

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

‘Magic Hai To-Mumkin Hai’

[If you have ‘magic’ - then anything is possible’]

‘Life isn’t only about the subjects on the National Curriculum, it involves learning how to think and communicate, and interpret, explore and represent our own experience and that of others. Society in the future, as in the past, will need citizens with more than academic abilities. Intuition, creativity, adaptability, and powers of perception, interpretation and communication will all be essential qualities in the third millennium. These qualities are at the heart of the arts, but are not always recognized or nurtured in formal academic settings. Young people live their lives in the present moment but their future potential will depend on the capacities, social, spiritual and emotional, that are fostered in their formative years. Given opportunities to make sense of and contribute to their world, they will become makers of culture... Quality experiences in the arts will help our young people to become capable of interrogating and evaluating the values, beliefs and traditions of their own society and to find their own place in the world.’(O’Neill, 2001: p. 31-2)

In this chapter I am offering my study as an original and significant contribution to the understanding and development of life skills enhancement using drama as an educational tool. I believe that by doing so I am providing ‘*a significant piece in a jigsaw of understanding*’ life skills enhancement (Bassey, 1999: p.89).

In Chapters 1, 3 and 4, I explored and questioned my reasons for doing this research while in Chapter 2, I reflected on the methodology chosen by me, which has been one that has allowed me to engage in a process of action and reflection. This process has helped me to problematise my practice, critique it, understand it and transform it.

Over the past five years through my reading and research I have extended my theoretical understanding and gained first hand practical experience of how drama can be used to teach children life skills. Here I wish to answer the following questions that were

raised during the implementation of this project in terms of experience of the children and the teacher.

1. How can drama be used as an educational tool to enhance life skills in children with specific learning disabilities (SpLD)?
2. What was the impact of the project vis-à-vis life skills enhancement on the class? What did the children learn from this project?
3. What is unique about this project?
4. How can I improve my practice? What have I learnt through the process of my research?

Answering the questions

1. In this study, I have demonstrated how I used drama as an educational tool to enhance emotional understanding (Chapter 6), understanding self (Chapter 7), empathetic understanding (Chapter 8) and creativity (Chapter 9) in children with SpLD in a school in Mumbai. These chapters answer my question concerning the possibility of drama as an educational tool in the field of life skills enhancement. In these chapters I have elucidated how I taught life skills and assessed the student's learning. They reveal how drama facilitated their learning and augmentation in life skills.

2. Which brings me to the second questions: What was the impact of the project vis-à-vis life skills enhancement on the class? What did the children learn from this project?

The project assisted positive behavioural intentions and improved psychosocial competence in the children. The results of this project indicated that after an intervention of twenty-two months there was a marked enhancement in the children's life skills. There was an augmentation in the children's:

- Emotional competence (Chapter 6):
 - Emotional understanding
 - Emotional perception
 - Emotional facilitation of thought.
 - Emotional management
- Awareness of self (Chapter 7).

- There was a marked improvement in the children's attitude in areas of self-expression, self-acceptance and acceptance of others.
- Awareness of his/her worth, which encouraged them to develop a strong sense of themselves as capable persons and that their ideas are valuable. Thus leading to a gain in self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Ability to empathise with others (Chapter 8).
- Creativity and creative thinking (Chapter 9).
- Communication skills (Chapter 6, 7, 8, 9).

Consequently I can respond in the positive to the questions raised in the WHO document (1997) concerning Life Skill Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools:

'Does the programme achieve what it sets out to achieve?

Do the children learn life skills?

