

A dream for equal education: Reflections on creating a living educational theory

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Abstract

Equal education, transformation and social change are challenging subject matters. This paper, written in collaboration between a student-teacher and a teacher-educator, narrates the journey taken by the student-teacher in a quest to find herself and an opening for educational change in a school for marginalised girls. The marginalised have a deep distrust of their voices. In this paper we provide an alternative that allowed one such teacher to communicate her lived experience. The connective reflection of the teacher-educator develops a theoretical perspective regarding the student-teacher's inquiry and grounds the creation of her living educational theory. Dealing with gender inequality, life skills and imagination through this collaboration we hope to connect our inquiry with the struggles of teachers in rural India, and hope to stimulate a dialogue in a search for a social vision of equal education.

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Keywords: Living educational theory; Life skills; Drama in education; Reflections; Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya.

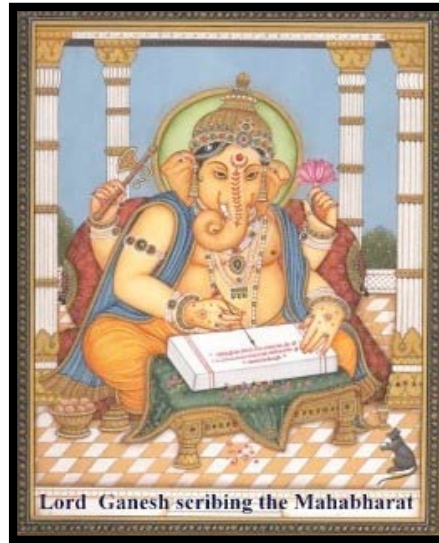


Image 1: Lord Ganesh

Sage Vyasa and Lord Ganesh

As the story goes, the great sage Vyasa wanted to compose the great epic Mahabharata (Swami Tejomayananda, 1993) Lord Brahma, whom he asked for advice considering the great task that lay ahead, suggested he request Lord Ganesh to be his scribe, bearing in mind the Lord's superior mental power. Lord Ganesh agreed, saying he would scribe the verses only if Vyasa gave a continuous dictation. Vyasa was taken aback; however after deep thought he accepted the condition, not before laying down his own stipulation that the Lord should understand the verse before writing it down. Both Ganesh and Vyasa agreed to each other's conditions. Vyasa began to sing the Mahabharata and Ganesh began to scribe. Occasionally Vyasa would compose some very complex stanzas, forcing Ganesh to pause to think and grasp the meaning, giving Vyasa just enough time to compose the next stanzas in his head.

Looking at the symbolism in this story, Ganesh's proviso that his writing down must be continuous signifies that for writing to do justice to reality, it must be, like reality, comprehensive and uninterrupted, unadulterated by human distortions. Vyasa's response was not to evaluate Lord Ganesh's intellect but it signifies Ganesh's assurance of the noetic [i.e. intellectual] value of the text.

Introduction

Swaroop:

This is a collaborative text written by a student-teacher, Rushita, and me, her mentor. It is written in response to a challenge I face when I try to persuade my student-teachers in Gujarat to write academic texts. My student-teachers from Gujarat are lost in the chasm

between educational research and teaching practice. First, this is because they are full-time teachers, and their calendar is always chock-a-block (Shrivastava, 2014). Secondly, there is a paucity of academic writing in Gujarati and the works of academic literature written in the English language are difficult for them to acquire. If they do manage to get hold of some works, the writing style is intimidating and invariably inundated with references to other literatures that are alien to them. This makes it difficult for them to grasp the meaning of who said what, why they said it, and what it really means. Their limited English language proficiency adds to the adversities they face.

At the same time their in-field work is exceptional. They carry out undeniably creative work in their classrooms. They have the knowledge of teaching but have limited knowledge about teaching. Scardamalia and Bereiter (2006, unpaginated) explain that, '[k]nowledge of is activated when a need for it is encountered in action. Whereas knowledge about is approximately equivalent to declarative knowledge, knowledge of is a much richer concept than procedural knowledge'. However, I believe, a teacher is not credited for what is in her mind but for the contribution she makes to education through her practice and sharing of her practice for the further advancement of knowledge. I sought my student-teachers' entry into 'the knowledge-creating culture' (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 2006), which involves not only cultivating knowledge-building skills but seeing themselves and their practice as part of an effort to advance knowledge for the benefit of others, which I knew they were capable of. How was I to facilitate their entry into 'the knowledge-creating culture'?

Teachers I teach are gripped by fervour to obtain ideas and advice on how to improve their practice and their students' learning. Theory is abstract philosophy to them, far away from the reality of their rural classrooms. How was I to explain to them that sets of theories and standards could guide their practice and need not be applied word for word but should be interpreted? How was I to bridge the gap between theory and practice? How was I to enable them to make a contribution to education by taking a step forward, moving from their role as teachers to becoming teacher-researchers? I had introduced them to action research. Some of them carried out the research to the stage of data collection. However, only a handful wrote it up and merely shared it as prescribed documents, in the form of success reports to SSAM (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Mission). They were banal reports that the authorities expected them to write.

Why was I interested in getting them to write authentic research articles? First, I wanted them to write because in a living-educational-theory action research, individuals produce explanations of their educational influence in their own learning by asking questions like, 'How am I improving what I am doing?' (Whitehead, 2009). After answering the question, my teachers carried out action-reflection cycles, collected data, evaluated them, modified their actions and so on but importantly could not or did not produce 'explanations for [their] own learning' (Whitehead, 1998).

Secondly, to make a contribution to education, writing an explanation of one's understanding is indispensable as it helps bridge the gap between theory and practice; I wanted them to move from reporting to writing meaningful, critical and reflective texts. I wanted them to progress from telling about their learning to transforming by learning and writing. There is a huge difference between 'knowledge telling' and 'knowledge

transforming'. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987, unpaginated) suggest that the former yields a minimized 'cognitive load', while the, 'latter engages learners in effortful reflective and dialectic processes of using writing for advancing and developing knowledge'. Moreover, McNiff (2002) suggests that bringing about change in your social situation is bound to have consequences for wider social contexts. This means academic writing and action research are a form of personal and social renewal.

