

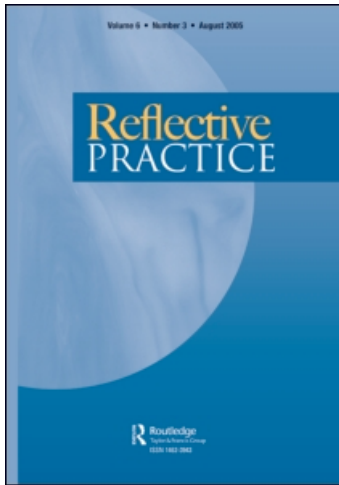
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## Reflective Practice

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### '... as I engaged in reflection: a play in three acts'

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## ‘... as I engaged in reflection: a play in three acts’

Swaroop Rawal\*

In this script the playwright elucidates how reflective learning enabled the protagonist to bring to light a creative and effective child-friendly method to track emergent changes in life skill learning in children. The play contributes to the development of an innovative method of analysis of children’s drawings and the unusual application of it to psychology and thereby provides a unique link to the complex process of understanding life skills enhancement and the evaluation of learning. The development of this method of analysis is grounded in a dialogical enquiry based on a real-life experience. It is a form of living educational theory which developed as the playwright worked empathetically and caringly for the benefit of her students.

**Keywords:** life skills; drawings; reflection; learning assessment; living educational theory; child-friendly

### Act One

#### Scene 1

*The curtain is not raised. Swaroop is seen sitting crossed leg like a yogi, on the apron a little to stage right. A spotlight is focused on her.*

Swaroop: This is a story of my learning  
as I engaged in reflection  
It takes the shape of living educational theory  
Whitehead (1989) led the way  
I practised it  
with love and tenderness  
With empathy and compassion  
I guided my students  
I listened to them talk  
heard them ... and had a dialogue

I sing a different tune  
Because I lived the experience  
Follow my quest  
from doubt to belief  
from Mumbai to Worcester and back to Mumbai

Finding and fitting in  
a tiny piece ... yet significant one  
in a huge jigsaw puzzle  
A jigsaw of life-skills enhancement  
and evaluation of its learning  
Come along and hear my voice  
... I sing a different tune

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*The houselights dim and the curtain rises.*

### Scene 2

*An office in Mumbai, May 2002. The room has a pristine appearance about it. Only a handful of books occupy the shelf which looks bare. Swaroop is seen sitting on the floor with lots of sheets scattered around her. She picks up one sheet and talks to herself.*

Swaroop: These drawings on the worksheet are really troubling. My students are 10 and 11 years old, yet their drawings are so childish. ... I know if Phil, my supervisor, heard he would say I am making a value statement. However, I believe my concern here is valid ... proper ... How do I interpret the meaning here ... there should be an appropriate assessment tool somewhere ... but where should I look?

I could lay a wager I am not making any sense to you.

I am a teacher-researcher carrying out an action research project. The title of my research is – ‘The role of drama in enhancing life skills in children with specific learning difficulties in a Mumbai school: My reflective account’.

This reflective-action research is a piece of classroom-based research, in the form of a modular course. The module is designed to cover a period of 22 months. On the principles of life skills enhancement I built the lessons of this module to augment: emotional understanding, self-awareness and understanding of self, creative thinking and empathy. As a drama teacher I am teaching 10 children who are 10 and 11-years-old.

I have planned to use various methods of data collection such as tape-recording of interviews and lessons, photographs, journal entries and questionnaires. As a part of data collection I specially designed worksheets for the children to complete. These worksheets are designed to initiate the students into the process of self-expression. Five sheets comprise the package: My Friend, Teacher, Mother, Father and Brother/ Sister.

The worksheets have a space at the bottom for the children to draw. Through the drawings I hoped to gain a better understanding of the children (Yamamoto, 1972) and gain knowledge of their world as they see it. I believe that children who are visual learners may be able to express themselves more deeply in drawings (Gardner, 1983). Visual art is a source of visual thinking suggests Arnheim (1969) seeing that thinking and art are closely connected (Vygotsky, 1971).