Are there changes in indicators of mental well-being, e.g. improved self esteem and self confidence?' (p. 30)

Apart from the acquisition of life skills, other indicators of the effectiveness of this project include:

- Eight out of ten children showed an improvement in academic achievements.
- Improvement in the drama classroom climate.
- Improvement in classroom behaviour of the children in the drama class and in the class during normal school hours. I believe the real test is not only how the children behaviour had transformed in my classrooms but also how their behaviour had altered outside my class in normal school life. What their schoolteachers say about them, which they would not have said before the commencement of the life skills lessons was important too. This clearly demonstrates that the students could and had begun to apply their drama class learning in their day-to-day school life. After a period of fourteen months of attending the drama classes their teachers' comments on the children's enhanced self-esteem (e.g. p.224-5), effective communication and interpersonal skills (e.g. p.224-5) and positive behavioural intentions during school hours (e.g. 244-5). These comments substantiate that there was a marked augmentation in the children's mental well-being. In October 2003, towards the end of this research, one of their schoolteachers remarked:

“Aap ke bacche ko to sanskar milgaye”

Translated into English it means, “Your students have received ‘sanskar’.” The word ‘sanskar’ has several meanings such as: to improve, removing shortcomings in a person and to endow a new attractive form to it. In short, the process by which positive qualities are developed and enhanced is known as ‘sanskar’.

- There was a marked improvement in the relationships between pupils, and pupils and teacher in the drama class. Additionally, outside the drama class, the students’ relationship with their parents (e.g. Chapter 6, p. 204, Chapter 7, p.225-6, Chapter 8,243-4), class teachers and SENCO also showed a definite improvement. This again demonstrates that they had begun to apply their life skills learning in the world outside the drama class.

3. There is abundant research in life skills so what is original about the work accomplished by me or what is unique about this project? What makes my thesis unique is the success I achieve in the students’ life skills education using drama in a school in Mumbai. There is no extant research in life skills education and drama education in Mumbai as:

1. Schools in Mumbai do not include life skills education in their curriculum.
2. The practice of using drama as an educational tool does not exist in schools in Mumbai.

Consequently this study is an original contribution in the Mumbai situation. Though the research findings emphasise local relevance they confirm expectations from extant literature from the international field (e.g. WHO, 1994, 1997, and 2001) and thus add a piece to the jigsaw of life skills education with reference to global relevance.

I would further like to discuss this in two parts: the success of life skills education and the use drama as an educational tool.

Life skills education

- Firstly, the capacity building agenda in core life skills is what makes this research unique.

Life skills has been applied in a wide variety of contexts worldwide, for example learning to make decisions related to road safety, friendships, school work, smoking and AIDS-related behaviour (WHO, 1994). One problem with many of the extant life skills

programmes is that they are quite often fragmented. Usually life skills education projects are merely focused on a single problem. Moreover, the frameworks of such programmes are not holistic. That is, there are separate programmes to prevent bullying, violence and delinquency, encourage school bonding and attachment, prevent dropping out, and decrease teen pregnancy and AIDS related behaviours. As a result, too many programmes have to be introduced into schools and in turn making it impracticable. The concern is that large number of activities will take time away from the educational mission of schools. The module designed for this research, to promote healthy social and emotional development, addresses the core life skills and is a comprehensive, multifaceted programme, timed (Chapter 2, p.25) such that it can be integrated into a school's timetable.

Moreover, I believe that the development of life skills education on the basis of programmes that teach skills specific to only one domain can be limited and incomplete. Many initiatives aim to develop life skills education, yet fail to develop efficient skills-based programmes (WHO, 2001). I believe it is a flawed premise to address these problems in isolation instead of establishing a holistic life skills enhancement approach. WHO (2001) illustrates the difficulties of trying to build a generic life skills programme on the basis of an AIDS prevention project in the South-East Asia Region and suggests:

'Although life skills education can contribute to HIV/AIDS education and prevention, it is important to preserve the developmental and generic approach to life skills learning and application.' (p.21)

In another study (Pick de Weiss et al, unpublished in WHO, 1996) it is indicated that a sex education programme based on life skills approach was more effective in bringing change in adolescent contraceptive use than traditional sex education that did not use life skills component. Similarly in Gylmn (1989), it was found that learning life skills was a necessary component in a smoking prevention programme. Importantly, it also showed life skills learning improved efficiency of the programme.