To the question why I did not enable them to write I can only say in my defence that there are miles of physical distance between my student-teachers and me. The lack of internet facility at their end added to the predicament. However, if I wish to claim credit to being creative and faithful to my practice I believe I should have found a way ahead. I read and tried to facilitate a deeper understanding of the theories of life-skills, action research, reflection, and living educational theory, but I could not ensure that they would be able to reach the next level, that of writing and theorising. I did not make possible for them to share their work accurately and truthfully to the authorities that employed them or to the outside world. I could not encourage an inquiry that is not supported by literature yet is academic (refer to the first paragraph on the Introduction). I could not assist a narrative in education that is based on a personal biography. By not doing so I hold myself guilty of not enabling my student-teachers' 'real' life problems and struggles to come to the fore.

Yet, the problem remains: getting them to write is as if I am forcing them to do something they do not want to do. Nonetheless, I knew once they crossed the first hurdle they would realise it is not so difficult. I wanted this act of writing to come from them. Educational equity can be achieved not by merely opening the door but by providing an environment or an opportunity for genuine education or the transformation of knowledge to occur (Eisner, 1997). Thus, keeping this view in mind I adopt a middle path in writing this text. I have drawn on a collaborative writing strategy, that of a patchwork text (Winter, Buck and Sobiechowska, 1999), to sustain both the voices and the reflective process. I asked Rushita to write her thoughts spontaneously in the text without worrying how well expressed or how theoretical it was. I later reflected and theorised her story. Rushita and I held a conversation all through the writing of this paper; a process of writing, reading, reflecting, speaking, listening and reflecting again, was followed to ensure that I was interpreting her story accurately.

Winter (in Akister et al. 2003, p. 225) advocates that, 'if we are talking about expanding Higher Education, to make it more 'inclusive', we need to find ways of encouraging and rewarding students who are intellectually skilled and subtle and complex, but not academically skilled'. The patchwork text does not merely show the answers as essays do, it makes it possible for the writer – or writers in this case –to present the explanation of the 'working' of the intellectual process of the writer. This is necessary for the reason that playing the game tells us little about how the game was played (Eisner, 1985, p.141). Keeping this in mind as we share the narrative of Rushita's living, teaching and learning, our focus is not on the text but on the position, interrogation and transformation of the lived life of a teacher.

In this paper we present Rushita's story, with my cerebration. The data consists of Rushita's personal reflections written in her reflective journal, photographs and reflections written by her students and my reflections on Rushita's writings. Through Rushita's

narratives, in Calibri-Bold and my celebration of it in Calibri, we have tried to re-create her classroom, her students, her lessons and additionally her learning. From these points, the paper has evolved into a collection of reflective thoughts, stitching the past with the present and focusing on a variety of contexts. The paper draws on the Living Theory research (Whitehead, 2000), which is the thread that holds the pieces together.

Rushita:

A hope-less life

‘Hey Bhavan! [Oh God!] Why do I have to be poor? Why was I born a girl? Why do I have to care if we have money or not? Is it only my responsibility to see that we have bread on the table?’ These thoughts were constantly on my mind. ‘Is being a teacher-a Government school teacher the only option I have? I hate this...is there no way out?’

My name is Rushita and I was born in a small town called Punjapadar in Gujarat. If you asked me to describe myself I would say I am shy...a daydreamer. I have no friends...no tangible goals. Being shy made me self-conscious. Being a girl made me vulnerable. Being poor and having to support my family made me become a teacher... even though I didn't want to be one. You are clever they told me. I asked them so then why are you forcing me to become a teacher. I never got any good answers and that made me pessimistic. Work till we are financially stable...work till you get married...work, work, work in a profession where I had no dreams... no liking for... Well then, work for a little while... a temporary job.

The turbulent day:

With much hesitancy, I started serving as a teacher in one of 109 schools working under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Mission (SSAM), which is run by the Central Government of India. After completing my PTC (Primary-teacher Training Course), in June 2009 I joined as a full-time teacher in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) in Mitiyala, in the district of Amreli.

I must tell you a bit about KGBVs. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2009) is a scheme implemented in India, where the female rural literacy is below the national average. The scheme provides for a minimum reservation of 75% of the seats for girls belonging to the Schedule caste (SC), Schedule Tribe (ST), Other Backward Class (OBC) and minority communities and priority for the remaining 25%, to girls from families below poverty line (BPL). KGBV provided education and shelter to girls aged between 10 and 16.

The KGBV I joined was run in a rented building, in Mitiyala. This small village is situated in the coastal area and hence fishery is the primary occupation. There is a noticeable lack of literacy here. The population is extremely backward as they have hardly any contact with the rest of India. The inhabitants have a regressive outlook to life, women, and education and so on. In spite of being a novice I recognised the absurdity that I – who didn't want to teach – was responsible for teaching those who were not expected to be taught i.e. the girl child. The girls in my KGBV had either never attended school or left schooling halfway through; they fell under BPL category, had a single parent, were orphans or their parents were migrant workers.

Even though I was stuck in the job I decided to carry on working suitably. This was because in my hearts of hearts I am a sincere person. Yet I did not work wholeheartedly and I felt really terrible when I cheated on my job. I worked like an efficient robot, an automaton, and carried out my duties, charge sheet writing etc., day in and day out.

The students and the teachers shared the dormitory. We lived together. In fact I would say we were thrown together into this miserable existence. KGBVs are usual in the most remote area and in the night they can be quite scary. As we lived in this tiny world of ours together, over time, I developed a soft spot for the girls. Having said that, I must also say that we had no attachment to each other. I never asked them about their well-being or asked them to share their personal problems. It was not that I didn't care at all, I didn't know enough. I was taught to run the hostel efficiently, teach them the 3 Rs and that's it. I had no comprehension about values, ethics and such high moral ideas. Once some girls caught scabies and I was shocked and sickened. This was something I saw for the first time in my life and I was revolted. I avoided touching the affected girls. I felt overwhelmed by the situation so difficult to deal with. This incident took away the little will power I had and I reconsidered quitting my job. If it weren't for my financial difficulties I would have certainly given up. So I continued...feeling like an imposter.

