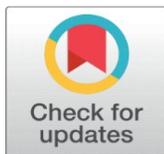


BUILDING SKILLS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN THROUGH STORYTELLING

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ABSTRACT

Stories have the power to engage any age group of children as they all enjoy listening to it. They nurture feelings of empathy and compassion and help us connect with people, cultures and emotions. They also assist as a gateway for character-building and socio-emotional learning, especially for the younger children.

Building life skills in primary children in the age group of 6-8 years can be a tough task but stories ease the work and make it enjoyable and bring happiness for them. A study was done by preservice teachers during the internship period on primary school children. Through a consistent effort of narrating stories was used to build skills like problem solving, critical thinking, patience, discovery etc. Data was collected by observing the classes where storytelling was done and the work done in the reflective journal by the children. The data was analysed using analytical memoing methods.

The children in the class where storytelling was used showed a marked increase in learning the skills and handling day to day small issues in the classroom. Our findings provide a basis for the benefits of storytelling and suggest that a simple and inexpensive intervention may help alleviate happiness and build upon the life skills in children from a very young age.

Keywords: Life Skills, Storytelling, Preservice teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

If you go down the memory path back to your childhood many stories will come to your mind-Rabbit and the tortoise, Cinderella and Snow white and the Seven Dwarfs, to name a few. These stories have the magical power to take you away into a different world. Stories provide an involvement to children who live in a fast-paced, information driven era.

Research has proved that children's body responds to the stories, there is a release of different brain chemicals at different parts of the story narrative. At the beginning of the story, there is no affect and no brain chemicals are released, but as the story proceeds, cortisol is released which shows that the mind and imagination are being stirred.

When the apex of the story is reached or when we are at the turning point or at the predictive end or a thought-provoking end new mysteries seem to be unfolding, the hormone oxytocin is released. If the story makes the listeners laugh then dopamine is released. This chemical is part of the brain's reward system. It is a feel-good neurotransmitter that contributes to feelings of satisfaction and pleasure. Besides the benefits of vocabulary enhancement, happiness, skills such as problem solving, empathy and many more can be introduced through stories.

According to Bruner (1986), " deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particulars of experience and to locate the experience in time and place. (narrative)" In children one can engage them with thinking, emotions, and imagination.

They get so involved while listening to stories that they participate with both mind and body as they enter the narrative world and react to it. They can be woven into the lives of children in ways of which they may not be conscious of. Stories support teachers reach children in ways they cannot with other methods which are not so interesting for them.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, a famous psychoanalyst, storyteller and author refers story as a "gift so simple that it requires no ribbon for wrapping, yet which is so miraculous." Stories have helped children during lockdown, at the time of Covid 19 pandemic, they were able to sustain them in difficult times. They help to see the power of love, mercy, generosity and strength in the world.

Andrew Peau wrote Write Better: A Lifelong Editor on Craft, Art and Spirituality, explains how stories bypass the rational mind in a constructive way because they engage the heart and the emotions, and therein lies their power. For this reason, we remember a story long after any other kind of information enters our mind.

2. TYPES OF STORIES

There are many types of stories, which can be told to various age group of children and can have varied theme. Some of them are as mentioned below-

- Cultural/traditional stories
(including Dreamtime or other Indigenous stories)
- Fables and fairytales
- Myths and legends
- Fictional stories
- Recounts and personal stories

3. LEARNING LESSONS WITH STORIES

Stories can benefit children in numerous ways, through them we can include activities which scaffold children's thinking and learning beyond the script. They can lead children to explore significant, relevant issues and make their learning more meaningful and memorable for a long time. It develops children's ability to use higher-order thinking skills, such as analysing, critical and creative thinking. It also develops their social and emotional skills, such as turn-taking, respect for the views of others and empathy. In order to work effectively, it needs carefully prepared language support. Children's learning can be extended and deepened in many ways but most effective can be by -

- Thinking from within stories
- Thinking beyond stories

4. THINKING FROM WITHIN STORIES

Thinking from within stories means going beyond what happens in the narrative and reflecting on the motivations, problems, feelings and actions of the characters. These can be explored through activities such as:

➤ STORY TUNNEL

In this way two children are involved, they face each other and are given lines to read, others listen to them but actively participate. One child takes on the role of one of the main characters at a point of conflict in the story. This child then walks slowly down the 'tunnel' and, as they pass, other children individually say pre-prepared sentences either supporting or criticizing their actions or giving them encouragement and advice. At the end, the child reports back on what was said and children deliberate what was most exciting, astonishing or helpful.