There is a tendency to recreate traditional programmes packaged as life skills education (WHO, 2001). This life skills initiative transformed into a programme with a clear definition and conceptual framework of what life skills education is about and how it can be achieved. This can be seen in the way I remodelled the life skills

programme, during the action research Cycle 2, beginning with emotions and then moving onto self and empathy and thus leading to pro-social behaviour and positive behavioural adjustment. Each lesson was designed to achieve clearly defined and measurable learning objectives, which contribute to the objectives of the curriculum over a period of time.

- Secondly, this project was based on the premise that a life skills enhancement programme need not be introduced only when there are signs of mental and behavioural disorders.

Epidemiological reports (WHO, 1996, 1999, 2001; UNESCO, 2005) suggest that a large number of school-age children experience or are vulnerable to an array of psychological and behavioural problems that interfere with their interpersonal relationships, successful school performance and their potential to become productive citizens. An early prevention and intervention effort in schools is the rationale of this study. Such programmes may be more effective in reducing the occurrence of behavioural and social problems and would be more effective than later treatment. This suggests that a life skills programme should not be planned only after signs of mental health problems are manifested in children. Bearing in mind the stress and violence in the modern children's life, problems related to stress for example, should be anticipated. Thus the goal of effective education should be to equip the children's social-emotional competence before such problems occur.

With this forethought in mind my project was a direct intervention for promotion of psychosocial competence and was aimed at enhancing the children's coping resources, and personal and social competence. The spectrum of mental health work covered in this study was aimed at more than treatment for children with mental or behavioural problems. It was aimed at caring for children who could be at-risk because of their learning disabilities by supporting their mental well-being and behavioural preparedness in order to meet the challenges of everyday life.

- The role of the teacher as a life skills educator

I believe that school personnel need to provide students with SpLD instruction in social skills, self-regulatory behaviours, and life skills, and further prepare them for transition from school to the outside world. While it is important for these students to

achieve high academic standards, it is also critical for them to develop social competency and prepare for a successful life beyond school.

This is something that is overlooked in the Indian school setting. The number of tuition classes and special coaching classes attest this. In India, the primary concern is to see that the students pass their board examination. The children's mental health is sadly overlooked and a life skills capacity building agenda is often ignored in the Indian school settings. When a student has been assessed with SpLD, great emphasis is put on his/her academic inabilities and the child is coached to overcome them. There is rarely any importance given to the child's psychosocial competence. In this study, however, fundamental attention is paid to the mind, happiness and mental health of the student. A student support and care system is the approach used in this project to improve behaviour through the integration of a mental health programme into an educational setting.

It is clear that schools remain a crucial social institution for the education of children in preparation for life and teachers play an important role in the student's life. In India mental health promotion practice in the educational setting remains limited with little more than lip service paid to the topic of life skills. Firstly, because life skills education lies outside the examination syllabus the area is still a sadly neglected one. Secondly, because there is a visible lack of teacher training in special needs and schools in India as a practice do not have trained counsellors and special educators attached to the institutes (Chapter 2, p.18, 46; Chapter 3, p.64-5).

This research is an attempt to share the efforts of the mental health establishment in life skills enhancement in children. Efforts in life skills education are usually restrained to mental health professionals. However, I believe that teachers have a large role to play in this field. This is because it is the teacher who meets the children on a daily basis. It is the teacher who first encounters the problems a child faces. Therefore, if teachers are trained in life skills education and life skills instructions are scheduled during the school day as an integral part of the total school curriculum they would be able to deal with most of the problems at the classroom level. Difficult cases could subsequently be referred to mental health professionals. This will lead to a more complete and well-integrated service system.

- Life skills education for children with SpLD in a school setting.

Existing programmes in life skills education have failed to adopt a theoretical framework and/or developmental approach, thus there is a dearth of data with which to guide future practice and inform theory (WHO, 2001). This study assesses the implementation of a programme to improve psychosocial competency in children with SpLD in an educational setting. To date no studies have examined the impact of a school-based preventive intervention on the development of these aspects of children's emotional and social understanding (Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait and Hertzman, 2003). This research provides a valuable source of data for development, implementation and assessment of life skills enhancement programmes in schools.