Swaroop:

Rushita had to face many demons like the poverty, gender disparity, and the lack of teacher motivation and teacher training. Through my reflections I wish to set the context in which Rushita was living and working.

Gender disparity, discrimination against women based on their sex is a part and parcel of India's patriarchal society. Extreme poverty and lack of education are also some of the reasons for women's low status in society. Educating the girl child is considered as a bad investment because it is certain she will marry and leave her paternal home.

World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index- 2009: ranked India at 114 in the list of 155 countries of the world (UNDP, 2009). This index scans the gender gap in four major areas: health and life expectancy, economic participation and opportunity, educational achievements and political empowerment.

Sadly, there is no great progress made since Rushita started working in 2009. In 2015, India continues to have large education as well as economic gender gaps. The Global Gender Gap Report-2015 highlights glaring gender inequality in India. With a score of 0.664 (0.00 = inequality, 1.00 = equality) India ranks 108 out of 145 countries.

The Indian educational system is highly gender-biased (especially in rural areas) with Indian girls facing markedly dissimilar educational treatment, outcomes and opportunities to the boys. It is obvious that females in India commonly get fewer education opportunities than males and this lack of education is of concern from an equity standpoint.

Explaining Rushita's situation further I would like to highlight the lack of teacher-motivation and teacher-training in India.

Ramchandran (2005) suggests that if one were to ask a teacher working in the Government run schools, what is 'teacher-motivation'? The answer you would invariably get is – a motivated teacher is regular in attendance, does what she is told and reports to the

higher authority. Administrators at the district level, like the ones to whom Rushita reported to, would describe a motivated teacher as one who attended work regularly, did what s/he was told and was, in general, obedient. At higher levels, the authorities' views are not much different; they related motivation to low absenteeism, appropriate record-keeping, use of money for teaching and learning materials, giving work in the class and checking it. There is nothing related to quality-education in their view of teacher-motivation. This is the educational system I wanted to bring change to when I carried out my Ph.D. (Rawal, 2006).

There is a huge discrepancy between the problems faced by teachers inside the classroom and training programmes designed by administrators and 'outsider researchers' who have very little idea of a rural classroom (Gelda, et al. 2014; Rawal, 2006, pp. 12–13).

I would like to highlight some issues:

- workshops are held during the academic session, thus reducing teachers' days in class;
- these programmes add little value when the overall teaching environment – as for example the examination system – remains unchanged (see Rawal, 2006, p.33);
- labels like 'joyful learning' and 'child-centred learning' do not mean anything to teachers who still believe in the banking style of education (Freire, 1970);
- these training events are burdensome as they are neither planned well nor do they cater to the teachers' needs (Rawal, 2014).

If I were to answer the question about what I did about it, I would say I tried to undo barriers in rural India against better ways of teaching and better ways of life through the enhancement of life-skills through drama (LSTD) training (see for example Bahl, 2014 and Rawal 2014). LSTD is a programme developed by me and was created from my doctoral work.

Rushita:

A skill called 'life'

Days went by, and life continued in a dull manner. Time made me more responsible but it failed to bring in a definite clarity to my life and teachings. Pessimism had taken me into its grip. In 2013, I was introduced to a concept called life skills training. 'Ephemeral and ornamental appeal!' I thought, 'projects like this are ok for the upper class. It's all easy for Swaroop ma'am since she is a celebrity; not for the likes of me or my students'. The life skills programme sounded too good to be true. Although, I perceived the potential of this project, I was reluctant to consider it could, in fact, support the circumstances of my school, improve the quality of education or help my girls build their character and individuality.

Swaroop:

Similar to Brecht's observation in the poem 'Changing the Wheel' (Appendix 1), Rushita did not like the place she had come from, nor did she like the place she was going to;

she sat impatiently watching the ‘driver’ ‘change the wheel’. As the poet waited impatiently, with little faith in the outcome, so did Rushita.

How are we to extend a hand to a person who has experienced what Kozol (1991) describes a ‘savage inequality’? I am not surprised at Rushita’s distrust; she suffered an ‘unequal’ education and came to work in a ‘minority’ institute. No wonder she doubted my ‘privileged’ education. Rushita’s upbringing and societal norms created within her a habit of docility and submission, made her live in self-doubt (Freire, 1970), and experience what Dewey (1934, p. 272) termed as the ‘inertia of habit’. Rushita’s cynicism concerning values and ideals was a roadblock for her. The lack of dialogue and being treated as a ‘human resource’ was demotivating.



Image 2: Girls and teachers from various KGBV in Gujarat who did the ‘Life skills through drama course

Rushita:

A glimpse of myself

As the training advanced so did my bearing. By the second schedule I was able to widen my perspective towards the situations I had previously tried to avoid and lost my temper over. My life took a ‘U’-turn. The previously shy girl realised, for the first time, how it felt to be confident and clear. There were many life-changing things that we learnt but I believe the most important lesson I learnt was to have confidence in myself. I was taken aback when at the end of the first day, at reflection time Swaroop Ma’am turned to me and said, “Rushita, you are very intelligent; I can see it in your eyes. Why do you hold back your thoughts... let them free. They may be different, they may be conflicting to mine, but they

come from your experiences. If my experiences and understandings are true for me, your experiences too are true and hence your world vision is correct for you.”

Swaroop:

I believe empowerment is self-won. I wanted Rushita to see herself in the mirror. Not just the external self but also the caring, empathetic, young woman with strong values and incredible intelligence. My thoughts are in harmony with Greene (2003); she explains that if:

... teachers can begin to think of themselves as among ... those willing to confront the dread and keep alive the sense of ‘a possible happiness’, they might find themselves revisoning their life projects, existing proactively in the world...