➤ STORY INTERVIEW

A child who seems confident and has good communication skills takes the role of a key character and others in the class ask questions about their feelings and actions. The teacher can give pre-prepared notes as the basis for their answers or get them to respond. Sometimes the teacher has to take this role as the children are too young to handle independently.

➤ COLLABORATION

In collaboration, children imagine and reconstruct a version of the story from one character's point of view. For example, a modern version of the snow white and the seven dwarfs can be told by one child as snow white and other children as dwarfs. This helps to develop children's awareness of different perspectives and 'truths' in stories and lays the foundations for critical thinking.

5. THINKING BEYOND STORIES

Thinking beyond stories means focusing on pertinent issues in the story that children can relate to their own personal experience, lives and world. They can later have a discussion on it or write about it also. These can be explored through activities -

➤ FINDING THE MESSAGE

Children find the moral or values message of the story. In the old story 'The thirsty crow, children think about how to solve problems hence they develop the problem-solving skill. This can then be the basis of a class discussion how to think and solve a problem. In the traditional story like 'The ant and the grasshopper' children identify the message that it's important to work as well as play. This can then be the basis of a class discussion: How important is work? How important is play? How can you balance work and play?

➤ ME AND THE STORY

Children recount the content of the story and their own experience. If a story is about cruelty to animals, then they can discuss with each other about animals. They can ask questions to each other -Have you ever been to a zoo? What was it like? Is it fair to keep animals in a zoo? With stories that explore positive values, such as being kind or helpful, or negative values such as loneliness or exclusion, it may also be appropriate to get children to think about their own attitudes and behaviour. How are you kind to the animals? How can you help an injured animal on the road?

➤ STORY LANGUAGE

When a story is told in a class where children have different mother tongue- multilingual class, children can identify and share, or even teach others, how to say key phrases from the story in their own languages. This boosts children's pride and self-esteem in their mother language as well as creating interest in the similarities and differences in different languages.

Thinking beyond stories also includes doing activities that link stories to content from other areas of the curriculum, such as science or geography, and activities that develop children's intercultural competence and awareness of social justice issues, such as gender equality and racism. By continually looking for opportunities to extend and deepen children's learning beyond the script of stories, the teacher achieves language learning outcomes and makes the experience of learning English or Hindi or any other language more engaging and worthwhile.

➤ TEACHING LIFE SKILLS

Learning and behaviour during children's early years are foundational not only for success at school, but also for contributing meaningfully to the society. Early experiences at home and school help to shape the nature and quality of the brain, supporting the development of a range of early skills, including cognitive, social, self-regulation and other skills.

As parents and teachers, we can harness of our experiences and re-telling them to children. We can create a collection of stories over time that have impact and serve the children up at appropriate moments. The skills such as being helpful, perseverance, honesty, time management can be taught through stories.

6. MOSTLY PRIMARY LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS STORYTELLING IS FREQUENTLY ORGANIZED AROUND THREE STAGES:

➤ **PRE-STORY ACTIVITIES** – The activities which are done before telling the story. It motivates and engages children with the story as well as introduce or reuse language and vocabulary that may be needed or is added. This is sometimes done through schema activation by showing the cover page of the book. It can also be done by writing the title on the blackboard for prediction about the story.

➤ **DURING-THE-STORY ACTIVITIES** -The story is read from the text book, big book or a story book or sometimes narrated. Props, puppets can be used as an aid for making the story interesting. One has to keep children attentive and focused on guiding and supporting their understanding.

➤ **POST-STORY ACTIVITIES**- Once the story is narrated then encourage children to use some or all the story language and give a personal response. This can be done by making them draw a story character they like, write anything about the character, what did they learn from the story, it can also be writing about a different end to the story.

These three stages are often used regularly by the teacher in a classroom and may also include a learning review at the end. Together they provide a strong and flexible framework for using a wide range of stories such as digital stories, coursebook stories, picture books and children's readers.