It is these worksheets ... See the drawings for yourself ... (*she holds the drawing up for the audience to see*).

These are completed by Lali (in January 2002), she is 10-years-old. Note she has drawn stick figures and each figure has six limbs! Her father and brother are both drawn in a feminine form.

And see these ones... These are done by Manni; she too is 10-years-old...

Would you not be troubled by such drawings?

Draw a picture of your father



Figure 1. Father.



Figure 2. Mother.



Figure 3. Brother.



Figure 4. Friend.



Figure 5. Mother.



Figure 6. Father.



Figure 7. Teacher.

Well, you will ask what I did. What could I do? I really and truthfully did not know what to do with them and how to approach the analysis of the drawings...so I put them out-of-the-way...But NOT out-of-the-mind...and continued my lessons in enhancing life skills through drama.

### Scene 3

*A warm and sunny day in June 2003. Swaroop is seen sitting with her supervisor, Phil, who she calls Guruji. The setting a garden attached to a typical house in England; Phil's house in Worcester.*

Swaroop: You have underlined the words 'greatly troubled' in the sentence – I was greatly troubled when I saw the drawings done by the children.

Guruji: Are you not making a value statement ... are you not labelling?

Swaroop: No, Guruji. I am asking what is going on here. What have I seen? What can I do about what I have seen? Can I do something about it?

Guruji: Can you make me see what you have seen? Your credibility will rest on others seeing your interpretation ... the relationship between fact and reasoning.

Swaroop: I am afraid I cannot explain my reasoning ...

### Scene 4

*Swaroop is seen looking distressed, sitting on the steps outside the Graduate School. There is obviously a drop in the temperature as we see Swaroop sitting with a shawl around her. A mug of coffee is placed near her but it is ignored and is going cold. It is late in the evening and the atmosphere created is one of loneliness.*

*She has the worksheets in her hand and studies them then puts the down ... only to pick them up again.*

Swaroop: Why are the drawings distressing me? Why am I troubled? I want to explain to Guruji that I am concerned because the drawings suggest some internal conflict ... some emotional distress. Now you will ask how I know. My

answer to that is I believe we know more than we can say (Polanyi, 1958). It is the hunch that leads to a particular inquiry.

What is it that I am supposed to know? What is it that tells me I know ... I cannot explicitly say I know it? It makes me feel soooo inadequate to both know and yet not be able to tell the world THIS IS IT.

Guruji: (*appearing at the entrance*) 'It is the nature of beginning that the path ahead is unknown, leaving us poised as we enter upon it between wondrous excitement and anxious dread' (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1983, p. 3).

## Act Two

### Scene 1

*October 2003, Swaroop's office in Mumbai. The same room as in Act One.*

*However, now we see several box files in the file cabinet, lots of papers on the writing table. A large number of books are scattered around. The office has an ambience of belonging to a person who is very busy and has been working extremely hard.*

Swaroop: This is the second time the children have filled in the worksheets. The process was carried out to enable me to complete a post-learning assessment of their learning.

See the change in their drawing ...



Figure 8. Father.

Do you not agree with me that there is an immense transformation? At last the drawings appear age appropriate (Lowenfeld, 1947; Silk & Thomas, 1990).

I have been working with the children over a period of 22 months. I know there is an improved psychosocial competence in the children. There is a marked improvement in my students' attitude in areas of self-expression, self-acceptance and acceptance of others. There is an awareness of his/her worth, which has encouraged them to develop a strong sense of themselves as capable persons, leading in turn to a gain in self-esteem and self-confidence.