Image 3: Rushita at the life skills through drama

Rushita:

A provoked learner

Human worth and dignity, respect for human needs, interests and points of view, equality and empathy were words which I felt but did not believe were a possibility for us,

the marginalized ones. I had never respected my values. I was not taught to respect values. During the course of the training I realised the importance of respecting 'my' values. I was encouraged to nourish my values...believe in them. For the first time I started rationalising that so what if I am a girl! So what if I am poor? I am a person of some consequence. I began to slowly and steadily ground the near escapist through the life skills lessons. I began to come out of the shell I had been living in, and expressed my feelings. Swaroop would repeatedly say, "don't become copies of me." She guided us to developing a strong, authentic version of ourselves and not being a hazy imitation of others. Everybody has a positive side she would say; I learned to embrace that.

Swaroop:

I wanted her to confront her 'dark times'. Brecht in his poem In Dark Times (Appendix 1) proposes that poetry is not possible in dark times, but he also indicates that silence is not an option.

Rushita:

No one is unimportant

Of course we learnt the core life skills. The timid girl learnt to communicate effectively. The indecisive girl learnt to take effective decisions and problem-solve. She learnt to trust the emotions she felt, manage them and regulate them. When Swaroop quoted Gandhiji-saying "Be the change that you wish to see in the world" it really touched my heart and I began to envision my life's goals.

Nevertheless, deep down I felt everything being taught here but was unable to comprehend it. The training introduced me to my true inner self and helped reveal the potential I never knew I possessed. Nobody is insignificant. I could break free from 'the imposter syndrome'. The programme has impacted my life so significantly that I have decided to pursue a Ph.D. on life skills. The finest part of the programme is that it chooses an experiential approach towards all learning. Additionally, it is a multi-layered programme, manageable to implement.

Swaroop:

In India, and I believe the world over, we talk of 'quality' in education, on 'more effective' education, on 'excellence in education.' However, we do not talk of 'equal education'. We talk of 'equality' and 'equity' for female, marginalised, vulnerable and invisible children. This means we are enabling their inclusion in the system, but we do not facilitate their retention in the system. We are concerned with the concept of giving a 'voice' but we do not 'teach them to talk'. We need to re-view education and create opportunities so teachers and their students have the capacity to reflect, imagine and become 'wide-awake' (Greene, 1996). Life skills enhancement is a significant way of achieving this and should be an integral part of the educational system because it is aimed at building psychosocial competencies in children.

Expecting children to change their behaviour merely by providing information is impracticable (Orley, 1997; WHO, 1999), because life skills cannot be learned or enhanced

on the basis of discussion alone. Learning life skills should be based on a dynamic, learner-centred, participatory methodology. Additionally, taking it a step further, I suggest that life skills education should embrace an experiential approach to learning, to create the conditions for social learning of life skills in diverse contexts.

Drama in education is a tool for child 'concerned' and 'experiential' education. The LSTD programme considers drama for learning and development of children and adolescents through the context of the Greek explanation for the word 'drama'- living through. The three main characteristics of drama in education are: learning through activity; problem clarification in group meetings; and discovering hidden meanings through self-experience. This is the distinctiveness of the LSTD life skills programme as it uses drama as a method to teach, making it experiential and multilayered.

Rushita:

Being the 'change'...

What I have gained through this course is not limited to the personal growth. My professional side was enriched as well. I developed a deep sense of empathy towards my girls. Since the training had imparted in me a problem-solving ability, I was able to overcome the scabies situation I shared earlier. Instead of feeling appalled by scabies, I now prepared an arrangement by which the girls could be treated separately with proper care, and most importantly without them feeling rejected. Because of the transmittable nature of scabies, appropriate steps were taken to prevent it from infecting others. The girls with the infection were made to bathe twice a day and were provided with fresh clothing. I personally applied Neem leaf extracts on the scabies-affected area, and saw that they were given the prescribed medicines. I was very happy that with my cautious approach and consistent efforts, I could successfully in eradicate the disease in my KGBV.

A similar situation emerged in 2013 when one of my students named Parvati [name changed] caught severe eczema. Again, I opted for home remedies and side-by-side employed the use of appropriate medication, hygiene and diet. Disgusted by such diseases previously, this time to make her feel cared for, I cleaned the infected area bare handed. It took nine long months to thoroughly get rid of the disease. Nevertheless this disease took a toll on Parvati's studies and she began suffering from an inferiority complex. I worked very hard to successfully get her through the stumbling blocks and enable her to get a hold of her education.



Fig 4- The girls in Rushita's KGBV

Swaroop:

The enhancement of Life skills and the skills of empathy in the LSTD class facilitated Rushita to move away from her debilitated, apathetic self. She learnt about empathy in the LSTD class and put it to practice in her KGBV. One of the consequences of life skills education, which I realised through the teaching of it, is that you cannot teach life skills effectively without sharpening your own.

Nonetheless, I turn back to the expressions 'wide-awakeness' (Greene, 1996), imagination, concern and caring. Imagination is important in the lives of teachers, as is

empathy, because imagination enables us to think or visualise a different kind of world. Greene (2000) links imagination to 'a sense of possibility', our capacity to respond to others and, to the co-creation of a humane society. And I link empathy to the capacity to 'feel with' and create caring communities, be a critical and creative thinker (Rawal, 2006). Empathy enables a teacher to see from another's point of view, become non-judgemental, caring and democratic.

Connecting empathy and imagination I believe these are the values that offer a hope and light for a better future.

Rushita:

A glimpse of the 'change':

I began teaching life skill to the girls from the 6th and 7th Std [Grade] but the games and activities were so interesting that the onlookers from other Stds would beg me to let them join in. I found this motivating as I did not have to persuade anyone to come to the life skills class: they would run to join in.

