

Reports

A Workshops on Storytelling and Creative Writing

Under the Banner of Katha Mach Katha Manch, 30 January 2014

Kusuma Foundation



Image 1: Workshop in progress
“A good story is always more impressive than a glittery picture”

Introduction

Storytelling is one of the most ancient art forms, and continues to this day as a vibrant part of culture throughout the world. However, the traditional Indian custom of passing down epics and village folklore from one generation to the next through storytelling is slowly dying due to increasing globalization and the all-pervasive media. At one time, stories were a part of the day-to-day teaching-learning processes, but in the current educational system, storytelling has become a lost art; it is considered nothing more than a leisure activity. This workshop on storytelling and creative writing was organized by Katha Manch to reinvent the art of storytelling and story writing.

Katha Manch, a group dedicated to the use of stories as a pedagogical tool, aspires to fill the

gap between storytelling and learning. Katha Manch is an informal group comprising school teachers, teacher trainees, field facilitators, university professors, students, etc., associated with the field of education. Most of the group members have witnessed the power of stories and storytelling, not only in capturing the attention of children, but also in improving their reading and writing skills, furthering their imaginative and cognitive skills, sensitizing them and developing tolerance towards different cultures and worldviews. A one-day “Storytelling and Creative Writing Workshop” was organised by Katha Manch in collaboration with Kusuma Foundation on the 30th of January 2014, in Hardoi District of UP, India with the objective of encouraging children to:

- (a) Read and listen to stories,
- (b) think scientifically and critically on different aspects of stories, and
- (c) learn to develop and write stories on their own.

Participant Profile

The participants included 50 students of class IX and X, and teachers from 25 schools of Hardoi District, where Kusuma Foundation has been carrying out various intervention programmes. The teachers accompanying these students also actively participated in the workshop. Experts (Yashika Chandna, Madhu Gupta and Vijay Kumar) from Katha Manch were invited to conduct the workshop from Delhi.

Sessions

The workshop was divided into two sessions, pre-lunch and post-lunch. The pre-lunch session started with introductions. Participants were encouraged to introduce themselves by adding a qualifying noun starting with the first letter of

their name, for example, charming Chanchal, sweet Shreya, *ashavaadi* Akash (optimistic Akash), etc. Children were encouraged to share things that they like doing. The idea was to help the participants overcome their hesitation and encourage them to interact freely with the resource persons and with each other. Familiarity with the hobbies of the participants helped the resource persons to understand the inclination of the participants towards reading and writing stories. After the introductions, the experts asked questions related to different aspects of stories—characters, characterization, contextualization, narrative style, flow of the story, etc. Participants were encouraged to think and express their views on why stories were important. They were asked to express their opinion on various kinds of stories such as historical, social issue-based, biographical, horror, fantasy, investigative, science-fiction, etc. There was a discussion on how stories impact a person’s worldview, how stories are part of our daily life and how the same story can be read through different perspectives. How stories can be developed was one of the most pivotal points of the discussion. Through this discussion, it was concluded that a story needs to have full-bodied characters, and a problem which needs to be resolved or an experience to be shared. The language should be such that it enhances the impact of the story; literary tools such as personification, description, metaphors and similes, etc., make a story worth a read.

After the discussion, a story based in Rajasthan entitled “JalPari” was narrated. The central theme of the story was gender discrimination, and to illustrate that many other sub themes were brought into play such as female feticide, gender-related stereotypes, superstitions, and power equations and how these marked the societal construct. Elements such as mystery, bravery, power relations, social problems, etc., were interwoven in the story. The children were encouraged to identify and verbalize various

aspects of the story. After initiation, they were successful in identifying most of these components.

In the post-lunch session, students were divided into six groups. They were given different themes such as betrayal, helping each other, concealing truth from elders, etc., and were asked to discuss these topics in their respective groups and develop a story. Resource persons facilitated the process of story formation. Teachers were also divided in two groups and were asked to discuss and write a paragraph on “Storytelling as a Pedagogical Tool” based on their experiences. Teachers and students made a presentation and feedback was given to each group. Finally each participant was asked to share her / his learning experience.

Outcome of the Workshop

All the participants were very appreciative of the workshop. Some of them remarked that this was the first time in their life that they had written a story. One of the participants said that she had learnt how to develop a story by working in the group. “*Pehli baar group me kaam karke humein bahut accha laga. Ye pehli baar hai ki maine koi kahaani likhi hai. Mujhe na keval accha laga, balki bahut kuch seekhne ko bhi mila*” (I liked working in a group. This is the first time that I have written a story, and I have really learnt from the experience.). While working on the ideas for story writing, the children brainstormed and discussed enthusiastically amongst themselves. Another participant commented “*Apne man ki jo baat main kaafi samay se kisi ko nahi bataa paa rahi thi aaj kahaani ke madhyam se likhkar bataana mujhe kaafi aasan laga*” (The thoughts that I have not been able to share with anyone, I could easily express through story writing). The teachers regarded stories as an

important pedagogical tool. However, opinions were divided on whether stories could play a similarly important role in teaching Sciences and Mathematics as compared to Social Sciences and languages. This needed further debate to arrive at a consensus. Finally, the workshop concluded with the recitation of poems by two participating teachers. These poems had a deep underlying message that life is itself like a story.

Feedback and Further Direction

Participants expressed the need to organize more such workshops in future. They commented that they had enjoyed the process of story writing, and it was not as difficult as they had thought it would be. Moreover, teachers also saw it as one of the most powerful pedagogical tools for language teaching, and dealing with multiple concepts at different levels. Another misconception which was busted was regarding the age appropriateness for using story telling as a pedagogical tool. Before the workshop, most of the teachers were of the view that story telling as a tool could only be used for children at the primary level. However, after the workshop, this idea changed when they saw that it had been conducted with and for children of classes IX and X.

“It has been said that next to hunger and thirst, our most basic human need is for storytelling.”
–Khalil Gibran

Madhu Gupta works as a teacher/facilitator in a government school of Delhi. She was a researcher at Regional Resource Centre for Elementary Education (RRCEE) Teacher Fellowship Programme, Delhi University. She did her B.El.Ed. and M.Ed. from Delhi University, and M.A. in Sociology and M. Phil in Education (Department of Educational Studies) from Jamia Millia Islamia.

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A Short Report of the English Language Capacity Building Workshop

State Institute, Jaipur, 3 - 8 April 2014

The English capacity building workshop comprised 21 participants, 10 facilitators, 9 Hindi co-development participants and 9 English co-development participants. It commenced with a recapitulation of the topics and reflections from the previous workshop during which an insightful summary of ideas and concepts on the nature of language, language acquisition, reading strategies and the concept of reading emerged. The context setting was done by recapitulating the learnings from the previous workshops and introducing the topics of the forthcoming interaction.

Kamleshji introduced the topics for the current workshop. He reiterated that in continuation with the previous workshops, we would explore the different perspectives on literacy, reading and writing, and their relevance in the classroom.

The first session was on the “Origins of Writing”. In this session, the participants explored how man must have created symbols for communication through many interesting experiential activities. This gave the participants a sense of the journey of the written word from early man’s symbolic pictographic representations of thought to the present day alphabetic and syllabic systems. This was