the theme of the play and the actors. The lines 'Ishvara Allah thero naam, subko sanmati de bhagavan' translated into English mean; Ishvar and Allah are the names used by Your devotees, the Hindus and Muslims, but You are only One, so it does not matter what name is used to address You. God [bhagvan] grant all true knowledge and goodwill [sanmati]. This hymn attempts to understand the 'mentality of truth' or 'sense of being', around which Gandhiji spun his life and his unique struggle.**

- The children represented the evils/problems that are damaging our environment and country. They try to catch Manni, playing the part of the white dove, representing peace, and persuade her to go with them.

Sarla and Chandani: I am 'menghaee' [high prices and cost of living] I will not let you survive.

Nihar and Samir: I am a computer virus; I will corrupt your systems.

Snehal: I am a thief ...come with me I will teach you to steal.

Kanha: I am a terrorist, join me and we will destroy the country.

- Manni, the white dove, 'flies' around on stage trying to dodge these tribulations, and finally sits down to meditate. However, here too she finds no peace.

Lali: I am a great religion, come to me I will give you freedom.

Manni: No. I do not want to follow your ways. I do not need any one great religion. I am a Hindustani [Indian] and humanity is my religion.

*(Addressing the audience)*

This is not our Hindustan [India]. Do you know how we want our Hindustan to be?

- The children then walk up one by one to the mike which is placed centre downstage, introduce themselves to the audience and convey their messages to their friends.  
I am Snehal; let's keep Mumbai clean and green.



I am Lali; how we live is important, not how long we live.

I am Pratik; I think we are all equal in God's eyes, we should not believe in castes and races.

I am Nihar; I think we should not fight with each other we should live in peace.

I am Sarla, since my childhood I have been taught not to tell lies. I think honesty is the best policy.

I am Samir; I wish I could remove poverty from our country.

- Finally all the children join hands and dance to a song on national integration.

### **Assessment**

The children performed extremely well in the annual program. However, that was not the question upper most in my mind. What was important was the fact that they went on stage and performed with abundant energy and enthusiasm in front of an audience that consisted of over 1500 peers, teachers and parents. This act in itself showed they had made great gains in their self-confidence (cf. Appendix 2, p.4). It was the first time all of them performed in a 'proper' theatre, as up till the fifth standard the children in this school, only performed on a makeshift stage, in the school compound. Five of the ten had never performed in front of an audience of any size. The only child who did not go on stage during the grand rehearsal and the final show was Mukul. No amount of cajoling by his classmates could persuade him to step on stage. On my part I did not compel him to perform as I did not want to distress him by forcing him to do something he did not want. At the same time I did not want him to feel utterly useless therefore I asked him to help backstage with the music system.

The children filled in two assessment sheets after the annual program. The first sheet: part 1(Appendix 11) was designed to encourage reflection-on-action, during the making of the play and behaviour prior to the performance and during performance. In this sheet the children assessed their classmates' behaviour and their own. The students had to indicate agreement or disagreement with each item on at a three-point scale: Agree (scored as 3), Not Sure (scored as 2) and Disagree (scored as 1), higher scores indicating favourable attitudes. The sheet was developed to provide an assessment of attitudinal and behavioural changes in students. The items included reflections on the children's achievement in:

- self expression;
- self-acceptance;
- self-awareness;
- acceptance of others;
- awareness of others.

I found that they showed significant understanding in completing this questionnaire as compared to the questionnaire filled up by them at the end of Cycle 1. I believe this is because:

- The questions framed in this sheet (Appendix 11) were more relevant to their immediate experience. Like:
  - Did your friend pay attention during rehearsals?
  - Gave ideas during the planning stage.
  - Listened to the teacher’s instructions.
- This was the third self-assessment sheet the children were filling up and could now understand the concept of self-assessment.
- To make the assessment more effective I talked the children through the sheet, explaining the questions one by one.

Swaroop: I had instructed you not to give instructions on stage, so if you gave instructions on stage you did not follow my [the teacher’s] instructions. Who did not follow my instructions on stage? Remember most of you were nervous before going on stage? I was nervous.

Shenal: Yes, Miss? (*With utter disbelief, the fact that I was nervous surprised most of them*).