'Understanding Emotions' was the first chapter. When I started teaching I noticed that the girls understood but were extremely inhibited. They were too shy to participate as I think the experience of talking about feelings and reflecting was extraordinary and novel to them. They were undemonstrative during the individual activities, but could perform well in groups. One activity that worked very well, in fact it was a hit, was creating tableaux to portray their emotions. Within three to four weeks of starting I got first-class responses from them. Interestingly, the girls who would hardly speak in front of the class were now expressing themselves well. I was impressed by the way these young girls were performing and their spontaneity was commendable. Once when I asked all the girls to make a statue they quickly got together and made a statue of a market (fig-5). Notice the details, e.g. the statue of a dog in the right hand corner.



Image 5: Group statue of a market, Rushita's KGBV

The girls found this particular activity intriguing since it became a medium of expressing their feelings and emotions. In fact during recess time I often saw them making tableaux with the younger girls.

They had never been given an opportunity to appreciate life and no one appreciated them. Through the life skills classes and during reflection time the girls got to know themselves and I got to know my students for the first time. I was impressed by their profound reflections and imagination.

On one occasion, while a girl was portraying sorrow through tableaux said:

The incident I am portraying is the most awful one of my life. Once when I had fever my mother came to take me home. She did not have any money for the tickets, nor could she afford any medication. She had to borrow money to take me to the hospital.

The girl then burst into tears. There was a deathly silence. Only her sobbing could be heard. Her heartache moved me to reflect how adversely this incident might have affected her tender mind. Imagine, I was there all the time and I did not know what my student was going through! My failure to have missed such grief made me feel negligent. I was abandoning my values. It struck me like a bolt of lightning and I resolved to be 'someone there' for these girls, someone who they can share everything with. Most importantly I decided never to abandon them.

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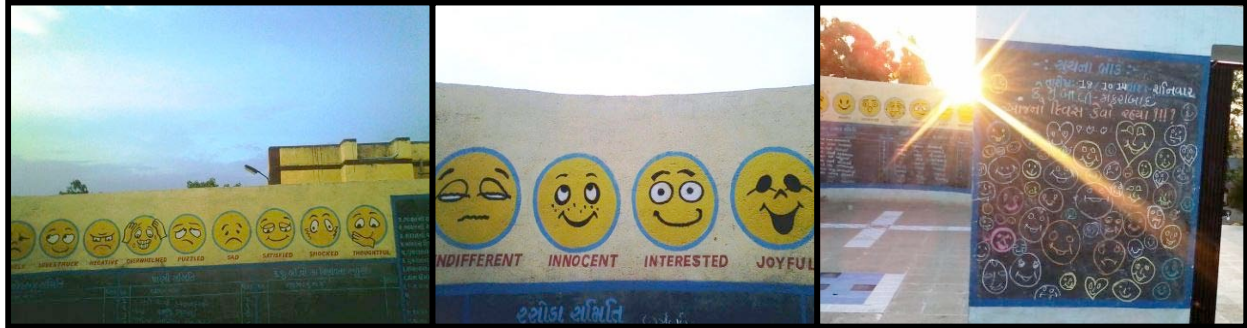


Image 6: Learning about emotions – painting emoticons on the walls and a board at the entrance

Swaroop:

Here I would like to bring to focus, ‘living-educational-theory’ and ‘contradiction of values’ (Whitehead, 2000), and imagination and reflection.

The earlier lines: ‘My failure to have missed... I decided never to abandon them’, demonstrate Rushita’s realisation of the contradiction of her values, which brings me to my argument that it is possible to engage in effective practice without the knowledge of theory. Rushita had no theoretical knowledge and yet she had begun to realise that she was negating her values in practice. It was only much later, a year after she completed her LSTD course that she learnt about Living Theory research. Rushita was energised by the action-reflection cycle explained by Whitehead (1989) when she asked: a) What is my concern? b) Why am I concerned? c) What am I going to do about it? The answers to these questions became ‘life-affirming and life-enhancing values’ (Whitehead, 2014, p. 82) that began to bring clarity to her practice. The more she asked herself what, why and how, the more her values became persuasive. Her practice started becoming a living process. All the KGBV teachers had learned the principles of action research and most had started following them to carry out their research in LSTD; however Rushita saw beyond the action and perceived her values and the contradiction of them in her actions. This, I believe, was the beginning of her quest to discover her living-educational-theory.

A living-theory methodology for improving practice and generating knowledge begins with asking questions like:

- How do I improve what I am doing?
- Why is that which is happening here a problem for me?
- Keeping my values in mind how do I negate the contradiction I am experiencing here?

Each person has a unique living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 1989) in improving practice and generating knowledge. This is because each individual operates within their distinctive work, cultural and social boundaries and life.

Whitehead (2008, p. 104) argues that, a living-theory is an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others... 'To make it clearer I suggest that we view educational influences in the broadest sense. In the wider sense educational influences are those experiences of life in the social and natural environment that result in the formation of a scheme of life and values.

Using their imaginations enabled Rushita and her students to symbolise their experiences; possibilities were seen and lives were transformed. The 'as if' world was not a pretend world; on the contrary when the girls indulged their imagination they were guided to the real event through reflections and reflections on the experience. This is because the LSTD programme dealt with the affairs of people even when they became inanimate objects and animals (for example see Rawal, 2006, p.241).

Reflection is part and parcel of LSTD as it draws on drama in education and encourages the use of reflective journals. Dewey (1933, p.78) suggests that, 'we do not learn from experience ... we learn from reflecting on experience'. Student reflections may happen by chance but in the LSTD class-reflections, deliberate structuring was carried out to facilitate reflections. It was used while making the rules the class would follow (see in Rawal, 2006, pp. 104-108) during the class and at the end of the class (see in Rawal, 2006, pp. 109-110 and pp. 112-117) and with the use of reflective diaries/ journals (Rawal, 2006, pp. 181-184). Linking reflection to imagination, I believe they both make the ordinary extraordinary and thus make it possible to see new perspectives in familiar, everyday situations.

