

A Story Telling Workshop

in Association with Dinkar Society

Ojas Institute of Management, Rohini, Delhi.

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There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories. —Ursula K. LeGuin

Introduction

Stories and folklore lie at the heart of Indian culture. For centuries, the first exposure to children about the world has been through the tales they heard from their family members, especially their grandparents. These tales not only enriched their imagination, but also allowed them to observe the different hues and colours of the world and get an idea of the languages spoken around them. The present generation seems to be losing out on this opportunity. *Katha Manch*, a group dedicated to the use of stories as a pedagogical tool, aspires to fill this gap.

Katha Manch is an informal group comprising of school teachers, teacher trainees, field facilitators, university professors, students, etc., associated with the field of education. Most of the group members have experienced the power of stories and storytelling, not only in capturing

childrens' attention, but also in improving their reading and writing skills, furthering their imaginative and cognitive skills, sensitizing them and developing tolerance towards different cultures and world-views. *Katha Manch* organized a one-day workshop with the following objectives:

- To create a network of people interested in storytelling
- To demonstrate various modes of storytelling
- To discuss the use of stories as a pedagogical tool
- To appreciate the cultural richness exhibited in the forms of folklores
- To invite suggestions for possible future activities of the group

Participant Profiles

The participants included school teachers, teacher trainees (B. El. Ed., B. Ed., JBT, etc.), school principals, assistant professors from Delhi University, field facilitators and people interested in story telling.

Sessions

The workshop started with an introductory session where the anchors discussed the importance of storytelling as a pedagogical tool in the classroom, with examples from their own and their students' teaching experiences. They emphasized on the importance of linguistic and cultural components in storytelling. They also observed on the basis of personal and teaching experience that there is a gradual decline in the use of storytelling and that it needs to be revived. With the advent of ICT (Information Communication Technology), multimedia, etc., people are not exposed to the feeling of warmth and coziness that comes from telling and listening to stories, and this is especially true of children. In the absence of this, children have taken refuge in television and other media.

The next session was conducted by B. El. Ed (Bachelor of Elementary Education) students from Delhi University. They focused on the various modes of story-narration. The first presentation was a solo theatrical performance of the story “Pinku Piggy”—a fable that explains why pigs prefer filthy surroundings. This was followed by a role-play of the famous Panchatantra story “The Monkey and the Crocodile”. Three participants played the roles of the monkey, the crocodile and the monkey’s wife, and delivered spontaneous dialogues that gave a comic sense to the traditional setting of the story. The next presenters also put up a comic performance that was based on a famous folklore about a bird whose grain got stuck in a grinder. This was in the form of an interesting rhyme that was really enjoyed by the audience. The last presentation was based on the story of a little girl who was saved from the jungle animals by her presence of mind and her mother’s advice. It was in the form of a puppet show and involved rhymes. Thus, the participants got an idea of how stories could be performed in different forms, individually as well as in a group, to make them more lively and natural for the learners.

The presentations were followed by a discussion on the different modes of storytelling, and the purpose they serve. The presenters who had used these narrative styles in their teaching internship, elaborated on the specific pedagogical aspects of each of these modes. While role play had been found to be extremely useful in developing creative dialogue-writing and situational writing, rhyming folklore used repetition as a strategy to build on reading and writing skills among beginners.

Other participants shared their experiences of how story-narrations had helped them build basic language skills of their students. The representation of socio-cultural aspects in stories was also discussed. Participants noted how the last stroke the stereotype of the male

figure always being the action hero and dealing with tough situations.

This was followed by a lively musical performance by three participants who sang folksongs from three different languages using the keyboard, harmonium and tabla. The performance brought back the point of traditional storytelling being deeply entwined with the creative arts of a society and culture. After this, a teacher recited a poem that he had written.

The post-presentation discussion started with the CIE school principal sharing her experience of introducing storytelling as a pedagogical tool in her school. She talked about the struggles and the successes that she had encountered and emphasized on the change in the attitude of the teachers once they saw the drastic improvement in their students’ performance after the use of stories in their classes.

Feedback and Further Direction

The participants, who had thoroughly enjoyed the presentations, noted that the narrative styles that had been discussed would prove extremely helpful in the pedagogy of not just language but all subject areas. One participant was of the view that stories as pedagogical tools could replace textbooks if taken seriously. Regarding the folklore, a teacher-educator pointed out how oral history tradition was being revisited and used in contemporary sociological studies.

A student of teacher-education asked about the criteria for selecting a good story. This was responded to by various participants who recommended the book *Child’s Language and the Teacher*. They further endorsed an article on storytelling by Krishna Kumar in which he discusses in depth, the criteria for choosing good literature for children.

Finally, the participants concluded by agreeing that teachers should be encouraged not only to use stories as a tool in their teaching but also to weave stories of their own. The stories they

create would have strategies underlying them to make learning more enjoyable. The group that had attended the workshop offered to work with teachers to help them innovate in different forms of storytelling. These new forms could then be tried out in the classrooms, and reviewed periodically and improved upon. In addition to this the children of elementary grades could be encouraged to write and perform stories in their classroom. Once they are skilled in creating stories, the next step would be to improve their writing skills so that they are able to present stories in a written form with illustrations, etc.

Participants expressed the need to organize more such workshops and include more school teachers in such workshops so that storytelling could become a way of teaching rather than being limited to a single period in the library. They added that most teacher-education courses were also not giving much space to storytelling, and pressed for it to become a compulsory part of teacher-education curriculum.

Storytelling can be done in various forms, which may be poem, songs, narrations, etc. Stories can be told using these forms independently or by mixing them as needed.

“Children played at those stories; they dreamed about them. They took them to heart and acted as if to live inside them.”

- Gregory Maguire, *A Lion Among Men*.

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Forthcoming Events

6th N.E.A.R. Language Education Conference

Date: 24 May 2014

Organization: North-East Asian Regional Language Education Conference

Location: University of Niigata Prefecture, Niigata

Last date for submission of paper: 16 February

JALT 2014 International Conference

Dates: 21- 24 November 2014

Organization: The Annual International Conference of the Japan Association for Language Teaching

Location: Tsukuba International Congress Center, Ibaraki Prefecture

Last date for submission of paper: 11 February 2014

ICLLTL 2015: International Conference on Linguistics, Language Teaching and Learning

Dates: 28-29 March 2015

Location: Madrid, Spain

Last date for submission of paper: 31 October 2014

ICLLTL 2016: International Conference on Linguistics, Language Teaching and Learning

Dates: 28-29 March 2016 Location: Madrid, Spain

Last date for submission of paper: 31 October 2015

TESOL 2015 - 49th

Annual TESOL Convention and Exhibit

Date: 25 March 2015

Location: Ontario, Canada

Last date for submission of paper: 01 June 2014

Website: <http://www.tesol.org>

The 2nd Task-Based Language Teaching in Asia Conference

Dates: 17-18 May 2014

Organization: Task Based Learning Special Interest Group, Japan Association for Language Teaching

Location: Kinki University, Osaka

Last date for submission of paper: 31 January 2014

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LLT Team, Udaipur