Swaroop: Yes, I was very nervous ... who else was nervous? I remember Manni saying “let’s not go on stage...”----  
 ---I want to explain the last question. Remember when we rehearsed our play. We worked in narrow rooms like the geography room ...later we worked in a normal classroom (see photograph a. and b. on p.148-9) ...then we performed on stage, which was big. Who adjusted to working on stage? Remember there were some children who stuck to each other in spite of my saying spread out ...spread out.

Transcript: Class 34-1.2.2003

Talking them through the questions did not colour their views. All the children expressed their opinion. This can be observed in the scoring sheet, all of which have a distinct scoring pattern (Appendix 12). The only question that has an identical pattern of answers was 'the group liked working with him or her', where eight children obtained an ideal score of 27 points, and Mukul and Samir attained a virtually ideal score of 25 points. This is because in actual fact everyone enjoyed working with each other.

The second sheet (Appendix 13) the children filled concerned, reactions of their friends and significant others and how the children felt on receiving the feedback.

I met the children's class teachers and music teachers after the program to assess the change in the children's behaviour after the program.

Music Teacher1: I cannot believe it was Nihar on stage ...and he spoke so well! Previously Nihar always stayed in the background and tried to disappear into the crowd. He showed total involvement for [sic] this play.

Music Teacher 2: Manni was superb! I liked the way she was so in charge of the play and so confident.

Music Teacher 3: All the children performed so well ...their musical drama was the best in the annual program.

Their class teachers filled in a short questionnaire (Appendix 14) in February 2003, three weeks after the annual program. Their answers helped me to understand the change in the students' behaviour in school.

Eight of the children showed a marked improvement.

- Kanha, who according to the teacher was not confident before and was an introvert had become confident, started speaking in class and took active part in class activities.
- Samir was shy and wandered aimlessly and would not write unless he was 'watched' (teacher's words). '*Now he loves working in a group, is friendly, more confident, good at project work, got himself upgraded with latest happenings [annual program].*' (Samir's class teacher)
- Chandani who was not confident initially became more confident and had also showed remarkable change in her academic work.

- Manni had become more confident. She had now started making an effort to answer in class; she was not worried about being incorrect. Her class friends/peer group accept her as an achiever, they listen to her when she talks and respect her opinion.
- Mukul was shy and moody and avoided contact, but now tries to answer in class and is friendly. Has become more self-assured and asks the teacher to repeat or explain something he has not understood.
- Sarla is more confident and is happy in class. She was greatly motivated by the fact that she played an active part in a highly successful venture in the annual program.
- Lali always complained in class now she is more obedient and responsible. However there is no sharp change, the change was gradual. Her class teacher narrated an incident when Lali came to the staff room to give her a card, '*Lali paused at the entrance, squared her shoulder, held the head up and walked in confidently.*'
- Nihar was disinterested in class work and fidgety; now he is a friendly, tries to complete his work in time and is gaining in self-confidence.

Snehal and Pratik did not show any change in school. Pratik was very irregular in his attendance, at the same time he was comparatively more confident to the other children even when we started in January, 2002 as can be seen in the creativity assessment (Appendix 16). Snehal too, was a '*good and clever boy*'- as described by his parents in the first interview in January 2002. He was regular in his attendance and from the beginning was well behaved, he answered well and as one can see in the creativity scores (Table 23, p.266) he started off on a medium level of 'some what present'-average score n=3.1 and progressed only to 'moderately present' average score n= 4.1.

All the parents were extremely pleased by the way the children performed on stage and changed the way they viewed their children's abilities. The children on the other hand experienced a boost in self-esteem with the complements received from their parents and significant others. These are some of their reflections:

Chandani: I was playing 'passing the parcel at a party and as a forfeit auntie asked me to perform the dance I did in the annual program because everybody said I did dance well.

Sarla: My Grandmother said my play was soooo good, now my uncles want to see

me act. My mother said she was so proud of me after we travelled home on the school bus together, as all the children complimented her on my achievements.

Manni: My mother said I was excellent ...I feel so proud.

Samir: Everybody was clapping for our play. My friends say they don't know how I could act and dance so well.

Lali: I am feeling proud of myself, because my teacher and parents said I was excellent.