Rushita:

Revelation of confidence

Before the life skills programme, the students who were scared and hesitant to approach me started to sit with me and talk to me and I too could now talk to them. I was fascinated by the way my wards were developing. Learning about emotions, learning how to manage them was taught through drama games and activities like drawing, mask making and statues. The girls learnt to convey their emotions through games which were easy to play. My students, who did not know about 'feelings', did not know about their likes and dislikes (nobody had ever asked them before), could now express their feelings, likes and dislikes. They began to appreciate their own and others' abilities in daily life, these potentials which lay hidden deep down. They did not even know they possessed them. Drama in education encourages reflection. No, I should say that drama in education is impossible to complete without reflections. I encouraged my students to reflect just the way I was encouraged to reflect. They started writing their reflections in diaries, which were standard exercise books. I requested them to share their problems with me. For my students, girls who were neglected, girls who had experienced extreme gender bias, girls whom no one cared for or about, sharing their problem was life changing. They were exhilarated to learn that I wanted to hear about her problems. One girl mentioned, in her

what they felt, what they experienced, about their lives and so on. This enabled her to take concrete steps to help them.

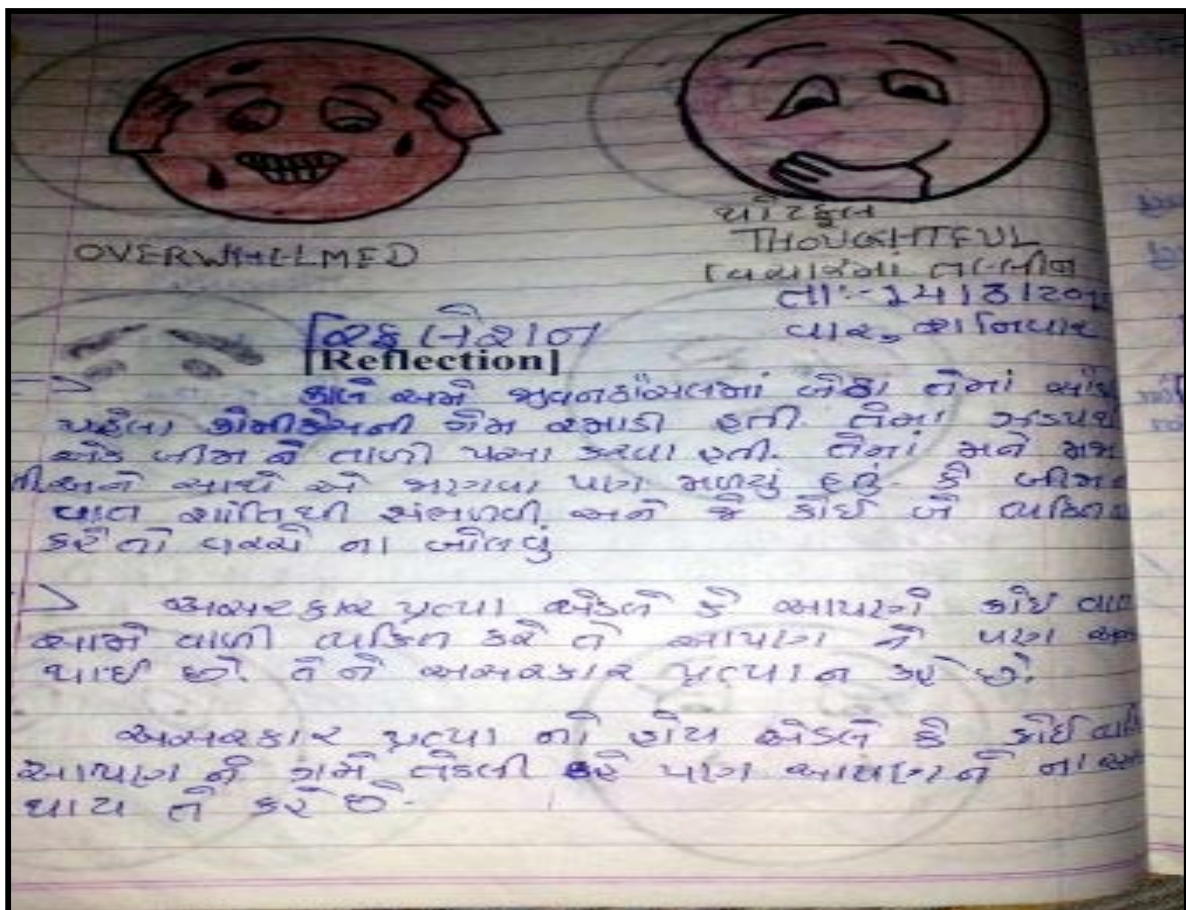


Image 8: A reflective diary written by Rushita's student

Rushita:

Certainty in practice

During the learning of the life skills programme we were introduced to assessment of the skills and action research. There were many forms we had to fill up (Appendices 6-15, in Rawal, 2006). When my students were filling up the children's work she entitled, 'My Mother' (Appendix 3) Vaishali [name changed] walked up to me and said sadly, 'Madam, I don't have a mother so I cannot fill this form nor can I draw a picture of her'. I was a bit baffled, but did not show it. I, without hesitation, said, 'Imagine her and then you can draw her from your imagination'. She smiled and gladly went on with her work. Two thoughts struck me; first, I was surprised by my decisiveness and ability to gently handle a potentially distressing situation and second, that my student had responded to my suggestion positively.

Swaroop:

Learning life skills is a liberating experience. In Rushita's and her students' chaotic world of continuous want, poverty, marginalisation, violence, it was like a breath of fresh air. Drama and the arts enabled the awakening of these girls. The 'teaching' machine, with the gift of imagination, was transforming herself into a caring, empathetic person.

Rushita:*A portrait of a girl*

An ordinary girl. Her name is Vaishali. Ordinary, yet different. I often see nervousness on her face, but that is not unusual as many of my students are reticent. She is good at studies and drawing. Working with her during the life skills classes I noticed that her behaviour was different from the rest. I caught her attention from the first class, 'Understanding Emotions' when I asked all the girls questions like:

- Do we all have feelings?
- Are all feelings 'okay' to have?
- Can somebody feel two emotions at one time?
- Can you hide your feelings?
- Do you think there are times when people should hide their feelings?
- Can feelings change?