The use drama as an educational tool

- An innovative programme design using drama as method to teach life skill.

Existing research in life skills education (WHO, 1994, 2000; UNICEF, 1997, 2001) suggests that learning life skills should be based on a dynamic, learner-centred, participatory methodology. It is essential that this methodology shapes the basis of all life skills lessons. However, life skills education is far more than a participatory approach to learning. The lessons should embrace experiential learning techniques to create the conditions for social learning of life skills in diverse contexts. Life skills cannot be learned or enhanced on the basis of information or discussion alone. Expecting children to change their behaviour merely by providing information is impracticable (Orley, 1997; WHO, 1999).

A wide selection of active, learner-centred methods have been drawn upon in life skills lessons, including group discussion, brainstorming, debate, drama, role play, games, song, drawing and so on. Most programmes are multifaceted with many lessons and foci. It is difficult to determine clearly which aspects of the programme are responsible for the effects in social and emotional understanding and concomitant behavioural changes. However, the module developed for this project used drama as a method, making it appropriate to assess drama as an educational tool in enhancing life skills.

At the forefront of this discussion is that arts education is concerned with understanding the world and understanding one's capabilities therefore it would be self-defeating not to include arts in the curriculum designed to enhance life skills. Drama is seen as efficacious in this study. This claim can be validated by the change seen in the psychosocial competency in the children using drama. This research marks a defining moment in life skills education since it exemplifies a decisive role played by drama in mental health work.

Drama is a tool for child 'concerned' education (Slade, 2002). Augmentation in life skills is a result of this research as the activities in the module developed for this project were designed to ensure that acceptance was maximum and failure nearly impossible. In high-tension classes the changes in the brain's chemistry impede learning and memory whereas positive climates facilitate learning and memory (Sylwester, 1995). My students had SpLD and constantly faced failure. The no-failure and dialogical atmosphere of the drama classes enabled a stress-free learning zone.

- The application of the developmental stages in learning drama in a life skills enhancement programme.

Drama in education is not related to the acting abilities of the students, it should be organized to enable the participants' entry into the fictional world (O'Neill, 1995). It is focused on student transformation rather than on performance. However, it is important the students should be comfortable and work in a non-threatening atmosphere. This I believe they would be unable to do if they were uneasy in the drama class and insecure about their ability to work in drama. Moreover, shy children, for example, are usually reluctant to engage in a dramatic act of any form. The curriculum in this research (in Chapter 5, section 2) was developed in a manner that enabled the children to be secure with their ability to carry out role-play and other dramatic forms.

I believe that the construction of the drama framework should be built keeping in mind the needs, interests and skills of the people who experience the structure (Taylor, 1995). The students in this study are children with SpLD who had little exposure to drama education before this experience. Therefore, the development of the structure of this drama experience was created in progressive steps to suit their particular learning requirements. I believe this is one of the crucial strengths of this

study seeing that the developmental stages in learning drama are usually overlooked when drama and role-play are used in a life skills enhancement programme. The participants are thrown into a situation with no background or skills in drama. The curriculum ‘delivered’ is usually mechanically and is not constructed or negotiated (Taylor, 1996). Thus they are unable to function effectively. Moreover, their lack of exposure to drama and inhibitions prevents them from taking active part. They are ill-prepared and un-trained and find role-play a difficult strategy to get off the ground. My concern here is that life skills education is thus disfigured as it pursues an agenda that is blind to the children’s skills and abilities in arts.

- The use of drama to assess life skills.

Finally, no international standards exist for evaluating life skills programmes (WHO, 2001). Evaluation tools are usually developed to assess each programme based on questions that are linked to the context of the programme. Characteristically, life skills programmes are evaluated using questionnaires to assess factors, such as self-esteem, confidence, self-reports of behaviour and behavioural intentions, analysis of peer and family relationships and observation of school performance. These are indicators of how the life skills programme has influenced students. This current approach is based on studies which have shown that positive self-esteem, perceptions of peer relationships and so on, are associated with more sociable, health-giving behaviour (WHO, 2001). When improvements in such domains are associated with the implementation of life skills education, the programmes are evaluated positively as having a positive impact on students.