7. CHOICE OF THE STORY

Stories appeal to children, and that allows a teacher to embed lot of new vocabulary, concepts, and grammar into the story. For this study, the preservice teachers choose the story based on the following-

- Age of the class/children
- Language skills they possess.
- New sounds, vocabulary, skills to be embed
- Characters and events within the story to appeal to the audience
- Length of the story.

8. METHODOLOGY

At University of Delhi, Bachelors in Elementary Education(B.El.Ed) is a four-year elementary teacher training course in which pre service teachers get an opportunity to be in a school for the practicums of different nature-school contact program, teaching in pairs, material development and internship. During these practicums, they get an opportunity to observe the classes, teach the students, interact with the students, be part of the various activities in the school.

The pre service teachers are required to be in school for 24 weeks in the fourth year of the course. A range of activities are conducted by the preservice teachers in the primary classroom during the period of internship in a school. Teaching various topics through role play, storytelling, demonstration etc not only makes the teaching learning effective but also build various skills amongst them.

A batch of 52 final year students were part of the internship in 12 different schools. Four interns were placed in a government school in central Delhi they were part of this study. They were teaching language in class 1,2 and 3. During teaching they taught the following skills/themes through stories besides grammar, vocabulary etc.

S.No	Class/Number of Students	Theme	Story	Source
1	III (40 Students)	Thinking	Tenali Rama aur Ghamandi Raja (Tenali Rama and proudy king)	Arvind Gupta toys
2	III (40 Students)	Evoke fantasy worlds with infinite possibilities	Little Red Riding Hood	Lady bird Books
3	III (40 Students)	Danger of greed	The Golden Goose	Lady bird Books
4	II (42 Students)	Value of being helpful	The Lion and the Mouse	National Book Trust and you tube
5	II (42 Students)	Perseverance and pacing oneself	The Hare and the Tortoise	National Book Trust and you tube
6	II (42 Students)	Danger of greed	The Golden Goose	Lady bird Books
7	I (38 Students)	Value of being helpful	The Lion and the Mouse	National Book Trust and you tube
8	I (38 Students)	Danger of greed	The Golden Goose	Lady bird Books

9. FINDINGS

The qualitative study investigates the use of stories in learning skills in primary classes in a Delhi school. In particular, it examines the pre service teachers' and the children's habit of using the skills and changes in practice over six months. The study uses a multimethod approach including observations, interviews, the work in the reflective journal of the children and memoing. Memos create an important extra level of narrative: an interface between the participant's data, the researcher's interpretation and wider theory.

The data for the present paper were collected classes 1-III. This class totalled 120 children, 38 children of class I, 42 children of class II and 40 Children of class III. The primary purpose of memoing in qualitative research is to foster reflexivity and analytical thinking during the data collection and analysis processes.

- The preservice teachers observed children of all classes helping each other during collaborative work or in the playground. There was a student with physical disability in class III. Students of his class were always willing to pick his school bag and assist him in coming to the class from the main gate of the school. The students always included him in all the tasks, games and activities.
- During Midday meal distribution, the children were seen standing in the line and waiting for their turn. They were asking the helper to put small portion of food only, which showed that they were not at all greedy about the food. Waiting for their turn showed that they had acquired to be patient which was not seen earlier.
- While line up for the games period, the children used to quietly stand in the line and move for the class.
- The pre service teachers always gave work in the reflective journal after the story session. It was either drawing or writing about the favourite character or their learning from the story. For class III children, situational incidents were told and they were supposed to give solutions to it.

Wells (1986) argued that storytelling is a fundamental means of meaning making. Teachers are experts in their field and, as a result, are accustomed to using sophisticated language that can intimidate and overload a novice. Storytelling breaks down the communication barriers between experts and novices and forms an accessible bridge for both to meet intellectually.

10. CONCLUSION

Storytelling is both a science and an art. They bring incongruent information in their life in a meaningful and connected way. Educators can use storytelling as an opportunity to develop numerous language foci including making meaning (listening skills), vocabulary, grammar, understanding of stories/narratives and more.

The exercise of teaching skills through stories benefitted the children in acquiring skills for life at a very young age. Simple stories reminded them of skills which become part and parcel of their lives.

Stories offer multi-dimensional understanding. They shape how children think, what they believe, how they interact with the world and how they determine what is and isn't important. True stories that detail real life experience and tales that hold the listener or reader in suspense are especially applicable and meaningful (Peau, 2019).

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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