During reflection time I could feel she wanted to answer but she wouldn't say a word. This surprised me because we were not strangers; I was her teacher from the 5th Std, two years to date.

I wondered why the girls were so unforthcoming and uncommunicative, especially Vaishali. I must say I was confused. I reflect and realised that I had never tried to understand my students before I learnt about life skills. Additionally, if something like not giving answers had happened before my transformation I would have yelled at them and lost my temper.

At this time, I kept calm and tried to encourage her to talk. I felt Vaishali wanted to say something but she just looked at me quietly. She was always found in a group of girls, rarely alone. I understood from her peers that she was often quarrelsome yet I had seen her helping them, too. Her behaviour was mysterious. Vaishali doesn't take credit for helping others, she doesn't seek acknowledgement, moreover doesn't attach importance to her personal needs. I feel that she is very insecure and has low self-esteem.

Our relationship grew in quantum leaps since the first class. I realised that she is not blank but she seems to be preoccupied. I got the impression that she was somebody who was distressed, somebody who wanted to talk but doesn't know where to start.

I was very surprised when one day she came to me and said that she wanted to leave schooling. She went on to say that it was her family that wanted her to leave the KGBV. So I in turn asked her what she wanted, did she also want to leave school? I was relieved, upset and frankly disturbed to hear her answer. She went on to say her father and her father's sister, who lived with them, wanted her to leave studies despite the fact that she wanted to

continue. When her aunt visited our KGBV, she also asserted that the family wanted to discontinue Vaishali's education.

School dropout was a considerable issue and girls who leave the school, usually never return to complete their studies. I could not accept this as I realised it would affect my students' future. Life skill training in Gujarat was launched to support a more stable and improved schooling system for girls who studied and lived in the KGBVs. It was launched for the protection of the adolescent girls; in view of that how could I forsake my girls? I believe by keeping quiet and not doing something concrete I would be an 'absconder'. My values, which I had begun to understand by now, suggested I had to take concrete steps to help Vaishali.



Image 9: Learning to analyse the forms research filled in by KGBV students; a part of training the action research project



Image 10: With the advance group post KGBV

Swaroop:

School restructuring could begin with the teacher. Greene (1966, p. 268) brings to mind Dewey's views concerning school improvement which comprised an intellectual and emotional outlook, and Theodore Brameld's proposal that schools should play an active role in social reconstruction. She continues, suggesting that, 'we may have reached the point in educational history where the two activities are continuous: It may be necessary to confirm the work done in overcoming deficits by helping to involve people in remaking their own impinging world'.

I believe we have reached a stage where we teachers need to reach out to the community, by problematising our work, enabling dialogue and negotiation. I believe if we leave it to the 'authorities' we will continue carrying out clerical tasks like polling duty (Election commission of India, 2015) and so on. We will continue seeing our students as 'enrolment' used to mask economic concerns. We need to transform into teachers who will

ask their students to pose their own questions while sitting in the circle writing in their reflective journals. We will have to make independent judgements about how to teach effectively the curricula that is thrust on us. Silence in the classroom and the invisibility of the students must be broken. We need a pedagogy of hope for the oppressed (Freire,1994).

Rushita:

A possibility of equity

I ached when I saw her pain and worked hard to 'set her free'. I on one side did not know enough and yet on the other side I recognised her struggle. I felt for the first time that 'knowing not enough' was not acceptable. The critical incident when Vaishali talked to me about the conflict between her wish and her parent's wish moved me to confront myself and the level at which I was teaching life skills. I realised I had only superficially touched life skills enhancement. I realised it is not only about activities and games. I reorganised my lessons. The first thing I did was make a problem solving flow sheet, just like the way Swaroop Ma'am taught and renegotiated my lessons. The word 'dialogue' kept reoccurring. I realised I was not having an authentic dialogue with my wards.

I started inviting the girls to meet me and talk, individually. I worked at becoming their friend. Gradually they started to confide in me.

I learnt that Vaishali's mother had left her when she was a little girl. Her father was an alcoholic. Moreover, he usually came home inebriated and created a ruckus at home. He verbally abused her and consequently her relationship with her father was doomed to failure. She could not talk to her father, let alone express her wants and desires. In a state where there is prohibition, a person who drinks is bad enough so imagine what she felt knowing that her father was an alcoholic! As a result she could not reveal her problems concerning her relationship with her father and about her mother deserting her to anyone. I realised that this concealed an introverted indication of misery and this was what I had construed as signs of insecurity.

I resolved to do something for her. After few months of starting the life skills lessons with the girls there was a huge function in school which Mrs. Rajashree Birla, a Director on the Board of all the major Aditya Birla Group of Companies, a celebrated philanthropist and others were going to attend. I decided to take a risk and suggested that Vaishali anchor the programme.

After that day there was a defining transformation in Vaishali. She started to take greater interest in the life skills lessons and consequently her behaviour started to change. The best gift I received from her when she returned from the holidays was her empowerment. She told me that her father wanted her to leave studies finally and get married. Child-marriage is still a problem in the lives of the marginalised girls' lives. She very confidently told me that she had put her foot down and refused to not only not to leave her education half way through but also refused to even consider marriage until she was an adult. She added that she did not care if he disowned her but that she would stick to her values and dreams.

Gradually her relationship with her father improved. Happily one day she informed that he had stopped drinking. The transformation from an anxious troubled girl to a confident young one was, I think, a huge victory for me. Vaishali now has become the permanent anchor for all our school programmes. She participates in all the school extra-curricular activities. She has a friendly relationship with her peers and is always seen taking care of the little ones. Vaishali won a Gold medal this year and was also voted as the school Head Girl.

I had transformed too, from the young girl who was unconfident, filled with self-doubt, who found her life insufferable and despised teaching, to a person who is empowered and in turn desired to empower others.

Swaroop:

I believe this is the confluence of Rushita's values and teaching philosophy. She had developed enough to enable a reflective and dialectic relationship with her wards. I believe this shows the transformation and harmonious relationship between Rushita's practice and theory.