Additionally, there is growing interest in direct measurement of life skills. The development of this instrument is part of a WHO/ UNICEF project for developing models for life skills measurement. The measurement instrument is a questionnaire for completion by students. It is designed to measure life skills including self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, critical thinking and problem solving.

I believe that pen-and-paper methods are not always useful for assessing the affective domain, such as feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and values or skills like creative thinking, empathy, assertiveness, refusal skills, decision-making, and problem-solving. In this endeavour I have developed a unique method in assessment. It is a multifaceted

assessment system, composed of a variety of assessment methods that are appropriate, especially for assessing skills that by definition are best understood by demonstration. The creative ways of assessing skills I have incorporated against a set of predetermined criteria include a range of collaborative methods, such as dairies and journals, story-telling, drawings, observations during reflection time, observation on role-play and other dramatic activities, peer feedback on a performance, and group assessment of a demonstration and role-play. In doing so I believe I have developed an effective and innovative assessment system.

As I consider the original contribution of my thesis, I claim that I am making a significant contribution to the development of an understanding of the life skills education and the role played by drama in it. I claim that my invented method is capable of generating a powerful insight into life skills education. To return at this moment to the title of this chapter ‘Magic hai to Mumkin hai’ I believe it was magic-my passion to teach that helped me determine my aims.

I recapitulate the answers to: what is unique about this project?

- It has a holistic framework.
- It has a capacity building agenda in core life skills.
- It is a direct intervention for promotion of psychosocial competence and was aimed at enhancing the children’s coping resources, and personal and social competence.
- It promotes the teacher’s role in the field of mental health.
- It draws on of drama as a method to enhance life skills. The drama curriculum itself was developmental and not an ad hoc method.
- It makes use of an innovative method of assessment in life skills using drama methods.

4. Finally, I answer the questions: What have I learnt through the process of my research? How can I improve my practice?

My learning through the research process has been wide and varied however; I begin with the role played by my supervisors in my learning because in India it is the teacher that is venerated first. A beautiful couplet depicts my values and sentiments:

*'Guru Govind donu khade, kisko laagu paay,
Balihari Gurudevaki jinhe Govind diyo bataay'.*

Translated it means The Guru and Govind -God, are present before me, to whom shall I bow down first? I bow to the Guru since it is he/she who showed me the 'light' of Govind.

I believe my tutors played the most important part in my learning to achieve excellence in my teaching and researching. As I have indicated earlier I am a qualified actor-teacher but I was a novice researcher. From the inception of my research my supervisors helped me develop the skills of negotiation, of systematic data collection and organisation. They were astute and from the onset established our relationship as that of 'co-truth-seeker' performing distinctively but pursuing the same goal. Thus they allowed me to maintain my individuality at the same time motivated me to problematise my work and investigate deeper. Given that I censure the *anti-dialogical banking education*' (Freire, 1970: p.74), my supervisors at no time imposed their views. If they had, it would have stifled my creative urges and will to learn. They were at all times open, tolerant, forthright, yet challenging and maintained a dialogue all through the period of my research, which in turn promoted my learning. I learnt to listen, think and reflect and explain. I learnt to learn and at the same time I learnt to teach more effectively.

They 'modelled' the art of being systematic by organising their comments in an effective manner. As an example when I sent text to be read and commented upon they underlined or highlighted the sentence in question and then stated their comment or formatted the pages into two boxes one which had my text and the second in which they wrote their comment alongside my views or actions. This action carried out by them helped me make analytic memos against a piece of data or work. It not only supported my thinking but also enabled me to see clearly where I needed to probe further.

The discussions on research methodology enabled me to progress and sharpen my epistemology. They were at all times encouraging with their praises and remarks but at the same time always pushed me further. Commenting on the first draft of Chapter 2 – Methodology, Bigger (personal communication) encouraged me to refine my work by suggesting:

'By the time you submit the thesis, I hope you can get beyond the listing of who claims what and let the underlying theory come out...What you come

out with might not have a name yet until you give it one –since you are coming at the problem from a unique position (as Richard Winter did) I don't see why you should not produce something unique.'