Transcript: Class 34 -1.2.2003

Making the play for the annual program and performing was a critical event in the children's learning (Chapter 5, p.145), it improved the children's attitude in areas of self-expression, self-acceptance, acceptance of others and self-awareness. It enabled the students to become more accepting of others' ideas and feelings and increases their awareness of their own feelings and motivations. Importantly for the underachieving students, it encouraged them to develop a strong sense of themselves as capable persons and that their ideas were valuable. These skills are important not only for school achievement but also personal development, improved relations with others, readiness to learn and ultimate success.

### **Deepening understanding**

*The curriculum on self-understanding proceeded with 'trust walk exercises' with the view to help the children practise co-operation with each other, to help them empathise with each other and to develop trust in each other*

The focus of my research is not just concerned with children as they are at the present, but as they will one day will become. The individual's notion of him/herself is undergoing constant change, particularly in childhood. When the children in my drama class experienced sudden success, their self-esteem was enhanced. However, I think it was a gradual change which was initiated by 'emotional understanding' and then further with understanding of 'self'. I perceive it as a movement towards '*self-maturity: that is, towards self-concepts that are realistic and self-accepting*' (Fontana, 1995: p 244).

Psychologists like Erikson (1980), Rogers (1969), and Maslow (1970) suggest that a well-balanced person is:

- aware of his/her worth;
- able to empathise with others;
- able to relate to others warmly and with an open mind, instead of using them for personal reasons.

It would be incorrect to think that maturity only comes with the initiation of adulthood and that mature children are old before their time. Mature children are those who development is appropriate with their years and experience and show the qualities suggested above (Fontana, 1995).

I used the ‘trust walk or blind walk exercise’ (Appendix 17) with the view to help the children practise co-operation with each other, to help them empathise with each other and to develop trust. Reflections during these ‘trust lessons’ played the most important role in understanding ‘self’ and others. Without the use of discussions during reflection time the trust walk exercise waters down to an ordinary game.

I paired the children, one child blindfolded and the other acting as the guide. If the child was uncomfortable with the idea of being blindfolded I asked them to merely close their eyes. I did not want this experience to be frightening to the children and/or make them feel like a ‘victim’ (Gorchakov, 1954; Bolton, 1998). For the first exercise I did not allow any child to take his/her partner outside the classroom for reasons of safety. However, to make it challenging I arranged the small, nursery room chairs around the room to act as obstacles.

- I asked them to lead the ‘blind’ partner by the hand in complete silence. After five minutes, I asked the participants change roles. In the beginning, this exercise did not work as everyone kept opening their eyes and peeking through the blindfold and thereby defeating the cause.
- To make the ‘blind walk’ a challenge I asked them to take the ‘blind’ partner round the room and count the number of times the blind person banged into an object. This not only made the game exciting but also made the guide treat the blind person more carefully.
- I then introduced oral communication into the game, where the guide could talk to the blind person and ask him, for example, to stop, or be careful and walk slowly.
- The most exciting blind walk game was played in the school compound, as it covered a huge area of different levels and surfaces.

- The hall on the ground floor by itself was interesting as it had pillars, a snacks counter and chairs.
- There were different levels, like one step down, three steps down and a short flight of steps, too.
- A small children's playground with swings and slides and monkey bars.
- Just near by, in the safety of the compound was a parked school bus.



**Kanha carefully leading Snehal.**

The 'blind walk' exercise performed on 15.2.2003 was the third time the children played this game. By now they were getting comfortable at the thought of being lead by their classmate.

Swaroop: How do you feel when you were 'blind'?

Snehal: I was scared I would fall down.

Swaroop: Did feel scared the first time you did the stairs?

Sarla: Yes, Miss.

Chandani: I got scared ...I was nervous, because she took me in the garden. She showed (sic) me all the toys ...and took me on the slide.

Swaroop: What about the guides? What did you think at that time?

Sarla: If I did not take care of her I will fall her [make her fall down].

...so we should be careful.

I help my Ba [grandmother]

Chandani: ...who is blind. So we have to care for him (sic). If she falls down we have to be responsible. We have to catch them ...if they are falling down. We must try to make the blind person feel as if they are seeing.

