

Language through Literature

Nivedita Vijay Bedadur

This is the fifth in the series of workshops on Teaching English to Middle School Learners. Number of Participants: 22 (19 teachers from various private schools, 1 kindergarten teacher, 1 program manager and 1 administrative staff member).

Workshop Details

This was a workshop on enhancing perspectives and pedagogy of teaching language through literature, and literary sensibility through poetry and short stories. On display on the bulletin board were several short stories which the participants took with them. There were also several poems displayed on the bulletin boards. The workshop began with a reading and analysis of the story “Voices” by Anthony Browne, which reflects upon the need to create the space for multiple perspectives and voices. In the discussion that followed, we focused on the objectives of introducing and teaching literary texts in middle school. After a short debate between the participants, a consensus emerged that the objective of teaching literature was not to only to introduce students to different cultures, but also to enhance their cognitive and creative capabilities and to develop their linguistic and literary sensibility. The larger objective of this effort was to get every child to develop his/her own distinctive voice and to give space and respect to multiple points of views in the classroom.

The revised Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* was discussed as the counter point to linguistic and literary

objectives. In order to demonstrate how these can be interwoven, the facilitator analysed two poems on the same theme but from different perspectives in an interactive session. These were: “I Cannot Remember My Mother” by Rabindranath Tagore and “My Mother at Sixty-Six” by Kamala Das. The participants were then divided into groups; each group was given two poems to analyse on the same theme. The presentation of this analysis culminated in a discussion on how comparative analyses of texts can be used to develop higher level thinking skills among students. The linguistic elements analysed were: the kinds of words used, patterning of structures, grammatical elements and breaking of patterns for expressing different moods. The literary elements analysed included symbolism, imagery, rhyme, and alliteration. Comparison was done by analysing the mood, tone and perspectives of the poems and the poets.

The second session began with a film version of the short story, “Winter Cruise” by Somerset Maugham. The participants watched the film and analysed edits plot, characters and story. The character of Miss Reid was evaluated to reveal how she had hidden traits of kindness, tolerance and quiet dignity in the face of the seemingly amusing but cruel joke played by the captain and the officers of the ship, just to get rid of her irritating talkativeness. The actions and character of the men were compared with those of Miss Reid. The nuances of class and the actions of the characters were also explored. The responses of men and women to the problem were compared to reveal how power and dignity played different roles in the characters of the film.

The session ended with a recitation of the poem “The Palanquin Bearers” by Sarojini

Naidu in different emotive enunciations and different voices for choruses.

Reflections of the Facilitator

This was a high difficulty level workshop for teachers as each group had a different set of poems for the same task. This necessitated reading out the poem, but a deeper analysis was difficult without the text of every poem at hand and the time to read it. To comprehend a poem by simply listening to it was difficult for the teachers. Moreover, teachers are not trained to read and analyse poetry and prose from a literary angle. They believe that teaching consists of asking and answering comprehension level questions. They had never analysed literature in the class room. Yet they were able to manage the tasks with an above average level of response, which means they found the engagement with literature fruitful. The teachers had also never analysed the mood, tone or images in a poem before, nor had they carried out a purely literary analysis. Other than examining the literary devices, they had never compared two poems or analysed them.

The film on Somerset Maugham's short story "Winter Cruise" was difficult for some participants to understand, although as a facilitator, I was of the opinion that the movie was very simple and very beautiful and humorous. It also had some elements of insights into the human character. Next time I will provide subtitles for the films if possible or give the teachers the scripts to read along with the film.

I learnt many important lessons from this workshop as well as the four others that I conducted in the series of Middle School English Workshops for teachers through the School Connect Programme of the Azim Premji University. I learnt that private school

teachers need as much help as government school teachers. Contrary to my beliefs, I found out that they also do not read a lot of literature, or academic texts. Their resistance to reading was manifested in the workshop as they seemed to prefer PPTs and videos to reading. They too, much like children, enjoyed challenging activities. They were ready to analyse and discuss theory based on them.

In conclusion, I would say that a good grounding in literary analysis must be included as part of teacher education programs for teachers of both private and state board schools. Reading and the joy of intensive and extensive reading need to once more occupy centre stage in class room processes if we want our children to become competent readers.

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Seminar on Inclusive Approach to Tribal Education in Chhattisgarh

Mahendra Kumar Mishra

A state level seminar on "Inclusive Approach to Tribal Education" was conducted in Jagdalpur, the district headquarters of Bastar in the state of Chhattisgarh between 22-24 January 2016. The objectives of the seminar were:

- Understanding the policy, programme, constitutional obligations and national goal of education in the context of tribal areas