Chambers (personal communication) continually prompted me to critique further by asking '*...i.e. what do YOU think?*' or commenting, '*All the above is worthy of further development...you probably need to elaborate on each one to put YOU in here.'*

The prescient nature of their comments, made during the data collection, recording and analysis phase cautioned me to gather valid and reliable data.

- '*This is challenging, if only in that personal judgments are involved. Sharing these judgements with others is one way of strengthening validity. Can the children be involved in validation- by eliciting their views on social/life skills?*'
- '*In your vignette about children and Girl ('Two stories and Nihar'), how can we be sure that you are not putting words into their mouth? That is a validity/validation question. I like the vignette by the way.'*
- '*This vignette (Two stories and Nihar) may be one way of recording it, but is your data also in a more prosaic form? In your PhD you may need to demonstrate both recording processes.'*
- '*Comment on Nihar's story: BRILLIANT! But it needs contextualising and critiquing to help to give it its fullest impact.'*

I think writing the thesis was the most difficult part of my doctoral experience. Initially I had naively thought a thesis is about 'this is what I did' put in black and white. Moreover, my arts background made me rebel against the pedantic style of writing a dead, lifeless academic thesis. Bigger (personal communication) cautioned me suggesting:

'Accessible language a) assumes that it is OK not to be intellectually sophisticated and b) is ambiguous in that words can mean anything. It is actually very hard to achieve the sophistication of thought, and make it accessible--- a skill we should all try to develop.'

Writing this thesis enabled me to maintain a critical engagement with my practice, personal experiences and values. I learnt that when writing to communicate one's thoughts to others one has to be very clear, consequently, one is often forced to rethink and revise. In doing so

writing helps to gain clarity of thought and of values. Additionally, it initiates augmentation in the art of communication.

My tutors comments and encouragement like: *'avoid butterflying around.... Go hard for one style'* and *'this is written very 'tightly' – aim for more of this Swaroop'* enabled me to learn how to write artistically, imaginatively, be bold and at the same time be academically sound.

From the very beginning, I was extremely concerned with my ability to 'teach effectively.' This brings me to question; how can I improve my practice? In the section titled 'The Living 'I'' p.10, I have described the inadequacy I experienced as a teacher, my lack of confidence to incorporate drama in a meaningful manner in my curriculum. I aspired to incorporate drama in my life skills classes but on one hand I did know how to do it and on the other I did not want to replicate an expert's agenda. Importantly, the use of drama in education is a rarity in the Indian educational set-up and above all there is a paucity of literature in drama education available to teachers in India. I believe I was in a difficult situation.

Even though I come from the background of arts and have a huge circle of friends from theatre and from the field of education I was unable to fall back on their help as the needs of drama in education are extremely distinct. I realised I had to do something for myself if I wished to fulfil my desire for excellence in teaching and shape an effective curriculum in drama

I decided to approach my self-study through an action research methodology, as it is a *'study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it'* (Elliott, 1991: p. 69). This was the premise I began on and I believe it was a sound seeing that doing an action research enabled me to put 'I' at the centre of my enquiry. It is intrinsic to my ontology given that I value democracy, dialectics and the belief that one of the most important objectives of a research should be to bring about social change.

The most remarkable transformations in my learning occurred by means of my action research project and the reflective practice it engenders. I believe I was a reflective practitioner at the start of my research as many principles of drama praxis and the characteristics of reflective practice overlap (Taylor, 2000). Artists, art educators and

reflective practitioners share so many characteristics that Taylor (2000) suggests that *'to be an arts educator is to be a reflective practitioner'*.

...Reflective practitioners exhibit an artistry, which people often characterise as some innate and rare talent (Schon 1983, 1987). In order to make this *'mystery of the mastery'* accessible, Schon (1983) carefully analysed the artistry behind reflective practice and recommended an approach to learning inspired by training in the creative and performing arts!