The children were empowered through the dialogic process that was initiated and maintained through LSTD. She 'modelled' democratic behaviour and did not attempt to control their thinking and actions. Democracy was not a noun but a verb to her; because democracy is in relation to a dialogue, it is in relation to empathy, caring and compassion, in relation to social justice and activism, and also social imagination and working towards the common good.

Rushita:

An unending ending

But my story does not end here. I remember Swaroop reading out to us 'Having made a discovery I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently' (Polanyi, 1958, p.143). We were introduced to the writings of Whitehead and 'the living-educational-theory'. She told us how she did not know anything about research and did not have any theoretical knowledge when she started her Ph.D.; or how her Director of Studies, Phil Chambers, facilitated her entry into the world of research; how 'I' as a living contradiction enabled her to look at her fallible pedagogy and bring changes she valued into her education and practice. She told us how simple it was (not really, but she pushed us and by making it simple taught us to fly). All we needed was to follow a process (Whitehead, 2000):

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

I imagine a way forward.

I act.

I evaluate.

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

But importantly, she pointed out, that we need to produce an autobiographical account of events that are important to us and that would help us and others understand our ontological and social values (Huxtable, 2014). Taking it further, we need to write our

narratives so not only can it be validated but we can share it. I want to share my story in the small KGBV-schools world where I live. I want others like me to believe it is possible to tell their story so that other KGBV teachers' eyes can 'see', imagine, tap on their courage and transform ... not only themselves but also the girls they live with and the creation of a caring, humane society.

Swaroop:

Writing this paper was not easy for Rushita, nor was it unproblematic for me. In the introduction of this paper I suggested that getting my student-teachers to write was a difficult task; it continues to be so. I believe we could accomplish the task of writing this paper only because Rushita actually wrote extensively in her reflective diary. Reflections enabled her to return to her experiences, attend to her feelings and clarify her values. She had a remarkable urge to change, to improve, to perceive the contradictions of the values she experienced in her practice and take concrete steps to negate the contradictions.

Importantly, I too negated the contradiction that I experienced as a teacher educator. Earlier I wrote, '[h]owever, if I wish to claim credit to being creative and faithful to my practice I believe I should have found a way ahead'. My approach to creativity is more as a means and not as the goal itself. I believe I embodied the qualities of a creative person (DeVore, Horton and Lawson, 1989) when I accepted a positive attitude towards the novel experience of writing a collaborative paper, and was motivated to solve the problem of the dearth of academic writing in Gujarat on my own by encouraging Rushita to write. I believe I took a calculated risk, fully knowing that my ideas and values pertaining to this paper may be attacked by others.

I acted with high self-esteem and self-confidence and was faithful to my belief in life skills education for the betterment of all. Through the LSTD programme I have assisted positive behavioural intentions and improved psychosocial competence in my student-teacher and she in her students. I believe I have been able to enable a teacher to intervene and say how she believes things ought to be. All this was not for my benefit but to enable a new beginning towards equal education for a better way of life. As Lord Krishna says to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, which is a part of the Mahabharata (Glossary):

... from the viewpoint of societal welfare you should perform your actions. Whatever actions a role-model perform, common people follow. Whatever standards they set by their actions, all the world pursues. (Bhagavad Gita, 3:20-21)

Glossary:

- Gujarat- A state in India
- SSAM- Sarva Siksha Abhiyan Mission
- KGBV-Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
- LSTD-life skills enhancement through drama
- Gandhiji- Mahatma Gandhi
- Std –Grade

- Neem leaf-Neem is a tree in the mahogany family Meliaceae. Products made from neem have been used in India for over two millennia for their medicinal properties. They are said to be antifungal, antibacterial, antiviral.
- Bhagavad Gita: is a great philosophical work that played the same role in the history of India, as the New Testament did in the history of countries of the European culture. Both these books powerfully proclaim the principle of Love-Bhakti as the basis of spiritual self-perfection of man. The Bhagavad Gita also presents a number of different Yogic and Vedantic philosophies, explaining the meaning and purpose of life and existence. Philosophical truths are expounded in the Bhagavad Gita in the form of a dialogue between Krishna- incarnation of God and His friend Arjuna before a military combat. The Gita is a part of the epic Mahabharata

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Appendix 1

'In Dark Times'

They won't say: when the walnut tree shook in the wind

But: when the house painter crushed the workers.

They won't say: when the child skimmed a flat stone across the rapids
But: when the great wars were being prepared for.

They won't say: when the woman came into the room

But: when the great powers joined forces against the workers.

However, they won't say: the times were dark

Rather: why were their poets silent?

(Bertolt Brecht)

'Changing the Wheel'

I sit by the roadside

The driver changes the wheel.

I do not like the place I have come from.

I do not like the place I am going to.

Why with impatience do I

Watch him changing the wheel?

(Bertolt Brecht)

Appendix 2

'Wink-and-Murder' Game

All the participants stand in a circle so that all are visible to each other. One of the participants will be identified as the "Killer" who will murder/kill the participants by winking at them. The person killed will scream and fall down. Another participant from the group is identified to act as the police/detective, who will stand in the middle of the circle and catch the killer as s/he winks. All participants are instructed to keep looking around the circle and

establishing eye contact with others. Once the killer is caught, s/he will become the detective and the facilitator will identify a new killer.

Note for the facilitator: Inform the participants that you will take a round behind their circle and as you walk, you will identify the killer by a small pat, pinch etc. so that others don't know who the murderer is.

Appendix 3

(adapted from Appendix 8 p. 46, in Rawal, 2006)

My Mother-3

My Name-

I like to talk to my mother. Yes or No

I can talk to my mother without getting scared. Yes or No

My mother plays with me. Yes or No

I like it when my mother _____

My mother gets angry when I _____

I get angry when my mother _____

My mother feels sad when I _____

I feel sad when my mother _____

I wish my mother would _____

Draw a picture of your mother.