### Scene 2

*December 2003. A coffee house in Juhu. Swaroop is sitting with two clinical psychologists / Art Therapists-Uvi and Hema. The worksheets are scattered all over the table, all three have journals which they keep referring to. The drawings are being discussed.*

- Uvi: Let's begin with Lali's drawings. Her first drawings ...
- Swaroop: ... the pre-learning level ones ...
- Uvi: ... suggest that she identifies with her mother. This can be seen, as all her representations Figures 1, 2 and 3 appear feminine, even when she is drawing her father and her brother. The stick figures suggest that she is not happy with herself. She is uncomfortable with her appearance and has a feeling of guilt.
- Swaroop: That is correct her mother said on 19.12.2001: [I quote verbatim] ... 'Lali clings to my pallo [end of sari], even while watching TV. I leave the room she leaves it with me. Sometimes she won't even let me get up and do the housework'.  
And then in April 2002 ...  
'The trouble is when my mother-in-law comes to stay she is always gossiping about my husband and me. When Lali hears she gets extremely upset and angry with her papa'.
- Hema: There is a critical change in Lali's emotional and social competence which is revealed in her later drawing, Figure 8.
- Swaroop: The post-learning level ones ... for the duration of 22 months the children have learnt about life skills like understanding emotions, 'self' understanding, creative thinking and empathy. I understand she now empathises with her father.
- Hema: The later drawing, Figure 8 suggests that she has started connecting with her father.
- Swaroop: I know for a fact that her relationship with her father has transformed. Her counsellor has reported that the two spend time together, like going for a walk on the beach ... going to restaurants together, just the two of them. In the worksheets dated 10.10.2003 Lali wrote: 'I feel sad when my father is in tension and I wish he would keep smiling everytime'.
- Hema: However ... the lack of feet and just three fingers suggest that the process of understanding at this stage is still incomplete.
- Swaroop: Accepted ... her learning does not halt here.
- Uvi: All the drawings suggest that there is an augment in their emotional and social competence, see the drawings done by Manni, Figures 4, 5 and 6. The stick drawing, Figure 4, suggests she had a low self-esteem ... a problematic family relationship is indicated by her representations Figure 5 and 6. It is not surprising to note that she had sketched a full figure drawing of her friend but not of her teacher, mother and father all of whom she probably has an uneasy relationship with. The drawing of her father is a mere faint pencil drawing and she had not cared (bothered?) to even attempt to draw her brother.
- Swaroop: Yes, Manni felt that she does not receive adequate support from her family. Her father works at an oil rig and is usually away from home. She believes her mother cherishes her brother more than her.  
In the '2nd parents interview- April 2002' the mother said that Manni had told her cousin, 'Our mother loves her son more than me'.  
Her mother also overtly praised the son's study and fine arts skills, at the same time suggesting the daughter does nothing creative.
- Hema: Your work holds a promise of relating drawings with behaviour ...
- Swaroop: Drawings when linked with verbal data offer a potentially richer 'new means of telling'. I believe interpretations of drawings have a strong potential for multiple reading.
- Uvi: ...a unique and creative art-based assessment of life skills learning.

### Act Three

*Swaroop is seen sitting on the apron again. A spotlight is focused on her.*

- Swaroop: This is a story of my learning  
I sing a different tune

I know when you don't know where you are going  
 You are probably already there  
 Reflective process did it for me  
 I did it by reflective process  
 This is the story of my learning  
 It enabled me to see from a different angle  
 It enabled me to sing a different tune

Reflecting is-  
 Recapturing an experience  
 Thinking, thinking, thinking, thinking ... about it  
 Masticating it like the cows do outside the temple walls  
 And then weighing it up  
 It enables me to sing a different tune

The reflective process assists me to frame and re-frame  
 It enables me to go back the beginning of my understandings  
 Helps generate fresh understanding of my knowledge  
 And then use this understanding to transform my practice  
 It enabled me to find a 'voice'

But ... It is not ... if you wish ... a lonely journey ...  
 Reflective learning is dialectical  
 I talked to myself  
 I heard myself  
 I talked to the 'others'  
 The 'others' heard me.  
 We learnt a different tune  
 We played a different tune  
 This is the story of my learning

I am a disciple of Reflective Learning ...

### Note on contributor

Swaroop Rawal is a freelance educational consultant. She is currently conducting a study with the Gujarat Council for Educational Research and Training. This project is based on training teachers and teacher-trainers to use drama to enhance life skills in school-going children in Gujarat.

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