Reflecting-in-action, reflecting-on-action and critical reflecting are all natural processes for an actor.

For many artists, suggests Taylor (1996), *'reflection happens not only before and after the performed event but informs the event itself'* (p. 30). I have found it natural to reflect on my feet (reflection-in-action, Schon, 1987), as we actors are always looking at ourselves... always shadowing ourselves, to see whether we are doing our job correctly. While acting and rehearsing we are always thinking on our feet. Stanislavski refers to it as the *'cognisance of the sixth sense'* (Sudakov, 1955, p. 79).

I believe I was trained to *'reflect-in-action'* (Bolton, 2003) since the early days of my career as an actress:

**'Thinking one step ahead'* (If he sits here by mistake, I'll have to change my movement and move further down stage..)

**'Being critical'* (What is the playwright actually suggesting?!...)

**'Storing experience for the future'* (When I say this line as if I am talking to myself, I get a better audience reaction, I can then convey the correct meaning of the line.)

**'Analysing'* (I did not deliver the line correctly.)

Reflection-on-action is what we usually do after the event: thinking through, and often discussing the incident/performance with a colleague/co-artists or supervisor/director.

'Reflection-for-action' which involves forward planning, (Gray, 2000) and *'Critical reflection'* used to gain a deeper knowledge (Larrivee, 2000) about the drama on hand are on going processes during rehearsals.

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However, the art of reflective practice before I started researching was tacit knowledge and is implicit in my actions. Reflecting on my practice in drama enabled me to

systematically study my art, making it possible for me to look at my experience in theatre with a new perspective. Reflective action research facilitated transformation through critical and deliberate self-examination and allowed me to make my tacit knowledge explicit.

Drama teaching is and always will be challenging, an area in which teachers need to be supported by good training and preparation. Reading about or watching a drama lesson executed by experts is not the same as participating in a teaching experience. Similarly, participating in a drama/teacher workshop is not the same as teaching. I believe teaching skills are only enriched in action while presenting work, receiving feedback and by experience. A teacher-action research can be a major contributor in development of the teaching practice. This research project demonstrates that it is essential to encourage teachers to take more ownership of their pedagogy if teachers aspire to transform their learning beyond the surface. In addition it demonstrates the way in which experiential learning and critical inquiry are the keys to effective learning.

A major shift in my teaching took place when I began to question my assumptions about teaching. Action research allowed me to grow as a professional by facilitating a process, which enabled me to answer a part of my research question: How can I improve my practice? Throughout this whole process, I have felt in complete control of all aspects of my research. I felt in control even in the most vulnerable moment of my research like I did when critical incidents during the research revealed that there was a gap between what I believed and what my actions were conveying. This is because of the basic problem solving nature of action research.

Moreover, the cyclic and emergent nature of action research that comprises of action, observation, reflection, planning and back to action and observation (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) ensured that no failure was permanent. Observation and reflection on every action taken by me ensured deeper understanding of drama, life skills and my pedagogy. This facilitated a confident progress or a re-planning of action. This was reminiscent of the actions taken by me after the observation and reflections on Cycle 1 when I realised the inadequacy of my life skills programme, which led to the modification of my teaching strategy in Cycle 2. Action research enabled me to act and reflect on my actions and make changes so as to develop a new plan of action. By doing so it encouraged me to take risks and consequently enabled me to grow throughout my research. The sense

of risk taking opened new avenues of discovery and became my source of creation. It facilitated my progress from merely using drama games to incorporating 'process' drama into my curriculum. It enabled me to co-produce a dance-drama with my students, a 'product' drama using approach of 'process' drama. Additionally, it encouraged me to use advance drama strategies such as 'stopping to consider', 'teacher-in-role' and 'teaching-at-risk' with confidence. Action research provided me with the research perspective as well as the methodological tools to set my own agenda for change and to transform my practice. For the field of educational drama, this research confirms the importance of teacher preparation, classroom management and discipline knowledge.