Snehal: I kept thinking that you must not fall down. (*He acted as my guide*)

Swaroop: Sarla was very careful. She made her partner touch the wall while coming down the stairs.

Transcript: Class 36-15.2.2003

While we were playing in the school compound a girl (pseudonyms: Shruti) who had come to school for some reason on a holiday asked for permission to join in. She was so fascinated by the game that I allowed her to join in. Her reaction to Sarla being her guide is worthy of note, as she merely identified Sarla as a student of the school. They had however never met before as they were in different standards.

Swaroop: What did you feel when Sarla took you around the compound?

Shruti: I felt nice. I did not feel scared. Sarla was taking good care of me.

Swaroop: Yes, I noticed the way she held your hand in hers...

Transcript: Class 36-15.2.2003

The fact that a stranger felt comfortable at being led in the blind walk by Sarla speaks volumes for her ability to show care for a person.

In October, nearly twenty-one months after we started the drama module, imbibing Heathcote's idea of teaching-at-risk (in Bolton, 1986), I handed the power over to the children. The class and I negotiated that each child would conduct a class of his/ her choice. Sarla chose the mask making and the 'understanding of the self' lessons for her class. She took the students back to the mask making class and each of the children made their own mask after discussing and reflecting on the class in which they chose their personal metaphors ('secret identity' see p.230). The following story is in Sarla's voice as she conducted the class (see Chapter 5, p.164). The story is based on the analysis of transcript and data of Class 48-18.10 2003. 'I remember the old days...' is a critique of the Sarla's development from the days when she followed me around (see Appendix 3, p.12-3) to the



time when she confidently performed in the dance-drama, directed the same (Chapter 5, p.150), and conducted a successful class in 'Understanding Self'.

### In which Sarla becomes the magician

I hope you like listening to stories... this is a story of a newly initiated magician. I am the young magician and my name is Sarla. I have an assistant, the Wise-one. I was going to perform magic for the first time and help all the others to find themselves.

No... the Wise-one had already began the chanting of the spell a long time back. What I was going to do is see if we could find ourselves without the help of the Wise-one.

I had decided to do 'the magic of the masks'. My assistant, the Wise-one had got all the materials ...paper plates, paints, brushes, gum and scissors....

We all knew 'the magic of the masks'; we had done it before when we became cats. But I remember that time we were not colourful. We were pale reproductions of ourselves. We looked nearly like each other.

What an important job I had today! Nearly twenty-one months since we started our journey. I was scared ...nervous, supposing no one listened to me. The Wise-one could control the wind-Samir, bring Nihar-the fog out into the sun, and help Lali-the little one to grow. And me, Sarla - the simple one, I was not plain any more. I am sure you can understand that performing magic in front of the other ten travellers was a task I could not have even imagined I would be able to do in the beginning of our journey.

I remember the old days when I followed the Wise-one everywhere she went, I was like her puppy dog. I did not allow anyone to hold her hand or sit next to her. In the magic circle, when we had our meetings, I had to sit next to her. Now I was slowly taking tiny steps and moving away on my own, like a young bird ready to fly out of the safety of the nest.

'The magic of masks' helps convey us to another world, stirring up our powers of imagination in the search of self-knowledge. At this point I must make it clear, masks could be used as a disguise, like we used them to become cats. Masked could be used to hide ones self. But I have used the 'magic of masks' to help my fellow travellers find themselves again. The Wise-one suggested we all try to geometrical designs and colours we liked. The Wise-one is growing old and forgetful ...she forgot we had already decided our secret identity. We were Mr. Rabbit, Raat Rani

['Rani' means queen] wild animals like Running Leopard and Chatterbox Monkey.



**Lotus.**



**Mr. Rabbit.**



**Sunflower.**



**Queen of Hearts.**

Nihar insisted he was the national flower of India, the lotus, because he did not want to become a cat again ...' Shenal transformed into a sunflower ...Mukul became a rabbit ...Samir and Kanha ...became wild and exotic animals and I metamorphosed into a queen of hearts...

The magic worked! This time we had become brightly coloured and had very definite identities. We were not like the pale sun on a cloudy monsoon day. We were like the vibrant sun in the Indian summer.