The capacity to solve problems in new ways and to produce works that are novel, appropriate and socially valued is how I would elucidate the abilities of a creative person. My approach to creativity is more as a mean and not as the goal itself. Some of the qualities of a creative person (DeVore, Horton and Lawson, 1989) are: the ability to change undesirable habits into desirable ones, a positive curiosity of the unknown, a positive attitude towards new experiences, the motivation to solve problems on their own, high self-esteem and self-confidence in their abilities, the ability to focus their full attention on a particular problem for an appropriate length of time and the ability to take risks fully knowing that his or her ideas may be attacked by others. I believe I have displayed all these qualities in and during this study.

Importantly, I have had to take creative risks in my work while teaching drama and while formulating a life skills curriculum and now I hold my practice up for scrutiny to an audience. These risks, I believe have been worth taking, as I now have first hand experience on how creativity and drama education can make a positive influence on life skills education for school children, not only in my country but also at a global level. In doing so I have solved problems such as creating an effective life skills programme using a novel method of drama in education. I solved the problem of assessing learning in life skills and produced an effective and unique module in life skills enhancement that is socially valuable.

Moreover, like my students I have been able to 'transfer my drama experience into other expressive modes' (see Chapter 5, p. 98). I have been able to transfer my drama and

theatre experience to using drama as an educational tool to enhance life skills. By doing so I believe I have united doing and thinking, practice and theory.

While investigating and teaching the life skills and finally while writing the dissertation I have to acknowledge that there was a significant enhancement in my own life skills education. Besides growth in my teaching abilities there was a significant augmentation in my self-esteem, confidence and pride. Importantly, I think there was a noteworthy growth in all the areas of life skills: problem solving, decision-making, critical thinking, creative thinking, communication skills, interpersonal skills, self awareness, empathy, coping with stress, coping with emotion. I can confidently say that drama played a proactive role in enhancing my life skills too.

Recommendations

1. In view of the above stated results, a major recommendation of this research is that life skills education should be an important part of schools mental health promotion. Although I worked with children with SpLD in Mumbai I think all children would benefit from a life skills enhancement programme. Thus I recommend that life skills programmes should be integrated into the whole school curriculum.
2. Additionally, life skills educational programme should be designed and taught as a subject in the school curriculum and not as 'extra classes' on a non-school working day. This would ensure regularity in their attendance for the life skills classes.
3. I recommend that a long-term intervention should be developed, continuing throughout the school years, beginning from primary school until school-leaving age. A medium length intervention of one-one and a half years like this endeavour can only hope to have an effect on mental well-being and behavioural intentions of the participants. To be effective, a life skills programme needs to be developed as a long-term intervention spanning several years thus enabling a significant and lasting impact on health and social behaviour of pupils.
4. I recommend that drama should be used as a method to teach life skills in schools. The uniqueness of drama is its capacity to act as an agent of change in the children's lives through experiential learning. It offers the students an opportunity to reflect on

life experiences and emotions both inside and outside the dramatic event, making it a powerful educational experience.

5. Importantly, the Indian drama teacher needs to be well informed of current drama practice and theory, understand intrinsically the needs of their students, plan scrupulously to meet those needs and know how to create and maintain an atmosphere of care, trust and co-operation.
6. A training course for educators should be developed for an effective implementation of a life skills programme. Life skills education facilitates the learning of skills that are learnt through a social learning process of observation, practice and reinforcement. Moreover, life skills are enhanced effectively in a participatory learning class atmosphere where students can express their feelings and opinions freely. However, in most schools in India, teachers are used to the traditional teaching method and the students are expected to accept whatever the teachers say without questioning. This is a perennial problem. Therefore, a teachers need to be 'educated' first so that they could be capable of facilitating human-centred lessons, thus making learning an enjoyable, stress free experience, enabling the children to face the world with interest, curiosity and resilience.

'In an African village, when a storyteller comes to the end of his tale, he places the palm of his hand on the ground and says, 'I put down my story here.' Then he adds, 'So that someone else may take it up another day.'

(Brook, 1999: p.227)